

true doors®

How personalising interiors improves the lives of people with dementia

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Chapter 1

- ▶ **The simple things matter**
- ▶ The giants that came before us
 - ▶ The elders' eye view
 - ▶ We didn't invent doors

The simple things that matter

In this age of innovation, so often involving technology, we think it's valuable to look back at what has already been established as a simple, good practice, and yet is sometimes forgotten.

Since the early 1980s, numerous "design guides" in the form of books and articles have offered planning, architectural, and interior design recommendations to instruct architects and care providers on how to enhance safety, home-likeness, and personalisation in dementia care facilities.

In the section "The giants that came before us" we point to some of the key insights around personalising interiors from the last 35 years.

The following section "The elders' eye view" illustrates how these findings have manifested themselves in practice, pointing to the importance of creativity.

We end with the section "We didn't invent doors" to explain how True Doors has climbed on the shoulders of the giants that came before us.

Where previous focus was often residents own rooms and common living spaces, our attention is personalising care and nursing home hallways, where people with dementia spend a great deal of time.

Transforming cold and clinical spaces into something personal and neighbourhood like.



Chapter 2

- ▶ The simple things matter
- ▶ **The giants that came before us**
 - ▶ The elders' eye view
 - ▶ We didn't invent doors

The giants that came before us

There is a significant body of empirical evidence pointing to the benefits of personalising interiors and the success criteria for personalisation.

In essence, alongside safety, the message is to ensure you create familiar, easy to navigate spaces in order for them to be dementia friendly.

- ▶ 1980s - The elders' perspective
- ▶ 1990s - The importance of home
- ▶ 2000s - Choice and control

THE GIANTS THAT CAME BEFORE US

1980s

One of the earliest studies from the mid 1980s highlighted an obvious and often forgotten good practice - involve the people or at least the perspective of those living in care facilities in the design process.

“Our research project on two nursing homes, found that, although both administrators and designers favoured designs that promoted social interaction, nursing home residents consistently selected designs that enhanced privacy. This clearly highlights the need for residents to be involved in the design process. If better privacy options were included in the design of care homes, social interaction may be more welcome.”

Duffy, M., Bailey, S., Beck, B., Barker, D.G. (1986) ¹

▶ OUR OWN EXPERIENCE

In one of our first projects we saw the day-to-day cost of not considering the residents' perspective.

On the 6th floor of a purpose built, state-of-the-art nursing home with a magnificent view over Amsterdam, we noticed that people with wheelchairs didn't have the same opportunity to enjoy the view and instead could see as far as the wall in front of their noses, with the window starting just that little bit above their heads.

The architect in question had failed to consider the basic physical reality of future occupants, wasting an opportunity and more.

THE GIANTS THAT CAME BEFORE US

1990s

Research in the 1990s began to highlight the reasons why it is important to help people with dementia feel at home.

“Non-institutional environments characterized as having homelike or “enhanced” ambiance (personalized rooms, domestic furnishings, natural elements, etc.) are associated with improved intellectual and emotional well-being, enhanced social interaction, reduced agitation, reduced trespassing and exit seeking, greater preference and pleasure, and improved functionality of older adults with dementia.”

Kihlgren, M., Bråne, G., Karlsson, I., Kuremyr, D., Leissner, P., & Norberg, A. (1992).²

▶ DEMENTIA CARE MAPPING

In the 1990s we began to see the development of frameworks for fostering change towards person centred dementia care.

The most established of which is now Dementia Care Mapping , often referred to as DCM, which was developed by the late Tom Kitwood (University of Bradford, UK) and has been used in formal dementia care settings since 1991 in over 30 countries.

DCM is both a tool and process for developing person centred practice on a day-to-day basis.

THE GIANTS THAT CAME BEFORE US

1990s

“Despite a loss of cognitive ability, a “sense of home” endures in the minds of people with dementia, even in the later stages.”

Citaat van Cooper-Marcus (1995) ³

“A home fulfils many needs: a place of self-expression, a vessel of memories, a refuge from the outside world, a cocoon where we can feel nurtured and let down our guard.”

Cohen-Mansfield, J. and P. Werner (1998) ⁴

THE GIANTS THAT CAME BEFORE US

2000s

Research at the beginning of this century touched on using visual design to support way-finding and the importance of allowing residents to have control over the design of their spaces.

“Monotony of architectural composition and the lack of reference points render wayfinding difficulties. However, visual access to the main destinations increases their use and facilitates wayfinding.”

Passini, R., Pigot, H., Rainville, C., Tetreault, M.H. (2000). ⁵

“Signage has an important function, creating redundancy in wayfinding communication and compensating for the loss of memory and spatial understanding.”

Passini, R., Pigot, H., Rainville, C., Tetreault, M.H. (2000). ⁶

THE GIANTS THAT CAME BEFORE US

2000s

“Personal control over the design of the environment is seen to be particularly important for older people as part of the practice of ‘making a home’.”

Percival, J. (2002) ⁷

“Apartment designs and furnishings are contemporary and comfortable and do not represent a frozen moment in time, say the 1950s. However, many residents bring their own furniture to their bedroom and in some cases to the living room. This provides a sense of authenticity and familiarity, without being cloyingly sentimental as in the case in the ‘decorated’ living rooms.”

Fay, R., Owen, C. (2012) ⁸



Chapter 3

- ▶ The simple things matter
- ▶ The giants that came before us
 - ▶ **The elders' eye view**
 - ▶ We didn't invent doors

The elders' eye view

Research around personalised and dementia-friendly interiors has for some time pointed to the therapeutic use of design in dementia. Care homes around the world have since put this insight into practice in order to improve residents' quality of life.

Yet, applicability of design interventions can be challenging. What makes a certain design feature successful?

In this section we describe some creative and inventive examples of personalised interior interventions for people with dementia to help answer this question.

We distinguish three main categories: dementia-friendly interior design, reminiscence spaces and culturally-sensitive nursing homes.

- ▶ Dementia-friendly interior design
- ▶ Reminiscence spaces
- ▶ Culturally-sensitive nursing homes



Dementia-friendly interior design

Interior design can be used as a therapeutic resource to promote person-centred care in a safe, engaging and functional living environment for people with dementia.

The following examples show how this has been realised in different ways, yet with the same intention: to create a care home environment where residents feel valued, comfortable and at home.

- ▶ Dementia friendly housing
- ▶ Indoor dementia village
- ▶ 'Street signs' and wayfinding

Dementia friendly housing in Setagaya, Japan ⁹

With one in five elderly Japanese predicted to have dementia by 2025, the entire nation is working to improve the lives of their older citizens.

Developer Tokyu Land Corp and the Dementia Services Development Centre at the University of Stirling in the UK collaborated to build a special care home for people with dementia.

The Setagaya Nakamachi Ward in Tokyo uses the power of interior design to help residents with dementia keep their independence longer and maintain their dignity as much as possible. It is designed in a way that reduces stress and anxiety for both the elderly and their caregivers.

For example, contrasting colours, such as red handrails along cream-coloured walls and contrast between sanitary ware and the floor

tiles, help residents with the visual challenges that come with ageing and dementia. Whereas all floors (including carpeting) have similar colours, as using contrasting colours would run the risk that elderly think there is a gap or hole in the floor.

Residents are able to see their bathrooms while sitting or lying on their beds. This way, the elderly are aware of the presence of a toilet, which increases their ability to use it independently.

Wayfinding is supported by signs with words and pictures. These visual cues are simple and easy to understand for people with dementia. Nostalgic and familiar furniture give the ward an intimate and domestic atmosphere.

Indoor Dementia Village in Waveny, USA ¹⁰

The Village Waveny, Connecticut, is a unique and award-winning assisted living environment for people with dementia. It's an indoor Dementia Village, created to give residents with memory impairment, staff, family and friends a place for social gatherings.

Sensory stimulation, such as music, dance and sports are provided. This ensures there are many opportunities for meaningful interactions. Meanwhile, residents receive person-centred care and health care monitoring throughout the whole day.

The Main Street appears to be like any other, if quite old-fashioned with a barber shop, stores and a clock tower. This is a familiar and recognisable setting for the residents, who are mostly from New England, the area on which the Main Street is inspired.

Elderly who live at The Village have their own spacious suites. They are very personal, comfortable and home-like, while everything is provided to empower people who are physically impaired.

‘Street signs’ to help residents with wayfinding, in Runcorn, UK ¹¹

Simonsfield Care Home in Runcorn, United Kingdom, installed “authentic” street signs throughout the hallways of their ward. In addition, the signs are accompanied by decorated walls with a brick effect and hanging baskets.

Names of the streets were suggested by residents and staff themselves. Ivy Street, for example, is named after Ivy Shaw, a much loved former resident of the care home.

This street sign project has helped residents feel like their homes have an identity, because it looks like they are part of a local street.

“The street signs have made a huge difference for our residents, as they can recall the names of where they live within the home. They are now calling their rooms, Cherry Blossom Road for example. Also, they are able to recall the hair salon on Woodlands Lane and the tea room on Ivy Street because of the signs.”

Debbie Smith, home manager, Simonsfield

Reminiscence spaces

For people with dementia it can be hard to adjust in a new living environment, in a care or nursing home. They are not familiar with the new surroundings, this can cause anxiety, stress and wandering.

Many elderly with dementia have clearer memories of the past, than of the present. An interior that reminds them of their past can help them to feel comfortable and happy.

Over the last decade care facilities have increasingly introduced certain areas or sometimes an entire ward that is decorated and furnished like a home from another era, such as the 50s or 60s.

Environments like this stimulate reminiscence in residents with dementia and bring them back to a familiar part of their life.

- ▶ [Recreating Communist East Germany](#)
- ▶ [De \(T\)Huiskamer](#)
- ▶ [Retro themed nursing home](#)

REMINISCENCE SPACES

Recreating Communist East Germany ¹²

Many residents with dementia of Alexa Nursing Home in Dresden have spent a large part of their life in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Life in socialist East Germany is more vivid than the current environment.

And so the director of the nursing home decided to recreate the old East Germany for residents. Now, some decades later, the vanished Communist era appeared - at least for them - to be back.

An East German scooter and an old radio from that era were put in the common area as decoration. The response from the elderly was striking; they remembered features of the scooter and told the staff members stories about how they had gone on trips with their friends when they were younger.



source: alexa-seniorendienste.de

REMINISCENCE SPACES

Recreating Communist East Germany ¹²

Other items, such as passports, hair dryers and well-known ice cream advertisements, were put into a special “memory room”. The room also had a small supermarket, a traditional living room and comfortable chairs from that particular period.

Residents' water and food intake increased and some could even go to the toilet by themselves, something they were not able to do before. The changes of interior brought out abilities of the people with dementia they did not show prior to that.

Sometimes residents recalled uneasy memories, for example about people who tried to flee their country. However, most have mainly positive memories of that era, from their first love or the small freedoms that they had.

Younger members of the nursing staff had to learn more about the GDR, so they could act as if they were living in a period they had never experienced themselves. This way, they learnt about East Germany from residents and older colleagues, and were able to deepen relationships.

REMINISCENCE SPACES

De (T)Huiskamer, WZC Sint-Anna, Haaltert, Belgium ¹³

Care home WZC Sint-Anna in Haaltert, Belgium, recreated a Belgian living room from the 60s by using retro wallpaper, old sewing machines and paintings, photographs from the past and statues of saints. Most of the decorations are gifts from residents, their family and the nursing staff. Other objects were obtained from second hand stores or flea markets.

The familiar and home-like atmosphere helps residents feel at home and stimulates social contacts between the elderly, family members and staff.



source: groepsf.be

REMINISCENCE SPACES

Retro themed nursing home “Easton Home” in Pennsylvania, USA ¹⁴

The Easton Home in Pennsylvania, United States, has created several retro-themed rooms from the 30s, 40s and 50s. Each room has a certain style that is characteristic for that decade.

The dining room has a wood-panelled radio and there is a antique cast-iron stove in the kitchen. Meanwhile, old fashioned music is played to stimulate the minds and memories of residents with dementia.

Residents have shown many positive responses to the personalised interiors. The retro objects and atmosphere are a good conversation starter. For some residents, visits by family and friends are now more enriching, because the old fashioned surroundings are engaging and stimulate the senses.



source: presbyterianseniorliving.org

Culturally-sensitive care homes

A familiar and home-like care home environment is different for every individual.

Often, a care or nursing home population does not have a homogeneous cultural background. Some people live in another country than where they grew up.

For people with dementia this may mean that their most vivid memories are from when they used to live in their country of birth. They may need 'cultural clues' to help them make sense of the world.

To meet the needs of people with dementia from specific cultural backgrounds, some care homes have focused on recreating those specific cultural environments in designated areas.

Residents are able to connect with the lifestyle that is familiar to them, including their native language, religion, life history and cultural preferences.

- ▶ [An Islamic residential group](#)
- ▶ [An Indian care home](#)

REMINISCENCE SPACES

Lingesteyn Ikram, Islamic residential group in Leerdam, The Netherlands ¹⁵



Care home Lingesteyn in Leerdam, The Netherlands, has a small-scale residential group for people with dementia with an Islamic background. Residents share a common area, but have their own personal apartment, that they can furnish and decorate as they prefer.

The atmosphere of the ward exudes Islamic culture. There are separated prayer rooms for men and women. Decorations and furniture in the ward are according to their lifestyle and cultural background. The kitchen serves halal food and in the background familiar music is played, to help residents feel at home.

REMINISCENCE SPACES

Sai Ram Villa, Indian Care Home in Harrow, London, UK ¹⁶

Sai Ram Villa is an Indian care home that mainly, but not exclusively, focuses on the Asian community. They use a relationship-centred approach, which means the residents are the central point of the home and have direct input on decisions that are made.

The community area is decorated according to the Indian culture, for example with the Taj Mahal and prints of Buddha. The residents have their own rooms and there are shared spaces where people can pray or relax. Asian TV channels are available.

Sai Ram Villa has strong links with the local community and only serves vegetarian food.



source: carehomesgroup.com



Chapter 4

- ▶ The simple things matter
- ▶ The giants that came before us
 - ▶ The elders' eye view
 - ▶ **We didn't invent doors**

CHAPTER 4

We didn't invent doors

...we just decided that they matter!

Our aim is to ensure the elders perspective is central by empowering them to exercise choice and control in order to increase the feeling of being at home.

Our focus is hallways where a great deal of time is spent by elders. These spaces are transformed from cold, anonymous environments into warm, familiar, homely neighbourhoods.

By taking a person centred approach to selecting doors, elders are empowered to express their personalities, life stories and preferences.

Involving families helps rediscover connections. Care staff learn about residents and relationships are strengthened. Person centred care is put into practice in a non-threatening way.

Once the True Doors are in place, elders find their rooms more easily and are generally better able to orient. People are less likely to walk into the wrong room. Consequently, there's a greater sense of privacy and safety.

Each day the True Doors can also be used to start a conversation or for reminiscence.

Elders have several reasons for selecting a certain True Door. Typically a door reminds them of a door from their past, or because they'd like a door in their favourite colour or style. A door that tells them: 'This is my home', a safe space that is theirs.

We've have received many heart-warming reactions to True Doors projects. Here we share feedback from nine countries to illustrate the range of effects people have experienced.

- ▶ Australia
- ▶ Belgium
- ▶ Canada
- ▶ France
- ▶ Germany
- ▶ Luxembourg
- ▶ Netherlands (The)
- ▶ Norway
- ▶ United States



“They are colourful and alive, creative and engaging. The True Door helps mum identify her room. It feels more homely and adds a lot more interest- takes away the "sanitation" of aged care. Everyone I show who sees the doors thinks they are marvellous.”

- ROSE SPINKS, RESIDENTS DAUGHTER, MERCY HEALTH AGED CARE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA



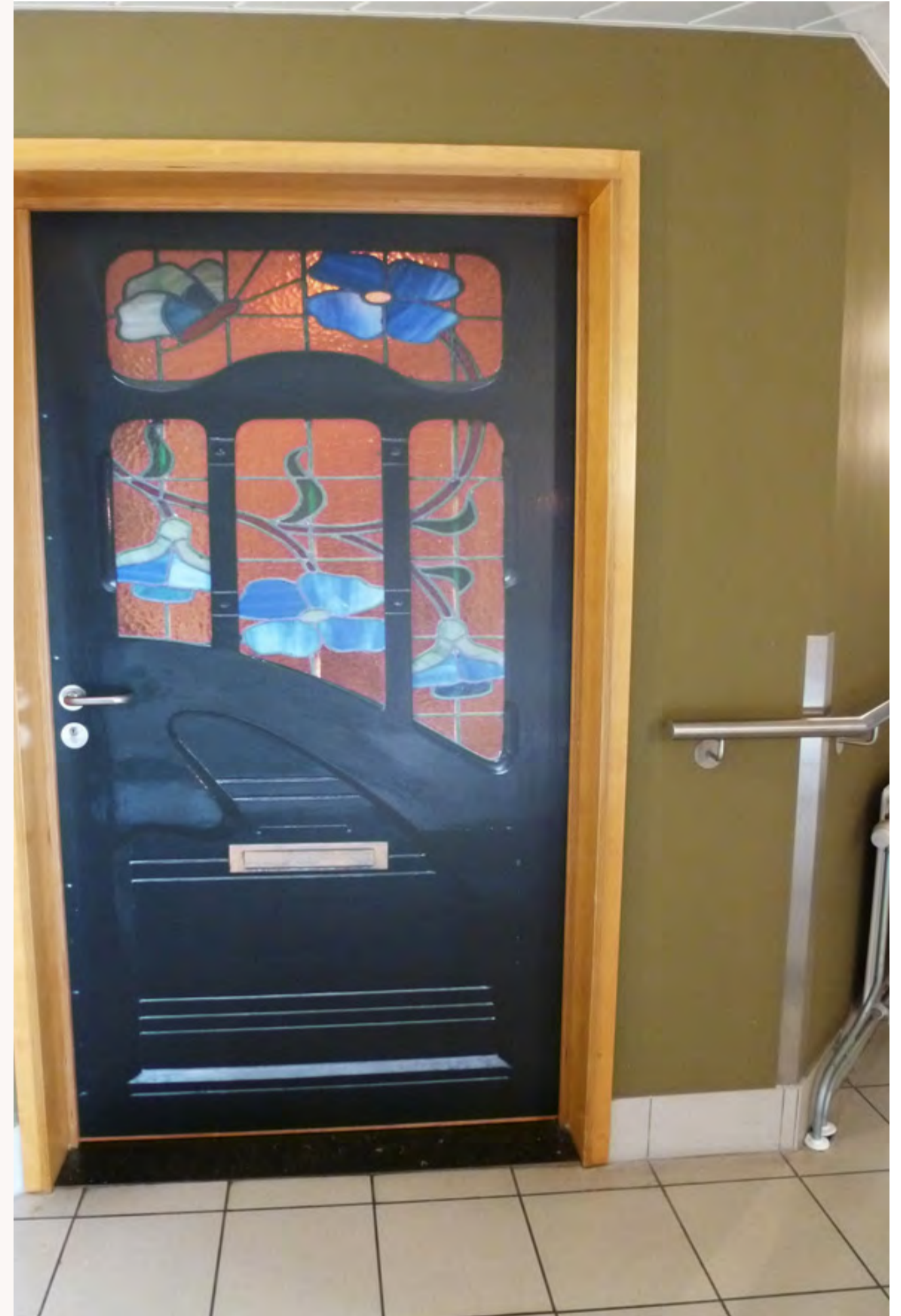
“I love the whole new look given to the wing. It looks clearer, more presentable and has a “cool” feeling, I’ve observed my husband who is 100 years old, correctly identify his room door. My husband has dementia and I visit the facility daily.”

**- RESIDENT'S WIFE, ACACIA LIVING GROUP,
WESTERN AUSTRALIA, AUSTRALIA**



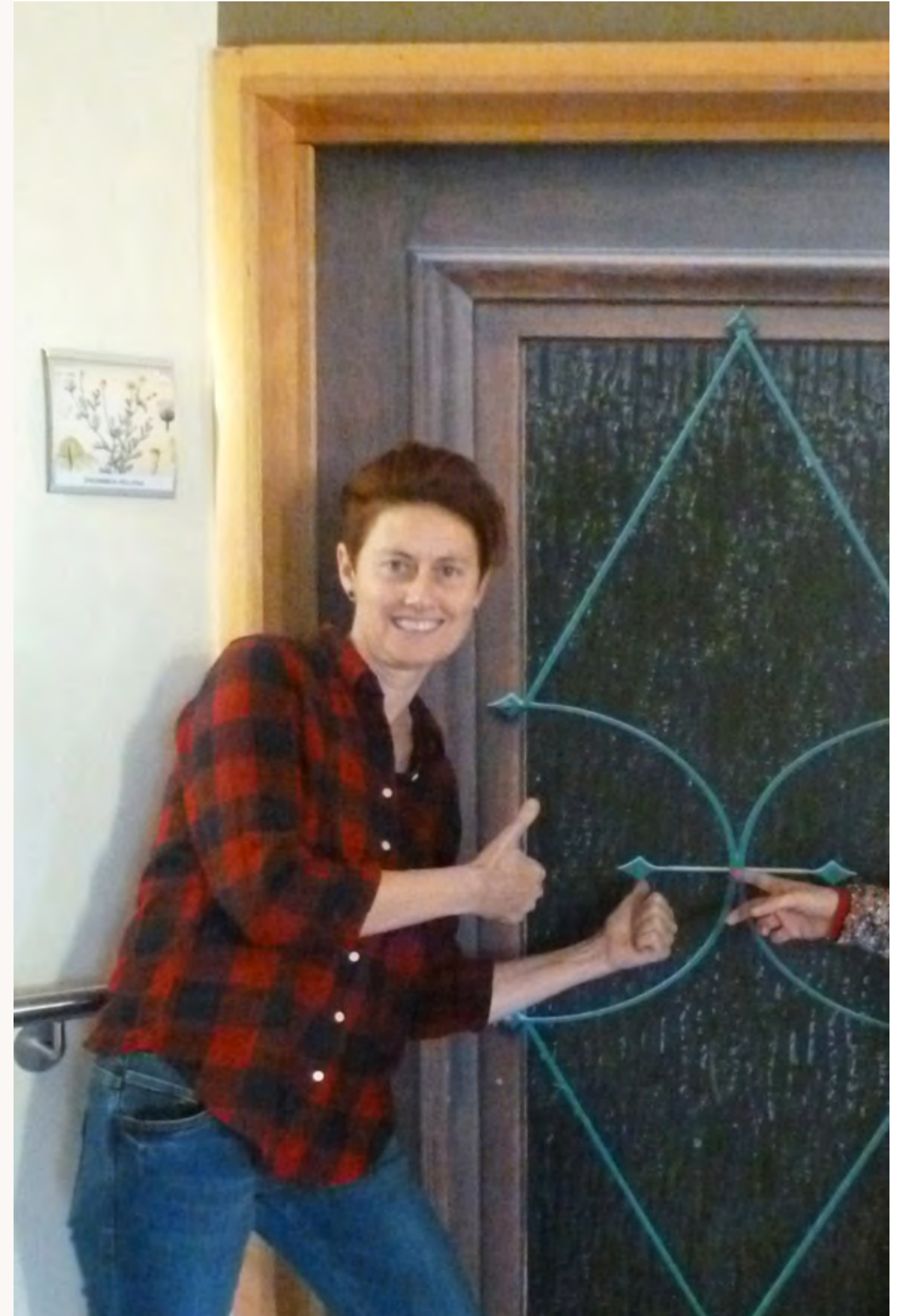
“The True Doors made it easier to tell the residents where their rooms are. Choosing the doors brings back memories, which increases the feeling of privacy. My home, my front door. Also, the doors are a nice start for a conversation.”

- CHRISTINA GEYSSENS, HEAD NURSE, OCMW
GENT - WZC HET , GENT, BELGIUM



“The atmosphere of the ward is more pleasant now, more like a home. It feels more personal. When possible, the residents have chosen their own doors. There’s a story behind each single door.”

- BIRGIT VANBOCKRYCK, PHYSIOTHERAPIST,
OCMW GENT - WZC HET HEIVELD, GENT,
BELGIUM



“We had fun interactions while deciding on the right door. Residents find their rooms more easily and memories are awakened. Makes the hallways seem bigger with the (true) doors. I love this. I have no complaints at all.”

- BERNARD GULLISON, RESIDENT'S HUSBAND,
NASHWAAK VILLA, NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA



“Residents really like them. For those who are able, it gives them something to talk about with staff and other residents and they go on about how beautiful they are, especially when they first go up. It warms up our hallways which are quite long and institutional.”

- MEGAN O'HARA, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR, KINGS WAY LIFECARE ALLIANCE, NEW BRUNSWICK, CANADA



“The True Doors have allowed residents and unexpectedly their families to feel in a warmer environment as part of a normal "home-like" everyday life. The more anonymous aspect of the institutional environment disappears.”

- MADAM MOIRAN, FAMILY MEMBER OF RESIDENT,
MAISON DE SANTE PROTESTANTE, CÔTE D'AZUR,
FRANCE



“When we learned about True Doors, we first tried a sample door. Immediately, we were convinced of the positive impact. We now have True Doors in our dementia ward and also in our day care area. The doors really add something special to our care facility. Not only do they help our residents with dementia with their orientation, the doors also look great.”

- MATTHIAS OSTERMANN, LOCATION MANAGER,
SENIORENRESIDENZ KINZIGTAL, GERMANY



“The films arrived, the quality is really good & the grannies love them.”

- NADINE FERRON, NURSE, HPPA MERSCH,
LUXEMBOURG



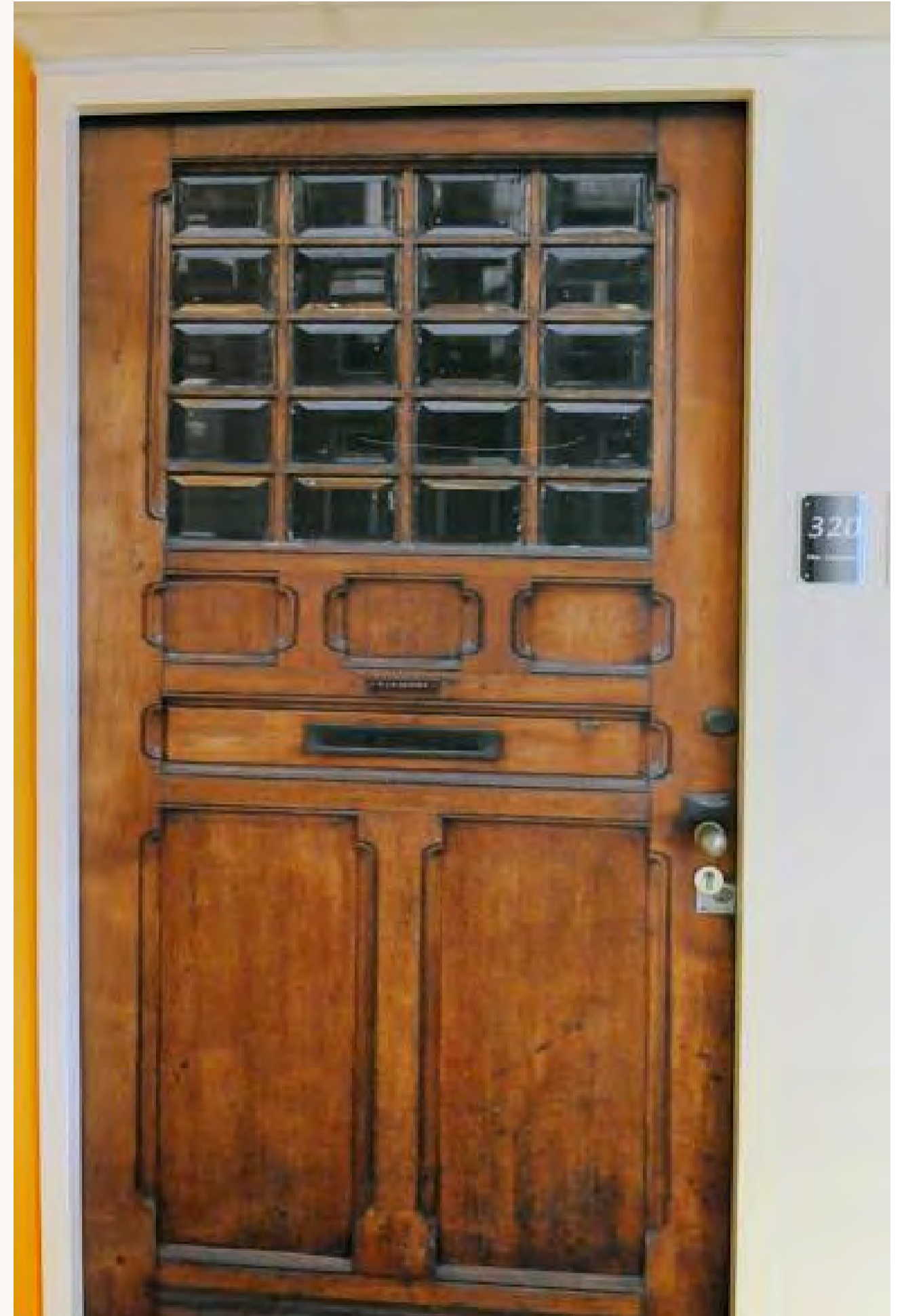
“For the residents it's very important to recognize your own door. Sometimes they forget where they live and they are wandering around. They just want to know how to get "home" and now they can. We are happy with the result and it also gives our residents a positive feeling.”

**- MIRANDA KOOLEN, OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST,
AMERPOORT, THE NETHERLANDS**



“Residents find it easier to walk to their rooms now. There are less questions about "where to go?". They also talk more about their past....”

- JOSÉ GOMMERS, NURSE, STICHTING ELISABETH
IN BREDA, THE NETHERLANDS



“I can tell my father feels more comfortable now that the environment looks less like a hospital. He is very proud of his door and he likes that it's blue, his favourite colour. He loves showing his door to visitors and he's happy when people say something nice about his door.”

- **PETRA VAN DER STAR, RESIDENT'S DAUGHTER,**
STICHTING ELISABETH IN BREDA, THE
NETHERLANDS



“I think, first of all, True Doors built very good contact between us. Residents and employees have been involved in the process and talked together about the doors. That’s been very positive and helped us know each other better. Residents are very proud of the door they have chosen and like to talk about them. Aesthetically, they have created a warmer and less institutional environment.”

- SYLJE HANSEN, NURSE, OPSJØ OMSORGSBOLIG,
ASKER, NORWAY



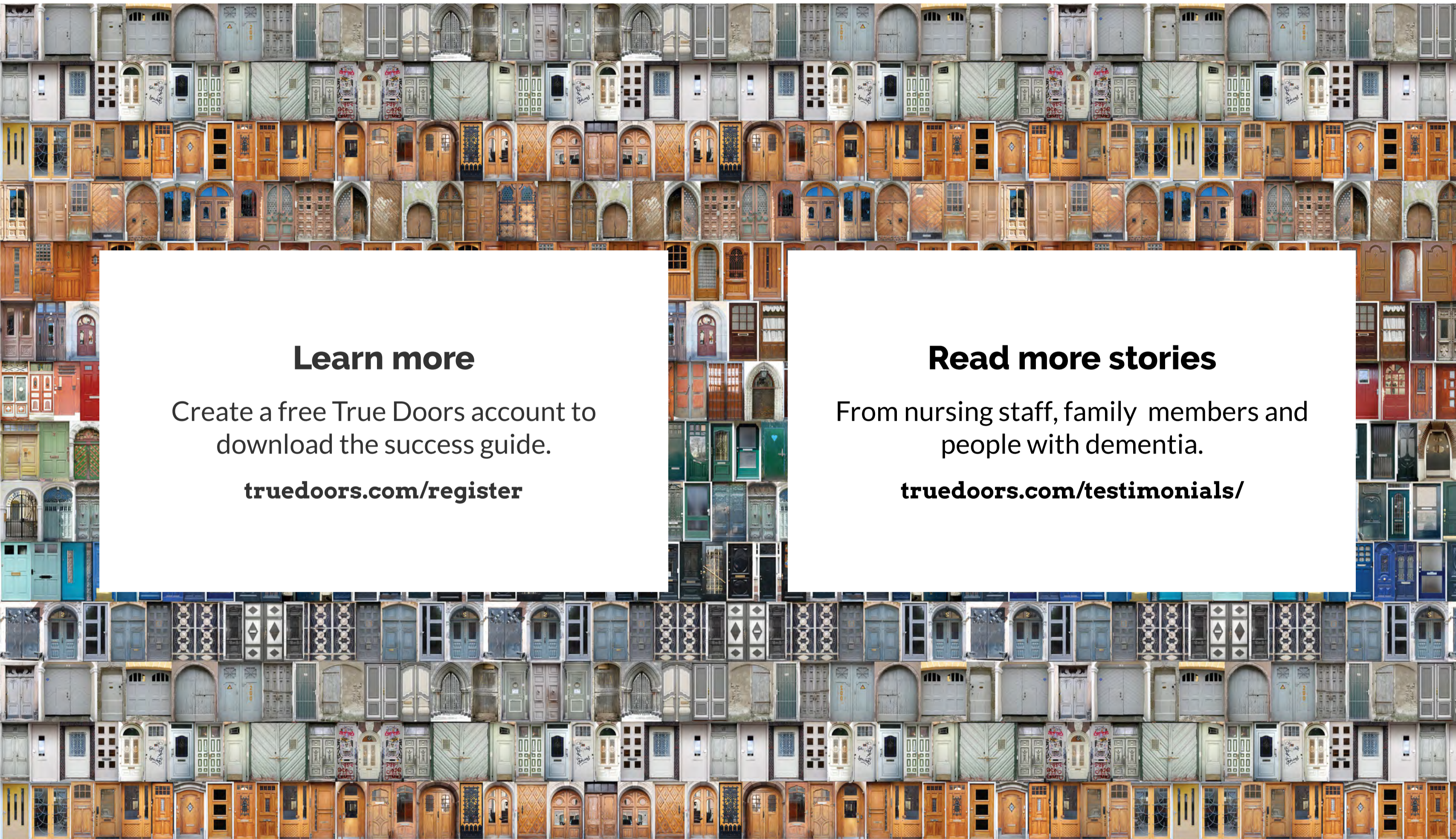
“The door has really improved this elder’s quality of life. She was having a really hard time adjusting and identifying her room as her space. She was spending her days sitting outside of her room and guarding it to make sure that none of the other elders went in.

She would frequently tell us we could have the room back and that she was going home. We have seen a huge improvement in her since we got her True Door in place. No more episodes of blocking her door, she finally identifies it as her room, and she is not constantly asking to go home every day.

She absolutely loves the door and couldn’t believe it was hers. It has truly improved her quality of life.”

- TIFFANY TERRIACO, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF NURSING, NAZARETH HOME, LOUISVILLE, USA





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Read more stories

From nursing staff, family members and people with dementia.

truedoors.com/testimonials/

Sources

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⁶ Passini, R., Pigot, H., Rainville, C., Tetreault, M.H. (2000). Wayfinding in a nursing home for advanced dementia of the Alzheimer's type. *Environment and Behavior*, 32 (5), 684-710.

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true doors®

**We didn't invent doors.
We just decided that they matter.**

Interested in a True Doors Transformation?

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