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## Coffee *for a cause*

For the last two years, the Social Roasting Company has been giving the disadvantaged and long-term unemployed a chance to step back into the workforce.

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**T**he Social Roasting Company doesn't come off as your average Melbourne inner-suburb café.

As its name implies, the company is in fact more than just a great source of beans, but a social initiative aimed at helping the disadvantaged enter the workforce. Formed two years ago, the Social Roasting Company was a merger of three Octane Espresso outlets and the not-for-profit Fair Business organisation.

The initiative aims to provide jobs and training for people struggling to find employment, which can be anyone from migrants to refugees, people with

mental illnesses or drug addictions, and the long-term unemployed.

Alex Forsyth and Matt Hampton oversee the daily operation of all three Social Roasting Company cafés.

Alex explains that the company aims to help disadvantaged people in giving them workplace experience and rotations at the café and roastery to increase their employment potential, in the hopes of giving them a facet to get their lives back on track.

"It's so much easier to get a job when you already have one or have industry experience," Alex says. "Even if [the employees] work with us for six weeks, then at least they're working and we can give them a good

reference to work somewhere else in the industry."

Alex says that there are many unemployed people with fantastic qualifications who struggle to find employment. The hardest step to get back into the workforce, is most often the first one.

"Thankfully, in this industry there's a lot of these positions available and positions that can be created to help people get back on track," he says. "Through working, they pick up new skills every week. They mostly just want an opportunity to work, which is fantastic."

Social Roasting Company employs 15 - 20 people throughout



their three locations in Flemington, Melbourne and Prahran. Alex notes that there are a few challenges to overcome as employers in dealing with high turnover. Furthermore, most employees have no hospitality background, and for many English is their second or third language, and this could be their first time working in an English-speaking environment.

with certain jobs or have trouble translating things. Some of the docket that come to the kitchen can be quite interesting for the chefs to deal with, and sometimes a coffee order goes astray.”

Nevertheless, Alex has found the experience of working at a café with a social mandate rewarding.

“It’s a little more difficult to

someone learns something from you and you see it click, it’s like a light bulb going on and you feel great that you’ve helped someone,” Alex says. “A new guy who started roasting asked me a question the other day that I’d never thought of, so I’m always learning as well and looking for the right answers. It’s really rejuvenating.”

The primary requirement Alex looks for in new staff is that they possess a little confidence and an eagerness to work. “A lot of it is trial and error because people are so different, you can’t put everyone under groups and categories, you have to take judgment calls and take a punt,” he says. “There’s no one we’ve said no to, in fact, there are people who have said no to us.”

Alex says he takes an egalitarian approach to his staff, and he hopes this is a strategy employees will adopt. “It’s always been my opinion that you don’t treat anyone different. It doesn’t matter who they are, you have to give everyone a fair opportunity,” he says.

Regardless of whether his employees want a career as a barista or roaster, Alex says the experience has consistently proven helpful.

“At the end of staff rotations, half

“I LOVE TEACHING PEOPLE AND WHEN SOMEONE LEARNS SOMETHING FROM YOU AND YOU SEE IT CLICK, IT’S LIKE A LIGHT BULB GOING ON AND YOU FEEL GREAT THAT YOU’VE HELPED SOMEONE,”

“Trying to overcome the communication issue is a challenge. But it’s also more than just the actual language, it’s about how you talk to people and treat them,” Alex says. “It’s funny the preconceptions of the people who come in here. In fact, everyone here is understanding, they come in here knowing there might be some people who are a bit slow

manage, it’s hard to deal with new staff coming through all the time and constantly retraining them, but generally it’s great, I love a challenge,” he says.

Alex notes that his work isn’t just about supporting disadvantaged people – it’s about learning and education, and that goes both ways.

“I love teaching people and when



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