

VERMONT SOUTH

Served with care

A community cafe mixes training for disadvantaged and disabled people with good food. **Sally Heppleston** reports

If you're on the lookout for a well-priced, fresh meal that's been prepared by someone who really needs the work, the Social Enterprise Cafe at the Vermont South Community House is worth a visit.

to support and give back to the community.

"The focus has been to encourage an environment that brings people together in a supportive caring environment and support those who are disadvantaged," Dr Smart said.

"What better way to do this than through food?"

Dr Smart said the community house worked with a Registered Training Organisation which offered a Certificate II in Hospitality and Food Processing.

In October last year, 10 of their students graduated, with four of them going on to gain employment and two more continuing to gain experience as volunteers.

Dr Smart said the cafe kept prices low and ran at a loss to ensure their staff were adequately paid.

"This is why this is absolutely a social enterprise cafe," she said.

She said the workers were mentored by more experienced staff.

They were given various tasks on each shift, depending on their skill set and how comfortable they felt with the work.

"What we really work on is getting their confidence up," Dr Smart said.

She said the cafe had also been wonderful for other

students attending courses at the community house, particularly those doing English as a second language.

The community house had noticed a trend of social

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- DR SHARON SMART

isolation with migrants or those with little or no English, so the cafe enabled the ESL students to socialise with others to help improve their English skills.

"It's wonderful to see our students from various classes coming into the cafe to socialise with the tutor. It's a friendly environment where people can chat over good coffee, food and freshly baked products," Dr Smart said.

The cafe is also working to train their employees to become baristas, learn food hygiene skills, cook in a wood-fired oven and get their Responsible Service of Alcohol qualifications.

The Social Enterprise Cafe is open 9am to 2.45pm, Monday to Friday.

Details at: vsc.org.au



The cafe was set up to enable those who are disadvantaged, or have physical or intellectual disabilities to learn new skills, improve their confidence and, hopefully, gain employment.

Community house manager Sharon Smart said the cafe project was begun in January 2015 and opened in May the same year.

Dr Smart said the community house was always looking for innovative ways

Alex Wheldon and Zac
Best work in the cafe, a
real boost to confidence.
Picture: STUVE TANNER