

The Lotus Bakery Project

In 2011, the Hospitality Training Association Inc sent me a chef and patisserie trainer to Mongolia to assist the Lotus Children's Centre in baking skills.

The training commenced in one of the small rooms at the then baby's house at Bayanzurkh with the kneading of dough and rolling of pastry in the dining room and then baking in an oven in one of the old bedrooms. There were about 15 very keen participants including some house mothers, cooks, staff and some of the older children. It was a fun and exciting time with language barriers and different ingredients and a baker who was new to the country and the people. We managed in a two week timeframe to set the standard and create some simple bread, pizza, pastry and other baked goods. There was a lot of laughs and fun but some really good results and the students showed a natural affinity with dough.

A year later Hospitality Training Association was no more, I had changed jobs and had commenced working for the Holy Spirit Northside Private Hospital. Within my first year of employment the Children's Health and Education Fund assisted me with funds to return to do follow up training which I took leave without pay and some holidays to complete. By then Lotus has relocated to Gachuurt and the training was conducted in the garage without running water and in low lighting. Unfortunately during the move the oven was quite badly damaged but was still working. I decided that I would go about seeing how I could improve the equipment being used.

My employer heard of what I was doing and offered to assist me with fund raising. A dinner is held each year to thank the doctors who bring the patients to our hospital and it was decided that it would be a great opportunity to raise some funds to help the cause. I thought it would be great if we raised about \$5000 but in less than 20 minutes \$25,000 was raised.

It was decided to use these funds to set up a commercial quality bakery at the Lotus Centre. The equipment was sourced in China, paid for from Australia and freighted to Mongolia and it was quite an effort to achieve. I then arrived to oversee the installation of the equipment. It was Naadam when I unwittingly arrived so work on the bakery and the opportunity to get anything done was very limited. However, after almost having a crane land on the roof of the new bakery and getting bogged in the soft ground, the new bakery was a reality. I had time for about three days training and was training right up until it was time to fly home.

In 2015 it was decided to see if some assistance could be given to the diet of the children using the bakery to assist the main kitchen creating healthier more balanced meals. A nutritionist and I came to study the diet and look at the food options available.

Then in August I returned with my Sous Chef Craig and this trip co-in sided with the 20th Year Anniversary party at Lotus. We set about planning and preparing for this great event.

This year the plan is to return to assist Lotus in re-opening the café and teaching some special needs children some skills so they can be employed. Stay tuned!