BUTTERFLY PROJECT: ENHANCING LIVES

"The word 'dementia' describes a set of symptoms which may include memory loss and difficulties with thinking, problem-solving or language" - the Alzheimer's Society

At its most basic definition, shown above, dementia can be refined to two main parts. Memory loss and difficulty with thinking. However, understanding how to fulfil the needs of a person with dementia is not so easily defined. It is not set by rules and regulations, it is not written out in a step-by-step guide. Caring for a person with dementia involves a personal approach and an understanding of each person, involving their life history and trying to bring their past back to life.

Dr David Sheard, CEO and founder of Dementia Care Matters, is challenging the way dementia care is handled in care homes across the country and overseas in Australia and Canada. David's approach to dementia care and what he calls the Butterfly Project introduces training for both staff and families in understanding how to care for a loved one with the condition.

The Butterfly Project encourages being a constant and attentive companion, delivering a natural approach, fitting between people, being still, connecting, creating colour and changing moments for a person with dementia throughout their day. This fitting between people is what makes a care home, a carer or a family member part of the Butterfly Project, which is helping to improve the lives of people living with dementia.

The spread of the Butterfly Project is taking place in care homes across the country. However, there is only one in East Sussex. Hastings Court, on The Ridge in Hastings, is undergoing a year-long project to achieve its

Butterfly Status.

The launch of the Butterfly Project was held on May 12, 2016. Since then a transformation has started throughout the home, the walls, the ceilings and the lives of staff and residents have been enhanced.

The process of transforming the home starts with the residents. Learning their life stories, their likes and dislikes, everything down to their favourite colour. Through the process of getting to know the residents, the environment within the home can be revamped with the memories of their lives from years gone by.

One resident, Don, has his memories projected on the walls of the home and his memory of his franchise has become his reality. Don once owned a butchers called

Katie and Ann Kramer – relatives of a resident at Hastings Court

*Image credits: Hastings Court
"The Meat Shop". From the age of 15 Don was a butcher in Brixton and then he started to work in Tooting. Don spent the next 51 years working in The Meat Shop, which by this time he owned and he was very well known in the Tooting area where it was based. The shop is still open today and is now run by one of Don's employees. Don's work approach was described as a show, as although Don was known as a very shy man, his personality changed when he came to the shop.

His wife Denise says: "He was a showman and even though he was a very quiet man, he would come to life the minute he put a white coat on. It was almost like an act. He loved it."

Since Don has been living at Hastings Court, his mind has been focused on the memory of The Meat Shop. He often asks his wife Denise questions related to the shop such as: "Have you got enough turkeys as it is six weeks until Christmas?"

Since the Butterfly Project has been in place, a replica of The Meat Shop has been brought to life in the home. Through handmade replicas of meat and the front of the shop made by relatives of Don, he can revisit the shop and once again become a showman.

Through using the Butterfly Approach at Hastings Court, not only the residents but the staff have also had a positive impact in their work life. The home has become a family. Through the guidance of the project, all uniforms in the home have been removed and night staff wear pyjamas. The removal of uniforms is a removal of a barrier between staff and residents, they are no longer workers but fellow friends. The pyjamas serve as a reassurance it is night time for residents with dementia as it can be hard to differentiate night and day. All aspects of care and lifestyles are undergoing change.

As well as lifestyles changing at Hastings Court, the building itself is also adapting. The third floor of the building, which is currently being occupied by St. Michael's Hospice, will be re-opened in September. This new floor will become a dedicated butterfly floor which will be known as a house.

The house will have a redesigned interior interactive lounges with a butterfly lead approach to dementia care and most importantly there will be an opportunity to invite an additional 19 residents to start their new lives living at Hastings Court.

Through the positive changes and the support and guidance of Dementia Care Matters, Hastings Court is the first home in East Sussex to undergo the Butterfly Project, and the progress over the last three months bodes well for the future at Hastings Court and the future of dementia care.

Hastings Court's ethos and Dementia Care Matters' vision of the future work as one, so fit very snugly together. It is the hope of all involved that this approach will be adopted by all caregivers to allow people living with dementia to continue to live fulfilled, contented and happy lives.

A replica of Don's butchers, The Meat Shop, has been brought to life at Hastings Court

Even though he was a very shy man, he would come to life the minute he put a white coat on.

The home's staff no longer wear uniforms

Resident Don owned a butchers in Tooting