



## Specialist People Foundation From Hope to Action to Impact

The Specialist People Foundation works to enable **one million jobs** for people with autism and similar challenges through social entrepreneurship, employment models, and a global change in mindset.

Our vision is a world where people are given equal opportunities in the labor market. We do this by sharing best practices, disseminating knowledge, and by spreading the Specialisterne model, to provide training, education and **employment for people with autism** and similar challenges.

The foundation is a not-for-profit organization established in 2008 by Specialisterne founder Thorkil Sonne. Through the Specialisterne model, we are turning the traits of autism – a remarkable eye for detail, pattern matching skills and a high tolerance for repetitive tasks – into a competitive advantage in business, thus **opening a world of opportunities** for adults with autism.



Specialisterne consultants  
Trygve Bjørst & Christian Andersen

The Specialist People Foundation strives to change how society views people with autism and similar challenges – from viewing it as a handicap to seeing it as a competitive advantage in the business market. By demonstrating that people with autism can thrive as specialists in certain fields of work, we are offering an often isolated group the opportunity for active, productive and fulfilling lives.

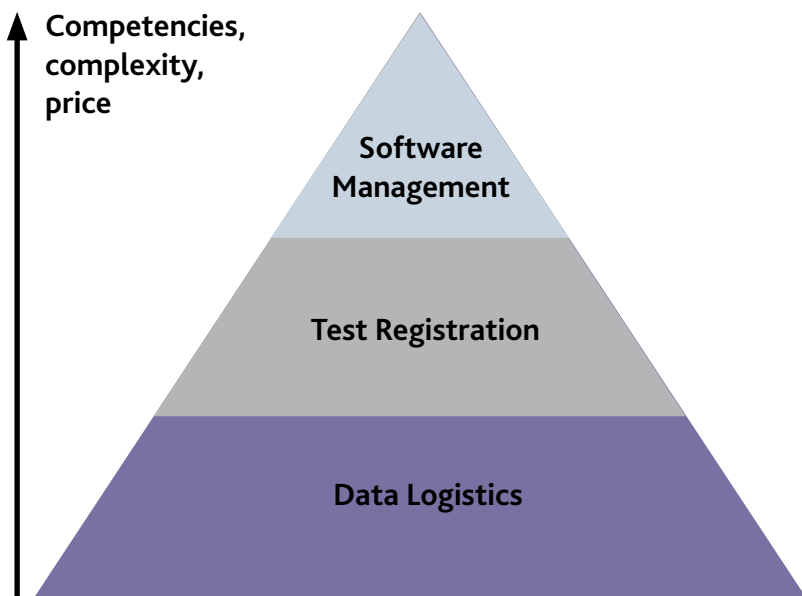
### Specialisterne

Specialisterne is a social innovation company founded in 2004 by Thorkil Sonne. Specialisterne, which translates from Danish as “The Specialists,” is owned by the Specialist People Foundation, and is a for-profit company harnessing the skill-set of people with autism and similar challenges as a competitive advantage in the labor market.

The majority of employees in Specialisterne have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum and **work as consultants in the corporate sector** on tasks such as software management, testing, logistics and data entry.

To date, Specialisterne operations have been established in Scotland, Iceland, Austria, Switzerland, and the US.

### Specialisterne - Business services





## The Founders Story



Thorkil Sonne's son Lars was 2½ years old when Sonne and his wife noticed that his development seemed to differ to that of his two older brothers. Among other things, it became difficult to communicate with Lars, and his language was not developing at the expected rate for his age. Lars was eventually diagnosed with Infantile Autism - a life-long pervasive developmental disorder for which there is no cure. It was a crushing blow to the Sonnes; realizing that their youngest son would have to live in a world he found difficult to interpret, and that would find it difficult to interpret him. The day they received the diagnosis their lives changed.

Sonne became active in the Danish Autism Association (DAA). He saw first-hand how families struggle for understanding and support because autism is an invisible condition, and that the knowledge of how best to help people with complicated invisible conditions such as autism is thin on the ground. Sonne wondered what the future would hold for his son.

Sonne began to investigate the opportunities for people like Lars. Through his involvement with the DAA he met many adults with autism, the majority of whom had many skills but no jobs to match those skills.

The lack of opportunities frustrated Sonne. So in 2004 and with the support of his family, he quit his job in the IT industry, remortgaged their home, and established Specialisterne (The Specialists in Danish). This socially innovative company uses the characteristics of people with autism – such as an attention to detail, zero tolerance for error, an outstanding memory and a persistence to get the job done – as a competitive advantage. The majority of employees at Specialisterne have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum, and work as consultants on tasks such as software testing, programming and data-entry for the corporate sector.

## Social impact

### Taking Social Change to a Global Level

The SPF is turning a world where 90 percent of people with autism are unemployed into one where they can succeed and thrive. Through the Specialisterne model, we are building an office culture that caters to the specific needs of people with autism, while at the same time boosting independence, confidence and cognitive development so employees begin to identify themselves as "specialists" rather than "someone with autism."

We are working towards a global change in mindset; bridging the gap between people with autism and the business community. In order to achieve our goal of one million jobs for people with autism, we are replicating the Specialisterne model and have developed a set of management tools (The Dandelion Model) that enable both the public and the private sector to assess, employ and manage people with autism. This helps create opportunities for an otherwise marginalized community, thus changing the way society perceives people with autism and therefore instigating social change.

In recognition of this, Ashoka Fellow Thorkil Sonne has been named as Ashoka Globalizer. The Globalizer program identifies approximately 40 Ashoka Fellows whose ideas are considered "most ready to globalize", and then aims to leverage Ashoka's global network of social and business entrepreneurs to link these ideas to the financial, strategic and intellectual support they need to go global. Find out more about Ashoka and the Globalizer program at [www.ashoka.org](http://www.ashoka.org).

### Make a Donation

Our goal is ambition; enabling one million jobs for people with autism and similar challenges. We can't do this on our own. If you would like to help us reach our goal then go to our website [www.specialistpeople.com](http://www.specialistpeople.com) to make a donation.

### Become a Specialisterne Partner

How would it feel to run a sustainable business that is also a catalyst for social change? By partnering with the Specialist People Foundation, you can take the first step to achieving this.

To find out more about partnering opportunities go to our website at [www.specialistpeople.com](http://www.specialistpeople.com)