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MERCURY

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BREWED WITH LOVE

ALEX MORRIS-BAGULEY
IS NO ORDINARY
WAITRESS. WITH HER
FRIENDS AT HAMLET
NOT-FOR-PROFIT CAFE,
SHE'S JUST CHAMPION

FOOD FLAVOURS OF HOME TRAVEL LESSONS IN FRESHNESS ART GHOSTS IN THE MACHINES

Just champion



They say it takes a village to raise a child. At Hamlet not-for-profit training cafe and TroubleSmiths innovative social training program, they're raising a new type of workforce — young people who are putting their disadvantages behind them and soaring to heights they never thought possible

WORDS TRACY RENKIN
MAIN IMAGE CHRIS KIDD

It's the lunchtime rush, and this trendy, community cafe at the end of the South Hobart Rivulet walking track is buzzing with conversation. A neatly aproned young woman confidently walks between the packed tables and approaches one of them while balancing two perfectly patterned coffees on a tray. Hamlet's waitress-in-training Alex Morris-Baguley carefully places the mugs in front of an older couple and the man makes eye contact with her as two words tumble out of his smile: "Thanks champion!"

Morris-Baguley beams. The customer is a regular but his encouragement is still soaked up like a sponge. She stands a little taller, reaches up to her neat braid and flicks it to her back and hurries toward the coffee station to prepare the next drink order under the guidance of coffee master Michelle Warner.

Warner is not just a barista here slinging out top quality coffee. She's also a teacher and a mentor and a coach and an encourager. She's a motivator. She's the one who taught this 28-year-old with a dream to find paid work, how to draw cocoa leaves and hearts into frothed up milk.

But to Morris-Baguley, this barista is also something else. She's one of her best friends. "A lot of my best friends work at Hamlet," Baguley tells *TasWeekend*.

"We have fun here. I'm a very happy person and the people who work here are happy, too."

For the volunteers in training, Hamlet isn't just a workplace, it's also a social outlet that makes them feel like they belong. Morris-Baguley is referring to her buddies Jimmy and Cam in the kitchen — two friendly chefs who like to sing from Spotify playlists, and who instigate interesting conversations to help the volunteers relax and feel a part of a team while they whip up seasonal dishes using mostly locally sourced produce.

Sometimes the trainees are so shy that when they first walk through the doors they can't even make eye contact. But after a few months they gain confidence and end up chatting comfortably with complete strangers and singing along to the playlist songs.

Morris-Baguley also thinks of Issy Casey as a bestie. She helps all the volunteers with their daily goals and sits with them after their four-hour shift to give them a "praise sandwich" of how they went.

Morris-Baguley loves hearing about her achievements on shift, like being able to carry multiple plates at the one time and staying focussed when she's working the floor — but says in hushed tones at our cafe interview (with the help of an eye-roll) that she's not too fussed on the dot points listed under (air quotes) "working on".

But if she was to see a list of her achievements since she started at Hamlet almost three years ago, she would surely enjoy reading through them. Her confidence has soared.

Her ability to hold a conversation with other adults has significantly improved and she's achieving things her parents Catherine and Patrick never thought possible.

For a young woman who has always struggled with maths, she is confidently standing behind the cash register, taking orders and processing payments.

Eleven years ago, as soon as she graduated Year 12, Morris-Baguley started work at what's now called Oakdale Enterprises, a bulk mail outlet at Glenorchy, where she still sits at a table with other disabled men and women twice a week for a full working day and packs boxes for clients like Tasmania's natural skin care company Beauty and the Bees, for \$3.50 an hour.

She tells *TasWeekend* she has many great friends at her Glenorchy workplace and that she enjoys the work. But it's the constant interaction with other volunteers and the support staff at Hamlet and the customers which has been transformative for his daughter, says her dad Patrick.



Left: Alex Morris-Baguley at work at Hamlet. Above: Troublesmiths volunteers Brayden Price and April Duffey making candles.

"We saw her confidence soar after she started at Hamlet," he says. "Her work at Hamlet has improved the way she sees the world. It's taken her out of herself so she can interact with other people outside of Hamlet."

Fellow Hamlet volunteer Sophie Kluver — who battles anxiety and low confidence — describes her workmates as an extended family. Recently she got to coordinate one of the special staff dinners known as the family dinner.

She and her trainee partner decided on a pizza night which the two chefs helped them create. It was a great night of good food, whacky conversation and fun.

"It's a really supportive and loving environment here," Kluver says. "I'm really coming out of my shell and I feel a part of something. I feel a sense of accomplishment after every shift."

Her uncle is Patrick Kluver who runs Hobart's Workskills program. Workskills is funded by the Federal Government through the Department of Employment to provide services to eligible job seekers who are Centrelink registered and referred. Kluver says the Hamlet system works because it replicates real life.

"This model isn't like the traditional classroom model where participants only get to practise in a simulated environment with pretend customers," he says. "Hamlet brings the real world into play, because you can't be proficient and an expert in something unless you are doing it over and over and over again."

This not-for-profit training cafe for people facing barriers getting into the workforce was started by Emily Briffa and her good friend Millie Pardoe. Briffa, 30, now runs it on her own.

They named the Molle Street venue after the British word meaning a small village. Briffa has poured her heart and soul into it, and has got to a point where the cafe is 80 per cent self-sufficient. Hamlet helps unemployed people who have some kind of barrier that's impeding their job hunting. They may have a mental or physical disability, a range of mental health issues like anxiety or depression, language barriers, or a lack of confidence.

Whatever the problem is, Hamlet's volunteer coordinator Issy Casey says she never says no to people who are brave enough to put up their hand and ask for help. Although the volunteer wait list is currently sitting at about six months, everyone who asks for help gets to come in, put on the uniform, join the Hamlet team and have a go at learning the hospitality ropes.

"Placements last for however long the participants want to stay," Casey says. "People stay with us until they feel confident to move onto the next step."

They get the opportunity to earn themselves a reference letter and an experience to add to their resume. And if Morris-Baguley is on shift, they are warmly welcomed.

"She gives everyone a hug. That may seem like a small thing but it's actually really important. It really improves staff morale."

Briffa says she learnt the power of community after watching her brother Jarrod set up his social enterprise cafe called Kinfolk in Melbourne. "Seeing what he did just made sense to me because he provided an opportunity for all sorts of people from all sorts of backgrounds to contribute and give back through experience," she says.

Briffa worked there before moving to Tasmania for a Franklin restaurant chef role five years ago. Initially, she thought she would only last here for about six months. But after she discovered Tasmania had the highest youth unemployment in the country, she says she was encouraged to stay and help find a solution.

Early on in her efforts to bring her dream to life and create a training cafe that would make a significant dent in Tasmania's dismal unemployment figures, her goal was constantly belittled and discouraged.

"A lot of the tradesmen told me it was a ridiculous idea and said it wasn't going to work," Briffa says. "They said why don't you just open up a normal cafe?" Her answer: "It's the responsibility of the entire community to make sure everyone is looked after. Hamlet is not the normal, standard kind of cafe. There is something a lot bigger going on here."

But as luck would have it — after the power of the Hobart word-of-mouth machine kicked in and more people fully understood what she was trying to achieve — Hamlet was flooded with support. Tradies started to donate their time and businesses donated products so they could create the funky space that Hamlet became.

In August, Hamlet won the Premier's Award for contribution to community in the Tasmanian Hospitality Association and Drysdale Awards for Excellence. Briffa says while recognition is always nice, the award has only further ignited her belief and passion that everyone has an ability to contribute in employment, no matter what their ability.

Sixty per cent of her volunteers identify as having a disability. In a state where one in four people identify as having a disability she says there needs to be a real cultural shift in Tasmania so that all work environments consider using people in their workforce of all abilities.

"Having a job helps people get up in the morning because they feel a part of a team and they feel connected in their community," Briffa says. "That's what people in our program feel every day. There needs to be space for all people of all abilities to be given the opportunity to have a go."

Take Morris-Baguley for example, who was awarded an Awards Australia Tasmaniann Youth Achievers transition to work award in May.

She was the first person with a disability to start at Hamlet about 30 months ago. She's got a bubbly persona that rubs off on other staff as well as the customers. She's ready to work. She's attentive and happy to chat with customers.

She's eager to please. She's the first to the food counter when the chefs ding the bell. And she has the empty chairs neatly stacked under the table and the table wiped down before the customers have even finished paying at the register. ▶



Picture: RICHARD JUPE

"She really opened our eyes to the fact that there is a real opportunity to work with men and women with a disability," Briffa says. "She was so determined to do well here that we wanted to offer others facing similar barriers the same kind of experience."

Morris-Baguley's mother Catherine says while she has always known her daughter will remember new things she's taught from a place of patience, she has been amazed with her progress since starting at Hamlet.

"She's picked up some skills there that I never never thought possible," she said. "She's confidently working behind the till, taking orders and processing payments. She's got her own system of writing down orders, and has learnt how to prioritise tasks."

"You get to the point where you think that your child has plateaued off and you start to accept that there are so many things that she cannot do. But Hamlet has proven that she can still learn. She is still learning. And it's given her so much confidence."

"And confidence breeds confidence – it's such a powerful thing. When I think of what she has achieved it makes me feel shocked and proud and amazed and it makes me feel a little bit teary too."

Hamlet's success is huge. So far 237 people have started their hospitality journey working at this social enterprise that Briffa says belongs to the local community. Hamlet has a 95 per cent shift-attendance rate. And 70 per cent of participants who finish their time there either get a job or start more training.

Briffa says her volunteers are wrapped in love, but the expectations of them are still best practice. And it's that approach that makes it so appealing, says TasCOSS CEO Kym Goodes.



"Hamlet cafe is an example of a best practice approach to supporting Tasmanians directly into employment," Goodes says. "While traditionally state and federal governments have used a one-size-fits-all model for training and employment, for many people this does not work."

"Hamlet has really hit the mark in responding to the dual needs of people with disability keen and motivated to work, while having first-hand knowledge of the needs of the hospitality industry."

"This is the model of the future, and we should be exploring it across more sectors and with a broader range of people who are looking for work."

Goodes says it is critical governments look at more flexible

and innovative models for training that sit outside the current TasTAFE or vocational education and training (VET) funding and delivery model.

Goodes says there should be more social enterprises like Hamlet and one of the only other Hobart-based, employment-oriented organisations for young people – a program called TroubleSmiths. TroubleSmiths is a youth social enterprise that takes 15-24 year old Tasmanians who are at risk of long-term unemployment and teaches them real and practical skills they can offer up to future employers.

While about 80 per cent of the TroubleSmith participants identify as having a mental health issue, they still successfully

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Little Devil | Prince's Square



Picture: RICHARD JUPE



Picture: EDDIE SAFARIK

absorb the small business and retail skills like marketing and promotions, product development, retail and sales and customer service.

While other employment programs recruit the best possible candidates, TroubleSmiths focussed on including the people with more challenging cases. Given that intake, the results are impressive.

One hundred people have been a part of the TroubleSmith team and almost half those young men and women at risk of long-term unemployment managed to find a job, 14 per cent started another course or training and 11 per cent have stayed with the team. So many young people have been interested in joining the program, they've had to knock some back.

In two years, the participants have developed an impressive suite of beautifully packaged, on-trend products originally sold at markets but now produced and sold out of their 106 Murray St shopfront next to The Retro Fudge Bar.

The products include handmade soap cubes, candles in a can, lip balms, bushy beard oils, massage oil, hair oil, chunky beanies, hand salves, up-cycled cushions and records turned into clocks. Last Christmas season TroubleSmiths sales peaked at \$10,000 but even in the chill of last month it managed to make \$5000.

For 21-year-old Ellie Ransom, from Kingston, the TroubleSmiths program has been an amazingly positive experience. Ransom has learnt how to make all the different products and says she gets a real sense of achievement selling something she's made.

She says she has been unemployed since finishing Year 12 at Elizabeth College because she didn't have anything on her resume. Before starting the program she says her social anxiety and depression made it difficult for her to leave her house.

"But I pushed myself out of my comfort zone," she says. "It was intimidating when I first started at TroubleSmiths, but once I started I really started to grow.

"I'm more confident now and I feel like a completely different person in the best way possible."

From left: Reusable wax wraps from TroubleSmiths; Enterprise supporter Matilda Moylan-Blaikie with TroubleSmiths volunteer Ellie Ransom; Hamlet cafe casual employee Lavender Zhang learns the ropes under supervision from the not-for-profit's owner and founder Emily Briffa.

The man in charge of the program is Mark Boonstra from Impact Communities (an agency that falls under the Workskills umbrella). Boonstra says, just like at Hamlet, TroubleSmiths takes young people with low literacy or numeracy, mental health challenges or circumstance difficulty and takes them on a real-world journey that promotes creative thinking, problem-solving, tenacity and self-belief.

"Everyone who works at TroubleSmiths has run into some sort of trouble barrier or challenge in life," Boonstra says. "That's why Smith is a good analogy – it brings to mind a masterful worker who takes pride in what they do.

"A 'smith' takes something like trouble, and makes something beautiful and valuable from it. Apart from the products we are making here, we are teaching young people how to do life, how to navigate life with great resilience, and how to work as a team despite their social anxiety."

Mr Boonstra says TroubleSmiths has also improved the participants' social and mental health. "It isn't just an employment program," Boonstra says.

"It is also a social program that helps tackle young people who have no direction or purpose. It lifts them up and gives them confidence.

"We've had participants with severe social anxiety who were so frightened they've literally not been able to look you in the eye – but now they are serving customers. We've had participants afraid of catching public transport who are now catching buses all over the place, and a young person who was so scared of talking to strangers they were shaking initially, but now they are confidently conversing and talking to people they don't know."

Despite a recent State Government injection of \$75,000 and support from state and federal politicians writing letters of praise advocating for additional funding, it's likely TroubleSmiths will be forced to close in October because it was initially set up as a two-year pilot program with Department of Employment Federal Government funding which has run out.

Boonstra says the innovative way TroubleSmiths is set up and operates means it doesn't easily fit into any current federal or state funding models. It's a frustrating reality for the man who believes this recipe for success could be used to put a dent in our high youth unemployment and help many of our young people with mental health problems.

Back at Hamlet it's another day and our waitress in training, Morris-Baguley, has moved from decorating the drinks to taking the orders behind the till. Despite the pressure of the morning-rush and its six-deep queue, she is taking her time so she doesn't make a mistake. And she still remembers to look up and give all her customers one of her impressive smiles.

Briffa proudly watches on from across the floor and, as she scans the faces of the people in the coffee-order line, she notices one of the regulars getting a little fidgety and becoming frustrated that he's waiting a little longer than normal.

"But then his demeanour changed and I saw a switch in him," Briffa says. "And he realised waiting a little longer wasn't really actually that important. Our trainee taking the coffee orders was trying so hard and had such a sense of accomplishment on her face. And he saw that and realised he was a part of that. That growth is really special to see. It means something to people. And who doesn't want to see people grow?"

Hamlet at 40 Molle St, South Hobart, has free parking on weekends, is dog friendly and all donations over \$2 are tax deductible. @hamlet_hobart
TroubleSmiths at 106 Murray Street, Hobart, has a great range of gifts perfect for Father's Day. @troublesmiths