

A letter from Taghreed Ibrahim, Project Feast Alumna

How did Project Feast change my life?

When I came here four years ago, I was a shy Iraqi woman trying her best to speak English. But she had no idea what kind of life she wanted for herself. Until one day, I received an email from a friend telling me about this organization. I was so excited and nervous at the same time. I did the interview and signed my name up for the class (Project Feast's original program, Commercial Kitchen Basics). The most amazing things about Project Feast is meeting people from different countries, learning about their food and culture, and listening to their stories. I was thinking I'm alone here and it's only me having these fears and struggles in the new country. At Project Feast, it feels like we all are a real family. **We support each other talking one language, which is simply just food.**

On that day, I took my first step and I never stopped. From new jobs and trainings to meeting people I never dreamed of knowing. That shy woman changed, becoming a pastry student and soon to be chef. Recently, she gave a tour of her college, talking with passion about how she loves her work and presenting a chocolate demo for them.

I'm a different person today. When I was looking at myself before I didn't know who I wanted to be and what I wanted in life...but not today. I'm a confident woman and know what my next step will be. All of that happened and is still happening because of this organization's support. I will always be thankful to my second family at Project Feast.

Thanks,
Taghreed Ibrahim





A Letter from a 2017 Project Feast Alumna

I came to the United States almost two years ago, after long years of fear and stress. I came from a country with a different language, culture and social life. At first I was amazed of my new life, civilization and the way of living here; everything is different even the air feels clean and cool. After this period of amazement was over, I was shocked of the difficult life here and how much it took to support our family so I took the first opportunity I came across. I started to work at a restaurant and I was happy at first. But after a short while I realized that I am missing a lot of knowledge on how to deal with different types of food and recipes, and on top of that, a lack of good communication skills, language, and customer service. It was difficult for me to communicate with customers and understand their orders about food, vegetables and kitchen tools I did not know. I lost my job there. I tried to find another job but failed and the main reason for my failure was my fears that I would face the same problem.

At that time, I was attending ESL classes at Highline collage to improve my English. One day I saw an advertisement about the Project Feast program that provided cooking classes about customer service, cashier responsibilities, and menu design. At that time I felt that this is what I really needed and this is what will pull me out of my frustration. I felt a strange power that pushed me to apply for the course.

In the kitchen at Ubuntu Street Café we learned how to keep food safe and healthy, names of kitchen tools, how to design a menu, recipes, and names of different foods. Students are of different cultures and countries so we shared how to cook our different types of food with one another.

Thanks for all who helped me during the last three months now I can speak English better, I can communicate with others and express my feelings and thoughts better. Furthermore, I had learned a lot of skills that I was missing like different recipes and foods, working a cash register, and menu design. But the most important thing I learned here was how to learn from other colleagues and supervisors and how to respect people and their time and how to stay calm when stressed.

Finally, and because of all what I had learned here, I started to work in a restaurant where I am using everything I learned at Project Feast and I feel more confident and successful in my new job.

Thank you Project Feast! You helped me start my new life here in the United States and I am full of confidence that I will succeed.

A letter from Veena Prasad, Project Feast Founder & Executive Director

Democrat vs. Republican. Progressive vs. liberal. Legal vs. illegal. Immigrant vs. American. Black vs. White. Good vs. Bad. Our news lately has been filled with rhetoric and stereotypes. From politics to every day life, discussions have seemingly devolved to binary positions.

My twins will turn 3 in a month. At home we work hard to instill in them independence, kindness and the ability to work hard to achieve goals. As a mother, it is natural to wonder (and worry) about the world they are growing up in. How will my bi-racial children be accepted in society? Will they feel comfortable speaking their father tongue and mother tongue in public? If I send them Indian food in their lunch boxes, will they feel embarrassed to eat it in front of their friends? They will have many privileges that my husband and I, both first generation immigrants, extend to them. They will most likely be fine.



But what about other kids who don't grow up with the same privileges as mine? What about other newly arrived refugee and immigrant children and their families who are seeking safety and are starting all over again in a new and unfamiliar country.

I envision a world for the next generation that is more welcoming to strangers. A world where we seek what we have in common with each other over what makes us different. I can only hope my kids will experience nuanced discussions and develop the ability to take on different perspectives.

At Project Feast, we see refugees and immigrants not just as people in need but as leaders, as multi-faceted people with skills and strengths. We hold this principle to heart when designing our programs. This is also evident in community events like Migrating Meals that offer avenues for deep discussions on various topics around culture and cuisine. We seek to get beyond labels and rhetoric, transform fear into curiosity, and enable a community where each of us feels empowered.

I'm grateful and proud to be able to personally and professionally invest my time, efforts and money in tangible solutions that not only make a difference in the lives of individual refugees and immigrants but also in our community at large. You each give me hope. Our apprentices give me hope. And so each time the news fills me with despair, I soldier on buoyed by the sense of Ubuntu I feel all around me. For my twins, for me, for us.

Yours in Community,
Veena



project **feast**

empowering refugee and immigrant cooks

A letter from Jaqueline Garcia, Project Feast Board President & Alumna

My name is Jaqueline Garcia. I am from Michoacán Mexico, a state rich in tradition and culture. I came to the U.S. seven years ago with my husband, who is a Mexican/American citizen. As a new immigrant I felt intimidated for my new reality and I started to bake and cook as a way to avoid depression. I was teaching baking classes to a group of moms into the cabana in my apartment complex. A friend sent me an email about a program to learn basic commercial kitchen skills to work in the food industry (Project Feast's original program, Commercial Kitchen Basics). I was very curious about the organization's course and I registered.



When I was taking the course, I had the opportunity to learn from other cultures and it was a process for me to feel more comfortable with the diversity. I realize the wonderful opportunity to learn and share with people around the world. Not only sharing recipes but also stories, sometimes painful experiences about what it means to be labeled as an immigrant or refugee.

Project Feast for me is a window to the diversity with a feeling of compassion, solidarity, and respect. After graduating from Project Feast I noticed I was more confident with my environment and I discovered my passion was more related to social justice and economic development for immigrants and refugees. Thanks to Project Feast I got connected with my two part time jobs one in Food Innovation Network as a community engagement co-chair and a position at Highline College as a Microenterprise Specialist, supporting the Latino Community to start small businesses.

This is my second year as the Project Feast board president. After graduating and volunteering for Project Feast activities, I received the invitation to participate in the board. I accepted the volunteer position in the board to give back to this wonderful organization and learn from wonderful people around the world.

Project Feast not only gives the training to gain the necessary skills to work in the food industry, it's an organization that connect immigrants and refugees with additional resources, job opportunities, and the most important: connection to each other and bringing hope while we cook a delicious international recipe.

Sincerely,
Jaqueline

A Letter from Lisa Nakamura, Project Feast Executive Chef

Hello Universe,

People often comment to me about the good I am doing, how Project Feast is important for our community, especially in today's political climate.

My job, and my desire, is to help a group of people from disparate backgrounds reach a point where they can obtain, and most importantly, KEEP jobs in commercial kitchens here in the states. It sounds like a wonderful goal—altruistic, generous, and compassionate.

In truth, it is one of the more difficult things I have tried to do.

Every apprentice has their untold story of grief, hardship, fear, and trials. They get frustrated and disheartened by the constant damage of English, math and that darn imperial measuring system. There are days when they don't believe they can make it. There are days when there isn't enough chocolate for me.

But then I see progress, like when I walk into the kitchen after yet another Cash and Carry run, and find the kitchen humming with activity. The apprentices assume their routines and are becoming cooks.

The end goal is sustainable employment, but every apprentice has their own trajectory towards that target. Sometimes the arc of learning seems to become concave. It doesn't go straight up. It's not a field of daisies; it's a real tough struggle, for them, for me. I'm trying to get them all to the finish line at the same time.

Change happens. We make progress, by the inch and by the mile. Slowly, surely, and with your help, at the end of four months, they will have found the beginnings of their strength, their voice, and their abilities.

Lisa Nakamura
Executive Chef



A Letter from Iad Sennan Alati, 2017 Project Feast Alumni

I am Iad Sennan Alati from Syria. I'm married and I have three daughters. I came to the United States because of the war that happening in my country.

I applied for the culinary apprenticeship at Project Feast because I wanted to live a happy and good. And I learned that this project would teach me the kitchen system in the United States and help me learn English. I taught my fellow apprentices, instructor, and the Project Feast team about Syrian culture and cuisine. I learned about their cultures and cuisines.

At the end, I want to thank all of the people who worked on this project.



A Letter from Molly Payne, Project Feast Program Coordinator

As a twenty-something millennial, I have been raised in the world of social media, my news feed saturated by negative headlines and hateful rhetoric. It makes me lose faith in our country and often makes me feel powerless.



But I have learned that to give up my power is to let myself be controlled by the negative forces in this world. Working with Project Feast, and the organizations we partner with, I am reminded everyday that out of sight of the headlines there are innovative ideas taking root, and amazing people working together to create change.

What I love about Project Feast is that our Culinary Apprenticeship Program build on the existing strengths that immigrants and refugees possess, and amplify those strengths to innovate solutions. It became clear to me right away that the women that we work with and their

incredible talents are heart of our organization.

Everyday at the Ubuntu Street Café we sit down for a family meal with the team of staff and apprentices. I also stay in touch with Project Feast alumni and often contact them with requests regarding outreach. I am consistently humbled by the strength and tenacity of the people with whom we work, despite the immense challenge of navigating a new country, while often dealing with past traumas. After thanking a Project Feast alumna for helping on some promotional material, her response hit the core of what I believe is the spirit of this organization, *"It's simple thing to do for Project Feast for helping and supporting us all the time. We are like one big family and that's what family do for each other."*

"Working with Project Feast and the organizations we partner with, I am reminded everyday that out of sight of the headlines there are innovative ideas taking root, and amazing people working together to create change."

Regardless of where we are from, what religion we practice, the color of our skin, the language we speak, we support each other to be the best that we can be. This is not a simple or a small thing: it is immense and hugely powerful. This to me embodies the spirit of Ubuntu. Working at Project Feast reminds me of this everyday, and makes me feel hopeful and proud to be a part of this community. We greatly appreciate your support and your contribution to a working solution.

P.S. The food is amazing.

Molly Payne, *Program Coordinator*

Hello world!

As a new member to the Project Feast team, I can say that this community impacted my life faster than I could have ever imagined. Every day I learn something new about food and cross-cultural communication.

After graduating from school, I thought I would travel internationally for a few months. But I am glad that life took a different turn. I have learned more from “traveling” through food, meeting new friends, and participating in meaningful discussions with the Project Feast community. In this community, I feel grounded with the strength, perseverance, and desire to spread kindness and respect.

Recently we held a meeting for Project Feast’s strategic plan. We started by stating what we wanted to see in the world in the next five years. So, I began reflecting and creating a list.

In five years, I want to see...more love and less hate, more acceptance and less tolerance, more conversations and less screens, more empowerment and less barriers, more doors and less walls, more we and less I, more global citizens and less divisions, more integrity and less deception, and, more equity and less poverty.

We need to see one another as human beings before labels and stereotypes. We need to respect one another. We need to create stronger communities. I realized that Project Feast has already started creating these ripples of change in today’s world. I am lucky to be a part of that and hope that you will be too.

Thank you,
Lauren McParland
Development Coordinator

ProjectFeast.org



After searching for a picture, I realized that I am often behind the camera at our events! But that’s me at May’s Migrating Meal, Filipino Fusion, one of my favorite programs we do!