



With jeans, a t-shirt and big dusty work boots, Irad Eichler, Chairman & Founder of Shekulo Tov Group, looks more like a social activist than a business man.

"The goal of Shekulo Tov Group is to integrate people with mental disabilities in the community, so in a sense I wear two hats- and get to connect the entrepreneurial side with the social side," he explains.

The Integrative Model works to integrate people with disabilities in the community using proactive rehabilitation in a variety of brands that act as vocational and social training centers.

"We have about 6,000 people with mental disabilities who receive rehabilitation services from us and work in our sales stands in malls, stores, factories and cafes in preparation for the free market."

The model of the organization is already internationally recognized: On February 22 2016, Eichler was called on stage at the UN General Assembly in New York together with Hagar Aloush, the group's CRO (Chief Rehabilitation Officer) - who built the model, and Offer Cohen, the group's CEO; to receive a prestigious prize from Zero Project. "It is a great honor to receive this prize," says Eichler, "It is also a significant recognition of our association and everything that is happening in Israel regarding the rehabilitation of people with disabilities. 30 percent of the people who are assisted by us go out and find jobs. This is a very good result, because the global average is only between three and seven percent. "

How did it all begin?

"After my army service, I worked as a counselor in a hostel for girls," says Eichler, "and from there I moved to the role of social coordinator at the hostel chain. At some point I noticed that all the social activities for the people were done inside the hostels- never anywhere public and always completely isolated from the rest of the community. And so I decided that I was going to throw a New Year's party for both people with special needs and ordinary people. I asked for a list of hostels, and this list actually changed my life. "

It was just a list of mental -health hostels, but Eichler approached them with a proposal that sounded revolutionary at the time. "The Professionals thought it was a strange and crazy idea that people with mental disabilities would go to a regular party in the community" he recalls. "They worried who would protect them, how they would get there, and how they



Vocational training, career development & social inclusion  
Bat Sheva st. 1, Lod, Israel | P.O. Box 185 | Zipcode: 7110101  
Tel: +972-8-9200050 | Fax: +972-8-9200339



would manage. I did my best to reassure them and promised that there would be no alcohol. I invited people from the all the hostels as well as my friends and other students. The result was one of the most amazing parties I've ever been to.

Following the success, I continued to organize parties, trips and other activities that were outside the hostel walls and that also involved the wider community. I received excellent feedback.

At the same time, the Law for the Rehabilitation of the Mentally Disabled was transferred to the public, and the Ministry of Health began to open frameworks based on the same worldview. Cooperation was established between me and the Mental Health Division of the Ministry of Health and I signed a contract according to which I would provide the State with rehabilitation services.

We built a chain of sales stands in shopping malls and I remember that when we opened the first stall, the marketing manager at the mall was afraid to let them sit alone without protection. "

Two weeks later the marketing manager that was initially afraid of us noticed that I was sitting at the sales stalls all day reading books as I was there to "watch over" the service users. She then realized that I did not need to be there watching over them.

Today more than 6,000 services users receive services across Israel in Shekulo Tov's different projects. The main goal of these services is to assist people with psychiatric disabilities to realize their potential and to achieve their life goals while decreasing mental illness stigma and promote social inclusion in their communities. Among our community based vocational training projects:

1. "**Rebooks**" is a leading brand for second hand books, offered for sale in nine stores, in over 450 different points of sale (e.g., cafés, kindergartens, large companies, and gyms) and via the project's website<sup>1</sup> and social media platforms. The vocational rehabilitation training process in Rebooks seek to improve hard and soft working skills including book collecting, sorting, sales (including on-line sales) and customer service. Here are two links for two short videos that describe Rebooks: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=udrdsqDCzNE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1sMsPpv1U>.

2. "**Erkuti**" is a network of sales points for value-driven quality gifts. The network is spread across dozens of selling points throughout the country and offers special gift packs and presents. "Erkuti" also sales its products to businesses (e.g., gifts for employees), in conferences and other events. All the products are manufactured by our integrative production plants. In the vocational rehabilitation aspect, "Erkuti" seeks to enhance knowledge, skills and tools to people with psychiatric disabilities, at the highest industry standards, in a natural environment and at the heart of the Israeli experience. As with all our vocational projects, this provide different opportunities to our buyers, suppliers, partners etc. to get to know people with psychiatric disabilities in a positive and productive context and may, in turn, reduce mental illness stigma and increase social inclusion.

3. **"Good Coffee"** is a chain of social cafés that provides a professional vocational rehabilitation training center for people with psychiatric disabilities. Its main objective is to enhance vocational and interpersonal skills and to promote practical experience in operating a kitchen, customer service and a variety of additional positions in this field. The vocational rehabilitation team of the cafés include professional rehabilitation manager, a placement coordinator and staff that specialize in the field of restaurants.

4. **Integrative Production Plants** that simulates a production work environment that enables the consumers to acquire vocational skills, and serves as an accelerator for their rehabilitation and recovery processes. The plants manufacture chocolate, candles, soaps, paper products and sweets and include a wide variety of training programs both in and out of the plant.

5. **"Zot Zot"** specializes in the design and production of games that are personally custom made for customers and include their photos. The project provides a vocational training opportunity in a computerized setting that may improve the ability to find and maintain a job in free market. As part of their training, the consumers are involved in all stages of the games' production – adjustments of the customer's photos, working with customers, print supervision and packaging are performed. The training is performed in an open work setting that is intended for social entrepreneurs and enables integration into a natural environment. Moreover, the consumers are trained and experience working on professional digital graphics, design and print platforms and programs.

6. **"Good Dog"** is a social business that offers dog owners a dog walking service by regular, trustworthy and professional dog-walkers who not only provide the dog an enjoyable and pampering walk, but also give it personal loving attention. Our dog walkers are people with psychiatric disabilities who loves dogs and receive an individual and professional training and support that include professional training in the field of dog walking and work with animals, animal first aid course, a basic dog training course and training of soft and hard employment skills. Our dog-walkers can also work as freelancers while receiving all the relevant knowledge and tools to open their own dog-walking business.

7. **"Dandasha"** is a second hand chain for casual and urban second hand and designer outlet fashion items. The consumers who make up the shop's staff enjoy practical training that includes: sales skills, styling, customer service, inventory management, shop window design and teamwork, that all aim to train them to work in the free market.

**Our supported employment services** are provided as an inherent part of the vocational rehabilitation training process. That is to say, our supported employment services are not detached from the earlier stages of vocational rehabilitation. From day one, the consumer meets the supported employment specialist, and relevant areas of occupations are explored together. Throughout the process, there is an emphasis on improving skills required for the desired job in the free market. The continual contact between the supported employment specialist and the managers of the different vocational rehabilitation training units, improves the understanding of the desires, needs, strengths and difficulties of each consumer. When a consumer expresses a wish to work in the free market, the supported employment specialist, who already knows him/her, accompanies the job-hunting process, and continues

to support the consumer while in the free market position. In case that a consumer leaves or is fired from her/his job, s/he has the option of returning to the training unit and to receive intensive support by the same staff, until s/he feels ready to reapply for a job in the free market.

**In the last three years alone, our unique working model managed in assisting the successful, long-term, free market work inclusion of more than 800 people (25%) with psychiatric disabilities.** They all are earning minimum wage or more, in various occupational settings, such as, Customer service, sales, education, manufacturing, retailing and much more.

### What's next?

One very exciting project is the creation of a new global online network for vocational rehabilitation professionals; RISE ([www.riseonlinenetwork.org](http://www.riseonlinenetwork.org)).

The purpose of the network is to connect service providers and professionals who work in vocational rehabilitation and supported employment from around the world- for networking, knowledge sharing and collaborations. We believe that by working together, by sharing our innovative models, best practices and experience—we can achieve greater impact, both in our local communities and in the world.

RISE is currently running an **ONLINE Roundtable Series- for peer groups** program. Each month group members from around the world meet online to discuss relevant topics and work to overcome common challenges

We have groups for CEO's, Supported Employment Managers, Job Coaches, Occupational Therapists and Social workers, Service Users, and more groups are opening up each quarter.

To join a peer group contact [info@riseonlinenetwork.org](mailto:info@riseonlinenetwork.org).

Furthermore, Shekulo Tov group is about to open the **first international "Rebooks" store in collaboration with Lebenshilfe-Chemnitz, Germany.**



Vocational training, career development & social inclusion  
Bat Sheva st. 1, Lod, Israel | P.O. Box 185 | Zipcode: 7110101  
Tel: +972-8-9200050 | Fax: +972-8-9200339

