

Deaf chef hopes new eatery is a mouthwatering recipe of success

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A deaf chef has broken down barriers against the hard of hearing to realise a childhood dream to open his own cafe.

Since he was a child growing up in Milan, Italy, surrounded by pasta-and-pizza-loving friends and relatives, Luca Cusini has considered himself a cook.

But the 43-year-old's dream to become one only came true just last month when he opened "Cafe no. 43", Newham's first "deaf cafe", with the help of staff from St. Marks Church and Community Centre in Tollgate Road, Beckton.

With a menu listing sandwiches named after areas in the borough, including "the Beckton", a delicious combination of ham, mozzarella and rocket, Luca, who has been in the UK for five years, admits he is still learning about British food.

Speaking through an interpreter, Luca, a vegan, joked: "It's a different taste. I focus on the colours and how to present the food."

And the father of a 17-year-old son, Brian, signed with pride that he didn't know how to use a microwave.

But Luca, whose pesto is possibly the best in Beckton, is clear on one thing - that serving lunches and dinners to happy customers is a delight.

"I like to see it when people like



■ Chef Luca Cusini in the kitchen of Cafe No. 43 at the St Mark's Church and Community Centre.

Pictures: KEN MEARS

my food. It makes me proud," Luca, who plans to put his homemade pizza on the menu soon, said.

But the chef, who approached staff at the community centre in March last year with his business plan, faces challenges as a deaf businessman trying to succeed.

"You can go two ways. One is up and one is down. But I have energy so I will succeed," he said.

But sometimes a little bit of help from St Marks comes in handy.

"If I'm by myself it's very difficult for me to take orders without an interpreter," he explained.

That's when staff at the centre, managed by homeless charity Caritas [Anchor House](#) and home to the London Deaf Information Service, including manager Barbara Yearsley, step in.

"I'm always trying to borrow Barbara," he said.