

From Volunteer to Business Owner



3 Kitchens

Volunteer • Seek Employment • Become an Entrepreneur

Funké Egberongbe
Nigerian food business owner
now living in Ireland

Business Name

Zeebahs Food

Country

Ireland

Find out more

www.zeebahsfoods.ie



My Story

I arrived in Ireland 20 years ago as an asylum seeker. Pregnant and alone, the early days were hard, moving between various refugee accommodations. It was during this challenging time I discovered my passion for cooking, as a volunteer, I started preparing meals to improve the quality of food available in the refugee centres. I spent seven years in the asylum process before my family could join me in Ireland. During these years, I honed my cooking skills but also pursued education when the opportunity arose. Upon receiving my residency, I attended the College of Further Education in Sligo, and later St. Angela's College, where I earned a degree in food science.

Motivation

It was always my dream to start a business, but I was scared. At first, getting a job seemed an easier route. But I was encouraged by my family to chase my dream I took every opportunity to develop my skills through training courses and education. After I completed a Bachelors Degree in Food Science and Business, I did some Start Your Own Business courses.

Originally from Nigeria, the food I cook is from my home, my culture and community so people can trust they are getting an authentic product.

I grew a business step by step .At first, catering at home for friends, then developing a range of sauces and now opening a restaurant. Currently, I employ 7 people as well as myself and my husband.





Challenges

No Business Background: I didn't have a business background in Nigeria, So I first did a 6 week start your own business course with the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) while working part-time.

Finding a Premises: We had some savings, and I thought funding the restaurant would be the biggest challenge, but actually finding a premises proved to be the biggest challenge. The business had grown too big to be able to continue to operate from home.

It took two years and I thought we would never find it so in that time I joined the Supervalu Food Academy and developed the bottled sauce business including the popular Jollof rice sauce, available in local supermarkets and Afro Caribbean stores, before finding the premises for the restaurant.



What learning can you share?



The power of education. My degree gave me credibility. The LEO supported me in the early days with courses, and taught me how to prepare a business plan, then supported me with mentorship sessions to help me prepare to seek funding.

Ask for help. Sligo LEADER gave me support to fund an accountant who helped me prepare the application to the bank for funding. The bank was a huge surprise, I prepared the application, not expecting a positive response, but within an hour and a half, my application was fully approved. Also, I got huge support to study for my degree and a job at the college afterwards, which provided an income I could save to put toward my business.

Use the power of social media. The COVID-19 lockdown was a turning point for me. With more time at home, I began cooking extensively, sharing culinary creations on Instagram, and building my profile <https://www.instagram.com/funkeskitchen/>. My online presence quickly grew, leading to the opening of Funké Afro Caribbean Restaurant in October 2023. My restaurant offers a variety of African and Caribbean dishes tailored to local tastes and has become a much-loved spot in Sligo Town.

What are your Future Plans?

To really make the restaurant successful, expand the sauce business and I am thinking of starting a consultancy business to support people like me. people new to Ireland, who want to open a business but need to understand how that works in Ireland.

Listen to Funké share her story [Funké Egberongbe Interview for 3Kitchens | The Momentum Podcast](#)

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