

Shlomi Avni Bio



Shlomi Avni, Former Major (reserve) Navy Seal squad leader and a father of 5, is the Founder and CEO of Nirim in the Neighborhoods, an Israeli not-for profit organization for youth@high risk.

Born and raised in a deprived neighborhood of Or Akiva, a small town in Israel, Shlomi was one of the many few in his town who enlisted to the army. Following an impressive service as a Navy Seal officer, Shlomi made a decision to return to his community and work with the youth to improve enlistment rates.

He established a combat fitness group preparing the young adults of Or Akiva for a meaningful IDF service as fighters. A couple of years thereafter, his brother in arms, Nir Krichman, was killed in action. Nir's commander, Shlomi and other navy seals were motivated to create a program that empowers youth@high risk, and to name it in his memory, Nirim.

Shlomi saw this as an opportunity to work also with the youth who were not part of the combat fitness group and opened the first Nirim in the Neighborhoods home in Or Akiva.

The government of Israel has estimated that 430,865 children and youth are exposed to family or external circumstances that endanger their personal health, welfare, growth and development.

Nirim employs two unique educational-therapeutic programs, Nirim Youth Village and Nirim in the Neighborhoods.

Nirim provides youth@high risk with an opportunity, in many cases their last, to overcome their harsh life circumstances, discover their strengths, and become self-confident, successful, fulfilled and contributing members of society.

Wilderness Therapy is a key rehabilitative component and pivotal to Nirim's success. As Nirim youth trek through nature, survival skills, marine and outbound challenge activities serve as intensive therapeutic mediums that strengthen self-confidence, leadership abilities, and a sense of self-empowerment. Wilderness therapy is a unique tool developed abroad (UK and USA) and underwent refinement and adaptation by Nirim staff.

Since its inception in April 2003, Nirim in the Neighborhoods has expanded from a one-city pilot program in Or Akiva to nationwide phenomenon serving 500 teenagers and 400 alumni in 15 cities across Israel. To date, Shlomi as head of Nirim in the Neighborhoods has taken hundreds of teens off the streets and guided them through a meaningful army service, academic degrees, employment and community involvement - critical steps in becoming productive members of Israeli society.

Shlomi has devoted his life to improving the Israeli society, working with youth. This is his day-to-day mission and it accounts for most of his waking hours (and some nights). However, duty calls, and when Shlomi was addresses by Yaron Svoray, an expert at researching, locating, and retrieving stolen Nazi assets, he said yes, and joined a unique group with an exceptional mission to find Jewish treasures stolen by the Nazis in Poland, France, Germany, Austria and Italy.

Team's discoveries and recoveries are handed over to Jewish museums around the world.

These Projects have received international media coverage ([New York Times](#), [Fox news](#), [Los Angeles Times](#) and more).

In his free time, and as expected from a former Navy Seal Major, Shlomi enjoys swimming both in the open sea and in the swimming pool.



Shlomi lives in the city of his childhood, Or Akiva with his wife, Michal, 5 kids (4 girls and the youngest... a boy) and a cute dog. His parents who still live in the same city have moved to a better neighborhood. The old building where they used to live will be destroyed soon. The Avni's are well involved in the community adopting Shlomi's mission and Vision.

Shlomi earned his Bachelor's degree in Political Science and Master's Degree (by the end of 2015) in Public Administration, both at Haifa University. He attended Harvard University's very selectively High Potential [Leadership Program](#), an opportunity that allowed him to develop and expand the Nirim program. For his social entrepreneurship, he received the coveted "Chairman of the Knesset" award in 2012.