

RE-SPECS Frames for the Needy: a volunteer's point of view

Recycling for the Earth, Tzedaka for the People

Ever had an idea so simple and practical, that you can't believe it hasn't been done before? I feel lucky enough to have been able to volunteer recently for a non-profit organization, an *amuta*, whose goal is to bring just such an idea into reality.

RE-SPECS Frames for the Needy, founded and run by Chana Simon, was conceived about 5 years ago when she noticed that an innumerable number of eyeglasses in great condition were being thrown away; meanwhile, many families with economic difficulties were struggling to afford new glasses. Taking both these facts into account, Chana realized that this wasted resource could be collected and channeled to the underprivileged.

Since its founding as a registered charity in July 2012, RE-SPECS has attracted many volunteers as well as optometrist supporters worldwide. The enterprise collects glasses, cleans and restores them, and passes them on to the needy at its new eye clinic at Tzomet Raanana. Many of the frames are brand-new, surplus stock. Pre-loved or new, RE-SPECS asks a nominal donation of 20 NIS a pair, which is then used for running the venture. According to Chana, "We have seen time and again the importance of allowing a person to pay a small amount for what they receive – it affords them self-respect and the feeling of having "purchased" what they wanted instead of receiving handouts."

I stumbled across this incredible project at school, where I found out that several of my friends had chosen RE-SPECS for their tenth-grade volunteer work. I decided to join their weekly volunteering, and used the time to clean and fix glasses frames for a good cause, while chatting with my friends. As time progressed, I was constantly amazed at the sheer motivation and enthusiasm that Chana had, which encouraged us greatly. It also made me realize the enormous amount of energy needed to run this *amuta*, and I see her as a role model for all of us.

When summer vacation arrived and I had finished my final year of school, there was a delay with my process of joining the IDF. Just at this time, RE-SPECS was opening its clinic, so I began volunteering there more often. RE-SPECS provided me with a job to do, the orderly time schedule I needed and fulfilling work with good people. I also learned skills that I had never expected to encounter at a glasses recycling organization: I learned a little about interior design, lighting, phone lines, computer programs, art equipment, types of posters, government forms, engaging donors, and the list goes on...

Another wonderful thing about RE-SPECS is that anyone, of almost any age and profession, can volunteer and help in some way. It's also because of the large variety of jobs that need to be done, and also because the activity suits everyone. I also received first-hand experience in seeing how a business (or *amuta*) works, and all the different variables involved in running it.

And for the people who come to get the glasses? They love the clinic and its whole concept. Since we've opened, we've had nothing but good feedback. RE-SPECS has grown into a kind of family, one where everyone feels they gain something in giving – and don't we all want a place where we love to give?

Miriam A.