

A San Francisco supper club gives young people a chance to reinvent themselves

by [Gabrielle Lawrence](#) in the [September 2022](#) issue



At the Old Skool Café, young people learn life skills while training in various restaurant roles, including manager and chef. (Courtesy of the Old Skool Café)

Velvety carpet lines the entrance to Old Skool Cafe, and as guests arrive they are greeted by a hallway full of photographs and memories. There is a sense that life has been lived here. Located right next to the Bayview Opera House in the southeast corner of San Francisco, the jazz-themed supper club is three levels high including the bar, an open red-leather seating area, and a balcony for lounging and performances. It feels both roomy and intimate, and warmth suffuses the space.

But Old Skool is much more than a restaurant; it's a faith-based violence-prevention program that provides job training, employment, and a second chance at life to at-risk, formerly incarcerated, and foster care youth.

Desiree, an Old Skool alum who joined the program at age 15 in 2008, returned in 2017 as a staff member to mentor others like her. (Current and former program participants are referred to by first name only to protect their privacy.) Since then, she has continued to learn about the food business and has worked her way up to the role of assistant general manager in training.

“Old Skool was created to give at-risk youth the family that a lot of them don’t have. [Some] don’t even know what a family is—other than the people on the streets,” she said.

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