

Transition House Gentbrugge - Belgium

Introduction



Transition House Gentbrugge, established in 2023, is located in the center of Gentbrugge, a sub-municipality of the city of Ghent in the Flemish part of Belgium. The facility is managed by Sterkhuis, a collaboration between G4S Care and Exodus the Netherlands, and operates under a contract with the prison system. A transition

house is a small-scale facility for people with a long sentence who have already served a significant portion of their sentence in a regular prison. It is one of four transition houses currently operating in Belgium.

Transition houses were introduced as part of the Federal Public Service Justice's master plan 'Prisons and Internment,' approved on November 18, 2016. This plan aims to promote a differentiated detention policy to support the reintegration of detainees into society. Residents of the facility are referred to as Participants.

Scale

Transition House Gentbrugge has a capacity of up to sixteen residents, making it a small-scale facility. All residents live together in a single house, creating a communal living environment.

RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

Differentiation

Target group:

Transition House Gentbrugge is designed for men eighteen and older who are preparing for conditional release. Residents are admitted eighteen months prior to their conditional release. The facility mainly accommodates men who have served long prison sentences, and the admission criteria stipulate that their offenses must not be related to sex crimes or terrorism. Residents must be proficient in the Dutch language and able to live in a group. People convicted of sexual offenses or terrorism-related crimes are not eligible for placement in the transition house. The selection process involves consultation with local prison boards and prison psychosocial services, and once a decision is made, a meeting with the transition house staff follows to finalize the placement.

Forms of security:

Transition House Gentbrugge uses a combination of relational security, static security, and procedural security. Relational security is central to the operation of the facility. Communication and trust between staff and residents are emphasized. Staff works as much as possible in the common areas, engaging with the residents. Life within the transition house is shaped by both the staff and the residents.



Static Security measures are in place to monitor and control access to the facility. There is a camera at the front door for security purposes, and both participants and staff have badges to open doors. Each resident's bedroom is secured with locks, and the facility maintains a system for noting the presence and absence of individuals. However, the facility has no fences or other physical barriers and camera surveillance is limited to the outside, along all windows of the facility. Residents and staff do not wear uniforms, and participants have the freedom to lock their rooms from the outside.

Procedural security includes various house rules, such as residents clean the house themselves, and smoking is not allowed indoors. Residents must wake up before 10 a.m. and attend the daily resident meeting in the dining room by 10 a.m. During the day, they may engage in various activities. By 1 a.m., all participants must be in their rooms, and between 10 p.m. and 7 a.m., all participants must remain in the house and are not allowed to leave the facility. If residents wish to leave for work, sports, or other activities during the day, they must ask for permission, as exit permits are required. They can move freely within the facility during the day. Residents may have personal phones and a shared computer is available.

Activities:

At Transition House Gentbrugge, residents are given a relatively high degree of autonomy. Although they can choose where they work, when they exercise and engage in other activities, they must always ask permission to go outside (outings are subject to supervised exits or exit permits that regulate this). The level of autonomy remains consistent throughout their stay. The facility's methodology is based on three core principles: strength, recovery and connection. The approach focuses on the individual's strengths and their recovery process, while also emphasizing the importance of human connection. This vision is

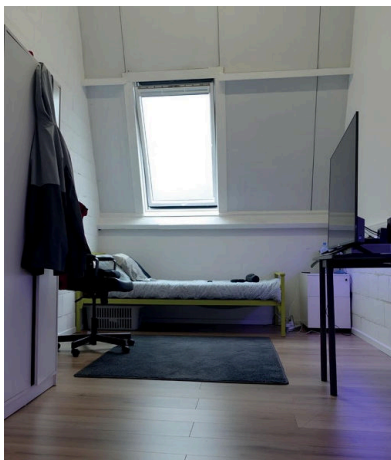
consistently reflected in staff attitudes and behaviors, fostering a sense of meaning and connection for participants. Each pillar aims to help participants set and achieve personal goals step by step.

Participants wake up before 10 a.m. and must attend the daily resident meeting in the dining room by 10 a.m. During the day, they may engage in various activities, provided they have permission to do so. Activities outside the facility include work, volunteering, education and sports. Work is not mandatory, but if participants choose to work, they receive a wage that depends on the work. Inside the facility, residents can watch TV, play games, cook and spend time in the garden. They cook and eat in groups and can do grocery shopping under staff supervision.

In terms of social interaction, participants can call and receive visitors during visiting hours. Visits take place in the visitors' room, where residents and their visitors can talk to each other unsupervised. Residents are also allowed to leave the facility during the week or on weekends for visits or other personal matter; however, this requires an exit permit or penitentiary leave.

Community-integration

Location and architecture:



Transition House Gentbrugge is located in a center area within the municipality of Gentbrugge, a borough of the city of Ghent in the province of East Flanders, Flemish Region, Belgium. Gentbrugge will have 16,481 inhabitants in 2024. The transition house is located on an ordinary street in the heart of the neighborhood, close to the train station, making it easily accessible by public transportation.

The house, previously unoccupied, was repurposed to serve as a transition house. The local government was involved in the decision-making process for its establishment, and a neighborhood meeting was held to discuss the project. The facility did not face opposition from the community in its implementation.

At first glance, Transition House Gentbrugge looks like a regular house. From the street, it does not stand out among the other houses, with an ordinary front door and no fence. The rooms are furnished in conformity with the contractual specifications, with a bed, table/desk with chair, lockable cabinet, private washbasin with running hot and cold water, night light, fire-resistant and blackout curtains, etc. Each resident has their bedroom that they can decorate as they see fit. The facility also has shared facilities, including a

common shower area, kitchen with dining area, toilets, laundry room, living room, a visitor's room and a garden. The entire facility is made homey with cozy sitting areas and a garden with plants and chickens.

Interaction with the community:

Transition House Gentbrugge works with various organizations to support its residents in their reintegration trajectory. These include CAW, CGG, Social House and Moderator for social services, as well as VDAB and employment agencies for employment assistance. To support life after the transition house, partnerships are established with local correctional facilities near the participants' new homes. The facility also partners with De Sleutel, a network of addiction treatment centers, because many residents are dealing with addiction problems.

Integrating Transition House Gentbrugge into the local community is also crucial. Residents do everyday activities in the community, such as shopping, using public transportation and visiting fitness centers or employment agencies. This enables them to rebuild their lives within society. In return, residents contribute to the community by volunteering, such as helping at local events such as the recognition of Ghent Olympic athletes and participating in the charity walk as part of Dementia Week.

Transition house Gentbrugge

Founded: 2023

Capacity: 16

Security level: Low

Nearest city/town:

Gentbrugge (Belgium)

Nature of interaction:

Visited by VZW De Huizen
(18/10/2024)

Publicity/ read more

- About transition houses at the official website of Sterkhuis:

Transitiehuisen. (n.d.). *Home*. Transitiehuisen. Retrieved November 19, 2024, from <https://transitiehuisen.be/>

- A video about the opening of transition house Gentbrugge (in Dutch):

AVS Oost-Vlaamse Televisie. (2023, October 27). *Transitiehuis Gentbrugge - een nieuw initiatief voor de voorbereiding van de terugkeer van gedetineerden*. YouTube. Retrieved November 19, 2024, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRm8Bciw2EE>