

August 15, 2014

Andy Byford  
Chief Executive Officer  
Toronto Transit Commission  
1900 Yonge Street  
Toronto, ON M4S 1Z2

**C-10**

Dear Mr. Byford,

This is a joint letter to ask you to urgently remove all advertisements on TTC vehicles and property for the Mystery Room with the tagline: "Enter if you dare... Escape if you can! Psychiatric Ward--Satan's Lair--Prison Break--Mummy's Curse." Here is an example from a subway ad:



Working for Change<sup>1</sup> is a non-profit organization that provides education and employment opportunities for people disadvantaged by mental illness and addiction issues. The Registered Nurses' Association of

Ontario<sup>2</sup> is the professional association representing registered nurses in all settings and roles across the province. We are coming together from the perspective of people with lived experience of receiving services and providing services to vulnerable people within psychiatric facilities and correctional facilities to ask you to remove this ad and create processes to prevent the TTC from accepting such advertising in the future.

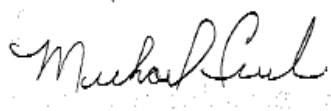
As the Canadian Mental Health Commission<sup>3 4</sup> and the Ontario Human Rights Commission<sup>5 6</sup> have clearly documented, stigma, stereotyping, and discrimination against people living with mental health and addiction challenges is a prevalent and dangerous societal problem. Sixty per cent of the people with a mental health or addiction issue “won’t seek help for fear of being labeled.”<sup>7</sup> Reluctance to seek help when needed is made worse by advertising that trivializes as entertainment the experience of those who are ill<sup>8</sup> and demonizes those who are hospitalized or incarcerated.<sup>9</sup> It is particularly incongruous to see this ad within the subway system, where people have tragically died from suicide<sup>10</sup> and signs ask people thinking about suicide to call a crisis line.

As Anne Thériault so eloquently said on this issue: “people with mental illness are failed by our society on a daily basis, and every time we let something like this...pass without saying anything, we are failing the mentally ill even harder.”<sup>11</sup> In addition to agreeing with Ms. Thériault’s request to immediately remove the Mystery Room advertising from TTC property, **we would like to be informed about what procedures or processes will be put in place to ensure that such advertising is not accepted in the future.** In our view, it is not satisfactory to wait until there are five customer complaints before an ad is sent to an advertising working group for review.<sup>12</sup> **It is critical that there be mechanisms in place to evaluate and reject advertising or sponsorship that conflicts with human rights or that might harm the public in some way BEFORE it is posted on TTC property.**

Working for Change and RNAO, alongside our expert nursing groups such as the Mental Health Nursing Interest Group and the Ontario Correctional Nursing Interest Group, would be pleased to meet with your staff and provide whatever assistance might be required to address this critical issue. Meanwhile, we are urging you to immediately remove these ads.

We look forward to your response.

Kind regards,



Michael Creek  
Director of Strategic Initiatives  
Working for Change



Doris Grinspun, RN, MSN, PhD, LLD(hon), O.Ont.  
Chief Executive Officer  
Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario

**PRESENTED TO THE BOARD  
AUGUST 19, 2014**

Copy: Marie Augimeri, TTC Chair  
Fiona Crean, Ombudsman, City of Toronto  
Barbara Hall, Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission  
Hon. Kathleen Wynne, Ontario's Premier

## References:

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<sup>1</sup> Working for Change <http://workingforchange.ca/>

<sup>2</sup> Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario <http://rnao.ca>

<sup>3</sup> Canadian Mental Health Commission, Opening Minds Campaign available at:  
<http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/initiatives-and-projects/opening-minds>

<sup>4</sup> Canadian Mental Health Commission (2012). *Changing directions, changing lives: The mental health strategy for Canada*. Calgary: Author.

[http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/system/files/private/MHStrategy\\_Strategy\\_ENG\\_0.pdf](http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/system/files/private/MHStrategy_Strategy_ENG_0.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission (2012). *Minds that Matter: Report on the consultation on human rights, mental health and addictions*. Toronto: Author.

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/minds-matter-report-consultation-human-rights-mental-health-and-addictions>

<sup>6</sup> Ontario Human Rights Commission (2014). *Policy on preventing discrimination based on mental health and addictions*. Toronto: Author.

<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-based-mental-health-disabilities-and-addictions>

<sup>7</sup> Canadian Mental Health Commission, Opening Minds Campaign available at:

<http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/initiatives-and-projects/opening-minds>

<sup>8</sup> Description of Haunted Hospital from Mystery Room website: "Ward 15 is the place the mentally disturbed were contained. Dr. Johansson had a passion for experimenting on the unanesthetised living. The patients grew mad, losing the ability to speak as their throats ruptured from constant screaming. These people now haunt the ward, seeking and exacting their revenge on unsuspecting victims." <http://mysteryroomonline.com/zones/psychiatric-ward>

<sup>9</sup> Description of Prison Break from Mystery Room website: "...Gordon was a prisoner here for 30 years. His cellmates always turned up dead the morning after they moved in. It is said that you could hear their screams all down the block, and the guards did nothing. Gordon died in his cell, and he swore that he would continue his killing spree in the afterlife." <http://mysteryroomonline.com/zones/prison-break>

<sup>10</sup> Zittler, J. (2004). Stopping the suicide train. *Now*. Vol. 23. No. 33. April 15, 2004.

<http://www.nowtoronto.com/news/story.cfm?content=141192>

<sup>11</sup> Thériault, A. (2014). An Open Letter to the TTC—Please Remove These Posters. August 11, 2014.

<http://bellejar.ca/2014/08/11/an-open-letter-to-the-ttc-please-remove-these-posters/>

<sup>12</sup> Deschamps, T. (2014). Transit rider files complaint over 'psych ward' escape game ads. *Toronto Star*. August 15, 2014. GT1-2.

[http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2014/08/15/woman\\_urges\\_ttc\\_to\\_remove\\_ads\\_for\\_psych\\_ward\\_escape\\_game.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2014/08/15/woman_urges_ttc_to_remove_ads_for_psych_ward_escape_game.html)