

'I Want Decent Work.' G1 Reports on Public Project for Transgender People in São Paulo

Transcidadania completes 6 months with 10% attrition and a waiting list.

G1 followed the group's classes for a month and interviewed ten participants.

[\[Original article in Portuguese\]](#)

[\[Video with English subtitles\]](#)

Six months ago, Aline Marques started to see more of the sunlight. Instead of working the nights in São Paulo, she now wakes up early, goes to school, is greeted by her classmates and gets hugged at work. Aline says her new routine is "pure happiness"—and what she means by happiness is not being humiliated, threatened or beaten.

Aline is one of the 100 transgender people who participate in *Transcidadania*, a pilot project of São Paulo city that gives a scholarship of R\$827.40 [about \$263 dollars] for those who attend 30 hours of classes weekly. G1 followed the group's classes and activities for a month and interviewed ten participants. [See the video with their stories.](#)

In addition to attending school (86% did not finish primary education), the participants receive psychological, pedagogical and medical care. The focus of the program is people in vulnerable situations: 85% live in shared rooms, with pimps or in cheap hotels, 6% are in shelters, 5% in informal occupied areas and 4% are homeless. One of the requirements for joining the program is participants must have been at least three years without regular employment.

Six months after launching, the program's attrition rate is 10%. In addition to the ten who left, three other people exited the program after being arrested, one got a job and one died (shot by a "client" while she was working as a prostitute). More than a thousand people have registered for the waiting list, and 171 were already selected to participate for a second year.

The compulsory 30 hours are filled by school activities and courses taught at the LGBT Citizenship Center, recently opened in Largo do Arouche. Rooms are full (absences are deducted from payment) and teachers often find it difficult to cope with students' anxiety for speaking - and the willingness to be heard.

"The first class was impossible to teach. Everyone was speaking at the same time," said Professor Fabio Mariano, a PhD student in the social sciences. In addition to the troubled relationship between the participants—one day the class was interrupted because the group considered the clothes of one of the students to be very short and to see-through for an academic environment—there are also the difficulties related to the context of violence to which many are accustomed, which ends up being reproduced in aggressive speeches in class. "The violence we suffer in the street is sometimes internalized and explodes in conflicts with others," Fabio said during one class.

But, slowly, things seemed to change. "There was a student who would say, 'I'm going to grab somebody by the throat,' and she stopped. At the same time, she started to participate in forums and public debates," said the professor.

In a course on Citizenship and Human Rights, transgender students learn how Congress works, what rights are guaranteed by the Constitution, how power is organized and how laws are written and approved in Brazil.

In debates, questions arise about the possibility of using their chosen name in schools and hospitals, and the recent withdrawal of references to gender in the City Education Plan. Teachers encourage students to think about policies and ways of having more LGBT political representation. "We need to invest in training you," Fabio says to the students. "I'm not your voice. You are your voice."

The Certainty is the Street

The profile of participants is very similar. Most, about 63%, are black and brown. There are 52 transvestites, 43 trans women and five trans men. Some were expelled from their homes by their parents or left by their own, taking to life on the streets. The vast majority, according to the organizers, work as prostitutes. Only few have completely stopped, but many managed to do it less frequently.

"It has reduced my workload, but I must supplement my income. [...] Before, I had to go every day. The project is not salvation, but it is a help. The only certainty is the street," says Ciara Pitma, a 25-year-old from Piauí who dreams of working in the fashion industry.

Some—usually the younger ones—say they like the freedom that prostitution gives. But their testimonies are usually full of fatigue and desire for change. "I never got a salaried job. What I had left was prostitution. [...] I have been beaten, abused, robbed. I do not want it any more. I just want to have a decent job," says Ciara.

The main concern of the members of the program is to get a job. According to an evaluation made at the end of the semester, 54% seek in the project an insertion in the job market. This is the program's great challenge. "We do not want these people to rely on public services. We want them to enter the job market. [...] If we get 100 people working as interns by the end of the program, we will consider it a victory," said the program's coordinator—also a transgender—Symmy Larrat.

But for some participants, even a small change means a fresh start. "Can you realize how much dignity there is in getting up in the morning, having coffee, taking the bus, and people treating you well? It brought me back to life. I used to live in the dark, I dressed like a clown to give men sex. I was depressed, I asked God to take me," says Aline. "And today... Today I feel integrated into people's lives. Today I see that life is simple. It's simple to be happy."