

**MEDIA RELEASE**

Tuesday January 5, 2016

**Alzheimer's Awareness Month is the perfect time to #BecomeAFriend**

**Vancouver, B.C.** – January is Alzheimer's Awareness Month, and the Alzheimer Society of B.C. is inviting all British Columbians of all ages to #BecomeAFriend to people living with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias. A Dementia Friend is someone who makes the decision to learn more about dementia and how to support people living with the disease through simple action.

"People with dementia who can remain engaged and active are able to enjoy good quality of life," says Society CEO Maria Howard. "Becoming a Dementia Friend means helping raise awareness and creating positive change, allowing people with dementia to stay connected to their community." With over 70,000 people in B.C. living with the disease and the numbers growing, it's becoming even more important to come together to support our neighbours and build communities that are more accessible and inclusive.

A part of being a Dementia Friend means knowing that there is no one story of dementia – both men and women can live with this disease in their 70s, 60s, 50s and even their 40s. This is something that Victoria Schuster – a Grade 11 high school student from Kelowna who is currently attending Shawnigan Lake School on Vancouver Island – understands very well. Her father was diagnosed with early onset dementia five years ago, at the age of 45. He now lives in an assisted living facility.

Victoria shared her story recently in a speech to the student body. There were few dry eyes when she finished. In a most open and vulnerable way, she knew this was an important step to take in her own journey, but mostly she spoke to raise awareness within her school community about the disease. "The best thing we can all do is to talk about it", says Victoria "and to educate yourself about the disease and how it really impacts people like my Dad. Dementia is what it is. It is not something to be embarrassed about."

"It's great to see young people like Victoria becoming advocates for people with dementia and helping spread awareness," says Howard. "Taking action as an individual is the first step in building a dementia-friendly community."

Stay tuned to [alzheimerbc.org](http://alzheimerbc.org) and the Society's social media this month as they continue to raise awareness about how you can #BecomeAFriend. Join the likes of the B.C. Legislature, CKNW broadcaster Lynda Steele, Sportsnet Central's Caroline Cameron and Victoria Schuster to improve the lives of people in your community who are living with dementia.

For more information about how to improve the lives of people living with dementia or the #BecomeAFriend campaign visit: <http://alzbc.org/1OdKgVY>, @AlzheimerBC or [facebook.com/AlzheimerBC](https://www.facebook.com/AlzheimerBC).

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Campaign hashtag: #BecomeAFriend

Society leaders and other spokespeople, including Victoria Schuster, are available for interview throughout January.

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### **About Dementia Friends**

A Dementia Friend is someone who takes the time to understand five things about dementia:

1. Dementia is not a natural part of aging.
2. Dementia isn't just memory loss – it can affect thinking, communicating and everyday activities.
3. It is possible to live well with dementia.
4. There is more to a person than a diagnosis of dementia.
5. The Alzheimer Society of B.C. is here to help people with dementia and their care partners.

### **About dementia**

Dementia is a term that describes a general group of brain disorders. Symptoms include the loss of memory, impaired judgment, and changes in behaviour and personality. Dementia is progressive, degenerative and eventually terminal. Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia accounting for almost two-thirds of dementias in Canada today.

### **About the Alzheimer Society of B.C.**

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. provides a provincial network of support and education for families impacted by dementia and people concerned about memory loss. Communities across the province count on the Society for support services, information and education programs, advocacy to improve dementia care in B.C. and to fund research to find the causes and cures. As part of a national federation, the Society is a leading authority on the disease in Canada.



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