



WAHIDA

# Impact Report

2022

Free to Feed

# Our Mission

We empower people seeking asylum and refugees to overcome barriers to social and economic inclusion in Australia through trauma-informed training, employment and psycho-social support.

We mobilise our community through the delivery of shared food experiences.



## Our North Star

PEOPLE SEEKING ASYLUM &  
REFUGEES IN AUSTRALIA LIVE  
MEANINGFUL, CONNECTED &  
PRODUCTIVE LIVES



# Introduction

Seeking protection, safety and opportunity in a land other than your own is an ancient and constant phenomenon. For some, it's a choice; for others, it is forced upon them.

The number of forcibly displaced people around the world has been steadily increasing over time. May of 2022 saw this number reach the milestone figure of 100 million people. This translates to one in every 80 people, of any and all ages, forced to flee their homes, leaving everything behind, and be absorbed by the label of a 'Refugee' or 'Asylum Seeker.'

Climate change, rapid urbanization and ongoing political instability is predicted to deeply aggravate the rate of growth of displaced people. Alarming, current trajectories predict, by the year 2050, there will be one billion forcibly displaced people living globally.

At Free to Feed, our participants tell us of the intimate and personal experiences of these phenomena in their everyday lives.

Stories of incredible resilience and bravery are matched only by stories of incredible loss. Too often, they are imbued with grief and confusion ... of no longer moving around the world as a respected Principal or Lawyer or Chef, but instead as someone that can't make eye contact or ask for directions when lost. Our participants show us daily acts of bravery and radical post-traumatic growth through their consistent appetite to learn and connect. We witness the power of playfulness as a healing agent for individuals, children and families.

In acknowledgement of the impacts of trauma, displacement and resettlement experienced by our participants, Free to Feed has created a three tiered program structure that invokes our Theory of Change. Each program is situated in the trauma-informed and strengths-based environments of our busy enterprise: the catering kitchen at the heart of our hospitality venues.

This Impact Report describes the outcomes of each program from three perspectives: Self (participant), Professional (hospitality/chef) and Clinical (psychologist). This triangulation offers powerful holistic insights.

It also celebrates Free to Feed reaching a monumental milestone in 2022: we've just surpassed \$1 million in wages to people from newly arrived communities! This, along with our alumni telling us that the impact from Free to Feed is still felt and experienced five years on, is cause for celebration.

We hope you will join us as we deepen our gaze in the creation of impactful structures that can support people from newly arrived communities, those who are here now and those that are yet to come.



# Our Impact Since 2015

**\$1,075,073**

IN PAID PARTICIPANT  
WAGES

**2,088**

CLASSES & EVENTS  
HOSTED

**11,170 hrs**

OF PAID LEADERSHIP  
TRAINING

**40,142 hrs**

OF PAID HOSPITALITY  
TRAINING

# Identification of challenges impacting our cohort

## LACK OF SOCIAL COHESION

People seeking asylum and refugees experience barriers to feeling connected and a part of Australian society due to:

- Isolation and dislocation from community
- Mental health challenges, such as recovery from trauma
- Language & cultural barriers

## LACK OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

People seeking asylum and refugees experience barriers to finding, securing and maintaining employment in Australia including due to:

- Visa uncertainty
- Stigmatisation / discrimination
- Career disruption
- Poverty and disadvantage

## STIGMA REMAINS

- The lack of opportunities for the broader Australian community to connect with refugees and people seeking asylum can create the conditions for discrimination, bigotry and policy paralysis
- Islamophobia and fear mongering tactics continue to persist in sections of the Australian community and media

## CURRENT SERVICES DO NOT MEET COMPLEX NEEDS

- Services are not tailored to complex mental health needs
- Lack of funding impedes collaboration and prevents effective service delivery
- Demand outweighs supply of services
- Services are not culturally appropriate: Anglo-centric frameworks are used and ineffective



# Demography

SINCE 2018

Amazigh  
Angolan  
Assyriac  
Bangladesh  
Bohri  
Chinese  
Colombian  
Egyptian  
Eritrea  
Georgian  
Hazara (Afghan)  
Indian  
Indonesian  
Iraqi  
Kenyan  
Kurdish  
Lebanese  
Malaysia  
Nepal  
Oromo  
Pakistani  
Palestinian

Papua New Guinea  
Pashtun (Afghan)  
Persian  
Polish  
Punjab  
Rohyngan  
Somali  
Sri Lanka (Sinhalese)  
Sudanese  
Syrian  
Tamil  
Turkish  
Uganda  
Ukraine  
Venezuelan  
Vietnamese

38

UNIQUE CULTURAL  
GROUPS HAVE BEEN  
REPRESENTED IN TOTAL

86%

OF OUR PARTICIPANT  
COMMUNITY IDENTIFY AS  
FEMALE

18 - 66

AGE RANGE OF  
PARTICIPANTS IN OUR  
PROGRAMS



# Programs Overview

Free to Feed delivers three unique trauma-informed programs designed specifically for and with people seeking asylum and refugees.

In addition, Free to Feed provides participants across each program wraparound support, akin to a warm hug.



## WRAPAROUND SUPPORT

- regular check ins
- welfare/ wellbeing referrals
- post-program support
- cultural celebrations

## PRE-EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Friendly, warm and inviting pre-employment learning and training opportunities held in a safe, inviting & beautiful space.

## COMMERCIAL COOKING TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Work experience and accredited training in a commercial kitchen alongside professional chefs & hospitality experts.

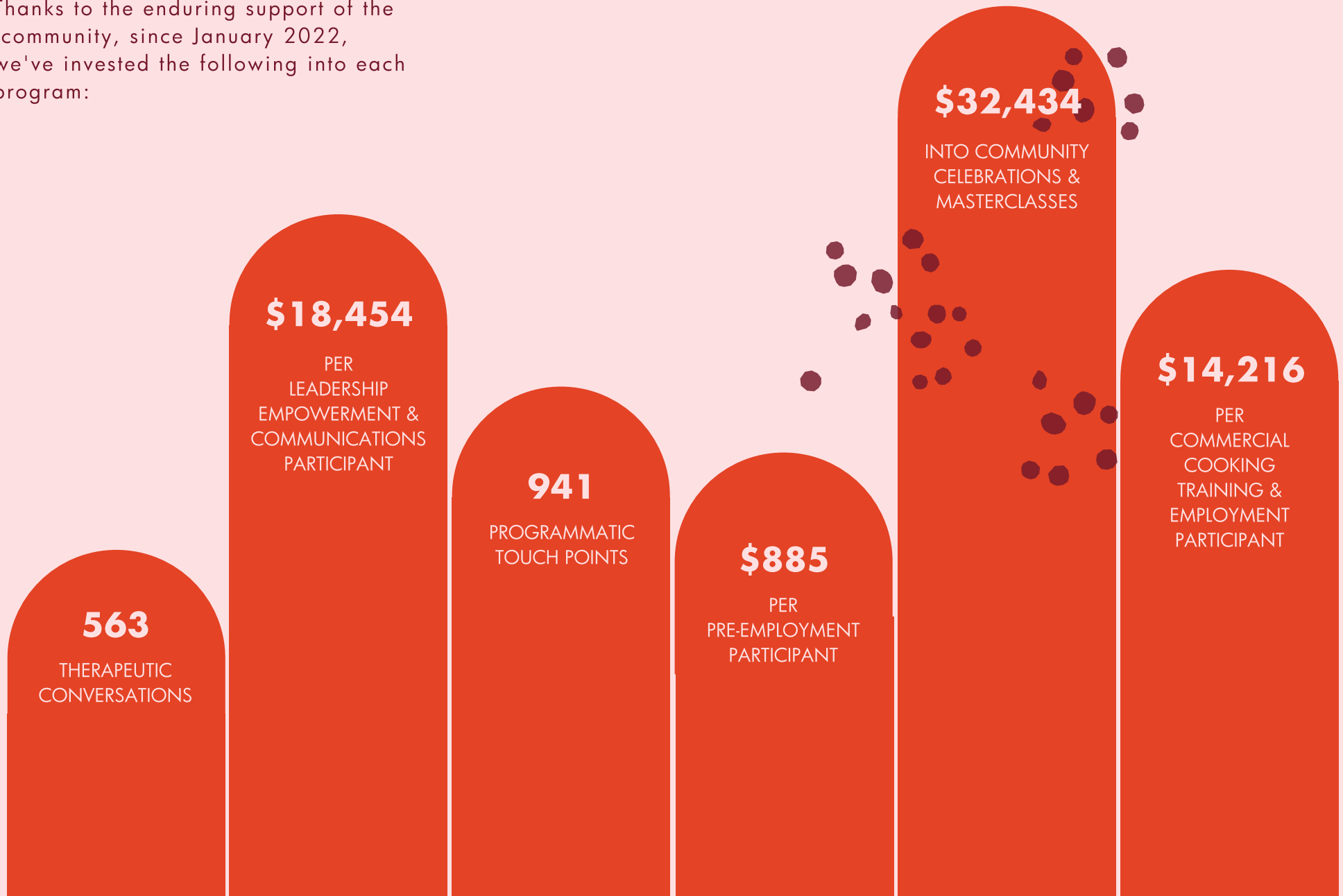
## LEADERSHIP, COMMUNICATIONS & EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

Professional development, participant-led story & recipe sharing, and skills activation through delivery of shared food experiences.



# Investment in our Programs

Thanks to the enduring support of the community, since January 2022, we've invested the following into each program:



# Our Participants in 2022

\*individuals that have been progressed from the Refugee humanitarian pathway to citizenship



# PRE-EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM



**48**

PEOPLE HAVE COMPLETED  
THIS PROGRAM, FROM  
MARCH TO SEPTEMBER  
2022

**747**

TOTAL TRAINING  
HOURS RECEIVED



# The Program

We have been enriched in launching our Pre-Employment program stream in 2022. Engagement with the needs of community members, highlighted the need for a culturally sensitive employment readiness pathway that provided onsite work experience to support participants to 'taste test' the hospitality industry.

In collaboration with Box Hill Institute's Community Adult Education department we have hosted two pre-accredited streams, 'Ready for Hospitality' and 'New Pathways', providing soft and technical skills, supporting job search independence and career planning.

"IT IS VERY UPSETTING LOOKING FOR WORK & WHEN I DO ONLINE ENGLISH CLASSES AT HOME ALONE & AM ON THE INTERNET AT HOME & READING BOOKS, I BECOME SAD & FRUSTRATED. COMING HERE & GETTING THIS PROGRAM, LEARNING THINGS, MEETING GOOD PEOPLE AND WORK EXPERIENCE HAS GIVEN ME HOPE TO FIND A JOB."

**Farah**

PEER BASED  
LEARNING &  
LINGUISTIC  
SUPPORT

10 WEEK COURSE  
LENGTH IN HYBRID  
LOCATIONS,  
CATERED BY FREE TO  
FEED

BRIEF INTERVENTION  
CASE MANAGEMENT &  
PSYCHOSOCIAL  
REFERRALS

PRE-ACCREDITED  
LEVEL CURRICULUM &  
CERTIFICATE FROM  
BOX HILL TAFE

WORK EXPERIENCE  
SHIFTS AT FTF

**44%**

OF THIS COHORT  
ARE OVER 56  
YEARS OLD

**77%**

HAVE HAD >10  
YEARS PRIOR  
PROFESSIONAL  
WORK EXPERIENCE  
IN HOSPITALITY,  
EDUCATION &  
TEXTILES

**82%**

OF THIS COHORT  
HAVEN'T BEEN  
ABLE TO GET A  
CONSISTENT JOB  
SINCE THEY  
RESETTLED IN  
AUSTRALIA

# Outcomes

**100%**

OF PARTICIPANTS INCREASED THEIR KNOWLEDGE & CONNECTION TO MELBOURNE DURING THE COURSE

**100%**

OF THIS COHORT FELT WARM & CONNECTED WHEN AT FREE TO FEED

**48%**

INCREASE IN INDIVIDUALS KNOWING STRONGLY THE JOBS THAT THEY CAN APPLY FOR IMMEDIATELY

**83%**

OF OUR COHORT REPORT LEARNING NEW SKILLS RELEVANT FOR THE WORKPLACE

**73%**

OF THIS COHORT HAVE SECURED JOBS OR ENGAGED WITH STUDY DURING OR POST THIS PROGRAM

**83%**

OF OUR COHORT IDENTIFY THAT THEY HAVE IMPROVED THEIR EMPLOYMENT READINESS; INCLUDING ENGLISH FOR THE WORKPLACE & HOW TO ACCESS JOB SEEKING SUPPORT

# Case Study

## CONTENT WARNING: MENTION OF SUICIDE, TREAD GENTLY

Ava, her husband and teenage son journeyed from Iran to Australia in 2013 on a rickety boat, following escalating physical assault by the religious police. Providing a safe life for her son, who was conceived through a difficult IVF journey, was Ava's complete purpose and impetus in seeking safety in Australia.

Today, Ava reflects that she believes her family never truly recovered the precipitating events and trauma experienced on their boat journey.

Soon after arriving, physical health difficulties prevented Ava and her husband from connecting to society. They both spent significant time in hospital, having medical investigations for things they didn't truly understand, not knowing they could even ask questions in their appointments.

Whilst this was occurring, Ava's son started experiencing symptoms of depression that were escalating

quickly. Tragically, this progressed to her son committing suicide in 2020 when he was 19 years of age.

On first meeting Ava, she carried her grief and pain openly and described her days being unending and isolated.

Due to her life experience she had not socialised much in English and wanted to work someday. Ava's goals and needs aligned her with our Pre-Employment program.

On joining the program, Ava met with many women who had similar stories to hers. Upon connecting, Ava and the other women were able to hold each other in their grief, whilst also acknowledging the personal strengths that had gotten them so far.

Ava attributed developing a deeper sense of belonging in Melbourne to her time in the program, including various excursions to the Box Hill Institute, CERES and the Immigration Museum. This momentum enabled her to complete a work experience shift in the Free to Feed catering kitchen and

commence a relationship with a Jobs Victoria mentor.

At the end of the program, Ava reported that all the connection and learning in the Pre-Employment program warmed her heart and interested her mind so that she forgot about her grief on those days. She also decided she would love to work in hospitality.

Post-program, Ava has enrolled in another pre-employment course and is working with her Jobs mentor to find work.





**COMMERCIAL  
COOKING,  
TRAINING &  
EMPLOYMENT  
PROGRAM**



SHADI & PETER



# The Program

Our Commercial Cooking Training and Employment (CCTE) program fills our North Fitzroy HQ with an atmosphere full of playful creativity and a hum of the pursuit of mastery.

It's a transitional employment program whose design is based off an intermediary labour market model that is constructed to support individuals with significant barriers to work into mainstream employment.

ONE ON ONE SUPPORT  
FROM QUALIFIED MENTAL  
HEALTH & SOCIAL WORK  
PROFESSIONALS

A CERTIFICATE 3 IN  
COMMERCIAL  
COOKERY DELIVERED  
ONSITE & FOR FREE!

ACCESS TO  
COMMUNITY SUPPORT  
& A CULTURAL  
CELEBRATION  
CALENDER

12 - 24 MONTHS  
EMPLOYMENT IN OUR  
COMMERCIAL  
KITCHEN



SHAYAMA

# Outcomes

## SELF

Commercial Cooking Training and Employment participants reported that the employment program had contributed to significant improvement in their:

- Sense of confidence
- Self-esteem and self-acceptance
- Identity growth and affirmation
- Confidence to share culture
- Technical cookery skills

## CLINICAL

Clinical assessments showed that CCTE participants have improved in:

- Increased awareness of mental state and wellbeing
- Increased ability in emotional regulation
- Decreased PTSD symptoms shown in the workplace
- Increased average daily mood

## PROFESSIONAL

Kitchen staff reported participants had shown significant improvement in:

- Confidence in workplace communication and English
- Contribution to workplace culture
- Driving own learning needs
- Competency in a commercial kitchen, having commenced the program with no formal training, now on track to graduating with a Cert III Commercial Cookery qualification

66%

IDENTIFIED A SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT IN TECHNICAL KITCHEN SKILLS & WORKPLACE IMPROVEMENT

100%

OF CCTE PARTICIPANTS ARE CONFIDENT THEY WILL GET A JOB THAT THEY ENJOY POST-PROGRAM

100%

OF PARTICIPANTS REPORT AN INCREASE IN PERSONAL SECURITY & STABILITY FROM CCTE



# Case Study

Badia, a mother of two, after being pursued by ISIS, moved to Australia from Iraq on a refugee visa in 2018. Badia, her 5 siblings and elderly parents had been separated globally in the urgent need to seek safety.

When we met Badia in 2021, her English was limited to greetings, a warm expression and Google Translate. She had been confined to her home in the deep North of Melbourne for 3 years.

Badia's goal was to work in an English speaking kitchen in order to achieve her dream of starting her own business offering Iraqi food to Australians.

Despite her English, her palpable ambition and obvious skill was verified by the Free to Feed chefs on her kitchen trial where she then commenced the CCTE program. Through her 12 months with us, Badia's work ethic has been exceptional. She was studying English 4 hours every night to practice diligently at work. She participated

deeply in the Cert 3 in Commercial Cookery, quickly learning the European techniques that feature in Australian cookery. Badia's excellence was clear in the kitchen and collaborated with chefs to have many dishes featured on Free to Feed's catering menu.

Badia began to lead in the kitchen, teaching others from other cultural backgrounds the secrets to techniques of the Iraqi kitchen. Her maternal nature shone as she took younger members of the kitchen under her wing, to provide them with direction and nurture.

Badia completed the program and is working full time in a highly regarded cafe in the inner North of Melbourne and speaking English confidently with the team.

She is currently saving all her money to sponsor her younger siblings to live in Australia however the dream of her own business is close to the surface. We're so proud of Badia, but no one's as proud of her as Badia is of herself.

"FREE TO FEED GAVE ME THE LIGHT IN MY HEART AND OPPORTUNITIES TO BELIEVE I COULD GET THERE AND I DID. I WILL NEVER FORGET WHAT I LEARNT AND WHAT THE OPPORTUNITY GAVE ME."

**Badia**



# LEADERSHIP , EMPOWERMENT & COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM

9 + MONTHS OF  
LEADING COOKING  
CLASSES &  
EXPERIENCES OF  
CULTURAL EXCHANGE

SUPPORT FROM  
QUALIFIED MENTAL  
HEALTH & SOCIAL WORK  
PROFESSIONALS

6 WEEKS OF PAID  
TRAINING IN  
PROFESSIONAL RECIPE &  
MENU DEVELOPMENT

ACCESS AND  
EXPOSURE TO MEDIA  
OPPORTUNITIES &  
PUBLIC STORYTELLING

DESIGNED FOR  
RECENTLY ARRIVED  
INDIVIDUALS WITH A  
SENSE OF VOCATION  
AND CULTURAL  
ADVOCACY

WAHIDA



# Outcomes

## SELF

Participants subjectively reported improvement in the following areas:

- An high sense of wellbeing that was able to be maintained at work and at home
- Improved English and communication skills
- Increased feelings of safety in Melbourne
- Positive feelings about plans for the future

## CLINICAL

Clinical mental health assessments showed the following results:

- Increased range of experiencing positive emotion
- Evidence of positive coping strategies
- Increased articulation of strengths and reflection of growth
- Increased reports of meaningful every day life

## PROFESSIONAL

Performance reviews indicate:

- Increased confidence in leadership and voice
- Increased ability to manage personal boundaries
- Increased ability to manage stressful situations
- Increased positive work behaviours

"THE STRENGTH OF COMMUNITY AND CARE AT FREE TO FEED GAVE ME SO MUCH GOODNESS AND CARE THAT MADE ME FEEL ALIVE AGAIN."

### Dyah, case study





# Case Study

Dyah was born in a close knit Javanese family in Malaysia. She loved exploring her creativity through baking, photography and cooking traditional Javanese recipes next to her father.

When she was a teenager, Dyah's responsibilities changed at home when her Mother had a stroke. She became the breadwinner and carer for the family. This involved being a door to door salesperson, caring for her mother and for her younger brother. Needing to provide more money for the family Dyah trained and commenced working at a bank. Due to ongoing gendered persecution and a lack of safety, Dyah sought safety in Melbourne in 2017.

Dyah commenced work in a bank, however faced constant sexual harassment from her clients, no protection from her employer and ultimately a dismissal from this process. Experiencing significant mental distress and being unsure of her rights, Dyah decided to leave the banking industry, questioning if she

would ever be safe in her life. Acknowledging the freedom she felt through cooking and the flexibility of the hospitality industry, Dyah joined Free to Feed's program.

Dyah commenced her cooking classes empowered by the wraparound support of the Free to Feed team. She now notes that re-engaging with the Australian community from a position of strength and cultural leadership provided healing for her previous experiences at the bank. Dyah reflected that the opportunities for skill development, warmth of community and wellbeing support created a permanent shift to how she viewed herself, her skills and hope for her quality of life.

Dyah reports that the impact of this experience on her and the development of technical skills has created a long lasting impact. She applied the technical skills and mental attitude to secure a role as Manager and Lead Trainer at a social enterprise café in Ballarat that supports newly arrived women.

Invigorated by creating visibility of Javanese culture, Dyah also runs her

own small business, selling traditional chilli pastes at a local farmers' market.

Dyah reflects that, through Free to Feed, she learnt how having organised structures for newly arrived communities is so vital to support safe resettlement. Motivated by this, Dyah commenced a role as Intercultural Ambassador with her local council, working to support newly arrived migrants in Ballarat to connect and support each other.

Dyah reports her life is full of meaning and connection. She is proud and hopeful of what she has created and is motivated to use hospitality as a tool to create social cohesion in her communities.



**OUR ALUMNI:  
WHERE ARE  
THEY NOW?**



# Our Alumni

Free to Feed exists as an active community, with alumni frequently engaging in our events and popping in for tea. We reached out to every participant that had been employed with us since 2017. We checked in with all previous alumni to assess for ongoing impact and feedback.

We were nourished to hear participants referring to their active felt connection to the Free to Feed community and the consistent offers of mentorship to newly arrived community members. Alumni reported the sense of belonging felt in Free to Feed was an integral safe place from where they could heal from their experiences and rebuild their lives.

Alumni reported the skills and experiences at Free to Feed supported them to access higher quality work opportunities and form positive connections with the Australian public.

**100%**

OF OUR ALUMNI  
CONSIDER  
THEMSELVES PART  
OF THE FTF  
COMMUNITY &  
WISH TO  
CONTINUE  
ENGAGING IN FTF  
EVENTS

**89%**

OF OUR ALUMNI  
FEEL THE  
ONGOING IMPACT  
& BENEFIT OF  
COMMUNITY  
CONNECTEDNESS

**44%**

DEVELOPED SKILLS  
AT FTF THAT THEY  
ARE USING IN THEIR  
CURRENT CAREERS

**55%**

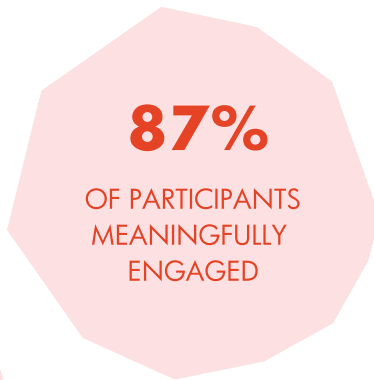
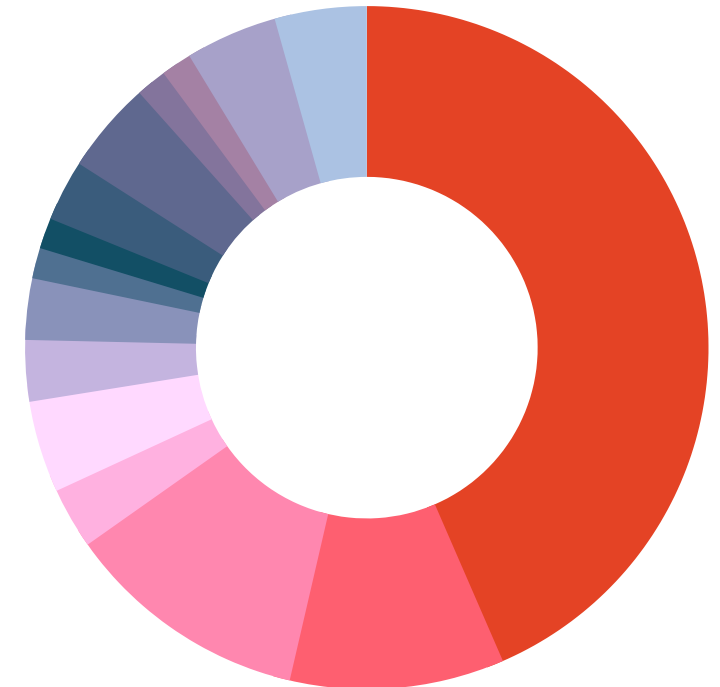
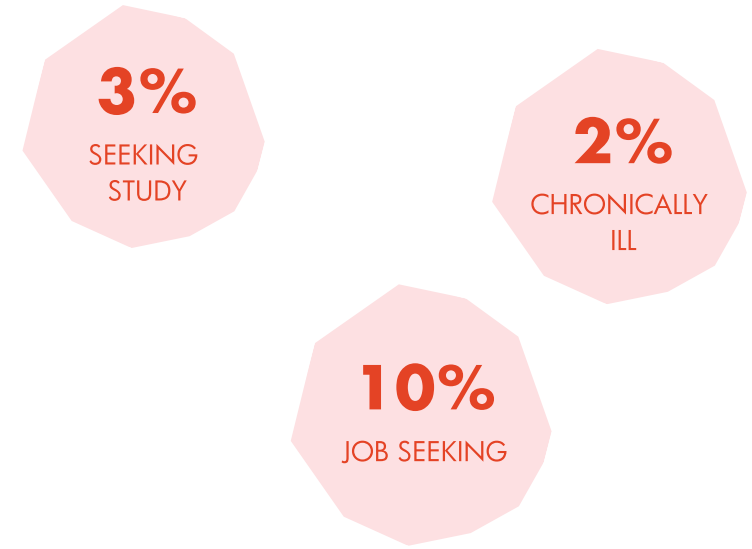
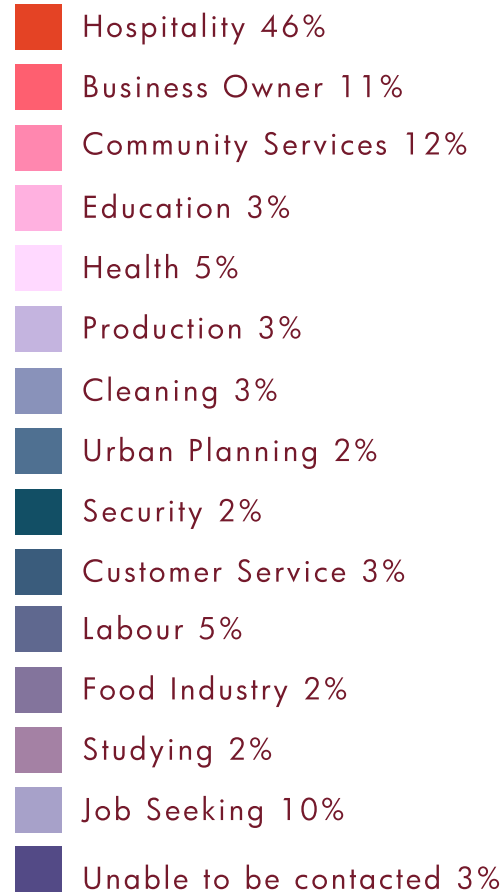
IDENTIFIED THEIR  
TIME AT FTF AS A  
POSITIVE  
RESETTLEMENT  
EXPERIENCE WITH  
ONGOING IMPACT  
ON THEIR DAY TO  
DAY LIVES



# Post-program Employment

Free to Feed is a hospitality based social enterprise. We are curious to see the industries where our participants end up choosing to work.

We asked 96 of our programmatic alumni, that employed or enrolled in our programs, and here's where they're at...



# Case Study

## CONTENT WARNING: MENTION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE, TREAD GENTLY

Yashal is a mother of two teenagers, seeking asylum due to threats on her family's life stemming from political unrest in Pakistan. On arrival to Australia, Yashal's marriage became turbulent and she became victim and survivor of family violence as well as a single mother.

When Yashal came to Free to Feed in 2019, she was navigating being a sole carer and bread winner, whilst moving between friends' couches and re-learning what it means to be safe.

An excellent cook and storyteller, Yashal commenced cooking classes with Free to Feed, providing powerful advocacy for the resilience and strength of Pakistani women.

Four years on, Yashal reflects that the communication skills that she developed at Free to Feed, and having people enjoy her food, was a fundamental step in her recovery and healing. She also began to develop

insights for her dream catering micro-enterprise ... which are ongoing today. She reflects that this positive feedback from the Melbourne community gave her the confidence and hope to rebuild her life here in Australia.

In 2022, Yashal reflects with confidence on her ability to be a single mother and that she is deeply working in her strengths. Her now teenage children are thriving academically and engaged with their local communities.

She is living in stable housing and is in the final month of a Certificate 4 in Community Services, which she manages whilst working as a catering cook and volunteering in two different community organisations.

Yashal intends to champion the intersectional voice for those with Lived Experience in Family Violence post completion of her studies.

Yashal notes with hindsight that her time at Free to Feed was at one of the most fragile times in her life, but it gave her the tools and opportunities to transform her situation.

"FREE TO FEED WAS SOO HELPFUL FOR ME, I FELT WARM AND SAFE AND THAT I HAD A VOICE THAT PEOPLE WANTED TO LISTEN TO. PEOPLE ENJOYED MY FOOD AND ENJOYED ME! THE LOCAL EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE HAS HELPED ME FIND MY PLACE HERE IN AUSTRALIA... WHICH IS TO USE MY EXPERIENCE TO HELP OTHERS"

**Yashal**



**Meet  
Yashal**

Free to Feed