



# Kindness for carers

Self-care for people  
supporting loved ones  
living with dementia



**Inspired by Leonnie Pedersen's  
gift of support to families living  
with dementia at Kanwal Gardens  
Care Community.**

## **Dear families, friends and carers,**

We may not know much about you yet, but we know this. We know that you care for your loved one more than we can imagine and that you may have walked through our doors trapped between grief and guilt and perhaps even suffering from sheer exhaustion.

We want you to know that each week, in our many care communities across Australia, people just like you walk through our doors traveling a similar agonising path. Like you, they come to us because, despite all their efforts, they are no longer able to meet the needs of their loved one living with dementia. Some carers need a break from their round-the-clock responsibilities, for others, their current home is simply no longer an option.

At Opal, we care for loved ones living with dementia every day. We have dedicated ourselves to creating the physical, social and clinical spaces that offer the opportunity for our residents to live healthy, independent and joyful lives in a new home that feels both free and safe.

The booklet in your hand was inspired by a simple handmade leaflet made by one of our lifestyle managers, Leonnie Pedersen, at Kanwal Gardens Care Community. When we asked Leonnie what had inspired her, she answered, "Families need to know that they've done the right thing and there comes a time when love simply isn't enough."

If this feels like your story too, we hope you will find comfort here.

**From your Opal family**

**“It hurts to know  
you’ll never  
remember the  
things that I’ll  
never forget.”**

- Tiffany Williams

## **Some gentle reminders if you’re feeling overwhelmed:**

*You...*

have not failed your loved one by moving them into a home that offers full-time care and support.

*You...*

may have come to a point where your energy and abilities have reached their limit and perhaps you simply cannot keep up with the demands of supporting someone living with dementia outside a care home environment.

*You...*

can take comfort in knowing that your loved one is being cared for by carers who come to our care communities refreshed and re-energised each day – eager to bring joy and calm to your loved one’s life.

*You...*

are now free to breathe, relax and regroup and to visit your loved one as often as you wish.



**“I can still hold  
my dad’s hand,  
but I miss him  
every day.”**

- Anna Copley

## Your loved one is in good hands

The person you love now receives care and services that may be difficult to replicate at home.

- Care for physical, social, cultural and mental wellbeing.
- A registered nurse around the clock to address urgent clinical needs.
- Companionship but also privacy and alone time.
- Access to safe wandering areas where a helping hand is close by.
- Activities to participate in and enjoy.
- Screens with engaging audio-visual content to enrich and entertain.
- A quiet area away from the TV to be alone and enjoy some time out.
- Nutritious meals modified for specific clinical requirements.
- Quality time with family and friends in a supportive and safe space.

**Sometimes, when things  
feel like they’re falling  
apart, they’re actually  
falling into place.**



**If you think my hands  
are full, you should  
see my heart.**

## **Being kind to yourself is important too**

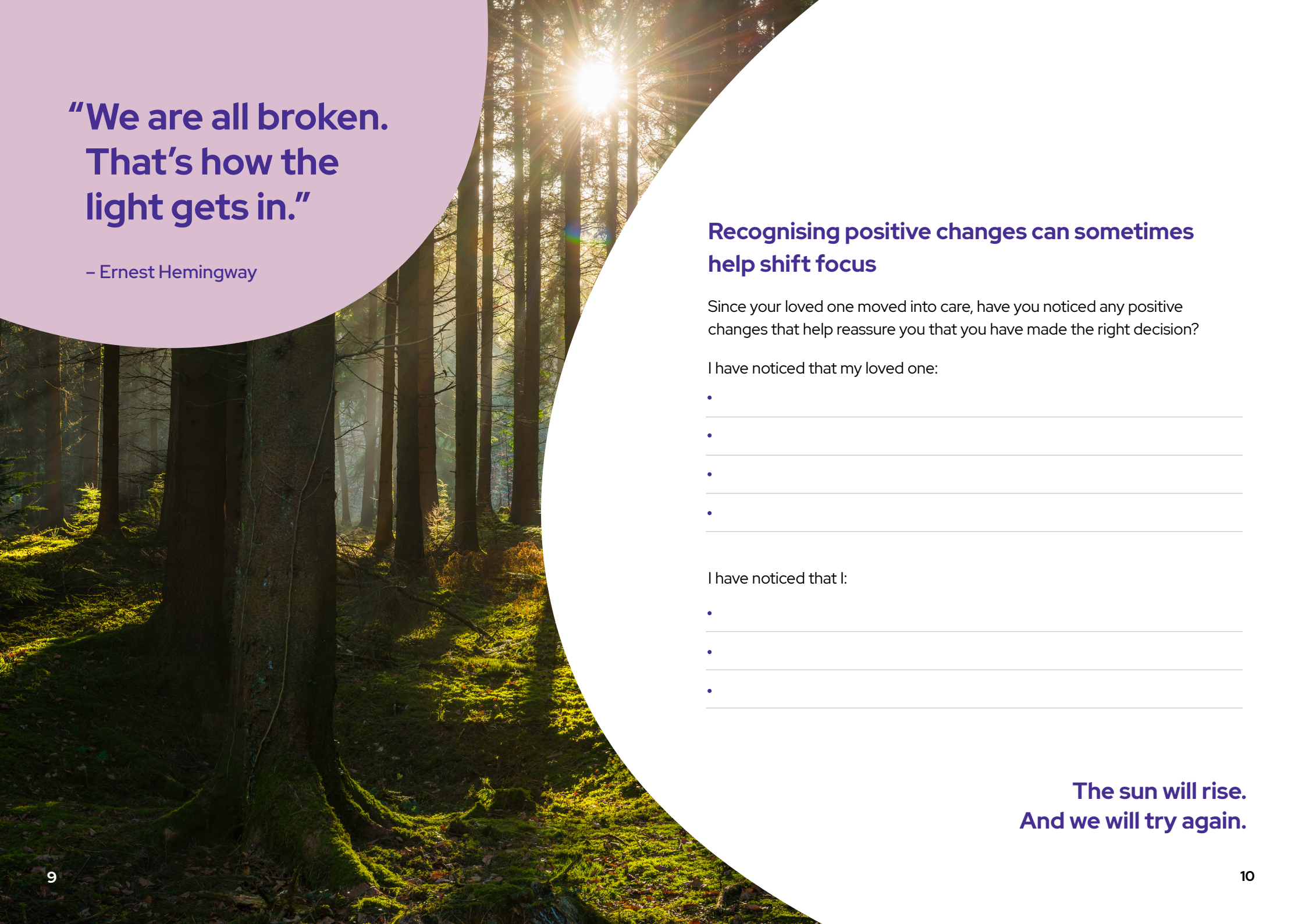
You have done your best to support your loved one, often under very challenging circumstances. Now is the time for us to care and for you to continue to love.

Write down something you love to do but haven't done in a very long time because you felt you didn't deserve it.

Write down one thing you can do this week to be kind to yourself and to fill your emotional tank.

**“Talk to yourself like  
you would talk to  
someone you love.”**

- Brene Brown



**“We are all broken.  
That’s how the  
light gets in.”**

– Ernest Hemingway

## **Recognising positive changes can sometimes help shift focus**

Since your loved one moved into care, have you noticed any positive changes that help reassure you that you have made the right decision?

I have noticed that my loved one:

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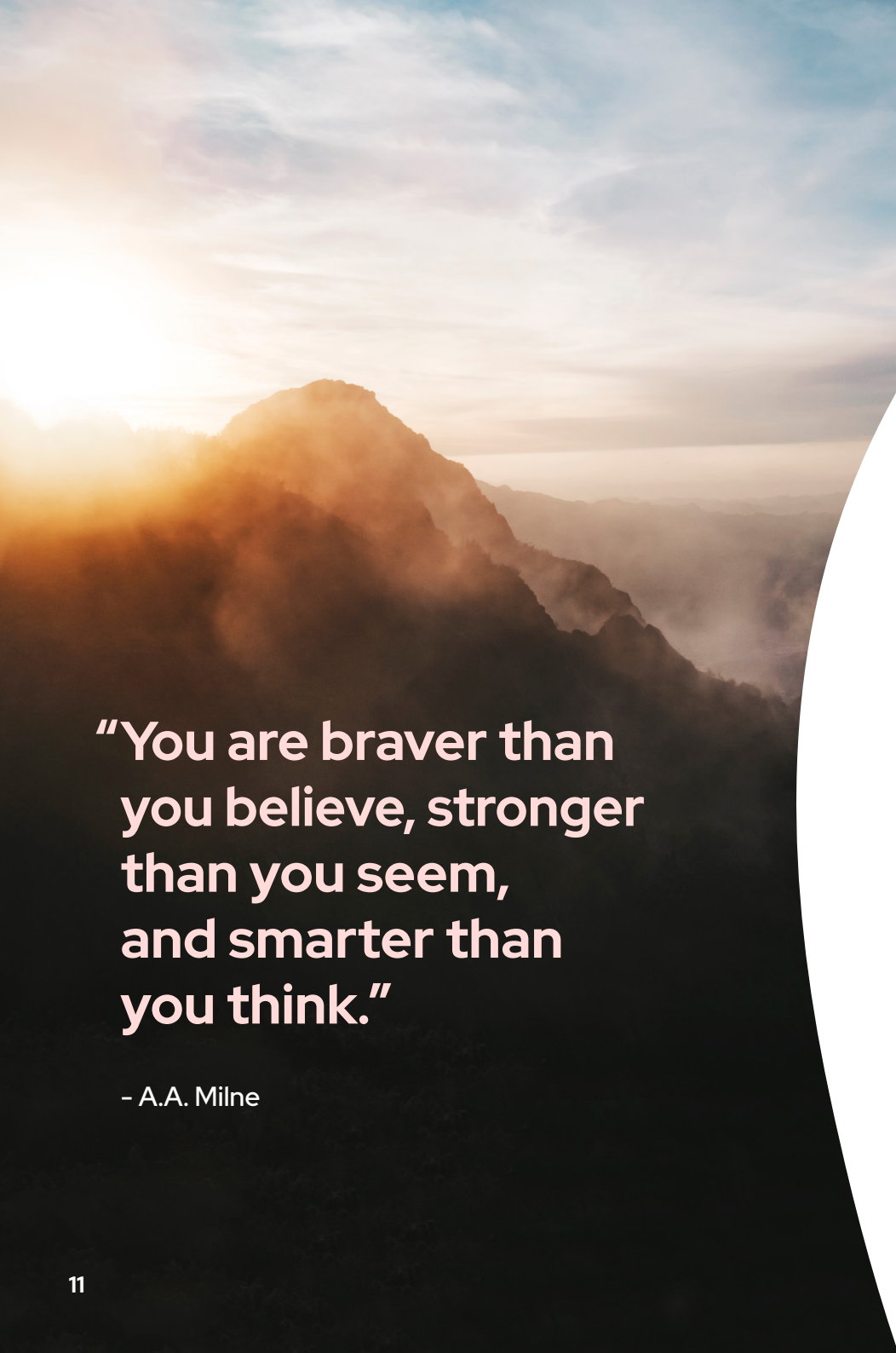
I have noticed that I:

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**The sun will rise.  
And we will try again.**



**“You are braver than  
you believe, stronger  
than you seem,  
and smarter than  
you think.”**

- A.A. Milne

### **If you have difficult days, this may help:**

You may have days when you feel overwhelmed by a range of emotions. To help you navigate these normal but complicated feelings, speak with our team about your loved one’s ongoing needs. Come and spend time with your loved one in their new home. Bring things that will brighten their day and yours.

It sometimes takes time to settle into care and it may take time for you to trust others to perform the roles that you may have done on

your own for a long time. We may do them differently from you, which may be unsettling or cause feelings of guilt. Ask questions to reassure yourself that your loved one is being well cared for. If your heart is still not quiet, ask again.

In time, we hope you will see that you haven’t failed your loved one. On the contrary, your loved one is living in a safe, calm and supportive space, cared for by an experienced and compassionate team.

**Love is not a memory.  
It cannot be forgotten.**

## You are still part of your loved one's care

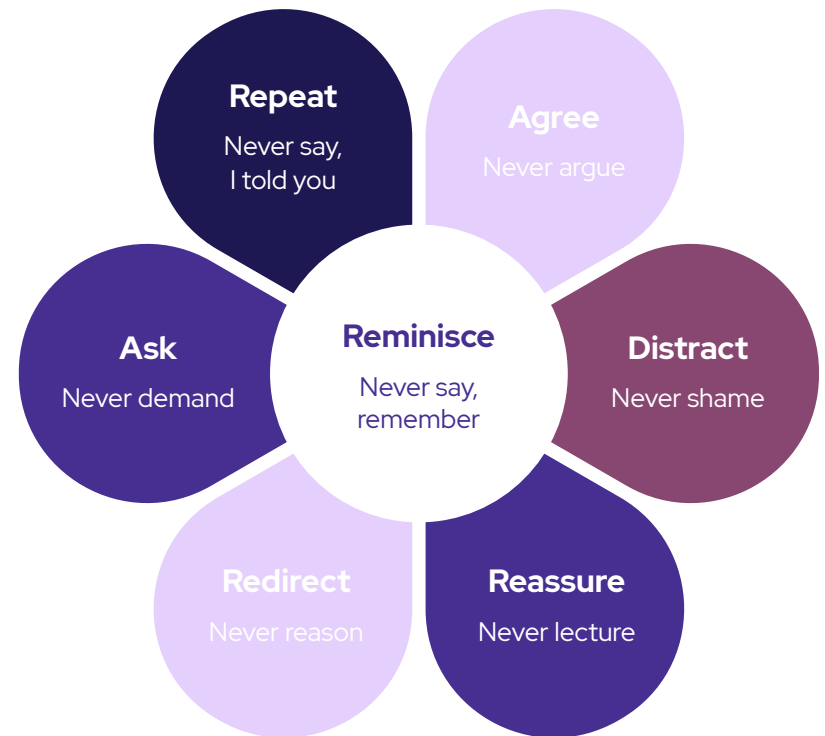
Write down any questions or concerns on your mind so you can share it with our team when you're visiting your loved one or during a family conference.



Here are some things on my mind that I need to share or discuss:

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## Some helpful tips for communicating with people living with dementia





**“Kindness is a language that the deaf can hear and the blind can see.”**

- Mark Twain

## Some helpful tips for communicating with people living with dementia

**Patience** is critical. Try to visit when you have time to stay a while and can relax. When you ask a question, give the person time to respond. It may take a while so just stay in their line of sight and wait for the words to come.

**Body language and gestures** are your best friends. Show, point and signal as much as possible. For example, hold the two glasses in your hand and ask, “would you like the apple juice or the orange juice?”

**Simplicity and specificity** help with difficulties in remembering things. Ask simple and easily answerable questions using just one idea at a

time. Try to use full names of people and places wherever possible like, “Your old neighbour, John Smith, sends you his love,” or “Would you like to see a photograph of your grandson, Nicholas?”

**Sweetness** goes a long way. A smile or a gentle touch on the hand can be understood even when communicating with words has become difficult.

**Keep a sense of humor.** People living with dementia often still enjoy laughing together with you. Lighten the mood with some gentle humour, but never at their expense.

## Some additional support resources

There are many support groups and resources for families living with dementia.

### Your GP

If you are struggling with guilt, anxiety or depression related to a loved one living with dementia, contact your local GP for a referral to a counsellor or psychologist who may help you to cope better with these emotions.

### Dementia Australia

**dementia.org.au** or call **1800 100 500**.

Offers the widest range of dementia information, services and programs in Australia with a local branch in each state.

### My Aged Care

**myagedcare.gov.au/caring-someone-living-dementia** or call **1800 200 422**.

Provides general information about government programs and assistance.

### Beyond Blue

**beyondblue.org.au** or call **1300 224 636**.

Provides information, resources and immediate support to anyone struggling with mental health issues regardless of the circumstances.

For more resources and support in your area, please visit our website **opalhealthcare.com.au**

## Notes

This booklet is intended to be a self-care resource for families and carers who may feel overwhelmed by the decision to admit a loved one living with dementia into care. It is not intended to be a clinical guide to dementia nor a guide for caring for people living with dementia. If you need further support, please speak with a team member or contact your GP.



\* Thank you to our residents, families and team for allowing us to use their photos in our publications.