



annual report

April 2023 – April 2024

WORLD FLAVOURS BY OUR REFUGEE CHEFS

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A NOTE FROM IOLANDA CHIRICO – THE FOUNDER



One year on I am delighted to write this introduction piece and celebrate one year of achievements.

Why did I set up Plateful café in December 2019?
I strongly believe in the power of food to bring down barriers and people together. Back in 2018 at Action for Refugees in Lewisham I hosted 3 community Iranian dinners which sold out straight away.

When refugees had a chance to cook traditional food from their countries, attitudes changed. Both for those who ate as well as those who prepared the food. Relationships were forged. For the first time, I saw the refugees relaxed and I saw they were sitting down at the dinner table with the guests. They were laughing and talking with each other. They were not afraid, not embarrassed anymore for not speaking the language because they could talk about the ingredients of the particular dish. Rather than being seen as refugees with no skills, no experience and no knowledge, they were able to use the language of food to share their heritage.

I wanted that wonderful feeling of belonging and togetherness to continue not just at sporadic dinners but on a continuous basis around a table laid in a commercial hospitality setting making a valuable contribution to the place we live and to the people around us.

In September 2019 I founded Refugee Café and in December 2022 Plateful Café to continue on the road to establish a physical café and becoming a more integral part of the local community.

Providing employment opportunities from creating delicious food is the mission of the charity. Bringing people together through food, we have given refugees a way to support themselves, break stereotypes and find inclusion in their new communities.

It's based on the idea that when you know your neighbour, you don't fear them. When you bake bread with them, you're more likely to see their humanity.

In the past year we have been on an incredible journey together and since September 2023 to April 2024 we ran a café from Parkside Centre in SE10 offering breakfast, lunches and dinners.

The healthy, vibrant menu introduces and celebrates the communities and cultures of the cooks. Community events, workshops and feasts are central to relationship building as well as a variety of unique artisan products sold online, at markets.

Some refugees never overcome the trauma of losing everything. Losing their families, homes, jobs and sense of place from their country of origin. The café currently works with many people fleeing the civil war in Syria. The trauma resides in their hearts, bodies and minds. The loss shows up in the way they talk. In the way they interact with people, as they remember. They keep telling me even after ten years, I wish I could go back because life in Syria was so much more enjoyable. I had my family around me. But here I'm alone. Still after ten years, they feel so isolated."

Beyond the actual running of the café, we continue to provides care to the people we work with. Many have complex stories. The norm is that they have experienced hardship and loss. Most of the families were smuggled across various borders and countries. Some may have traveled more than a year to arrive. Their journeys were perilous.

To be employable, they have to overcome prejudice and beliefs about who they are. They require constant encouragement and support.

Getting basic needs met such as grocery shopping can be daunting for a refugee. Embarrassment about speaking English can create problems when seeking a job. Even leaving the house and navigating the streets can be overwhelming.

It's ironic that we work with people who have such complex needs, that can be solved through the simple common denominator that we all share – eating together.

I am deeply grateful to our chefs,funders, staff, volunteers and supporters who have come together to set up Plateful café and achieve so much in our first year. Plateful exists because of you.

I hope you enjoy reading about what we have achieved so far.

Why Plateful?

We live in a society where immigrants and refugees in general are seen as a threat instead of asset.

The current immigration system in the UK is designed to present a very “hostile environment” to migrants.

As our name implies the plate is central to everything we do. A full plate means you’re fulfilled, safe, and not wanting. It also implies arrival, togetherness, and the ability to provide to others. Our plate is one of variety, filled with food from many sources and cultures. We celebrate and appreciate how much they have enriched our society, in so many ways, not least through food.

The humble beetroot shows that we’re a family kitchen, not something manufactured or artificial. Our food is healthy, handmade, and unique. And the cafe itself helps refugees in south London put down roots and flourish in their new environment.

About Plateful



Plateful café is a refugee-led charity which provides employment for refugees and brings together communities through the art of food. Plateful Café was set up in December 2022 by founder Iolanda Chirico with the mission to empower refugees to obtain mainstream employment in the catering industry. We work with refugees in sharing cultural dishes from their home countries, where they are paid London living wage to serve them at our café. They are provided with tailored training to expand their existing culinary skills, whilst being given the environment to utilise their existing abilities.

What we tackle



Refugee unemployment & poverty

Ethnic & socio-economic inequality

Language barriers & improving cultural cohesion

What we do



ONLINE SHOP



CATERED EVENTS

**We operate
in various
environments:**



MARKETS



OUR
PHYSICAL CAFÉ

plateful
cafe

Our physical café



Peabody Housing Association approached us at the beginning of the year to offer a café space at Parkside Community Centre in SE10 8FY. We were thrilled about the venue opportunity, which has a good kitchen and a spacious front of house – sitting 24 people.

The location is in a prime position within a new housing development with a potential customer base of 8000 people. We recruited a Kitchen Manager in June and started training a group of 7 female cooks from Syria and Iran from July to September. The training included: Level 2 Hygiene and Allergens Courses, Barista training, and hands-on practical training in working in a commercial kitchen and cooking menu dishes.

Our physical café opened to the public in September 2023, offering a wide menu of breakfast, lunch, and hot & cold drinks. The café was open from Thursdays to Saturdays weekly and our opening hours were 9:30-15:00.

Since opening our physical café, we have received affirmation that our café is providing quality food with entirely 5 star google reviews. The café closed on 30th April 2024 after a 8 months pilot.



Sarah Rodrigues
Local Guide · 8 reviews
★★★★★ · a month ago
Everytime I attend an event this cafe has run, it has always been such a lovely affair. The food is amazing, so simple and humble yet so full of flavour that really makes you feel like you're eating someone's original "grandma's" recipe. The live music on is so lovely and it's just an all round lovely place to be and spend time. Wish I lived closer so that I could make a weekly trip!

Food: 5 | Service: 5 | Atmosphere: 5

Sam Light
3 reviews
★★★★★ · a month ago
Lunch | £1-10
This place is fantastic! The food is great and the staff are lovely. I hope they stay here for a long time

Food: 5 | Service: 5 | Atmosphere: 5

Hannah Smallwood
2 reviews
★★★★★ · 3 months ago
Dine in | Lunch | £1-10
Lovely cafe serving delicious food from around the world, and selling home made jams. Even better knowing it all supports refugees from the area with training and onto full time employment!

Food: 5 | Service: 5 | Atmosphere: 5

Helen OK
3 reviews
★★★★★ · 5 months ago
Dine in | £1-10
What a gorgeous cafe. We just had coffee and some fabulous pastries but will be back for the yummy looking middle eastern lunches very soon.

They also do external catering so why not book them for your party?

Run by refugees so you're also supporting a great cause.

Oh and try the little cheeses in a jar to take away 🍷

Food: 5 | Service: 5 | Atmosphere: 5

Recommendation for vegetarians: Highly recommend

Vegetarian offerings: Vegetarian menu or section

Kristyna Novakova
1 review
★★★★★ · 3 months ago
Great falafels, hummus, and tea. The cafe is run by refugees and volunteers - delicious food for a good cause. Definitely recommend!

Food: 5 | Service: 5 | Atmosphere: 5

Jo Munro
28 reviews
★★★★★ · a month ago
Dine in | Brunch | £10-20
Excellent cafe, very friendly and tasty food. A welcome addition to the area.

Food: 5 | Service: 5 | Atmosphere: 5

Isabella Andersen
3 reviews
★★★★★ · a month ago
Dinner | £1-10
I have attended lots of the events they have here and have never been disappointed! Always incredible food that I haven't been able to find at such a reasonable price anywhere else, often live music and a lovely atmosphere.

And it's great to feel like your money is going to a good cause 🌟

Food: 5 | Service: 5 | Atmosphere: 5

Recommendation for vegetarians: Highly recommend

Albert Grain
22 reviews
★★★★★ · 5 months ago
Dine in | Lunch | £1-10
Delicious food for a great cause - all staffed by refugees or volunteers. And super cheap! Really good falafels, hummus, and babaganoush. Very kid/baby friendly, too

Food: 5 | Service: 5 | Atmosphere: 5

Recommendation for vegetarians: Highly recommend

Vegetarian offerings: Large vegetarian selection, Clearly labeled vegetarian dishes

Vegetarian options: Pretty sure everything was vegetarian/vegan? Certainly most things were.

Kid-friendliness: Plenty of high chairs, all on one level and easy buggy access

Wheelchair accessibility: All level and wheelchair accessible

cangying x
2 reviews
★★★★★ · a month ago
Dine in | Dinner | £10-20
Amazing café - not only was the food amazing but the atmosphere and the charity initiative it supports is absolutely wonderful and first of its kind. Will definitely be revisiting soon!

Food: 5 | Service: 5 | Atmosphere: 5

Francesca Scott-Sills
3 reviews
★★★★★ · 3 months ago
Dine in | Dinner | £10-20
I came here for Plateful's Yalda celebration, the food was lovely and the music was beautiful :) all the volunteers were so nice and helpful too ❤️ will definitely come back and highly recommend to friends x

Food: 5 | Service: 5 | Atmosphere: 5

Recommendation for vegetarians: Highly recommend

Vegetarian offerings: Large vegetarian selection

Sophie Hanson
19 reviews
★★★★★ · a month ago
Dine in | Dinner | £1-10
Had a brilliant evening here with live jazz, delicious wraps and it was BYOB which is always welcome. Lovely crowd, will be going back!

Food: 5 | Service: 5 | Atmosphere: 5

Frances Ray
3 reviews
★★★★★ · 6 months ago
Dine in | Lunch | £1-10
Great cafe with delicious Middle Eastern food. Very reasonably priced. Lovely, friendly staff 😊

Food: 5 | Service: 5 | Atmosphere: 5

Recommendation for vegetarians: Somewhat recommend

Vegetarian offerings: Vegetarian menu or section

Sidney Pantton
4 reviews
★★★★★ · a month ago
Dine in | Dinner
The live jazz evening was a relaxed, fun atmosphere with great food. All of the people helping out were attentive and took enormous care in making sure everyone was having a good time.

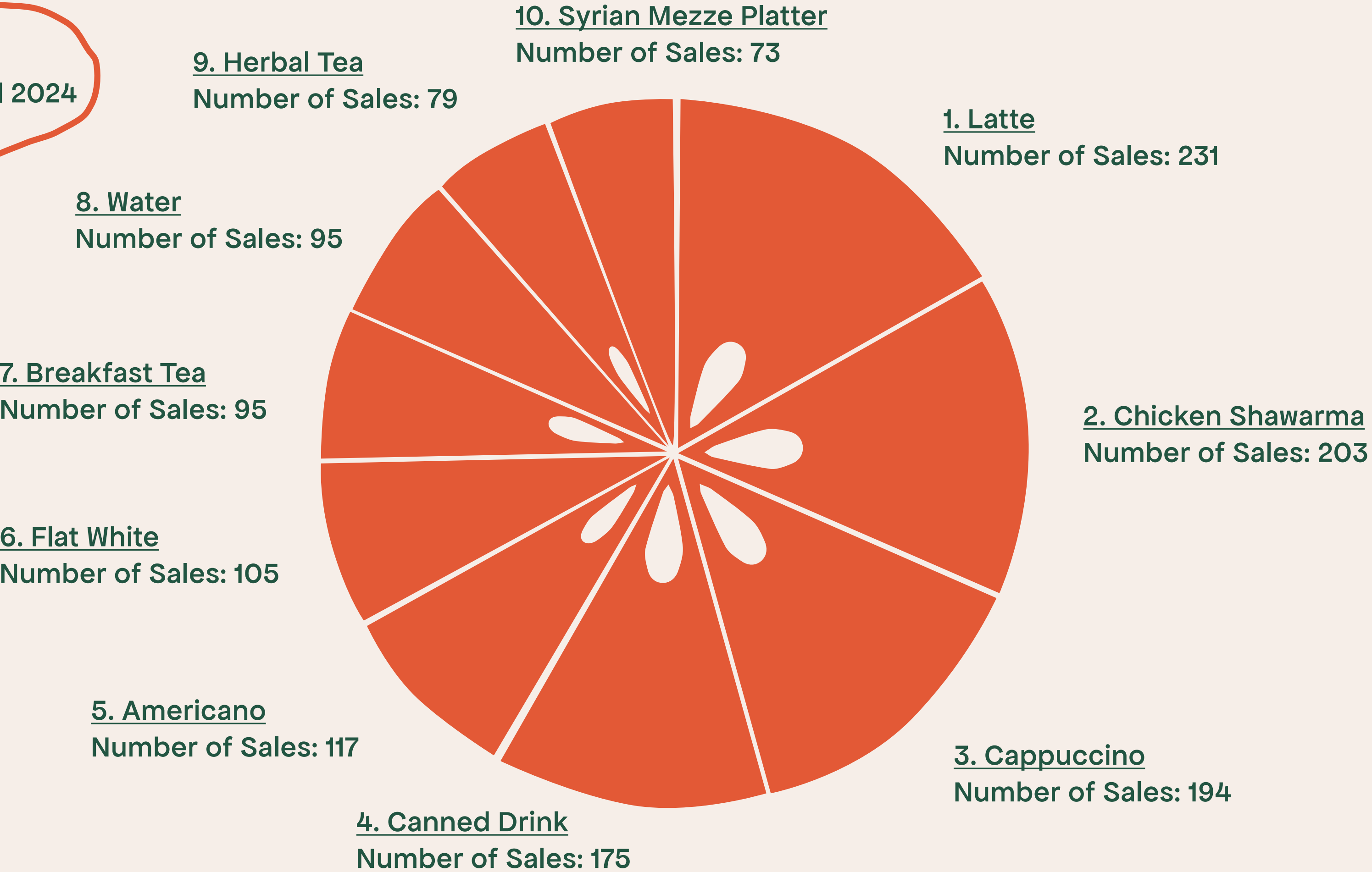
Food: 5 | Service: 5 | Atmosphere: 5

Recommendation for vegetarians: Highly recommend

Vegetarian offerings: Clearly labeled vegetarian dishes

Top 10 sold items

TOTAL SALES:
September 2023 – April 2024
2,856 = £11,363.23



Who we help

WHO WE HELP



Our inclusive café benefitted many people of various backgrounds. The chefs acquired valuable skills during their time at the café which they can carry for their future prospects.

As a refugee-led café, refugees are at the forefront of the operations for the café. The trustee board are all refugees, providing an integral role in sustaining our charity.

However, our café not only provides for refugees, but our volunteers are also from all scopes of life and whilst volunteering with us, they are encouraged to branch out, trying new things and learning useful new skills.

We are also determined to unite the local community through both our daytime café and our community dinners/events.

Online shop



Christmas Hamper 2023



Persian Carrot Jam



Seasonal Hamper



Valentine's Day Card



Valentine's Day Hamper

We sell products made by refugees in our online shop on platefulcafe.co.uk and we tailor our products to target our customer base during certain holidays. For example in December we sold Christmas gifts and in February Valentine Gifts.

Our products consists of preserved foods (e.g. chutneys), knitted items, and artwork – all handcrafted by refugees.

Markets



We regularly sell our refugee-produced goods at local markets. These markets not only help to sell our products, but they also promote our cafe and encourage new customers.

At these markets we sell the same products as in the online shop.



Catered Events

We regularly hosted catered events, provided at our physical cafe out of open hours (usually evenings). Our tickets are always affordable and popular with the local community.



EVENTS WE CATERED:

- February 2023
VALENTINE DINNER
AT GOLDSMITHS COLLEGE
- October 2023
IRANIAN THREE COURSE DINNER
- December 2023
YALDA NIGHT
- February 2024
FIRST PLATEFUL LATE
- March 2024
PLATEFUL LATE &
NOWROZ CELEBRATION
- April 2024
PLATEFUL LATE

THE CLASSES AND WORKSHOPS WE OFFERED:

- March 2024
SUSHI MAKING CLASS
- September 2023
MENDING WORKSHOP
- March 2024
EXPLORING NET ZERO
IN FOOD SME LONDON





CATERED EVENTS



We continue to offer catering for private events including birthdays, workshops, celebrations and a sample dishes for buffet style to sitting down menu are the above.

Please consider us for one of your events!



Our journey so far



OUR JOURNEY SO FAR

Since September 2023, we hosted around

20 events

in Parkside Cafe, and have sold about

500 tickets

and as a part of this have provided approximately

**160 hours of paid work
for our refugee chefs**

and the help of

20 volunteers

across the events.

OUR EVENTS GIVE VISITORS THE CHANCE...

...to learn about the customs and traditions
of a new community and culture.

...to meet like minded people
and new friends who are also committed
to supporting local refugees.

... to try really tasty food!

...to music and other artistic practices
from refugee creators or those
who strongly support refugee causes.

Introducing our chefs

Sara



FROM IRAN
I am eager to showcase
Iranian cuisine.

Faten



FROM SYRIA
My favourite dish is Fatteh.

Yasmin



FROM SYRIA
My favourite dish
is stuffed vine leaves.

Nahed



FROM SYRIA
My favourite dishes are Rice with peas
and cashew nuts falafel.

Sana



FROM SYRIA
I like to cook rice with peas.

Asmahan



FROM SYRIA
I like to bake bread.

Hadis



FROM IRAN
I like to make Iranian foods, desserts
and sweets in the cafe.

“I would say working at Plateful Café changed my mental health and gave me a better mindset. Plateful Café also gave me a chance how to sharpen my English speaking and be more active and interactive.”

Kevin (Front-of-House)

“Improving my English language, giving me a lot of experience about working in a café, making a new community, improving my communication, making money, giving me information to make my new life in the UK, and giving me self-confidence.”

Hadis (Chef)



What we offer our chefs:
Training
Employment
Supportive community

WHAT WE OFFER OUR CHEFS

We recruit out of work refugees who have a passion for home cooking and take them through a journey starting from a 8 weeks training programme which takes them from home cooking to confident cooks in our café.

The training programme includes:

- UK work experience
- Level 2 Food Safety and Hygiene qualification
- English speaking practice
- A foundation course in working in a community cafe

Trainees also receive 1:1 help towards your long-term employment goals including signposting to extra training, advice looking for jobs with a local employer and well being support.



They also have the option to get involved in events, monthly community dinners, private catering and making our products.

During this course, trainees learn the practical culinary skills to work in a busy cafe cooking professionally the lunch, dinner dishes, pastries and cakes, and the three courses meals served at monthly community dinners.

They also develop practical expertise and produce a range of food products to cater for a busy service in a cafe.

We started offering training at Parkside community centre in June 2023.

The classes offered an opportunity to the cooks to interact and build their language skills and confidence, feel valued and appreciated and earn an income.

Alongside the classes we offer our chefs holistic support signposting, helping them with everyday matters and a welcoming community.

Celebrating Achievements

CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENTS

Whilst each chef faces individual challenges, the key benefits which are mentioned time and time again fall into four categories:

Wellbeing

Increased confidence and self esteem
Improved mental health
Reduced social isolation

Income

Increased employability

Integration

Wider social networks and connections

Language Skills

Improved Communication skills

Volunteering at Plateful



Volunteers are the lifeblood of Plateful Café and without them we would not exist as at present we have funds to pay Kitchen Manager and chefs only.

At any time we have at least 40 volunteers helping in different areas from graphic design, website, fundraising to admin, finance, events, press and more.

Our volunteers come from all walks of life – from professionals to students and asylum seekers on placement.

We also have a long-term partnership with Lewisham College who sends students from their catering department on work placement and also Goldsmiths Students Action for Refugees who continue to collaborate on projects such as stalls at the college and also fundraising events.

Asrar



“It has been an incredible fulfilling experience, especially knowing I am supporting a charity that empowers refugees helping them gain valuable skills for a brighter future.”

Asrar (Fundraising Volunteer)

“As a mum of two children it is important to help them understand and appreciate the world around them, showing them that it’s not all about work, but also enriching our passions.”

Shahnaz (Corporate Volunteer)

Shahnaz



“My decision to volunteer with Plateful stemmed from my awareness of the disadvantages and struggles of refugees and asylum-seekers in the UK. Plateful’s aim to reduce socio-economic and ethnic inequality resonates with me deeply.”

Orla (Admin Volunteer)



“I first started volunteering at Plateful Café all the way back to when the cafe started at the tail end of 2021. I had previously volunteered with Iolanda at the Refugee Café and when Iolanda mentioned that she wanted to start a new project, I jumped at the idea! Over the last few years, Iolanda has been such an inspiring person to work alongside. It is her passion and the passion shared by so many other volunteers at Plateful Café to make London and our local communities a more friendly place for refugees that motivates me to keep volunteering at Plateful Café. My experience at this charity has meant that I’ve met so many wonderful people from a whole host of different backgrounds and that’s something I’m really thankful – long may Plateful continue!”

Tejan (Events and Social Media Volunteer)



“I love working with Plateful, working alongside the chefs and volunteers who have faced unimaginable challenges to reach and settle in the UK.”

Anne (Driver)

“I am passionate about Plateful Café vision of providing social inclusion, employment opportunities and education to refugees and asylum-seekers through the universal language of food.”

Shannon (Fundraising Volunteer)



Life after Plateful

We want Plateful to be a first step in a journey to fuller integration not the end destination.

Nahed, one of our chefs has secured employment in a local nursery but continues to work occasionally with us when we cater for events.

Hadis has finished a barista course with the Red Cross and is now looking for further work as a barista as well as started a band with fellow country people performing Iranian songs.

Yasmin now teaches Arabic at a local mosque and has also just passed her practical driving test.

Sana, Asmahan and Faten continue to attend English language classes at Lewisham College and have significantly improved their spoken English since working at the café.

Our plans for 2024

In May 2024 we moved to Star of Greenwich pub and continued to offer pop ups there as well as three course dinners featuring new cuisines.

We are now waiting on the outcome of a tender to buy the building and refurbish it. If successful we will also fit a new kitchen as at present there is not one and we need to cook elsewhere and bring the food in.

We will continue in our efforts to find a permanent place to call home and without doubt we will draw inspiration from the many supporters and followers we continue to support our work.



Our partners

Star of Greenwich pub have supported us from the start and since October 2023 we have been running pop ups.

The Migration museum and Hill Trader cafe continue to sell our jams and condiments and we would like to have new shops selling our products and promote our charity.

Could you be the next one?



“We work with the Plateful Café as they provide excellent quality food, whilst also having a huge impact on our local community. Our customers love that they can taste different types of food in our community pub - much of which they’d never normally try. The fact that it is all served professionally and with a smile, whilst also doing good is even better. We firmly believe that food can be a way to build bridges between people and that’s why we continue to partner with the Plateful Café.”

James Gasdby (Star of Greenwich)

“Plateful Café have been brilliant partners for the Migration Museum and our Migrant Makers Market. As partner organisations, our values are similar and so we are very happy to support the Plateful Café. Supporting, working with and telling the stories of refugees is a key part of the museum’s work, and so collaborating with the Plateful Café on events and products to sell in the museum shop is of great importance to us.”

Katy Clinch (Retail Manager, Migration Museum)

“Plateful Café has given some of our refugee students a chance to experience working in a catering environment. It has also provided staff at the college with opportunities to buy products made by local refugees or to have catering provided for family events.”

Pascale Herreman (Esol Lecturer, Lewisham College)

Our funders

Our work would not have been possible without grants from the trusts and foundations below.

We are all very grateful for believing in us in our first year of operation!



the
Swan Mountain Trust



London  Catalyst



platefulcafe.co.uk

Instagram @platefulcafe Facebook Plateful Cafe X PlatefulCafe
#platefulcafe

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Charity number 1202710