

Fit for a king

Nada Subramaniam knows a lot about fine dining. His culinary experience as a chef was gained in the five-star hotels of Malaysia's Golden Triangle and in the grand dining halls of the country's royal home *Istana Negara*.



His hard work and expertise brought him to London and to Harrods, where he worked as head chef and later as personal chef to its owner, Mohammed Al Fayed. He is now the catering manager at Canning Town homeless hostel, Anchor House. Nine years since he left his native Malaysia we speak to Nada about his journey from serving nobility to serving the needy.

Charity Anchor House is a 118-bed homeless centre for singles aged from 20 to 60. Nada, despite only being in post for year, has recently gained Healthy Options status from Newham Council for his healthy meals for Anchor House residents – and the community, who for just £2 can enjoy a delicious, nutritionally balanced meal and dessert. He said: "There are some real health freaks here! They requested a healthy option meal at least once a week.

"I worked with a nutritionist who looked at our menus and suggested where we could make small changes; eg. baking hash browns rather than frying, using sunsalted butter or margarine and replacing full fat milk with semi-skimmed."

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The award is merely the icing on the cake. Under his supervision, and with his encouragement, 15 residents have gained a formal catering qualification and Nada has persuaded many more to give up their time to volunteer in the hostel's kitchen. Nada is brimming with ideas and opportunities for the residents at Anchor House. He said: "At the moment I teach residents basic food hygiene and how a professional kitchen works before putting them forward for a formal qualification at college. I'd like to build a training kitchen so we can deliver apprenticeships from Anchor House."

A former seaman's hotel, Anchor

House doesn't just provide a roof over its residents' heads, it also helps them with their confidence and self-esteem and steers them towards living an independent life. Anchor House welcomes the wider community with open arms, offering them qualifications in IT, entry level English and maths and CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme).

Being healthy can be hard when you're working with a shoe string budget. As well as keeping his eyes on the pennies, Nada has managed to persuade his suppliers to charge him the same price they charge schools for ingredients. This is supported by regular donations from Fairshare, a charity who distribute supermarket food which is about to expire to organisations like Anchor House.

What lured someone with Nada's wealthy of experience from the glamour of Knightsbridge to the not so glamorous Canning Town? He laughs: "When I came for the interview they asked me the same question! I've been working as a chef for 22 years. I feel good about doing something for my local community, especially the people here at Anchor House, and if they want to learn skills I can teach them." He also admits: "The work of a chef can be quite anti-social, so you tend to miss a lot of special occasions. I've got two young girls. In my other jobs the money was great but I didn't have time for socialising. My salary has dropped but I have a better quality of life."

Anchor House is not just a hostel or a recognised Healthy Options Café or an accredited training facility – it's all this and more. If you're in doubt about our claims and want more information about the organisation pop down to their premises on Barking Road and see for yourself.

For more information about Anchor House visit www.anchorhouseuk.org To book make a lunch booking call 020 7476 6062 before 9.30am on the day you wish to go.