

Choices
Support Center



Choices@AZC:
Mental Health and Prevention Interventions for LGBTQ+ Asylum



BACKGROUND

- In many countries being queer can result in death, imprisonment and abandonment
- 67 countries have laws criminalizing same-sex relations
- 14 countries criminalise gender identity and / or expression of transgender people
- 30% of clients report history of sexual violence
- Stigma and discrimination is widespread e
- Trust issues and fear of government workers are common

LIFE IN ASYLUM CENTERS

- Trauma, fear, anxiety, and stress prevail
- Living in isolation and feelings of loneliness
- Discrimination, bullying and attacks are common
- 100% of our clients report stressful or unsafe living conditions
- The asylum center is a second closet: not being able to be yourself
- Transgender asylum seekers have highest rates of attempted suicides

TRANSITION INTO SOCIETY

- Long waiting period for the asylum process
- Bottleneck in getting assigned housing
- Limited appropriate counselling and support
- Mental health situation often prevents successful workplace integration
- Adapting to Dutch open LGBTQ+ culture is overwhelming
- Polarisation in Dutch society offers new challenges

Choices Support Center

Choices Support Center (Choices) is a community-based organisation. We provide support and guidance to individuals struggling with risk behaviours related to drug use and sex, particularly within the LGBTQ+ community. Our clients include asylum seekers and status holders. We work with evidenced based behavioural interventions tailored to the individual. The European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has selected our care and prevention service model as good practice for testing, linkage to care, and retention in care for migrant populations in relation to SDG-related diseases (TB, HIV, viral hepatitis, and STIs)

Over the past five years Choices has developed an initiative for prevention and mental health counselling for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and status holders still living in asylum seekers centers (AZCs), called Choices@AZC. It is first of its kind to provide crisis management and mental health support and assists with transitioning into the labour market and Dutch society.

Choices prevention counselling helps people with trauma, depression, PTSD and anxiety to remain stable during the long, uncertain asylum procedure. Many turn to dating apps and sexual activities combined with drug use to become accepted in the queer community.

We stabilise our clients with counselling, social gatherings and a free telephone helpline. Our efforts prevent psychological decompensation and harmful behaviour (such as drug addiction and risky sex). Choices helps clients find a healthy coping mechanism during a period of their lives with a lot of uncertainty.

MORE INFORMATION: CHOICESCENTER.NL I INFO@CHOICESCENTER.NL

GUIDANCE

- Stability and motivation during long wait for mental health services
- Connections with the queer community and organisations
- Integrating into society after receiving residence permit
- Building networks supporting healthy lifestyles
- Information on drug use and risky sexual behaviours
- Help with practical issues and language barriers

RESULTS

- Clients recognise patterns causing use of drugs, alcohol and risky sexual behaviour.
- 60% have minimised and prevented problematic drug use
- 40% have minimised and prevented HIV & STIs
- 90% of clients remain stable several months without escalations
- Our free Helpline has prevented various suicide attempts
- A safe space to communicate freely and be who you are
- A buddy helpline team of experts by experience

OUTCOMES

- Improved mental stability
- Reconnecting with emotions
- Reduced inner conflict
- Reduced feelings of shame and self-blame
- Increased self confidence
- Improved management of health
- Improved communication & problem solving skills
- Better prepared for integration & job interviews