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# Changing lives, one forkful at a time



PHOTO: NATI HADAD

BY NATHAN JEFFAY

► AS ISRAELIS flock to caterers this week to buy holiday food, one Tel Aviv business has an edge on others: it captures the spirit of Rosh Hashanah as well as the taste of the festival.

A restaurant named Liliyot is all about helping young people to change their ways and get on the straight and narrow. The kitchen that prepares trays of up-market ready-made food is run in a large part by 10 at-risk youngsters who are turning their lives around with a special chef's training.

Edward Plastowitz, 19, was a high-school dropout in trouble with the law when he found out about Liliyot through his parole officer, and joined its year-and-a-half chef's course.

"I could never sit and talk freely; the minute you pushed one of my buttons,

I'd explode," he said. "I couldn't have cared less about anything. There were times I got kicked out of a job after two days. I never cared what people thought."

The programme not only hones his culinary talents, but also gives him a lot of general life skills.

"I had to learn to stop myself from blowing up," Mr Plastowitz said. "I've also learned a lot about getting to work on time, about responsibility, and about patience."

He added: "Suddenly, I was part of a team and it was up to me to prove myself."

For the staff and students of Liliyot, stories like this seem especially apt at this time of year, as rabbis everywhere preach about the Rosh Hashanah theme of personal change. They also think that Liliyot's success — with

waiting lists for tables and 250 graduates from at-risk backgrounds to date — shows the power of another High Holy Days ideal: charity.

The nonprofit organisation behind the restaurant, the Dualis Group, has used donations and investments it receives, alongside government money it has secured, to create 13 Israeli "social businesses" helping weaker groups in society. "This is the next generation of philanthropy," said Dualis' director Chanoch Barkat. "You're giving them a fishing rod."

Dualis' marketing director Tamar Levine said that diners as well as donors are buying in to the ideal of Liliyot — even to the extent that they enjoy the food more when they hear its story. She said: "Our research shows that when people see it's a social project, even the food seems tastier."

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