

**Apartment #1**

**First year in the new home**

Qualitative impact measurement – Year 1

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## **Introduction**

This report refers to the first impact interview after one year the family moved into FICA's Apartment # 1 (69 Julio Mesquita Street).

The family was chosen after a selective process carried out in the first half of 2019, and moved into the apartment in July 2019.

The family of Apartment # 1 consists of the couple Mariana and Eudes, and their three children: Maysa, 9, Maria Eduarda, 6, and Enzo, 3.

## **Interview process and indicators**

The first impact interview of the selected family took place in August 2019, to tell how the process of moving and adapting to the new apartment had been - the interview was conducted only with the adults, Mariana and Eudes. On that occasion, we talked about health issues, work, moving to São Paulo, family and support network, education of the kids and their former homes. The recorded interview originated one of the videos presented during the [Chicago Architecture Biennale](#) and it tells a little about the family's story and its search for housing in downtown São Paulo.

To monitor the impact of the new house, we planned a new conversation to be held one year after entering the apartment (July 2020). However, with the Covid-19 pandemic, the interview was postponed and happened only in November 2020, when everyone was already adapted to the context.

The interview was held through a video call (Whatsapp), respecting the social isolation during the pandemic. The goal of the conversation was understanding what the apartment's impacts were on the family's life and what new opportunities the housing security brought, in five aspects:

- work and income
- health
- kids' education
- culture and leisure
- security

We also talked about how the pandemic affected the family's life on these same subjects.

## **Interview structure**

The interview was broken in two parts: the first one was held with the two oldest daughters, Maysa and Maria Eduarda, and the second one with the couple, Mariana and Eudes. In both moments, we explained that catching up with the family, their opportunities and impacts of the apartment on their lives were important for us to continue and improve FICA's work, and it would not represent any change in the family's relationship with FICA. It was agreed that the interview would not be released and it was recorded (audio) for later transcription only.

The questions were open and qualitative, just like they were in the first interview in 2019, so that interviewees could talk about other topics if they wanted to. The conversation with the parents was semi-structured, so we could talk through the themes with flexibility to explore each one. Talking with the children, on the other hand, had to follow a structured interview, with more direct questions, since they had no former bond with the interviewer and felt a bit shy, and included the request for a drawing of the apartment at the end.

## **Interview with parents – topics and answers**

### **1. Work and income**

**Savings:** Moving to the Apartment #1 made it possible for them to save money on public transport to go to work - the commuting started to be carried out on foot.

**Work:** Before the pandemic, Mariana worked as a manicurist. The number of jobs she took after moving in increased, and so did the family's income.

#### *Changes with the pandemic*

With the pandemic, about half a year after the family moved into the apartment, the relationship with work has changed a lot. The restaurant where Eudes works was closed for a few months, until delivery service started. His labor contract was changed and he started to receive part of the salary from the government. The change in his workday meant that his food vouchers and benefits were suspended during this period and, therefore, his income was lower.

Mariana stopped taking jobs as a manicurist, fearing that she could be contaminated and bring the virus home. "The savings that we had before the pandemic were spent during the pandemic," they say. With the relaxation of the pandemic's isolation rules, she started accepting some cleaning jobs.

#### *Rent and the pandemic*

"When we arrived, everything was great, everything was wonderful. Then the pandemic came. We were scared, because we were going to have bills to pay every month." During the pandemic, after talking and discussing with FICA, a decrease in the rent was conceived to the tenants for 4 months.

## **2. Health**

### *Situation in the previous house*

In the family's previous house, there was a lot of humidity: they lived in the same space they washed and hanged their clothes, and every six months, their home would flood due to the clogging of the building sewer (the unit they lived in was on top of the sewer box of the building). The unit had only a small opening that overlooked the building's moat. There was no natural light or ventilation. Who suffered most from the housing conditions of the previous house was the couple's youngest son, Enzo, who was born premature and has breathing problems.

### *Changes in relation to health*

Mariana said she used to take her youngest son to the hospital every month due to respiratory reasons, and when they started living in Apartment #1, she no longer had to. This improvement in Enzo's condition was already pointed out in August 2019, a month after the move. Back then, they reported that the son had not needed to use the inhaler yet, while in the previous house he would use it every week. "He would always be sick and need to go to the hospital, we could not skip a month without taking him to the hospital. Now we see a lot of difference (...) the only thing that happens now is getting a cold when there's a weather change, which is pretty normal", said Mariana.

The couple did not notice much difference in their health: "We have always been strong, we always had to be strong for the kids. We can't feel weak, for them". What they noticed, though, was that they felt a better disposition and mood in their day-to-day: "The tiredness has gone. Back in the other place, we had to go up and down the room every day. There was a ladder that we climbed", explained Mariana - in their previous home, they built a mezzanine where the beds were installed. Now, they feel an improvement in their psychological health." Since we moved here, we're in a better mood" said Eudes.

### *Health and the pandemic*

We asked them to imagine what it would have been like to live in the pandemic in the other house and they laughed with relief: "It would have been very difficult! Very difficult! The worst thing was that the house was very damp, it would make everything harder." They say

that the humidity and the lack of space for children to play would have hindered their day-to-day activities, as they started to stay indoors all day.

The high circulation of people, the impossibility of social isolation and the recommended hygiene practices to prevent the spread of the virus would have increased the exposition of the family to the contamination risk. Mariana's brother and mother still live in the building where they used to live, so she knew what was going there during the pandemic months. "Nobody had to wear a mask, no one cared!", Eudes says.

They heard of a case of contamination by coronavirus in the previous building, where 16 families live, but fortunately nothing serious has happened to their relatives who still live there. They did not hear of any cases in the building where Apartment #1 is, and they say that the condominium was very strict with the use of masks and there was plenty of gel alcohol for the residents.

### **3. Education of children**

The oldest daughter, Maysa, goes to school with the school van, while Mariana takes the two youngest on foot. Mariana said that Eudes and her have always been very conscious when it comes to the education of their kids, saving a moment everyday to guide them in their studies and lessons. Now, in a pandemic, the three are at home: Maysa attends classes online and the two youngest are not having school activities. Maria Eduarda's nursery school implemented optional classes, but the family decided it was better not to go.

**In children's development, playing is very important for elaboration, creativity and understanding of themselves. Mariana says that moving into the Apartment #1 was very important for children in this matter, as it has more space, more privacy and security.** They like to play on the balcony and, when they can't stay there, they make their play tents in the living room. The mother says that, before the pandemic, they even invited girls' friends to the apartment, which they were unable to do in the previous house.

### **4. Leisure and culture**

Despite being quite homely, Eudes and Mariana say that they started to go to the Marabá cinema from time to time (before the pandemic) – in the other house, they didn't use to go because there was no cinema nearby, and they didn't come this part of the city. Whenever they talked about leisure options, they included the children: "We used to take them a lot at Mc [McDonald's], at the cinema, this is their favorite place", explains Mariana.

As the children studied full time (until 5 pm), the only leisure time, according to Mariana, was on weekends. Parents say that “whenever we had a little time and extra money, we would take them”. Mariana says: “I took them to Shopping Light so they could get to know it. Their business is neither a toy nor a game: it’s visiting stores! ”

## 5. Security

According to Eudes, the biggest change for them was the security that Apartment #1 provides: “Keep them [the children] safe, at home”, while he leaves for work. Mariana says that the apartment brought “the security of sleeping and waking up with no worries and knowing that we can’t be evicted anytime”.

In addition to the fear of eviction, the place where they previously lived [an unstructured occupation, with an eviction order] was quite exposed and they were susceptible to police searches. After witnessing an episode in which police officers came armed searching the place, the youngest daughter started to show fear: “When someone knocked on the gate, she would say ‘oh, it’s the police!’ Because we’ve been there”. “We highlight the safety of knowing that you are at home and know that the police won’t come in to knock you out or come and knock on your door, looking for someone, you know? The most important thing for us is the safety and the location. We really appreciate that”. In Apartment #1, safety is no longer a concern, according to them, since for anyone to enter, they need authorization at the entrance.

Mariana also mentions that they have the “safety of the address” now: “We have more opportunities here. At the former place, I have nothing against the community, but it would always be an issue. Everywhere we would go, people wouldn’t know where [our address] was. Then I would say ‘it’s close to the Moinho Community [a favela on the train line]’ ”.

Eudes also adds: “when we were there, and we would mention where we were from, and everybody would criticize us, they thought we were nobody. We just couldn’t afford to pay such a high rent”.

“Once, I received some relatives who live in Bertioga, an aunt. The most difficult thing for her was to visit us, at Eduardo Prado [occupation where they lived]. Due to the location, she would be afraid of coming home and find the police there. She has already been here, at the new place”.

## **6. Children, from the parents' perspective**

When asked how they saw the impact of the new home on the kids, they said that there is more space to play now, and they also have more privacy. "They are very happy here!". According to them, **their favorite part of the apartment is the balcony and the television, and when the weather is bad, they can play indoors.** "They make their play tents and pretend they are camping. They say it's fun sleeping in the living room. Then it becomes a pajama party, they put the mattress in the living room and make their tent". The kids have invited their friends a few times, but with the pandemic it doesn't happen anymore. "When their friends come, it's like a party! This is something we wouldn't do at the other place, cause there was no space there".

They remember that when they moved in, the new home was important for them, but especially for Maria Eduarda, who was always very afraid of the police coming in a violent way. **"Maria Eduarda says that she has an old house and a new house."**

### **Interview with children – topics and answers**

We also talked with the older daughters, Maysa, 9, and Maria Eduarda, 6. The two had taken a shower and got ready to talk to us (also through video conference – Whatsapp) and, despite having started the conversation timidly, they let go and talked more openly in the end.

The interview with the children was more focused on the apartment's perceptions, what they like the most and what they like the least in the apartment, what they do for fun there and how they are experiencing the pandemic.

#### **1. What they like the most about the apartment**

When asked what they liked the most about Apartment #1, they pointed out the balcony as their favorite place. "It has rails, my mom and dad's chairs, and we can play there. It's very small, but you can play there." Duda also added: "I really like the TV and the food". The living room is where they spend the most time.

#### **2. What they do not like about the apartment. What they would change.**

The two answered that they would not change anything, and that there is nothing they do not like about the apartment.



### 3. What they do there that they couldn't do in the former house.

Playing in the balcony and having more space is what draws the most attention from the two girls.

"Everything else is cool!", says Duda.

### 4. What they miss and/or what they can't do in the new house.

As it was a close community, children would play with each other, which in the new apartment does not happen. **Maysa says that in the other house she had more friends, and in the apartment she only has friends from school.**

### 5. Leisure

The two said they used to go to the movies before the pandemic. "We went to see Frozen 2, several films. But we are not going anymore because of the pandemic". McDonald's, as the parents said, is also an option of leisure for them.

### 6. Pandemic

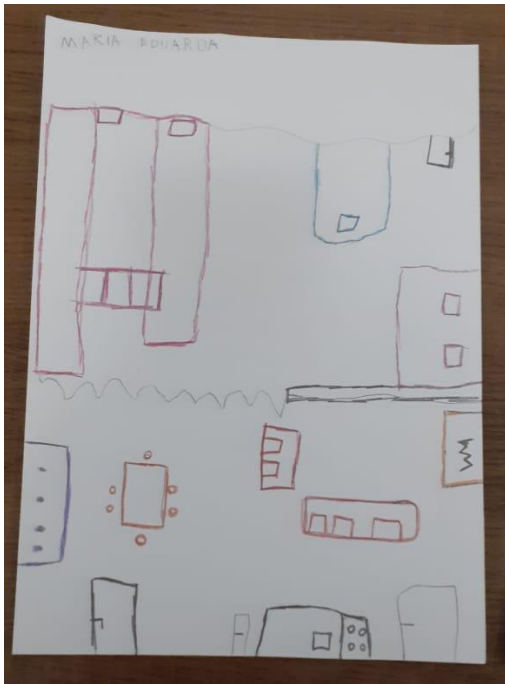
The two have been spending time playing with each other. "It's being really cool, there are lots of toys for us to play with". **"Mom made them a unicorn cake and candies, healthy candies"**, they say. Maysa, the only one who takes classes online now, says she is also studying. "I'm studying, reading books, watching a lot of television".

### 7. Apartment #1, from the children's perspective

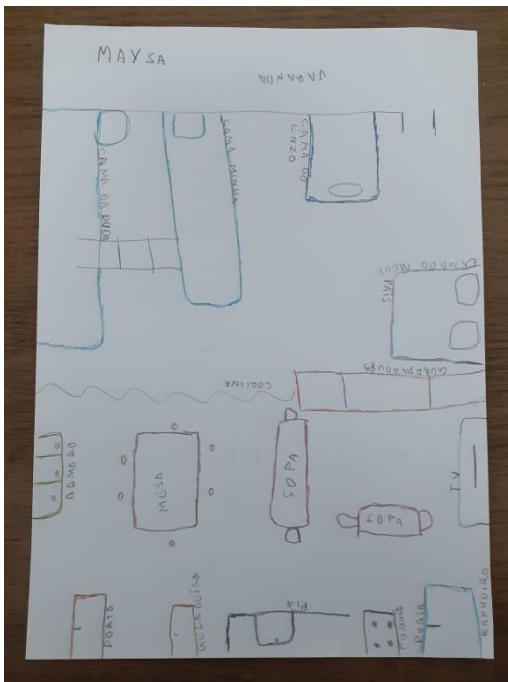
"It is a comfortable place". "It is very cool".

We asked each one to draw the apartment, however they wanted. They described their drawing, and when explaining, the first thing Maysa pointed out was the balcony, then her bunk bed and went over the beds. She showed the sofa, the TV, the kitchen, the "dishes to wash" and, finally, the bathroom.

The two decided to draw the apartment in the form of a floor plan, including all the rooms and furniture in the house, as seen below. We imagine that the drawings came out very similar because the two made them together.



Drawing by Maria Eduarda, 6



Drawing by Maysa, 9

### Conclusions

The interview was conducted nine months after the pandemic began, so it was challenging for the family to detach their perceptions of what the previous moment was like (July 2019 to

March 2020) from the Covid moment. The impacts of the new home were measured by the family's speech, so it goes through their own perception of what impacts are.

From the family's interview, we noticed impacts on two main points: the physical and mental health of the family. The physical health is highlighted mainly by the improvement of the breathing issues of the youngest son, Enzo. Without having to go to the hospital constantly – something even more serious in the middle of a pandemic related to the respiratory system –, Enzo was authorized by his doctor to attend the daycare center, consequently freeing his mother to work, increasing the family's income.

The improvement in mental health is seen in the testimony of the parents, when they report that they are no longer concerned with the safety of their children regarding the entry of strangers into the house, or of the police in the building. It also stands out an improvement in self-esteem when they have the security of a formal address, where relatives and friends are not afraid to go/visit, and can tell where they live without fear of judgment.

In the leisure part, the highlight was to start going to the cinema – parents and children.

The pandemic was a complicating factor in the area of income. With the children at home all day, Mariana stopped working outside, while Eudes had a decrease in income mainly in the first months. In the leisure area, they ended up restricting themselves to options at home, making TV more present. Living in Apartment #1 during the pandemic, however, guaranteed quality housing, with natural ventilation and lighting – essential for children and, specifically, for Enzo. With space to play on the balcony, the children had a more quality environment. The building also had strict rules, such as wearing masks and providing alcohol gel, helping to protect residents.