Nursing home for elderly provides a type of residential care. It is a place of residence for senior citizens who need some assistance with daily activities and health care. Residents include the elderly adults with physical or mental disabilities as well as people with special needs, such as Alzheimer patients.

Living away from home means they have to give up their familiar social network and living habits. Elderly people want to keep their own lifestyle they have for so many years and they could not accustom to a new lifestyle easily. Being unable to live independently and having difficulty in living a normal life, disabled people constantly feel upset about themselves and they may close themselves to the outside world. It is important for them to integrate in to the communal life to gain self-awareness and social confidence. The aim of the project is to provide space encouraging people to participate into community activities. A building program containing diverse communal activities is required.

In addition to the needs of future occupants, the context of the site is also a vital factor to define what kind of elderly home fits the specific environment including the needs of care service in the neighborhood and how to organize the volumes to more closely connect people from the neighborhood to the project. The site is in Schilderwijk, one of the 8 districts of Den Haag city center. It has the largest immigrants group in Den Haag with more than 90% non-Western origin and it is also one of the poorest districts in the Netherlands with a high unemployment rate. Focusing on the specific site, it is a collage composed of housing from different ages and styles including 4 rows of Spanish houses in the west, long housing block in the east and detached houses in the north. In this way it is crucial to provide more public functions for the whole community and to integrate to volumes to the site.

After a careful consideration of living groups and urban context, I could develop the project in a more reasonable way. Reflecting on the whole design process, it is filled with challenges and renewals of perspectives. Among them, I would to pick 3 important turns that leads the project to what it is now.

1. Design concept and studio research
The initial idees is to encourage residents to live in a communal life as had mentioned to gain self-awareness and social confidence. The first challenge is to find an architectural element to realize the idea and to find a specific theme in studio research to support it.

I found I was curious about the rich street life in Schilderwijk and was impressed by the direct and indirect connections by street encounters. Because it shows how strangers could merge together to create communications. I found there are specific places people would like to stay and have conversations. I came up with an idea that I could explore the physical behavior settings for lingering and the research analysis could be summarized to conclude design principles and guidelines to encourage people’s lingering and gathering in public place.

How can I apply the idea to the project? I found corridors along with connected communal space are the place for encounters to meet and communicate. However, normally they are
treated only as circulation space and people do not like to linger on corridors. What would happen if I could introduce the ideas of street life into corridors? Then residents would be encouraged to stay a longer time and have connection with each other and the elderly home could become a really nice place to live. After conducted the research I concluded several principles support people’s lingering. The fixed elements like the proportion and dimension of space, the pavement and material significantly affects the atmosphere of the corridor space. The semifixed elements like the appropriation of tables and chairs and non-fixed elements like regulating people’s movement could also be organized according to the principles to generate people’s lingering activities.

As shown in the 1:50 concept model, by creating the little corners in the corridors, people will linger or gather at the corridor as the corners could satisfy people’s needs like reading a book, talking with others or drinking coffee. So it will become a communal place for them and encourage occupants to take part in communal activities.

2. Social consideration - make the building open to the neighborhood
When designing the building I was filled with conventional perspectives that the residents should be carefully protected and people from the outside could be dangerous to them. In this way I make the building very closed and it is impossible for people to walk through the building and have connections with the residents. Also I did not pay close attention to the relations between the surrounding roads, building openings and volumes of surrounding buildings.

As shown in the picture, the road in the west is not connected to the opening of the building so the road is blocked by the volume and people living nearby would not like to enter the
building. After discussion with my tutors, I realized the program would be more interesting if it could be open to the neighborhood at the same time providing privacy to the residents so that they could live without being interpreted by people from outside. In this way, I developed a new plan as shown below to turn the central outdoor gallery into an outdoor open one and moved the entrance to be more closely connected to the road. I also developed a strategy that these openings are accessible in daytime and closed at night controlled by folding glass doors. The residents are living in the first floor with their private entrance and stairs. Near the entrances there are public functions like wellness center, library and gym. People from the outside could walk into and walk through the building through the openings and galleries and enjoy the care service provided. In this way, the project could serve its function not for the people living inside but also for neighborhood in Schilderwijk an area where public functions is in short.

3. Detail design
The last turn in the design process is a huge challenge for me and turned out to be the most impressive part I benefit from the project.

I rarely had the experience to design with details and detail for me is no more than draw several 1:20 or 1:5 drawings at the last week before final presentation. I originally view detailing as the way to solve problems so I do not have the awareness to detail different elements in an elegant way. So I had really bad details when I tried to put things together in the façade. As shown in the drawing below I expose the shading part and all window frames outside making the façade really ugly. After several weeks’ discussion and reversion I learned that detailing is a tool to help me to think how things are organized in a reasonable way to achieve the expected result. Then I studied different ways of detailing and learned how to use the basic principles to design things I want. Then I designed the window like the one below to
make it elegant and echo the style of the whole program. In addition the detail design should be more integrated and could be applied to the whole building.

The 3 turns guided me to develop my project to what I am now and will further affect my project and push it forward. And I expect there will be more fresh ideas and new perspectives could play a positive role. In the end, I would like to reflect my motivation and the whole design process and make the building a better place to live and to take part in a communal life to gain self-awareness and social confidence to age with dignity.