



**Reimagining
Dementia**
A Creative Coalition for Justice



January 9, 2023

In this special guest editorial, Mary Fridley, Co-ordinator of Reimagining Dementia: A Creative Coalition for Justice, discusses some important topics related to aging, stigmatization, and dementia. SSAO is proud to be partnered with Mary and Reimagining Dementia in an international movement that is taking shape to challenge the tragedy narrative all too common today. It is time to begin to see aging, dementia, and a host of other conditions as part of life - not reasons to exclude, isolate, or dehumanize.

WHERE ARE WE SUPPOSED TO GO?

On behalf of Reimagining Dementia: A Creative Coalition for Justice, which I have the honor of leading, I want to first wish the Seniors for Social Action Ontario (SSAO) community a very happy new year!

In my end-of-year message to the Coalition's 760+ members (from 31 countries), I wrote about my November trip to the U.K., where I spoke at a reception for the Coalition held at Third Age Project, a very active senior community center in London. The festivities brought together dozens of Coalition members and new friends, including people living with dementia, care partners, advocates, artists, researchers and community members active with Third Age.

In my remarks, I shared my response to a *NY Times* guest editorial column written after the shootings at Club Q, an LGBTQ bar in Colorado, that had taken place just days before the event. In it, the author wrote, "They tell us not to talk about it. They tell us everything would be fine if we'd just keep it behind closed doors. It's tragic because...no matter how quiet we kept it....we aren't safe. As one of the survivors asked, "Where are we supposed to go?"

As I read the column, I thought of the many thousands of older adults, many living with dementia, and so many others, especially the poor, people of color and indigenous peoples who were allowed to suffer and to die during the pandemic with little or no consequence for those who continue to neglect, dehumanize, stigmatize and silence far too many across the world.

So where are we supposed to go?

Into every community and every corner of the globe! The Coalition is more committed than ever to bringing dementia "out from behind closed doors" by tearing down the cone of silence that prevents dementia and other "shameful" conditions from being an ordinary part of public discourse/life even though millions - including the "worried well" - are impacted.

We are proud to join with SSAO and our others partners and friends on transforming a world that produces and perpetuates a shame- and isolation-producing tragedy narrative of aging, dementia and so much more. I believe our growing movement has much to offer, not just to people living with and impacted by dementia, but to people of all ages and life circumstances who are living in uncertainty and looking for new and more positive ways to navigate and impact on our strange new world.

Because there are so many creative and innovative programs/organizations/ initiatives/activists, the Coalition can focus on shining an ever brighter spotlight on this work even as we intensify efforts in 2023 to leverage our collective resources, experiences and successes in ways that allow us to bring dementia fully out of the closet, much as those before us did with disability rights, AIDS, neurodiversity, cancer, aging and so many other important social issues.

While I'm not a historian, I have been an activist and community organizer for over four decades and feel confident in saying that there are no social change movements that have succeeded without touching the "hearts and minds" of ordinary people. Believe me, I understand the very human pull to protect ourselves - and especially those seen as "vulnerable" - from an increasingly harsh world. And it is a harsh world. In Canada and across the globe, millions of people are fleeing war, gang violence, disease and drought, floods and fire and countless more seek an escape from the cruelty, violence, destitution, alienation and pain of everyday life. They are also searching for and trying to create a haven.

But what if there are no havens?

For try as we might to escape or to hide, through retreating into our "tribe," our work, our family, our relationships, our organizations, our faith, or drugs, gangs or crime, it's not clear we can succeed because there is no haven in a world that is heartless.

So what can we do?

We can do the work of creating and developing a world in which havens are not necessary. I don't believe people living with dementia, or anyone else for that matter, need havens.

In short, we can create a HEART.

We can help lead a broader cultural transformation through creativity and play (the arts, theatre, performance, music, dance, improvisation, poetry, storytelling) so that new social-cultural-psychological-political possibilities are available to *everyone*.

If you are interested in learning more about and/or becoming a member of the Coalition (it's free and takes only a moment), visit www.reimaginingdementia.com or email me at mfridley@eastsideinstitute.org.

The Coalition also invites you to attend one of their member gatherings during the week of January 16, where you will have the opportunity to meet the Coalition community - and have some fun! For more information or to join, [click here](#).

In addition to leading Reimagining Dementia: A Creative Coalition for Justice, Mary Fridley is on the faculty at the East Side Institute in NYC, where she co-created and leads The Joy of Dementia (You Gotta Be Kidding!). An accomplished teacher and workshop leader, Mary practiced social therapy for 12 years and uses the play and performance inspired social therapeutic approach as a teacher and workshop leader. She is the author or co-author of several articles and chapters on the Joy of Dementia and the Reimagining Dementia Coalition. Additionally, Mary is a guest blogger for agebuzz and a playwright and theater director and makes her living as a non-profit fundraising consultant.