



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