

Brazil, and emigrated for education and work purposes. Claudia has experience working in charities within the Latin American communities; similarly, Andrea started her journey in the UK working at a Latin American organisation called Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). After years of experience, both of them decided to co-found TeSer, an organisation focused on the prevention of VAWG suffered by Brazilian women based in the UK. For them, it was time to finally invest in prevention instead of waiting for women to reach out for help when experiencing high-risk situations, which is where their work with communities and innovation lies.

London is well-known worldwide as one of the most diverse cities in the world, but through their personal and professional paths, Claudia and Andrea discovered how that may not always be the truth when it comes to how underprivileged Latin communities can be overlooked. Studies have shown that despite the fact that LA communities represent a significant part of the population, especially in London, parts of the community still face invisibility when it comes to public and general policies developed by the government, workplace abuse and exploitation, as well as illegally being paid below the National Minimum Wage.

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AFFECT



Luiza Paiva

How was TeSer co-founded and what were your motivations?

Claudia Croppo/ Andrea Fonseca

TeSer was the result of more than two years of chatting and meeting, full of dreams and plans, as well as a lot of worries and not knowing. This was a very long and difficult journey that needed the help of other women for us to be where we are now.

We both worked for the same Latin-American organisation in London supporting the Brazilian community, and we realised that regardless of being Latin-American, Brazilian women had their own specific cultural needs that went beyond the language. We noticed that the barriers they faced and the support they needed were slightly different due to the nature of the abuse and also their immigration status.

We started noticing that there were many gaps in the support offered to Brazilian women and felt that the Brazilian community would benefit from an organisation that would try to focus on it. Some of the gaps we noticed were language and culturally specific services that focus on prevention and neglect to support the women's children while focusing just on the women. We felt that it was about time we started something that could tackle the issue, covering the existing gaps.

We had a vision of a world free of violence and for that we had to focus on how to get there – not only how to fight it. We decided that the aim of TeSer would be to focus on prevention. And that was our way to innovate by offering help and support to women before they are in a vulnerable situation.

So TeSer was born with the mission of freeing the Brazilian

community living in London from gender-based violence. Our approach towards prevention would be focused on the antidotes against violence: foster and nurture equal and respectful relationships; weave support networks to tackle isolation, share information and experiences and develop a sense of community by creating cultural events. We are still in the very early days of achieving our goals and due to COVID-19 we are having to adapt to a new reality and way of promoting the TeSer mission.

LP

As the number of women asking for help during lockdown went through the roof because they were stuck with perpetrators, how is TeSer working to give them assistance or planning to prevent outcomes in the near future with this new reality (distancing measures, zoom life). How are you tackling this issue in general as an organisation, what is the general feeling? How are you meeting the needs of the users and the organisation during this period?

CC/AF

The difference in the way TeSer focuses its actions is not with immediate support to women in crises, we are not an advice service provider. TeSer strongly believes in challenging rooted strong beliefs that keep reinforcing behaviours and relationships based on a patriarchal and controlling society.

With the lockdown and the switch to virtual lives, TeSer had to postpone many of its interventions in the community that were already planned, like workshops and group work. The reason not to immediately transfer it to a virtual space was the barriers we came

up against to assess the safety of the participants, so TeSer chose to postpone the idea for now. However, TeSer is trying to catch up with the new reality, the way it's been focusing its work has been through developing actions to promote information and campaigns to challenge and deconstruct certain reinforced beliefs directly linked with gender-based violence.

LP

We know that innovation is about taking risks, but for some organisations taking risks is not always safe. How can you share information with women online when the perpetrator is possibly stuck with them? What role does culture play in innovation: how can you share information with people that need to hear it without it being dangerous for them?

CC/AF

This is such an interesting question, and one we have held dearly to our heart. During this period we have planned so many actions and had to rethink them, especially considering women safety. One of our most successful campaigns was the one to provide information about signs of violence linked with the lockdown and also details of different organisations and services available in the UK to reach out to for help.

This campaign was a muted video with pictures of different women holding posters with the info. The reason we chose it to be silent was exactly so it would not call the attention of the perpetrators around the women. TeSer is also in the process of developing new campaigns to be shared online, tackling myths and facts of gender-based violence.

LP

In your opinion, how can we raise awareness to issues faced by Latin American communities in the UK, especially involving Brazilian women with or without documents?

CC/AF

The first thing is to be recognised by the local authorities and the government in order to receive more strategic support. We are aware that Latin community organised groups have been working for years to receive recognition as Latin Americans in London, but so far, we have been recognised by four boroughs only.

TeSer has been part of a network with other Latin American organisations to work with the Greater London Authority (GLA), in which the idea is to discuss ways of how the LA community can integrate, engage and be part of one of the many communities in the UK. In addition, TeSer is also part of the Emerging Communities in Brent, where historically the Brazilian community has been mostly based.

Another way is to develop partnerships with other Brazilian and LA organizations as a way to support women and their dependents, and together, create safe spaces for women to receive the best information and therefore, enable them to make decisions on how they can lead their own lives. ■

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