

Transition House Leuven - Belgium

Introduction



Transition House Leuven is located in the heart of Leuven, in Belgium and was established in June 2024 by Foundation De Kansenfabriek ("The Opportunity Factory"). This foundation is committed to the recovery and successful reintegration of vulnerable groups in society, making the Transition House an essential resource for people seeking to rebuild their lives. At the

Transition House, participants learn to adapt to their new environment by focusing on finding work, finding housing, discovering hobbies and rebuilding relationships. The facility is managed by an NGO and operates under a contract with the prison system. Its creation followed a government call for applications, inviting several NGOs to participate in the project. The government then decided which organization could run the transition house. Activities are now planned for three years and can be extended thereafter based on success and need. The opening of the Transition House grew out of close cooperation with the city of Leuven and local partners to ensure that participants receive comprehensive support. By referring to residents as "participants," the program emphasizes their active role in making their reintegration process positive.

Scale

Transition House Leuven accommodates a maximum of sixteen residents, classifying it as a small-scale facility. All residents live together in a single house, fostering a communal atmosphere.

RESCALED-principles in practice:

- Small-scale
- Differentiated
- Community-integrated

Differentiation

Target group:

Transition House Leuven focuses on men nearing the end of a long sentence, especially those with about 18 months left until their parole. This program is designed for men aged 18 and older who are preparing to reintegrate into society. The average length of stay ranges from two months to more than a year, depending on individual circumstances.

To qualify, participants must speak Dutch and be comfortable working in groups, allowing them to function effectively in social settings. They should reside within a 40-km radius or have access to public transportation. Participation is voluntary, and individuals need to actively seek support for their reintegration. The program is not open to those with sex offenses or terrorism-related convictions.

The placement process begins when a potential participant expresses interest. The prison's Psychological Services Department (PSD) and the director provide a recommendation that is reviewed by the decision-making board (DDB). If approved, the transition house coordinator conducts an intake interview and makes the final admission decision.

Forms of security:



At Transition House Leuven, relational security is central, built through personal connections between staff and residents. There are two types of staff at the transition house: integration coaches and transition coaches. Integration coaches oversee participants' individual paths, serving as supporters, confidants, facilitators, and liaisons. Transition coaches focus on supervising and guiding group activities, helping residents engage in tasks and going outside together. Together, the ten staff members provide support and guidance.

The procedural security in transition house Leuven consists of house rules that everyone is expected to follow. At regular meetings, residents can discuss house issues, which fosters a strong sense of community. Residents can move freely within the facility during the day, and can leave the facility for various activities. They can use personal cell phones and have access to a shared laptop.

For static security, the house has a coded metal door for controlled access. Residents do not have keys to their rooms, but do have keys to the facility. Attendance is tracked to ensure everyone's presence and safety.

Overall, Transition House Leuven emphasizes relational safety while practical measures are implemented to maintain a safe and supportive environment for all residents and staff.

Activities:

At Transition House Leuven, the approach is guided by the four action domains of De Kansensfabriek: self-determination, connection, recovery and identity. This framework emphasizes self-determination by encouraging autonomy, competence and self-leadership. It focuses on connection by strengthening relationships with important people in participants' lives, while also promoting recovery by taking responsibility for the impact of their actions on all parties involved. In addition, it supports the development of a positive identity detached from previous harmful beliefs and behaviors.



Based on this approach the weekly schedule is tailored to the needs of each participant. Within the facility, residents engage in domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning and watching movies. To promote group cohesion, residents must cook and eat together, as individual cooking is not allowed. They have the opportunity to do their own shopping, though this is not compulsory.

Participants are encouraged to pursue various activities outside the facility, including paid work, volunteer opportunities, sports, and educational pursuits. Labor outside the facility is mandatory, and residents receive a wage for their efforts. They can also engage in fitness, football, or join local clubs, allowing them to explore their interests and build social connections.

Contact with their personal network is flexible, with a focus on preparing them for life after their sentence. Visits with family and friends are usually scheduled outside the facility, although initial visits may take place in a special visitors' area that offers a more relaxed environment without security personnel.

Overall, Transition House Leuven creates a supportive environment that encourages personal growth and successful reintegration into the community.

Community-integration

Location and architecture:

Transition House Leuven is centrally located in a residential area of Leuven, a city and municipality in the Belgian province of Flemish Brabant, home to around 100,000 people, including a large student population. The house fits right into the neighbourhood and looks like a normal house in a quiet street.



The placement involved cooperation between the mayor, municipality, government, prison organisation and the community. Leen, founder of 'de Kansensfabriek', carefully choose this location. The house is easily accessible by public transport and is located in a residential area, making it well integrated into the community. Despite some challenges with the NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) effect, it maintains positive relationships with neighbours through open communication and activities, such as baking biscuits for the community, organizing an opening drink with neighbours, etc.

Architecturally, the transition house is modern yet cozy, with private bedrooms, bathrooms and toilets for residents, along with a shared living space. It also has a visitor area and a small courtyard, making it a welcoming environment for both residents and guests.

Interaction with the community:

Transition House Leuven actively works with the local community and nurtures strong relationships that promote the reintegration process of residents. Interaction with the community occurs constantly as participants participate in various activities, such as working, shopping in local supermarkets and playing sports. Recently, participants took part in a futsal competition where teams from different organisations from Leuven competed against each other and several residents donated blood to the Red Cross, showing their commitment to important social initiatives.

The house has a positive collaboration with Group Intro, which contributes to a strong bond with the community. Being good neighbours is a priority and activities such as baking biscuits for local residents help build rapport and goodwill. This hands-on approach not only enables residents to connect with their neighbours, but also creates a welcoming environment where everyone feels included.

Transition House Leuven

Founded: 2024

Capacity: 16

Security level: Low

Nearest city/town: Leuven
(Belgium)

Nature of interaction: Visited
by VZW De Huizen
(09/09/2024)

Publicity/ read more

- About Foundation De Kansenfabriek at the official website of De Kansenfabriek:

Kansenfabriek. (n.d.). *De Kansenfabriek*. Retrieved September 27, 2024, from <https://dekansenfabriek.be/>

- A book about Foundation De Kansenfabriek written by the founder of this NGO (in dutch):

Muylkens, L. (2023). *De Kansenfabriek: Waarom ook gevangenen moeten kunnen dromen*. Uitgeverij Lannoo.

- A video about the opening of transition house Leuven:

Robtv. (2024, June 26). Eerste transitiehuis voor gevangenen in onze regio is een feit: Op deze manier voorkomen dat mensen hervallen. Retrieved September 27, 2024, from <https://www.robtv.be/nieuws/eerste-transitiehuis-voor-gevangenen-in-onze-regio-is-een-feit-op-de-ze-manier-voorkomen-dat-mensen-hervallen-191599>