



## ALMA France network

### General presentation

The ALMA France network (Allô MALtraittance) was funded in 1994 by Professor Robert HUGONOT, a retired professor of geriatrics. The president to-day is Professor Robert MOULIAS.

ALMA France has several objectives:

- Develop a national elder abuse help line network. Since 2004, ALMA also helps handicapped people.
- Support and protect the isolated, excluded and vulnerable elderly and younger handicapped people.
- Recruit and train help line listeners/counsellors among the community and from the students and professionals of its institutions.
- Evaluate and document the work in the form of statistics, research, and publications.
- Inform the general and professional press, radio and TV networks.

ALMA France is developing a national network of ALMA help line centres, with the aim of one in each of the 100 French départements. So far, 61 ALMA help line centres have been opened and each functions according to its specific local needs.

ALMA France helps professionals and volunteers build an entirely autonomous and self-governing local ALMA centre. Before the centre opens, ALMA France provides specialist training to all listeners/counsellors and some administrators, and afterwards provides free running support and advice. Each ALMA centre is represented on the national Board of Directors.

Once established, each ALMA centre trains its own volunteer listeners/counsellors. It keeps in contact with local medical professionals, and informs the press through publications. It encourages training and research in schools, institutes and universities.

An ALMA centre involves four groups of people who each play a well-defined part. They are the administrators, the help line listeners, the counsellors (a multidisciplinary group that collectively formulate the best advice by cross-referencing their knowledge and specific techniques), and finally, an advisory committee which is made up of representatives from the local

In each ALMA centre there are three operational groups – the listeners, the counsellors, and the Technical Steering committee.

To cover two help line duty sessions per week, a team of six or eight listeners is necessary. Two listeners are present at each session so that they can both listen to the call and take notes. Listeners are often retired people, but this is by no means a requirement. We usually recruit people with good availability and regular habits who are concerned by the problems of elder abuse. Listeners tend to have a professional background – social, medical or civil service. It's essential to know how to be a sensitive and receptive listener – we can never over-emphasise this point. It's also a good idea to designate one or two volunteer listeners to be responsible for the paperwork (logging calls and creating case files). There's a mix of skills, but a good team spirit is indispensable. Listeners are supported and advised by the counsellors. To the help line callers, listeners and counsellors must remain anonymous.

Counsellors are professionals delegated by their department for a few hours a week or retired volunteers. They must have experience of older and handicapped people and their problems and a good understanding of the role of the social and medical services and the local network of gerontologists. In a team of four counsellors (sometimes more), contrasting and complementary professional profiles will give the best results. After a group discussion of a new case, one of the counsellors takes individual responsibility for its handling. The counsellor decides how to handle the case and discusses any proposed course of action with the caller. This ensures that the caller is aware of and in full agreement with the proposal. While the case is open, its counsellor can at any time consult the others or the Technical Steering Committee on specific points.

The Advisory Committee consists of representatives of all of the health, social and judicial professions who are aware of the difficulties of older people, either at home or in an institution. Included are the DHSS professionals, home help and carers, both urban and rural, lawyers, solicitors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and related volunteer organisations. It's important that these individuals cooperate and coordinate their efforts to deal with and prevent elder abuse. There are typically four meetings a year between the listeners, the counsellors, and representatives of the Technical Steering Committee. Each meeting chooses a particular theme ; judicial protection, a case involving an institution, a psychiatric case, etc.

The Technical Steering Committee has four essential roles :

- advise the listeners and counsellors on how to approach specific complex cases,
- be advised of the difficulties of older and handicapped people, their families, and the working professionals,
- identify and analyse abuse and neglect and their risk factors both in the home and in institutions,
- use ALMA's database to put into place the means of abuse prevention.

The ambition of ALMA France is to be formally recognised as an organisation dedicated to the public good (Reconnaissance d'Utilité Publique). The work done since 1995 has borne fruit and ALMA France continues to develop and extend its network of help line centres in the spirit of its founding charter :

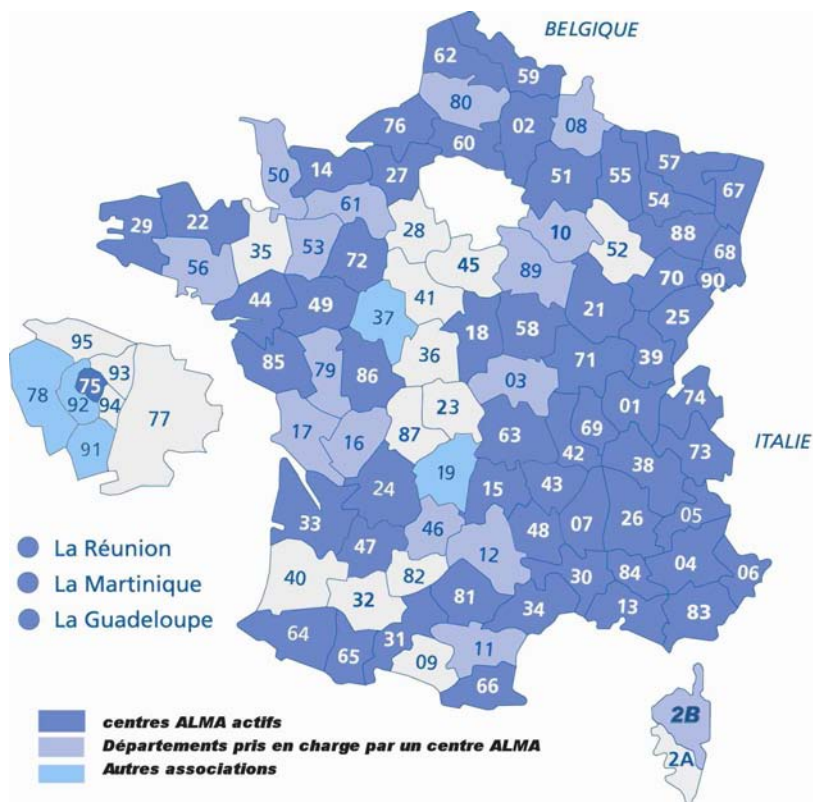
- the right to be listened to
- the right to privacy and a guarantee of confidentiality
- the right to dignity and personal choice
- the right to be informed
- the right to make an informed choice
- the duty of strict impartiality on all members of ALMA

ALMA's efficient method brought the topic "elder abuse" into the open. Now ALMA France receives substantial funding from the French government. In 2002 several official texts and laws were passed to fight elder abuse. A "Comité de Vigilance" was created by the "Secrétariat d'Etat des Personnes Agées" (State Secretariat for the Elderly) in December 2002. ALMA France's overall goal is to find ways to uncover the risk factors in institutions and in the home which lead to elder abuse and to prevent it from happening.

In 2008 the French government introduced a national line (3977) that sends the cases to be dealt with to ALMA centres. Indeed, the cases can be solved only locally.

ALMA France and over a thousand volunteers work at ALMA as listeners, counsellors, administrators, trainers, developers ... all to prevent abuse and neglect against the elderly and the handicapped.

### The ALMA France Network in 2010



#### Alma France Key figures

61 ALMA centres in France  
 78 French « départements » covered by ALMA  
 1000 ALMA volunteers  
 60 000 hours of voluntary work

#### In 2009:

15462 calls  
 7358 calls concerning abuse cases  
 3593 abuse files opened  
 11271 personnel trained on elder abuse

#### ALMA files in 2009

##### Home

Psychological abuse: 29%  
 Financial abuse: 21 %  
 Physical abuse: 16%  
 Neglect: 12 %  
 Others: 22%

##### Establishments

Neglect: 41%  
 Psychological abuse: 15%  
 Medical abuse: 12%  
 Physical abuse: 10%  
 Financial abuse: 7%  
 Other: 25%

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