

# MULHERES MIL THOUSAND WOMEN MILLE FEMMES



DO SONHO À REALIDADE  
MAKING DREAMS COME TRUE  
DU RÊVE À LA RÉALITÉ



## A STORY TOLD BY MANY VOICES

This publication tells us the story of a public initiative, Mulheres Mil, through first-person narratives. The story is told by 27 women, students and former students, who have taken part in a pilot project to improve the lives of 1000 Brazilian women in the North and Northeast regions of the country. Daring and unparalleled in the National Professional and Technological Education Network of Brazil, the Mulheres Mil project took on the challenge of working with a specific marginalized population: young and mature women, poorly educated, socially and economically vulnerable and excluded from the labor market.

The project's primary goals were to improve the women's education, to offer them professional qualifications and to help them to enter the labour market. Beyond these immediate goals, the program also changed the women, in ways that are not as easy to measure, by helping them to rediscover their citizenship, restore their self-esteem, and improve family and community relations. In short: these women started believing in themselves again.

The Mulheres Mil project was launched in 2005 with an inclusive vision, and the courage and boldness of a cross-section of Brazilian and Canadian partners. The project was initially a collaboration between Rio Grande do Norte Federal Institute (IFRN), (at the time called Federal Center for Professional and Technological Education (Cefet), and Canadian colleges. At the Rio Grande do Norte institute they promoted an extension project that offered training for chambermaids. The impact was such that Canada, through the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Brazil (through the Professional and Technological Education Secretariat and the Brazilian Cooperation Agency

(ABC/MRE)) decided to develop a larger program to take this same approach to other states. And that is how the Mulheres Mil project was born, a project which was taken to 12 other institutions after Rio Grande do Norte: the federal Institutes of Alagoas, Amazonas, Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, Roraima, Rondônia, Sergipe and Tocantins.

The real people in these stories took part in the introductory courses that have been offered since 2008. The skills taught are diverse and the courses are designed to match the talents of students and the vocations available in each region. That is why there are courses on tailoring, office management, food handling, housekeeping and handicrafts. The recognition of informal experience and previous studies was a key factor in the implementation the Mulheres Mil project. The Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) methodology was an important element brought to the project by the Canadian colleges, which have used the process for decades. PLAR is an approach that allows educational institutions to validate and certify the knowledge gathered throughout life.

On a national level, the project was implemented by the Professional and Technological Education Secretariat (Setec/MEC) and supported by International Advisory of the Minister's Cabinet (AI/GM), the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC/MRE), the North and Northeast Technological Education Network (Redenet), the Federal Professional, Scientific and Technological Education National Council (Conif), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA/ACDI) and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) and partner colleges.

In the states, the Federal Institutes (IFs) relied on a number of government and non-governmental collaborators to implement the project. Other important participants were the teachers, IF staff and volunteers and collaborators who welcomed students, who taught and supported them. They all contributed directly to significantly changing the lives of these women and their families. In fact, all those interviewed since 2008, both for this publication and for the website, commented on the importance that the classes and community life at the institution had in their development as professionals and citizens.

Like everything that is new, Mulheres Mil is a work in progress and is looking for ways to consolidate its success and strengthen the links created between communities, institutes and society. New approaches employed in this project range from changes in access – as the institutes came out from behind their walls and into the communities – to the design of courses, ways to help

women stay at school and collaboration with other organizations to fulfill the many demands brought by those non-traditional learners such as childcare, education for mature and young students and advice from the manufacturing sector to guarantee acceptance into the labour market. That is why there has to be more than one pathway. There is no such thing as a universal formula. The challenge is to establish dialogue and to adapt the methodology developed for Mulheres Mil to different realities without losing sight of fundamentals of the project: Education, Citizenship and Sustainable Development.

The results are not always the same and not every story is as successful as the ones published here. There were women who dropped out when they found a job, or when they moved to another house, or when they didn't like the course or they were unable to combine studies and life. There are students who got a position in the sector they were trained in and those who are working in different sectors. Others are still searching for a position. Some of them have come back to the classroom and others have not. There are those who are starting their own businesses and there are some who are discussing setting up cooperatives. However, one thing is certain: all those who finished their training say that the project brought significant changes to their lives.

From an institutional viewpoint, the results are extremely positive. From 2005 to March 2011 there was an intense exchange of knowledge among Brazilian and Canadian educators and managers through technical missions, workshops and meetings. More than being partners in international cooperation, Brazil and Canada have developed a relationship of respect, confidence and partnership in the area of professional and technological education and have many plans for the near future. One result was the strengthening of the relationship between Brazil and Canada, and several other partnerships have been signed between the two countries. As for the Mulheres Mil project, the idea is to take the project not only to more Brazilian institutions but also to other countries that may want to adapt this successful method to meet the needs of their people.

In Brazil, an important outcome is that all the 13 Federal Institutes developed a methodology of access, retention and success for women that today can be expanded to the other institutions and applied to other marginalized communities and populations that would like to have professional or vocational education. The recently-created Mulheres Mil Reference Centre, will be responsible for spreading the methodology, following up on the expansion, training network resource people and overseeing research and design of educational materials.

Another important contribution from the Mulheres Mil project is that the Federal Institutes have developed the tools to provide access to a public that for decades would not even enter the gates of a Federal Institute. That is why this initiative has been more than a project, it represents a commitment to social inclusion and thus contributes to a more egalitarian and just country. It will contribute to Brazil reaching the Millennium Development Goals set by United Nations (and approved by 91 countries) to promote gender equity and female autonomy, environmental sustainability and the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

The goals for the coming years are still audacious. The objective is to utilize the accumulated knowledge as a foundation for project implementation in the rest of Brazil, making Mulheres Mil a permanent policy of the Federal Network to be offered in each of the 366 institutes throughout the 27 states in the country.



SEBASTIANA



QUITÉRIA



ELISÂNGELA



## MARECHAL DEODORO



*On the margins of society*, this is how the inhabitants of Vila Santa Ângela live, in the municipality of Marechal Deodoro. The houses, many of them made of mud, are located two metres below highway AL-101 South and it is not uncommon for someone from the neighbourhood to be run over and killed by a car.

These families are ignored by official statistics and are invisible when planning for basic services such as sewage, education and health care. Without any neighbourhood association to defend their basic rights, vehicles, including government vehicles, drive too fast through the area and one barely has time to look both ways.

A distinguishing trait of the people in Alagoas is their shyness. These women, even the young ones, have been working for many years. The daughters of peasants, some of them would go to the mills to cut sugarcane or would stay and help their parents work the land by day. At night they would attend Mobral (The Brazilian Literacy Movement), which offered education for youth and adults from 1964 to 1985.

The professional training offered at the Alagoas Federal Institute aims to provide them with qualifications for positions using skills they already have from work they do now – in sales and preparation of food at bars and restaurants – work done on weekends – crab fishing in the mangrove, selling coconut candies by the roads near their houses and working as housemaids. The IF has also signed an agreement with the local government to improve education levels of the women in this neighbourhood.



## ELISÂNGELA, SEBASTIANA AND QUITÉRIA



*Maria Sebastiana da Silva, age 49, Maria Quitéria da Silva, 32, and Elisângela da Silva, 23, are mother and daughters with similar life stories: early motherhood and no free time for education. Like Sebastiana, Quitéria began to work early in order to help raising her brothers and sisters. Marginalization is the distinguishing trait of their lives. They live near each other and help each other whenever they need to: they share what they have, they mourn together and celebrate joys and achievements together. Today, in the classroom, they share the dream of a better future. Elisângela's wants financial independence and her goal is to become a receptionist. Quitéria's goal is to take a nursing course and that was one of the reasons she came back to a classroom. As for Sebastiana, she has not abandoned a dream of a better future.*



My name is Sebastiana and I was born in Marechal Deodoro. I had five children and raised four of them on my own.



One of them was raised by the father. I made it only to third grade. I would work all day and at night I would go to a school called Mobral<sup>1</sup>. I would arrive tired. Sometimes I wouldn't even have had breakfast. The little I learned came through sacrifice, letter by letter, word by word. That was the life I lived until I got married when I was 17. My wedding was both religious and legal. I had my first child when I was 18. My former husband was a driver. I loved him but he drank too much. We separated 17 years ago.

I had a painful childhood, and my adolescence was even worse. My mother had no means to raise seven children. I was raised without a father, cutting sugarcane, cleaning sugarcane. At the age of 11, I began cutting sugarcane and I worked until I was 16 and then I got married. Now it wouldn't be like that because of the childhood protection agency, children are not allowed to work any longer, they must go to school.

“ And I’m learning them now that I’m old. I’m learning about cooking, woman’s rights.



Most people criticize the place where we live; some call it a slum and others call us slum dogs. Sometimes I catch a bus to Maceió and I see people who are filled with prejudice. I feel embarrassed because I’m poor and I only live in this place because I have nowhere else to live. It hurts, because being poor is not my fault.

I went back to school and discovered the Mulheres Mil project because my daughters persuaded me. I’m taking the EJA<sup>2</sup> and am enjoying it. When I joined the class I learned things I had never learned during my childhood. And I’m learning them now that I’m old. I’m learning about cooking, woman’s rights. I was a victim of domestic violence, but was not aware of my rights. I had no fear to try using the computer, I was actually curious about it; a dream come true.

I sell Avon, I sell clothes made by other people; I do a little bit of this and that to survive. I do lace<sup>3</sup> and the family benefit (Bolsa Familia) also helps a lot as I have a handicapped son who lives with me. My dream is to be self-employed, have my own business and one day leave this place and stop being discriminated against. I would like to earn my daily bread without having to work for others, only for myself. And I have never given up dreaming and struggling for a better life. ■



2. EJA – Education for Youths and Adults.

3. The lace comes up from a simple net consisting of meshes and knots, which is also called “knot network”, by following the same technique used to make a fisherman’s net, which serves as an inspiration.

My name is María Quitéria. I have three children and am now separated from my husband. I didn't have the chance to get an education.



My childhood was kind of troubled. Until I was 12 I lived in downtown Marechal Deodoro<sup>1</sup>. But then my parents separated and my mother moved so often I had to quit school to help raise my brothers and sisters. She would work in family houses, work at a fast food restaurant, and I would help. Then she had an operation and I had to take her place and help even more. I had no more time to study. I made it to fourth grade.

I was shy and the project helped me to find a job. Sometimes I work on weekends at a restaurant, as a kitchen assistant, and I am also given family benefits. I have learned to value myself. I have more courage to face the challenges of daily life, and there are many. But I believe things will get better.

At the course I learned to prepare chicken recipes, make refreshing drinks and to re-use leftover food. I learned how to wash my hands properly, that you need to wash up to the elbows and that if you go to the bathroom you need to take off your apron, take off your head covering, and that



“I want to complete the course and then to take my nursing course.”

you can't talk while handling food. I would ignore those things. I have to wash the greens and vegetables before putting them in salads or in casseroles. I am determined to finish the course and get my certificate.

I have good memories of the time when I went to Brasília. It was the first time I had been out of my state. It didn't even cross my mind that one day I would leave Alagoas. When I'm watching TV and I see those places where I have been, I always say: "Look, I was there," and it is really moving. I keep on saying that to my children. I had never been to such a *chic* hotel.

I have already worked as a maid, a kitchen assistant at a restaurant, as a waitress, as a cleaner. What I like most is to work in the kitchen, because I don't enjoy being in the crowd. I prefer peace and quiet.

I want to complete the course and then to take my nursing course. I have dreamt of being a nurse ever since I was a child. I never shared it with anyone. I'm saying it now that I'm a grown-up; that my dream is to study nursing. Someone told me that to study nursing I have to at least have finished the first year of middle school. That is why I'm back in the classroom, because I want to take that course. ■





My name is Elisângela da Silva. I have three children, two from my first marriage and the youngest one from the second.



I had an operation so I wouldn't have anymore children. My childhood was better than Quitéria's, who had to work to help to raise us. I stayed at home and was able to study.

When I went to school in Maceió, there was a Mother's Day celebration. When the mothers came into the classroom, we began to sing that song by Roberto Carlos. "Don't ever forget, not for a second, that my love for you is the greatest in the world." Most of them couldn't contain their emotions and wept. I wept as well; my classmates, the teacher, everybody wept. It is a song to remember as it tells about love, and love is something very important in our family. My mother is everything to me; she's Mom and Dad; she's everything. After her the most important thing to me is my children, my sisters who I love so much and my nieces. We are united.

I learned a lot from the course Rights and Health, the importance of the rights we had in the past and nowadays. Before women didn't have the right to vote but now Dilma has been elected president. She is the first

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woman to be president of Brazil. So you can see how things are evolving! What was really worth learning was women's rights, like the Maria da Penha act, for example. The little I know of the law is that violence is not only physical aggression, but it can also be through words, through gestures. So that was useful as there are women afraid to say that the man they live with beats them.

My first marriage lasted five years. I started dating when I was 15 and got pregnant at 17. And then he would begin to argue: he would beat me and I would beat him. There was this Woman's Police Station, but there was no Maria da Penha law (the law on domestic and family violence) yet. Many people would say don't denounce him because he will kill you. He would always say: "if you turn me in, as soon as I get out I'll kill you". The last time we fought, when we broke up, my mother came and said: "Let's go to the police station!"

I went there, I made a claim against him and asked the chief to make him sign a term of responsibility. From that day on I gained courage and until this day, if any man decides to slap me, I denounce him right away. He can threaten me as much as he can. So, by studying the law, I have made progress and now I know what women can do to stop abuse. Something else that was important for me was Information Technology. We had 10 lessons on that.





5. Brazilian chicken stew.

I learned how to access the Internet, which I didn't know before. And to open the pages on the computer, to turn it on and off, which I didn't know either and I learned.

Learning is something that really helps us, because without it you won't get anywhere. If you want to work for a business you need to have at least an elementary school education or even have completed high school. And this has an effect on the education of our children as well, because if we send a child to school but we cannot read nor write ourselves, how we will help them with their homework? So that is something to think about, too.

We took classes with a nutrition scientist; we learned to cook different kinds of dishes. She taught us a cashew recipe. When the cashew season comes, I'll make it. We cooked chicken "bobó<sup>5</sup>," even better than you get in the market. So now I can say: "I'm going to finish ninth grade and then take a course at Cefet." And people already show interest.

I am finishing eighth grade. I expect to become a professional receptionist. I want to attend Cefet in the evenings so I can take a receptionist course to be able to get a permanent job and be able to provide for my children and not depend on a husband, because he could leave me someday; and then what? How will I raise my children then? Will I be left without a cent? I expect to have a regular job and I hope the course will help me find one. ■





JANAÍNA



OSMARIVETE





## MANAUS



The women benefiting from Mulheres Mil project in Amazonas are former inhabitants of houses in a flooded area called “palafitas,” something common in the North Region where many families have built their houses over rivers and mangrove beds. The lack of sewage facilities or garbage collection, as well as regular flooding, make the housing conditions deplorable and threaten the health of the inhabitants.

In order to remove families from these risk areas, the state government of Amazonas has built new houses, with basic sewage and residential condominium infrastructure through its Manaus Wetland Social and Environmental Program (Prosamim). The women who live here are poorly educated and have children to provide for. Many were born in other Brazilian states or other municipalities in the same state. Many of them have life histories of abandonment, violence and child labour. They have a common need to improve and guarantee their family income.

Besides the housing problems, a lack of professional qualifications keeps the inhabitants unemployed or under-employed. This was the background that prompted Prosamim and the Amazonas State Federal Institute to cooperate in offering courses to train professionally-qualified employees for the tourism industry. The institutions worked together to ease the adaptation to new the homes that is crucial to allow the women to find work and earn an income. The tourism industry is expanding in Manaus and there is a lack of qualified employees for in sector. The course in chambermaid skills offers an important opportunity for these women to develop professional skills.

To contribute to the relocation process, the course included Environment and Interpersonal Relations to help focus on living sustainably and functioning well in their new environment. The professional internship is an important part of the course as it is the time when they learn the work routine and can obtain a position at a hotel. This was the means to entering the workforce for many

students. As well as finding positions at hotels, some students have also found work at motels and apartment hotels.



## JANAÍNA TEREZA LESSA DA SILVA



*Janaina Tereza Lessa da Silva, age 35, is celebrating her return to the labour market. Her new profession as chambermaid opened the door to a full-time job. She was hired by the same hotel where she had her internship, as she had hoped to be. Being employed, she plans to continue upgrading as she is certain that she is in a sector that has a promising future.*

I am working at the Caesar Business hotel.  
I had my practical training there  
and they hired me.

After the internship we had an interview with the Human Resources department. Then they asked for our documents and CVs. I didn't have my worker's card number with me, so I went there Saturday to give it to them. When I arrived, she said, "It's good to see you. I was going to call you. You are hired." I cried so much; I really wept. My





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daughter was there with me. It was hard; I spent almost two years with no work.

The first person who I told was my father, because he was the one who encouraged me the most. I said, “Guess what? I was hired for a trial period of three months at the hotel.” He cried and said that I should never give up my dreams.

It’s a little tiring but it’s good. It is good to work there, people are nice. I’m learning more as there are always details we forget. But there are people there coordinating and little by little I’m getting used to it, and I’m not forgetting the details anymore. Small details that we must not forget; but there are so many things to tidy up that we don’t remember everything, but now it’s getting better.

The teachers at the Federal Institute are amazing. They really are. The course itself is very good. I have already recommended it to other friends. I learned a lot; Portuguese language mistakes that we make in our daily life, how to behave, and English as well. Now and then I use it, because whenever there is a guest who only speaks English, we need to communicate somehow. So I try to remember some phrases and try to communicate. The course prepares us. Anyone works hard and completes the course will certainly find a position. I am going to take another English course this year.

Now, a way to improve the course would be to open it to the public. Some friends of mine wanted to take it but could not as they don’t live in Prosamim. I’m certain the course would be jam-packed. Many people would like to take it, people my age, 35, who can’t find a job and who would like to take the course because it offers a chance to get work. At the hotels



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where some former classmates work there is always a vacancy, but there is no chambermaid course available. It should be national, open to all women, because many women really need a professional training course nowadays.

When you’re unemployed, people kind of forget about you. They don’t think about you, they don’t respect you. Now people respect me again; they see me in a different way. Things have gotten a lot better, because people show more respect, people start respecting you again.

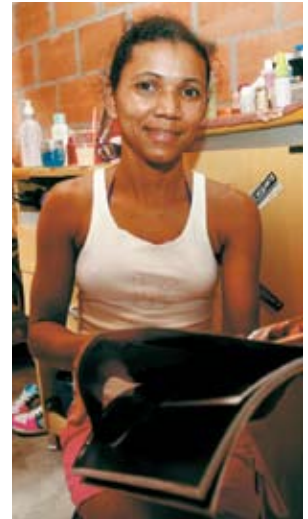
I worked as an administrative assistant at the City Hall for 10 years. I have worked as a receptionist and a telephone operator; and as a dentist’s assistant as well. So being chambermaid had never crossed my mind, but I did do cleaning in other people’s houses. But chambermaid...they actually don’t like us to call it chambermaid; they prefer ‘apartment attendant.’

The way I see it, it is good, and now I am going to take the supervisor course, because I don’t want to spend the rest of my life being a chambermaid. The course is about to start, at Senac, on being an apartment supervisor. It starts in March and I have already enrolled.

I completed high school; I even completed the second semester at the Physical Education faculty. But then my mother died and I had to stop going temporarily, and then I didn’t feel like starting over again. It was very hard because my father and I were not very close as he worked all day long, he would always be out. But not today, he’s my best friend and we get along very well. When I finally decided to return to college, there wasn’t a way to continue at the faculty.

I can say I had a good childhood, I played a lot. I played with dolls until I was 15. I went to school, I completed high school and then I passed the admission exam to college. Then I had my daughter when I was 23. I’m kind of married, we consider ourselves husband and wife, but I have my own home, my apartment. I spend more time at his place because my brother lives with me, and he doesn’t work, he’s unemployed. And besides, he is really into drugs. I work all day long, and I don’t like leaving my daughter alone where I live. So she spends most of her time with my husband.

There are many hotels that need a professional chambermaid, someone who has a diploma. In the two months since I’ve started working, people have asked me: “Janaína, do you have a job already? At the Adrianópolis hotel, there is a kind of a condominium that is looking







for a chambermaid.” So I told them about other colleagues I know who took the course.

Now I see that there are many vacancies, because I’m in this industry. But for those who haven’t taken the chambermaid course, they have no idea that hotels are looking for chambermaids. When you take a course like that, you get involved in the industry and you get to know who’s looking for a professional and who’s not. You get to know people who will recommend you and then you get a job. So this chambermaid course really helps.

I’d like to go to college to study pharmacy. But first I’ll first enroll in the course for apartment supervisor, which is above chambermaid, as many hotels don’t have one that and there is a lot of demand. I don’t want to be only a chambermaid, I want go further, but I must study to make it possible. And that is what I’m going to do: I’m going to study. I’ve already lost too much time, so I want to study. I want to take a university preparation course. I want to learn English, to update my knowledge on Information Technology because I’ve already forgotten some things. I want to learn English, at least the basics, and I should do it now while I can afford it because I’m working.

If I don’t stay there at the Caesar, there is already another job for me. I’m waiting until the end of my trial period to see if I’ll be hired or not. If I’m not hired, I’m not worried, because there will be another opportunity waiting for me.

There are many opportunities for chambermaids, and especially for those who have a course. It is never too late. And now that I have the chance to do something to improve myself, I’ll do it. Things can get hard... What I say to my workmates and to my husband is, “You need to study, to take a professional training course. Nothing is more important than getting an education.” ■



## OSMARIVETE CARLOS DE SOUZA E SILVA



*Osmarivete Carlos de Souza e Silva is 39 years old and has three children. She works at the Adrianópolis hotel and is determined to change her life. When she began professional training in 2008, she did not have anyone to leave her children with and for some time had to bring them with her to the classroom. For Osmarivete, it made the training especially difficult. But now, as well as an identity card, she now has another important document: her worker's card.*

I have grown so much that if you could see the woman I was, you would notice a real difference.

I take more care of myself. I pay more attention to myself. I know who I am and I know what goes on around me. I know people are watching me and I am aware I am changing, that I have already changed. I needed a boost of courage, needed someone to give me a shake and say: "You exist! You are real!" I believe this project was a boost of excitement. It was what I needed, but didn't know how to get. So when it came I seized the opportunity.





“When we lived on the wetlands the postman almost never showed up. Today we have a fixed address, which is very important.”



Today I'm a woman in the labour market. And that was an important change to me. I can say that I have another identity called a worker's card. I had worked before, but I was self-employed, doing this and that, but I had never had a regular job with an employer signing my card.

I started working when I was seven, helping my mom. We lived in the country most of the time, so my mother did a lot of 'caieira<sup>1</sup>' charcoal work. My mother had many children. She had 16: four of them died but 12 are still alive. So she had to do all kinds of things to help my father. When I was 10 she changed jobs and went to sell food on the streets.

The course helped in every sense. It raised my self-esteem and deepened my perception. I was a reserved woman, always at home, always thinking about today. I couldn't think about the future. And the Mulheres Mil project couldn't have come at a more propitious moment in my life. I needed something like this. I was in a situation where I didn't know where to run. Me and my husband were going through hard times. There was really no one I could ask for help.

When we lived on the wetlands the postman almost never showed up. And in order to get any document you need to give an address. Even to be given a job you need to have an address. When it rains you don't sleep, you stay awake all night. You simply cannot know you'll be alright, that you'll be safe. Many times when someone asked me where I lived, they would look at me and say something like, "You don't exist, you have no fixed address, no known address!"

Today we have a fixed address, which is very important. There is no need for my children to rush, or for me to worry, because I don't have to worry when it rains. Everything has changed. Before, besides having the problem of being surrounded by water, there were also the rats and, along with them, the carapanãs<sup>2</sup> that would come, and it is impossible to sleep with so many of them.

In the Mulheres Mil project I felt important surrounded by so many people. Wow, I'm taking a course at the technical school! And people, didn't believe it, and would ask, "Are you really taking your course there?" So I would feel well, welcome, and



1. Word used in the Amazon to define coal production.

2. Long-legged mosquitoes.



if on a certain day I couldn't come, I would get worried. I think I was absent only three or four times.

I can really say that it prepares you for the workplace, and I'll keep saying it. When you get a job, the first thing you remember is each instruction they gave you. So you start doing things and by doing them, you remember. So you learn in every class, even in chemistry, and you remember what you learned when you are about to mix certain substances and you remember you can't, because it might harm you.

Today I feel I am important, that is how I regard myself. I don't have a credit card and, for God's sake: you have to use it wisely if you have one. I am more cautious now than I used to be. So I get the pay and say to myself, "No, I'll spend it on what I really need. I won't just waste it. It is not that much and it must be spent on something I need, something which I need most."

When I went to the hotel, they didn't want to give me the position because all I had was the certificate. So I said, "But I'll only get experience if you give me a chance; and there is nothing I cannot do." Skills are something we develop as we get experience and today you can see I do what I'm capable of, I do what I can. The hotel has an occupation rate of 100% and we're there.

I have money of my own and I can help at home. My children really went through hard times, without anywhere to play, and the little I could do didn't help. Now what I manage to bring in is enough to do something; it is not that much, but there is enough.



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I can say today that I have a future. Is it still a challenge? Yes, I know it is hard, but I'll get there. I want to be a nanny. They don't have that course yet, but I'm keeping an eye out for it and am already learning something about it. I want to take an English course and become more

qualified in the sector I'm working in now.

This project that I took part in is meant for any woman who has no prospects, who lacks confidence, any woman who isn't valued by her husband because he doesn't say nice things about her, as he treat her however he chooses. This is the kind of woman this course is meant for, women who really need help, who need support, like I did. ■



CLEONICE



MARIA DAS GRAÇAS



## SALVADOR



Vila Dois de Julho and Jaquaribe II are neighboring communities in Salvador with similar challenges. They have no sewage network, poor infrastructure, the streets are unsafe and violence is omnipresent. There are no areas for leisure: there are no squares or meeting places.

The neighborhoods were originally laid out as subdivisions but, at the beginning of the 1990s, were inundated with families coming from other areas in the capital city and the interior who crowded into the area and squatted. This kind of neighbourhood is the reality of many of the women involved in the project.

The lack of schools in the rural areas and widespread child labour are the main reasons these women have such poor educations. This has made it harder for these women to join the labour market. Many of them are the heads of families and are informal market workers or unemployed. Most of them work as housemaids or general labourers.

The Federal Institute of Bahia faced many challenges implementing the Mulheres Mil project, primarily because of the violence in the communities and the difficulty overcoming colour and gender prejudice in the tourism industry. In order to remove barriers, the IF designed a new course: caregiver for elders, which has considerable labour market potential. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in 2008, for every 100 children under 14 there were 25 seniors aged 65 or older. In 2050 it is forecast that there will be 173 seniors for every 100 children.

In both the chambermaid and housekeeper professions, students are finding jobs in the labour market. For many women, training in health is guaranteeing them a new professional level of work, with better job prospects and higher pay.





## CLEONICE FERREIRA DA CONCEIÇÃO



*Cleonice Ferreira da Conceição is devoted to Our Lady of Livramento (Our Lady of Deliverance) and plays an active role in the Catholic community of the Jaguaribe II neighborhood named after this saint. There were two moments in her life when this devotion of hers helped: when her husband had an accident and when her brother was hit by depression and disappeared for a period of time. At 41, she is struggling to return to work. Her goal now is to find a job as caregiver for elders. Her dream, which was born when she completed her teacher's course, is to study pedagogy and then truly be able to give classes.*

*It exceeded my expectations because  
it completely changed my life;  
even the way I think,*

the way to interact with others. That is something they really focus on: that we should have more self-esteem. That we should look after ourselves.

When I started the course, I felt I was useless. I would send my CV and then wait for someone to call me so I could work again, but no one would







call. They say, “Your CV is great, but you lack the profile the company is looking for.” Even in retail, where I worked before as a supermarket cashier, they were only hiring people 27 years old or younger. So you begin to think, “I am strong, I am brave. I have the will to work and I am not given a chance only because of my age!” And so you feel bad because you only feel good when you are working.

When I started taking part in the meetings on self-esteem, things started to change, because there they also focus on the spiritual aspect. They say that you’re a being of light, that you’re important, and then they also address issues of childhood, family issues. They also talked about detachment, and about people not giving up, so that strengthened my self-esteem. So when I went to Cefet (the federal institute), that was when I got rid of my depression for good. I was aware it was a course for becoming a caregiver for elders, but didn’t know that it would be at Cefet and that there would be grants.

The classes were very dynamic. As for the teachers, if I had to give them a grade from 1 to 10, I would give 10 to all of them. I liked them all. We had first aid lessons, which were important, we acquired knowledge on many things we had ignored before, like how to prevent accidents. I learned about depression, about Alzheimer’s disease, which strikes people over 60 years of age. I learned how to take care of sick people, how to identify symptoms.

And then there were the workshops, the crafts one as well. We got together to make gift boxes from recycled milk cartons. You coat it, you trim it with a tape and then it looks beautiful. We learned to paint, and I even took part in the IFBA<sup>1</sup> Christmas Fair selling our recycled products.

We also had classes on solidarity economics with teachers who are experienced in running cooperatives. Now we are considering creating a recycling cooperative; we are looking at this idea. Not everyone was interested, but three or four are interested in discussing it over. We have to complete our internship period and get our certificates and then we’ll start thinking about it again. The teacher said he will guide us. They told us that the moment we decide to talk about it again, they can come to the community and explain how it works.

I feel I’m prepared for the labour market. My broader objective is to be back in the labour market. Expectations are high because it will be

1. IFBA – Federal Institute of Bahia.

☺ After the course I became a stronger person, someone with more hope.

in the internship that I will apply what I learned in the classroom. My goal today is to find a job because we need to work and, in the future, do something that may help people. Perhaps to work as a volunteer with the Mulheres Mil project as well. And I can help the people I live with as well, because at home there are three older seniors, my mother, 61 years old, my father-in-law, who is 67, and my mother in law year who is 62.

There are certain people I already knew by sight, but had no contact with. So that was one of the positive things about the course: being able to get to know certain people, people I would only know by sight. Then we became friends, and I discovered that they're great people. There are people who I found like the same things and I know it's the kind of friendship that lasts for a lifetime.

After the course I became a stronger person, someone with more hope. I think I became someone much better. I'm still a woman with many dreams, that I haven't managed to fulfill in my life yet, but I haven't given up, I'm struggling, going for it, and I'm certain that I'll fulfill my dreams. I know I can't just sit and wait for things to happen, I have to make it happen. And then there is this professional training which I need to complete and also the dream of going to college, to get a degree on pedagogy.

I like the song "Emoções," by Roberto Carlos, because when I graduated from high school, during the ceremony, they played it, and it says, "Being here, at this beautiful moment." So my life passed through my mind like a movie. I had no one to help me with my homework. It was hard. I would normally ask a neighbour to help me.

When we're children we dream of so many things, and my dream was to become a pediatrician. And you know, families not so long ago had many children. At home we were nine children. And the older ones had to work to help raise the younger ones. Because I'm the eldest, I began working very early, I've been working since I was 13. If I hadn't been working I wouldn't have been able to finish my secondary school.

I went to work at a family house, where I stayed for five years. When I finished my secondary studies, I went to a teachers' college. But when I went to get my certificate, I discovered the course



“ I think we must never give up on our dreams, we must fight for them, always go for what we want.

was not official. And the bureaucratic red tape took so long; it took me almost six years to have my certificate recognized. When I finally managed, I was already outdated, I couldn't teach any longer. Now, if I want to teach, I would need to take a course on pedagogy, which is what I am trying to do. I am waiting for my situation to get better.

I think we must never give up on our dreams, we must fight for them, always go for what we want, because many people have dreams but don't have a chance to make them come true. Mulheres Mil was an opportunity for me, and it has given me this chance to have dreams again and to try to achieve my goals. The message I want to pass on is this one: that people should never give up their goals, they should never think it is too late. There is always time to start over. ■





## MARIA DAS GRAÇAS PAULA DE JESUS



*Maria das Graças Paula de Jesus is 51 years old and has worked as maid, nanny, car washer and construction worker. Now she is starting on another professional path as caregiver of seniors. She likes going to church on Sundays to pray to her namesake Our Lady of Grace (“graças”). She lived in São Paulo for a few years looking for better work. She doesn’t like where she lives because of the violence but stays because she inherited the house she lives in from her mother. One of her goals is to improve her living conditions so she can leave something better for her son and grandson.*

1. The Plataforma borough is located in the railway suburb of Salvador, and it’s bathed by the waters of Enseada do Cabrito and Baía de Todos os Santos.

**The love of my life was my first boyfriend,  
from the Platform<sup>1</sup> itself.**

I was 18, we were together for something like two years and then it was over. I think there is only one love. Your heart has to love a single person, because that is how it was: when I would see him in other places, with other people, I felt like dying. I would tremble, I would feel horrible; everything would freeze. He is still alive, but he won’t talk to me. He



“I always told my mother that I would like to do something like that, to study to become a nurse.



is married and has children. They're already adolescents, but even to this day, when I go to Plataforma sometimes, I still feel something. So that is what I recognize as love.

The course happened like this: there was a teacher taking enrolments at the Father Hugo school, and a girl who lives on a street nearby came and told me, “They're taking applications for a course, but you need to go there to get information because they will only accept 40 women.” So I went and was

told that it was for taking care of the elderly and she gave me a form to fill in. They wanted us to describe our house, to say if there was a wall, if there was a floor, if it was not a dirt floor. I filled in the form and left my phone number. They called me three days after that.

I always told my mother that I would like to do something like that, to study to become a nurse. But I couldn't make it. This course is giving me a chance. I can already gauge someone's blood pressure, I can see the body temperature, I can give medicine. I can do those things the right way. So I'm really close to what I was looking for. I haven't got as far as I want yet, but I know I have already achieved something.

I liked it a lot there. I expected something worse, thought it would be boring, but then I thought, “It's free, I'm not working anyway and I have to keep my mind busy with something.” So I went. And I also enjoyed it because I got to know other people. The teachers are very good. I learned something about life; I learned how to get along with people. I used to be tense, quite angry. I got sort of angry after my mother died and my son got ill. But during the course, I would leave here and hurry to the school, and it was great.





And we also learned about detachment; that people shouldn't feel attached to everything, that one should be able to be detached from things. That was when I really started going frequently. Because I was sort of a rebel, I had many problems in my mind, but then it got better. I became more patient, got more detached from things. I didn't get so worried anymore. I'm a lot better now. I feel like I've become a new person and I owe it to this course. My relationships with other people got a lot better, my life got better. I know other people now. I have a job; so things have gotten better for me. I'm buying stuff and paying my bills.

I only got this job because of the course, because of the quality of the course, because to get this job you have to take the course and get the certificate that proves that you can really take care of an elder. When I went to apply for the job, the first thing the woman there asked was, "Have you got a certificate?" And I answered, "I do!" "Have you got the manual?" and I said, "I do!" The manual tells us how to deal with an elderly person. Before I knew it, I was working.

At first I would get nervous. I would swap medicines and would tremble if I had to give insulin, but that was only for the first three months. Now I can do it with my eyes closed. And it has been a year since I started working there. The old lady I take care of has diabetes, hypertension and thyroid problems. Most of the time she just sits and she doesn't bother me, doesn't get me nervous. She's wonderful.

I started working as a nanny in a house when I was nine years old. Then I left and went to take care of my brothers and sisters. My mother kept having more children, so she had to work out of the house, and it was me staying home and taking care. I was left with no time for an education.

After growing up and moving here, I made an application for the Vera Lúcia<sup>2</sup> school and studied for another two years. When I was going to complete my third year, I moved to São Paulo to work there. But I came back because my mother had a stroke. I really enjoyed São Paulo. You have the opportunity to study and work; it only depends on you. I have many friends there.

“It was a good feeling (coming to the Mulheres Mil course) because I lived so long without learning anything, and now I'm learning again.”

2. The Vera Lúcia Cipriano school is in the Nova Brasília borough within Salvador, where Maria das Graças lived before moving into Jaguaribe II.





3. *The National Institute of Social Security (INSS) is an independent organism of the Brazilian Federal Government that receives contributions for the maintenance of the General Regimen of Social Welfare, being responsible for the payment of retirement plans.*

If I was a little younger, I would study, I would take the admission exam to do the nursing course. The only thing that stops me from doing that is that my sight isn't good anymore; and I don't have the mindset anymore, and I'm too old. But if I could, that is what I would like to do.

It was a good feeling (coming to the Mulheres Mil course) because I lived so long without learning anything, and now I'm learning again. We had Math class, on the cost of living, how to live on what we earn, that kind of thing. And we had classes on how to take care of elders, first aid lessons. They brought a needle with a syringe so we could learn to give insulin, they told us about blood pressure, how to gauge it. They told us about how to deal with diabetes, about what can happen.

At recycling class we learned how to make soap. We had a class on breast cancer, on uterus cancer, those kinds of things – how to examine oneself, the importance of getting medical care. Now I take better care of myself. My classmates also thought the course was very good; it changed their lives too. They also learn a lot. Some of them are looking for jobs.

In the future, I plan to fix my house, to put a proper roof on it – so I can leave to my son and grandson when my days are over. It's quite small - there is only one bedroom. I'm paying for my INSS<sup>3</sup> (The National Institute of Social Security), so I can retire someday when I get older. So I have to work now.

I have already done the internship, and I have my seniors' caregiver card. They signed my card, I have done the internship and I've been doing things the right way. If I find another job with better pay, that would be nice. But I like working here. ■



ILDA



SELMA



CEARÁ

## FORTALEZA



In books on the history of Ceará, the first mention of Pirambu is in 1932, when a drought devastated the Northeast region of Brazil. At that time, a concentration camp was established called the Camp of Pirambu or Camp of Urubu (“buzzard”), where the drought victims were taken and provided some care and food, and could work, but always under the observation of guards.

Decades went by, and the neighborhood grew with the influx of people from the interior of the country. It became organized; neighborhood associations were created that maintain an active dialogue with local authorities. However local residents are still marginalized. Women born in the 50s, 60s and 70s, some of them students in the project, live in makeshift mud houses and have no opportunity for professional or higher education. At most they may have completed secondary school. As adolescents, many went to work in the chestnut processing plants that surround the neighborhood. They would then marry and have children, only to discover the importance of education once they were let go from these jobs, a seasonal occurrence in this industry.

Today, Pirambu is one of the largest neighborhoods in Fortaleza, with over 300,000 inhabitants or almost 10 percent of the capital city’s population, which today is over 3.2 million. It accounts for one of the highest population densities in Brazil with more than 40,000 inhabitants per square kilometer. As with other neighborhoods on the periphery of large urban centers, residents have to cope with violence, drug trafficking and prejudice. And more and more women are the sole providers for their families.

With a location already in the neighborhood, the Federal Institute of Ceará offers professional training in the tourism and food industry. The Institute established a partnership with a local tourism authority to offer internship opportunities that have become an integral part of the curriculum, and to open doors to the labour market. With Fortaleza being one of the host cities of the 2014 FIFA World Cup, the need for a qualified workforce in this field is growing. Former graduates are increasingly being hired as chambermaids or in hotel kitchens.





## ILDA MARIA VITAL DE OLIVEIRA



*Ilda Maria Vital de Oliveira, is called “the Obese,” an affectionate nickname given by her colleagues due to her slim body. She is the thinnest of the chambermaids and her story shows us how access to education can change reality. Ilda is an inhabitant of the neighborhood called “vixe,” a pejorative expression that is used by the people of Ceará when they come across someone who lives in the district of Pirambu. She really believed she could change her destiny, and she did it. At age 40, she left unemployment behind and today works at the Holiday Inn.*

When they called me saying that I would have to be at the Holiday Inn at a certain day and time, I got dressed up, and I went.

When the lady asked, “Where did you take your course?” I replied, “At Cefet” – “Which Cefet?” – “13 de Maio’ Street.” It is a really great reference that helps to open doors.





“When I worked at Iracema, at the chestnut processing plant, I had just a small salary.

When Mulheres Mil came into my life, I was really down. My son was in jail, I had been unemployed for almost two years and my husband had lost his job too. We were a burden on my mother. But I said to myself, “When I finish this course my life will get better, because I’ll be able to look for a job.” And it worked! It has been a year and a half since I came to the hotel.

When I worked at Iracema, at the chestnut processing plant, I had just a small salary. I didn’t have medical or dental insurance of any kind. After I took the course and came to work at the hotel, my life got 100% better as I earn much more than a salary. I now have health insurance and a dental plan. My children, who had dental problems, have been able to get their teeth fixed and me as well.

My mother had the same job as me, working with chestnuts. We were five children without a house of our own. I remember us living in a wooden hut with no stove, just a portable wood stove, without any prospects whatsoever. My grandmother was blind and would wake up very early to light the wood stove and the house would fill with smoke, then she would cook some beans. Sometimes she would cook an egg only with boiling water; it tasted horrible. And then my sister and I would leave to bring lunch to my mom; and it was very far. I never had any news about my father.

I wanted to be able to one day say, “I left Iracema.” My sister is still there, and there are days when she comes home exhausted, with a lot of back pain because she has to work hunched over, separating almonds from



their shells and peels. She's 36. And then I tell her, "Girl! Take the nursing or the chambermaid course because they're really good and the life at the hotel is completely different".

And it's so good when we arrive for our shift, everybody's in the cafeteria having coffee, then everybody goes to the changing room to change, put on their make-up, fix themselves up and get ready. And then everyone gets their cart, the work plan, the key and we all go to our floors. Sometimes after our shift we complain about being tired, but then we shower, we relax and go down the stairs to go home, and we feel relieved, something good. I find it really good.

During the internship, I wasn't sure if I liked it. On the first day I thought, "Boy, this is tiring!" I thought I wouldn't make it. On the second day it was the same. But on the third day all went well. I finished my internship on a Friday and by Saturday I was already sending out my CVs to hotels and businesses. Two other hotels have called me since, but I'll stay where I am. I already have a permanent job. The employment market for chambermaids is very good at the moment; as it is for seamstresses.

Education changes people. I also started studying again because of the project, because my friends said that the project wouldn't take anybody who only had elementary school. That gave me the strength to face problems. It used to be very hard. The day of the interview I had a big headache, but my husband really supported me; he told me not to give up. And my son is alright now.

Everything I learned at the course I use at work: information technology, Portuguese, the chambermaid training as well. Even though I only learned the basics of informatics, it helps a lot. The little I know – how to access the Internet, how to go on the computer to see how many rooms are clean – helps. People at the front desk call and ask me to open the computer and see the status of a room, if it's dirty or clean. So I open the computer and check it out. It is very important to this business.

Math helps in certain aspects, but Portuguese is really important because we have to fill out a worksheet indicating if the room is occupied, clean, vacant or dirty. We may come into an apartment and find that the guests left their things there, as they usually do: like a watch, a ring, those kinds of things, an open suitcase, I have to write it all down on my worksheet. English classes also help. There should be more English because currently there are not very many hours on this.



“I finished my internship on a Friday and by Saturday I was already sending out my Cvs.





If I could relive something, I would do the course again. The best memory I have of the classes was interpreting texts. We did a play with music; it was like we were living the characters. It was one of the best classes.

At the Institute they really make you feel welcome. I would sometimes feel inferior to others because we would see all those students and we thought they were rich. We live by the beach. But to be inside that centre, surrounded by so many adolescents, we began to think we have a future ahead of us... I would sometimes be afraid of going to the bathroom. But then I would think, I managed to get here...

The graduation ceremony was so good, we were called in front of everyone to receive that certificate, that diploma. That was really good! We felt so important, like someone who could say, "I won! I made it to the end!"

Now that I've finished the course, I have more freedom. And I have the will to do something when I decide to do it. For 2011 my plan is to specialize. I'm thinking about completing my third year and starting a course in advanced IT. That's the goal and I'm taking an online course called 'How to properly host the World Cup in Brazil,' which is preparing all the hotel industry personnel for the 2014 World Cup.

I would give the course the highest grade. One thousand for One Thousand Women! And those like me who really want to get somewhere, if they really apply themselves, they'll succeed like I have. I don't want to quit being a chambermaid. I'm fulfilled! ■



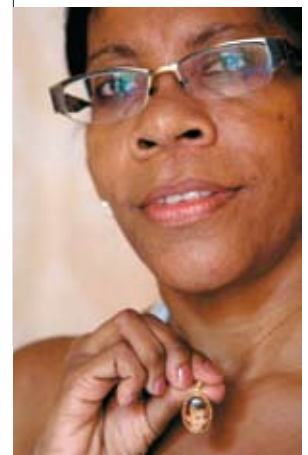
## MARIA SELMA DA SILVA



*For the past 15 years Selma has taken care of Davi, her eldest son, who was born with brain paralysis. In 2008, she began to prepare herself to say goodbye: she took the chambermaid course and started her education over. In July 2010, Davi passed away and in October she began to work at the Holiday Inn recommended by a Mulheres Mil classmate: Ilda. About the past, she says she has a clear conscience because she accomplished her mission. Regarding the future, she is sure that she is capable of re-writing her story and taking care of her youngest son, Danilo. "This Selma is very different from that one who came into Mil Mulheres. She is dynamic, a different woman, a woman who knows what she wants: Selma wants to work and be happy."*

**It was incredible! As I said the first time, the girls at home laughed when I told them**

what I had said in my interview, that I was afraid of computers. It's true; I wouldn't even go close to one, I was scared to death. My mother would say, "Girl, it's a thing from another world. It is something from the end of





“ I have an Orkut (social network) page and an e-mail address as well. I created it as soon as I left the project.

time because it knows our whole lives.” And it’s true! Do you want to see? Suppose you’re in an apartment, you finish cleaning and you press ‘clean.’ ‘Clean’ is the code you have to type. So the supervisor downstairs knows where you are, where you came in. When you put the key in the lock it shows on the computer. Everybody knows what time you came in, how long you stayed. So the computer knows it all (laughs). I have an Orkut (social network) page and an e-mail address as well. I created it as soon as I left the project.

It is a huge challenge, a very intense one. We work a lot, the routine is hard, but when we like what we do, we continue. We close our eyes and we embrace it with all the love we have, with all the tenderness, because we’ve trained for this, it’s what we wanted. At least in my case; it’s what I trained for from 2008 to 2009.

I was apprehensive, nervous, I knew I would start working. I knew my employment card had already been signed because, when I went to be interviewed, both because of the Mulheres Mil project and because of the certificate I had earned, I knew I was already hired. I was so emotional that I hardly could take any of the tests to enter the company. My blood pressure got high and the doctor got a little concerned, but it all went okay. My heart was beating so fast because I knew I was ready and I knew I what was waiting for me, but then I went in there with all my heart, with all my strength and I faced up to it. I like it a lot; I love being a chambermaid.

It’s been three months since I was hired, with a signed contract right from the first day. Everything is great because we meet a lot of nice people, people from other states and we discover a whole new world. During the project we learned the theory, but when it comes to the practice, it’s really good.

The first time I worked with an employment contract was when I had my son. I stopped working for 15 years because of Davi’s problem. He was a baby. I knew I would lose him, I knew one day I would have to work, but then my work was to look after him, to the point that I was



paid an allowance to take care of him. It was pretty much the only income for the household because my husband really didn't help, just to say that I had one. I left my husband to take the course, in order to live, because I felt trapped.

I participated in the project and I also started to study. I went to the EJA<sup>1</sup> and completed my elementary school. Secondary school studies are still in progress. I had only made it to the fifth grade. At that time it was enough. My mother always said, "Have you learned to read and write? Well, that's enough!" We only needed up to fifth grade because we had learned to read, write and do a little math.

I started to work at a hammock factory when I was 14, where I would do laces and braiding. At that time, hammocks were hand made. My mother would always make us do something, because we were five sisters and four brothers. It was a big family. Only my father worked and my older brothers worked with him.

I feel very important having participated in the Mulheres Mil course. It helped a lot. I learned that we have to have a positive attitude in life, that we have to take care of ourselves, that we have to value our life because it's the only one we have, and we need to live for the moment before it's too late.

There are many unemployed women in our country and this project is the starting point for them to get ahead and win, because it is a wonderful project. I met one of the girls who is taking the course on the bus, and I recognized her because of the Mulheres Mil t-shirt. I had been working at the hotel for a few days. She looked at me and smiled. I didn't know her, but she knew me. "Aren't you Selma?" Then I said, "You know me from the Mulheres Mil project, right? Listen, you need to continue because this project is really good and it opens doors."

Mulheres Mil was my key to open the door to a new beginning, because I was kind of dead and all I would do was watch soap operas on TV, one after the other. When I opened my eyes, my life looked like a soap opera. And I thought, "Hey! Wait a minute! I have to turn the page."

We think we are not capable of rediscovering ourselves, but we find that we're capable of doing things. We can discover things we never would have imagined. I

☺ We think we are not capable of rediscovering ourselves, but we find that we're capable of doing things.

1. EJA – Education for Youth and Adults.





often felt inferior, but the project helped me, because we know we have strength, we just have to learn how to use it. And the project helps us to teach as well, as it is not only a matter of giving advice, of reproaching, of arguing, we also have to teach. The project teaches us many good things that we then teach our children. I teach Danilo that he must never lower his head for any reason, that he must never feel inferior. He can accomplish anything he sets his mind to, because he has enough strength to do so.

Before I never would have thought that things could be as they are now. To be paid money because you made the effort, you studied, you practiced. Oh, it is so fulfilling! It was great to get that money and to know: that now I can pay my bills – I used to have a pile of unpaid bills. When my little boy died, the money stopped coming in.

The importance of Mulheres Mil in my life?! It was very important! It was a unique and defining project. It defined our future, at least mine, because life doesn't end when you turn 40, life begins when you turn 40. Life begins when you decide it does. And a woman always has to study, not only at school, not only at the project, a woman must never stop studying, she must be ahead of her time, because she can never stop.

I'm by myself in the changing room. I get ready and I look in the mirror: "ah yes, it's like that, now I can go to work because now I am a chambermaid. I can achieve whatever I want". This year I'll finish third grade, I'll pass the Enem<sup>2</sup> exam and I'll enter the faculty of home economics. ■

*2. The National Examination of Secondary Education (Enem) is an individual examination applied all over Brazil to assess the knowledge of students who are graduating or have finished high school. With this exam, students can apply for a slot in federal universities and institutes, and also for a scholarship in private institutions.*

RAQUEL



MARIA ROSILDA





## São Luís



Located 20 km from downtown, the Palmeira village is one of the oldest districts in São Luís. In the beginning, it was settled primarily by rural workers and descendants of slaves, living on the outskirts of urban development. The region was marked by disorderly urban growth caused by the rural exodus and led families to build their houses on the banks of the Anil River, which cuts through the capital city and was once the city's primary source of water.

Part of this community is settled on the river's mangrove swamp, which nowadays is completely polluted. Many families live in subhuman conditions, in wooden houses set on stilts over the swamp and surrounded by waste. A number of the women who live here have had no access to education or professional skills training. Many of them are single mothers who provide for their families by working as cleaning ladies.

The food industry in São Luís lacks a skilled labour force and can provide opportunities for these women to enter the labour force. The Federal Institute of Maranhão therefore offers professional training programs in food conservation for both prepared and frozen foods, and works with the manufacturing sector to develop pathways for these women to enter the labour market. The project was presented to a group of entrepreneurs who currently employ trained program graduates. Another important step was the extension of the Mulheres Mil project to offer courses on handicrafts at the city centre campus.



As for the graduates, some are earning their income by preparing pastries to order, while others have fulfilled their dreams of having a steady job by working with the partner companies. Many sell their wares in the neighborhood itself and some worked together to open their own small business.



## RAQUEL SANTOS



*Raquel Santos, 34, lives her life cheerfully. She likes to joke and laugh, and enjoys being happy. Maybe that is why she enjoys the month of June the most. It is a time of celebration in São Luís with many fairs, and folk dancing such as the Tambor da Crioula<sup>1</sup>, Portuguese dances, Bumba Meu Boi<sup>2</sup>, and square dances. In her youth, she took rhythmic gymnastics classes and used to dance the Cacuriá folk dance, with its sensual choreography in which the couples change partners and dance specific steps that change with the cadence of the music. Full of plans for the future, Raquel has accomplished the seemingly impossible dream of having a signed contract in her employment card.*

1. Literally, the Creole's drummer, Afrobrazilian dance practiced by descendants of African slaves.
2. Popular street folk dance which depicts an 18th century legend which tells the history of the death and resurrection of an ox.

**I miss the practical and theoretical classes, because they were so animated!**

The one thing I don't miss is math class, despite the fantastic teacher. But now my skills are being put to the test because I found work as a sales clerk, and since June I've been working as a cashier. The cash has to







balance. So I am working on strengthening my math skills and hopefully it will all work out.

I had already given up on many things. I would go this way and it wouldn't work out, so I would go the other way and it wouldn't work out either. I had given up on the idea of having a regular job because I was 32 years old and hadn't found anything. I graduated from high school, I have an elementary school teaching degree, but I always worked in community schools. At the last school I worked for, I received 150 reals a month, but from September to November there was no pay at all. I was not counting on getting a regular job, because for the job market, it is not only your CV that's considered, but also your age. It's not just experience that counts!

I joined the course to see what could happen, and if things could be better for me, and it completely changed my life. I am working at Bondiboca<sup>3</sup>, with a signed employment card, and on January 28, I celebrated my one year anniversary of working there. That was my first achievement. Now my work is beginning to become known. I make flowers and dolls.

I bought a washing machine with my first pay cheque. That brought some relief, because I used to spend my days off washing clothes. I am now saving to buy a refrigerator and a bed, to provide some comfort for me and my children.

There are so many good things I remember... our class was very good. I participated in the Cefet project thanks to a grant, and I worked there, as well, in the human resources department. The grant money helped me to provide food for my household as well as to buy material for making the candy and the dolls that I would sell.

The *Mulheres Mil* project is very important as it provides an opportunity for women who have given up the hope of finding something worthwhile, because of their daily troubles, difficulties in finding a job,

3. Bondiboca is a chain of fast food restaurants in São Luís which partners to introduce students into the market.



troubles feeding their families, and because of the prejudice against women. Yes, there is prejudice. Sometimes just being women was enough to disqualify us from getting a job. We were discriminated against and under-valued. But this project helps women to recover their self-esteem. It motivates women to not let go of their dreams, their ideals, and to continue to fight and eventually win. That is what counts most: the enthusiasm to encourage a woman to recover her self-esteem, and for her to say to herself: “I can, I can make it, I am capable, I am going to make it,” and later, “I made it!”

I intend to continue my studies, to go to college, to get a degree and move forward. As I am working in the food industry, I am very interested in nutrition and in gourmet cuisine. I want to work. I want to succeed and perhaps even open my own business, maybe making decorations for children’s parties.

In the entrepreneurship class, we were taught to cherish every cent we make. The instructor said that if we make one real per day, then we should save 10 cents. We should always save and value our money as it comes with effort. As I am planning on opening my own business in the future, I have to cherish the money I make.

Despite the challenges I have already faced and those I still face on a daily basis, I have nothing to complain about. I like forró music, samba music, classical music, and even meditation music, with its sounds of water and birds singing. The only music I don’t like is reggae. I also enjoy going to the beach.

I met my husband because of an argument we had. We would have preferred to see the Devil than to see each other. I was 19 when I got married, and I was 19 when I had my first child. And I have been married for 25 years. I really wanted the first child, but the other two were not planned. I had three Caesarean sections.

My childhood was good. I was born and raised in Vila Palmeira. My grandmother found a piece of land and I lived in my parents’ house with my grandmother. I am the eldest of four sisters. My father started working when he was 13, washing cars at a gas station, and he has worked there ever since. At that time in Vila Palmeira, the greatest difficulty was getting water; my mother had to go out every day with a can to fetch it.

“The Mulheres Mil project is very important as it provides an opportunity for women who have given up the hope of finding something worthwhile.”





“We grow old the moment we stop working.”

looking for something to do. ■

I enjoy joking around a lot; you have no idea how much. At work we play so many jokes that I say, “If my children ever knew how I behave here, they would say, Mom, who would have imagined you were so much fun!” I like to laugh with friends, when someone has a funny story. Sometimes it’s something serious when it happens, but then we all laugh at each other. We have a lot of fun, and even at home with the children it is like that. At first it’s serious, but then we start to laugh at each other. That’s how I like it, it’s fun.

We need to set our mind to work on something. We grow old the moment we stop working. If you don’t use it, you lose it. The reason why I don’t look old is because I am always



## MARIA ROSILDA COSTA CASTRO



*Maria Rosilda Costa Castro discovered her passion for cooking during adolescence, already venturing into new flavors and mixtures. A churchgoing Catholic, she took her husband to the altar last year and celebrated the event using her talents to bake a cake. She is shy, and Rosilda's challenge has been to learn to accept payment for the products sold by Guloseima, the small business she opened in 2010.*

1. A football team from Rio de Janeiro. Also known as Rubro Negro, it is the football club with the greatest number of fans in Brazil and the world, according to Ibope poll.

2. Fans of the São Paulo football club, which is also popularly known as Tricolor do Morumbi.

*I like cheering for Flamengo<sup>1</sup>, but I hardly know any of the players.*

Sometimes my husband asks, "What kind of a fan are you?" But I've always liked the team, ever since childhood, although I'm no fanatic. I have two sons. Lucas is 12 and Caio, 7. They are both São Paulo<sup>2</sup> team fans. I have been living with my husband for 13 years, but we only got married last year. It was a collective wedding. It was great; I was moved, everybody was moved, my sisters... It was so good, it was a dream come true! I baked a gorgeous cake.





“When I see those gorgeous cakes in magazines, I fall in love. And I know I’ll get there.

I like to cook, I always did. I began when I was around 12. When my mother would go to the kitchen, I would go with her. I was probably the only one who cooked at my mom’s house. I liked to create, to take a recipe and make something of it. Sometimes it would work and sometimes not.

Taking part in the project was an accomplishment. I used to work as a dental assistant, but only because I had to work, not because I liked it. I worked in a dentist’s office for ten years, then I got tired of it. I would leave home at 6:00 in the morning and not return until 9:00 at night. I wouldn’t get to see my children, and I had no time to look after the house. So I quit.

Drawing our life maps was interesting. Each of us has our own path to follow. We have a view of our life from childhood to the present day. It is interesting because we see the past, we see everything that was left behind and what we can still try to find in the future. I made many drawings, I am horrible at drawing, but I made myself understood. I kind of played with it, showing what I would like to achieve, the summit I would like to reach: to have a business of my own.

On my life’s path, I discovered I could still study, learn more skills, be better prepared. My objective is to become an outstanding professional. I want to specialize in preparing pastries. I love to make petits-fours, sweets and cakes. When I see those gorgeous cakes in magazines, I fall in love. And I know I’ll get there; I’ve already had two great successes.

I would make pastries for my friends, for their children’s birthday parties, but I wouldn’t charge anything. People would ask me, they





would bring the ingredients and then say “thank you.” I didn’t do it professionally; I couldn’t bring myself to charge them for it, I was hesitant to do so.

It was only after the project that I began to value my work enough to get paid for it. My self-esteem improved. I began to value myself and to value the things I made, something I didn’t do before. I never knew what to charge, but now I do. Today I can tell people what things cost and why. I can justify the prices I charge.

The name of my small business is Guloseima. I was able to open it with help from Sebrae<sup>3</sup>. Now I can expand my business and issue invoices. The registration was issued quickly by the CNPJ<sup>4</sup>, and even after 10 months, there are many benefits. You pay a fee of 57 reals, and in 15 years you are eligible for a pension. I will work from home and I am already receiving orders for pastries.

It is a good market and there are many people working in this area. The market is open to everyone, but you always have to improve, rather than always doing the same thing, you have to innovate. On average, I make more than minimum wage each month. Some months I earn less, but others I make between 700 or 800 reals.

I improved in many different ways; I got to know myself better. Before, out of sheer ignorance, I thought I only needed to go to a doctor when I was ill. But now things are better for me, for my sisters, for the whole family, because today I encourage my sisters to go to the doctor for regular checkups.

3. The Support Service to Micro and Small Enterprises (Sebrae) guides and promotes events to facilitate the process to start small businesses.  
4. CNPJ - National Register of Legal Entities.

“This is due to our own will, because the course doesn’t give us everything, we also have to make an effort.



Everything I learned to do improved my work – in terms of hygiene, safety, preparation, entrepreneurship, and professionalism. All of which added value to my product.

Today everybody works; only one or two of us are not working. This is due to our own will, because the course doesn’t give us everything, we also have to make an effort. It doesn’t help if you take the course and then just sit back and wait. ■



APARECIDA



MARTA



## BAYEUX



The municipality of Bayeux encompasses the communities of Baralho, São Bento, Porto de Oficina, Casa Branca, Porto do Moinho and São Lourenço. There are no borderlines; they are neighboring communities with fishing as the main economic activity. Men, women and children earn their living from the swamp which runs behind their houses. The adults fish and the children help by cleaning the seafood.

The conditions of the housing and basic infrastructure are poor. Streets are paved but there is no basic sewage, and the supply of drinking water is compromised. Household water reservoirs were built too close to cesspits and vegetable gardens where pesticides, applied without technical guidance, are a threat to people's health. In these neighborhoods there are problems with alcohol and drug abuse, and the number of people infected with HIV is the third highest in the country.

The development of educational opportunities based on a dialogue held with students was one of the challenges faced by the Paraíba Federal Institute. The institute is creating a competency-based technical course on fishing. The institute also wanted to include the community of women who sell seafood in initiatives of the Ministry of Fishing and Aquaculture, a measure that benefitted not only the Mulheres Mil students but the community as a whole, which was able to get information on public policies developed for the fishing professionals.

The students are housewives, craftswomen, clam fishers, and cleaning ladies. Their ages range from 18 to 60 and some of them had never set foot in a classroom. Taking the bus to the Instituto Federal da Paraíba (IFPB) in João Pessoa, four kilometers away from where they live, means opportunity, discovery, a new beginning, citizenship. At first, the IFPB's challenge was to raise awareness among these women and encourage them to participate in the training. Workshops were held on health, the environment and the production of crafts. Then came the program to improve educational levels and the opportunity to

become professional in fishing and crafts, training that is currently underway.



## MARIA APARECIDA BATISTA MARINHO



*Maria Aparecida Batista Marinho (or Cida, as she is called) enjoys listening to romantic music. The first record she bought was by Amado Batista. She loved the song “Menininha, Meu Amor.” The album was left in one of the homes where she worked. There is no record of the years she worked as a cleaning lady and sugarcane cutter. There is no work card. Only her body bears evidence of this work in the form of scars that began to appear in childhood and that she accumulated in adolescence resulting from the frequent accidents experienced by these children. Cida is a seafood fisher, but motherhood has forced her to stop working. She has to take care of her baby. Housewife and student at age 37, she is the first in her family to overcome the vicious circle of illiteracy. Her dream is to become what she never had as a child: a school teacher.*

When the bus arrived at Cefet, I asked,  
“Is this where I will stay?”

Then we entered an elegant room with air conditioning and I thought, “God in heaven! This is a dream. And if it is a dream, I will hold on to it, I won’t let it go.” I felt so good the first time I came, and even better when





“So many mothers who are illiterate. It is horrible to be illiterate; it is the same as being blind. I was blind and now I can see.”



I was given the uniform. I felt so proud. I thought: “Now I belong to the Mulheres Mil group. And I don’t want to ever leave this group.”

There are so many housewives wanting to study, so many mothers who are illiterate. It is horrible to be illiterate; it is the same as being blind. I was blind and now I can see. That is why Mulheres Mil has to continue, to give a chance to other women.

When I went to the factory to be paid, I signed with my fingerprint. Sometimes I wouldn’t want to go because they would ask, “Can you read and write?” I would feel humiliated whenever I saw someone writing but I couldn’t. It was awful! I was ashamed of not being able to read and write. I felt guilty. Today I know it’s because I was never given a chance to study. I didn’t have a choice in life. It’s just the way it was.

We grew up cutting sugarcane: my father, my aunts and uncles still work cutting cane and my brother as well. It is not easy. We would arrive early in the morning and would only leave at 6:00 in the evening on the tractor. When my mother said that she wanted me to have an education, I would tell her I didn’t want to, because it was too hard. She had many small children and I wanted to help at home. In those days my dad would drink too much and I didn’t want to leave home and leave my mom in such a miserable situation. At that time I had no idea of how important an education was. I didn’t care if I had one or not. But today I am aware of its importance.

When I turned 18, I found myself a boyfriend, got married and had my first daughter at age 19. My father would threaten to kill my mother. I

was afraid and I would beg her to leave. Then my cousin sent me a message asking me to go to Bayeux with my daughter. Then I thought, “I must gather my courage and go!!” I took my mother along with me. There I spent some time working in households. Then I met my second husband, had a new family, but I always felt deep inside that something was missing.

I think that if there were no inequality in Brazil, things would be much better. If everyone were equal and if everything was shared equally, there wouldn't be so many people hungry and suffering. There is plenty of land in Brazil, but so many people have to pay rent. If things were shared equally that wouldn't be so.

What I like most about Mulheres Mil are the teachers. They encourage us. I thought their obligation was to give classes and that would be it, but the teachers here are wonderful. They say: “Persevere, don't give up, don't quit, because an education is the only thing no one can take from you”.

I love the classes so much. I learned so many things. We had a class on women's rights and on health; the nurse told us how important it is for a woman to take care of herself, to have a yearly exam. I was scared to death of doing so, I hated the idea of going to a doctor. In the countryside no one has medical checkups. I was never into prevention, but now I am.

We have Math, Portuguese and Information Technology classes. I was afraid to hold a computer mouse. I would tremble, I wouldn't hold it, I thought it would break. And then the teacher would say, “Woman! Hold that mouse! Have no fear, it won't bite you!!” Then I learned how to turn the computer on and off.

My self-esteem improved so much. Today I can teach my children. I can solve math problems and do calculations. I am sure about the things I do. I serve as an example at home. I have five girls and they all go to school. When I study I give them a reason to go too. They think, “mom, at her age, is going to school, then I must not give up on my studies”. I didn't have a chance to study as a child, but I want them to have the opportunity. And I want to be an example for them.

The relationship between the women in the community improved a lot with Mulheres Mil. Today we communicate with each other. When someone is going through hard times, when someone is ill, when there are problems in the family, we try to see what happened and how we can help. And when



“It really helped my self-esteem. Today I know how to teach my daughters. Today I know how to work with math, to add and subtract. I am confident about what I'm doing.”





the bus comes to pick us up, people say, “There go the Mulheres Mil women.” When we come to the association meetings, they say, “Here come the Mulheres Mil women.” The people in the community see it too; the project has been embraced by the people in the community.

Today I have a choice. I want to learn more and I won’t give up. This year I will renew my enrolment at school. I take classes here and at the state school near home. I just finished my fourth year. People say, “This woman has many children and is getting an education.” But it is because I want to achieve my goal of becoming someone in life. If you don’t have an education you’re no one! I want to finish my education and take a course on working with children. I can identify with children.

I’m a warrior and, there is no doubt that if I had stayed in the countryside I wouldn’t have come this far. I feel I am someone capable of learning of growing, and that is not how I used to think. I like who I’ve become. And now that I can read, I really like who I am. ■



## MARTA DE LIMA



*Skinny, with sunburnt skin, Marta de Lima became a clam fisher after she got married and moved to Bayeux. Ever curious, she would observe neighbors when they set off in their boats. One day she tried it. It was love at first try. And it is the sea that allows her to provide for her children and to have a unique sensation of freedom. A skillful negotiator, she persuaded her husband to resume his studies and allow her to study as well. A 38-year old mother of three children, Martha lights up when she talks about her desire to learn and to go to college.*

**You need to enjoy whatever you do.  
I like what I do and I like it a lot.**

I have to be really sick or something really serious has to happen to keep me from going fishing. On the sea you feel free, you breathe fresh air, which is so good. It is wonderful! It is a very pleasant sensation. Although I fear water and I can't swim, I like to fish.





“I learned in environment class that we really have to protect the place where we live.”

I learned in environment class that we really have to protect the place where we live. It is the mangrove! But there are people who have no idea of how important the mangrove is, how important the sea is. And it is sure important to me; it's where I earn my living and it's where many people earn their living. If you throw

garbage into the mangrove you pollute the environment and then your children and grandchildren won't be able to know what you know today. That's how I think.

I started to work when I was nine. We lived at my grandmother's, we were six children, and my father was the only one working. I found it very hard. I am the eldest, so I thought I should do something. I took a short course on crochet and began to sell my stuff. So that is how I would help at home.

Then I began to work in other people's houses, but continued to crochet. When I was 17, I went to work selling shoes. That is also when I stopped going to school, in grade eight. I wasn't able to work and study, so I decided to just work.

At age 21, I met my husband and came to live in Bayeux. That is when I began to fish. I came to live by the mangrove, which is where I live to this day. At that time my house wasn't made of brick, it was made of mud. I was curious to see people get in their boats and go out to work. So I thought, "I'll go too!" And my husband would say, "No, you won't!" And I would say, "Yes, I will!" And I ended up winning the argument and going. And then I fell in love with it.



In the beginning my husband didn't want me to start studying again. We used to argue a lot, but not anymore; now he agrees. Then I insisted that he go back to school as well. I have to force him but he goes. I go with him, because that is the only way to make him go. It is so funny. The teacher finds it funny that I am the one who helps him; I look like the teacher.

I like the Roberto Carlos song "*As curvas de Santos*". It reminds me of the good things in my youth. I also like to dance on the street where we live. The people who live there organize street parties and I enjoy myself with my husband. I don't like clubs; I don't like crowds that much. But a small street party with people we know, for the whole family, that I enjoy. I can dance all night long.

Mulheres Mil represents a great dream come true. I feel I have accomplished something. Not yet completely, since I haven't finished my studies. But the mere fact of having the opportunity to study again is really a dream come true. To me, to be here at the Institute is even more important, because normally you have to pass an entrance exam to get in and I don't think I would have been able to pass this exam. I got in because of the project.

Since I joined the project in 2008, I have become someone totally different. I used to be quiet, and now I am more talkative, I talk a lot. When I first came I hardly knew anything, but today I feel quite intelligent. I can help my children do their homework. Today I can communicate better with people; I know what to say. Before I only liked to talk with my neighbours, but would never go to other meetings, in other places. Now I feel stronger: I feel alright. Actually, I feel great.

We also had class on rights, and we have many rights. They talked about women's rights, and the Maria da Penha law. That helps a lot, because whenever we decide to do something, there is always a man who says, "I will beat you if you do that." My God! Now we know where we can go to make a complaint, who to call. So the beatings are over! The days of female slavery are over. Women can now be free.

I got my fishing license, which means a pension in the future. You pay your social security<sup>1</sup>, to a maximum of 45 reais a year, and in the future you can retire. We managed to get it because of the meetings we participated in here at the Institute<sup>2</sup>. Now I have mine.

I don't make as many math mistakes as I used to, because I'm pretty good in calculating. I feel like I'm someone new. I remember when we went to Brasília<sup>3</sup>, to the Ministry of Education and saw the video telling our life story. That was something to remember, to see a Minister watching me fishing, working. I felt really important.



1. The Federal Government of Brazil has been creating options so that self-employed workers, including fishermen, may contribute to the National Institute of Social Security (INSS) to ensure their retirement.

2. The meetings were held by the Special Secretariat for Aquaculture and Fishery, under the Ministry of Fishery and Aquaculture, and the participation of shellfish collectors was articulated by the team from the Thousand Women Project in the State.

3. In April 2009, the Secretariat of Vocational and Technological Education (SETEC), promoted an event that was attended by a student from each state in Brasília. On that occasion, there was the launch of the national documentary of the Women Thousand Project, produced by filmmaker Helvécio Raiton. The video can be accessed at the following website: [www.mulheresmil.mec.gov.br](http://www.mulheresmil.mec.gov.br).





“It changed my way of thinking and improved my view of the world that I can pass on to my children.”

Sometimes I miss the bus because I arrive late from the sea. So I dress really quick, hurry, get to the road and people say, “The bus already left.” Oh, no! But I always save a few cents in my wallet for these occasions when I have to pay to take the bus. And I have my student’s card.

For me, the project represents everything I could have dreamed of achieving in life: to study again, to receive my fishing license, all because of the project. It changed my way of thinking and improved my view of the world that I can pass on to my children. At home I insist that, “You must study because the sea may not always be there as a source of income.” If I have an education, I can provide a better life for them, and if they have education, they can have a life better than mine. By studying, anything can be achieved, the only thing that it takes is courage and perseverance.

My goal is to finish my studies. And when I finish, I will see what course I will take then. I won’t stop myself anymore. I hope the project doesn’t end so it can provide opportunity to other women who fish, make crafts or are housewives, because there is nothing to lose and a lot to gain. ■



DEINE



VERA LÚCIA



PERNAMBUCO

## RECIFE



The rhythm of daily life in Chico Mendes, a village district in the outskirts of Recife, is punctuated with the deafening noise of aircraft preparing to land at the Recife international airport. But only visitors hear the noise and duck their heads as the aircraft fly low above their heads. Children in the neighborhood don't react at all.

The community appeared in 1991 when families coming from different districts occupied the area and built houses with materials they could afford: cardboard and mud. Rent of existing housing would eat up a large part of their wages and the lack of a housing policy at the time forced many workers to move to outlying areas in search of shelter.

Some still remember the stories of confrontation with the police and of the struggle to get basic services. Today, two decades later, Chico Mendes is home to more than 3,000 workers who still struggle to be recognized by public authorities and to obtain access to education, health and jobs.

On the narrow streets, some of them without basic sewage, prejudice, violence and trafficking are mingled with hope, achievement and the search for opportunity. This is why the proximity and activity of the Pernambuco Federal Institute to Chico Mendes is so important. It opens opportunities for employment by offering training in gastronomy. With their existing knowledge in food preparation, several women sell food on the beach every Sunday while others take orders for pastries and deserts. The Federal Institute in Pernambuco has established partnerships with other institutions that are providing hands-on training.

As they restore their self-esteem and acquire new knowledge, the students begin to plan for their future. Some dream of opening a community restaurant, while the dream of others is to have a full-time job or to open their own business. For all of them, the greatest battle won has been the right to dream of a better future.





## DEINE ARAÚJO



*Deine Araújo speaks slowly but with a firm voice. Of medium height, she has an open smile, and has the courage and competence to face the not always pleasant obstacles in life. At the age of 43, with three children and married for 23 years, Deine is still invited on dates in the local square. Determined as she is, she has finished high school, is finishing professional training and plans to combine two dreams: getting a degree as a Math teacher and opening a food business.*

**For these women, this project means they can have a place under the sun, a profession.**

They finish the introductory course and already want to go to college. Why? Because their eyes were opened, the window to knowledge was opened. It is the project that made this possible for us.

My dream is to become a Math teacher. I like numbers, I have a talent for them, and I learn very fast. That would be like a trophy to me, a personal accomplishment. Cooking and Math are two things I enjoy. I am



“Love is something you build every day.  
I often say to people that every day my husband is different.



happy, I am fulfilled because I have a husband and family. I have this chance to take the course, something I didn't have before, but a door was opened. Finishing high school is a good thing to do because I lived as a prisoner in the past.

I've been living here for 20 years. It was hard in the beginning because when I came we lived in a small cardboard and plank hut. There was no covering on the floor and my first son got parasites in his feet and his hands. I took him to the health station and when the doctor realized what had happened she called City Hall. Ours was the first house to have insect extermination.

It wasn't easy to raise a child here. There were children who played with them who didn't go to school, who had children when they were still adolescents, who got involved with drug trafficking. I raised the three of them. The eldest is going to college. The girl got married and the youngest is doing his year of military service.

Before coming here, my husband had two jobs and we would do alright. He lost his first job because of poor sight; the second one, because of his age. He worked in electronics but his sight was damaged by toxoplasmosis, which led to almost complete blindness. It is a disease one gets from dog, cat, pigeon or chicken feces; perhaps he got his from pigeon feces. He must have drunk January water. It is a belief of the Northeast: mothers gather the water of the first rain in the year and give it to the child so he will learn to speak earlier.

It was harder for him, because he came from Campo Grande, a good neighborhood near Pinheiros. His father was a bank office manager, had a car, a house. The reality I came from was different. My father was a mechanic and a civil servant but, having five children as he did, he couldn't provide everything we needed. We never spent a whole day without eating, but we sometimes ate only once a day.

Love is something you build every day. I often say to people that every day my husband is different, and what strikes me most is that he treats me the same way he would when I was 15. There is still the same tenderness; he says I look pretty, even when I gain weight. He brings me flowers,

chocolate, sends me love messages on the phone, invites me to go for a date at the square. I don't go because I feel ashamed; I tell him that we're too old for that. When I come from work late at night, he warms milk and puts some cheese on a piece of bread for me. When I finish my shower and I sit, he gives me his hand. I usually get home between 1:30 and 2:00 in the morning.

Here in Chico Mendes, Mulheres Mil provides a chance for growth, because many people would like to improve their lives, but have no opportunity. These are women that did not have a chance to study, some of them even having had children when they were adolescents, as single mothers, or with partners who didn't have any education either. And they are very chauvinistic, saying that women must not work.

The course gets you ready for the labour market, as it includes things like food handling, as well as social and work etiquette. We learn how important it is to know how to handle food because it can affect someone else's life. In Portuguese class we learn how to express ourselves, how to understand, how to listen to others, because we often want to impose our own point of view. We learn how to work as a team, because without others we can achieve nothing. And in Math, everything we do includes Math: weight, height, division, the use of percentages. It is something







Here in Chico Mendes, Mulheres Mil provides a chance for growth, because many people would like to improve their lives, but have no opportunity.

I have worked in a bar and used to earn R\$ 100.00 a week, but it was too little money. I deserved more for that kind of work I used to do. The owner had a bit of education, so I used to teach him everything I learned in the course. I showed him how to handle the food and hygiene procedures. Afterwards, he would share all the lessons learned with the morning staff.

My ambition is to open my own business, and I already told one of the girls taking the course with me about it, because she likes the office work whereas I like cooking. We will serve lunch. She will handle the commercial side of it: go to the businesses and offer the luncheon and then charge, because she's good at that. There are people in the market delivering lunches in plastic recipients, which is wrong. I will work with something disposable, as it is more hygienic, which is something I learned at the course. ■

that prepares us for the marketplace. So it is an opportunity that they grab with both hands and that may lead to a better job. And I am convinced that, having such opportunity, the doors may open, both for those wanting to have their own business as well as for those wanting a position in a restaurant or a hotel.



## VERA LÚCIA FRANCISCA DA SILVA



*Rediscovery is perhaps the word to define this moment in Vera Lucia's life. Perhaps because no word is strong enough to describe the process of seeing one's own self through a positive lens after years of feeling inferior. At age 39, Vera started to believe in herself and little by little is learning to have confidence in her talents. She is evangelical, has a six year old daughter and says she is about to move. She will say goodbye to the village of Chico Mendes. The destination is as yet unknown. Only one thing is certain: the departure will be because dreams that were stifled by the social exclusion she experienced in life have now come true.*

Every class we would go to was fun. It was us doing things, doing our Math.

It started to motivate me and then I fell in love with the project. It is experiencing what we never had experienced before. I never had the chance of entering an institution. I heard about the vocational institute, but had never gone in. What for? It was too far for me.





“ My self-esteem was kind of low, because without an education you tend to feel inferior.

The arrival of Mulheres Mil raised my self-esteem. My self-esteem was kind of low, because without an education you tend to feel inferior. Today I feel a little more accomplished, because I met new people, people who recognize our worth, people who encourage us. We had new experiences and we started to have more confidence in ourselves.

I didn't have a chance to study but it wasn't because I didn't want to. For some people, and for myself, life was very hard; I couldn't have everything I needed. Many dreams I had were crushed, dreams that never came true. My dad didn't have a regular job and we had to do whatever we could to help at home. I started to work when I was 12 in other people's kitchens, as a maid. Sometimes we would go to school feeling hungry and what helped us stick it out was the free school lunch. It was

hard. There were days when we would eat some grated coconut, manioc flour and sugar.

In times of celebration we would get very excited as neighbors felt solidarity with each other and would exchange plates of food. Sometimes we would have nothing to eat, but neighbors would cook a little corn desert and send it to our mother. That was really a party.

You can't tell how much we cherish this opportunity the Federal Institute has given to us. It is so important that it is as if I was going to college. It is as if I was waiting for my graduation day. I am already dreaming.

I finished high school when I was 25. When I succeeded in completing high school I stopped because I found a regular job and the work pace was very tiring. This is something I blame myself for as I should have been more dedicated to studying. Today I see how much I miss in the job market by not having the qualifications required for a better job. The only thing I can do today is 'general services.'

My wedding was the happiest day in my life. With the money I had saved for years I made a dream come true: to be married in grand style wearing a veil and a garland. That was the happiest day. I felt totally fulfilled in seeing my parents there and how I was making them proud. I was married in a church. I was wedded as a virgin.

When the practical lessons of the course began it was great. It was really great. We think cooking is simple. At home it can be simple, but when it comes to working with a *chef*, with people with a higher education, we need to know some basic theory. Before you start to work with the food itself, there are rules you have to know. And that is part of cuisine, both things go together, the theory and the practice.



“ But I also learned that I must not bow, that I must go for my dreams and that is what this project’s purpose is.



Now I see that I am capable of studying, that I can pass any test I want, that all it takes is to believe in oneself. The Mulheres Mil project is here to show us how capable we are, that I am more than a housewife; that I’m not good only to work in other people’s kitchens washing dishes, washing bathrooms. No! The potential I have makes me want more than that.

And we learned about ethics, I learned that everybody has rights. I learned that I have a right to learn, that I am a citizen equal to any other, that I only lack opportunity, which is not my fault. With the inequality that we have nowadays, those who are rich want to get richer every day, and because of that, those who are poor get poorer. But I also learned that I must not bow, that I must go for my dreams and that is what this project’s purpose is. I’ll go for my dreams and there is nothing and no one who will convince me that I’m not capable of achieving them, because I am.

My dream is to complete my course and work at a restaurant, even as a *chef’s assistant*. What I want is to be good enough to do this, because I am capable of being there, as an assistant chef. I want to work as an equal.

When I knew there would be a competition for a general service job at the Cabo city hall, I decided to enter. I couldn’t afford private classes, but got the books and





began to study on my own. I took part in the competition to test myself. But I passed and now I am only waiting. I always had this habit of feeling inferior to others. I would always think: “I can’t, this is not for me”. But that is over.

So I am very grateful to God and to Mulheres Mil for allowing us to have this vision that we are capable, as we are not ostriches, that animal that sticks its head in the sand. We need to raise our heads and believe in ourselves, believe that we can reach the horizon. We are eagles, we can wake up. ■



FRANKELICE



SOCORRO





## TERESINA



Anyone who visits Villa Verde Lar when it's at its hottest cannot imagine that every year its inhabitants suffer from flooding of the Poti river. Located in the eastern zone of Teresina, this neighborhood was settled in 1999 and today many houses are at risk.

With rural characteristics, unpaved streets, many trees and, in certain places, a fair distance between houses, it is like a small rural village. By coincidence born of necessity, the majority of its inhabitants came from small towns in the country's interior; children or grandchildren of rural workers in search of a better future.

The problems are the same as in other suburbs in the country: lack of sanitation, lack of a housing policy, violence and prejudice. As far as work is concerned, poor education is the main cause for unemployment and informal labor, a reality for most of the women who took the course. Lacking qualifications, many of them have worked most of their lives as house cleaners.

Getting information to appropriately link local skills to market demand was one of the factors that guided the establishment of the Mulheres Mil project in Piauí. Given that this state is the industrial centre of the apparel and fashion industry in the country, the Piauí Federal Institute (IFPI) conducted a market research study of businessmen and union leaders to identify needs in this sector. Through the study of the women in the community, it was found that many had been exposed to cutting and sewing in their childhood, watching and helping their mothers and grandmothers sew children's clothes. Others did small repair work and made some items of clothing to sell in the markets. So the IFPI began to offer training in sewing. The institution has already altered its initial proposal, and is now providing training in underwear manufacture and tailoring.

With these courses, talents acquired throughout their lives became skills. Most of the women who were part of the initial class are still self-employed, and others found work in the labour market. Many dream of having their own businesses,

and a small group is creating a production association. The courses are offered at the Federal Institute which counts on the support of the local city hall.



## FRANKELICE MELO DA COSTA



*Frankelice Melo da Costa, age 32, has been married for 12 years and has three children. She can embroider and crochet, and with these skills she contributes to the family income. In order to study, she had to live far from her family, but she was fortunate in having two mothers. A little more than a year ago, she discovered she also has good business skills. With confidence in herself and in the future, she has already established her goals for the next 10 years, which include having her own business and taking a management course.*

**A course like the one we are taking is something I and other women cannot afford.**

I was looking for this type of course before the project began, but none of the ones I came across offered what I was looking for, only sewing basics. This course teaches things that are useful down the road, how to cut, design, and meet the customers' needs so they leave happy.

I think many things in the Mulheres Mil course will be useful. I came in with a goal and I think today I've surpassed it; I've learned so much and



“The teacher made us read, and to write down what we did and did not want, what we did and did not like.



I've developed so many skills. I used to say that I knew how to cut, but I would cut the fabric any which way. Now I see which way the threads go and how to cut it correctly; I see how I must place my hands, if it's better to lean on the table or not. Before, I would sit at the sewing machine and thought I could sew. Through the course, I learned that the way I was sewing was wrong; even the way I used to sit at the machine was wrong.

I admit I was a mischievous child. I have good memories of my childhood. We were nine children in my family and, like all children, we would play a lot. I was raised by two mothers. I lived with my real mother until I was seven, then I went to live with someone else because there was no school where we lived. I lived with that lady until I was 20, when I left to get married. So I say she's my second mother.

My real mother was not of the kind who cuddles a lot, but she was my inspiration, and she still is. She was the one who encouraged me to work, and I began to work very early. She would say, "Tomorrow you will be rewarded." On vacation we would arrive home crying, and she would say, "Go back and continue."

Everything we learned here is useful. We had classes on design and texture. We are still learning math, Portuguese and the history of fashion. The ethics course was very useful because it helped us to think about our rights, duties, and how to behave in certain situations. It is all very useful things which I had never stopped to think about, but today I do.



Before I wasn't even able to draw a circle, and now I see a piece of clothing and I wonder how I would design it. In the design course we learned how we can put it together, because the teacher taught us to do it piece by piece, the sleeves, the pockets, the collar. The teacher taught us many things that we can use on a daily basis. I can now identify different fabrics. We learned how to identify fabrics, to see whether they are natural or synthetic. And that really helps because we are able to tell the customer what fabric the clothes are made of.



The teacher made us read, and to write down what we did and did not want, what we did and did not like. This helped me discover who I am. It made us think about doing the right things for ourselves. As for me, the course helped me in many ways, and I realized I could do things that I thought I'd forgotten. Not only with crochet and embroidery, but I found I had talent for other things as well. I discovered myself as a person; I am competent, I have talent. It made me look to the future, for good things for me and my family. I think I feel more like a woman.

I didn't finish secondary school; I dropped out in the second year. But I would really like to finish my education and get my diploma, as I discovered I have a talent for administration. That was about a year ago. You know how sometimes an idea just comes into your head? With little money, I did something no one thought I could do. I turned 50 reals into 150. No one believed it, but I did it; I tripled the amount I had. It was money well spent. I learned to crochet from a neighbor. Then I bought a sewing machine, as I needed a few pieces sewn; and I wanted to make them myself. Now, in a good month I make around 350 reals. One day I would like to take a management course.

Today I know what I want for tomorrow. I want to keep on doing what I am doing. In 10 years I want to consider myself a successful woman, to be acknowledged for my work, to have a business of my own, to have my own workshop and financial stability. I want to earn enough to have a comfortable life. And I would like my children to go to college, and for me to have completed my college education.

Projects such as this are very rare; here, at least, I hadn't come across any. There are so many women at home doing only housework, looking after the hus-



“Projects such as this are very rare; here, at least, I hadn’t come across any.



band, the house, the children, but there’s nothing like this project to help them get skills training.

This would help so many people who cannot afford an education, who hardly survive on what they earn. But if they had training in a skill, my goodness! It would be so good. It would be a shame not to expand this investment. In my opinion, if there was more investment it would be even better. If there were other projects like this, many others would be saved from lives of misery.

I believe that I will be qualified when I finish my training and I will even have the courage to knock on a company’s door and say, “Hi, I need a job; and here is my certificate.” It will be good for me and I hope that others will achieve their goals as well. ■



## MARIA DO SOCORRO COSTA



*Maria do Socorro Costa has an abundant amount of courage in facing anything new. After being swindled by a boss while she was working as a maid, she decided she had had enough and learned to sew with her sister. A little more than a year ago she and her husband moved to Goiás in search of a better future. She brought with her a fear of the unknown, the longing for her family, and her sewing skills, which she improved in the project. There she found a job, surveyed the market and is now self-employed.*

When a woman gets to learn something she goes for it. In Piauí there is not much available,

men take it all. So whenever women are encouraged, when they find out what they are capable of, they grab the chance. Then they can provide a better future for their children, they can buy something here, something there, they help their husbands, they fix up the house. I think that's important.







My life story goes like this: I was born in the hinterland of Piauí, in Pimenteiras. Then we moved to São Miguel dos Tapuios, where I stayed until I was 15. My dad is a peasant farmer and so is my mother. The 11 children always worked. None of my older brothers had the chance to go to school. It was only after my two younger brothers and I were born that we moved to town and were able to go to school. But my Dad would make us alternate, one week some of us would go to school and the others would stay home and help him work the land.

We suffered through a lot of hardship. Some days all we had had to eat were beans without any seasoning, just a bit of salt. And I didn't like to live like that; I always wanted to improve, to work. When I was 14, I tried to work by selling

little things. I would sell spices and peppers; I would do everything I could to earn something.

At age 15, I moved to Teresina and began to work as a maid. In 2003-2004, I worked in a house for one year and five months and my boss didn't pay me for five months. I really counted on being paid because I wanted to buy a house, to improve my situation and because I dreamed of having a child. I was disgusted and I promised myself that from then on I would work for myself, that I would never work for someone else again.

My sister took a course on cutting and sewing at Senai, but I couldn't afford it. She would go to work and I would too: I would clean her house, wash clothes, cook for her, I would do everything so that she had the time to teach me how to sew as soon as she came home. So I learned, and my husband helped me to buy a sewing machine on credit. And I started to work a lot, to make small clothes that I would sell in the marketplace, going up hill, pushing my bicycle, my son with me, struggling. I'm 29 years old. I was married at 21. I have been sewing for a living ever since.

And then the course came. At first I thought, everything that shows up in this neighborhood is temporary – people talk a lot, do some things, but then disappear and there's nothing left. And I thought the course would be the same way, but I applied anyway. I called my sister and we went. But I was very happy to have the course in my life and, as many girls

“In Piauí I would work in the market, I would make my little pieces of clothing and sell them to customers and to resellers.

have already said, it changes our self-esteem, because we want to grow, to improve. I lived my little life, I sewed and went to the market. Now I have bigger dreams.

I've made a lot of progress in my profession because I can now use industrial machines. I can now do more. Before, I only made underwear for children. Now I make t-shirts and dresses. With the little I learned in the course, I can already cut out a dress or a t-shirt, and I am learning to make patterns. I also learned how to properly cut patterns and my sewing has improved.

We assembled a wedding dress in *patchwork*, as the teacher taught us<sup>1</sup>. And we learned that putting small pieces together can yield amazing results. I learned how to make a proper sewing knot, which I didn't know how to do before. I learned how to copy a pattern from a magazine.

In Piauí I would work in the market, I would make my little pieces of clothing and sell them to customers and to resellers. Here in Goiás things have changed. I get orders and I work at home. I no longer have to go to the market carrying a heavy bag on my head. I now assemble t-shirts that come already cut and printed. I get paid by the piece.

My dream is to have my own workshop. I would like to make my own t-shirts. I can do the sewing and my husband can do the screen printing. That way none of us, not even my son, will have to work for someone else. I own two industrial machines. I want to keep taking courses. Next year I want to take a course on pattern-making.



1. In November/2009, the students from the first class took the pieces made using the patchwork technique, including a wedding dress, to be shown at the First World Forum of Technological Education.



It's a unique opportunity. I have learned so many things that I now put into practice. This project helps to change lives.

that I can help others.

A program like this is the only opportunity for women in the slums. It's a unique opportunity. I have learned so many things that I now put into practice. This project helps to change lives. ■

I often say to my baby that when he grows up and goes to college, I will buy him a car so he can drive there. I dream of making a better future for my son, and helping my mother, my brothers and sisters. I have two visually-impaired brothers. So I dream of having enough





JOANA



JOSIRENE



## SETTLEMENTS OF CANUDOS, ARACATI, BEBIDA VELHA, MODELO I AND II



1 Settlement of Modelo II

The life of students from the settlements far from town is repetitive, spent doing household chores and working the land. The landscape is that of the sertão: the land is dry, the wind blows dust, the sun burns and there is little vegetation. When the winter rains are good, there is plenty. The land provides green beans, corn, manioc, gherkins and okra. When rain is scarce, water and food must be conserved, what little there is. Men try to find some work nearby, like breaking stones. Women stay at home.

In Rio Grande do Norte, the project serves five communities, four of them in settlements and the other in the municipality of Touros. Most of the students are rural workers. They come from families with lots of children children, began to work at age seven, and never completed elementary school. In those days, the most one could dream of was to make it to fifth grade.

The political and geographical realities are complex, and the Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Norte had to overcome many obstacles to provide professional qualifications and ensure appropriate training. These ranged from transportation – the settlements are far from each other – to the process of negotiating with local entities – which was very long and needs to be continued.

There was a school in each settlement but it was closed at night and did not offer education to youths and adults, so for these women, education was just an dream. And that is precisely the importance of the project in these areas: to ensure the provision of education to young and adult women. Through Mulheres Mil, the Federal Institute negotiated with the municipal administrations to provide better education.

The professional training was to be in the fields of tailoring, fish processing and conservation, food preparation – making homemade confections, processing and conservation fruit pulp – and crafts. Also, students would be integrated into the school routine, where they participated in workshops and events on important issues for rural workers, such as retirement and setting up cooperatives.



For some of these women, studying has become a routine. With lanterns in their hands – the settlements lack public lighting and there is only electricity in the houses – they walk along those wide streets, passing each other's houses until they arrive together at school. Once they get there, they face their fears and little by little they learn to dream again.



## JOANA DARC DOS SANTOS



*Joana Darc dos Santos does not like her name very much, but she seems to have inherited her courage from the famous heroine. Along with her husband and three children, she confronted the police who tried to remove them from their disputed land and camped in a tarp tent for almost a year. With this same courage she now confronts the blackboard. She freezes and trembles to the bottom of her soul when she has to write on it, but she does it. She already writes her name in front of others and when the teacher passes the attendance list, she is the first one to sign. And off she goes, taking her life one step at a time.*

I don't like my name because whenever something happens, people say,

“Go to mother Joana's house!!”. My husband is a farmer and when it rains he does other things. I live on my income from the Bolsa Família (Family benefit) grant, and that is how I help. I am paid R\$ 200. It really helps and in my house it is essential, because we're nine people and none of us has a regular job.





“ Sometimes we don’t even know how to hold a pencil but we learn. I still fear the blackboard...



Nowadays if you lack education, there is nothing for you, everything depends on having an education. I had this opportunity and let it go, and now I miss it. Because if I had had an education, where would I be now? I would have passed an exam to work at the City Hall, which I actually tried without passing. I would have had more than one chance.

My parents broke up and my mother took my birth certificate with her. Then when I was nine, my father managed to get a second copy of the document, but I wasn’t interested in studying any longer. I did go to school for a while, but my classmates would make fun of me because I couldn’t read or write. That really bothered me and I didn’t want to go anymore. I gave up.

I expect a lot from this program. I expect to finish it but to never stop studying again, because if I had studied I could have offered something better to my children; because every mother wants the best for her children.

The program offers many courses and I’ll choose one of them to see if I can get a professional education. I like to cook and I think that is the one I will choose. I’ll apply myself a lot and I won’t give up. I won’t let this opportunity go by, I’ll persist until I make it because everything is possible if you have the willpower, right?

I also want to serve as an example to my children. I have seven children. And how can I encourage my children to study if I don’t show any interest in studying myself? I don’t want them to become what I became:

“If you gather together a group and everybody has the same dream, everyone will visualize this goal! Then you feel even more encouraged.

someone with no education, with no knowledge. And today you can only achieve something if you have an education.

Compared to what I was? I'm learning. Because it's a different culture. Sometimes we don't even know how to hold a pencil but we learn. I still fear the blackboard. I get so afraid when they call me to the blackboard. Good Lord! But I am gradually losing my fear and am facing what life has to offer!

My husband had this dream of having land of his own to work. At first I wanted him to give up. When he told me the police were there, I said, "Give up! This will never work!" But he told me he would not give up. So when I saw he would not give up, I decided to support him. So I came here in 1995, living a tarp tent. It was really difficult. Can you imagine?! We would stay until the police would come and kick us out. So we would leave carrying our things on our heads; they would kick us out of the farm. Then we would come back.

I came with the children; I had three children at the time. By day, as it was so hot, I would let them sleep outside. I would gather some sticks and stretch the hammock in the shade. When night came I would bring them in. It was so hot. It was a year of struggling. Then we got registered and we made our mud house. So all the sacrifice was worth it.

I would like my community to improve, with more doctors, with better living conditions because I don't intend to leave here to go to a town. Because cities attract violence, and this is bad for adolescents. So there is this fear of taking them to town and ending up destroying their lives. I prefer to live in my community, but would like it to improve, I would like government to provide us better conditions: the means to find a job, to better survive in this land. Here in this region.

I'm learning to read and write because I couldn't read or write that well. I made it to fourth grade, but I can't read very well. I can read a few words, but I make many mistakes. I'm still struggling but I have become a better writer than a reader. I would get very nervous if anyone asked me to sign my name. I can write, but when I went to a bank and someone asked me, "Could you sign?" I would tremble inside from fear of mixing up the letters. Sometimes I would say that I couldn't write, so that I could sign with my thumbprint and it would go faster. Every day, when the teacher passes the attendance list, I'm one of the first to sign. And now I have





no problem! I learned a little bit of everything, I learned a little math too. Regarding the lectures at the IF, I liked the one on creating cooperatives, can't remember what it was called, but I liked that lecture very much.

Many things changed in my life, because first of all I couldn't sign my name correctly and I would be afraid of doing it, I would feel very ashamed of making mistakes and having people laughing at me. And that is something I don't fear any longer. If there is something to read on TV, I can read it without having to ask anyone to do it for me. I'm able to learn about things I never knew before.

That was after the project. I think it is because of the encouragement and the possibility of improvement offered to us. If you gather together a group and everybody has the same dream, everyone will visualize this goal! Then you feel even more encouraged. And all that because of one simple objective: to improve. ■





## JOSIRENE FRANCISCA DE ALMEIDA



*Josirene Francisca de Almeida is 54 and the mother of 12 children. A rural worker ever since she was seven, she lives in the Modelo II settlement and is part of the group of women who stood by their husbands throughout the struggle for land. Her dream? To learn more. And she does not care when someone tells her that the time for education is over. She had very little time for studying. Born into a family of 12 children, the need to survive spoke loudest. At age seven she had to divide herself between her work in the fields and her notebooks. The failures at school began to take their toll. She abandoned her studies.*

The first time the students and teachers met, that first day of classes,

it was very emotional. I was very moved when the first assignment was written on the board. A memory came to me of when I was small, of when I was seven and went to school. I felt like I was a child again. It had been



“ And I can already read and write. We’re discovering things we didn’t know before. I love it.



35 years since the last time I had copied an assignment from the board. It felt great, just great! And it still feels like that.

I gained more experience. I learned more Geography, Math, Social Studies. I enjoyed the classes, as well as the trips to Cefet. I enjoyed those as well, they were really good and we learned a lot of other things. I would like to take the professional course on tailoring.

My parents were farmers and they still work the fields. I started working the land when I was seven. At 6:30 a.m. I was already out of bed. Then I would work until 10:30. At 11:00 I would be back home so I could be at school at 1:30 p.m. I would feel tired, but in those days parents wouldn’t care if the children were too tired. You had to obey, you had to go, you had to work! I made it to the third grade. I was behind in my studies. I didn’t pass at the end of the year, so I had to repeat. That pattern lasted until I got married when I was 16 and still in third grade. Then I quit school.

I decided to start studying again because there were many things I had forgotten in my life. The little I learned when I went to school is not







enough for me. I would like to learn more, to learn to read better so I can learn more, to understand things better because I don't read very well.

I'm enjoying the project very much. As I see it, the more I learn, the better. And I can already read and write. We're discovering things we didn't know before. I love it. I remember I had trouble writing, more so than reading. There were too many words, too many letters and I wouldn't get it right. Now, I know all the letters and I can write correctly. The teachers are excellent and I like them very much.

I came to live here 15 years ago and I have 12 children. Six of them live with me and the other six live elsewhere. When I first arrived there was only wilderness, then people chopped the wood and built houses. I didn't get to live in tents; I came after the mud houses were built because my children were going to school where I lived. My husband decided to come here because it was a city where we lived, the town of Ceará Mirm, and he was born and raised as a farmer and had nowhere to work. That is why he looked for a camp and then became a settler, so he could work and survive. He works the land. This year hasn't been good as there was no winter rain, and if there's no winter rain, there's no yield.

You start working too early, as a child, and when you turn 40 you're already tired. Which is my case and the case of many people. I still work the land. When winter comes, you sow and you harvest. But when winter does not come, you stay at home looking after the children, washing clothes, cooking, sweeping. And in the evening I go to school. It makes me tired but it has to be done. Sometimes I fall asleep in class. And then the teacher says, "Mrs Josirene!" – "I'm here, teacher!", I answer. I'm tired but I'm there.



“I think studying improves our knowledge; it is through study that we can have a better life.



At my age I cannot have big dreams, just to learn more and gain more knowledge. I know I won't earn a degree. My husband says, "Josinha, you still go to school at your age? You should have already learned everything!" And then I say, "But I want to learn more!" But I know I will never be a doctor or an engineer.

I find this project very important. I think studying improves our knowledge; it is through study that we can have a better life. Some women here want to become veterinarians and others dream of becoming nutrition scientists. We all have dreams, right! If I could have a degree, I would be a psychologist because I think it is a good profession, and the first one I would talk to would be my son, who is a very nervous person, and everything stresses him out. He studies and he's clever, but he struggled to finish elementary school. He had to do the same grade over many times. ■



CELLY



FILOMENA



## Ji-PARANÁ



Jardim dos Migrantes and Novo Ji-Paraná are two districts that have benefited from the Mulheres Mil project and the arrival of the Federal Institute in the state of Rondônia in 2008. In Ji-Paraná, 373 kilometres from the state capital of Porto Velho, the campus has the smell peculiar to new buildings – it opened its gates in 2009 to a community that had never before had access to professional education. Mulheres Mil began offering classes in November and December 2010.

The process of expanding the federal professional and technological education network is clearly visible here but there have been many challenges. One of the biggest challenges was to offer education that responded to the needs and employment opportunities in the region and that would respect and include marginalized citizens that for decades had no access to education.

The communities that will benefit from this are neighboring rural areas. There are few stores. Houses are fairly far from each other, there is no sewage system, public lighting is poor and the streets turn to mud when it rains making it difficult to get around.

In the neighborhoods it is easy to find students from all parts of Brazil. The stories of these women are so similar that they could have come from the same family. Actually, they could have come from any of the 14 communities supported by Mulheres Mil. Child labour, little time for school, household violence, low self-esteem and an infinite strength to look after the children – all of those are common traits.

Training was given in crafts and bio-jewelry. The Federal Institute looked for partners to ensure the education provided new skills and helped with the commercialization of the products made by the students. The project's promotion of dialogue and of community access to the campus was unprecedented in this region. Most students work as maids and their dream is to find a better job in order to give their children the prospect of a better future.





## CELLY SANTOS SILVA



*Celly Santos Silva is 25 years old and has four children from two marriages. She spent part of her childhood working in the fields and another part working as maid in the home of another family, so she could help raise her brother and sisters. She had children herself when she was still an adolescent. She had the first one when she was 14 and from then on there was no time left to study. Her dream, like that of most women, is to improve herself so she can help her children. Disproving her mother's prediction, Celly intends to go to college.*

*1. Named Seringueiras, the municipality was created by Law No. 370, dated on February 13, 1992, and signed by Governor Oswaldo Piana Filho..*

**I was in school up until to fifth grade. My dream is to complete my studies.**

I believe it is an opportunity to grab with all our strength. It is an opportunity to leave the life we have lived until this day. For example, I didn't have much of an opportunity to study.

We lived in Seringueiras<sup>1</sup>. We were six children there. There we would only get paid once a year. There are middlemen who buy coffee





and throughout the year we can borrow money from them in advance. I remember, my father killed himself in this period. He drank poison as he owed so much money. I had a brother who had got into drugs and my father did everything he could to stop him from stealing. We ended up having a debt of 240 sacks of coffee. My mother was left with that debt to pay. So I had to find a way to make extra money and help my mother. I left home when I was 11 to work in other people's houses.



At that time all I thought about was being able to stop working in other people's houses and to have my own house, but I didn't think that I could have the problems that faced me in finding a husband. In those days I knew nothing about contraception and had no one to talk about it. When I was too young I went to live with this guy. I was 13. Then he started to beat me; if he arrived from work – he worked in the fields – and thought that anything was not in its place, he would beat me and the children. I had two children with him.



“I can finish my education, finish high school and then take a technical course on nursing and, if God wishes, go to university to become a pediatrician.

So I ran away to Ji-Paraná. I took a few pieces of clothes for me and my children and moved in to my mother's house. I was 16 years old and began to work again in other people's houses to help my mother and provide for my children, as what I earned was not enough to live on my own.

With the Mulheres Mil course I hope to find a better job than being a maid. I want to make some money so I can finish my education, finish high school and then take a technical course on nursing and, if God wishes, go to university to become a pediatrician.

I loved the classes we had. At first it was more conversation to get to know our classmates, but I liked it a lot. I was a little afraid, but when the teacher started to explain, the fear went away. It is easier than I thought; I was very afraid of coming close to a computer, of erasing the programs, but not any more.

I consider myself a simple person who doesn't know a lot. A cheerful person, a person full of life. I consider myself brave, because I'm not afraid to face what life brings us; there are people who when they come across any obstacle say: "This is too much for me; I can't handle this."





“I think in 10 years I’ll be able to have a comfortable house, even in my current neighborhood.”



Starting to study again can completely change my life. And it can change my life and the life of my children. I think in 10 years I’ll be able to have a comfortable house, even in my current neighborhood. My eldest son will be 21 by then and the other one will be somewhere between 18 and 19. The youngest will be 12 and the other one, 16. If I haven’t finished college by then, I will at least be there and I will have a better job anyway. And I’ll be able to help my eldest to go

to university himself. That is where I want to be in 10 years. ■



## FILOMENA FERREIRA DE ABREU



*From the 1970s to the 1990s, thousands of workers moved from the Southeast to the North of the country in search of land. The story of Filomena Ferreira de Abreu is directly related to this migration. Born in Minas Gerais, she moved as a child with her parents to the outskirts of Ji-Paraná. She lived on a small ranch and started working the land very early. At age 43, with three children, one of her dreams is to return to her hometown and meet her relatives. The other dream is to see the beach. A quiet person, she says it's only lately that she's been able to speak more, and she intends to finish her studies so she can find a better job and see the sea.*

**My mother worked a lot and we would help her with sowing and harvesting.**

After my father died, she sold the small ranch, which was on km 12, and she bought a house in Jardim dos Imigrantes and came here. I was 14 years old. And then life became even harder, because things are





more difficult in the big city, and she had no education. At age 14, my brother went to work and my mother worked as a housekeeper. So I stayed home to look after our house and my little brothers.

I had my first child when I was 16. My mom wouldn't let me date, so I ran away with the first young man I dated. My husband was not a hard worker. I went home to my mother's house but I was pregnant. Then I married again. Life got better for a while and I had two children. But my husband drank too much and got violent. He even shot me with a gun. I didn't call the police because he came with me in the ambulance and threatened that if I said anything about it, he would kill my daughter and then kill himself. I never said a word about it. I left him and moved to Porto Velho. It's now been four years since I came back here.

As a child I made it to fifth grade. I enjoyed going to school to meet my friends and to learn as well. Every day the teacher would choose two girls to prepare the meal since there was no stove and we needed wood to cook. So we would light the fire, we would get some big pans to cook and we would make sweet rice or soup. There were some salty soups which I never saw again, that would come in a big package. You only had to add water and let it boil, and it tasted really good.





“As a child I made it to fifth grade. I enjoyed going to school to meet my friends and to learn as well.”



Twenty-four years later, I returned school. I made it to eighth grade, but the school was far away and I would come home tired. My dream is to finish my studies and find a good job. I work as house cleaner and it is hard; I don't make much money. I would like to make a better life for my children. One of them dreams of going to college and I have no means to help.

I first enrolled my daughter and then I came to the project. I think it's great because we will learn a lot and we already had some classes in computers, just a few. I want to learn how to use it. I already know a little, but it is not enough. It was great, the teacher made us feel at ease, because I was afraid to touch it and break it.

I feel welcome, people speak a lot; the teachers ask a lot of questions, they ask how we're doing. So we feel better. People look at us differently, they expect more from us, and it's good, it's very good. It is encouraging. It is good to meet new people, with other views. We learn a lot from the stories other people tell us. I learned that we have to accept others with their flaws. Nobody is perfect, everybody makes mistakes. Everybody has problems.



“I feel welcome, people speak a lot; the teachers ask a lot of questions, they ask how we’re doing.”



It’s good for the self-esteem, to have more confidence and feel happy, and talk more. I’m learning to talk a little more. I think I didn’t used to have many friends because I was always very shy, I would hardly talk. I was too quiet.

I expect to finish my studies, to learn as much as I can, and maybe find a better job, maybe as a saleswoman, something like that, or even a job at city hall. To be honest, I’d really like to pass a public competition.

I dream of building my own house and I would like to start it next year. The house I have is made of wood and I’d like one made of brick. I have another dream, but I have no idea when I’ll get to do it: I’d like to go to the beach. I see it often on TV. ■



SIMONE



SÔNGLILA





## BOA VISTA



Bordering Venezuela and British Guyana, the State of Roraima is a corridor for drug trafficking. The activity victimizes many women who get arrested for several reasons. At the Boa Vista Women's Penitentiary there are over 100 inmates doing time, almost all of them for trafficking. There are women of all ages, 18 year old youths and adults over 50 years old.

Women from many areas of Brazil, including indigenous women from the Macuxi and Wapichana tribes and even from abroad, were used as "mules". Without their knowledge, they were bargaining chips: given by traffickers to the police in order to disguise the entry of larger cargoes. Some of them were never involved with drugs, but because they won't turn in their husbands or sons, they are considered accomplices.

The jail is small and as many as four women share a cell. There are bunk beds and each cell has a small kitchen for making snacks. The hardest thing is to bear the heat; some rooms are covered with asbestos tiles and the temperature is up to 50°C. Breathing is difficult. Since many cannot afford a lawyer, they can wait for over two years for a trial. The sense of being abandoned by their families leads to profound depression. In the childcare wing, the cries of children are a distraction and they can forget they are in a prison, but the desperate look in the eyes of some inmates shows the need to develop alternatives for the future. One day they will leave the prison.

In Boa Vista there were two groups with similar goals. The prison management was looking for alternatives to the education they were offering and the Roraima Federal Institute (IFRR) was discussing the adoption of the Mulheres Mil project. In order to develop the project in the prison, the IF acted as a facilitator and raised awareness among several local institutions that were needed to make the daily work possible. This ranged from the simplest things, like obtaining authorization for the instructors to enter the prison, to more complex matters, like getting permission and escorts for inmates to leave the prison for the practical training.

The partnership had a happy end. Eighty women were certified in food preparation and upgraded their education. Some of them have already been released and found work in their field and one of them has opened a business at the men's prison. Organizations continue to plan ways to ensure these women enter the work force. One of the proposals is to help them organize a cooperative so they can supply their own meals in prison. Currently the state government hires a private company for food service.

The goal is to help them organize a cooperative so they can produce and supply their own meals, something that currently is in the hands of a third party.



## SIMONE PIRES LOPES



*Simone Pires Lopes is 40 years old. She was born in Manaus and had a normal childhood and adolescence. She was able to study and even finished high school, but chose trafficking rather than going to college. Arrested for the second time, Simone has assumed the role of representing her classmates and helps organize the choir. Since she is evangelical, her challenge is to avoid the temptation of easy money when she finishes her sentence. Her dream is to open a business with her husband, who is also doing time.*

The woman who began, who stayed until  
the end, until the last day,

who went on stage at Cefet to receive her certificates, she knows how important this was to the lives of all of us who took the course. Do you know the story of the star that guided the three kings and led them to their goal? That is what the Mulheres Mil project means.

Throughout the project I witnessed the rehabilitation of some of my colleagues. Those who participated will never forget it, because it opened





our minds to take advantage of this opportunity in our lives. It taught us the importance of making the decision to change our lives, to seize the opportunities that are presented to us, like this course. Those who took the course and those who are taking it now know it's an opportunity they have to hold on to.

With *Mulheres Mil* I learned to take all the courage, the energy I had put into doing illegal things, and use it in another way, with the same courage, the same energy, but with less ego, because too much ego isn't good. The way you treat people changes; the use of money, the way to earn it, because we learn to work in order to reap the benefit.

I wasn't afraid of the police, I wasn't afraid of the drifters, I had no fear at all. I was brave, I would challenge them. I had a gun with me and I'd shoot if I had to. Thank God I never had to, but I really had the guts. I thought I was really something. Then I found out I was nothing like that. On the contrary, I was a fool for having thought that way. I thought I was the best, but I was nothing at all. I was a fool, an idiot who thought she was better than everyone else because she had some drugs, some money, and because she could get whatever she wanted and she could spend as much as she wanted in one night because that's how my life was.

The course content filled several gaps in our lives. Right from the start it worked on our self-esteem, that thing which so many people lack, by repeating: you can, you are capable, you can change. You just have to want it. So many of us had those gaps that we needed to fill. And this course came and filled them. It taught us that we can change our lives. We just have to want it.

When we find ourselves here in prison, everyone is equal. I was born and raised in a very good family. I was always very much loved as I was



☺ And this course came and filled them. It taught us that we can change our lives. We just have to want it.

the only girl, and was always given many toys, much attention, lots of affection and that is how I grew up.

I fell in love; the so-called love bandit came into my life. I went to Boa Vista for 15 days, and stayed for two years. Then I started trafficking, but not because he encouraged me, but because I saw how quickly you could make money, easy money. We are often in a hurry to succeed in life. This is blind thinking, because reality is something different. I had already finished high school, but then let my education drop. I had wanted to study Biology.

We took the entrepreneurship course, and that really broadened our minds. When I leave this place, I hope, and so do the other women, to follow a new path. Actually, this new path has already started in here. It began the moment we applied for the course, the moment other people started to take part in our lives.

The Mulheres Mil project is a door, even for those who already have had the chance to study. Sometimes we would joke that we were left outside of society, but we see that there are people outside these walls that think otherwise, and those who leave this place will return to society. And the hope is to succeed, because the prejudice is not only against those of us in here, it is also against our families, because we lose our self-esteem, we feel ashamed.

Participating in Mulheres Mil also showed me that I don't exist as an island, that there are other people around me, even if we're not linked by



“ And a woman is a human being that, when it comes to fighting, doesn't fight alone. She fights for her husband and children.



blood we're linked by bonds of friendship, of care, of affection. Even here we used to get together in the kitchen many times to prepare appetizers and meals. And a woman is a human being that, when it comes to fighting, doesn't fight alone. She fights for her husband and children. When she does something, it's not for her sake alone. That is what being a woman is about: companionship.

I want to apply all that I have learned. I'd like to open a small market and sell rice and beans, and on weekends, from the front of my house, sell chicken with salad. My dream is to leave prison at the same time as my boyfriend, João Morais. I think I'm the pan and he's the lid [laughs]. What would be the soundtrack for my life? *Love without Limits* by Roberto Carlos. ■



## SÔNGILA SOARES DE LIMA



*Sôngila Soares de Lima, age 47, could be called a natural-born entrepreneur. She opened a restaurant with her boyfriend at the men's prison and has a candy shop at the women's prison. Born in Pará, her mother was indigenous and her father was Portuguese. Inactivity can be hard for someone who worked in the mines for over 20 years. At the prison she studies, cleans the guards' surveillance post to shorten her sentence, and looks after her business.*

Even after all I've been through, I've never been fearful.

I am fun to be with, I'm popular, and very loyal, a real friend. I live life smiling, there is no such thing as a cloudy weather. That's who I am: full of attitude, guts, ready to take action. I don't make promises, I do. Whenever I decide to do something, I go and do it. I have confidence in myself.

I didn't feel I was their daughter, and then I found out I had been adopted, I was 16. One day I heard my adoptive mother talking with







my biological mother. I had seen her visit many times before but it had never occurred to me that I was adopted. I never managed to call her mother, because she saw me being abused so many times, she witnessed my pain and never did or said anything about it. But my adoptive mother never abused her own children!

In 2008 Mulheres Mil appeared. Since I already wanted to take a course like this but couldn't afford it, I jumped at the chance. I had made it to fifth grade but it had been 20 years since then. So I started studying again, I became qualified, I learned about entrepreneurship, about math, about the environment, about how to work with the public, so I could start my own business.

I had an aunt who was a gifted cook and baker. I would stand by her side in the kitchen watching and learning. She liked me a lot. I think I have a talent for cooking. I learned really easily.

I never got involved in trafficking; I always worked on mining sites, in businesses, in restaurants. I would cook for the guy who owned the site, and for the miners, and I was paid 2 grams of gold per day. When I started, the mining was done manually, later it was done with machines. I worked in Colombia, Venezuela and English Guyana. When I was arrested I had just arrived from Guyana. It was there that I met my boyfriend. He helped me build my house; I would contribute with my money, my diamonds, and he would contribute with his.



“In 2008 Mulheres Mil appeared. Since I already wanted to take a course like this but couldn’t afford it, I jumped at the chance.



Now I have a restaurant at the men’s prison. There are seven, but thank God mine is the most popular. I took the course and passed on everything I learned to my husband and my fellow inmates. I have five workers at the prison and they need to be equipped, wear a cap, they need to have clean hands, need to be clean-shaven, nothing on their hands, no watch or ring. I go there every Sunday and when I arrive everybody is there clean-shaven and smelling good. They do everything right.

I was sentenced to 12 years in prison. The judge considered me an accomplice, he said I was aware of what was going on, and since my boyfriend had been in prison and escaped from parole, I was therefore an accomplice. I didn’t turn him in. But I have already done my jail time, so now I’m on probation.

I didn’t see anyone in my family for eight months. I am a mother of nine children; two of them live in Manaus, the other ones live here, but only one of my daughters has visited me. When we come here, the family turns its back on us. In the beginning they come, but the visits become rarer. It hurts because you feel abandoned.

We were 40 women, 20 in the morning and the other 20 in the afternoon. Everyday they would take us to Senac<sup>1</sup>, for the practical part of our gastronomy course. I learned a lot, made a lot of progress. Before I started taking that course I already had a stand where I sold sweets, which I still have, and that is what gave me the courage to cope with this sentence and to make a living.

I already knew many recipes, but I lacked practice with the rest: the ingredients I needed, calculating the amount per person, because

1. The National Service of Commercial Learning (Senac) in Roraima is one of the project partners in Boa Vista.

“I plan to continue, because it doesn't make sense to be a businesswoman without an education.



sometimes I would prepare too much and then it would spoil. So I would have to throw it away. I learned everything in the course. I learned how to live with my earnings, because I would spend everything I earned, I would buy things that were not necessary. Now I know how to save my money, how to make it last. I learned a lot of math, and I use all I learned. I had many classes here, I had lessons in manners, in good behaviour, how to get along with people, how to address people.

This project is meant to open doors to women who can cook, who want to get ahead, who want to learn more, to improve themselves, because a woman can, further down the road, set up stall in front of her house, so she doesn't need to rely only on her husband.

I passed seventh grade and I am going into eighth. I plan to continue, because it doesn't make sense to be a businesswoman without an education. My plan for when I leave here is to continue, to open a small snack bar and a shop at my house, to sell soda, dairy, things like that. ■





ELENILDE



VALDENICE



## ARACAJU AND NOSSA SENHORA DO SOCORRO



The district of Santa Maria, known as Terra Dura (hard land), is in the southern zone of Aracaju and is where part of the garbage from the capital city is dumped. Even after the Public Ministry outlawed it, the inhabitants say there are families who still make their living from the garbage brought from Aracaju, São Cristovão and Nossa Senhora do Socorro. The village of Taiçoca de Fora is in the municipality of Nossa Senhora do Socorro, a coastal area of Sergipe, and the majority of the population fishes for a living.



The landscape and the subsistence in these areas are different, but the social and economic realities of the women are similar. Both in Santa Maria and in Taiçoca de Fora, work begins in childhood. Because of that, the education level is low, motherhood comes early and the lack of professional qualifications becomes an obstacle to entering the labour force.

1 Santa Maria neighbourhood

2 Taiçoca de Fora

The challenge for the women in Santa Maria was to make them see themselves. They had to strip away the layers of fear and prejudice accumulated through years of working in garbage. In Taiçoca de Fora, they had to confront the resistance of husbands and the suspicion of other women, who were so tired of hearing unfulfilled promises from politicians. In both communities, the goal was to use and improve the talents that they had already acquired during their lives.

To work with these realities and fulfill the needs of these women, the Federal Institute of Sergipe designed courses in the areas of recycling and crafts, which



were not previously offered in its programming. The establishment of partnerships was essential to ensure the improvement of the education level among the female population of Taiçoca de Fora, to offer professional qualifications and to integrate craftswomen into local and national markets. All these measures required the involvement of many organizations, which created a support network that could be replicated in other locations in the state.



The results for the students are varied. Some graduates chose to make crafts, which they sell at markets. Others still work at the Independent Gatherers Cooperative of Aracaju (Care), and some are looking for other professional alternatives. The women from Taiçoca de Fora are discussing the possibility of organizing a production association.



## ELENILDE DO ESPÍRITO SANTO



*Besides her family name and physical traits, Elenilde do Espírito Santo inherited the profession of shellfish gatherer from her parents. At age 32, she has already had long experience working in the sea and in the mangrove. She has been doing this for 23 years and knows how to catch, crack and clean the shellfish. She did not learn to sell, however, so she still depends on a middleman. Cheerful and objective, she says what she thinks without worrying about criticism. Memories of school include quarrels with schoolmates and she still will not tolerate disrespect.*

**It was very good to study Information Technology and we would like to have more classes on that.**

First we were afraid of wrecking the computer, so we asked, “If we break it, will we have to pay for it?” “No, you won’t have to pay.” I learned to access the Internet; I got very curious about it. We started to look for boyfriends, we learned how to chat.





“Now I know how to embroider using “sururu” shells, oyster shells, things we would not know before as we would throw the shells away.”



I was glad to return to the classroom and to know we can learn even at this age. This course will be good for me and to show my children that the best thing in life is to study and for them not to do as I did, quit.

In Portuguese class we wrote a story telling about our lives, what we had done in our childhood. My childhood was a hard one. I didn't have time to play; my children became my toys. I started to work when I was nine. My mother would wake us at midnight saying it was 4:00 a.m., to crack shellfish. And I would say: “Won't the sun ever come up?” That was our only choice, fishing was our only choice.



We would also go to the mangrove, to catch oysters and shellfish. My mother would take us with her, rather than leaving us alone at home. I only made it to third grade. When it was time to go to school, I would already be so tired, and all I would think about was the work I had to do when I went home: do the dishes, go out to fetch water. When I left school I was 13. And that was it. I started taking care of the children and as of this day I take care of my children and gather shellfish. I do a little bit of everything, but what I like most is to take care of children.

It is 4:00 a.m. when I'm off to the sea and I'm back between 2:30 and 3:00 p.m. We go out

by canoe and I can't swim. As for the shellfish, there are some weeks when you catch them and some weeks when you don't. And we crack the shellfish that we gather from the sea at home and then pass them on to someone else to sell. He goes to Bahia and sells them by the kilo. Each kilo costs five reals. I crack between 10 and 12 kilos a day, from 4:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m..

Many of us feel insecure, and are afraid, but having taken this course I feel more self assured, I have more confidence. The classroom is something else because we get more involved, more focused on learning, on seeing what good things the teachers have to show us.

People can learn at any age, it is just a matter of wanting to. We start to learn things we didn't have time to learn earlier in life. Now I know how to embroider using "sururu" shells, oyster shells, things we would not know before as we would throw the shells away. We're learning to make art from shells. Now we know that the shells we used to throw away can be worth something.

I like the math teacher a lot. He's a very cheerful person and is really into making us learn, because calculating can be hard. At school I wasn't very good in math, but the way he teaches it shows us we are capable of learning, of moving ahead in life. I learned how to divide. It was not easy for me, but I learned.







☺ The course also helped me to be patient with my children. Now I come, I play with them, I take them out.

The course also helped me to be patient with my children. Now I come, I play with them, I take them out. I'll go to the mall, to the beach, because I like to go out. I like having the coldest beer I can find. I'm learning to give more love to my children. I didn't get that much love from my parents, love in the sense of kissing, hugging, and today I kiss, hug and even spank when it's necessary.

My children don't work. They can be children. I have one who is ten, a five year old and another one who is two years and five months old. Cleidiane, the eldest, Adriano and Raquele. By getting qualifications, I expect to provide a better life for my children. Through my studies, through the project, I intend to give many good things to my children. ■





## VALDENICE ALVES



*Valdenice Alves is not very talkative. She keeps things to herself, does not speak very much, perhaps because she was given a great deal of responsibility at a very young age. She started helping her mother make a living very early. Born in Alagoas, she helped to sell shellfish and crabs when she was around 10. At age 11, the family moved to Aracaju, where she and two brothers had to cope for years with the Terra Dura landfill, as the Santa Maria neighborhood is known, in order to provide for her mother. Education was a luxury that she seldom experienced.*

*I liked the project name – Mulheres Mil – as I consider myself a winner, one who's empowered.*

I can handle any kind of work because working on a landfill since 11 years of age wasn't easy. I'm 24 years old. I was born in Maceió but I came to live here in Aracaju when I was 12. When we first arrived, I





would leave at 8:00 a.m. and would stay until 5:00 p.m.. Sometimes we would work all night long, because many people worked at night. When my father started to drink, we had to look after ourselves, because he would go on and on, and if it wasn't for us, my mother would be in trouble. The twins and I provided for the house.

I knew about the project through Care<sup>1</sup>; I was one of the cooperative members. It was good to be back in a classroom after so long. This project was a very good experience, I met many people from my neighbourhood and I liked the other women very much.

I liked the psychologist because she made us feel at ease, we would feel alright. I liked the computer lessons. Many of us had never handled a computer. There was one woman who was so happy just to be able to turn it on and off. I was too, as I had never used one before. Someone who never handled a computer before is afraid to touch it, I was really nervous. I never stopped asking for help. We felt at home, I felt at ease, and the teachers helped a lot.

I made it to fourth grade. At the time, a neighbour enrolled me in school. She asked for our birth certificates and filled out the applications for myself, my brother, and my cousins, who all worked at the landfill. I enjoyed going to school, I wanted to go. There were times when I would feel ashamed when the bus would pick us up at the landfill. The other students would stick their heads out of the window and call us gargonemen. Once I argued with a boy; I stepped on him because he called me gargoneman.

Many people show prejudice when they know that we are from Santa Maria or Terra Dura. It is a horrible feeling being humiliated. Even when I wore the Care uniform, when I would go to buy groceries they would stare at us. If I could I would swear. I would say, "What are you looking at? Is this any business of yours? It's better to work than to steal." Things like that. I would argue a lot because of that; I was pretty angry about it.

Before taking the course, I only thought of work as a means to eat. Now it's different! I think about working, about buying clothes, buying a pair of shoes. In those days I would only think about working and building my house, and that was it. I wouldn't include myself. And today I take myself more into consideration. I think it was because of the way I was raised, because that is how my dad was. The way he saw things, as long as there was rice and beans, nothing was missing. I never had a toy, a good piece of clothes. He was as poorly educated as we were.

*1. The Cooperative of Autonomous Recycling Agents (Care) from Aracaju was established in 1999 aiming to take families out of the landfill.*



After the landfill, my second job was at Care, and it was with something I already knew how to handle, which was garbage.

I learned to make crafts with newspaper. It was good, but there should have been more lessons. I would like the project to have a second phase. I can make elastic bands for holding hair. I gave a few to my nieces and sold the other ones. They sell easily. I only stopped because I began to work at a lady's house in Atalaia. But then I left because she wanted me to live in.

I stopped working for a few years when I was in my eighth month of pregnancy and when I had my son. I got pregnant when I was 15 and it was unplanned. I took more precautions after he was born. He's nine years old. I met my son's father when I was still a child.

After the landfill, my second job was at Care, and it was with something I already knew how to handle, which was garbage. I started there when I was 20, I stayed there for three years and nine months. I left because I got sick; I had a blood and lung infection. At the graduation ceremony I was in hospital; I spent 13 days there. Before that, I had never looked for a job outside of Care. I was afraid of leaving there and not being able to find another job. I would go to work even when I was sick, wouldn't mention it, because I was so afraid of having to leave.

In the beginning I was used to working in a different area, only with garbage. Cleaning work is easier. If we know precisely what to clean, it's easier and you earn more. I also do manicures at home.

This project raises the self-esteem of many women. Sometimes we're going through hard times, but then we





“The project helped me to develop communication skills as I used to be quiet. I wouldn't like to talk with people without having been introduced.



stand up, and value ourselves more. We've been through a lot of pain, so we need to look after ourselves a little more.

The project helped me to develop communication skills as I used to be quiet. I wouldn't like to talk with people without having been introduced. It was “Hi” and that was pretty much it. But now it is easier for me to communicate. Taking part in the project changed many things: the way I relate to my family, the way I talk to my son. Taking part in the project was good for me. Now I feel I am better.

I have many friends who work at the landfill. There are still many women and children. Many of them work more than men, pulling the wagons, and going through the garbage. What I find beautiful is their attitude. They're not afraid to face life's challenges, but it's very hard.

I've been through many hard times in life but never gave up. And I won't ever give up. I won't give up fixing my house, seeing my son study, having a job I never had before.

I would like to work as a manicurist. I'll prepare a few CVs to send to businesses and see if I can get a job in general services. I feel I am now more qualified for the job market. My dream is to have a signed job card and build my house. I want to give to my son what I never had. ■



LÚCIA



SHEILANE



## PALMAS AND TAQUARUÇU



2

1 Palmas

2 Taquaruçu

Students of the district of Taquaruçu and Santa Bárbara neighbourhood have life stories with many similarities. Many of them worked as children, most of them married early, and many of them are the sole providers to the household. Some of them try to hide the marks of domestic violence they carry, many have no self-confidence and none of them have taken a technical course or sat in a college classroom.

The district of Taquaruçu is 32 kilometres away from Palmas, where the Federal Institute of Tocantins (IFTO) is located. The district is a small town and has an air of tranquility, as if time has stopped and the hustle and bustle of the modern world is something from another world. In the Santa Bárbara neighborhood of Palmas, there is an atmosphere of fear. The houses are close to one another, there is no healthcare, urban planning or sewage disposal. And there is plenty of violence. Most of the population lives in extreme poverty. As in other slum areas there are no government services and many inhabitants are unaware of their rights to education and jobs.

In order to promote access to education for the women from these communities, the Federal Institute established a dialogue with the neighbourhood association. Many challenges then presented themselves: the need for transportation to school,



1

a way to ensure continued attendance and how to offer professional training to a group with a wide range of ages – from 18 to 60 – and varied education rates – from a few grades of elementary school to middle school graduation. At the Santa Barbara State School there was no Education for Youth and Adults course and the dialogue between the IFTO and Palmas City Hall made it possible for women who had left the classroom decades ago to continue their studies.



2

The institution also collaborated with local businesses to offer qualifications in a variety of skill areas. Today, besides the handicraft-making course offered to women living in Taquaruçu, students at Santa Bárbara are also enrolled in courses on tailoring and food handling. The impact in the lives of those who have earned their certification varies. Many found work in areas not related to their qualifications, a group is still making and selling crafts, but the majority of them have gone back to school.



## LÚCIA ARAÚJO MENDES



*Good humour and a 'joie de vivre' are strong traits in Lúcia Araújo Mendes. She is from reggae land, or Maranhão, and is proud of her roots. At 51, she has lived most of her life in a rural area sowing and harvesting and raising brothers, sisters and children of her own. During her life, she has rocked the cradle of 19 children, and is now raising a 13-year-old granddaughter and helps with another four grandchildren. Soon it will be six years since she came to live in Palmas and she now makes a living from recycling and making crafts.*

When I started getting into crafts, it was because a friend told me about it,

I wasn't really that enthusiastic. But I liked it! It's been four years since I started making crafts. I'm convinced and really like it. I also work on recycling. I gather iron, cans, plastic. I make crafts and I make recycled



“I’ve liked everything I’ve done while participating in this group. I took the culinary course. We learned to do appetizers, cakes, confections, chicken recipes and puffs.



paper and then I sell everything to the middleman. I’m the only one working now because my husband is sick.

I was happy when I heard that the project would offer us a course on crafts. I’ve liked everything I’ve done while participating in this group. I took the culinary course. We learned to do appetizers, cakes, confections, chicken recipes and puffs. I really liked the craft workshop on making boxes; I fell in love with those little boxes.

I used to live in the country and I worked sowing and harvesting. I could give classes on that. We would plant beans, rice, corn and manioc. There were years when it produced enough for everyone to eat as much as they wanted, but others years we had a bad harvest and not enough to eat. My mother had quite a few children – she had 15, and she raised 13. I came second, so I had to help look after the ones who came after me. The first ones are the ones who suffer most; that is why I didn’t grow very tall, because I had to carry the



boys! When I was a girl, until I was 11, there was no school, it was really only farmland. I married very young, around 13, 14 years of age. I felt like I was a prisoner because my father wouldn't let me go out with my friends.

This project was really wonderful for me, because I couldn't write at all, not even my name. And today I can sign my name. I already know all my letters, but I still can't put them together when it's a big word. I went to Mobral<sup>1</sup>, but I had to quit at that time because of my children. I began to study here at Santa Bárbara, but when the EJA<sup>2</sup> came to an end, I had to stop as well.

I think this course has helped us in many ways. Not knowing how to read or write is really difficult. I once went to the capital city, Teresina, to take my sick girl to the hospital; they gave me a paper with something written on it, and I didn't know what to do or where to go. I would ask for information and people would send me to somewhere and then to somewhere else. It was horrible.

Now I'm not afraid of having to write my name when I need to sign a paper. I'm feeling more confident. Now I can read a little, I already know all the capital letters. But putting letters together to form big words is something hard to me.

Mulheres Mil changed the life of the women from our neighborhood.



1. *Mobral – The Brazilian Literacy Movement.*

2. *EJA – Education for Youth and Adults.*





“This has opened my eyes and my spirit, and for me it’s good. Things will be better if I continue.”



I tell you that because my girl said to me, “Mom! I’m really glad because I finished the eighth grade and I know things I didn’t know before.” Now, thank God, because of this project, she said she will never stop studying.

We are given a grant, which is very important to me. It’s R\$100, but it’s a lot of money to me. I pay the electricity and water bill with it and sometimes I even buy rice, meat, I provide for the house.

This has opened my eyes and my spirit, and for me it’s good. Things will be better if I continue. Many women were like me: unable to sign their name. But now they know how and are excited about studying, they want to continue. Even if the course comes to an end, they want to keep studying. ■

## SHEILANE ALVES



*Sheilane Alves is a housewife, who works at the Palmas City Council and is studying music at the Military College. She quit studying when she was in seventh grade and for 17 years she didn't go back to the classroom. She came back to school because of the project and now, at 37, she has new goals, one of them being a college degree in social services. She enjoys singing, she sings beautifully, especially when she sings the song that reminds her of when she started dating her second husband. "Quero colo" (I want some tenderness), by Leandro e Leonardo.*

*I keep wondering why I stayed away from school for so long.*

Sometimes now I may be tired, because this job demands a lot from me, but when I go to school I feel so good, so happy to know I'm going to learn something! I leave home at 4:40 p.m. and only come back at half past midnight. And sometimes I study until 4:30 in the morning to do





all the homework and get ready for the tests.

For me, going to school is a challenge that I want to share with those people who I've learned to love and respect. Going to the military school today feels like going to *Mulheres Mil*: it's a challenge, but it's also a joy and an apprenticeship, because every day is different.

I quit school when I was 17 and was in eighth grade. And I developed this desire to study through the project because before that I didn't get any encouragement and didn't really want to do it either. I thought I could only manage to work and to do what I could to provide for my life. Now it's different! I learned that I can manage both: I can take care of my household and do what I like, which is to study.

We are four children and my father guides us, and we always respect his opinion. And I married to please my father. I was about to turn 16. My father approved of the boyfriend I had. But then we argued and split up. So he went to my father's house, who didn't yet know we had split, and asked him for my hand in marriage. I resisted a bit, but didn't want to displease my father. So I accepted and got married.

I was in the seventh grade and never came back, because I was working and didn't have much time to study. And my husband didn't encourage me. Two years after that my son was born. That is when I really dedicated myself to the house, to the child, to the job, and I couldn't even think about studying. Five years later we separated – and soon it will be 20 years since we separated – then I married again. We've been married 11 years. We get along well; he's one of the people who encouraged me to go back to school. He helped me a lot while I was in the *Mulheres Mil* courses.

I heard about this opportunity at Military College on the radio. They were taking applications for courses on music and information technology. So I went there and filled out the application and today I am studying music. We are learning to play and also to become a music teacher. I love my course. We think music is something so simple, but it's really not. Nowadays, for you to become a music teacher or to learn to sing and play well you have to study, because we have to read music, there are rules to be studied, and obeyed.





“The project taught me to look at myself, to like myself better, not to think that I had no right to fight, to persevere...

Through this project I have also had the opportunity to work. On January 1st it will be two years since I started working as a civil servant at the Palmas City Council. It was through Mulheres Mil that people began to see my value. They saw I had the potential for leadership, to be committed to my job, to work and to survive.

One thing that I'll always remember was our trip to Brasília, and there we met the 13 communities taking part in Mulheres Mil project. I met a very special

person, Marta de Lima<sup>1</sup>, a shellfish gatherer from Paraíba. With all the hardships she had faced, she didn't give up, she didn't stop believing. I wish there were more Martas.

Many things have changed for me. I always say that the project allowed me to see life differently, because up until then I was a housewife, I didn't expect anything else and, all of a sudden, the project opened new horizons for me. I felt like studying again, growing again, because I had given up. And the 2011 Sheilane is a Sheilane who learned to be a warrior, who learned to go for her dreams. That was one of the things I learned in the project: don't give up, no matter how difficult it can get.

All the girls who made the life maps mentioned the bus, because a bus would come to pick us up and bring us back. When we arrived, I remember it as if it was yesterday, everybody looked at the institute building and said, "My God! Is this really meant for us?" When they brought us to a classroom, and began to tell us about the project, I said to a friend, with my eyes full of tears, "Here, if we want to, many of us will be able to improve our lives." When they brought us back home, everybody was amazed, wanting to tell everyone what had happened, what they had thought about it. It never crossed my mind I would be treated so well, that people would respect us so much.

The project taught me to look at myself, to like myself better, not to think that I had no right to fight, to persevere, because I would think that at my age I wouldn't get very far. And the project showed me that there is no right age to win in life. There is not an age that you have to think you've grown old and that your time is over. No! It showed me that, if I want, my



1. See the story of Marta Lima on page 205.

“ I learned that I can manage both: I can take care of my household and do what I like, which is to study.



age doesn't matter, that I can win and go for my objectives. I am 37 today and in a year and a half I'll complete the music course.

The women from Taquaruçu, I'm absolutely certain many of them don't have the dignity, the love for oneself, that we have today. We have become different women. The majority of us managed to get a job, there are those who didn't continue with the handicraft work, but we are all working.

My goal now is to complete my education at the military school and then take a university course on social services, because I think I have some talent in that area.

It is a project that has changed the stories of poor women. And it is really worth investing in this project, because it helps human beings to discover their value, to have self-esteem, to develop, to improve as human beings, to try to succeed in life without worrying about the barriers, because some people give up for the slightest reason. ■



## PROJECTS BY STATE

### **Alagoas Federal Institute for Education, Science and Technology**

#### **The Sweet Flavour of Being**

**Area of Qualification:** Food

**Brazilian Collaborators:** Alagoas State Education Secretariat, ECAPEL (stationery store), African Roots Project – ONG Maria Mariá, Banco do Brasil Cooperative of Employees, Barra Nova Pastoral – Canadian Nuns, Aerotourism

**Collaborating Colleges:** Red River College and Cégep Régional de Lanaudière

### **Amazonas Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology**

#### **Transformation, Citizenship and Income**

**Area of Qualification:** Tourism

**Brazilian Collaborators:** State Government of Amazonas/Manaus Social and Environmental Wetland Program and National Commercial Apprenticeship Service (Senac-AM)

**Collaborating Colleges:** Niagara College, George Brown College and Collège Montmorency

### **Bahia Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology Institute**

#### **A Voyage to New Horizons**

**Area of Qualification:** Tourism and Caregiver for Elders

**Brazilian Collaborators:** Terreiro Mokambo, Raja Yoga Brahma Kumaris Meditation Center, Neighbourhood Association of Vila Dois de Julho Community (Amovila), Betesda Baptist Church, São Lázaro Parrish, IFBA Technological Incubator of Popular Cooperatives

**Collaborating Colleges:** Niagara College, George Brown College and Collège Montmorency

### **Ceará Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology**

#### **Women of Fortaleza**

**Area of Qualification:** Tourism, Food Handling and Governance

**Brazilian Collaborators:** ONG Emaús, Pirambu Neighbourhood Association, Technological and Qualification Research Centre (CPQT) and the Brazilian Hotel Industry Association – Ceará

**Collaborating Colleges:** Niagara College, George Brown College and Collège Montmorency

### **Maranhão Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology**

#### **Food for Social Inclusion**

**Area of Qualification:** Conserving Techniques and Food Handling



**Brazilian Collaborators:** National Commercial Apprenticeship Service (Senac-MA), Foundation for Supporting Education and Technological Development of Maranhão (Funcema), Maranhão Commercial Association (Ascom), Olívio J. Fonseca, Bondiboca, Pão Nosso Bakery, Bakery and Confectionary Sabor e Qualidade, José Sarney Foundation

**Collaborating Colleges:** Red River College and Cégep Régional de Lanaudière

**Paraíba Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology  
Community Development – Impact on Quality of Life and the Environment**

**Area of Qualification:** Fishing, Crafts and Environment

**Collaborating Colleges:** Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles

**Pernambuco Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology  
Culinary Solidarity**

**Area of Qualification:** Culinary

**Brazilian Collaborators:** National Commercial Apprenticeship Service (Senac-PE) and Federal Rural University of Pernambuco (UFRPE)

**Collaborating Colleges:** Red River College and Cégep Régional de Lanaudière

**Piauí Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology  
Fashion and Citizenship**

**Area of Qualification:** Fashion and Apparel

**Brazilian Collaborators:** Brazilian Service for Supporting Micro and Small Businesses (Sebrae-PI), Municipality of Teresina, Municipal Secretariat for Economic Development and Tourism and Casa de Zabelê (Archbishop Social Action – ASA)

**Collaborating Colleges:** New Brunswick College of Craft and Design and Cégep Marie-Victorin

**Rio Grande do Norte Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology  
Casa da Tilápia**

**Area of Qualification:** Processing of Fish Leather - Food to Crafts

**Brazilian Collaborators:** Education and Technological Development Support Foundation of Rio Grande do Norte (Funcern), National Rural Apprenticeship Service (Senar), Municipalities of Ceará-Mirim, João Câmara, Pureza and Touros

**Collaborating Colleges:** Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles

**Rondônia Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology  
Organic Jewellery – A Network for Life**

**Area of Qualification:** Crafts

**Brazilian Collaborators:** Ji-Paraná Municipal Secretariat of Education and Rondônia State Education Secretariat

**Collaborator Colleges:** New Brunswick College of Craft and Design and Cégep Marie-Victorin

### **Roraima Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology**

#### **Inclusion through Education**

**Area of Qualification:** Food

**Brazilian Collaborators:** State Education Secretariat of Roraima, Brazilian Service for Supporting Micro and Small Businesses (Sebrae-RR), National Industrial Sector Service (Sesi-RR), National Commercial Apprenticeship Service (Senac-RR), Youth and Adult Education Forum (EJA), State Justice Secretariat, Federal University of Roraima (UFR), Brazilian Cooperative Organization (OCB), National Service of Apprenticeship on Cooperatives (SESCOOP)

**Collaborating Colleges:** Red River College and Cégep Régional de Lanaudière

### **Sergipe Federal Institute de Education, Science and Technology**

#### **From Garbage to Citizenship - Fishing and Citizenship**

**Area of Qualification:** Recycling, Crafts and Culinary Arts

**Brazilian Collaborators:** State Public Ministry, Federal University of Sergipe (UFS), Brazilian Service for Supporting Micro and Small Businesses (Sebrae-SE), Social Inclusion State Secretariat, Health and Prevention Group for Schools, Nossa Senhora do Socorro Municipality, Aracaju Recycling Agents Cooperative (Care), Sergipe Foundation for Supporting Technological Development (FUNCEFETSE), Cida Duarte Beauty Institute and volunteer educators

**Collaborating Colleges:** New Brunswick College of Craft and Design and Cégep Marie-Victorin

### **Tocantins Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology**

#### **Citizenship through Art**

**Area of Qualification:** Crafts and Organic Art

**Brazilian Collaborators:** Brazilian Service for Supporting Micro and Small Businesses (Sebrae-TO), Municipality of Palmas, National Industrial Apprenticeship Service (Senai-TO), Ecológica Institute

**Collaborating Colleges:** New Brunswick College of Craft and Design and Cégep Marie-Victorin

MULHERES MIL  
DO SONHO À REALIDADE

THOUSAND WOMEN  
MAKING DREAMS COME TRUE

MILLE FEMMES  
DU RÊVE À LA RÉALITÉ



# MULHERES MIL

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GOVERNO FEDERAL  
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PAÍS RICO E PAÍS SEM POBREZA