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NEWS



Jennifer Mahfouf is one of the beneficiaries of a new CBD-based social enterprise.

Picture: MITCHBEAR N13ME523

Selling a big serving of hope

Training | Nic Price

AT THE age of 13, Jennifer Mahfouf ran away from home.

Fleeing family problems, she crashed on friends' floors and couches and kept moving so as not to wear out her welcome.

"I was running around the streets, getting into a lot of trouble," the now 21-year-old recalled.

Now Ms Mahfouf finds herself back on the street – but this time getting employment, training and counselling from a new social enterprise in the CBD.

Started earlier this year, STREAT operates carts at two high-profile

A new social enterprise in the CBD is providing training for some of Melbourne's most disadvantaged citizens

locations in the city. The Federation Square cart dishes up food, while two carts at Melbourne Central serve coffee.

STREAT students are aged 16-25 and have a history of homelessness, drug, alcohol or mental health issues, disability, family violence or juvenile offending.

A clinical psychologist and two youth workers provide support and counselling, while students also complete a Certificate II in

Commercial Cookery at the William Anglis Institute and work at the carts during their six-month internship.

The first class of eight participants graduated last week and moved into apprenticeships and employment, including three fine dining apprenticeships.

STREAT is the brainchild of Rebecca Scott and Kate Barrelle, who witnessed the success of a similar model on the streets of Hanoi, Vietnam.

"It really was a light-bulb moment the first time I ate there (in Hanoi) and saw the young lives that it was starting to impact," Ms Scott said. "I thought this makes so much sense – you can solve social issues by running businesses."

Ms Scott said the social enterprise model moved away from welfare "to provide real jobs, real experience and real skills".

She said street food was a perfect fit. "The rest of the world has great street food but Australia doesn't.

And with street carts you don't need the huge expenses of setting up a bricks and mortar cafe," Ms Scott said.

Started with funding from a Danish philanthropist and the Federal Government, Ms Scott said the business planned to expand the number of carts and interns and aimed to be self-sufficient in three years.

For her part, Ms Mahfouf has moved back in with her parents in Hillside and is hoping to pick up work in a hotel.

"My whole life has changed. Before I thought I couldn't do anything, that I was hopeless. But now there is so much I can do," she said.