

OVER 20% OF  
TRANSGENDER  
AND GENDER  
DIVERSE ADULTS  
IN AUSTRALIA  
WERE BORN  
OVERSEAS<sup>1</sup>



# STARTTS

## SERVICE FOR THE TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION OF TORTURE AND TRAUMA SURVIVORS

The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) is a non-profit organisation providing culturally appropriate psychological treatment, support and community interventions. They help refugees, asylum seekers, new migrants, communities in cultural transition, and members of the CALD community heal from trauma and rebuild their lives in Australia.

WentWest has funded the STARTTS CALD suicide prevention and literacy program since 2018 and supported the pilot and launch of the LGBTQIA+ program in 2020.

Over 20% of transgender and gender diverse people aged over 18 were born overseas<sup>1</sup>. Many LGBTQIA+ people express tensions or conflict between their cultural background and their sexuality or gender identity.

Anita\* came to Australia on a tourist visa and applied for a protection visa based on her transgender identity and bisexual orientation. Anita was informed that a letter from a specialist was required to prove her trans identity. She could not afford a specialist and did not qualify for financial support or a caseworker through the Status Resolution Support Services payment (SRSS) scheme. As a result, Anita resorted to working as a 'soft' sex worker to afford her medical and living expenses.

Since arriving in Australia, Anita has found it challenging to build a connection with community members from her country of origin. The majority of the community are deeply religious. Despite practising her faith extensively, Anita is concerned about sharing her gender identity and sexuality with them.

Anita has, however, found connections within the STARTTS LGBTQIA+ support group. Through these networks, she found shared accommodation, and these friendships have provided Anita with confidence and self-validation. Anita is a very active member of the group, attending meetings, following up with other participants and maintaining group coherence. She provides active feedback and is integral to decision-making and the peer-led program. As part of this project,

Anita co-facilitates the psycho-social support group in Blacktown and regularly works with LGBTQIA+ community members in Parramatta.

Anita is currently a member of the WentWest Project Steering Committee and takes an active role in developing training for interpreters. She was on the original Reference Group and provided oversight, technical advice and direction for the project. She has since co-trained sessions on inclusive practices for working with LGBTQIA+ refugees and asylum seekers.

Anita is an enormous asset to the STARTTS LGBTQIA+ project. She works tirelessly to provide support for community members who otherwise may fall through the cracks in the system. Her lived experience offers essential insights and ensures better support services for asylum seekers or refugees with diverse genders and sexualities.

For more information about how WentWest supports Western Sydney, visit [www.wentwest.com.au](http://www.wentwest.com.au).

\*Name has been changed to protect the identity of this client.

1. Hyde et al (2014) cited in: LGBTQIA+ Health Australia (2021), *Snapshot of mental health and suicide prevention statistics for LGBTQIA+ people*