The Story of EDEN

People around the world are familiar with the story of Eden – the story of making a world for humans. In this story, the very first place where humans were supposed to live was a beautiful garden – The Garden of Eden.

That is the story that inspired the founder of the Eden Alternative, Dr. William Thomas when he began to think about making a better world for our Elders.

Shortly after taking a job at the local nursing home, Dr. Thomas was making his rounds one day. He went to see a woman who had a rash on her arm. In his best doctor voice, he leaned down and screamed in her ear, "Hello, I'm Dr. Thomas, what can I do for you today?"

He will never forget the beautiful blue eyes that stared up at him as she reached up to draw him closer. And he will never forget the words she whispered, "Doctor, I am so lonely."

Those words haunted him for weeks as he searched his medical texts and found nothing. And so he began to think about a different kind of world.

He began to think about a true human habitat – a place where humans could live, not just wait to die. And so began the story of the Eden Alternative. It is better to live in a garden.

Dr. Bill & Jude Thomas, Founders

What is the Eden Alternative?

The Eden Alternative is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to remaking the experience of aging and disability across America and around the world. It is a powerful tool for improving the well-being of our Elders and their Caregivers. We are dedicated to supporting others in the creation of communities which eliminate the plagues of Loneliness, Helplessness, and Boredom, the plagues of the human spirit.

The core concept of The Eden Alternative teaches us to see aging not as decline, but as a continuous stage of growth and development in a human life. The places we create for our Elders to live should foster that growth and the growth of their caregivers.

The Eden Alternative shows us how companionship, the opportunity to give meaningful care, and the variety and spontaneity that mark an enlivened environment can succeed where pills and therapies fail. It also shows us how progressive leaders can create a warm culture through empowerment and the development of teamwork as an organization-wide operating philosophy.

Institutions Control, Habitats Nurture

Most importantly, Eden teaches us that decisions belong with our Elders, or as close to our Elders as possible. Our Elders want, need, and deserve autonomy over their daily lives. Edenizing Homes give it back to them.

The institutional model that has been dominant in the care of our Elders has many shortcomings. The plagues of the human spirit run rampant in these cold, sterile social and physical environments. Our Elders need and deserve an opportunity for a life worth living, not just time spent waiting to die.

EDEN ALTERNATIVE®

Lincoln Long Term Care, Davenport

An Eden Alternative Registered Home

It's Better to Live in a Garden…

Eden Alternative Registered Homes

As a way of honoring those who would undertake the hard work of transforming their institutions into warm, loving homes, The Eden Alternative maintains the Eden Registry. The Registry is not an accreditation or in any way an indicator of quality. It is simply a commitment to strive for the Principles & Practices of the Eden Alternative. It's like joining the Scouts.

Registered Homes are agreeing to abide by the Eden Principles, and to work toward creating a better world. So, just like in the Scouts, you will find Eden Homes at all different stages of the process. That doesn't mean one is better than another, just at a different point. The important thing to remember is that the organization has made a commitment to strive for a better way.

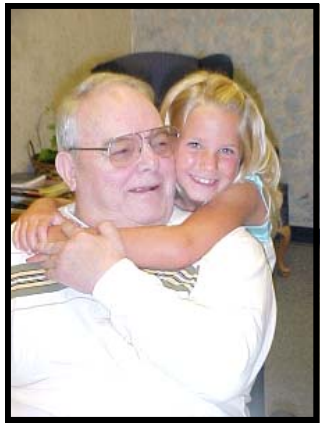
If you are entering an Eden Home, there are some things you might notice…

What You Might Notice Here

Even before you enter an Eden Home you might have noticed something different from other long-term care facilities. You may have had a hard time finding a parking spot. We call it the "Parking Lot Theory." Edenizing Homes are committed to involving the larger community in creating a home for their Elders. They create places where old and young alike enjoy being – so, their parking lots are often full!

Sights

When you enter an Eden Home you might see a few things that are different. There may be live, green plants, everywhere, not just in the lobby. A cat may scurry past you with a child in hot pursuit, as you make your way. Or a dog may be sleeping at the front door. You will definitely see smiling faces – on the Elders and the staff. And people will be engaged in life, not slumped in their wheelchairs, lined up down the halls.



Sounds

You might also hear some different sounds in an Eden Home. Rather than call bells and alarms screeching, there may be the sound of birds singing, children laughing, and people sharing life stories. There may be music playing, and people talking with each other, not at each other. You will also hear respectful voices from the Caregivers towards the Elders, and from the management towards the Caregivers.

Smells

With animals and children and lots of people, you might think you would smell bad odors. But an Edenizing Home understands the importance of maintaining a clean, safe environment. You might smell the aroma of fresh baked bread, or cookies being prepared by the Elders and the children together.

Feelings

There is something else you might notice when you enter an Eden Home. There is a certain "feeling". You might not be able to describe it. It just "feels" different from other facilities. You're not going crazy. We have this reported to us all the time from all kinds of people. That feeling you are feeling is simply LOVE. Love abounds in Edenizing homes. So, relax and enjoy it.

Understanding

Please remember Eden is a journey, not a destination. If you don't notice these things, it may be that this organization has just begun their Eden journey. They are undertaking the hard work of changing the culture before they change the environment.

It is from this cultural transformation that many of the real benefits for the Elders are derived. Congratulate them for choosing the right path and ask if you can help. We welcome all who are willing to help us in this important work.

Experience the difference!