

Brazilian Recycling NGO Wants to Export Its Know How

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The favela (shantytown) of Jaguaré, in the western side of São Paulo, in the Southeast of Brazil, is one of the oldest and most populated in the city. There are over 12,000 people. At least one third of that population is 18 to 35 years old. The need for social projects turned to professional training is huge.

In that respect, an NGO established in the region in 1995 has many a reason to be proud. Instituto Reciclar turned thirteen years old last July. During that period, 225 adolescents in the community were trained and prepared for their second job.

Products manufactured at the NGO - notebooks, notepads, agendas, calendars, Christmas cards, among others - are usually ordered by companies and "s. The demand is strong, so much so that it is often necessary to refuse large orders, as the products are handmade.

Thanks to contacts with multinational corporations, many of which support the project, Reciclar's products have already been shipped to locations such as Martinique, United States and France.

At Reciclar, adolescents learn how to recycle paper and manufacture products using the recycled material. It is their first job. That, however, does not sum up the entire project. "Here, they learn to have responsibility, to accomplish tasks, to do teamwork, to have discipline. In a nutshell, we prepare them for the labor market," says Paulo Roberto de Carvalho, administrative and financial manager at the NGO.

Youths under 16 years of age participate in the Complementary Schooling Program - which includes lessons in math, Portuguese, computing and general knowledge. The course is taken at the headquarters of the NGO. Those aged over 16 participate in the Education for Work Program. They work from 8 am to 1:30 pm and, in the afternoon, attend reinforcement classes. In the evening, they attend regular school.

There are many requirements in order to participate in the program. One must live in the Jaguaré shantytown, go to a local public school and have good grades, good behavior and good attendance at school. Paulo plays the role of pedagogical advisor when it comes to deciding who deserves to remain in the project or not.

"The school sends the report cards straight to us," he explains. "And I make comments on all of them." If the adolescent starts to perform badly, he receives warnings and might even be expelled if he does not improve.

Every year, as new candidates present themselves to the NGO, Paulo conducts individual interviews in order to learn

about the family, habits, and school performance of each of them.

"But the first question I ask is: do you know how to prevent from having children?," he says. "We want these youths to be educated and informed as well." After three years working there, the youth has to leave the project to make room for a new colleague.

Such is the case with Camila Aparecida da Silva Santos, 19 years old. She should leave the NGO in the end of this year. With a high school diploma and experience in every step of the production process at Reciclar in her resume, Camila already knows what she wants once she gets out:

"I am going to study gastronomy. I love cooking". The director-president at the NGO, Matiko Kume Vidal, is already getting in touch with restaurants and hotels, so that Camila may know up close the labor market she is dreaming of. "We always try to help them make that transition," explains Matiko.

Reciclar gained its own headquarters early this year, thanks to a donation from Carrefour - one of many companies that sponsor the project. With the new infrastructure, it is possible to cater to the 127 adolescents attending the program this year, 58 of whom are involved in the production process, and 63 only studying.

"The other six are taking an assistant entrepreneurial manager course at Senac (National Service of Commercial Learning - an entity sponsored by private commerce) with which we sustain an agreement," explains Paulo. To have an idea of the project's expansion, as of 2003, only 38 youths were involved.

João Batista da Cruz Filho, production manager and the only employee who has been in the NGO since the beginning, recalls that in the first year, 1995, production totaled 500 Christmas cards. "In 2007, we manufactured 152,000 units," he boasts.

Currently, the institute has approximately 220 clients. Citibank, KPMG, Vivo, Merck Sharp, Pão de Açúcar and Sadia are some of them. The paper used in the recycling process is donated by 60 companies.

Youths participating in the labor program are registered and earn one state-level minimum wage, of 450 reais (US\$ 285). Those who attend the school program receive a basic food basket. Breakfast, a snack and lunch are offered onsite.

Nowadays, Matiko takes pride in having forwarded many of them to the labor market. There are people working at law firms, medical practices, other NGOs, and going to college. The head of the project since the year 2000, she believes that the Institute has matured and is an example of self-sustained project.

"Now, we are able to export our model. We can help train similar NGOs in developing countries around the world. We have done it before in Brazil, with other "s. Now we are prepared to go international," she says. "We also enjoy receiving visits here, in order to show our production process."

Furthermore, Matiko dreams of seeing Reciclar's products being exported in a more systematic fashion. "Why not? I have known similar products manufactured throughout the world. Ours is second to none."

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