

Fake bus stop calms Swedish dementia sufferers who want to go home

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

In a Swedish nursing home, residents wait for a bus that never comes.

Staff have installed a fake bus stop in a hallway to ease the minds of anxious dementia patients eager to leave.

A bench is pushed up against the wall under an authentic-looking bus stop sign for the municipal transport company, complete with a map of the town of Sodertalje.

An imaginary bus schedule is even posted on the opposite wall.

Caroline Wahlberg, who runs the Tallhojden nursing home, sat down with Edward, a resident in his 80s whose piercing blue eyes looked vaguely off into the distance.

"It is very common... that they have this worry and want to go home" at a certain stage of Alzheimer's and dementia, she told AFP.

"Some have their bags packed" as they wait on the bench, she said.

The bus stop was installed four years ago and has helped patients on numerous occasions.

"I had a lady who lived here and she would come to me several times a day and ask for her parents to come and pick her up," Wahlberg said.

"We used to sit on the bench with her and just wait. And then we started to talk... and then she was calmer (and) happier. And we could then go eat or watch TV," she said.

Brings back memories

Fake bus stops were erected in parks outside some [retirement homes](#) in Germany in 2008 to give wandering patients a place where they would instinctively go to sit.

At the Swedish nursing home 35 kilometers (22 miles) southwest of Stockholm, where 17 people currently live, the measure is part of the patients' treatment.

"It has brought some change here, it's like therapy," said Louise Bass, a [nurse](#) who has worked at the home for 13 years.

The bench is most sought-after at the end of the day, when the patients are more likely to feel restless.

"Everybody has taken a bus. They recognize the sign, so sometimes they think the bus is coming," Bass said.

"We sit here and chat (and) they forget that they wanted to go out. It helps a lot."

The [bus stop](#) "brings back memories", added Rebecka Gabrielsson, manager of several of the town's nursing homes.

"They can talk about where they worked, where they have traveled. It is a tool that helps them with their symptoms."

But is it morally acceptable to lie to vulnerable patients?

An article published by the *Israel Journal of Health Policy Research* in 2019 examined the question of fake bus stops.

It showed that while the goal was to reduce the number of dementia patients trying to escape from nursing homes, the bus stops could also increase their sense of frustration and the feeling of being deceived.

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