

Lewis and Clark College
**SPORTS EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION:
“PROYECTO DEPORTIVO FTM ECUADOR”**

María Laura Andrade Laso '18
July 1st 2019 - August 31st 2019
Quito, Ecuador

Mission

The main objective of this project is to foster peace through sports and dialogue among trans youth in Quito, Ecuador. “*Programa Deportivo FTM*” is a community-based program that combines sport, mentorship, art and advocacy, to create spaces and practices through which FTMs have the opportunity to *develop* a deeper understanding of their gender constructions, *experience* an affirmative bodily transition and *engage* in political reflections and actions towards peace-building and social justice.

Background

According to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, due to violence, poverty and risky medical practices the average life expectancy for trans people in the region is less than 35 years. Excluded from basic services and largely invisible within the Ecuadorian trans rights movement, many youth transitioning from female-to-male (FTM) struggle with isolation, racial discrimination, social stigma and health issues related to hormone self-medication. According to UNESCO, the practice of sports is a powerful tool to strengthen social ties and networks, and promote ideas of peace, solidarity, non-violence and justice. Trans folks have been historically excluded from sports due to discriminatory practices and oppressive policies that reproduce the pathologization of non-hegemonic gender identities. On one hand, due to their gender identity and bodily differences, many FTMs in Quito are discriminated against when trying to access a public swimming pool. On the other, due to a severe lack of resources, many of them are unable to access a private gym. This contributes to their experiences of marginalization and isolation, which further undermines their sense of self and connection with their own bodies and identities.

Local Community Partners

In collaboration with *Project Transgender*, a local non-profit, this project will contribute to further visibilize FTM youth activism and mitigate different forms of violence that threaten their life chances, health and security. In 2017 *Project Transgender* started to address this issue through its *Community Programmes* and organized an experimental project with five FTM folks who were starting a collective called the Fraternity of Trans Men FTM – ECUADOR. They were given the opportunity to practice boxing and swimming with professional coaches for a few months, which in addition to allowing them to exercise for free, created a sense of community and political awareness. The youth involved in this project have expressed that doing sports together has become one of their most powerful, dynamic and meaningful ways to resist discrimination, cultivate healthier bodies and foster a unified community. This project aims to continue this initiative and establish a sustainable and ongoing sports program that promotes interpersonal peace, empowers FTM youth and advances strategies for social transformation on a personal and collective basis.

Project Description and Goals

We¹ believe that sports education, mentorship and arts have the power to contribute to peacebuilding and social transformation, especially when accessible to those most affected by violence and marginalization. We envision this project to be a sustainable opportunity to engage participants in processes of individual and collective healing. “*Programa Deportivo FTM*” has three components: sports education, Brother-to-Brother (B2B) mentorship and visual documentation of the experience. Through these complementary components we hope to achieve the following goals: 1) explore alternative constructions of non-toxic trans masculinities through sports; 2) promote a safe space for FTM youth to voice their “narratives of transitioning” reflecting on the importance of physical activity,

¹ Community partners, Project Transgender, Fraternity of Trans men FTM, mentors, trainers and student María Laura Andrade. I have volunteered, interned and collaborated with this organization for two years, and I plan to continue collaborating with *Project Transgender* after the project is implemented.

nutrition and mental health in gender affirmative transitions; 3) address the lack of accessibility to public spaces, healthcare services and sport centers as a systemic issue that undermines FTM youth's wellbeing, life chances and political participation; and 4) raise awareness about the pressing needs of the FTM community with policy makers, local authorities and the larger Ecuadorian society. **The sports education** component will be tailored to respond to the specific needs of transmasculine youth focusing in fitness, swimming and modeling. A professional coach with experience working with gender minorities will facilitate each session. Fitness sessions will take place in indoor gyms and public parks promoting peaceful, non-discriminatory and respectful interactions between FTMs and people in those spaces. The modeling sessions aim to challenge and deconstruct stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity addressing racism, classism, sexism, ableism and celebrate the beauty of trans bodies. **The B2B mentorship** will be led by FTM activists, many of whom participated in *Project Transgender's* sports initiative last year (see annexes). They will be trained by the organization to become peer-mentors and will organize workshops for the new participants to discuss topics that the group has identified as important. Finally, the **visual documentation**² will result in the creation of an online blog documenting each component of "*Programa Deportivo FTM*" and the publication of a Calendar with pictures and reflections of the participants involved in the process. These two cultural productions will be presented in an open cultural event at *Centro Cultural El Útero* to raise awareness and open a dialogue about gender justice, non-discriminatory policies and peaceful coexistence. Additionally, there will be a FTM Runway at the event that will give participants the opportunity to share what they have learned through the program with policy makers, activists and public.

Proposed Implementation and Timeline

July week 1 & 2: Fitness Training – Indoor Gym (weight station, benches). Swimming.

B2B Mentorship topics: **1)** Nutrition, exercise and "natural transition" as a complementary or alternative transitional path; **2)** Reflections on gender-differentiated access to outdoor facilities, time, leisure, food and resources.

July week 3 & 4: Fitness Training – Park/ "Urban Gym" (Cross-fit). Soccer in the park

B2B Mentorship topics: **3)** Mitigating the effects of hormone therapy and self-medication through sports practice; **4)** Transitional health and public policy demands.

August week 5 & 6: Fitness Training – Indoor Gym. Modeling basics. Swimming.

B2B Mentorship topics: **5)** Overcoming female socialization of physical "weakness"; **6)** Subverting the occupation of traditionally cis-male spaces

August week 7 & 8: Fitness Training; Modeling; Catwalk techniques; Dancing.

B2B Mentorship topics: **7)** Body awareness and empowerment in a transphobic world; **8)** Celebrating the beauty of FTM body diversity and fighting sexist and racist stereotypes.

CULTURAL EVENT: presentation of calendar, screening of audiovisuals and Runway t by participants.

Impact on Peace & Sustainability

This project has a multilayered impact on peace. First, it encourages FTM youth to have a peaceful relationship with their own processes of gender identity formation and the construction of their bodies. Sports education will contribute to FTMs' emotional, psychological and physical well being reducing the side effects of self-medicated testosterone (weight gain, increase blood pressure, decrease insulin sensitivity, acne, anger, frustration, irritability, etc.). Second, it creates a safe space and support network that breaks FTM youth's social isolation and empowers participants to occupy public spaces and learn about their rights while having fun and doing sports. Third, it promotes respect, empathy and awareness of the realities and rights of this population among the larger Ecuadorian population. "*Programa Deportivo FTM*" is designed to respond to the specific needs of FTM youth, who would otherwise struggle to access resources and information about how to have a healthy, autonomous and peaceful bodily transition. To ensure its sustainability, the program aims to encourage more FTM youth to seek for these safe spaces, continue to organize around the Fraternity of Trans Men- Ecuador and work to strengthen this sport-art-activism program.

² I will coordinate the photo shooting, video editing, blog creation and the logistics of the event. There is a possibility to host a fundraiser to secure the sustainability and continuity of the project.