The Camphill Initiative was developed following World War II in Scotland to care for children with developmental disabilities. These children have now aged and many of them require the kind of assistive care provided for older adults living in assisted living environments. Camphill Ghent is a response to enabling this older developmentally disabled population to live in a supportive environment under the community’s guiding principles of Anthroposophy.

“Ultimately, we are all strangers to one another and must be welcomed as such. While the mentally ill, the physically handicapped, refugees, immigrants of different religions and skin colours from strange lands and cultures, the aged, the addicted, and others might be special cases, they are only special cases of what we all are: human beings.”

~ Karl Konig (1902-1966)
In keeping with the tradition of the community’s self-sustaining nature, the Initiative purchased a 114 acre farm capable of supporting several phases of development. The community sits comfortably within the natural features of the site, with co-houses and townhouses arrayed around the two large natural ponds.
The project was awarded a $9.6 million HEAL grant from NY State, for the purpose of creating new environments for care in the state. The HEAL grant had a two-year time table from award to occupancy. The site was carefully analyzed to understand not only topography, but natural drainage patterns. It was also planned to dedicate the most appropriate areas to biodynamic farming, a key activity for the community. The existing two ponds were utilized as part of the storm water system.

“...care must grow out of and be an expression of love: we must meet others with gratitude, awe, compassion and conscience.”

~ Karl König
Working with the land and its contours as well as creating a community that blends with the site were important guiding design principles on this project. Designers used an integrated approach to site planning that protects natural systems, heals disturbed areas and serves the basic need of the community. Outdoor living is a key element of the program with a focus on facilitating social interaction among residents through a variety of outdoor spaces.
The new barn is a replacement of the original, strongly encouraged by the local planning board. The “new” barn involved moving the existing wood silo to a new concrete foundation, allowing the project team to create a service/community structure that serves as part of the site treatment plant, receiving bulk food storage on the lower level, with administrative and medical offices on the upper level.
ADULT HOUSE
FLOOR PLAN

Program Legend
- Administration
- Circulation
- Commons
- Resident Support
- Staff
- Service
- Resident Room

Activity Room
Dining Rooms
Resident Rooms
Cafe
Staff Room
It was part of the project’s mission to support an idea of aging that appreciates the special strengths and needs of those in their elder years. When developing building plans, particularly the Adult Homes, it was important that there should be no more than two rooms together before light or a window could be seen.
Camphill Ghent’s environment encourages movement and balance and the activity spaces are light-filled. The design enlivens surfaces with different textures and color. The colors evoke certain emotions and the design integrates color in an Anthroposophic way: Blue/Violet evokes reverential feelings; Green evokes new life; Yellow/Orange: light and brightness; Red/Blue: deep emotions/contemplation.
Co-houses with rear patios overlook and surround a large pond; this arrangement promotes chance social experiences. Staff and co-workers live among residents in apartments above and attached to the assisted living houses, which help to reinforce personal relationships.
The Steiner principles affected the overall building geometry, creating many irregular angles in building form and corridor configuration. As a result, the design avoided flat ceilings and right angles where possible to create the sense of a living environment as opposed to a closed box and the roof forms create movement.