



Spirituality | Learning | Culture

# Annual Report 2022-23

**Makom** – meaning place in Hebrew – is an inclusive community fusing Jewish tradition and progressive values through spirituality, learning and culture. Makom inspires diverse participants to explore together how Judaism can meaningfully enrich our lives.

# President's Message

This past year (July 2022-June 2023) was a positive, pivotal period for Makom. As the COVID-19 pandemic waned, we returned fully to in-person programming, including indoor events. Through the quality, quantity, and variety of our programs, we had tremendous success welcoming our diverse community back together. Participants continued to express their appreciation for Makom's core values of inclusion and meaningful Jewish experiences.

While Makom's programming is thriving, I'll note with some concern that this was our second consecutive year with a modest net financial loss. While, thankfully, we have enough operating reserves to cover this loss, we need to establish more stable financial footing going forward. To achieve this, we must grow our membership significantly – both in terms of numbers of contributing members and average contribution – and also cultivate other donations and sponsorships. I hope you'll join me in realizing those vital goals, in order to ensure Makom's ongoing success.

With appreciation for your involvement in our community,

*Alan*

**Alan Sless**

President

August 2023





# Rabbi's Message

During Elul, the month preceding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Jewish tradition urges each of us to engage in *heshbon ha-nefesh* – literally, an accounting of the soul. We're bidden to look back on our actions and words of the past year and make an honest appraisal of how we've succeeded and how we've fallen short in our relationships both with God and with one another.

Makom's annual report is a *heshbon ha-nefesh* of sorts for us as a community and as a charitable organization. In this report, you'll see our achievements and challenges of the past year, as well as goals for growth and improvement in the new year.

I also invite you to reflect on what Makom has meant to you thus far, how we can enrich your life further, and how you can contribute to our community's flourishing.

As individuals and as a community, may we continue to go and grow, to use the phrase from the High Holiday version of *kaddish*, *le-eilah ul-eilah* – higher and higher.

With warm wishes,

*Aaron*

**Rabbi Aaron Levy**

Executive Director & Rabbi

August 2023



# Our year in numbers

229

Adult  
members

75

JK – Grade 8  
students

53

High school teens  
in youth group

23

Community  
Shabbat meals

81

Programs

We gave  
**\$24,000**  
of Financial aid to  
Afterschool / ATID  
families

We raised  
**\$146,324**  
in donations

# High Holidays

We returned to beautiful Hart House for the 2022 High Holiday season! Once again, we welcomed Carrie Watkins to lead services alongside Rabbi Aaron.

Makom provided joyous, uplifting High Holiday services to 250 people, as well as multiple family services and guided meditation.

*“Inspiring, meaningful, and joyful... I’m still singing.” – Lauren*

*“Amazing ruach and insights... very inspiring and special.” – Pat*



Participants gather in Makom’s backyard for a pre-Rosh Hashanah shofar-blowing workshop

# Shabbat & Holidays

This year, we've returned to our full schedule of Shabbat and holiday programming.

We provided Jewish experiences to hundreds of adults and children across the religious spectrum, who joined us as we prayed, remembered, sang, commemorated, and celebrated together.



Lighting Hanukkah candles on the sidewalk outside Makom's storefront

*"We liked the informality, the warmth, the singing, your dvar Torah, the dinner – everything!"*  
- Anonymous

## Our jam-packed schedule featured:

- Monthly Friday night & Shabbat morning services
- Shabbat meals
- Tishah be-Av services
- Selihot & songs workshop
- Sukkot services in the sukkah
- Simhat Torah services & dancing
- Hanukkah candle lightings
- Ignite – Tikkun Leil Hanukkah
- Purim carnival, juggling performance, megillah reading & party
- Pre-Pesah Matzah Bake
- Post-Pesah Mimouna
- Lag ba-Omer bonfire
- Community-wide Tikkun Leil Shavuot

# Adult Education

Beginning in November, we held monthly **lunch n' learns** following Shabbat morning services. Scholars taught classes on fascinating topics, ranging from Hanukkah's historical sources to Jewish environmental ethics, and from Moroccan texts on interreligious relationships to female golem stories.

On **Ethiopian Memorial Day** in May, guest speaker Yonatan Belete shared a brief history of Ethiopian Jewry and pertinent perspectives on the present and future of the Ethiopian Jewish community.



This fall, we ran our first-ever course for community members to **learn to chant Torah**. Several students who completed the classes and individual mentorship now read Torah at our monthly Shabbat morning services.



# Family Programming

Children are always welcome at Makom's services, and we're also pleased to offer dedicated programming for families with young kids! Families from across Downtown Toronto gather together to celebrate Jewish life in our warm community.



*"We met lovely people and our grandchildren had a fun time. Great event!" – Hilton*



This year saw the return of the **Matzah Bake** for the first time since 2019! Over 250 people came together to bake matzah with us in the wood-burning oven at Dufferin Grove Park.

Other highlights included crafts and dinner in the **sukkah**, **Shabbat** activities in the park, a **Purim** festival complete with comedic juggling performance and abridged megillah reading, and our annual **Lag ba-Omer** bonfire.





# Afterschool (JK – Grade 5)

This year, Makom Afterschool **returned to in-person learning!** Across our three locations, we provided fun, inclusive, and pluralistic Jewish and Hebrew education to 60 downtown kids.



*“Our girls are super happy even after a long day, and they seem to be learning a great deal.”*  
– Aaron



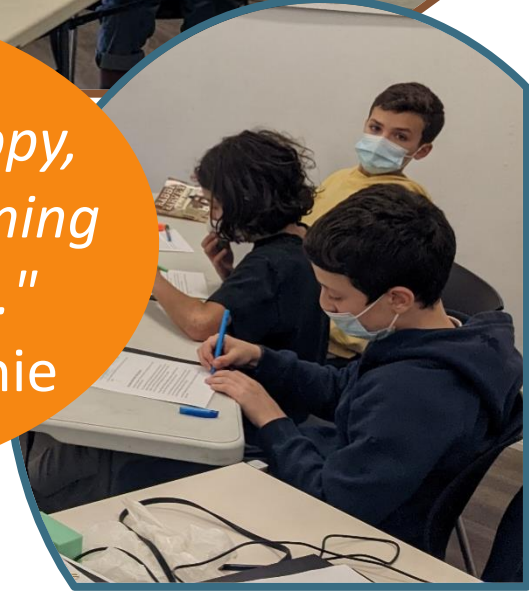
Our students had fun learning to speak (and, in older grades, read and write) in **Hebrew**, and discussing **Torah stories** and **Jewish values**. We also celebrated **holidays** together, both during class and together with the broader Makom community.

# ATID (Grades 6-8)

This year, our fifteen middle-school students studied **ethical and ritual mitzvot** (commandments or good deeds) through weekly text study and activities with Rabbi Aaron. Most students also opted into **conversational modern Hebrew** classes with our experienced, fluent Hebrew teachers.



*"Our kids are happy, engaged and learning a lot at Makom."*  
— Jason and Jennie



There were also opportunities for ATID students and their families to celebrate Jewish life together, including a **Hanukkah candle-lighting party** and a communal **Shabbat dinner**.

# Financial Aid Fund

**Jewish education is vital for children's development as ethical, engaged, and empowered Jews. We're committed to making Makom Afterschool and Makom ATID accessible to all families, regardless of financial situation; we never turn away a student due to lack of funds.**

This year, **thanks to our generous donors** – including a grant from the Julia and Henry Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Education of UJA Federation, and the 31 individuals who contributed to our June campaign – we awarded **\$24,000 in financial aid.**

These contributions enabled 14 students who would otherwise have been unable to attend our programs to learn **Hebrew**, connect with their Jewish **heritage**, and be part of our warm **community.**

*"I deeply value your work and what you do for these kids and the community. Having been in [financial hardship] when I was young, I'm very thankful to be able to contribute to support the work you do today."*  
– Anonymous Donor



# Downtown Jewish Teens

We launched Downtown Jewish Teens in 2021 to foster pluralistic and inclusive Jewish community for high-school teens, and engage them in meaningful and fun Jewish experiences.



This year, we **expanded our reach** to more than 50 teens from downtown Toronto. Teens came together to **socialize, celebrate** Shabbat and Jewish holidays, and **connect** with each other.

53

Teens



# Interfaith Couples & Families

Makom's diverse community includes many interfaith/intercultural couples and families, who are **welcome at all of our events.**

We also run **programs specifically for interfaith couples and families**, such as Shabbat dinners, holiday celebrations, and learning sessions. These provide focused opportunities to reach interfaith couples and provide them with a safe space to discuss their challenges, successes, and aspirations; learn more about Jewish holidays in an accessible yet substantial fashion; and form friendships.

*"Super, super fun and so nice to meet others that are in a similar situation to us." – Haley*



*"It was so exciting and invigorating to connect with so many other [interfaith] couples, and you created such a warm and inclusive environment." – Riviera*



*"I wanted you to know how much you have already changed our lives for the better!" – Lindsey*

# Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Our community would not be what it is without the diversity of its members.

**Makom is committed to building an inclusive and diverse community** that actively welcomes Jews and non-Jews of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and gender identities, and that promotes everyone's **equality, dignity, and welfare.**

As well as bringing an inclusive lens to everything we do, we also run programs with a DEI focus.

The week before Rosh Hashanah, Makom hosted award-winning Indigenous educator Dawn T. Maracle to facilitate **The Blanket Exercise**, an interactive workshop on Indigenous history, colonization, and reconciliation, that fosters truth, understanding, and respect.



# Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (cont'd)

Our first-ever **Mimouna-Iftar Jewish-Muslim Unity Dinner** in April was a really special and fun evening!

With a sold-out crowd of 70 folks of Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Muslim, and other backgrounds joining us, it was both a cultural-sharing experience and a party. We'll need a larger venue next year!



Yonatan Belete spoke on **Ethiopian Jewry: Past, Present & Future** for Ethiopian Memorial Day.

During Pride month, we hosted a **LGBTQ+ Pride mindfulness meditation sit**, and co-sponsored a community-wide **Pride Shabbat dinner**.

In March, we were delighted to welcome to Makom 14 high school students in **Camp Machane Lev's March Break program for LGBTQ+ teens**. We had a great discussion about Makom's approach to building diverse and inclusive community, and how we fuse Jewish tradition and progressive values.



Community-wide Pride Shabbat dinner

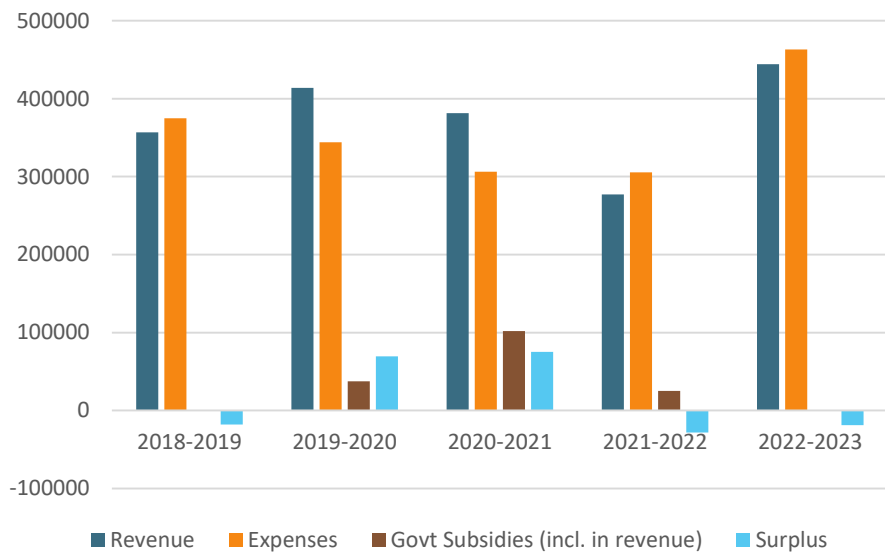
Photo credit: @shaimarkowitz [www.shaimarkowitz.com](http://www.shaimarkowitz.com)

# Financial Information

Registered Charity #828311712

Makom's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30.

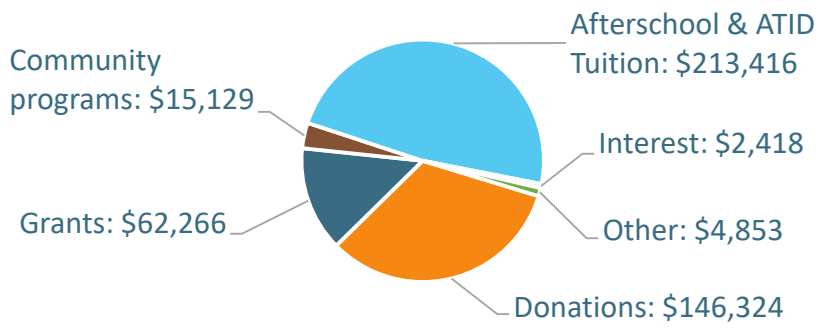
Revenue & Expenses by fiscal year



Government Covid subsidies received between March 2020 and October 2021 helped Makom continue to operate, and resulted in larger-than-usual surpluses in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. These funds are supporting us through our recovery as we return to in-person programming and Afterschool after years of disruption.

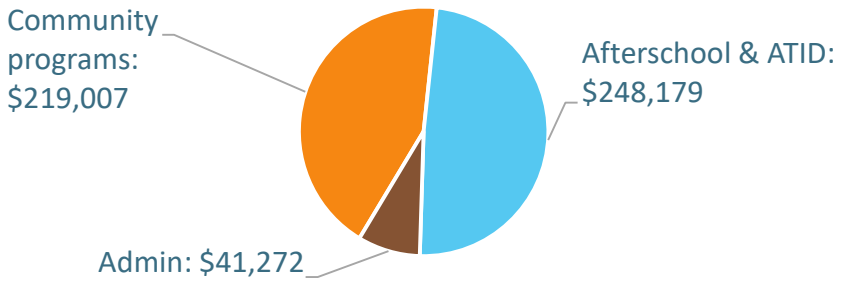
**Makom operates on a tight budget; your contributions really make a difference!**

## Revenue



Makom relies on the support of our generous donors. Thank you to everyone who donated this year!

## Expenses



	Afterschool/ATID	Overall
Revenue	\$248,808	\$444,405
Expenses	\$248,179	\$463,093



# Leadership

## Staff Members



**Aaron Levy**  
Founding Rabbi &  
Executive Director



**Adina Gamse**  
Managing Director



**Ariel Zaltzman**  
Director of Youth  
Education & Programming  
until December 2022



**Racheli Mandelker**  
Director of Youth  
Education & Programming  
since February 2023



**Sarah Raizel Avalis**  
Communications  
Coordinator (part-time)  
since February 2023

## Board of Directors

Makom is overseen by a Board of Directors, who provide leadership and guide the strategic direction of the organization.

**Ari Kaplan**  
President  
until Nov 2022

**Barry Gang**  
Treasurer  
until Nov 2022

**Lea Zeltserman**  
Afterschool  
Liaison  
until Nov 2022

**Reuben Klein**  
until Jan 2023

**Alan Sless**  
President  
since Nov 2022  
Secretary  
until Nov 2022

**Josh Patlik**  
Secretary  
since Nov 2022

**Lihor Abraham**  
Treasurer &  
Afterschool  
Liaison  
since Nov 2022

**Tae Hart**  
**Daphne Jackson**

**Ilana Newman**

**Michael Daum**  
since Nov 2022

**Dina Gang**  
since Nov 2022

**Josef Nulman**  
since Nov 2022

## Connect with us!

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