

18-month mentoring programme for

Women from Refugee Resource charity to launch a food business.



PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY

ANNA RICHARDS, MAYMESSY SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Fostering social and economic equality



A LITTLE BIT ABOUT OUR COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

Over the last 18 months, Maymessy has supported a group of women in turning their business dreams into reality. In collaboration with Refugee Resource and funded by People's Health Trust, Maymessy ran a friendly and nurturing programme consisting of a series of workshops and monthly gatherings – online and in person – to help seven women integrate into their communities and set up their start-ups.



How we came together

Since 2018, the Oxfordshire-based social enterprise, Maymessy and charity Refugee Resource have been working together to help refugees, asylum seekers, and vulnerable migrants heal from trauma and facilitate their integration into Oxfordshire's diverse community.

Founded by Anna Richards, Maymessy runs a varied calendar of wellness events focused on food, gardening and outdoor activities aimed at creating a place of belonging and interaction for socially and economically disadvantaged groups and individuals. Likewise, Refugee Resource's programmes help their members overcome difficulties, support and learn from each other, upskill and become more confident to live a happier life within their community.

This shared ethos has led both organisations to work collaboratively on several programmes where Refugee Resource's members receive mentoring and attend cookery classes and wellness activities organised by Maymessy.

The success achieved by a 12-month befriending programme during the lockdown, which saw a number of Refugee Resource's women come together, share their skills, support one another and raise their confidence, has been the catalyst for bringing People's Health Trust on board and use their funding to continue to support these women in flourishing.





Your food business 18-month mentoring programme

FUNDED BY PEOPLE'S HEALTH TRUST

The "Your Food Business" programme was designed to help seven women from Refugee Resources gather the knowledge and experience needed to launch their food-related startup.

With funding from People's Health Trust, the 18-month programme encouraged the seven women to take the lead and own all the aspects of their business idea. In addition, it allowed them to meet every week, learn new skills and access a social and business network in their local communities and across Oxfordshire.

Working with women's coordinators Fatou Cessay and Jameela Shodunke from Refugee Resource, Maymessy organised fifteen workshops focused on upskilling, with classes in marketing and social media, brand design, labelling, objectives strategy and an insight into how to run a successful cake business.

Due to the Covid restrictions during the early stages of the programme, some of the workshops were online.

The in-person workshops enabled the participants to travel to Maymessy's cookery school in Oxfordshire. Located in Wantage, the converted barn and surrounding countryside offered them a safe and relaxed environment to meet regularly, learn new skills and be in a setting promoting their sense of belonging. Just travelling to the premises helped some of the women overcome low confidence when taking the bus and leaving the familiarity of their neighbourhood.

The classes were complemented by a series of practical days to support learning best practices. The women visited farmer markets like Wolvercove and community cafes such as Yellow Submarine and Childrey Stores to become familiar with the operations and health and safety side of running a food business.



These workshops were possible thanks to the support of twenty female business owners. Some worked freelance, and others kindly volunteered their time to deliver £1,800 worth of mentoring and training. Many of these women are members of the female entrepreneurs' community: DiscovHer with Kat from Sharp Fox Social, Cathy from The Bespoke Brand Designer, Ola from Luminate Portraits, Isabel from Little Red Writing Agency, Daisy from Very Vanilla, and marketing consultant Bryony Taylor Edwards among the key contributors helping with the project.

The "Your Food Business" programme has allowed these seven Refugee Resources' members, deeply affected by social and economic disadvantages, to gather the skills

and assets to set up their businesses and create strong social links between one another and their local communities. Together, they have shared and lived moments of deep connection, finding love, peace and friendship in a nurturing environment, which is vital for well-being and living life to the fullest.

Furthermore, it has immensely helped them boost their confidence. They've started to attend and participate in local events across the region. Some have been brave enough to display their own art at The Modern Art Gallery and invited the DiscovHer volunteers and Maymessy's staff to visit it.

Refugee Resource Coordinators

JAMEELA SHODUNKE

Jameela started as a participant in the "Your Food Business" programme and eventually took over from Fatou Cessay and became the new women's coordinator at Refugee Resource. In addition, Jameela founded and is a Director of Lighthouse Empowerment Space, an initiative supporting women with community therapeutic services, particularly women suffering from domestic violence from the BAME community and FGM. She is a life coach and NLP Practitioner CIC. Jameela is an exceptional businesswoman and has played a pivotal role in this programme over the last eighteen months.



Meet the mentees



MARRIAM (PAKISTAN)

TAKE AWAY BUSINESS

Mariam's dream was to set up a takeaway business and run it from her kitchen. So, in addition to the programme's workshops, we hired Mariam to help us with a few events where she made delicious samosas. The intention was to show Mariam how to cook larger quantities in a busy environment, budget and write invoices and food labels while providing her with a paid-work opportunity.

Volunteer Daisy Pratt from Very Vanilla talked Mariam through food labelling and ran a mock kitchen inspection to get her all set up. Mariam successfully passed the inspection with five stars and has her kitchen up and running.

The "Your Food Business" programme has allowed Mariam to believe in herself, building healthy self-confidence to turn her business dream into reality. As a result, Mariam is currently working in the Oxford Museum while setting up her catering business on the side. She's so eager to get started that she has already produced her logo and business cards.



“**THANK YOU, ANNA AND TEAM, FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT AND MOTIVATION. I STILL DON'T BELIEVE IT...IT'S SO KIND OF YOU REALLY APPRECIATE YOUR HELP.**” MARRIAM

TOUHIDA (BANGLADESH)



STREET-FOOD-STYLE CAFE

Touhida came to the UK with her daughter in 2003. She left Bangladesh searching for freedom and a more fulfilling life where she could realise her dreams. She talks through food and is passionate about opening a street-food-style cafe one day. She's proud of her Bengali dishes and, with the support of Oxford Community Action, has run several pop-ups at Flo Cafe, serving delicious takeaways.

The "Your Food Business" programme allowed Touhida to be proactive and find a way to cook for people and sell her authentic food. Today, she occasionally works in the kitchen of Flo Cafe, delighting its customers with her Bengali recipes. She has found it the perfect setting for getting started while she builds her business.

Volunteer Cathy from The Bespoke Brand Designer has helped Touhida with her logo and business cards.

TOUHIDAS
— BANGLADESHI KITCHEN —



BY SOPHIE CARSON



LUBNA (IRAQ)

IRAQI WOMEN'S ART AND WAR POP-UP CAFE

Lubna has come a long way since she started the programme. However, she still finds it extremely hard to be in the UK without her mother, who's in Iraq.

The workshops and social interaction have enabled Lubna to connect with her community and have the confidence to work. Today she works twice a month in the Soldiers of Oxfordshire Museum and has joined an Iraqi group, with whom she runs an Iraqi women's art and war pop-up cafe at Woodstock farmers market on the first and third Saturday of each month.



“ THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR ALL YOUR SUPPORT AND TIME AND I NEVER EVERY FORGET EVERYTHING WHAT YOU HAVE DONE WITH US. I REALLY REALLY ENJOYED EVERY MINUTE I SPEND IT WITH YOU.”



BY SOPHIE CARSON



BY SOPHIE CARSON

AZA (SUDAN)

AZA SUDANESE SWEETS

Aza likes her privacy, so she has requested we don't display her photographs. After many setbacks, she is finally ready to launch her cake business, specialising in Sudanese sweets. As she will be running it from her home kitchen, she's in the process of registering the company and getting her kitchen inspected. Aza also has designed her logo and business cards.



BY SOPHIE CARSON

“ I TRIED MANY TIMES TO DO THIS BUT HAD TO STOP BECAUSE OF LANGUAGE AND CORONA VIRUS. WANTS TO SET UP A FAMILY BUSINESS WITH FROZEN FOOD BUT DO NOT KNOW HOW TO BEGIN. WHAT ARE THE RULES IN UK?

MICHALLINE (ERITREAN)

CHILLY JAM

Michalline's dream is to make her delicious chilli jams and sell them at local Farmers' Markets.



DILBER

FOOD CATERING

Dilber has blossomed since she first came to Maymessy in 2018. At the time, she was afraid of teenage boys resulting from a nasty incident on a bus in Oxford when she first arrived in the UK. Dilber led a cookery class at Maymessy's kitchen showing fifteen students from Wellington Collage how to make Eid cookies. Not only did the experience help raise Dilber's confidence but it was also the catalyst that encouraged her to participate in other local activities. Today, Dilber is no longer scared of travelling by bus on her own. She has painted a beautiful picture in memory of her sister and displayed it at Oxford Modern Art Gallery. She volunteers at her local school and she is keen to run some charity food events. Her food is delicious, and we are so proud to see how far she's come. .



“MAYMESSY MAKES ME HAPPY. LEARNING ABOUT NEW THINGS. I HAVE LEARNT SO MUCH, AS ENGLISH IS MY SECOND LANGUAGE. I HAVE MADE VERY GOOD FRIENDSHIPS AND RELAXED IN YOUR WORKSHOPS AS VERY FRIENDLY AND FEEL STRONG. YOU ARE MY BACK.



Laying the foundation of a bright future

The "Your Food Business" programme has allowed these women to explore their potential and believe in themselves.

As a result, three of the women are in the process of setting up their individual or family businesses. The others would like to establish a collective catering enterprise, such as a regular café or event, and work in partnership. They find this initiative incredibly appealing as it offers them the security of a joint venture with shared costs, risks and responsibilities but, most crucially, because it enables them to learn from and support one another.

Therefore, these women have expressed their desire to seek additional support and training on the technical and legal aspects of setting up and managing a business partnership.

We foresee they will need help with the type of enterprise they set up, the aspects involved in opening a community cafe or running a catering service, finding a venue and hiring a coordinator.

At Maymessy, we are keen to help them make this dream a reality. Hence, we are looking for additional funding for this project to guide them through the next steps in an environment that promotes their confidence and helps them flourish in their communities.

We would welcome the opportunity to arrange a meeting to further discuss the project. Please do get in touch with anna@maymessy.com.



Thank you

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