

STARTING OUT Start-up Kitchen is helping young entrepreneurs to get ahead with advice from stars of London's business scene, James Hurley reports

Only good things come of Brixton's Baddest

Daphne Greca arrived in London from Greece almost a decade ago as a young student. By the time she was ready to embark on her career, Europe's debt crisis had made it difficult to go home.

"Greece went to hell so I couldn't go back," the 26-year-old said. Minimum-wage waitress and coffee shop jobs followed, but you won't hear her complaining about a lack of opportunities. Ms Greca has embraced self-sufficiency, setting up Brixton's Baddest, a skateboarding shop that she hopes will turn a personal passion into a community hub and a sustainable business. "I feel very blessed to be here, where new businesses are supported," she said.

Ms Greca is one of about 50 young people expected to benefit this year from a charitable programme linking early-stage businesses with stars of the capital's entrepreneurial scene.

The Startup Kitchen has allowed young founders from diverse backgrounds and working across all sectors to find advice on getting their ventures off the ground from the likes of Niklas Zennström, the founder of Skype; Richard Reed, of Innocent drinks; and Saul Klein, one of Europe's leading venture capitalists.

The scheme was set up to help young adults from Hackney, east London, often from disadvantaged backgrounds, who had little access to the thriving "Tech City" of start-ups, entrepreneurs and investors that was right on their doorsteps. It has been expanded across the capital but Fay Cannings, who runs the charity, said that linking up youngsters with leading entrepreneurs was still the name of the game. "The participants tend to be from inner-city areas, it is culturally and ethnically diverse and we get a good mix of women," she said. "It is often young people

who haven't embarked on a career yet but have found the drive to set a business up early on." Free half-day sessions are run in small groups, with up to nine founders taking part in discussions with five experienced



Beatrice Newman, above left, has made clothes for Rita Ora and Anna Friel, left. She and Daphne Greca, middle, have had advice from business leaders through a charity run by Fay Cannings, above



Looking ahead

Startup Kitchen often catches founders at pivotal points in the development of their young companies, Fay Cannings says.

The project tries to deliver as much as possible in the three hours it spends with each participant. "It cuts through a lot in a short space of time," Ms

Cannings says. "They don't have to go on a huge expensive training course to get the advice they're looking for."

Because many will need further support, Ms Cannings is working to build partnerships with relevant services. "Brokering is fundamental," she says. Startup Kitchen

works with Urban MBA, a training programme to help young adults who missed out on an adequate formal education with their communication skills, as well as Seedcamp, which provides investment and mentoring for the most promising technology-led businesses.

entrepreneurs, advisers or investors. Then they break up into three smaller groups for more detailed discussions.

The young founders seek advice on anything from financial planning to raising money and marketing, to things as rudimentary as getting the right company name, finding office space or setting a pricing policy.

When *The Times* dropped in on a session in Brixton, south London, Ms Greca was among those looking for guidance. Admitting that she had started the day not knowing what to expect, she said: "The advice I received was not at all sugar coated, and it was directed very personally."

She left with ideas on improving her retail operation and making the business self-sustaining, so it can wean itself off the subsidised rent it has on its premises. "It has got me thinking five years down the road instead of three months," she said. "It has given me the confidence not to rush at every opportunity."

Another participant was Beatrice Newman, 28, who runs Korlekie, a women's fashion brand. Her three-year-old company has produced clothes for Rita Ora, the singer, and Anna Friel, the actress.

She said that detailed advice on the fashion industry had been hard to come by in an inevitably general forum, but she found the experience valuable nonetheless. "It was good to hear lessons from successful people and the other start-ups," she said. "It helped me believe my business can get to where I want it to be."

One of the advisers was Carlos Espinal, co-founder of Seedcamp, the start-up "accelerator" and investor, who has worked with hundreds of ambitious businesses. "For a young founder starting out, having the chief executive of, or investor in, a multimillion-pound business sit with you for half an hour could have a serious impact," he said.

The sessions were fascinating for advisers too, he added. "You can learn a lot just by listening to how someone else approaches their business," he said. "It was great to get involved, meet passionate entrepreneurs and spend time understanding their challenges and helping them where possible in their journey."

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