

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. ■

