

# Head in the sky: 8-year-old Brazilian girl dubbed world's youngest astronomer

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Brazilian 8-year-old astronomer Nicole Oliveira poses for a picture with her telescope in Fortaleza, Brazil, on September 21, 2021.

When Nicole Oliveira was just learning to walk, she would throw up her

arms to reach for the stars in the sky.

Today, at just eight years of age, the Brazilian girl is known as the world's youngest astronomer, looking for asteroids as part of a NASA-affiliated program, attending international seminars and meeting with her country's top space and [science](#) figures.

In Oliveira's room, filled with posters of the solar system, miniature rockets and Star Wars figures, Nicolinha, as she is affectionately known, works on her computer studying images of the sky on two large screens.

The project, called Asteroid Hunters, is meant to introduce [young people](#) to science by giving them a chance to make space discoveries of their own.

It is run by the International Astronomical Search Collaboration, a citizen science program affiliated with NASA, in partnership with Brazil's ministry of science.

Beaming with pride, Nicolinha told AFP she has already found 18 asteroids.

"I will give them the names of Brazilian scientists, or members of my family, like my mom or my dad," said the lively girl with dark brown hair and a high-pitched voice.



Eight-year-old Nicole Oliveira, known as Nicolinha, has been dubbed the world's youngest astronomer.

If her findings are certified, which may take several years, Oliveira will become the youngest person in the world to officially discover an asteroid, breaking the record of 18-year-old Italian Luigi Sannino.

"She really has an eye. She immediately spots points in the images that look like asteroids and often advises her classmates when they are not sure they have really found any", said Heliomarzio Rodrigues Moreira, Oliveira's astronomy teacher at a private school in the city of Fortaleza in northeastern Brazil, which she is attending thanks to a scholarship.

"The most important thing is that she shares her knowledge with other

children. She contributes to the dissemination of science," added Rodrigues Moreira.

## 'Passion for astronomy'

Nicolinha's family relocated to Fortaleza from their hometown of Maceio, about 1,000 kilometers away, at the beginning of this year, after Nicolinha received a scholarship to attend the prestigious school. Her father, a computer scientist, was allowed to keep his job and telework.



"I would also like all children in Brazil to have access to science," says Nicole Oliveira.

"When she was two, she would raise her arms to the sky and ask me, 'Mom, give me a star,' said her mother, Zilma Janaca, 43, who works in the craft industry.

"We understood that this passion for astronomy was serious when she asked us for a telescope as a birthday present when she turned four. I didn't even really know what a telescope was," Janaca added.

Nicolinha was so set on getting a telescope that she told her parents she would swap it for all her future birthday parties. Still, such a gift was too expensive for the family and the girl got it only when she turned 7 and all her friends pooled money for the purchase, her mother said.

As she continued her studies, Nicolinha enrolled in an astronomy course that had to lower its age limit for students down from 12.

On her YouTube channel, Nicolinha has interviewed influential figures like the Brazilian astronomer Duilia de Mello, who took part in the discovery of a supernova called SN 1997D.



Brazilian 8-year-old astronomer Nicole Oliveira works on her computer at her house trying to discover asteroids as part of a NASA-affiliated educational program.

Last year, Oliveira traveled to Brasilia to meet with the minister of science as well as with the astronaut Marcos Pontes, the only Brazilian to date to have been to space.

As for her own ambitions, Nicolinha wants to become an aerospace engineer.

"I want to build rockets. I would love to go to the Kennedy Space Center at NASA in Florida to see their rockets," she said.

"I would also like all children in Brazil to have access to science," she says.

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