

The Hogeweyk® Reflections

Teffie Landman, Director of Dementia Friendly Experience for Landis Communities, recently traveled to the town of Weesp, Netherlands to tour The Hogeweyk®, a dementia friendly village. Internationally renowned as a groundbreaking example of how to care for individuals living with dementia, The Hogeweyk® model promotes autonomy and socialization within a controlled environment.

THE VILLAGE WASN'T THE LESSON

When I booked my travel arrangements to the Netherlands, I anticipated going there to study a dementia village.

Like many people, I had seen articles and videos describing The Hogeweyk® – a community where people living with advanced dementia move freely through streets, visit cafés, shop for groceries, and live in homes instead of traditional nursing units.

This is a concept many of us in the United States think sounds amazing, but the conversation often leads back to one question:

"How do we recreate this village?"

After spending several days there, I came home asking a different question:

"What if the true innovation wasn't the village at all but the culture that made the village possible?"

The buildings are beautiful. The neighborhood is thoughtfully designed. The grocery store, theater, restaurant, gardens, and homes all contribute to an environment that feels safe, familiar, and not particularly out of the ordinary.

But as I listened to their leaders, spent time with staff, and watched daily life unfold, it became clear that the buildings are simply the stage.

The culture is the performance.

One statement stayed with me throughout the visit.

Years ago, when Hogeweyk® was still a traditional nursing home, the leadership asked a simple question:

"Would we want someone we love to live here?"



Their answer was no.

That question changed everything.

Instead of asking how they could improve their nursing home, they asked how they could help people continue living life.

That subtle difference reshaped every decision that followed.

Residents still receive skilled nursing care. Medications are administered. Personal care is provided. Medical professionals remain part of the team.

But those services support life, they do not define it.

One afternoon I watched residents help plan meals, shop for groceries, prepare food together, and gather around the kitchen table.

It would be easy to describe that as an activity.

It wasn't.

It was simply life.

That distinction may be the greatest lesson I brought home.

Throughout our visit, another theme emerged. Although physical restraints have largely disappeared and chemical restraints have been greatly reduced, one type of restraint continues to exist in every organization including our own:

Cultural restraints.

They are the routines we have always followed.

The assumptions we make.

The schedules we create.

The policies designed with good intentions that slowly become barriers to choice, purpose, and belonging.

Those restraints cannot be removed through architecture alone.

They require a change in how we think.

Perhaps my favorite observation came from watching the people who provide support each day. They rarely described themselves as caregivers. Instead, they saw themselves as people who support someone else in continuing to live an ordinary life.

That shift may sound small.

It isn't.

When someone sees their role as completing tasks, the day naturally becomes organized around the work. But when someone sees their role as supporting another person's life, the work begins organizing itself around the person.

As I reflected on the experience during the flight home, I realized something important for Lumina and for Landis Communities.

What I brought home wasn't a blueprint, it was a challenge.

How do we continue creating a community where someone living with dementia is first known as a neighbor... before they are known by a diagnosis?

How do we design systems that support normal life instead of replacing it?

How do we ensure our team members see themselves not only as caregivers, but as people who help others continue living meaningful lives?

The answers to these questions don't require Dutch architecture.

They require intentional culture.

That is the work of Lumina.

Our responsibility is to ask the same courageous question they asked decades ago:

What do we want for someone we love?

Across Landis Communities, we believe it will be found in our vision of Enriching Lives and our Guiding Values of Joy, Compassion, Integrity, Stewardship and Community.

It will be found in the conversations we have with residents, clients, families, team members, and our community.

Most importantly, it will be found in thousands of everyday moments.

The future of dementia support may not depend on building more villages.

It may depend on building a culture where people living with dementia continue to experience purpose, belonging, relationships, and the ordinary rhythms of life.

That is the lesson I brought home from Hogeweyk®.

And I believe it is a lesson worth exploring together.

