



## THE FRANCO AND FRANCA BASAGLIA SCHOOL IN BELÉM DO PARÁ: THE CENTENARY OF FRANCO BASAGLIA, THE STORY OF MARCO CAVALLO, AND NEW STORIES OF FREEDOM

*A Escola Franco e Franca Basaglia em Belém do Pará: o centenário de Franco Basaglia,  
a história de Marco Cavallo e novas histórias de liberdade*

*La escuela Franco y Franca Basaglia en Belém do Pará: el centenario de Franco Basaglia,  
la historia de Marco Cavallo y nuevas historias de libertad*

### PRESENTATION



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This dossier has been published to mark the III International Congress on Mental Health: Escola Franca and Franco Basaglia – “The Right to Mental Health and Care in Freedom: Knowledge and Practices,” an important Brazilian event held at the Franco Basaglia Free School in Belém, Pará, which provided an opportunity for professionals, service users, and the community to discuss experiences with community-based services, as well as successful national and international examples in the field of deinstitutionalization. The event also paid tribute to the 100th anniversary of Basaglia and revisited the symbolism of Marco Cavallo in the Italian deinstitutionalization process, which influenced changes in different parts of the world, including Brazil.

In September 2011, Roberto Mezzina, then director of the Department of Mental Health in Trieste, launched the “Franca and Franco Basaglia International School” to encourage countries from around the world to share best practices in the process of deinstitutionalization. The first International School was titled “Beyond the walls: the transition from hospital to community-based care” and was held in Trieste, Italy.

In Brazil, the event was held for the first time in September 2014, in the cities of Campinas and Ribeirão Preto (state of São Paulo), marking the fourth edition of the International School and the first to be held outside Italy. It was named the Franca and Franco Basaglia International School and had the theme “Open Doors: From the Psychiatric Hospital to the Community—Policies and Best Practices in Mental Health.” The second Brazilian edition took place in 2017, in Marília and Ribeirão Preto, with the theme “Encounter with the Community: Dialogues Between Theory and Practice.” Finally, in 2025, the event moved from the Southeast to the North of the country, taking place in Belém do Pará under the theme of this dossier, bringing together approximately 400 participants and highlighting local and regional aspects distinct from other regions of Brazil.

The School’s primary objective is to promote the exchange of experiences among participants—in a dialogic and reflective manner—on the topic of “Best Practices in Mental Health,” through lectures, roundtable discussions, workshops, conversation circles, and supervised visits to local mental health facilities.

Furthermore, the project seeks to: (i) establish a national and international network for the production and exchange of knowledge, comprising universities, health departments, and civil society, aimed at discussing and refining mental health proposals with an interdisciplinary and innovative approach; (ii) disseminate knowledge about community-based service models and successful international examples in the field of deinstitutionalization; (iii) promote exchange between Brazilian states and the countries of origin of the guests regarding innovative deinstitutionalization practices; and (iv) strengthen micro-political spaces for the exchange of successful experiences.

Therefore, this event is extremely valuable for work processes within mental health services and the intersectoral network, as it reinforces principles such as comprehensive care, expanded clinical practice, and community-based care, helping to move away from the hospital-centered and institutionalizing paradigm. This is a movement grounded in the principles of Italian

deinstitutionalization, strongly influenced by the legacy of Basaglia and the symbolism of Marco Cavallo.

Among the many pioneering theorists who shaped the political shift in the mental health care paradigm, Franco Basaglia stands out as a leading figure who continues to inspire us to this day, having spurred discussions on social, political, and economic issues, as well as proposing care practices aimed at deinstitutionalization and the promotion of humane, patient-centered care for people suffering from mental illness.

The Brazilian process, launched in 1978 by the Mental Health Workers' Movement, which challenged asylum practices and knowledge, was to some extent influenced by the changes taking place in Italy, a country that enacted a new Psychiatric Reform Law, regulating the phasing out of the asylum model and its replacement with a set of alternative practices, principles, and mechanisms, which were later incorporated into Brazilian mental health policies.

In Trieste, Basaglia formulated conceptual and political foundations and led one of the most significant transformative processes in the history of psychiatry, challenging the fundamental concepts of psychiatry as ideology, epistemology, and politics; he placed the person at the center of care, setting aside illness as an abstract category. This approach emphasized citizenship and the concrete needs of life—such as housing, work, friends, music, art, the city, and the local community—deconstructing.

Marco Cavallo, in the trajectory of the psychiatric reform in Trieste, is a symbol of how freedom is therapeutic. In the 1970s, the residents of the then psychiatric hospital in Parco di San Giovanni in Trieste sent a letter to the president of the Province of Trieste, written in the first person as if it were the horse's own narrative, requesting his retirement from the exploitative conditions to which he was subjected and avoiding the fate of being sacrificed. The request was granted and became a landmark in the process of institutional opening and the recognition and recovery of the civil rights of the residents, transforming Marco Cavallo into a symbol of the end of isolation in psychiatric institutions.

In circumstantiation and belonging, residents, professionals, workers, and artists, such as the sculptor Vittorio Basaglia and the theater director Giuliano Scabia, worked together for two months to create a big blue horse, the color of the sky, made of papier-mâché, called Marco Cavallo. On its belly were placed writings containing the wishes, dreams, hopes, and poems of the residents and all who participated in the process of building Marco.

Marco Cavallo came to represent a metaphor for the Trojan Horse, becoming a symbol in the fight against the structures of hospitalization and in defense of the freedom and human rights of people institutionalized in asylums. On March 25, 1973, Marco Cavallo was ready to march through the city, his belly full of the dreams of the residents and carrying a banner demanding the end of asylums.

It was built inside the Arts Laboratory; the monumental dimensions of the work were not considered, and no hospital door was large enough to allow its exit. The difficulty caused deep

frustration among residents, who compared the situation to the imprisonment they lived under due to the hospital rules applicable to inmates. The impasse was resolved by Basaglia and other team members by throwing the horse against the gate, allowing its exit and breaking down the real and symbolic wall between the “inside” and the “outside” (Figure 1).



The holding of the sixth Franca and Franco Basaglia International School, and the third in Brazil, in Belém do Pará, initially constituted a challenging process, but resulted in days of intense exchange of experiences and innovative practices between national and international participants, such as the creator of the International School, the psychiatrist Roberto Mezzina, who participated in all editions of the School in Brazil.

Therefore, we believe that all the experiences and leadership in the 2025 event were another historical scenario that we would like to add to the trajectory of partnerships that make up the history built by Basaglia, Rotelli, Peppe D'Acqua, Roberto Mezzina, and so many others involved in the fight for deinstitutionalization and human rights.

These are the stories we believe in and fight for.

May we build more and more stories marked by good practices in mental health, because freedom will always be therapeutic!!!

Long live the SUS (Brazilian Public Health System): health as a right for all.