

Plus Exclusive

## Residents with disabilities locked in their own homes due to a broken elevator: 'This leads to social isolation. I don't do anything anymore



Jan Karel Jansen-Venneboer, resident of De Veste on IJburg, drives into the 'ghost elevator' next to his apartment on the fifth floor. Image Mariet Dingemans

Apartment complex De Veste on IJburg is plagued by a ghost elevator: sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. That is a problem for everyone, but a complete disaster for residents in wheelchairs.

[Malika Sevil](#) March 9, 2024, 3:03 AM

The elevator in her apartment complex has always been unreliable, but since November last year it has broken down so often that wheelchair-dependent student Merel had to make a choice: either she stayed in this house and accepted that she was regularly locked up at home and therefore could not attend lectures. "Or I let my life go on."

She chose the latter.

Since the end of last year, Merel has been staying with her parents again. Temporary. It's an emergency solution. One that is difficult for her. "I keep thinking: when can I go home again?" She monitors from a distance how the elevator is going. But it is still broken every now and then, even after several repairs.

This concerns the elevator in the part of the De Veste apartment complex that is located on IJburglaan. Housing association De Alliantie rents a number of independent care homes there to people with a physical disability. The building also has a support center with nurses and residential counselors from Ons Tweede Thuis. These care homes and various owner-occupied homes are criss-crossed in the complex. In addition to Merel, there are four other people who are dependent on a wheelchair. And so they too are imprisoned.

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**Stock up on groceries just in case.** Because that's exactly what you can call it, says Jan Karel Jansen-Venneboer (78). Captured. He lives on the fifth floor and doesn't trust the elevator one bit. "A while ago he didn't work for three days in a row. A disaster. I live alone. I have to do everything myself, but if the elevator is broken, I can't do anything."

Jansen-Venneboer is sitting in his apartment where the sun shines generously. In his room, the flags with '75 years' still hang from a few birthdays ago, and the artificial Christmas tree has also remained standing. Jansen-Venneboer, a retired advertising executive who 'had problems with his heart, up to and including a stroke', is in a wheelchair and now tries to enjoy the little things. Just dropping by the store to buy a bunch of tulips, getting some fresh air, reading the newspaper, a visit from his dear daughter, all those things.

"But now, because of the broken elevator, I often can't even go to the mailbox to get the newspaper." Nowadays he also buys extra groceries. "Just in case I get stuck in my home again."

According to neighbor John Dobber (51), who is also dependent on his wheelchair but lives in a different part of the complex, the residents have baptized the elevator as a 'ghost elevator'. "He does what he wants."

The elevator goes to floors you don't want to go to and of course people have also been trapped there. One <sup>x</sup> day he does,

people have also been trapped there. One day it works, the next day it doesn't - with the unpredictability of an NS timetable on a rainy autumn day.

### **Social isolation**

Many care workers also no longer dare to take the elevator, says Jansen-Venneboer. "They're afraid they'll get stuck.

They would rather walk up five flights of stairs and then arrive here exhausted. And what if a fire breaks out here? Well, then it's on the front page of *Het Parool*."

The residents do not know what exactly is wrong with the elevator. But after a report or complaint from De Alliantie or the lift mechanic, they are often told that they are 'waiting for a part'. Many people will not realize that the lack of a piece of metal or plastic can have such a major impact on a human life, says Merel. "The fact that I cannot live at home now has turned my whole life upside down. I am very tired."

Her days in IJburg were organized and fine-tuned down to the last detail. She received caregivers several times a day for washing and dressing, for example. Now her parents do. She received physiotherapy in IJburg, but now has to miss that too. "My body deteriorates as a result. And hard too." She does not see her friends in IJburg and she misses the mental coaching she received at home. "This leads to social isolation. I don't do anything anymore." Merel can indeed go to school. "But I'm having trouble focusing on homework."

In short: she doesn't know at all how to proceed.

The residents of De Veste do not feel taken seriously by their landlord De Alliantie. They have reported the malfunctions many times, but a real solution has not been found. Every time the repair service comes to repair the elevator and a little later the whole routine – complaint, repair, defect – repeats itself again. Jansen-Venneboer: "And the same excuse every time: There are no more parts."

### **The Alliance's response**

The Alliance acknowledges that there are problems with the elevator and stated in a response that it finds it 'very annoying' for the residents. The elevator will undergo major maintenance this year, De Alliantie promises.

This was decided by the Owners' Association (VvE), of which the corporation is a part. "We assume that this will solve the problems," says De Alliantie.

Merel and Jansen-Venneboer have a gloomy outlook. She has little faith in it, as previous revisions did not solve the problems. He mainly sees it as a sweetener.

"This elevator is just gone.

An overhaul isn't going to help. A new elevator is needed," says Merel. "At the very least, I want us to be serious

Blackbird. "At the very least, I want people to think seriously about it and accept that people with disabilities live here, whose lives cannot simply be stopped. If you are as dependent as we are, you do not dare to stand up for yourself so easily. When people say on all sides: 'Yes, it costs so much money.' Or: 'It's so much trouble', then at a certain point you don't dare say anything anymore. But what lingers is the feeling: we don't matter."

**The name Merel has been fictitious. Name and surname are known to the editors.**

**About the author: [Malika Sevil](#) has worked for *Het Parool* for 25 years . She wrote a lot about healthcare, she also reported on the corona crisis. Since 2022 she has been writing about inequality of opportunity, poverty and the gap.**



Apartment complex De Veste on IJburglaan. Housing association De Alliantie rents there a number of independent care homes for people with a physical disability. Image Mariet Dingemans

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