



The True Heart Café

1st Social Enterprise in Cyprus

Presented by

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An Initiative of the NGO Voice for Autism



2.8 million social enterprises in Europe.

Inclusivity: Located in a downtown area of Nicosia.

Ownership model: Five people with autism are shareholders in the business.

Scaling impact: The team has grown from 10 to 18 in three months.

12 are currently on a waiting list. One of the pillars of EU Presidency is “no one left behind”.

Skill Development: Staff gain transferable skills

The Model

- A synergy between the NGO, government and private enterprise.
- The business model was designed with advice from the Department of Social Inclusion for People with Disabilities, under the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare.
- The Department of Social Inclusion is a valued partner and private enterprise has stepped up to support this impactful social mission.
- Community project

Key Challenges in the Cypriot Context

- . **Legislative Hurdles:** Navigating Cyprus' complex social enterprise laws and regulations.
- . **Legal costs:** Being first didn't help. Social Enterprise is a grey area. Legal help needed.
- . **Economic Costs:** More expensive to set up than traditional businesses. More incentives needed.
- . **Sustainability:** Moving beyond initial grants to create a self-sustaining business that can reinvest in more jobs.
- . **Policy lags:** Public policies and legal designations often fail to keep pace with the hybrid nature of social enterprises, leaving them without adequate regulatory support or incentives.
- . **Implementation Lag:** The delay in rolling out government support, such as procurement opportunities

Our Mission

- Inclusivity
- Dignity
- Opportunities
- Respect



Job Coaching in an Inclusive Social Enterprise

Why employment opportunities matter:

- When we started: **10 candidates**
- Today: **18 autistic employees**

Demand is growing rapidly - Opportunities remain limited

➡ *There is a strong need for structured, supported employment opportunities*

How we build our team

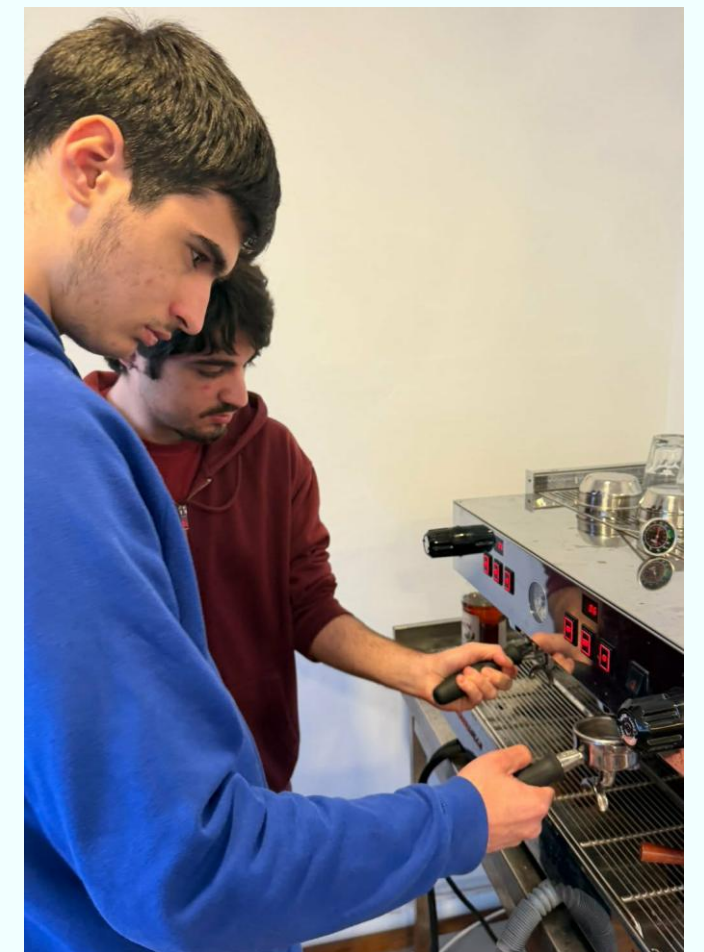
- Individual skills assessment

- ✓ strengths
- ✓ challenges
- ✓ interests

Grouping employees based on profiles

Assigning roles accordingly

➡ *The right role = higher success & confidence*



How we build our team

As an enterprise, we:

- Designed **adapted workflows** and simplified tasks

Why? ☞ To include individuals with higher support needs

Examples:

- Packaging
- Placing stickers on cups
- Takeaway preparation
- Packing used coffee for fertilizer

➡ *Everyone can contribute when given the right opportunity*

THE JOB COACH AS A LIFE COACH

Beyond employment

The job coach:

- Trains in job-related tasks
- Provides daily support
- Builds life skills

Key skills developed:

- Communication
- Social interaction
- Teamwork
- Problem-solving
- Confidence
- Initiative
- Hygiene & routines

Work becomes a tool for life

Change happens when we work together

Need for a training hub - tool

- Employee training
- Employer training
- Preparation for autistic individuals
- Family/Carers Training
- Public awareness

Inclusion is not an individual effort — it is a shared responsibility

Key Challenges in the Cypriot Context

- . **The Employment Gap:** The disability employment gap continues to widen.
- . **Social Inclusion vs. Segregation:** Social enterprises serve as a critical bridge for de-institutionalisation, offering pathways to the open market.
- . **Economic Impact:** Social enterprises drive innovation. They are key to implementing Principle 17 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which guarantees the right to services that enable participation in the labour market.
- . **Inclusion by Design:** Move from sheltered workshops without legal employee status to enterprises that pay minimum wages and offer transition pathways.
- . **Digital Literacy:** Utilize EU funds like **ESF+** and **InvestEU** to help social enterprises adopt assistive technologies, ensuring persons with disabilities aren't left behind in the digital transition.

Social Inclusion

- It's not about being invited to sit at someone else's table, it's about building a new table together.
- Inclusion is the action, but belonging is the goal.



Thank You

Everyone belongs

