



3 Kitchens

Volunteer • Seek Employment • Become an Entrepreneur

Tania Kengoua
From Central African Republic
now working in France

Tania Kengoua

Country
France

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<https://entr-autres.eu/>



My Story

I arrived in France in 2020, at just 19 years old, feeling isolated and depressed after leaving the Central African Republic. Struggling to find meaning in my life, I spent my days withdrawn. However, a psychologist encouraged me to join the Entr-Autres association, which specializes in social integration, health, and ecology. It was there that I met Julia, who led the cooking workshops. What started as a simple task of chopping vegetables quickly became a way for me to reconnect with life and myself. Through the workshops, I learned to cook, and cooking became a personal victory. Each dish, from vegetable lasagna to cookies, marked a step toward greater self-confidence.

Motivation

Volunteering at Entr-Autres was the turning point in my life. It was not just about cooking; it was about reclaiming my confidence and purpose. As I learned new skills in the kitchen, I also gained strength, and every moment I spent volunteering helped me open up and face new challenges. I now feel proud of what I've accomplished, and my dream is to continue growing, both personally and professionally, through cooking. The skills I've gained through volunteering gave me the courage to pursue a career and continue my journey toward autonomy.

From chopping vegetables in a workshop to preparing full meals and now working in a hotel kitchen, I've slowly rebuilt my confidence and skills.

Cooking helped me reconnect with others and gave me the strength to believe in my future.





Challenges

When I arrived in France, the biggest challenge was psychological. I felt like I had lost everything—my family, my country, my sense of direction. I was very young, only 19, and found myself completely alone in a new country. I didn't speak the language, I had no job, and I was deeply depressed. I stayed in my room for days, not knowing what to do or where to go. I felt invisible. Even going outside or talking to someone felt like an impossible mountain to climb. The turning point came when a psychologist encouraged me to join the Entr-Autres association. But even then, I hesitated. I was scared of being judged or not being good enough. The fear of failure was constant. Volunteering was a big challenge at first because I didn't think I had anything to offer. But little by little, I saw that I could contribute, that I had value, and that people were happy to have me there. That changed everything.

What learning can you share?



One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that healing takes time, but it starts with connection. Volunteering wasn't just a way to stay busy—it was a powerful tool for rebuilding my self-esteem. I learned that even small actions—chopping vegetables, preparing meals, speaking to someone—can have a deep impact. These things might seem small, but they helped me feel alive again. I also learned that you don't have to be perfect or have everything figured out to be useful. You just need to show up and be open. I want to tell other women going through hard times that it's okay to ask for help, to take a step back, and to start slowly. Surrounding yourself with the right people, people who believe in you, can make all the difference. It made me realise how strong I actually am.

What are your Future Plans?

Now that I've gained confidence and experience, I want to build a future in the food sector. I've discovered that I truly enjoy cooking—not just as a hobby, but as a way of life. I'm planning to take a professional qualification, a CAP in cooking, and later one in pastry-making.

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