A project by Laurence

Introduction

This program is a one year introduction program to multicuisine cooking. The course introduces students to a range of culturally different cooking styles, cultures and dietary approaches. It also trains students in basic kitchen technical skills and approaches to kitchen management. The course places students in professional kitchen environments and stages some major catering events prepared by the students.

Description of project

This was the first year of the program, running from July 2016 to April 2017, with 7 to 10 students participating through the year. The students were trained by two main teachers (Amrit and Matteo), and had classes with five other cooks from different cooking backgrounds (Jothi for South Indian cooking, Jane for raw food, Noeul for Korean cooking, Antonio for pizza, and Alison for Middle Eastern mezze).

The teaching sessions were held in the PTDC kitchen and occurred 2 afternoons a week.

The students also interned part time in Auroville restaurants. They contributed to 5 major catering events, and were assessed all through the year.

Outcomes

Through this program, the students developed their skills in an overview of the different aspects of cooking activity (technical, from street food to gastronomical, managing big catering events, team spirit, managing projects).

At the end of this first year, 7 students of an initial 10 completed the whole program, of which:

• 2 are going for cooking school in France
• 1 is going for internship in villa Shanti Pondi
• 1 will work in a restaurant while studying at university in the Netherlands
• 3 will attend the second year of the program next year

Reflections

The way the program was designed – very practical, with a lot of student autonomy – made its success. The students committed for one year to this voluntary program and they could quit anytime. They developed focus and self-management through the experience.

We found that the program interested youths still in school as much as youths who have finished school; and it turned out to be more of an ‘introduction to cooking’ than a ‘cooking program’.

We had some challenges:

• It was difficult to find chefs with technical skills who also had teaching skills.
• We did not have a dedicated kitchen or classroom.
• We felt the lack of a dedicated full program teacher.
• The young age group was difficult to schedule with.
• There was uncertainty of Auroville recognition of this program. Students would have liked the assurance of a certificate or other transferable recognition to support further studies.

**Future direction**

Next year the program will be enriched. Students joining for their first year will replicate the program conducted this year, with the additional topics of organic farming, more nutrition, and more hygiene.

Students continuing for their second year will build on their skills, and grow in confidence and competency. They will teach new students, manage events, create menus, learn design skills, and sophisticate first-year program recipes. They will participate in workshops with professionals as well as cook in the application restaurant once a week. They will also have one-to-one personalized mentoring.