



annual report

2024/25

Plateful Café empowers refugees through food,
employment, and training.

In 2024, we delivered paid opportunities, shared global
cuisines, and fostered community through events, building
towards a permanent home in Lewisham.

This report highlights our impact, and growth this year.



1	Our founder
2	The importance of supporting refugees
3	About Plateful
3	Our mission
5	Our impact
7	Our volunteers
14	Our highlights of the year
15	Our training programme
16	Our online shop and pop-up events
17	Our catering and supper club
18	Our catering reviews
19	Our partnerships
21	Our team
26	Our chefs
29	Our residency at Parkside Community Centre
32	Our plans for 2025
33	A call for support





Our founder

1

Our second year of operations has been one of uncertainty, but great resilience and incredible support from our community of supporters, friends and beneficiaries. Our delicious food is a hit at pop-ups, external catering and private dining. Food has an incredible power to bring people together and break down barriers. At the dinner table, we are united by our shared humanity and love of good food. We continue to cater for dinners, events and also at markets successfully, and the impact is shown in this report.

Our cooks continue to perfect their dishes and improve skills in preparing a variety of menus for different audiences and according to strict timescales. It is reassuring to see all of them improving their skills and knowledge, and also getting jobs after their time at Plateful Café. We are also very proud to support a baker from Sudan who has set up Nubian Delights. Her cookies and cakes continue to grow in popularity, and we are delighted to see her business grow.

Despite not having a physical venue, we managed to prepare and deliver food to many locations and new and old supporters. We have been inspired by their unwavering support and the excellent reviews they have provided.

Our wonderful and hardworking team of volunteers are the driving force behind our charity, as we do not have paid staff apart from the cooks who receive the London Living wage. At any given time, we work with at least 50 volunteers, from all walks of life, of all ages and many nationalities. They continue to each give a minimum of two hours per week for a staggering 5200 hours per year.

In 2025, we forged new partnerships with Mikes Table, Spitalfields Farm, and Brixton Windmill, Linklaters Law Firm, SET Social, and continue to work with Netflix, Katten Law Firm, Pistachios in the Field, Hill Station Café, and more!

What will 2025 bring?

At the moment of writing, at the end of a very busy Refugee Week, we are proud to announce a new residency at the Hill Station café, where we will be every Wednesday evening in the summer, and also a new residency at Spitalfields Farm launched on the 18th of July with a Taste of Sudan meal and live jazz music.

It remains challenging to operate as a volunteer-led organisation without fixed-term staff members in place. I continue to dedicate myself full-time as a volunteer, working seven days a week, often over eight hours a day, managing volunteers, overseeing operations, and supporting with cooking and deliveries. Despite the demands, I'm hopeful that our ongoing fundraising efforts will soon enable us to employ a dedicated Café Manager and Trainer. We're also currently in discussions for a potential venue, and we're optimistic that it will lead to a positive outcome.





The importance of supporting refugees

2

As 2024 came to a close, we were relieved to hear the news of the fall of President Bashar al-Assad's brutal 24-year dictatorship. In 2025, we hope the regime's fall has a positive effect on the situation in Syria. However, with the UK alongside many other European countries choosing to pause decisions of asylum claims from Syrian nationals, there is certain to be growing fear and uncertainty amongst Syrian asylum seekers in the UK (Right to remain, 2024). Furthermore, Asylum seekers are prohibited from working and are provided just £7 per day by the Government to cover their basic necessities. How would you manage living on £7 a day? (Refugee Council, 2024).

The moment someone is finally granted refuge in the UK should be symbolic of the end to instability and a moment of relief and liberation. However, many newly recognised refugees face homelessness, poverty and unemployment amongst many other challenges. This is because once their asylum claim is finally accepted, just 28 days later, they must leave their Home Office accommodation and government financial support stops. This is where Plateful Café steps in. Our 8-week training programme offers more than just skills; it provides a stable foundation for refugees to rebuild their lives, overcome barriers, and work towards long-term independence. We are extremely proud of our offerings that include providing our trainees with UK work experience, a Level 2 Food Hygiene qualification, barista and catering skills, CV and interview support, and tailored 1:1 guidance toward their future employment goals. Alongside this, the chance to share their cultural heritage through food helps foster connection and integration into their new community here in South East London.

Unlike traditional top-down approaches, our training program is built from the ground up, shaped by the needs of refugees themselves. We meet people, our refugees, where they are, and walk alongside them to support them. This ethos is what sets us apart.

With over 50% of refugees unemployed even five years after arrival in the UK (compared to 4.2% in the general population) (Refugee Council, 2023), refugees must have access to this training. When trainees complete the programme, opportunities don't stop. They are invited to join our paid team of chefs, lead community dinners, or deliver cooking workshops, creating a lasting pathway to empowerment.

However, despite the strength of our training program, we are not yet able to offer a secure, consistent income to all our chefs. Without a permanent venue, we're limited in the number of paid opportunities we can provide, meaning we rely instead on market stalls, monthly dinners, and catering opportunities. While we pay the London Living Wage for every shift, we simply can't sustain regular hours for all the incredible chefs who complete our programme.

This lack of stability impacts our chefs deeply. Many are ready and eager to work, to contribute, and to build a future, but are held back by the gaps between events or lack of space to cook. A permanent venue would transform our impact. It would allow us to operate a full-time café, expand our training capacity, and offer long-term employment to more chefs. Above all, we want to offer our chefs a permanent space where they can feel confident and grow.



About Plateful



Plateful Café is a refugee-led charity which provides employment opportunities to refugees and brings together our community through the love of food. Plateful Café was set up in December 2022 by our founder Iolanda Chirico with the mission to empower refugees to obtain mainstream employment in the catering industry. We work with a vast range of creative refugees who share dishes from their home country and are paid London Living Wage to bring them to the public.

They are provided with tailored training to expand their existing culinary skills alongside building vital skills for the workplace in the UK.

Our mission

Our vision: A community where everyone, regardless of their journey, finds belonging, dignity, and purpose through the unifying power of food and creativity.

Our Mission: To empower refugees by providing meaningful employment opportunities in a welcoming café environment, fostering community connections, breaking down barriers, and celebrating diverse cultures through the shared language of food.

Our values:

① Inclusion

We believe everyone deserves to be welcomed, regardless of their background or circumstances. Without our diverse community, Plateful Café would not be the vibrant, unique place it is. Our charity is here to treat everyone with respect and provide opportunities that acknowledge amazing talents, skills, and humanity.

② Empowerment

We believe refugees deserve meaningful work, skills development, and opportunities for self-expression. This is why we are proudly a real-living wage provider for our talented chefs. We also empower refugees to become artists, artisans and more! When these products are sold at our events, the creator receives the full 100% of the profits from the sale.

③ Community

At the core of our charity is the community. Our refugees, volunteers, local community and you all make this possible! We believe that sharing cultural heritage, food, stories, and traditions can build bridges between diverse groups, foster relationships, and reduce isolation.







Our volunteers

7



Tejan

My name is Tejan Pereira. I am 25 years old and live in south London. I've been volunteering at Plateful Café since its inception in 2022.

I volunteer at Plateful Café because I'm inspired by its mission to empower local refugees through food. Through my three years at the café I've met such fantastic people – both refugees and volunteers who are all committed to making our community a more inclusive and delicious place!

In my spare time I'm a keen runner and have recently taken up laying tennis and, in turn, putting all of south London's green spaces to use! Other than that, I work for an urban planning tech start-up in my day job and I'm a keen food and music lover which makes Plateful Café a good fit!



Mateo

Hi! I'm Mateo and I work as a volunteer filmmaker for Plateful Café. I started working for Plateful last summer just after I had finished my Master's Degree and was keen to do some filmmaking (I'd studied film and journalism at Uni).

I saw the role for volunteer filmmaker advertised online, and since joining everyone has been extremely nice and friendly to me and it's been great to help out where I can (and also to try some of the delicious food!)

I really respect Plateful's mission and the amount of work that its volunteers put into making it a successful charity. Having left education and not really knowing what to do with myself, being able to volunteer at Plateful was a fantastic opportunity to broaden my horizons.

I have recently started a job at a music venue in marketing/social media/events management. I am certain my work at Plateful – where I was able to develop my skills and gain hands-on practical experience – was the main reason for my being hired.

Overall, it's been great to volunteer at Plateful and I wish to continue to do so well into the future!



Our volunteers

8



Zayn

I am a volunteer coordinator for Plateful Café. I manage recruitment of volunteers. In my day-to-day life I work for a university in HR.

I volunteer for Plateful Café for the thrill of making a difference to the refugees who come here. I know how traumatic and unsettling it is. My auntie and uncle were refugees from Uganda so I have second-hand experience.

Between work and charity-work I walk 10K a weekend and run 2K. I also enjoy watching crime shows and I love sport – football, tennis and horse racing. I am also learning and practicing to become a part-time football trader.



Katryn

I joined Plateful Café in December 2024 as a coordinator. I'm attracted to working with a charity that provides support for asylum and refugee people. That the charity provides food for the community is new to me.

I previously worked in contemporary dance theatre and have enjoyed world food for a long time. I'm so happy to be working with over 20 volunteers to engage and bring connectivity between all the groups and create the monthly newsletter.

I have 14 years' experience as a director for a non-profit business which includes fundraising, financial management for project-based activity working with financial income from funders and public.

I have managed and fundraised successfully with several years of professional experience in arts and cultural management. Financial management has been the core of running a business. My work has been primarily based in the not-for-profit sector. I have a great focus toward equality and inclusivity, safeguarding, equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging.



Our volunteers

9



Adeleke

I have always been passionate about using my skills and experience to create real impact in society. Volunteering at Plateful Café gave me the chance to support a meaningful cause by helping refugees and vulnerable people while also gaining valuable experience working in the UK.

Before joining Plateful Café I worked as an accountant and internal auditor at First Technical University in Nigeria. I also have experience in the banking sector, which gave me a solid background in finance and internal controls as an account support officer.

Academically, I hold a Master's Degree in Finance and Risk and a Bachelor's Degree in Finance.

When I joined Plateful Café it was a start-up. This gave me the unique opportunity to get involved from the beginning and take on a wide range of responsibilities. Unlike in a big

company where roles are more limited, I was able to learn quickly and contribute directly to the organisation's growth.

I helped set up financial systems, created monthly management reports and designed dashboards to support better decision-making. My work contributed to the café's growth from a small project into a fully functioning restaurant and helped improve its profitability and financial stability.

Overall, volunteering at Plateful Café allowed me to apply my finance background to a meaningful cause, gain practical UK experience and grow, both professionally and personally.



Our volunteers

10



Ella

I joined Plateful as a social media manager in May. Since joining, I've been supporting the promotion of events and collabs and focussing on raising awareness about the amazing impact Plateful Café is having on the local community. It's been really rewarding to help share stories and show how the work we do is making a real difference in people's lives.

I joined Plateful because the charity's mission is really close to my heart. I was interested in social media and saw this as a great opportunity to develop new skills in that area. I also recently moved to London and was hoping to find a sense of community where I can make a difference. It's been such a positive and inspiring experience to be part of a team.



Erica

Feeling frustrated by the limited government support for refugees in England, I saw volunteering with Plateful Café as a way to make a tangible difference. Along the way, I met their incredible chefs - driven individuals eager to share their love of cooking, build workplace skills, and find a sense of purpose through food.

I managed Plateful's social media, keeping their Instagram community informed about upcoming events, introducing the chefs, food and recipes from their homeland, and helping to challenge the stereotypes often attached to refugees.

I love Plateful's mission and hope they continue to thrive in supporting refugees on their journey to rebuilding their lives through meaningful work.



Our volunteers

11



Meg

I moved to London from the USA in 2019. I started volunteering with Plateful Café in the beginning of the year and it's been an incredible experience.

I've worked in marketing for the past five years and wanted a way to use my professional skill-set to help others, so when I came across this opportunity I knew it was a perfect fit!

Now I help manage the website for Iolanda and the charity, leading the team of website volunteers and making sure our site is up to scratch in terms of content, SEO, messaging and so much more.

Volunteering here has been nothing short of rewarding and I can't wait to see what the rest of the year brings.



Jo

Jo Munro has been our driver for over two years driving products and food to a number of locations and also helping at markets, pop-ups etc.

Jo is patient, hard working and very sympathetic to our cause. Without her help we would not have been able to run some events or cater. These activities require a lot of logistical and practical help which Jo continues to provide with great patience and flexibility.



Our volunteers

12



Adela

We would like to congratulate Adela Resuli for all her efforts with designing our leaflets, menus etc. For months she has worked tirelessly to create unique designs for our promotional materials, paying great attention to detail and always executing to deadline.

At very short notice and sometimes over the weekend, Adela worked on new promotional material having it ready by Monday.

Adela, thanks a lot for your flexibility, great work ethic and professionalism. It continues to be a great pleasure working with you!



Enxhi

Enxhi Lami is our Treasurer and has been with Plateful Café since the start.

She has set up all our financial systems and procedures and continues to train and support our finance volunteers. She is responsible for cashflow, budgets, management accounts and at the end of the year she prepares the accounts which are then sent to the Auditor for independent examination.

She has worked tirelessly over the past two years and continues to give at least two hours per week to upload the monthly income and expenditure on Free Agent.

Enxhi is a qualified accountant and we are privileged to have her on board!





Our highlights of the year

14

Community Champions

Plateful café was delighted to be voted members and associates of Lewisham Council as a community champion in the community/faith group category which recognises the work we do for the refugee community.

The Albany

In June 2024, we proudly delivered our biggest catering event to date at The Albany for Lewisham Council's Refugee Week Sanctuary Celebration, a powerful event for our chefs and community. As the UK's first Borough of Sanctuary, Lewisham welcomed hundreds to honour the contributions of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers and thus is the perfect place for a base. It was a joy to serve food that told stories, sparked connection, and celebrated the spirit of sanctuary.

Pullens Festival 2024

Pullens Festival 2024 marked our biggest festival participation to date and was a true highlight of the year. Held on 31 August, the event brought together music, art, poetry, workshops and community spirit. We had the opportunity to serve a well-received menu of hot food while also showcasing and selling our artisan jams, condiments and sweets made by our refugee chefs. It was a great day of community and culture.





Our training programme

15

We recruit out of work refugees who have a passion for home cooking and take them through an eight-week training programme which takes them from home cooks to confident cooks in a professional 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 café

Trainees also receive 1:1 help towards their 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 the making of our products.

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

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

We began offering training at Parkside Community Centre in June 2023 to give our cooks the opportunity to build confidence, gain hands-on experience with professional kitchen equipment, and learn how to prepare and serve dishes in a commercial setting. The programme also included online training in food hygiene and allergen awareness, as well as barista skills. To support English language development, we provided one-to-one English conversation sessions throughout the course.

Alongside the training, we provide holistic support for our chefs, including assistance with everyday challenges, and a warm, welcoming community where they feel valued and supported.





Our online shop and pop-up events

16

At Plateful Café, a key chain of our income and marketing is bringing our mission to life through our products. These are sold on our online shop at platefulcafe.co.uk and at local markets.

Each product we sell, whether a hand-knitted product, or a unique piece of artwork, is lovingly crafted by our community of refugees. It shows their skills, traditions and often through their artwork, their stories.

Our preserved foods are a customer favourite, especially our range of imaginative, flavour-packed jams that always have repeat customers. Markets are an especially joyful time for us, allowing us to meet new people, share our story, and invite customers to connect. And, when the holidays come around, we offer bespoke, seasonal products that make perfect gifts and add a meaningful touch to the festivities.





Our catering and supper club

17

Whether it's a wedding, office event, or an intimate dinner at home, Plateful Café brings unforgettable food and purpose to every occasion. Our catering service prioritises beautifully presented meals, and dishes rooted in the cultural heritage of our incredible refugee chefs. We regularly host catered event including Community Dinner Fundraisers and Dinners with live music which bring the community together and spread the joy of supporting our mission.

In January, we had the joy of catering two incredibly special occasions that marked exciting milestones for Plateful Café. We hosted our very first wedding reception for the wonderful Anne-Marie and Gids and, we also helped Clare celebrate her birthday in style, serving up a delicious spread that made the evening truly memorable.

In February, we launched our collaborative supper club with Mike's Table, held at the iconic Brixton Windmill. This one-of-a-kind event brought together 36 guests to enjoy a vibrant Sudanese-inspired vegetarian feast, live jazz by musicians Rudi Creswick and Kaidi Akinnibi, and heartfelt hospitality. Our talented refugee chefs from Plateful Café, Maysoon, Manizha and Bahara, served up samosas, koshari, and a stunning Valentine's cake, while Mike's Table co-chefs Andi and Simon complemented the menu with a sweet potato, coconut and chilli soup, and vegetable tagine. The collaborative menu showcased the creativity and skill of everyone involved, with guests eager to try every dish. The evening also featured a joyful raffle with handmade gifts from Brixton Windmill and Plateful Café, and a pop-up shop selling artisanal refugee-made goods. All proceeds supported Plateful Café's mission to empower refugee chefs with fair pay, training, and opportunities in hospitality.

In May, we proudly launched our brand-new Supper Club initiative, kicking off with a special private fundraising dinner in a warm Brockley home. On March 29th, 18 guests gathered around a table to enjoy a lovingly prepared Iranian vegetarian feast, cooked by one of our talented chefs. The evening raised over £700 in support of our mission to empower refugees through food and hospitality.





Our catering reviews

18

Partnering with Refugee Cafe is a true privilege. Their work not only supports people rebuilding their lives but also brings our team closer to different cultures and stories. For our customers, it's a chance to enjoy authentic dishes from around the world. It's a beautiful exchange – food, culture, and community all coming together.

Jacqui Shimidzu
Hill Station Café CIC

Plateful were INCREDIBLE from start to finish. Amazing menu, wonderful flexibility to deliver what I wanted for my 50th birthday party, unbelievably tasty food, generous portions, very reasonably priced, delivered to our door – AND a spectacular birthday cake, literally the cherry on the icing on the cake of a fabulous, memorable birthday. We couldn't have asked for more. THANK YOU!

Simon

The food from Plateful Cafe was a huge hit with everyone. Meaningful (and affordable) for us to be supporting this amazing cause.

Elizabeth
Mayor of London, Violence Reduction Unit





Our partnerships

19

Maysoon Mohammed, Nubian Delights

Hello, I'm Maysoon, founder of Nubian Delights. My love for baking began in Sai (Nubba land north Sudan), where I learned from my grandmother that baking is about more than just sweets – it's about sharing love, memories, and tradition.



I came to the UK to build a better future for my family and to follow my passion. Starting over in a new country wasn't easy, but it gave me the chance to turn my dream into a business. Working with Plateful Café has been a truly uplifting experience for me.

As a new business starter, I was struggling to find customers and promote my work. Being part of Plateful Café gave me so much more than just kitchen space – it gave me support, encouragement, and real opportunities. They invited me to take part in the Mike's Table event where I had the honour of presenting my bakes alongside professional chefs. It was a big moment for me and helped me believe in myself even more.

Plateful Café also encouraged me to join a number of local events, which made a real difference. I began to meet new people, gain confidence, and reach potential customers – many of whom were referred to me through the café. These experiences pushed me to challenge myself and created even better products, because I wanted to make them proud. Their belief in me and my mission – that everyone deserves a sweet treat – has helped shape the growth of Nubian Delights in the most beautiful way.

Katya Griffin, Lewisham Borough of Sanctuary network



Plateful Café is a valued partner in the Lewisham Borough of Sanctuary network.

Lewisham Council was delighted to be able to support Plateful Café's work through the Borough of Sanctuary 2025 small grant of £1,500.

The grant enabled the organisation to offer a free Refugee Week community meal, offering employment and work experience to refugee chefs and offering an opportunity for Lewisham's communities to socialise and learn about each other.

Plateful Café's work exemplifies what being a place of sanctuary is all about: it enables people seeking sanctuary to lead, to use their existing skills, develop new ones and to rebuild their lives; it fosters a sense of community, solidarity and belonging.





Our team

21

Our trustee board of all refugees:

Esmat Keshavarz

Esmat brings 29 years of experience in education, having served as a teacher, principal, and high school education counsellor in Iran. At Plateful Café, she shares not only her deep educational expertise but also her passion for arts and crafts, enriching our community with creativity.

Maysoon Mohammed

Maysoon is the proud founder of Nubian Delights, a vibrant bakery business offering cakes, mini cakes, cupcakes, and biscuits with a unique Sudanese twist. Backed by a degree in Business Management, she combines her entrepreneurial skills with a passion for baking to bring bold flavours and beautifully crafted treats to the community.

Hafiza Ayesha Syeda (Co-treasurer)

Hafiza brings over 20 years of experience in accounting and risk assessment across Pakistan and the UK. An Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) member with a BSc (Hons) in Applied Accounting, she plays a vital role as Co-Treasurer, helping us with financial transparency at Plateful Café.

Enxhi Lami (Co-Treasurer)

Enxhi is also a qualified ACCA member with a strong academic background in finance. She holds an MSc in Global Finance (Distinction) from the University of Westminster, London, and a BSc in Finance and Banking (Highest Honours) from the European University of Tirana, Albania. As Co-Treasurer, Enxhi brings impactful financial advice to Plateful Café.

Andy Rowland

Andy brings extensive leadership experience and a strong track record in both strategic and operational management. With a deep commitment to social impact, he has led enterprises through times of growth and crisis, always with a focus on community engagement. His dedication to an empowerment ethos makes him a valued member at Plateful Café.

Iolanda Chirico (Founder)

Iolanda has over 30 years of experience in the charity sector, dedicated to supporting refugees and creating pathways to inclusion. She is the founder of three impactful initiatives—Action for Refugees in Lewisham, Refugee Café, and Plateful Café—all rooted in her unwavering commitment to supporting refugees. Through her leadership, countless refugees have found opportunities, support, and a sense of belonging.



Our team

22

Our creators:

At Plateful Café, we're proud to support not only refugee chefs but also talented artists from displaced communities. Many of the artworks we showcase and sell are deeply personal expressions and portray stories of loss, resilience, identity, and hope. For the artists, creating this work can be an emotional journey, often rooted in difficult experiences and memories.

Supporting these artists is about providing a platform for creativity as a form of healing and empowerment.

Javad Karimi

I'm 24 years old and was born in Afghanistan, but when I was young my family took us from our home to seek refuge in Iran.

My family's living conditions were very difficult in Iran because we were living there as refugees. Therefore, we were not supported like the local people. Many resources were not available to us and I was prohibited from studying.

I've loved painting since I was a child and for as long as I can remember I've always painted. I've always dreamed of being an artist, but also an art professor so I can give many people the education and opportunities I never had growing up.

I took the idea of this painting from the bottom of my heart.



'Mask' - acrylic paint on canvas

Nazgol Golmuradi

I am a 20 year old artist from Iran. I came to Greece when I was 17 with my father, but he was deported back to Iran not long after we arrived. I endured many hardships in Greece, both in the refugee camps and in Athens, alone without my father. Until I started painting again.

I have been interested in painting since I was a child. As long as I can remember, I always painted and even though I did not have the support from my family, for a while I even took classes and learned basic techniques. Where I am from, women do not get to choose their paths, which is one of the reasons why we came to Europe—my family wanted me to have freedoms.

I always try to express my feelings when I paint, or create more conceptual pieces about my own life or the lives of others. It is very important to me that my painting be based on reality. However, sometimes I also create fantasy paintings, which allow me to live in my imagination, and find an escape from reality sometimes. In Greece, we immigrants are deprived of our rights, and life can be hell sometimes. So, in fact, the only thing that matters to me now is to live a quiet and trouble-free life in a corner of the world. It doesn't matter to me which country I go to, the only thing that matters to me is peace. I seek peace.

My wish for every artist is to have the opportunity to express their talents and leave a positive legacy for others in the future. May your souls be brightened with our talent.



'Be Kind to Yourself'
acrylic paint on canvas



Our team

23

Our volunteers:

Without volunteers, Plateful Café wouldn't exist. Every meal we serve, every event we run, and every opportunity we create has volunteers involved at every step of the process.

They all bring their skills and time, making a huge difference!

Finance	Enxhi, Ayesha, Adeleke
Events	Amina, Lawrence, Monia, Sara, Shannon, Smriti, Tejan, Bella
Website	Alex, Alex Humphries, Richard, Tejan, Yehia, Sara
Admin	Gabriel, Lisa, Orla
Social Media	Erica, Yehia
Design	Adela, Katya
Corporate	Asrar
Fundraising	Helmut
Filmmakers	Lawrence, Mateo
Traders	Jo, Tamara, Lotte

And many others!

A word from our volunteer – Aref:

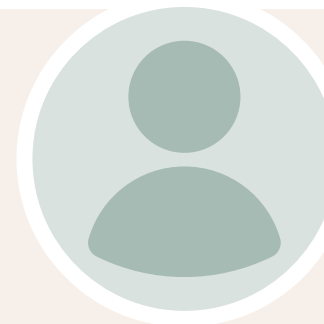
Aref is a Kurd from Afrin, Syria, he came to the UK seeking safety and the chance to rebuild a life marked by years of conflict, multiple displacement with his family, persecution, discrimination and instability. Aref arrived in the UK hoping for dignity, stability, and the opportunity to contribute.

But shortly after his arrival, the UK government announced a pause on asylum decisions for Syrians. "I had only just arrived, trying to understand the system and find my footing," he explains. "Then suddenly everything stopped, my life, my plans, all frozen."

Since that announcement in December 2024, he has lived in a constant state of limbo. "It's been mentally exhausting," he says. "You can't work, can't study properly, can't make plans. You're just stuck, waiting, with no control over your future."

The uncertainty has taken a toll. "This pause means I can't move forward with my life. I want to study, work, and contribute, but I'm not allowed. Instead, I live with anxiety every day."

Ending the pause would be life-changing. "If the government resumed decisions, I could finally start living, not just surviving. I could rebuild, focus on my goals, and give something back."





Our team

24

The possibility of being forced to return to Syria. “It’s not safe. The country is fractured. HTS, a group known for Islamist extremism, controls the central government and imposes harsh and radical rules. But many areas are outside even their control. There are warlords, armed militias, and regions with no real governance at all.”

He continues: “The danger is real. Sectarian, ethnic, political, and religious differences can still cost people their lives. kidnappings, detentions, and assassinations are common. The same old regime henchmen are still active, and many current officials are under global sanctions. Israeli airstrikes regularly hit targets inside Syria. It’s chaos, there is no safety, no justice, and no protection.”

When asked that conservatives suggested most Syrian asylum claims were related to the threat posed by Assad’s government and those people could return when it was safe to do so?

“It’s a dangerous oversimplification. The threat was never only Assad. 14 years of war destroyed the country’s structure. It’s the entire ecosystem of chaos that still exists. The country is fractured, sectarian and ethnic hostility have become more prominent, with lawless areas controlled by different armed groups. The danger is still there, just with more faces and more flags. Syria isn’t safe to return to. Not for me.”

You!

By reading this annual report, you are part of our team! Thank you for being so supportive. Want to do even more? Whether it’s donating, volunteering, or spreading the word, every action makes a difference.

Visit <https://platefulcafe.co.uk> to get involved and help us keep the mission going!







Our chefs

26

Hadis

I am Hadis, a Persian woman. I came to the UK around four years ago. I worked as a physiotherapist back home and hadn't any experience working at a café before immigration.

My first experience working in a café started at Plateful Café, where I learned to work as a chef, barista, cashier, and waitress. I learned about salesmanship and customer service.

I learned how to prepare and cook several Syrian appetisers, main courses, and desserts.

Working there was a great opportunity to connect with international people, improve my English language and increase my confidence in the work environment of a new country. I was sad to be away from my family and homeland. By holding Iranian events there, I was able to show parts of my country's culture, art, history, and food style, and this had a positive effect on changing my mood.

With the experience and resume I gained there, I was able to apply for jobs at other cafés and get accepted.

I would like to thank Iolanda for all her efforts and kindness in supporting us women to enter the workforce and earning money to have a better life. I hope she is always successful on her path and receives more support.



Faten

I am Faten from Syria. I came to the UK around five years ago. I wasn't working in Syria because I got married at a young age, so I was good at cooking.

My first experience working in a café started with Plateful Café, where I learned to work as a chef, barista and in customer service. I have become more experienced in dealing with customers and more experienced in cooking and serving dishes, especially Syrian dishes.

People used to love the dishes we used to serve, such as shawarma, kibbeh, falafel and various salads.

I got to know people from different countries, and I learned different dishes from them, and my English was improved. It was difficult to integrate here because of the language, but the coffee shop helped us a lot with that.

It was great to work with Iolanda. Maybe now I am more able to work thanks to that. Great support for refugees is a reason to help them build a successful new life in a country different from their country.

So thank you from the heart Iolanda.





Our chefs

27

Kevin

My name is Kevin. I come from Albania.

I came in to the UK three years ago and I used to work in the first year of moving here as a grocery store staff member.

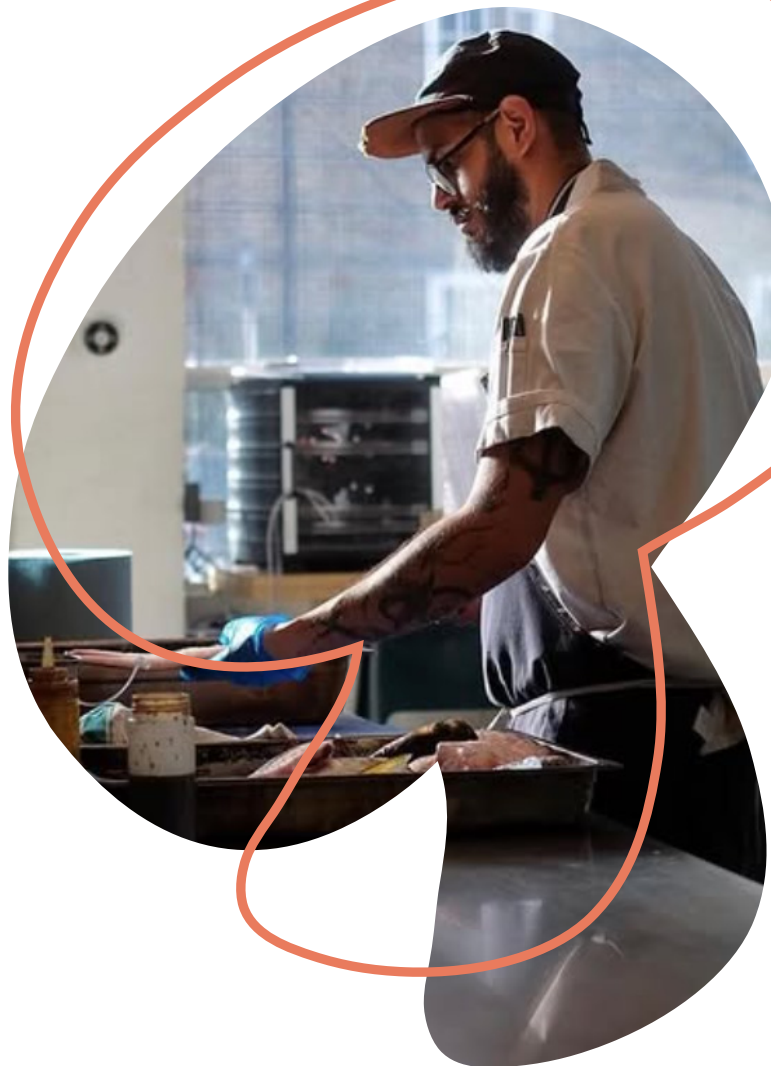
Eventually I moved out in another area that I used to work and after some research of other different job opportunities I was presented to Plateful Café.

My first experience in Plateful Café started by working as a barista, chef, cashier, cleaner, dish washer and waiter in the first months of working there. I learned how to serve to the costumers, how to talk to the customers, and how to prepare all sorts of drinks, food and desserts.

Working there was a really good opportunity to talk and meet so many international and interesting people to be able to know other cultures and food around the world.

Finally, I would like to thank Iolanda for this opportunity and her efforts and her kindness for helping us build experience for other work opportunities in the future.

I hope she is successful on her path and receives the support that she needs.







Our residency at Parkside Community Centre

29

Plateful Café was at Parkside from June 2023 to April 2024.

We started by providing hospitality training from June to August and then ran taster sessions in August for resident engagement and to develop a customer base. We officially opened to the public on the 7th of September running the Café at Parkside from Thursdays to Saturdays 9.30am-3pm offering a delicious Syrian inspired menu covering breakfast, lunch, hot/cold drinks and snacks.

We understood that the space could offer many opportunities, so we also sold a variety of our artisan products made by local refugees such as jams/condiments as well as paintings and bespoke products for festivities such as Christmas and forthcoming Valentine.

Residents were not always available during the day of the café due to work commitments, so we launched our Community Dinner programme, running two sold out events themed around Iranian cuisine with music, art and poetry.

Our goal was and is to make top quality food for affordable prices for all. Our food was popular, with 5 star reviews on Google Business, and we engaged with residents to match our pricing to their expectations.

Our programme for training refugees was also successful. We had eight refugees in our first cohort, from Syria and Iran. They were trained to work in a commercial kitchen, in using equipment safely, preparing and serving their traditional dishes in a café, obtained Food Hygiene and Allergens certificates, customer service and Barista training.

We worked with them once they graduated to find further employment. One moved on to permanent work as a chef in a local nursery and two more secured





Our residency at Parkside Community Centre



work placements in an independent café. We are assisting one chef to launch his own business selling Spirulina growing kits. Two more cooks are being assisted to re qualify in Pharmacy and physiotherapy as their qualifications are not accepted in the UK.

A total of 12 local BAME young people also volunteered in the café's front and back of the house. The young people assisted the cooks in the kitchen and also served at the front of house which improved their customer service and cooking skills.

Our mission aligned with one of the key objectives of the borough's council – defending the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, along with a network of not-for-profit organisations in this sector, offering a rich source of potential referrals and collaboration opportunities.

We developed partnerships with several local organisations including Lewisham (Catering and ESOL departments) and Goldsmiths College (Student Action for Refugees), Greenwich Cake Club, the Refugee Council, Hill Trader, Migration Museum, Sanstore, Lewisham Local, and Creative Impact Club. This network was and is very important to us. It helps us promote the café in the local area, provide activities and classes to our chefs and the community, and continue building momentum for the organisation.

In 2024, our plans shifted dramatically. We were thrilled about the venue opportunity which had a good kitchen and a spacious front of house sitting 24 people. For many of our chefs, the café wasn't just a place of work, but a vital source of routine, training, income and confidence. In the 30th April 2024 our Café closed after an 8 month pilot and its closure was deeply felt across our team and wider community. In May 2024, we looked for new opportunities. Despite the excitement around launching pop-ups and community dinners from our base

at The Star of Greenwich pub, we were unfortunately unable to progress with the venue as hoped.

Without a permanent base, we've faced significant operational challenges. We've been limited in the number of chefs we can train and employ at once, and the lack of a kitchen on-site means we're constantly navigating the logistics of preparing food off-site and transporting it, making it harder to grow. Yet despite these setbacks, our commitment to our mission has never wavered.

To overcome these hurdles, we're actively searching for a new permanent space that can house our chefs, support our operations, and serve as a true community hub. In the meantime, we've expanded into new income-generating initiatives, from catering weddings and corporate events to launching intimate private dining experiences where our chefs cook directly in people's homes. These new strands not only provide vital income but also help our chefs continue to integrate, build language skills and connect with local communities. We've also launched fundraisers to support our training programmes, with the ultimate goal of building a stronger, more stable future for those we serve.





Our plans for 2025

32



Secure our venue to open a café run by local refugees



30

Minimum number of refugees trained in the Introduction to Working in the Hospitality Sector course



5

Minimum number of trainee work placements in supporting a local café



3

Minimum number of new chefs securing employment in the catering sector



Secure funds to employ a full-time Café Manager/Trainer



Recruit a professional chef to our advisory board



2

Establish and maintain at least two new partnerships with corporates



Maintain existing residencies and create residencies in new locations



2

Recruit two new refugees to our board

In 2025, our priority is to secure a permanent venue to open our community café, run by local refugees. This space will not only serve delicious food but also act as a hub for training, events and community support. From this space, we plan to deliver our Introduction to Working in the Hospitality Sector course to at least 30 refugees, helping them build the confidence and skills needed to thrive in the industry. Following this training, we aim to secure at least five work placements in supportive local cafés and empower a minimum of three of our new chefs to move into employment in the catering sector. To support this growth, we're actively working to raise funds to hire a full-time Café Manager and Trainer, who will provide consistent guidance and mentorship to our chefs.

To ensure our work continues to grow in impact, we're strengthening our foundations. We aim to recruit a professional chef to join our advisory board, bringing valuable industry expertise, and we plan to welcome two new refugees onto our board to ensure lived experience continues to shape everything we do. We'll also focus on building new relationships by establishing at least two new partnerships with corporate supporters while maintaining and expanding our partnerships and frequent event spaces across London. With the right support, 2025 will be an exciting year for Plateful Café as we move closer to our vision of a community where refugees can flourish through employment and belonging.



A call for support

33

With the closure of our café, we're now searching for a new home to continue and grow our work. A new space will allow us to expand training, host more events, and support even more refugees in our community.

Any support is appreciated! You can donate, volunteer or get our delicious products [here](#)

Know a refugee - or are one - seeking support?

Contact us [here](#)





