

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.

