Step inside a Butterfly Dementia Care Home in the UK or Ireland and you will find the people working there are genuinely transforming lives through colour, movement, touch and stillness. That’s according to Dr David Sheard, CEO and founder of Dementia Care Matters, the national movement in dementia care in the UK.

Gone are the uniforms, drug trolleys, staff toilets, large dining rooms and other institutional features. People are no longer seen as residents but as family; the old culture of ‘them’ and ‘us’ is swept away, says Sheard. “Task orientation, standing around watching people eat, and ‘doing to’ people have no place in this model of care. Detached management styles and a focus on process belong to the malignant social psychology of the past,” says Sheard. “Instead, people living and working together come alive sharing their histories, eating, laughing, and supporting each other to recall who they were. Helping people to be reached and connected to whoever they now need to be.”

The movement started in 1995 when Sheard left the UK’s National Health Service after 15 years of employment. “I won’t run factories in dementia care anymore,” he said at the time.

Twenty years on from trialling his model of care in the first care home Merevale House, Butterfly Care Homes continue to gain momentum and are about to be launched in Canada and Australia. Sheard has been called “The Marmite Man of Dementia Care” in the UK – you love him or loathe him for his passionate, emotional and uncompromising stance.

In 2014 he received the award of Care Personality of the Year, with the judging panel noting his “beliefs, values, boundless energy and passion have driven changes that to many were only a dream.”

Sheard cites data showing that in one Butterfly Care Home the use of neuroleptic drugs was reduced from 70 occasions to just one, over a six-month period. Similarly, comparative weight gain in the same group and over the same period increased from six people to 23. “Feeling you matter is at the core of being a person,” he says. “Knowing you matter is at the heart of being alive. Seeing you matter is at the centre of carrying on in life. It is time for residential aged care to prove that people living with a dementia really matter most.”

David Sheard and Dementia Care Matters director Peter Priednieks will be in Australia from 2 to 19 June presenting a series of talks on achieving culture change in residential aged care. Go to dementiacarematters.com

David Sheard has a passionate and uncompromising stance on dementia care. AAA meets the instigator of the Butterfly Care Home ahead of his Australian speaking tour in June.