

# LGBT ENTREPRE NEURSHIP

Case studies of socioeconomic empowerment  
in Rio de Janeiro between 2015-2017

Produced by



Partners



Project funded by  
European Union







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**Case studies of socioeconomic empowerment  
in Rio de Janeiro between 2015-2017**

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, we would like to thank the **participants in the Micro Rainbow Brazil Project** for believing in our work and accepting the challenge of becoming agents of social change through their own lives. We hope you will inspire others to fight and join the struggle for a more inclusive and egalitarian world.

We are especially grateful to those who gave their time and entrusted us with their **inspiring and important stories** in the interviews that support this publication. It was a difficult task to choose from amongst so many project participants. We would love to tell each of your stories, but unfortunately, we did not have the time to do so. We hope that the interviewees featured here can represent and serve as role models for other lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transvestites and transsexuals who also long for freedom and effective integration into Brazilian society.

A special thank you goes to **Leidmar Verneque**, our entrepreneurship course instructor, for the dedication and knowledge that helped our students achieve success as entrepreneurs. We are also grateful to **Maud Chalamet** for her confidence in Micro Rainbow International and her continued collaboration in all stages of the project.

We are also grateful to the **partner institutions** that have opened their doors and hearts to LGBT inclusion in so many ways. It would be difficult to imagine the



growth and impressive results of this project without their extraordinary cooperation. With the same respect and recognition, we thank all the **project volunteers** who invested their time and professional skills in the LGBT cause.

Finally, we would like to thank the **European Union** for providing three years of financial support for this project, as well as methodological tools for its implementation and monitoring through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. The achievements reported here were only possible because they believed in the social relevance of our project for the LGBT community, as well as in the institutional capacity of Micro Rainbow International and its partner organisations to put it into action.



# PREFACE

Work dignifies, gives meaning to life, provides sustenance, and is a right guaranteed by the Brazilian constitution, but not all Brazilian citizens have access to this right. This is the case for LGBT people, especially transvestites and transsexuals. Unfortunately, LGBT people are denied their rights because they fall outside of cis/heteronormative standards and are seen as aberrations and abnormalities. Transvestites and transsexuals, for instance, are still seen as immoral and deplorable. They are socially excluded and segregated, relegated to the fringes of formal employability and systematically driven into prostitution. We need to humanise this section of the population and transform them into legitimate citizens with real rights. Brazil, with the highest rates of homicide of transvestites and transsexuals in the world, urgently needs to learn to live with these people and to coexist with diversity.

In my experience as a trans woman and LGBT militant, Micro Rainbow Brazil's entrepreneurship course was crucial in teaching me what entrepreneurship is and how to become an entrepreneur. Aside from learning as a student, being a teaching assistant was important in building my self-esteem and showing me that I can be productive and useful in supporting my peers as they develop their own business plans. It was an extraordinary experience!



The Micro Rainbow Brazil Project is enormously relevant because it uncovers talents and supports the generation of jobs and income amongst LGBT people on several fronts. The entrepreneurship course teaches participants to manage business earnings and income in an organised way. It is a concrete opportunity for participants to acquire the tools to become entrepreneurs and generate their own income, not relying exclusively on formal employability. At the very least, I think that participants finish the course with higher self-esteem. They also learn to better organise their ideas and set goals to put their entrepreneurship skills into practice, now equipped with techniques for success.

As a project participant and trans activist, I am excited to recommend the stories of my peers. I hope that they are an inspiration for building a society with truly equal opportunities for all. Enjoy reading!!!

**BÁRBARA AIRES**

*Gender and Sexuality Consultant  
and Parliamentary Advisor*



# 1. INTRODUCTION

Micro Rainbow International (MRI)<sup>1</sup> is a non-governmental organisation that works on the socioeconomic inclusion of **lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual and intersex (LGBTI)** people<sup>2</sup>. Our mission is to create tools, programs and advice to help LGBTI people step out of poverty. We facilitate LGBTI people's access to employment, job training and the creation of small businesses. Currently, we have projects in the UK, Cambodia and Brazil.

The results of the survey "**LGBT People Living in Poverty in Rio de Janeiro**"<sup>3</sup>, published by MRI in 2014, served as the basis for the Micro Rainbow Brazil Project. This pilot project carries out activities in the area of employability and entrepreneurship for low-income LGBT people in the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area. To this end, MRI secured funding from the **European Union** for a three-year period (2015-2017) through the **European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)**, and consolidated its partnership with

the *Grupo Arco-Íris de Cidadania LGBT* (Rainbow Group of LGBT Citizenship) and other local organisations to implement the project.

## 1.1 MICRO RAINBOW BRAZIL PROJECT

To address the demand for job opportunities that was identified in the survey referred to above and in the light of successful experiences of socioeconomic engagement with LGBT populations in other countries where MRI operates, the Micro Rainbow Brazil Project Team developed a pioneering methodology to support the low-income LGBT population in Rio de Janeiro, focusing on two lines of action:

- **Entrepreneurship:** In partnership with the NGO Positive Planet Brasil, MRI has developed one of the world's first entrepreneurship courses designed exclusively for LGBT people. The course provides financial education and business management training for the opening, expansion or formalisation of small enterprises, as well as monitoring progress and providing follow-up support and individual guidance.

1 Learn more at: [www.micro-rainbow.org](http://www.micro-rainbow.org)

2 Although MRI works with intersex people in other countries, none of the participants in Brazil identifies as intersex. Therefore, we use the acronym "LGBT" throughout this publication.

3 Available at: <https://goo.gl/Xf6TqX>



- **Employability:** In partnership with various local institutions (see pages 12 and 13), MRI facilitates access for LGBT people to upskilling courses, workshops, and free training to improve technical skills and job opportunities.

In addition, the project team offers **free training for private companies and other institutions** on the barriers faced by LGBT people in obtaining employment, as well as recommendations for inclusive corporate policies and practices based on international research and guidelines. The objective of this training is to educate managers and employees of private companies about **LGBT inclusion in the workplace**. They are taught how to increase LGBT people's access to and retention in the formal labour market. They are also advised how to make the corporate environment more welcoming to employees and clients with diverse sexual orientation/gender identities, thus avoiding instances of homophobia and transphobia.

## 1.2 OUR PARTNER NETWORK

One of the principles of Micro Rainbow International is the creation of local partner networks in all countries where we operate. We believe that cooperation with local initiatives is fundamental, not only to increase the chances of reaching our target audience, but also to maximise the potential of existing opportunities by developing systematic collaboration strategies with local institutions.

In Brazil, we have established partnerships with several organisations that work with socioeconomic inclusion in general or with the LGBT community more directly. Through this network, we refer beneficiaries to courses in the areas of employability or entrepreneurship and gain access to employers for training and other awareness-raising activities. This collaboration with a wide range of organisations and collectives, as well as extensive on-site and online promotion of our activities in LGBT spaces, have been effective tools for disseminating free training opportunities that were previously unknown or inaccessible to our target audience.

Our primary partners are *Grupo Arco-Íris* (Rainbow Group), *Positive Planet Brasil*, *Rede Cidadã* (Citizen Network), *Gastromotiva*, *Escola Carioca de Hotelaria* (Carioca School of Hospitality) and *Feira Velcrx*. In addition, we referred some project participants to the *Programa Vira Vida*, run by the Federation of Industries of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FIRJAN), and to the *Ecomoda* project (see pages 12 and 13 for a more in-depth description of these partnerships).

The Micro Rainbow Brazil Project also has important allies in the public sector, both at state and municipal levels, which complement government efforts to implement public policies aimed at the LGBT community in Rio de Janeiro. The ***Rio Sem Homofobia* (Rio Without Homophobia)** programme, managed by the **State Department of Social Assistance and Human Rights**, was



one of MRI's first partners in Brazil. They facilitated MRI's dialogue with various organisations in the state of Rio de Janeiro, from members of civil society to public agencies. As well as publicising project actions, *Rio Sem Homofobia* allowed the project to use its auditorium for the graduation of our third entrepreneurship course. MRI was also strategically positioned in working groups and in the process of drafting proposals for regional LGBT public policy conferences in 2016. In addition, the project's activities had a political impact on the State Council for the Rights of the LGBT Population, emphasising the need for inclusion of LGBT socioeconomic demands in its agenda.

MRI developed partnerships with the **Rio de Janeiro Municipal Government** on two fronts. The **Special Coordination of Sexual Diversity (CEDS)** helped disseminate information about project actions to transvestites and transsexuals participating in the Damas Project, which is aimed at social and professional reintegration for this section of the population. The second partnership was developed through the former **Sub secretariat for Productive Inclusion (SUBIP)**, currently the Centre for Productive Inclusion, which is linked to the Municipal Department of Social Assistance and Human Rights. SUBIP facilitated the referral of project participants to

entrepreneurship and professional training courses in tourism and hospitality at the **Escola Carioca de Hotelaria (Carioca School of Hospitality)**, as well as making introductions to allies in academia and the public sector.

MRI received crucial assistance from teaching and research institutions. The **Núcleo Universitário de Empreendedorismo e Inovação da Unicarioca - NUEI (Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at Unicarioca University)** has made available three positions in business management training for our teaching assistants and entrepreneurship project coordinator. The company **Educativa**, along with psychology undergraduate students from the **Augusto Motta University Centre - UNISUAM**, did an amazing job in providing psychological and motivational support for our first class of students. Psychology students from the **IBMR University Centre-Laureate** provided similar assistance to our fourth class of students. In 2016, we collaborated with the **Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Fiocruz)** on several fronts, from interacting with the coordinators of the *Divas* research project to participating in a Trans Empowerment course and in the post-graduate program in Gender, Sexuality and Human Rights, both initiatives of the **Sérgio Arouca National School of Public Health (ENSP)**.



## MAIN PARTNERSHIPS



Founded in 1993, **GRUPO ARCO-ÍRIS** (Rainbow Group) is one of the oldest LGBT non-governmental organisations in Brazil. Grupo Arco-Íris worked alongside MRI in submitting the funding proposal to the European Union and in addition to housing the project office, also allocated two of its experienced staff to the project team. The group's extensive reach and connections in political advocacy arenas of the local LGBT movement enabled MRI to expand project actions, tap into their partner networks and identify opportunities for increasing project visibility and mobilising the community.



**POSITIVE PLANET BRASIL**, formerly Planet Finance, is an affiliate of a French NGO that aims to eradicate poverty through financial inclusion. Positive Planet has been involved in the Micro Rainbow Brazil Project since it began, and has contributed to the development of the entrepreneurship course through its expertise in financial education and business management. Maud Chalamet, Positive Planet Brasil's former Executive Director, provided support for project activities and offered business-consulting services to students through her company *Soluções Inclusivas*.



**REDE CIDADÃ** (Citizen Network) has developed partnerships in all areas of the project. They offer individual mentoring to our entrepreneurship graduates as they implement their business plans as well as job market training, including registration in a talent bank. Rede provided an exclusive course for MRI students, training LGBT people for jobs at the Olympics. MRI was invited by Rede to provide training on LGBT inclusion to employers of partner companies in their first Seminar on Diversity in the Workplace, held in 2016.



**GASTROMOTIVA** is a non-governmental organisation that promotes social inclusion through cooking. In addition to *Refettorio Gastromotiva*, a restaurant school that promotes social and community integration, Gastromotiva offers free professional cooking courses. They have reserved five places per class for students of the MRI project. Students, who have participated in five of the courses since February 2016, have achieved an excellent level of performance, satisfaction and job market placement.



The **ESCOLA CARIOCA DE HOTELARIA** (Carioca School of Hospitality) offers free specialised courses in Tourism and Hospitality through a public-private partnership between the Municipal Department of Social Assistance and Human Rights, the *Pertencer* Institute and corporate sponsors. MRI has placed LGBT candidates in two bartender classes and one kitchen assistant class. Importantly, this was the first time that the Escola Carioca de Hotelaria taught trans students and specific training for staff, teachers and students was carried out by the project team during the first week of classes.



**FEIRA VELCRX** is an entrepreneurship fair for lesbian and transgender women. MRI has supported all the fairs that have run so far, exhibiting the work of entrepreneurs participating in the project. Feira Velcrx has been a productive space for strengthening businesses and building networks, as well as for disseminating information about and recruiting for the entrepreneurship course.



### 1.3 RESULTS

Between 2015 and 2017, the Micro Rainbow Brazil Project produced new opportunities of job creation and income generation for LGBT people in Rio de Janeiro, both through entrepreneurship and professional training. Further, it has played a fundamental role in raising awareness in various sectors of society about the importance of the socioeconomic inclusion of the LGBT community. The project has had a strong impact on and positive reception from our target audience, both due to its pioneering quality and to the extensive and strategic dissemination of project information in LGBT spaces, the press and social media.

Over this period, MRI has assisted **164 LGBT people** in vulnerable situations. Of this total, **127 completed training courses** in employability and/or entrepreneurship<sup>4</sup>. Overall, the project has assisted **52 lesbians (32%), 56 gay men (34%), 18 bisexuals (11%),**

**7 transvestites (4%) and 31 transgender people (19%).** The following data shows the results for each project action:

- **46** of the **77** people referred to upskilling courses completed their professional training in the sectors of cooking, hospitality, fashion and young apprentice.
- For the four entrepreneurship courses provided, there were a total of **336** applicants, of which **122** were selected.
- Of the **81** students who completed the course and produced their business plans, **53** opened or expanded their small businesses.

MRI also delivered training courses on LGBT inclusion in the workplace in **23 institutions**, including Petrobras, Grupo Pão de Açúcar, Carrefour, SENAC and SENAI, as well as European Union delegations from Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Venezuela, and UN agencies in Brazil. Altogether, **230 people** attended training and significantly increased their knowledge of the barriers faced by LGBT people in accessing and remaining in the job market, as well as learning strategies to promote a corporate environment free from homophobia and transphobia. ■

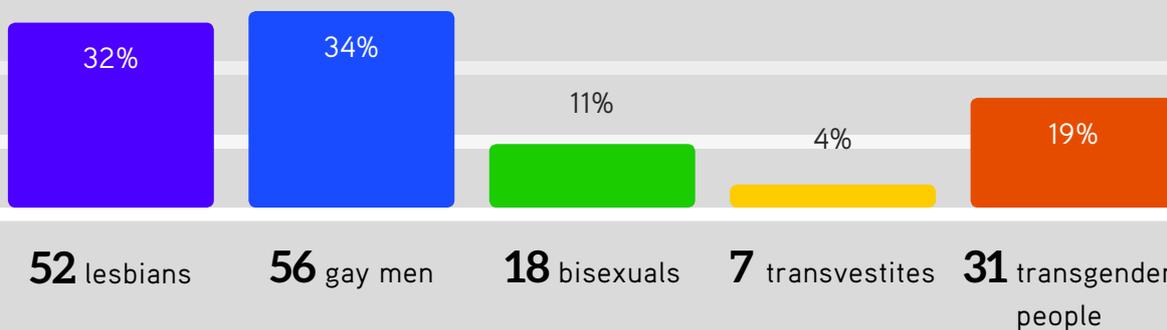
<sup>4</sup> Based on individual monitoring, the main reason for the loss of 37 participants was poverty - the need for additional income and more immediate employment opportunities, especially with the worsening of the economic crisis in Brazil and in the State of Rio. Government cuts in social programs aggravated this urgency, especially for trans and transvestites, leading to withdrawal from on-going courses.



## MICRO RAINBOW BRAZIL PROJECT (2015-2017)



We assisted **164 LGBT people** in vulnerable situations



**127** people **concluded training** courses in



**employability**



**entrepreneurship**

**46** people completed **professional training** in the sectors of



**Cooking**



**Hospitality**



**Fashion**



**4** entrepreneurship courses

**336** candidates

**122** selected students



**81** students **graduated**

**53** opened or expanded small businesses

## 2. CASE STUDIES

This publication describes the qualitative impact of Micro Rainbow Brazil on the lives of its participants, since the quantitative data above is insufficient to demonstrate the growth and achievements accomplished in the last three years. The results of the project show that **the socioeconomic inclusion of LGBT people not only improves their living conditions and financial situation, but also creates positive examples of LGBT visibility, empowerment and leadership in the labour market.** This, in turn, contributes to a change in negative social attitudes towards this group.

The eleven case studies in this publication are a small sample of a pool of **more than 160 project participants.** The group was not randomly chosen: the selected cases follow criteria of project participation and broad representation. The first criterion is that **participants must have completed the upskilling and/or entrepreneurship activities in a satisfactory manner,** including subsequent monitoring and referral stages, demonstrating commitment and identification with the project. The **criterion of broad representation** relates to both the identities that constitute the LGBT community and

**racial/ethnic, age and gender markers,** in order to understand the impact of the project from different places of speech, perspectives and trajectories.

The interview process consisted of an initial screening for general information and professional interests, as well as a monitoring form that was completed both before and after project participation. This monitoring form aims to understand each participant's **exposure to socioeconomic vulnerability** in a comprehensive way, establishing a benchmark for later evaluation of the impact of the project in each case. In addition to questionnaires, there was a **constant process of monitoring,** including face-to-face interactions, telephone calls and other means, that provided information about how participants evolved through time, allowing MRI to make fundamental adjustments to improve the efficiency of the activities. The results of this detailed monitoring are presented in the cases below, tailored by the biographical diversity of the interviewees.

MRI hopes that **these stories of resistance, resilience and socioeconomic empowerment** are more than a record of the positive effects of the Micro



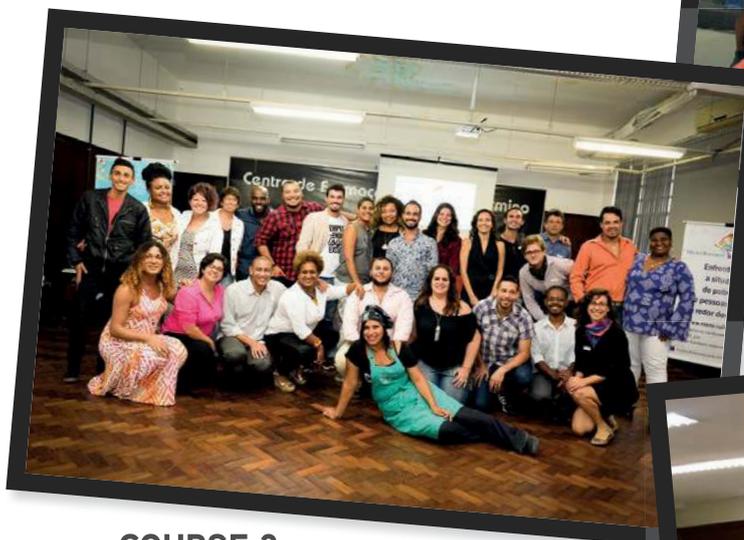
Rainbow Brazil Project on the lives of its participants. We believe that these examples can inspire and motivate other low-income LGBT people who

dream of better job opportunities and full recognition of their talents and potential, regardless of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. ■

### COURSE 1



### COURSE 2



### COURSE 3



### COURSE 4



# LAYLAH

40 years old

Laylah El Ishtar - Image Lab

[www.laylah.com.br](http://www.laylah.com.br)



## **LAYLAH'S PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AS A PERSONAL STYLIST**

began when she was 15. Before facing the challenge of investing in entrepreneurship in a more structured way, Laylah already worked in this sector both as an employee and on her own. While she was married, she did not see work as a potential means for autonomy, but rather as an important addition to family income. When she divorced her husband, she began to change her mind. During this painful time, Laylah began to chart a path of personal and professional independence. She decided to change her expectations about romantic relationships, always prioritising her freedom and wellbeing. Professionally, Laylah's years of experience as a personal stylist conferred skills and consistency to her career. She already had an aptitude for business and was about to discover how to use it for her own empowerment.

## DEVELOPING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL IDENTITY

Laylah joined Micro Rainbow Brazil's second entrepreneurship class in May 2016, just as she started to expand her personal stylist consulting business, *Laylah El Ishtar - Image Lab*. When she started the course, she was not yet aware of her entrepreneurial potential:

***“I did not see myself as an entrepreneur, I thought I was a survivor”.***

The course made her reassess her professional goals and provided her with tools to better manage her business.

As she applied course content in practice, Laylah developed her identity as an entrepreneur, drawing up a business plan that would ensure financial autonomy and business growth. She developed a contingency plan to keep her business stable despite Brazil's economic crisis. It was hard for Laylah to confront her management mistakes, although these were instrumental in helping her acquire a realistic and objective view of her business.

In addition to improving business management, the financial lessons Laylah learned through the course were important in organising her personal finances. She is less satisfied with her current income than she was before taking the course, but this is because her ambitions are much greater than

they were previously. She realised that her business could enable her to pursue dreams that once seemed impossible. Her awareness as a consumer has also changed, and now she manages her earnings and expenses better: *“Now I know that I can take a trip if I want to. I can plan and save for it”.*

## FEMINIST RESISTANCE

Laylah secured new job opportunities after completing the course, such as coordinating the makeup team at the Rio Olympics. She felt empowered as a trans person to resist and confront discrimination based on gender identity. Her perception of the situations where she suffers prejudice has also become clearer. Laylah was already a feminist and LGBT activist, and reflecting on the various forms of prejudice that permeate her daily life made her increasingly aware of her role in transforming society. She can now see homo/transphobia and machismo more clearly, fiercely fighting against all its forms, even when the target is someone else. Using urban spaces such as shopping malls, streets and public transport remains a challenge, but she does not let looks of disapproval limit her freedom.

Laylah has frequently suffered prejudice in both public and private spaces because of her gender identity. As a practitioner of Afro-Brazilian religious traditions, Laylah did not feel welcome in a space that was



once very important to her. As a militant, she attempted to engage in this debate internally, but without success. She chose to distance herself from the religion in the face of others' unwillingness to discuss the subject. This was an extremely difficult decision, but Laylah's faith goes beyond religious institutions. Laylah demands more than tolerance - she demands to be fully accepted, in all settings. She stresses:

***"I decided that I do not need religion anymore, I continue with my faith, I continue with my belief, but I can't, I can't be only tolerated".***

Her financial and professional autonomy ensure that Laylah does not experience in her daily life the discrimination that many trans people face in the workplace, but the prejudice has not disappeared. Although she feels respected by clients and other personal style professionals, she realises that establishing partnerships with courses and companies in the beauty sector is more difficult for her. Nonetheless, she keeps on going, facing this as yet another challenge that will not disrupt her journey.

## **ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND FREEDOM**

Although Laylah did not suffer discrimination while working for others, she sees prejudice as a major obstacle to trans labour market inclusion. In her militancy, she advocates for financial autonomy as a crucial tool for improving trans women's quality of life. She also promotes entrepreneurship as a good alternative to achieve this goal. The greatest obstacle for an entrepreneur is being afraid to take risks. On this subject, Laylah cautions:

***"You need to have the courage to break with the role that society determines for trans women".***

And this is a battle worth fighting. When we look at Laylah's story today, we see that entrepreneurship fits perfectly with her journey. Being an entrepreneur gives her much greater autonomy over her professional life. Nothing is more fitting for a woman who takes control and responsibility for her future than to face the adventure of entrepreneurship with courage. Laylah chose the path of freedom and full acceptance of who she is. She did this in all spheres of her life: love, faith, and work. ■



**ISA**

34 years old

IT Consulting

[www.itconsulting.net.br](http://www.itconsulting.net.br)

**ISA IS A PROFESSIONAL IN THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) field.** At the beginning of her career, Isa worked in software factories, where she felt the pressures of machismo and the exploitation of labour on a day-to-day basis. Motivated by the desire to break free from this exhausting and oppressive environment that affected her quality of life and limited her professionally, Isa decided to open her own IT consulting firm, *IT Consulting*.



## BENDING OVER BACKWARDS

The beginning of *IT Consulting* was not easy. Even with her vast professional experience and motivation, Isa had to work hard to establish the company, expand its clientele, and gain financial stability. At the end of 2015, she was in the middle of this process when she learned about Micro Rainbow Brazil and joined the first LGBT entrepreneurship course. The training directly contributed to the development of *IT Consulting* in several ways, such as the design of the business plan and strategies for increasing revenue. After learning how to formally establish a business, Isa began issuing invoices and gaining access to the corporate market, significantly boosting her business:

***“I had no fixed income, I had to bend over backwards all the time, and nowadays I have an income that keeps me going. So, yes, my income has increased quite a lot since then, when I was self-employed, lacked management knowledge and did not have the proper legal status. Now that I have the MEI (Individual Micro Entrepreneur) permit, the proper knowledge, legal status and understand invoices, I am able to sign monthly contracts for computer maintenance, websites and web hosting with small and medium sized businesses. I practically doubled my revenue last year”.***

This increase in income allowed Isa to leave her family’s home to live with her wife, enabling her to make a more balanced contribution to the household budget and giving her a more comfortable standard of living. Achieving professional recognition also brought more trust and intimacy to Isa’s relationship with her mother and sisters, who previously saw her sexual orientation with detachment and distrust. Her financial independence was reassuring for them and opened the door to discuss other concerns, such as their curiosity about her love life. This helped dispel their initial discomfort and create possibilities for reconfiguring family ties on new foundations.

## IT CONSULTANT, WOMAN AND LESBIAN

Isa acknowledges that although she has been self-employed since 2013, the course has helped her fully understand the meaning of being an entrepreneur. For her, entrepreneurship is not limited to owning a small business or not, but:

***“It’s how you do your job regardless of whether you own [the business]. It is believing in the idea without alienating yourself. It is connecting with people and finding out the best way to offer your product or service, and this can be done even when you are an employee, not just the owner. I think this vision changes everything”.***



Isa's learning has not gone unnoticed. Due to her outstanding performance on the course, Isa was elected as teaching assistant for the second class. She maintained this position over the next three courses, answering students' questions and helping them review course content. Isa describes how being a teaching assistant influenced her personal and professional life, both through revisiting course content and having enriching contact with others' lives, which sharpened her sensitivity to LGBT, racial and gender vulnerabilities. She describes the value of this experience, which goes beyond the professional dimension:

***“As a student, I acquired a lot of knowledge and made great friends, but when I began to see from the other side, that of teaching, I began to observe how other students absorbed knowledge and how this changed their lives. This had a much greater impact on me. I am very grateful for the opportunity of being a teaching assistant, it was a very enriching environment for me”.***

Despite the learning and gains described, the challenges for an entrepreneur are still numerous. Isa believes that she has never lost job opportunities because she is a lesbian. However, she admits that she has a flexible and strategic approach regarding revealing her sexual orientation to clients and she maintains discretion in some cases. She also recognises her

position of relative privilege in accessing the labour market, as a white person with “hetero passability”<sup>5</sup>.

If being a lesbian no longer represents an obstacle to employability, being a woman in the IT field still does - and very much so. It is undeniable that many stereotypes disqualify women in the fields of science and technology and the gender issue seems to prevail over others: “You can't hesitate at all, you can't say that you need to learn more about a subject that you don't know in-depth... No one is a specialist in all fields, but a woman in IT has to prove all the time that she knows everything”.

In this sense, Isa stresses the importance of participating in feminist markets and networks such as “Indique uma Mina” (Hire a Chick) as a strategy for socioeconomic empowerment and confronting misogyny in the labour market: “the question of networking is also important because you know who to count on, and you can support people who are victims of discrimination and prevent violence from escalating”. Isa is also a founder of *Pink at Work*, an online platform for services offered by LGBT entrepreneurs (learn more on page 28).

<sup>5</sup> Cis or hetero “passability” occurs when transgender people (those who transition to the gender with which they identify) are seen by society as if they were cisgender (those who identify with the gender attributed to their sex of birth). It can also be applied to lesbians and gay men who are perceived as heterosexual. Cis or hetero “passability” is not intentional or based on modified behaviour, it is a social interpretation about individuals based on physical characteristics and forms of expression culturally attributed to the feminine and masculine genders.



## “DOGS SMELL FEAR”

In Isa's view, prejudice and discrimination against the LGBT community have not become milder or less frequent since she became an entrepreneur, but what has changed is her ability to confront these forces: *“We know that people discriminate, and if the person's self-esteem is not in tip-top shape, then she can become depressed. Now my self-esteem is at a point that I consider wonderful, so I see that there is discrimination, that it exists, but I do not let it affect me”*, she says, with pragmatism.

She also reflects on the impact of this personal and professional shift and increased income on her vulnerability to homophobic violence, which is so frequent in public spaces. Isa confirms

feeling more protected from this type of aggression nowadays. This shows the effectiveness of socioeconomic inclusion on individual empowerment and the reduction of negative social attitudes based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, which is one of the premises of Micro Rainbow International:

***“It's all about how you see and place yourself in the world. The more dispirited you feel, the more people will put you down. Dogs smell fear. From the moment you become empowered, when you see that you are capable, that you are generating income, generating value for society, you feel less vulnerable”.*** ■



Isa and Isaque with former student Hélio (*in memoriam*), in the middle. He was the owner of a famous LGBT bar in the north zone of Rio, “Bar do Hélio”.

# ISAQUE

34 years old

Fale Easy

 *easyinglesfacil*



**IN 2011, ISAQUE BEGAN TEACHING PRIVATE ENGLISH CLASSES** in Rio de Janeiro. Through his experience as a teacher, he realised that to achieve financial and professional autonomy it was not enough to have qualifications and competence: he had to take another step. So he left the schools where he worked and opened the course *Fale Easy*.



## FROM PREJUDICE TO FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

Openly gay since he was 16, Isaque suffered prejudice and discrimination because of his sexual orientation during his childhood and adolescence and when applying for jobs in language schools. However, since he became self-employed, he has not experienced any problems because of his sexual orientation. He believes that the fact that he is cisgender and not effeminate exposes him to fewer risks of homophobia.

Moreover, since gaining financial independence, he no longer feels prejudice within his family, even though they are conservative and evangelical. Quite the contrary, this independence not only gave him more freedom and acceptance, but also allowed him to help his family financially. He emphasizes:

***“When you have financial independence, when you no longer depend [on your family] for anything, for us, gays, LGBTs in general, the relationship becomes easier, they have nothing to go against”.***

## “NOW I CAN DO MY WORK WITH PROFICIENCY”

In 2015, Isaque enrolled in the first class of Micro Rainbow Brazil’s entrepreneurship course in the hope of developing the business he had dreamed so much about. Before the course he ran

his company very intuitively, without systematic control of its finances. Completing the business plan and learning the course material enabled him to better organise his company’s finances and more efficiently monitor its expenses and cash flow, which were previously unknown. He is now able to better plan his spending and investments and separate the management of personal and business expenses:

***“Before, I had a hard time organising my finances to pay the basic bills, and nowadays it goes smoothly. [...] Today I have two bank accounts, one for personal use and one for my company, which is something I’ve learned from the course”.***

In fact, Isaque says that the greatest lesson he learned on the course was how to make a proper financial plan. This enabled him not only to organise the finances of *Fale Easy*, but also to invest in his own company. While he did not necessarily increase his company’s profit, he did learn how, when and what he could spend. Consequently, two years after the course, he has managed to gain financial stability and achieve the dream of financing the purchase of a car and his own apartment. He says enthusiastically:

***“What the project did was to professionalise me. I already had qualifications [to teach], but now I can do my work with proficiency”.***

## “IT’S POSSIBLE TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF OTHER LGBT PEOPLE”

Isaque still wants to get his own office, since he currently teaches English at home. This goal, which once seemed impossible, now seems feasible in the medium-term. His experience with Micro Rainbow International broadened his horizons and sparked a desire to increase revenues and expand the business. He hopes to be able to change his legal status from individual micro entrepreneur (MEI) to Simples Nacional in the near future<sup>6</sup>. Being in contact with other LGBT people has also increased his awareness of the difficulties this community faces in entering the labour market, so he intends to hire other LGBT people, especially transvestites and transsexuals, when he expands his business.

Isaque emphasises that his participation in the project made him see his potential to pursue another profession. After finishing the course, he was elected by his peers to be a teaching assistant of the next class, in

<sup>6</sup> Unlike MEI, Simples Nacional is a taxation arrangement that allows successful micro and small businesses to have annual revenues of more than R\$60,000 and other advantages, such as hiring employees.

order to help others develop their business plans. Isaque performed so well on the second course that the teacher invited him to continue being a teaching assistant on following courses. Also, Isaque together with another teaching assistant created an online registration platform of LGBT entrepreneurs, *Pink at Work* (learn more on page 28). He believes that his role as a teaching assistant has increased his empathy and solidarity with other LGBT people, allowing him not only to support other entrepreneurs and share his knowledge, but also to aspire to a future career as a coach. *“Now I am able to think beyond my own company, to the professional success of others, of my friends. Now I see that it’s possible to improve the lives of other LGBT people”*.

Isaque’s story suggests that the entrepreneurship course helped him not only to plan and organise his own business, but also to achieve financial stability and economic prosperity. In addition, his case shows that being part of the Micro Rainbow Brazil Project encouraged participants to become positive role models for other LGBT people. This contributes to one of Micro Rainbow International’s central objectives, which is to expand LGBT support networks and recognise the talents and potential of LGBT people. ■



## PINK AT WORK

**PINK AT WORK** is an online platform of products and services offered by LGBT entrepreneurs that was created by Isabela Colucci and Isaque Lima, former students and teaching assistants of the MRI entrepreneurship course. Inspired by their participation in the project and the potential of virtual networks to empower vulnerable groups, they describe this innovative tool. Isaque explains:

**“Pink at Work was created after a conversation in the first class of the entrepreneurship course, where we realised that there was no platform to promote products and services offered by LGBT people. Through an easy-to-access platform that includes a customer review feature, we intended to strengthen and give visibility to LGBT businesses so that they could potentially expand in the future. The LGBT community is a strong consumer base, and we could direct our buying power to promote our own businesses and circulate money within the community, empowering ourselves and creating a network of services and businesses”.**

Isa reflects on the social relevance and sustainability of the initiative in helping LGBT micro entrepreneurs enter the market:

**“When we encourage individual production and, in this case, the LGBT audience specifically, we better distribute income, create equal conditions and allow each person to develop their potential. Relying on small business is the most sustainable path for our society as a whole. It is very inspiring for me to know that the entrepreneur can compete in this market. Even if you pay a little more sometimes, it's not just the price that makes a product or a service”.**

To learn more and register, go to [www.pinkatwork.com.br](http://www.pinkatwork.com.br)

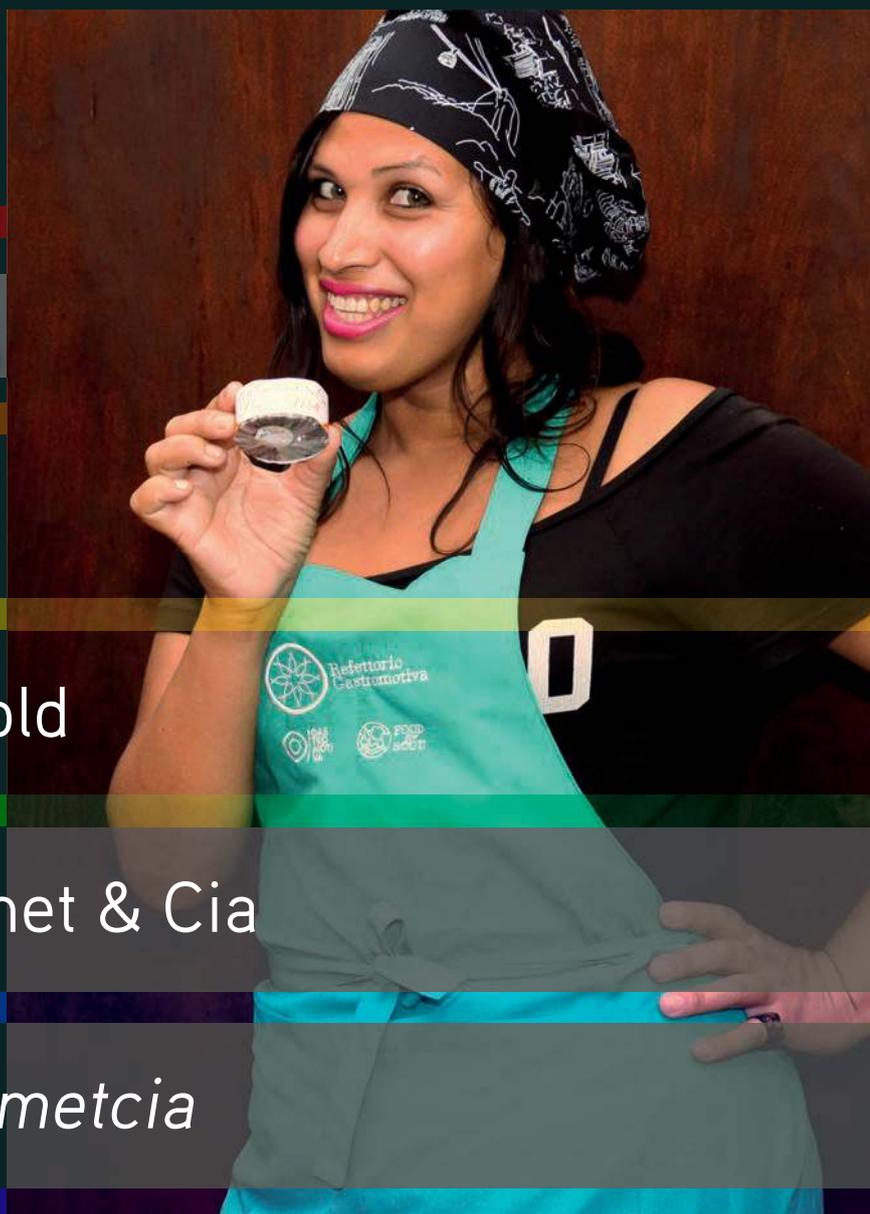


# MELL

35 years old

Art Gourmet & Cia

 [artgourmetcia](#)



**SINCE SHE WAS A CHILD, MELL LOVED HELPING HER MOTHER** and aunt cook. Making sweets and confections was one of her favourite pastimes in a kitchen that brimmed with affection. Many years later, Mell experienced haute cuisine in the restaurants and bistros of Europe. By then, her mother and aunt were no longer with her, but the desire they had planted in her heart was sparked by those delicious and finely decorated dishes. She began to seek job opportunities in those restaurants, “*even to mop the floor*”, so strong was her desire to be in an environment full of aromas and flavours. Mell had suffered many rejections, but she did not give up hope – the hope of getting off the streets, breaking the stigma and becoming a trans chef.

## ONE STEP AT A TIME

At the time, Mell was sad, tired and afraid for her health, since her body already showed signs of pulmonary complications caused by working on the streets on cold nights. She never liked being a sex worker because of the abusive behaviour of the clients and the competitiveness in terms of aesthetics and clientele. According to her, *“in the streets, some people earned more, some less, but all went through the same experiences of discrimination, violence, prejudice and suffering”*.

After undergoing sex reassignment surgery in Thailand in 2007, Mell believed she could return to Brazil and get other types of work. However, this path was not as straightforward as she imagined. Upon her return, Mell felt the pressures of transphobia and had to face the streets again to support herself. She realised that she needed training to find work in another sector, but she couldn't see a way out:

***“One day I cried a lot on the street, and I said, ‘I need professional training to get out of this’. But I didn’t want to do something obvious, like being a hairdresser. I wanted to do something different, so I thought of something I was good at, which was cooking. And that’s what saved me”***.

When she was already on the verge of exhaustion and despair, her first opportunity arrived - a scholarship for a confectionery course.

## MELL’S HONEY BREADS

With this training, Mell created her own honey bread recipe and started to sell her product in order to increase her income. Her honey bread was a success, but she wanted to continue her training and gain experience in the kitchens of great restaurants. In February 2016, Mell joined the Micro Rainbow Brazil Project and was referred to the professional cooking course at *Gastromotiva*, an NGO project partner. This course helped her further improve her culinary skills and knowledge. Mell continued to invest in the sale of honey bread, but she still lacked confidence and knowledge to expand her business, which had low earnings. Moreover, despite improving her training, she continued to face the most obstinate barrier to trans inclusion in Brazil: access to the formal labour market.

In the face of this challenge, Mell decided to invest in the development of her own brand, *Art Gourmet & Cia*. Thus, she joined the second class of the Micro Rainbow Brazil entrepreneurship course in May 2016. The knowledge she acquired included marketing, pricing, planning, audience targeting and other indispensable tools for the development of a business plan and the structuring of an enterprise. Through the course, Mell also gained the confidence that she needed to launch her business, putting into practice the knowledge acquired in *Gastromotiva* and strategically investing in innovation, product presentation and market niches.

While she was still finishing the entrepreneurship course, Mell seized another opportunity from the Micro Rainbow Brazil Project. The NGO Rede Cidadã, another great partner of the project, trained Mell and 15 other LGBT professionals for job vacancies at the Olympic Games (learn more on page 38). This was the ingredient that was missing from her recipe. After the training, Mell was selected for the Sapore Olympic Restaurant team. Her goals and dreams, which had previously seemed so far-fetched, were coming true one by one. She was working in the international kitchen of a great restaurant, she had her first work experience in the formal job market with guaranteed labour rights, and most importantly, her social name and preferred pronouns were respected in an environment that valued her professionalism and competence. Thus, Mell was quickly promoted and had her contract renewed for the Paralympics:

***“I loved working at the Olympics. I learned a lot, I made contacts from all over the world, I found many job opportunities. It was a once in a lifetime experience”.***

### **“THE PROJECT THAT MADE THE MOST DIFFERENCE IN MY LIFE”**

Mell has participated in other LGBT inclusion initiatives and she believes in the power of affirmative action to address the historical inequalities that affect the LGBT community. She has been fearless in

making the most out of the opportunities she has had, since so many potential opportunities are inaccessible for trans women. In this sense, she believes that the Micro Rainbow Brazil Project brought the most concrete results to her life. Her participation in employability and entrepreneurship activities allowed her to build a more solid professional path, aside from increasing her income and improving her self-esteem:

***“The courses that gave me a boost, that made me push forward and create ways to get out of the hole where I was, came from here. It was like the answer that I was looking for, the project that made the most difference in my life”.***

Just over a year after joining the project, she takes stock of this impact. She says that the *Gastromotiva* course provided technical and safety qualifications that enabled her to invest in her chosen sector, and the entrepreneurship course taught her the basis of consolidating and expanding a business. Regarding her work at the Olympic Restaurant, mediated by Rede Cidadã, she gained experience, expanded her professional network and diversified her gastronomic repertoire, getting to know chefs and cuisines from all over the world. In addition, she acquired formal work experience for her résumé as well as a financial situation that allowed her to save and reinvest in materials and equipment for *Art Gourmet & Cia*. Most strikingly, she felt welcome and respected in her trans identity in all



these environments, without which she would have been unable to advance to where she is today.

Currently, Mell is developing a new project “*Gastromania, Sabores do Mundo*” (Gastromania, Tastes of the World)<sup>7</sup>, a YouTube channel where she gives tips about cooking, restaurants, explores regional cuisines and reveals the secrets of “family recipes”. As a YouTuber, her goal is to take gastronomic trips that inspire people to diversify their cuisines and even complement their income with practical recipes, always with a lot of charisma and humour.

Despite these advances, Mell explains that she still faces difficulties in changing her legal name. This process, which

has been stalled in the legal system for years, has caused discomfort, incited transphobia and is the greatest obstacle to her access to the labour market today. Her process of empowerment and financial autonomy was also crucial in helping her cope with domestic violence, a condition still present in her life.

Despite all the difficulties, Mell thinks that the total outcome is positive. She believes that, in addition to the support she received, this has all been possible thanks to her own determination to confront conservatism and her refusal to settle for the places and occupations typically attributed to trans women in society. She still dreams of pursuing higher education in gastronomy, which would allow her to be a trans chef and university professor. It is easy to believe that she will get there one day. ■

<sup>7</sup> Learn more about her YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/38isjeKhqEM>

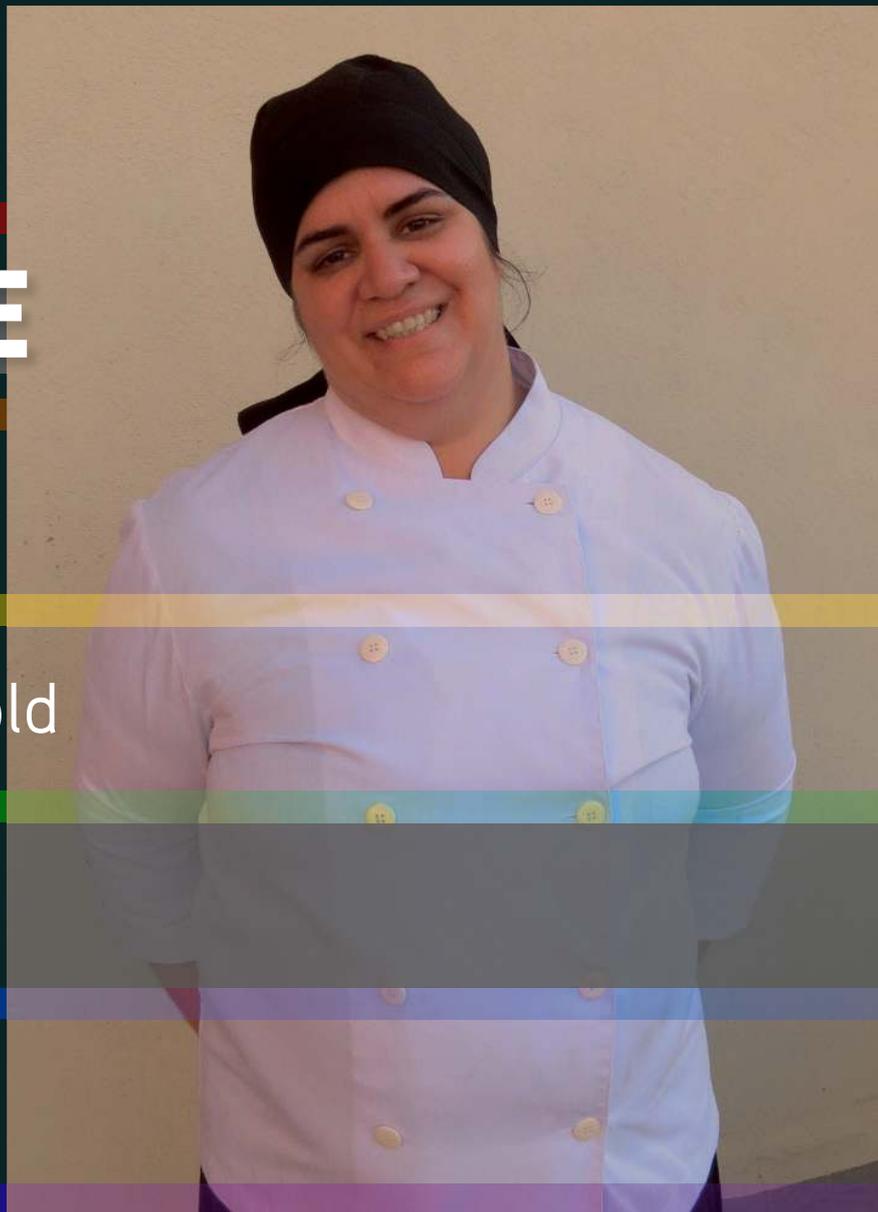


Students from the second entrepreneurship course

# ALINE

41 years old

Cook



**ALINE DISCOVERED HER PASSION FOR COOKING AT THE** age of 11, when she started cooking for her family all by herself. She worked in a children's party buffet as a teenager, and during the 16 years when she worked as an administrative assistant in a mechanic's shop, she maintained a food stall where she sold sandwiches and juices in her spare time. Although Aline has a degree in aesthetics, she had to change the course of her professional life after having tendonitis. This encouraged her to embark on the culinary field once and for all. This was how Aline and her ex-partner opened a confectionery company in 2015: *Amor em Doces* (Love in Sweets).



## SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE

A mother of two, Aline started to become involved with women at the age of 35. Several friends rejected her when they discovered her sexual orientation, so she had to make friends all over again. She has always preferred to keep her relationships with women private, not only for fear of family rejection, but also for fear of exposing her children to discrimination and homophobia.

Aline has suffered much sexual harassment by men, since the time when she identified as heterosexual. After she started having lesbian relationships, not only did she continue to be a victim of machismo, but she also faced even more aggressive and hostile situations when she revealed her sexual orientation to heterosexual men. Aline came under threat of physical violence when, accompanied by her girlfriend, she rejected the unwanted advances of a man in a nightclub. She says that she has never felt comfortable trying to fit into the heteronormative patterns imposed by society. Machismo and homophobia are constant challenges in her personal and professional life:

***“We really swim against the tide, you know, because society thinks you have to be a certain way, but you’re not like that. You don’t fit into that standard of what society tries to impose, of what is ideal, what is perfect, what you have to follow. And when you’re against that, everything gets harder”.***

Coming out as a lesbian affected some relationships with co-workers in her most recent positions. One cook did not want to work the same shifts as her and another colleague ended up sexually harassing her. Today, she prefers not to reveal her sexual orientation in the workplace out of fear of prejudice, and feels that she must work harder than her male and heterosexual colleagues to attain professional recognition: *“you always have to prove that you are capable of doing your job, regardless of the person who you are dealing with. It seems to me that when you expose yourself, you send the message that you are incompetent”*, she says with regret.

## OPENING “A WIDE RANGE OF POSSIBILITIES”

In September 2015, Aline and her ex-partner enrolled in the first entrepreneurship course of the Micro Rainbow Brazil Project, with the goal of improving the management of their business *Amor em Doces*. She says that the course was instrumental in helping them adapt the pricing of their products and teaching them to manage not only the company's budget, but also their personal expenses.

After the course, Aline managed to organise her finances and plan her spending more efficiently. Currently, she is able to invest more in leisure and travel, and is in a position to help her mother with household expenses. Aline explains that her quality of life



improved greatly with the financial lessons she learned through the project. For instance, she managed to accumulate savings that later enabled her to pursue cooking training on a full-time basis.

Another great lesson was working alongside other LGBT people during the project. Aline admits that she did not have much contact with trans people before the course. She learned with her classmates to respect different gender identities and expressions, overcoming some of her own prejudices. Today she is able to put herself in other people's shoes, and is more supportive and empathetic with transvestites and transsexuals. She has developed a greater degree of sorority with the struggles and experiences of women in general, whether they are trans or cisgender. For Aline:

***“Interacting with other students was very enriching and enlightening! It made me get rid of all of my prejudices and lack of knowledge... it opened a wide range of possibilities!”***

## **FROM ENTREPRENEURSHIP TO EMPLOYABILITY**

Unfortunately, Aline was unable to carry on with her business. Three months after the course, she had to stop making her cakes and sweets, as she and her ex-girlfriend had to move to a small apartment that did not have the facilities to prepare her

products. Soon after, the couple ended their relationship and dissolved their business partnership. Aline went to live with her brother and mother after the separation, and with regret, she decided to give up her business. Without losing heart, Aline sought out the Micro Rainbow Brazil team again to help her find job opportunities in the culinary sector.

In June 2016, the project team directed her to a proficiency workshop offered by the partner NGO *Rede Cidadã*, which sought to place LGBT people in temporary work positions during the Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games (see page 38). Aline was hired to work in the Olympic Restaurant in a position with guaranteed labour rights. This was one of the most remarkable experiences in her career, since she had constant contact with professionals from different countries and cultures, as well as the opportunity to work in an industrial kitchen for the first time. She summarises her time at the Olympic Restaurant with pride and enthusiasm:

***“I worked in the biggest restaurant in the world for three months. Who has that kind of experience on their résumé? I served 20,500 meals a day - can you believe it? Today, cooking for 200 people is no big deal for me. These are things you only learn through experience”***

Working at the Olympics had such a big impact on Aline's life that she decided to take a cooking course to improve her skills and increase her chances of getting a formal job in this sector. With

the help of Micro Rainbow International, Aline was accepted on a course at *Gastromotiva*, a partner NGO. During this three-month course, she was able to develop cooking skills in new areas, such as European cuisine and bread making. In addition, she became more aware of the “*transformative power of the kitchen*”. In her citizenship and cooking classes, Aline learned strategies of “root-to-stalk” cooking that uses all ingredient parts and avoids food waste. In her view, this sort of knowledge is extremely important for those who work in the culinary sector.

Aline found a job soon after finishing the *Gastromotiva* course. At the end of 2016, she was referred to job openings in the hospitality industry by a former chef at the Olympic restaurant. Currently, she is the head cook in the dining hall of a renowned hotel in Rio de Janeiro: “*I work with cooks who have 10 to 25 years’ experience, some with no formal training at all. Given everything I’ve learnt at Gastromotiva and the Olympics, I feel more qualified to help them and offer suggestions*”, says Aline, who also says that some older cooks do not appreciate her suggestions. She believes she suffers prejudice for being a lesbian in a male-dominated kitchen and for being new to the hospitality industry, even though she has over 25 years’ experience in the kitchen.

## “COOKING IS A FORM OF LOVE”

These difficulties do not discourage Aline. She says that the Micro Rainbow Brazil Project taught her to be more

understanding and patient when working in groups and diverse environments, as well as when delegating tasks. Now she is better able to cope with the limitations of her co-workers.

Aline is determined to acquire work experience abroad. In her opinion, the cooking profession is not adequately valued in Brazil. She wants to work in other countries, learn about other cultures and acquire skills in other cuisines. She hopes to diversify her knowledge in the field and be recognised as a good cook, since the pleasure of cooking has always permeated her life. Reflecting on her professional achievements she says, “*For me, cooking is a form of love, a gesture of care, a comfort*”.

Aline's story is an example of determination and resilience. It is evidence that LGBT people can fulfil their aspirations and be recognised for their talents and abilities. When she joined the Micro Rainbow Brazil Project, Aline wanted to become a better entrepreneur, but personal challenges made her change plans and seek formal employment. With the help of the project, she was able to gain work experience as a cook in an international restaurant during the Olympic Games and complete a longed-for professional cooking course. Aline is a fighter who has overcome many obstacles in pursuit of professional success. Such success is still only a dream for many other LGBT people in Brazil, who want, and deserve, to be recognised for their work, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity.



*“This tattoo is my way of saying thanks. There are feelings you can’t express through words... Just like cooking is a form of love, the tattoo for me was a way of showing on my skin what I carry in my heart, in my soul. Micro Rainbow Brazil has changed my life in a way that I can’t explain, and the tattoo represents my gratitude, my appreciation for the team that helped me so much, and how proud I am to be part of such a beautiful project.” ■*



## LGBT DIVERSITY AT THE RIO OLYMPICS

In the opening ceremony of the 2016 Olympic Games, Brazil's team was led by a trans model, symbolising the event's focus on inclusion of sexual and gender diversity. MRI was part of this story. In June 2016, **sixteen participants** in our project took part in a **training course for job openings** at the Rio Olympics, offered by the partner NGO *Rede Cidadã*.

After completing the training course, candidates were referred to recruiters associated with the Rio Olympics. In total, **six candidates were employed in the Olympic Restaurant**. For some, it was their

first experience working under formal contracts with labour protections. Social names and corresponding pronouns were respected in the case of trans people and contracts included an anti-homo/transphobia clause. All of this helped to create an accessible and welcoming work environment that was conducive to professionalism and outstanding performance. So much so, that some participants were able to renew their contracts for the Paralympics. In addition, a trans student of our entrepreneurship course was hired as a make-up artist at the Olympic Games, reinforcing **trans visibility** at the event.



# RENAN

34 years old

Graphic designer

[www.rocrenan.carbonmade.com](http://www.rocrenan.carbonmade.com)



**RENAN IS PURSUING A DEGREE IN GRAPHIC DESIGN AND WORKS** freelance in the field. At the beginning of his career, he worked in companies both in Rio de Janeiro and in Belo Horizonte, his hometown. With great resilience and wisdom, Renan has adopted a number of strategies to face racism and homophobia in his quest for autonomy and professional satisfaction.

## FIGHTING AGAINST PREJUDICE

As a black gay man, Renan realises that he is vulnerable to a complex intersection of prejudices. He has suffered homophobic insults in the workplace, and despite being cautious, he defended himself and made it clear that he would not back down. He has also supported other LGBT workmates, for instance, he interceded on behalf of a trans friend who was prohibited from using the women's restroom. Renan did not hesitate to defend her, despite the risk of being reprimanded.

In Renan's professional life, racial prejudice overlaps with homophobia. He has suffered several instances of racism when applying for internships. The graphic design labour market does not welcome black professionals. The best positions are allocated in the wealthiest regions of the city, which are predominantly white. On the other hand, neighbourhoods like Renan's have a high incidence of discrimination based on sexual orientation. Renan lives with his partner, and their neighbours have verbally harassed them. Renan cautiously and politely confronted the harassment, trying to avoid more serious problems. Nonetheless, they face the risk of violence from drug dealers who are friends of their homophobic neighbours.

Unfortunately, Renan's experience is common among black and low-income LGBT people in Brazil. Although

they are seen as equal to other residents of urban peripheries based on social markers of race and class, they still experience prejudice and discrimination due to homophobia. This lack of acceptance takes a big toll on Renan's self-esteem, but he remains strong and determined not to give up on his autonomy and freedom.

## INCREASING INCOME THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

For Renan, increasing his income is a key factor in improving his self-esteem. He continually seeks to improve his technical training. As well as attending university, Renan has taken several online courses to extend his skills. Hoping to increase his income as a freelancer, Renan decided to register for Micro Rainbow Brazil's third entrepreneurship course in September 2016.

With the knowledge he obtained from the course, Renan realised that incorrect pricing was one of the main obstacles to the growth of his business. He had been charging very low rates that did not reflect the value of his work. This is a recurring problem among our students, especially those who work in the service industry. Renan recalculated the cost of his services and began to earn greater profits, using cost and price estimates to justify the increase to his customers. He happily reports:

***“With everything I learned from the course, I made spreadsheets and revised the pricing of my services and saw that I was charging much less than I should. So I started charging three times as much as before and the customers accepted it”.***

## **ENTREPRENEURSHIP VERSUS FORMAL EMPLOYMENT**

Renan has future plans as an entrepreneur, but is currently seeking formal employment in his field. In order to establish his business, he needs more financial resources than he currently has access to. He believes that formal employment will bring greater economic security at present. Aside from sharing the domestic chores with his partner, his studies take up a lot of his daily life, leaving little time to devote to his business.

Renan's preference for the formal labour market reflects the reality of thousands of Brazilians and reveals

one of the stumbling blocks to entrepreneurship. Like Renan, many professionals who have the talent and aptitude to become entrepreneurs prefer stable employment as a way to gain experience and financial stability in their early careers.

Although there is a widely-held view that entrepreneurship is a way out of unemployment, it is important to stress that autonomy is not a cure-all. A large number of Brazil's new businesses close in the first two years and lack of financial planning has been identified as one of the main contributors to this.

Renan took the course to better plan his entrepreneurial activity, and in the process realised that he lacked the capital to implement his business plan in the short-term. Therefore, he made a conscious choice not to start a business at this time. He continues to work freelance, but hopes to find a job that will allow him to organise his finances and save enough money to invest in his business in the long term. Choosing formal employment was a deliberate and planned decision that respects his current needs and limitations. ■



# GEISA

34 years old

Concreto Rosa

 *concretorosa*



**GEISA IS A BLACK LESBIAN FROM AN UNDERPRIVILEGED** background. After experiencing many financial difficulties throughout her life, in 2015 she founded *Concreto Rosa* (Pink Concrete) a construction and remodelling company that aims to provide female labour in a market dominated by men.

## CONFRONTING SEXISM IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Since starting her business, Geisa has been subjected to machismo from clients and hardware store employees. When she buys materials, the, mostly male, hardware store employees are impressed by her knowledge of plumbing supplies and doubtful about her ability to carry out the work. It was only recently, after years of confronting sexist comments and trying to demand respect from her suppliers that her work started being recognised and praised. She explains:

***“I often get this look, like, ‘you, black woman, doing things that are usually done by an alpha male’. I get looks of disdain and curiosity from clients, and many of them question whether I can actually fix things. [...] For them, it is often uncomfortable for a woman to be painting their apartment, going into their house, walking through their space”.***

*Concreto Rosa* is challenging the institutional sexism of the construction industry and building an increasingly female clientele, regardless of sexual orientation. Geisa says that many lesbian couples and single heterosexual women hire her because they do not feel safe with men working in their homes. Demand for her services has increased significantly due to her participation in online directories of female-operated services such as *“Indique uma mina”*

(Hire a chick) and *“Indique uma preta”* (Hire a black woman). She is also part of a group of women who work in construction in Brazil and discuss strategies to deal with sexist attitudes from clients and the husbands of women clients.

In Geisa’s view, most of the discrimination that she suffers is racial, since many clients do not know she is a lesbian. She says that some clients, mainly older people, have refused to employ her after she disclosed her sexual orientation. Now she prefers to be more discreet and not expose her personal life at work. However, being a lesbian is an advantage within her company, as most of the people she hires are part of the LGBT community. She recently hired two lesbians who previously had difficulty finding work because they dress in a “masculine” way.

## “DEDICATED TO AN OBJECTIVE”

In 2016, Geisa enrolled in Micro Rainbow Brazil’s second entrepreneurship course. She believes the course had a positive impact on the management of her business and on her personal finances. Developing a business plan has helped her to better manage *Concreto Rosa*, further understand her market niche, and above all, price her services more accurately. Before taking the course, Geisa was not able to make a profit because she did not know how to work out an appropriate price for her services, and often ended



up charging too little. Now she can plan better and consequently serve more customers. She says:

***“The course was a first step, you know. I started the course full of ideas and determination, but I did not know where to start. I did not know what I had in stock, the exact amount that I should charge, and that I have to include transportation, food, all of these things [in the service price]”.***

After the course, Geisa increased her income and could rent an apartment for herself and her son. She purchased more furniture and appliances and spent more on her son’s health and education. The improvement in her personal finances also affected her relationship with her family, especially with her sister, an evangelical Christian who helps raise her child. Geisa feels she can now be more assertive within her family, and her sister has cut back on jibes and “religious preaching” directed at her sexual orientation. Geisa explains:

***“She sees that I’m working, I’m dedicated to an objective, I’m earning money, I’m investing more in my son, taking him on trips, paying for drum lessons. This helps. I start to get more acceptance from them, from the family, they know that I am really a lesbian and that I will not change. This is me, this is my nature... [they] end up accepting and don’t say anything”.***

The increase in income also had an impact on her personal safety. Geisa feels less exposed to street violence because she can now afford to take a taxi when necessary, thus returning home safely: “I realised a short while ago, that now if I am on the street at night, I can leave a place where I don’t feel safe and not have to wait for public transport. I came to realise that one of the advantages of being better off financially is being able to afford these expenses... my girlfriend and I do not take risks any more”.

## **EXPANDING CONCRETO ROSA**

According to Geisa, the Micro Rainbow International course not only enabled her to better manage Concreto Rosa, but also gave her several ideas of how to improve her company. First, she wants to invest more heavily in marketing strategies, such as changing the logo and making T-shirts and other promotional items. Then, she plans to expand her range of services to include air-conditioning installation and interior design. Finally, she intends to concentrate more on management, since she currently carries out day-to-day operations in addition to managing the company. At the moment, she is following one of the most important lessons of the course: saving money to pay her debts and accessing credit in order to achieve her goals.

As she expands her business, Geisa hopes to increase her team and to hire other LGBT people. The Micro Rainbow Brazil Project gave her contact with other LGBT entrepreneurs and taught her to value their services more highly. In fact, she has been



hired by some of her former classmates to do work in their houses. She concludes her analysis of her participation by saying:

***“Taking a course with other LGBT people has helped me to walk in other people’s shoes, to have more empathy, you know, without losing my identity, knowing that other people have the same problems... This exchange was very enriching, it really was!”***

Geisa's success story illustrates how a low-income, black lesbian was able to use entrepreneurship to improve her living conditions while breaking into a male-dominated sector. With *Concreto Rosa*, she challenges racism, sexism and homophobia and proves that her innovative work and productive potential can counter both LGBT and gender discrimination, which are still widespread in Brazilian workplaces. ■



Geisa showcasing her business in her graduation ceremony





# ANA

22 years old

Fábrica da Preta

 *fabricadapreta*

**WHEN SHE WAS LITTLE, ANA USED TO SAY THAT SHE WANTED** to be a businesswoman. Even without financial resources, she had a decent education. She attended a good school and was awarded a scholarship for an English course, where she acquired language proficiency. Also through a scholarship, she enrolled at university to study administration. For a time, she set aside the desire to have her own business and entered the formal job market, where she worked in a large company. Later, with her English skills, she worked at a hotel, where she started dating a co-worker. Both were praised for their professionalism and promised a future in the company, but without justification they were fired simultaneously. This murky episode, with such clear overtones of prejudice, was a watershed moment in both their lives.

## FÁBRICA DA PRETA (THE BLACK WOMAN'S FACTORY)

When she announced that she was in a relationship with another woman, Ana suffered a lot of discrimination at home. In order to have more freedom she decided to live with her girlfriend. After losing their jobs at the hotel, they found themselves in a very difficult financial situation. With limited resources and no expectation of getting another job, they decided to capitalise on the fact that her partner liked to cook and started to sell food at markets and on the beach. They had only just begun when they participated in the third *Velcrx Fair*, one of our project partners. There they heard about Micro Rainbow Brazil, which was in the process of selecting applicants for the third class of the entrepreneurship course. Ana decided to take the course to learn the management part of the business, while her partner would focus on developing her culinary expertise to improve their services.

During the course, Ana designed a better structure for *Fábrica da Preta*. She corrected mistakes that were damaging her immediate income, such as the mispricing of some products. She learnt that it was essential to separate the company's capital from personal expenses. This is a recurring problem among our students who are in the early stages of planning their own businesses. She also realised it would be more profitable to shift the focus of

the company to larger events, with the potential to increase revenue. At the end of the course, *Fábrica da Preta* catered its first large event: the graduation of her own class of entrepreneurs. Even with a newly developing structure, they stepped up to the challenge of providing full catering service for 100 people. From then on, they found other opportunities and became even more specialised in this niche market.

Within a few months, they had made excellent progress, building a customer base and even featuring on a TV show as an example of entrepreneurial success in the midst of Brazil's economic crisis. Although most of the profits are being invested in the structure of the company in this initial phase, Ana can already feel the positive effects of the income increase on her personal finances. This has had an effect primarily on their access to personal care and leisure. The visibility gained through their business has also changed how others perceive them. Discrimination is not over, but people in their social circles are beginning to see them as entrepreneurs, and not just as lesbians.

## “WE ARE NOT DREAMING ALONE”

Ana says that the entrepreneurship course gave a big boost to her business, especially the hiring of her company for the graduation reception. However, she believes that the gains were more than

simply financial. Even though she faced many difficulties in establishing her business at the beginning of the course, she felt inspired by being part of an LGBT socioeconomic inclusion project that offered such opportunities and knowledge to the students. This increased her self-esteem and encouraged her to continue:

***“In addition to participating in the course itself, there were teaching assistants to help us. It was important to feel that you really cared about us. And the culmination was the graduation ceremony, when we saw that you were not only supporting us, but also having faith in us. Sometimes we really need someone to believe in us so that we can see we are not dreaming alone”.***

The course was the first time Ana had had contact with LGBT people outside the party circuit. She met a diverse group of

people of different ages and felt, for the first time, she was part of a welcoming learning environment that emphasised her professional skills. Ana had practically no previous contact with trans people and the course provided this coming together, which revealed the difficulties faced by this sector in the labour market. She, therefore, decided that in addition to hiring exclusively black people, she would give preference to trans men and women.

Ana and her partner pushed *Fábrica da Preta* forward with great determination. They were able to significantly expand their business in a short time, and they still want to advance much further. Ana has managed to fulfil her childhood dream of being a businesswoman. From now on, she plans to engage with the formal job market only as an employer. Naturally, she hopes to do so in a much more reasonable and welcoming way than the company that fired her. ■



Ana and her partner Evelin preparing the buffet for her graduation ceremony



# RUAN

24 years old

Mr. Carrot - Culinária Vegana e Orgânica

 [mrcarrot.vegan](https://www.facebook.com/mrcarrot.vegan)

**RUAN IS A CHEF AND OWNER OF MR CARROT - VEGAN AND Organic Cuisine.** Based in Vila Valqueire, western zone of Rio de Janeiro, it is the first vegan delivery service in the city suburbs. Ruan mixes vegan flavours and ideals with an inventive cuisine inspired by traditional Brazilian dishes, with no animal products, but with much creativity and great prices. He heard of Micro Rainbow Brazil in January 2016, through our Facebook advertisement for a professional cooking course conducted by *Gastromotiva*, a partner NGO. Just over a year after this initial contact, he takes stock of the transformation that the project has brought to his life.

## ARE YOU AN LGBT PERSON WHO LOVES TO COOK?

When he came across this question in the Micro Rainbow Brazil advertisement for the course at *Gastromotiva*, Ruan already loved cooking, was a staunch vegan and had an entrepreneurial spirit. What he didn't know was that participating in an LGBT inclusion project would be the boost that his business needed to take off. Back then, Ruan had a delivery service of vegan dishes produced in his home kitchen in Magalhães Bastos, western zone of Rio, where he lives with his mother. However, his revenue was very low and he needed to increase production and attract more customers. The opportunity of free, accredited training in cooking came at a key moment in his career:

***“Gastromotiva has totally changed the issue of professionalism for me. I learned a lot more things, I was able to explore other aspects to better develop the brand. So much so, that I could open a kitchen, something I did not think I would do so soon”.***

In addition to building his confidence as an entrepreneur, the course included essential practices for the development of his company. The course also provided him with the opportunity to practice in *Gastromotiva's* dining hall, a well-deserved recognition of Ruan's performance as a student.

He declares that the support of the vegan community was fundamental for him to open and maintain his business,

reconciling work and activism into a more deep-seated practice of veganism. His clients' confidence and appreciation for his work have earned him an expanding customer base. Ruan's adherence to the vegan lifestyle, which could be a limitation to his training in a traditional cooking school, was accommodated with respect and understanding by the teachers at *Gastromotiva*. Although he admits that it wasn't easy to use and experiment with ingredients of animal origin in practical classes, he believes it is a “*necessary evil*” to train future vegan chefs while there are no well-known vegan cooking schools in Brazil. This determination taught him valuable techniques for his food: “*My dishes improved a lot after Gastromotiva and I learned to optimise time as well. Dishes that used to take me 14 hours, I was able to cut down to half the time. They teach you how to use your time much better*”.

## LEADERSHIP AND PERSEVERANCE

“*Talent is important, but I think perseverance is worth much more*”. It was in this spirit that Ruan tripled his income in less than a year, achieving much-desired financial independence and making a variety of improvements to his home. Although he does not seek a luxurious lifestyle, Ruan modestly explains that he has significantly improved his access to goods and services, of which leisure is the most important. Today he is able to travel in Brazil and eat out at restaurants, expanding his culinary experience. However, due to his intense work routine, time constraints trump



budgetary restrictions. A man of humble origins, he chokes up when he remembers the deprivations that he has been through, and he is proud to be able to contribute financially to the household, which was previously supported with much effort by his mother: *“We have really gone hungry... and we’ve had times of: ‘oh dear, you can’t eat that now’. This does not happen anymore. That was a promise I made to her a long time ago and now I can more easily provide”.*

In addition to helping his mother with household expenses, he encouraged her to leave a poorly-paid and dangerous job to work with him at Mr Carrot, doing the mise en place (cutting and preparing ingredients) of his dishes. Since Ruan is unhappy with their current home, they are also planning to buy a home in a different neighbourhood, something that would have been impossible a short time ago. At one point in the interview, Ruan admits that he had not realised how much his life has changed in a year, because this was the first time he was looking back:

***“When you are a minority you have to do much more than people who are not part of that minority in order to be noticed. As a gay man, I have to study much more, as a black woman, she (in reference to a former manager) has to study much more, and you, women, do too, to prove that you exist. And the fact that in a year, things have changed to the point where I can see it, it’s very important”.***

## **“A SIMPLE INITIATIVE THAT CHANGED MY LIFE”**

This is how Ruan sums up the impact of Micro Rainbow Brazil on his career. Before opening his own business, he worked in environments where he did not feel comfortable being open about his sexual orientation and was constantly subjected to homophobic insults, even though the presence of LGBT people was not uncommon. Today, in addition to having financial autonomy, he has the freedom to be who he is at work and at home:

***“Today, after embarking on this path as a chef, I have a little more prestige than I did a year ago. People in the community where I live, for example, can see that. They know that I have my own business, that I support my home, and it seems like they respect that. So they will not say a word about who I am as long as I show them what I’m capable of”.***

In this period Ruan also reconnected with a very special neighbour, his father. After three years without any contact, Ruan’s father saw him on the street when he was returning from the Gastromotiva class and made a sincere apology for his intolerance, starting a new phase in their relationship. Raw emotion takes precedence over words as Ruan remembers this episode.

Despite these advances, not everything has changed in the past year, and Ruan acknowledges that being gay is



still a daily challenge. He experiences hostility in his neighbourhood and in other public spaces, especially when he is accompanied by his boyfriend, who embraces a more transgressive gender expression which is, in his words, a “plateful of hate” for many people. Despite these setbacks, Ruan has felt more empowered to confront homophobic violence and seek alternatives to limit his exposure to it. Ruan wants his example to be an inspiration to others:

***“I am a chef, vegan, gay and from the poor part of town. I want to show people that, although it’s not easy, we can do a lot for the community through small contributions. That’s leadership!”***

In this sense, Ruan believes that the benefits of his training go beyond the acquisition of knowledge and technical resources to open the business itself. He explains that he is proud of participating for the first time in a project of LGBT

inclusion which resulted in personal and professional empowerment: *“This is important in shaping who we are as well. For those who were ashamed to say that they are gay, being able to say that they are gay and being assisted by an NGO that supports the LGBT community is a very important achievement. Being able to say this is a form of visibility”*. He ends with gratitude:

***“It’s reassuring to know that there are people like you who work every day so that people like us can have something in the future that we never even imagined (...). You mean a lot to the LGBT community! If I ever make a speech one day, you will be in it, because it really was very important for me. It was a very simple initiative, a referral, but it changed my life”***.

We are overcome with emotion and close to tears. We are the ones who thank you, Ruan. ■



A portrait of Raquel, a woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a colorful patterned top and large hoop earrings. She is smiling slightly. The background is a plain wall with a whiteboard partially visible. The image is overlaid with a dark blue background on the left side, which contains text and social media information.

# RAQUEL

31 years old

The Way English

 [thewayenglishcourse](https://www.facebook.com/thewayenglishcourse)

**TO FULLY LIVE LIFE AS A LESBIAN, RAQUEL HAD TO FACE** rejection by her family and her church. Her parents, who are very religious, did not accept their lesbian daughter. Likewise, the church did not welcome her. With no family support and very little professional direction, Raquel faced a difficult financial situation. In the beginning, she had no furniture or basic kitchen appliances, such as a refrigerator, which made her daily life extremely complicated and left no room for planning. She worked as a freelance English teacher, but she went about it in a disorganised way and had great difficulty surviving day-to-day. But Raquel persisted so she could have the freedom to be who she is and to live the love that she felt - and still feels - for her partner.



## IN SEARCH OF FINANCIAL AUTONOMY

Raquel taught on her own, but her expertise as a teacher was not enough for her to achieve autonomy, as she did not know how to organise her business or her personal expenses. She lacked management knowledge and financial education and, in order to obtain them, she enrolled in the second Micro Rainbow Brazil entrepreneurship course, which began in May 2016. Her main hope was to break with the economic fragility that exposed her to discrimination and dependency, since she had to rely on the support of people who criticised her life and subject herself to very difficult working conditions.

Through the course, Raquel learned how to manage her business, *The Way English*, as well as her personal finances, acquiring as much knowledge as possible to develop her business plan. A week after graduation she decided to face her biggest challenge: putting the business plan into practice, a process that was, she says, at times painful:

***“I only became aware of it when it was over. Now that it's on paper, it has to be put into practice. It was a struggle in some ways - knowing that my plan was there and that I had to reach a certain number of students, but how do I get there? So I got to marketing... It was painful, but it contributed a lot to my business”.***

The business plan she developed exposed weaknesses in her business practices, such as lack of appropriate pricing. But she no longer saw herself as someone who needed to pay the bills in order to be independent - she came to see herself as an entrepreneur. She realised that she needed to grow as well as her business.

## EMPOWERMENT

On this new path, Raquel has already taken significant steps towards autonomy and no longer feels exposed to violent situations. In less than a year, her income has improved considerably, providing access to basic home goods such as appliances, furniture and a telephone. This directly impacted her quality of life and expanded her professional possibilities. However, having access to leisure activities had the most impact on her self-esteem. Taking her partner to the theatre, to the movies and being able to travel in Brazil were the greatest achievements in her view. After so many struggles together, they can finally enjoy what they have achieved.

As well as improving her professional life, Raquel has sought other sources of empowerment, such as LGBT advocacy groups. These new support networks have provoked further questions and fostered a new understanding of her place as a lesbian. Her family's prejudice remains, but today she limits her interactions with them in order to avoid conflicts. She found an inclusive church where she feels completely accepted, and began to



surround herself with people who do not discriminate against her. She believes that some of her clients are prejudiced, but she acts naturally, without hiding her sexual orientation, and she has had no major problems. The looks she used to get when she was with her partner in public are no longer a source of shame, but of pride. Raquel has taken full control of her life and feels free to express her love.

## LGBT SOLIDARITY

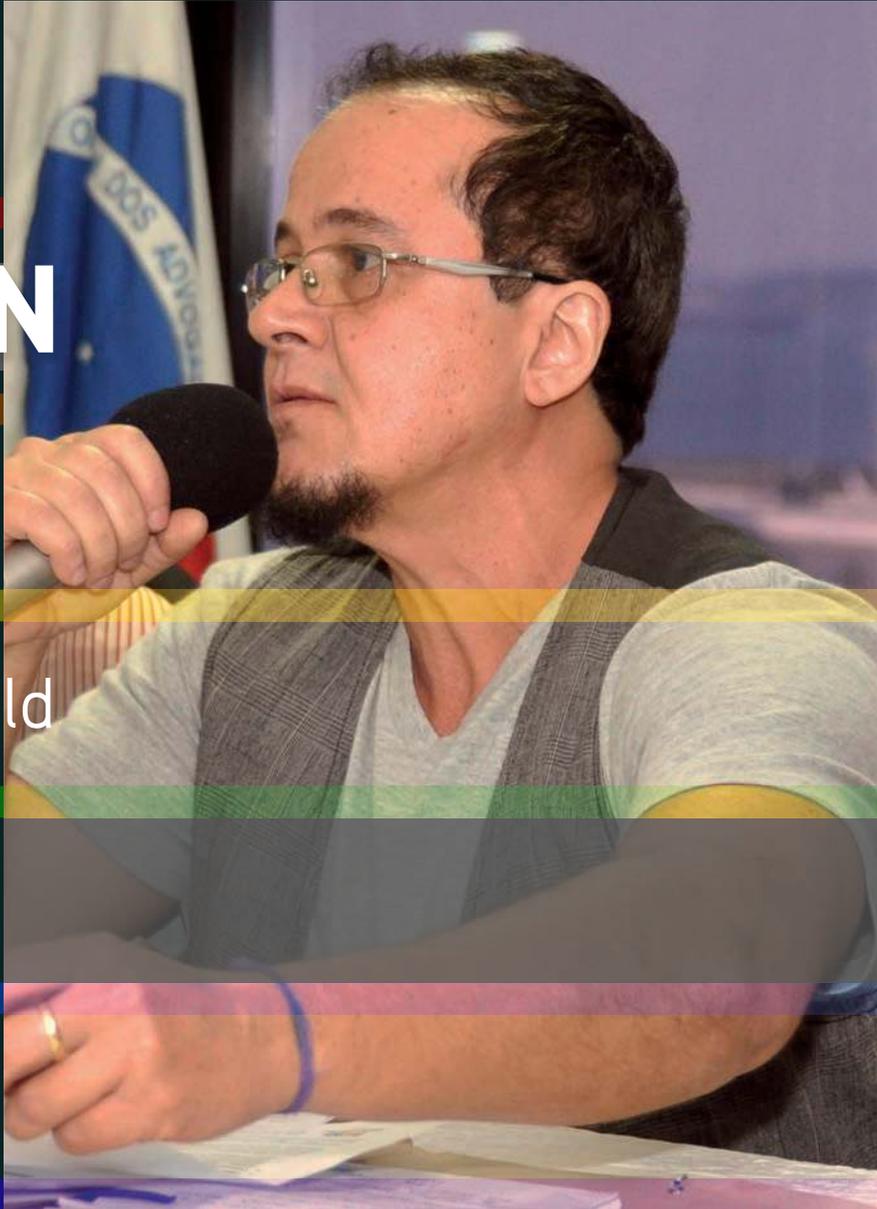
Raquel knows that there is still a long road to full rights for LGBT people. Public policies that promote full citizenship regarding gender identity and sexual orientation are very rare. In the labour market, LGBT professionals do not have access to equal opportunities because many people do not want to coexist with diversity. Precisely for this reason, as a businesswoman, Raquel gives priority to service companies operated by LGBT people. And this preference will soon apply to employees too, as she embraces LGBT community belonging as the primary criterion for hiring. It was her LGBT friends who supported her

in the most difficult moments, such as when her parents abandoned her, and she formed a new family with them. According to Raquel, maintaining this support network is fundamental for the empowerment of other lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transvestites and transsexuals. She concludes:

***“Many of us need to move away from our families and other LGBT people end up becoming our family. We find solidarity among ourselves”.***

Raquel's experience shows that financial autonomy can be extremely influential on one's quality of life. The lack of support from her family meant she did not have access to basic subsistence goods, since she had not yet achieved financial independence. But it also showed her that she was not alone. Raquel had unconditional support from her partner and some friends, and she built new family ties with them. Now that she is in a new stage of her career, she wants to reciprocate by giving opportunities and support to other LGBT people. ■





# SIMON

51 years old

Activist

## **SIMON IS AN ANTHROPOLOGIST AND TRANS ACTIVIST.**

At the end of 2015 he graduated from the first Micro Rainbow Brazil entrepreneurship course. In his opinion, as a former student and LGBT militant, taking the course broadens horizons and “*breathes new life into the LGBT community*”, opening doors for autonomy and the creation of important spaces of personal and economic self-management.

## “THAT'S WHAT I COULD BE!”

Simon's story is particularly beautiful and revealing. It exposes the cruelty of the framework of gender in the process of socialisation, which is so conditioned by stereotypes, scientific “truths” and control over bodies. Our society classifies, frames, pathologizes and punishes, even if without legal support, people who do not express themselves according to the gender attributed to them at birth: *“Before the transition, everything I did was misunderstood. All of my expression was perceived as wrong. Everything was reprehensible... This is a daily humiliation; a form of psychological suffering that makes social interaction totally unappealing”.*

It is also a story of transition overcoming social constraints that restricted him at every gesture, at every moment. Simon was already a university professor and researcher when he first made contact with the trans world in all its richness. This world would quickly become part of his experience as a person, professional and activist: *“The day I discovered that there was such a thing as a trans person, I cried. I thought, ‘Guys, that's it! That's what I could be!’”.*

## “BIOGRAPHICAL RUPTURE”

In this way, Simon began his process of “biographical rupture”, a term which he uses to define his transition. After a seven-year period of depression and complete social isolation, he talked about the subject with a friend, who invited him to

the National Meeting of Transvestites and Transgender People Who Fight Against AIDS (ENTLAIDS). There he met a trans man for the first time, and was advised to go to the Pedro Ernesto University Hospital to learn about the transition process offered by *Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS)*, Brazil's national public health system. At the time, he did not know that Brazil's public health system offered this service, and was already preparing to go to the United States if necessary. He began his transition immediately, and when he obtained the medical report that authorises hormone therapy, he changed his clothes, changed his name, and re-introduced himself to the world as Simon.

***“I found peace after I made the transition. There are people who say, ‘the life of a trans person is problematic’. For me, life as a trans person has solved a lot of issues”.***

Even with this optimistic and liberating perception, Simon recognises that the world he encountered after transition was the same as before, with its conservatism and limitations. He recounts the difficulties he faced in being recognised in his new existence at various levels, from having to be reintroduced to people to enduring serious expressions of transphobia: *“Friends, relatives, neighbours, everyone has to go through their own ‘transition’ as well”.*

The transition also created the need to be re-socialised into the masculine world and to define what kind of man he



wanted to be. He realised that he did not feel the need to prove his masculinity through physical strength, sexual competitiveness, objectification of women and other macho behaviours. In this sense, he had difficult experiences in the workplace, when revealing his trans status provoked bizarre and even violent reactions. Close friends who used to share their feelings and secrets with him felt “betrayed” when they discovered that he is trans, and even threatened him with physical assault.

## ACTIVISM AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS FORMS OF RESISTANCE

Even the misfortunes in his story were harnessed by Simon in an intelligent and productive way. Beyond experiencing the social relevance of this subject on his own skin, he also perceived its incredible investigative potential as an intellectual. So he decided to pursue postgraduate studies in gender and sexuality, articulating his knowledge and activism as a lecturer in the health sector. His lectures address the issue of gender expression, which encompasses a large number of people who suffer from a supposed discrepancy between their gender condition and the social expressions attributed to it, including cisgender individuals such as “effeminate” men and “masculine” women:

***“My body is a tool of expression of my culture, which I perfect and modify. The use of techniques, instruments, the use of language,***

***all of this is part of human nature. Nobody is dominated by reproductive organs, this does not determine gender expression. We have chemistry, we suffer, we love, we have preferences... we feel things we cannot explain! You can't reduce the human being to a set of organs and parts as if he were a piece of mechanical equipment, an automobile. We're more than that”.***

Through this journey, Simon also understood that the formal labour market was no longer for him. Now it was time to step up and establish a business, always remaining attuned to trans issues. This is how he had the idea to invest in the development of penile prosthetic devices for trans men, with the objective of bringing more comfort and quality of life to basic activities such as using the bathroom and engaging in sexual intercourse: “As an entrepreneur, what I want to do is to improve the lives of my peers. I want to promote well-being in this population because I am also part of it”. Using the bathroom is a particularly sensitive issue for trans people in general, and many trans men end up not urinating during the entire working day because the bathrooms do not have adequate privacy, exposing them to embarrassment and violence.

In order to acquire the skills needed to put his idea into practice, Simon enrolled in the first Micro Rainbow Brazil's entrepreneurship course. His business plan, which he developed and defended



as the final step in the course, was crucial in guiding his entrepreneurial experience. He compares his plan with an academic research proposal, and is very proud of its outcome:

***“The business plan broadens your horizon, you are constructing your business subjectively, which gives you a basis to work from later, giving you an idea of your limits, possibilities... it gives you grounding. I feel like I have a business because I have a business plan, even though I depend on financing to carry it out. But I already have a [legally established] firm, a business tax number, everything”.***

Currently Simon is investing in improving his product prototype, and the biggest barrier to launching it in the market has been accessing microcredit to start production and structure the business. He is trying to use his FGTS<sup>8</sup> for this, but since it is registered under his birth name, he has faced great difficulties in accessing it. However, this does not discourage him because he believes in the quality of his product and its competitive edge in relation to others on the national market. The confidence that the course instilled in him encourages him to continue as an entrepreneur:

<sup>8</sup> The Fundo de Garantia do Tempo e Serviço, also known as FGTS, is a resource for the government and an assistance fund for workers. Both employees and employers contribute to the fund. With FGTS a worker accumulates financial assets that can be withdrawn in certain circumstances.

***“This course was important for me because it stitched everything together, it tied together what I want to do, who I'm going to sell it to, what's the competitive difference of my product. It helps you to act as a real entrepreneur, to know the importance of planning, to have a total vision of the business. Also, you're in the midst of LGBT people, you feel normal, equal, empathetic... you don't expect prejudice from anyone. I think it's great; I loved taking this course, really!”.***

As an activist, Simon believes in the potential of entrepreneurship to contribute to freeing the LGBT community from excluding and exploitative working conditions. He highlights the role of the project in LGBT socioeconomic inclusion:

***“We need entrepreneurs in Brazil. The boss gets his or her way, and if you're your own boss, you can be whatever you want, no one will complain. So I think this course is important for that, to open people's eyes to autonomy, to financial and personal self-management, to reconsider your choices, to believe in yourself, to make plans, to produce something”.***

Simon's narrative personifies the need to reinvent oneself, articulating several fronts of resistance and



empowerment in order to subvert, in a creative and innovative way, the values that underlie gender oppression in our society. Although he has not been able to implement

his business plan because of financial issues, he has made entrepreneurship a form of activism, and his experience with Micro Rainbow International is part of that. Bravo! ■

## OTHER ENTREPRENEURS FROM MICRO RAINBOW BRAZIL



## 3. CONCLUSION

The case studies featured in this report provide a privileged view of a pioneering social project in LGBT socioeconomic inclusion in Brazil. Beyond the objectives and methods adopted, these case studies allow us to grasp **the meaning of inclusion for each participant, with all its nuances, limitations and commonalities**. From a methodological point of view, this could be described as qualitative analysis, but it is much more. The personal stories presented here have been carefully woven over almost three years, creating a unique research context where respect, familiarity and mutual cooperation go beyond the formal limits of data collection and monitoring to comprise the biographical richness produced here. At Micro Rainbow International, we abide by the principle that **lives are not numbers**. Thus, we are not interested in producing a statistical analysis of LGBT inclusion without understanding, qualifying and contextualising its effects on the individual experiences of the people involved in this process.

The interviews we carried out demonstrate the variables that affect the production and reproduction of LGBT vulnerabilities, as well as the effects of socioeconomic inclusion

on the experiences and discourses of participants. In regard to the first aspect, we can identify **how the intersectionality between social markers such as race, gender and social class, comes into dialogue with sexual orientation or gender identity and produces different effects on the lives of the interviewees**. What does it mean to be a black lesbian with a low income? Or a white trans man? What changes in the diverse lives of those who undergo a gender transition in a sexist, racist and cisnormative society like ours? **Finally, what does professional and economic repositioning imply for each of these people in practical and symbolic terms?**

The representative diversity of the individuals featured in this publication provides an empirical answer to these questions. **Ana and Geisa**, both black lesbians, demonstrate the genuine experiences of entrepreneurship from *Fábrica da Preta* and *Concreto Rosa* as a way of affirmation and empowerment. **Isa and Geisa** entered predominantly male fields, such as information technology and construction, highlighting the challenges for women in these contexts. In the culinary world, jobs such as those of **Ruan, Aline and Mell** stand as successful

cases of dialogue between actions of employability and entrepreneurship, with experiences in professional training and the formal labour market. **Raquel and Isaque** narrate striking accounts of organising personal and business finances bringing about extraordinary advances in their financial autonomy. **Renan and Simon** present a critical perspective on the limits of short-term entrepreneurship. **Simon, Laylah and Mell** share rich experiences of trans vulnerability and empowerment from different locations of speech and activism, using the power of entrepreneurship as a resource to break with the stereotypes and stigmas associated with this population. **Aline and Renan** faced serious challenges to the implementation of their businesses and had to reassess their objectives, seeking out technical training and formal employment as alternatives for professional achievement and financial stability.

In the opinions of our entrepreneurship course alumni, learning about cost analysis, business formalisation, and especially pricing and financial education, was fundamental for the implementation and expansion of their businesses. Most of them experienced an **objective improvement in their socioeconomic condition through applying these lessons in their own small businesses**. Some are still in the planning stage because they have more complex business plans, which demand more investment capital. There are those who want to run their business as

a supplement to income while seeking formal employment in the short or medium term. All of them emphasised the **importance of strategic planning and financial management to becoming a successful entrepreneur**.

Beyond the knowledge and tools gained through the course, participants also **discovered their entrepreneurial identities**. Many of their accounts describe a transformation of perceptions about the company itself. What they once considered a form of day-to-day survival, a sideline, or a temporary occupation, became their **life's work, that which provides sustenance, but also gives pride and meaning to knowledge and action**. This entrepreneurial identity was not created by the course, but was revealed by the participants themselves in the course of classes. For many students, it was their first experience in a professional environment that welcomed their sexual orientation and gender identities. In this space, they have strengthened their entrepreneurial identities or discovered them for the first time.

Despite differences in careers and business sectors, there are many common aspects in the narratives of participants. Undoubtedly, **increases in income** were the most direct measurable result on the lives of the interviewees. Access to leisure, cultural activities, travel and paying off debt are some of the associated benefits they mentioned. Also important are **defence strategies against homophobic and transphobic violence** in public, private and domestic/family spheres, forged



through this economic rise. Examples of this strategy include having the financial autonomy to leave their parents' home or the ability to choose safer modes of transport in some situations. But not everything boils down to rupture or defence. Economic empowerment also fostered **re-encounters, apologies and the rebuilding of relationships**, especially with family members, who began to respect participants' sexuality and gender identity.

In addition to professional and financial benefits, the fact that participants felt valued by an LGBT inclusion project has produced **invaluable effects on their self-esteem, pride and sense of belonging**. The conviviality and empathy with other LGBT people and issues is a highlight in the narratives, especially the **solidarity with trans people**. Another important development of the project was the spontaneous formation of **mutual support networks** which promote LGBT-owned businesses and prioritise the hiring of LGBT employees in the expansion of their micro-enterprises.

Finally, interviewees' narratives show evidence of the **unanimous recognition of the pioneering spirit of the Micro Rainbow Brazil Project** and the relevance of the socioeconomic approach to the struggle for improving the living conditions of LGBT people. Further, these narratives indicate interviewees' conviction that **they are agents of change in this process**, with the visibility and inspiration that emerge from their own efforts and work, so different from the patterns of dependence usually seen in social projects directed towards vulnerable groups.

The evidence of the positive results of the project in a short period of time, testifies to the need and relevance of this type of initiative and the high demand for continuity and expansion of our current actions. Whether through economic aspects or symbolic dimensions of empowerment, **we effectively paved the way for socioeconomic inclusion, acceptance and recognition of rights among the LGBT community in Rio de Janeiro - including the right to dream. ■**



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