



TEN
YEARS
OF
GRADUATE
STORIES

Celebrating 10 years of Growth, Courage and Community

This book is dedicated to the 1168 trainees who
have walked through our Academy doors.

2026
marks ten years
of Well Grounded.



Long before Well Grounded started, the idea had been quietly brewing, born from my work in the voluntary sector and a deepening love for London's specialty coffee industry. When I finally took the leap to launch the organisation, our purpose then, until now, has been to create supportive pathways into work, breaking the cycle of unemployment for people here in the UK: where it's hard to get a job without experience and hard to get experience without a job. Above all, Well Grounded was built to create a nurturing, people-centred space where community can grow.

Our early years were shaped by chance, generosity and belief. Like many things luck had a big part to play too. A chance encounter with a youth organisation led to meeting the team at Ozone Coffee Roasters. Which then in turn led to our first training programme in their basement at Leonard Street with just 3 trainees. From this foundation and the support of early funders, we became a Community Interest Company in 2016. We worked wherever we could, from the back room at Vagabond N7 and downstairs at Prufrock, using loaned equipment from La Marzocco, until we found our first home at Spotlight Youth Centre, where we continue to train until this day.

In 2019, thanks to the support of Equatorial Traders, we found our first permanent space at King's Cross, enabling us to double our impact with another academy in the heart of London. Shortly after, the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything. As the industry shut down, our focus shifted to care. Thanks to the support of UBS and other close partners, we delivered welfare support, virtual training, care packages, mental health, housing support and regular check-ins for our Graduates. We built an online platform to train from, involving reading rooms, craft clubs, and sensory sessions. It was a space held for any person who walked through our virtual doors and as soon as we could, we got back to face to face training.

As the world reopened, coffee once again proved its power to bring people together. In 2023 we began training in Bristol at Wogan Coffee Roasters. Then, in 2025 we launched our '10,000 Lives' campaign, to train and support 10,000 people across the UK over the next 10 years. To live up to these ambitious goals we opened our Leeds Academy at North Star Coffee Roasters. Today, our Academies are central hubs to provide training, qualifications and long-term support, helping people not just enter the coffee industry, but grow within it.

In 2022 we launched our career development programmes including our Coffee Career Accelerator and Coffee Leaders programmes which evolved from our research into barriers to employment and progression in the industry. These programmes are designed to support progression and job fulfilment for Baristas, supervisors, team leaders, anyone, to continue to propel them forward in an industry that is committed to fostering change and driving impact.

Whilst we are a training and community organisation at the core, we also run a commercial business to fund this work. Through growing deep partnerships with leading coffee and hospitality industry brands, we now have a range of partnership coffees and collaboration cafes, government contracts and sponsorship, which drive revenue and social impact across the country.

At the heart of everything we do is community: a place to build skills, friendships and a sense of belonging.

It hasn't always been easy. We've faced challenges and made mistakes. We change, we learn, we grow, and it's through those moments that relationships strengthen and resilience deepens. I am endlessly grateful to everyone who has believed in Well Grounded. To our partners, funders, team, board, and most importantly, every person who has walked through our doors.

This publication shares just a few of those journeys, told in the words of our Graduates. They are stories of growth, courage and hope.

To everyone who has been part of the last decade:
Thank you.

Eve Wagg
CEO and Founder



* FROM JAN 2016 - JAN 2026





Rasha Obaid

Graduate 2016

Artist and coffee professional



In 2016, I was part of Well Grounded's first cohort, shortly after receiving asylum in the UK as a refugee. It was my entry point into a new life. Starting as a Barista at Notes, I've since built a career in coffee trading and qualified as a Q Grader. In 2018, I completed a Master's in Economics and Coffee Sciences in Italy. This led me into research and publishing papers on agricultural livelihoods and women, work that grew directly from the technical foundation I built at Well Grounded.

The biggest change for me has been professional confidence. Well Grounded supported my transition from displacement into a skilled profession. I developed technical expertise, industry networks, and the confidence to work at a senior level within the coffee sector. Beyond technical skills, my sense of belonging and agency transformed.

I went from navigating a new country during the war in my home country to being active within an industry and beyond. I am now a full-time artist, working as a sculptor and stone carver, and I teach art in different settings across London. I remain involved in research and continue to engage with the coffee sector.

Looking back, I'd tell myself this is the start of a lifelong journey, not just a job. Lean into every lesson, these skills will open doors. Trust the process and your own resilience.

Looking forward, my focus is on my work as an artist, alongside continued involvement in research and the agricultural supply chain. As a board member at Well Grounded, I aim to help create opportunities for others, especially refugees and women, to access training and careers that can transform their lives.



Liam

Graduate 2024

Barista, Company of Cooks

Daniel

Graduate 2017

Supervisor, Gather + Gather

My name is Daniel, but most know me as DB. I was first introduced to Well Grounded through an employability course with Arsenal Football Club. After joining the Well Grounded traineeship, I gained valuable skills and a huge boost in confidence. My life changed massively as I was placed in a workplace to further improve my skills and knowledge about coffee. After three years of working in coffee, I became a supervisor of the Brew Bar at UCL, which is one of my biggest achievements.

What makes my journey even more meaningful is that I inspired my younger brother Liam to follow in my footsteps. He joined Well Grounded in 2024, and I supported him as he completed the programme. Now he works as a Barista at the Royal Opera House with Company of Cooks. Coffee has brought us closer, and our shared passion connects us as brothers, both at work and in life.

One day, I hope to open my own coffee shop and partner with Well Grounded to take in Graduates like me and help them, just as Well Grounded helped me.





I spent much of my childhood as a young carer for my parents, who both suffer from severe mental health issues. As a result, I had little aspiration for academia or my future. I was too aware of life's negativities to focus on school or a career.

In 2018, at rock bottom after being discharged from an inpatient mental health facility, I realised that if I didn't seek a positive future, I likely wouldn't have one at all. I had left college and felt completely lost. Somehow, Well Grounded found me at the perfect time.

Since graduating, I've worked in many coffee roles including some of London's best coffee shops Press, Rosslyn and Frequency. It took time to understand the commitment of hospitality. I failed a few times but learnt crucial lessons that shaped my work ethic. Customer service is something I strive for. People make my job what it is, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

Well Grounded has been a support network, a family to fall back on when things felt difficult. Coffee has given me purpose, being even just a small part of somebody's day is so fulfilling and seeing little ones so excited for a babyccino makes my heart melt.

Since 2024, I've worked for Carnival Coffee Roasters, managing the café and training wholesale customers and the public. Teaching and passing on my passion for coffee is something I absolutely love.

Last year Carnival won the London Coffee Festival's Community Coffee Shop award, an award that meant so much to me.

Looking back to 2018 breaks my heart. I would tell myself, even when you can't imagine a stable future, it will work out. The things that felt so gigantic and overwhelming then are things I cannot even remember now. Keep seeking help, change and friendship. They will all come if you love yourself enough. You cannot blame yourself for not knowing. Nobody is perfect. Love yourself for who you are.

Looking forward I have always wanted to open a coffee shop- a place where everyone comes to talk and make friends, a training space for young people struggling to keep their heads above water, a family of humans willing to help each other thrive. I would love to give young people that have had a difficult start a positive future to look forward to.

I also love to travel. In eight years, I still haven't been to a coffee farm. If I am honest I don't think you can fully understand everything that goes into coffee until you have met the people working day in day out hand picking cherries and fermenting and raking and washing. I am almost at the very end of the chain for supply in coffee. I would love to see the beginning.

Chloe Franklin

Graduate 2018

Coffee Career Accelerator Programme, 2023

Head Barista and Trainer, Carnival Coffee Roasters



My journey began when I came to the UK looking for opportunities. I tried different jobs in sales and retail, but they never felt like the right fit. I wanted something more skill-based and long-term. Finding Well Grounded changed everything. From day one I felt welcomed, and they taught me how to make coffee, how to communicate, and helped me grow out of being naturally very reserved.

My confidence wasn't good at the start, but it grew over time alongside my skills and attention to detail. After completing a work placement with Gather + Gather I went on to work there until in 2023 I thought I needed to try something different. So, I went into the prison industry, taking all the confidence and customer-facing skills I gained with me. Today I'm more confident, more lively, and more able to put myself out there. Looking back, I wish I had applied sooner. I enjoyed every single moment because it was the best part of my life when it comes to making friends. In the future I dream of opening up my own coffee shop because it's definitely something I have a passion for.

Brian Witter

Graduate 2019

Prison Officer, Brixton Prison



My journey into coffee has been one of progression and discovery. As soon as I graduated from Well Grounded, I was offered a roasting position. I'm proud to still be roasting coffee today, having started at Press Coffee Co and now at Campbell and Syme Coffee Roasters.

The biggest change has been my personal development. I've moved in and out of London, taken up new skills either in deliveries or plumbing, visited many incredible cafés, and I've been taught by so many people along the way. Well Grounded gave me the knowledge, skills, and further qualifications to grow confidently in the industry.

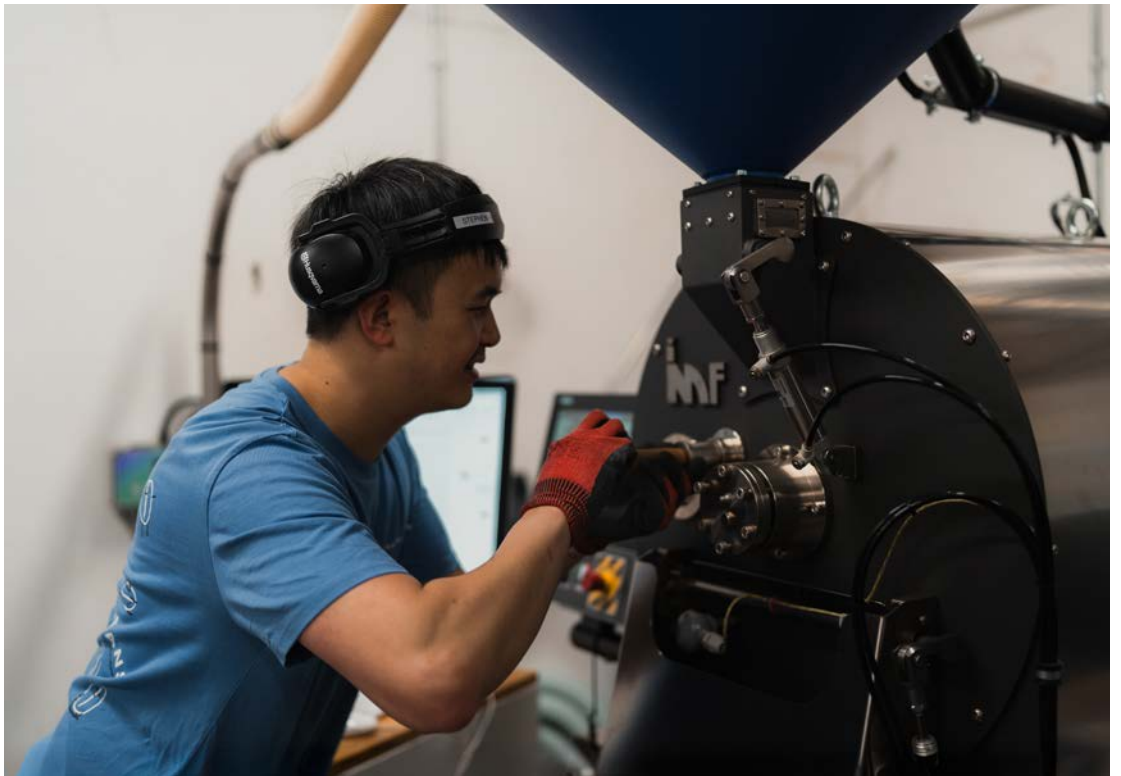
Looking back, I would tell myself to have more confidence, seize the moment, stop hesitating, and get things done faster. My dream for the future is to stay with my current company while developing my own coffee product and continue to grow through education and skills, whether in roasting, Barista work, technical roles, or even learning another language.

Stephen Chong

Graduate 2019

Coffee Career Accelerator Programme 2022 & Coffee Leaders Programme 2024

Production Roaster, Campbell and Syme Coffee Roasters





Tjaša Svetelšek

Graduate 2021

Coffee Career Accelerator Programme 2022 & Coffee Leaders Programme 2024

Progressions Co-ordinator, Well Grounded



My first steps into the world of specialty coffee were as a Well Grounded trainee, following a challenging relocation to London during the pandemic. After multiple Barista roles, increasingly advanced Well Grounded courses, and many meaningful connections made, I joined Well Grounded firstly as a Training Administrator and now as a Progressions Co-ordinator. It is incredibly rewarding to give the same opportunity to others.

While I've always had an interest in coffee, it started as a way out of unemployment. I had not yet realised how vast the world of specialty coffee is! First, I thought I was only gaining technical expertise, but it soon became clear how Barista work helped me grow in confidence and how I relate to other people. The community aspect is the most valuable to me now.

Looking back, I would say to myself: Trust the process. It's impossible to plan your future, in part because what you want can change along the way. Staying flexible and open to opportunities will take you to wonderful, unexpected places in life, all you need is intentionality behind your decisions.

My dreams for the future are in line with what I would say to my past self, I am excited to just find out where the future takes me! While specialty coffee has an incredibly special place in my heart, my intention is to move in the direction of non-profit, social impact, and community-centred work-meaning I've already found the best of both worlds working at Well Grounded.



When I first came to the UK from Hong Kong in 2021, it was difficult to find a job, so I started working at a Bubble Tea shop. While working, I realised I wanted to integrate more into society and grow personally. My friend, also a Well Grounded Graduate, recommended the programme. That's how my life began to change.

From day one, everyone was friendly and supportive. I engaged fully in every session and completed a work placement at Vacherin. On graduating I joined Vacherin as a Barista role where I still work today.

At first, I struggled to speak up and share my ideas. Through practice, feedback, and stepping out of my comfort zone, I became more confident, proactive, and self-assured. This growth strengthened my teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership skills. Looking back, I realise that learning to trust my own voice has been one of the most important changes in my personal and professional life. Recently, I was promoted to Team Leader, which was a very proud moment for me.

If I could speak to my past self, I'd say: "Good job, Kristy. You changed your life."

Well Grounded isn't just a training programme, it's a supportive community. Whenever you need help, they are there for you. The programme gave me coffee knowledge, skills, and the confidence to grow personally and professionally.

Looking back, I wish I had believed in myself sooner and taken the chance to join the programme earlier. It taught me the importance of stepping out of my comfort zone and embracing opportunities for growth.

Long-term, my dream is to do what Well Grounded does, to help others grow and shine. As Rabindranath Tagore said, "Live yourself as a light, because you wouldn't know who, by your light, comes out of the darkness." I believe in influencing life with life, using my own experiences and growth to positively impact others.

I remember feeling stuck in life before joining Well Grounded, and the programme truly changed my path and my career. I hope to inspire and support others, using my experiences to positively impact lives and create opportunities for people to discover their potential.

(Kristy) Pui Lam Chau

Graduate 2023

Coffee Career Accelerator Programme 2024

Team Leader, Vacherin

I joined Well Grounded as an academy learner, where I trained as a coffee Barista, and through the programme I gained practical skills, confidence, and support. After graduating, Well Grounded helped me find employment, and I have been working as a Barista since 2023.

I have grown in confidence and independence. I feel more secure in my skills, more comfortable working with people, and proud of how far I have come.

Looking back, I would tell myself to trust the process, believe in myself, and take every opportunity.

My dream is to open my own coffee shop one day, using the skills and experience I have gained through Well Grounded and my work as a Barista, and to create a welcoming space for the community.

Sara Aman

Graduate 2023

Barista, Benugo





Before I met Well Grounded, I was a full-time parent to two children, and we had two dogs. We lived overseas for a while for my husband's job before returning to the UK in 2015, choosing Bristol for a fresh start. My children were 11 and 8, and my priority was to support them as they settled into their new life.

Well Grounded came at a time of my life in a way I can only describe as god-sent. I had lost my confidence and hope in finding employment and my fitness had deteriorated as a result of a back injury. Then in October 2023, the grief from a bereavement consumed me.

After a difficult Christmas and New Year, I made a plan: find a Barista course, complete a food safety course, and get CV guidance. Within a week, I saw Well Grounded's first training in Bristol and immediately applied.

The programme gave me everything I wanted. The course helped me navigate my grief and gave me hope.

Looking back, I'd tell myself: "Be brave, be kind, and believe in yourself, you'll never know if you don't try." I tend to hesitate, but these opportunities have opened me to new experiences and wonderful people.

I really love Well Grounded's work and impact. When I applied for training, my objective was simply to learn to make coffee. When I learnt more about Well Grounded, I was blown away by their work and impact, and for the first time, I felt I had met an organisation that embodies everything I am passionate about (but without knowing how to apply those passions), and to which my values are aligned. It has given me renewed energy and enthusiasm.

I have had the privilege to support them in some of their training with Waitrose and trainee assessments. This is an avenue that has never occurred to me as a career progression, and hence a new direction I'd love to pursue.

My dream for the future remains, but now with a deeper meaning. I still hope to open my own cafe, with Well Grounded's values at its heart, employing over-50s and supporting their trainees, and using the cafe to help dog charities.

Andrea Ling-Godfrey

Graduate 2024

Coffee Career Accelerator Programme 2025

Barista, Bristol Loaf

When I joined Well Grounded in the summer of 2025, I was nervous at the beginning but really eager to learn about coffee after being long term unemployed, and overcoming challenges with my mental health. My life from there changed, from learning new skills in the Academy and at my work experience with BaxterStorey, to speaking about my experiences at my graduation at UBS. After a brief period spent looking for a new role, I started with Ozone at the Santander work cafe.

I am surprised by how outgoing I am in my role. I think I had a false self image of being someone who couldn't thrive talking to customers all day, but I just have my own style. I like to call it 'David Lynch' style customer service after the film director, because he had such well meaning weirdness in the way he presented himself. As well as deadpan silliness that comes naturally to me. The relationships I have formed with my regulars and coworkers are so important to me now.

Looking back, I think that I would reassure myself that the programme was a challenge that I was ready to take on. I'd say that I would find self love and self acceptance amongst the people in my cohort and in the wider community of people that I would get to know.

Currently, I balance my job with my tailoring studies and gym training. In September, I want to compete in a queer strong man competition. My dreams for the future are just to keep making coffee and clothes that follow my passions.

Cap De Las Casas

Graduate 2025

Barista, Ozone Coffee Roasters





My journey hasn't always been smooth sailing, as I've struggled to fit in at some places I've worked. Low confidence and self-esteem haven't helped along the way.

Everything changed when I discovered the Well Grounded course in Leeds. I learned amazing things about coffee, from its origins to making milky beverages and even creating latte art. Meeting such kind colleagues and tutors also made me a better person and set me on the path to a career I want, whether as a Barista or roaster.

If I could speak to my past self, I'd say "There's nothing to be afraid of, you are one step closer to employment and love every minute of the course."

My dream for the future is to work in coffee and visit a coffee-growing region to expand my knowledge and of course, enjoy a holiday along the way.

Joshua Harland

Graduate 2023

Volunteer, Little Owl Café, Saint Aidans Nature Reserve







Abdullrhman Hassona

Graduate 2025

The person behind the camera for this publication

As a photographer and coffee lover, I was always curious about the stories behind coffee, even before I knew where to start.

In early 2019, during a trip to Vietnam, I spent some time inside a coffee factory, creating visual content in exchange for learning. Experiencing the journey of coffee from farm to cup for the first time was brief but captivating. It left me with the sense that something in this world was waiting for me.

After arriving in the UK in late 2019, I spent the next five years waiting for my asylum papers, during which I was unable to work. Throughout those years, I volunteered in various communities, taught myself coffee using online resources and home experiments, and even started a YouTube series about my journey, still unsure where it would lead.

In early 2025, as soon as I received my papers, I applied to Well Grounded. The programme helped me understand what I wanted from coffee, how to grow in it, and how the UK job market works, knowledge that would've taken me years to learn on my own. This support, along with the strong network I gained, has made Well Grounded more than just a coffee community to me.

Today, I work as an artist with refugee communities (pictured), sharing human stories through photography and film while freelancing as a Barista.

I'm also working on starting my own coffee project, something that brings together coffee and art. And I'm sure I will continue sharing coffee content online as part of my journey.



OUR JOURNEY SO FAR

IT ALL STARTED WITH...



BEGIN DELIVERING
Coffee Career
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

2022



2023



OUR FIRST
COLLABORATION
Coffee PRODUCT

LONDON
2023

WE ARE
EXPANDING



BRISTOL
2023



LONDON
2025



LEEDS
2025



OUR FIRST
PARTNERSHIP
Cafe

2023



LONDON

STARTED
TRAINING IN
BRISTOL

2023



DELIVERED OUR
FIRST PIECE OF

2024



OPENED
our LEEDS
ACADEMY

2025

OPEN



OUR VISION TO SUPPORT
10,000 Lives
ACROSS THE COUNTRY



2035



Special thanks to
everyone who shared their story.



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