



Choices

Support Center



BACKGROUND

- All come from countries and cultures where being queer can result in death, imprisonment abandoned by family and friends
- 65 jurisdictions criminalise, consensual, same-sex sexual activity
- 12 countries have jurisdictions with death penalty for consensual same-sex sexual activity
- 14 countries criminalise the gender identity and/or expression of transgender people
- Many have not talked about feelings due to stigma and cultures that frown upon it
- Trust is difficult gain due to fear of corrupt government workers
- 30% report history of sexual violence

LIFE IN ASYLUM CENTERS

- Trauma, anxiety, shock and stress
- Loneliness and living in isolation
- Living with people from the same country they fled who have an anti-gay hateful mentality
- Living in constant fear is stressful, for many mentally impossible
- 100% of our clients report stressful or unsafe living conditions in the AZC
- The asylum center becomes the second closet for many hiding in isolation

TRANSITION INTO SOCIETY

- Long waiting period for the asylum process
- Bottleneck in getting assigned housing after receiving asylum status
- Limited appropriate counselling and support transitioning into Dutch 'queer' society
- Fear that HIV infection will prevent asylum
- Adapting to Dutch open LGBTQ+ culture is overwhelming and difficult finding their way in a new culture

Choices@AZC: Prevention Services for LGBTQ+ in Asylum Centers



Choices Support Center

Choices is a community-based organisation that provides support and guidance to individuals struggling with risk behaviours related to drug use and sex, particularly within the LGBTQ+ community, including asylum seekers and status holders. The foundation of our work is utilising behavioural interventions, tailored to the individual.

Over the past two years Choices has developed a national community-based initiative for prevention and mental health counselling for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, called Choices@AZC. The initiative provides crisis management and helps people make the best choices to live healthy lives.

Choices prevention counselling on site in the asylum seekers centers (AZCs), helps people with trauma, depression, PTSD and anxiety disorders to remain stable during the long, uncertain asylum procedure. Many turn to dating apps and sexual activities accompanied by drug use as a means of being socially accepted in the queer community.

We stabilise our clients with ongoing counselling, social gatherings and a free telephone helpline to prevent further psychological decompensation and harmful behaviour, including drug addiction and sexual infections. Choices counselling helps clients find a healthy coping mechanism during a period of their lives with a lot of uncertainty.

The success of the Choices@AZC project is due to our international multi-lingual diverse team of volunteers and psychologists.



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

GUIDANCE

- Stability and motivation during long waiting times for mental health services
- Connections with the LGBTQ+ community and relevant organisations
- Guidance on integrating into Dutch society and queer community after leaving the AZC
- Building networks supporting healthy lifestyles
- Information on drug use and preventing risky sexual behaviours with drug use
- Help with practical daily issues due to language barriers at asylum centers

RESULTS

- 80% of sessions per month are online via WhatsApp video calls or in the office
- 60% have minimized and prevented problematic drug use
- 40% have minimised and prevented HIV & STIs
- Our free Helpline has prevented two suicide attempts
- Creating a safe space has provided an opportunity for many to communicate freely for the first time and be who they are.
- Transgender asylum seekers have highest rates of attempted suicides and no access to hormone treatment

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 immigration interview