

MUDANDO A HISTÓRIA

Training youth to serve as reading mentors

THE CHALLENGE

Education, and poor reading skills in particular, are a constant challenge for children and youth in Brazil. Young people, especially those from disadvantaged communities, attend overcrowded and under-resourced schools and often do not learn to read or write properly. A major study conducted by the National Institute for Education Research found that “the Brazilian education system is producing primary-school 4th graders that can neither read nor write.”¹ In response, the Brazilian government has made education a national priority, with emphasis on improving and expanding early-childhood and primary education, and increasing literacy training for youth.

THE PROGRAM

Through the *Mudando a História* program, young people from all socio-economic backgrounds are trained as volunteer reading mediators and as trainers of mediators in the cities of São Paulo and Manaus. The reading mediators reach out to disadvantaged children and teach them the joy and rewards of reading. The program encourages a love of reading as a way to improve access to education, provide greater access to books, increase cultural understanding and tolerance, improve relationships among youth and their communities, and strengthen the image of youth as agents of positive social change. Currently in its seventh year, the program is piloting a collaboration with the public education system in Brazil as a way of scaling up its impact. Additionally, *Fundação Abrinq* is focusing on strengthening the outcomes as they relate to the children (the focus in the past has been mainly related to the youth), in order to measure the impact the intervention is having on their literacy skills and educational readiness.



OUTCOMES

In 2006 the program participated in two external evaluations to measure changes in participants. The first, conducted by Brandeis University, showed statistically significant improvements in youth participant’s life skills. The program also worked with a leading Brazilian evaluator, Dr. Cecilia Roxo, who conducted an in-depth evaluation of its impact on youth, as well as on their families and communities. Related to youth outcomes, Dr. Roxo’s evaluation shows that 92% of sampled youth improved their life skills and 88% of participants reported an increase in their community involvement after participating in program activities. Related to family and community, the evaluation shows that the families of youth involved in the program increased their reading time at home, and for those families that had not previously read, it became a necessary activity. Eighty-one percent of those families interviewed report positive changes in the life of their son/daughter.

THE PARTNER

Fundação Abrinq was founded in 1990 by a group of Brazilian business leaders to sensitize and mobilize society around children and youth issues and promote social and business engagement. Positioned as a leader in the defense of children’s rights in Brazil, it aims to expand, replicate, and disseminate effective youth programming. Strategic areas focus on raising awareness and engaging the public and civil society in political action; supporting youth-serving programs; and fundraising at the local, regional, and national levels.



PROGRAM: *Mudando a História*
PARTNER: *Fundação Abrinq pelos Direitos da Criança o do Adolescente*
PERIOD: 15 November 2000 – 31 December 2007²
LOCATION: Sao Paolo and Manaus
REACH : 39,900 children and youth
MODEL: Youth community service

1 A Brazil Fit for Children, p. 61.

2 This program is currently in its third phase.