

A new chance for prisoners in Brazil

- By EU Delegation to Brazil, [European Union](#)

In a country like Brazil, where human rights abuses against prisoners in the prison system are still very common, it is possible to find cases like Jelletly Aron, an example of recovery and rehabilitation.

With a troubled childhood and adolescence filled with financial difficulties, as well as a disruptive family life, Jelletly began stealing small things at school: a pencil, an eraser; things he did not have. After a while, he no longer wanted to go to school and began stealing from supermarkets and from people's backyards, eventually going further with crime, using firearms and getting involved in drug trafficking and drug abuse.

He was caught six times, but as he was a minor, he did not remain in custody for long. When Jelletly entered the prison system, he met other people involved in more serious crime and emerged from prison immersed in this criminal world.

After being sentenced for more serious crimes, Jelletly was transferred to APAC (Associação de proteção e assistência aos condenados — Association for the protection and assistance of the convicted) located in the city of Perdões, where his mother used to live. This is one of 40 existing APACs in Brazil that practice an alternative methodology of incarceration and rehabilitation, humanising the punishment and preparing offenders to re-enter society.

Without the presence of the police or weapons, prisoners learn to act with APAC staff on a more equal footing and to recover the meaning of some essential values such as society, family, dignity and work. APAC is a pioneering methodology in Brazil and it is nowadays a reference worldwide as an alternative to the traditional penitentiary model. According to Jelletly, APAC helped him in the most difficult time of his life, and it was there that he entered as a criminal and left as a recovering human being. Jelletly reports that he did not know much before being arrested, nor did he have any interest in learning, because he felt that crime gave him what he needed. His only work experience had been to plant and harvest tangerines, but he had chosen crime instead, as it had offered a better financial return.

Jelletly enrolled in a professional course on civil construction, which was offered inside the APAC prison unit. He was one of 300 convicts who graduated in the training courses offered by the project.

Upon his release from prison, Jelletly, with his new skills, was able to find work in civil construction in his city and says, 'I changed my life completely. The hands that once destroyed now build houses; those hands that once stole, trafficked and killed

the dreams of other people are the same that received the trust of APAC to carry its own cell keys. I learned a lot, from laying bricks to making dough, painting, etc.’
‘I learned much more than that too. I now understand that building is an art and know how to create instead of destroy. That work also carries something more valuable than money: the ability to help other people accomplish their dreams, for example by building someone’s first home’.

Jelletly finished serving his sentence but keeps going to APAC. Only now he goes to the prison unit as a volunteer, preparing other convicts to face the labour market and society’s prejudice beyond the prison’s walls.

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