



Spirituality | Learning | Culture

Annual Report 2023-2024

Makom: Creative Downtown Judaism 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.

## RABBI'S MESSAGE

Two thousand years ago, Hillel the Elder taught: *בְּמָקוֹם שֶׁאֵין אָנָשִׁים, הִשְׁתַּדֵּל לִהְיוֹת אִישׁ* – “In a place where there’s no person, strive to be a person” (Mishnah, Avot 2:5). This is usually understood as a concise exhortation to each of us to stand up and do what’s right, even – or especially – if no one else is. Yet the 11th century French commentator Rashi offers a different interpretation: *הִשְׁתַּדֵּל וְתַעֲסֵק בְּצָרְכֵי צְבוּר* – “**strive and work for the needs of the community.**”

Since Makom’s inception 15 years ago, our overarching approach to building more robust and inclusive downtown Jewish life has been to **identify unmet communal needs and work hard to meet them.** This has certainly been true this past year. In order to meet both longstanding and acute needs of downtown Jews, we dramatically expanded our public programming and personal pastoral support. We initiated Hativah, our youth group for middle school students; launched House of Searching: The Downtown Beit Midrash, weekly Torah study for everyone; resumed PJ Plus for toddlers for the first time since 2018; offered multiple programs in response to the horrors of October 7 and the ongoing war in Israel and Gaza; and provided hundreds of hours of counselling and spiritual care for community members reeling from the conflict and its local ramifications.

As we have stepped up to do all this and so much more, our budget grew, so we asked you, our community members, to step up and support Makom. Collectively, **you gave more in donations this year than ever in Makom’s history**, whether for membership, Shabbat and holiday programming, the Makom Afterschool and ATID financial aid fund, House of Searching: The Downtown Beit Midrash, or our general operations. While we did need to dip into our reserve fund this year and still have real work ahead to increase our revenues to cover all of our annual expenses, we’re moving in the right direction. With your help, we’ll achieve a balanced budget and begin replenishing our reserve fund in this coming year.

As we pray on Shabbat mornings, may our efforts to meet *צָרְכֵי צְבוּר* – the community’s needs – find *בְּרָכָה וְהַצְלָחָה* – blessing and success – as **Makom continues to grow** in both the depth of what we offer and the breadth of the community we serve.

With warm wishes,

*Aaron*

Rabbi Aaron Levy  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
July 2024



**OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS**

**302**  
MEMBERS

**85**  
KIDS IN  
AFTERSCHOOL  
JEWISH EDUCATION

**\$190K**  
RAISED IN  
DONATIONS AND  
SPONSORSHIPS

**65**  
PRE-TEENS &  
TEENS IN OUR  
YOUTH GROUPS

**\$38K**  
AWARDED IN  
FINANCIAL AID FOR  
OUR STUDENTS

**22**  
SHABBAT  
SERVICES

**800**  
COLLECTIVE  
HOURS OF  
TORAH STUDY

**221**  
COMMUNITY  
EVENTS

**2,000**  
PEOPLE BENEFITING  
FROM OUR DOWNTOWN  
JEWISH COMMUNITY



## OUR DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

**Makom welcomes everyone:** all ages and stages of life, all approaches to Judaism, all identities and orientations, all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and all income levels.

On this page and throughout this report, you'll find examples of how we put inclusion into practice.

### CELEBRATING PRIDE MONTH

During June, we hosted an LGBTQ+ mindfulness meditation sit and co-sponsored the annual Community-Wide Pride Shabbat dinner at the MNjcc.



### PRAYER

Our prayer services **blend traditional practice with progressive values.** We offer three seating sections: mens', womens', and mixed (all genders'). Female, male, and gender non-binary Jews can lead parts of services, read and be called up to the Torah, and count towards our double minyan.

### INTERFAITH COUPLES

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

This year, we also ran events specifically for interfaith couples and families, including a Shabbat dinner and an explanatory Havdalah, dessert, and Ask the Rabbi Anything session. These programs create a comfortable space for interfaith couples to discuss their challenges, successes, and aspirations; to learn more about Judaism in an accessible yet substantial fashion; and to form community.

### MIMOUNA

In May, we hosted our third-annual Mimouna, the Moroccan Jewish and Muslim celebration of friendship and eating together after Pesah (Paasover) ends. It was a wonderful, sold-out evening of Moroccan customs, music, and food (including moufletta, pictured left).

## HIGH HOLIDAYS

Our **joyous and awe-inspiring High Holiday services** drew hundreds of people of all ages to start the Jewish year together on a spiritual high-note. As well as our song-filled traditional services for Selihot, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur, we provided family services, childcare, guided meditation, and soulful chanting.

As an **inclusive and diverse** Jewish community, we incorporated different traditions by inviting Sephardic community members to lead traditional Sephardic piyyutim (prayer poems) at some key points in the service.



*“The music and singing are always transportive and a large reason why I love coming back!”*

*“I love tradition, I love singing familiar tunes, I love being part of beautiful harmonies. Inspiring awe and reverence is an essential part of Yom Kippur and Makom services make that happen for me.”*



*“Yom Kippur was simply magical.”*

## SHABBAT AND HOLIDAYS

Makom provides meaningful Jewish experiences for a growing and diverse downtown Jewish community.

Thanks to a generous group of 15 donors who established a matching fund, and 75 households who donated to our matching campaign, we were able to provide 74 meaningful Shabbat and holiday experiences over the course of the year for **hundreds of participants**.

Our storefront space was often filled to capacity at our monthly Friday night and Shabbat morning services. These were followed by community meals, with kosher, vegan food, singing, Torah learning, and warm company.



Hundreds of people joined Makom throughout the Jewish year for our holiday programs and events. We had services, meals, and activities in the sukkah; dancing on Simḥat Torah; Hanukkah candle lightings on the sidewalk; Purim megillah readings and parties; pre-Pesaḥ matzah baking in the park; a celebration of the Morroccan tradition of Mimouna; games, singing and s'mores around the bonfire for Lag ba-Omer; and all-night Torah learning for Shavuot; as well as prayer services on many of these occasions.

## **RESPONDING TO OCTOBER 7**

Zeman simḥatenu – “the time of our joy,” our prayers’ description of the holidays of Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and Simḥat Torah – was abruptly shattered on Shabbat, October 7 by the utterly horrifying news of the attack on Israel. The ongoing war in Israel and Gaza is a nightmare without end, as the death count continues to rise and hostages are still in captivity.

Am Yisrael – the Jewish People – is a politically diverse, extended family, and we’re all hurting in different ways. Many of us are having a hard time coping with the terrible news from Israel and Gaza, hateful acts and rhetoric here, and strained relationships in our lives.

Here are some ways our Makom community has been expressing empathy and providing support.

### **TEEN DISCUSSION GROUPS**

We held two discussion sessions for high-school teens to talk about the situation, their feelings, and their experiences at school and online, in a safe and supportive environment.

*“Thank you for running the teen night. My girls said it was the first time they could really talk about what they were experiencing.”*

### **SINGING SONGS OF PEACE IN COMMUNITY**

In early November, 100 adults, kids, and teens gathered around a bonfire to sing songs of peace, togetherness, and comfort.

### **PASTORAL COUNSELLING**

In the days and months following October 7, Rabbi Aaron provided a listening ear and spiritual guidance to dozens of community members.

### **COMMUNITY HEALING WORKSHOPS**

We ran two workshops on the journey from helplessness to helpfulness, with therapist and grief counsellor Aviv Bialy.

*“I appreciate all that you and Makom do to sow the seeds of inclusivity, empathy and understanding during a time when I have been very uncertain about what it means to be Jewish.”*

### **PRAYER**

Before Shabbat on Friday, October 13, we held a moving ceremony to memorialize all those brutally murdered on October 7 and the innocent civilians killed since then. We prayed for the safe return of over 250 hostages, reading every one of their names, prayed for healing for the thousands injured, and prayed for peace. Since then, we’ve included many of these prayers at every Shabbat morning service.

### **ARTIST GATHERINGS IN DIFFICULT TIMES**

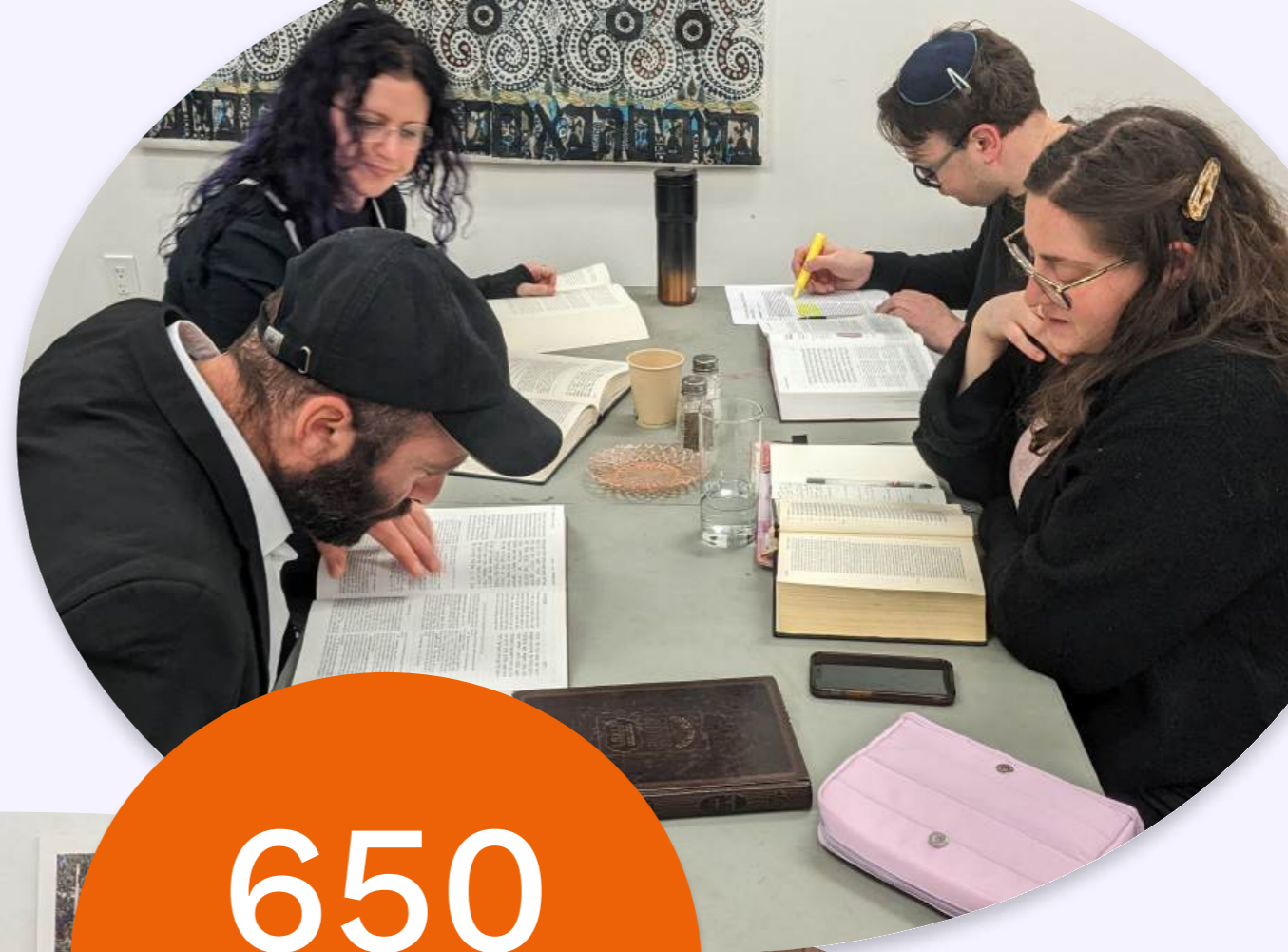
Makom hosted three evenings facilitated by Fentster for Jewish artists to share their experiences and feelings, especially in navigating the arts world post-October 7.

## HOUSE OF SEARCHING

This year saw the launch of House of Searching: The Downtown Beit Midrash! Every week, adults from across (and outside) the Jewish spectrum came to Makom to spend an evening engaged in Torah study in an open and supportive environment.

Rabbi Aaron served as Torah concierge, helping people find a havruta (study partner) and an interesting text at their learning level.

Topics studied ranged from the weekly Torah portion to ethics, law to mysticism.



650

COLLECTIVE  
HOURS OF  
TORAH STUDY





## FAMILY PROGRAMMING

Children are an important part of the Makom community and we offer frequent kid-focused programming, where families from across downtown Toronto come together to celebrate Jewish life in our warm community.

This year, we revived our partnership with PJ Library to offer PJ Plus: 15 Sunday mornings full of games, songs, and story time for toddlers and their parents.



For families with older kids, highlights included Family Services on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and certain Shabbat mornings; Shabbat afternoons in the park; crafts and dinner in the Sukkah; a Purim carnival with a smorgasbord of games, activities, and prizes; our annual outdoor Matzah bake at the brick oven at Christie Pits Park; and a Lag Ba-Omer bonfire.

## MAKOM AFTERSCHOOL (JK - GRADE 5)

Makom Afterschool is our fun, inclusive, pluralistic Jewish and Hebrew learning program for kids in JK through Grade 5. Across our three locations, we welcomed 70 students from downtown public schools.

Our students developed their Hebrew conversational skills through play-based activities and games, studied Torah stories and values, and celebrated Jewish holidays together.

Our curriculum supports their development as ethical, engaged and empowered Jews within the diversity of religious and cultural approaches to Jewish life.



**70**  
**STUDENTS**  
**ENROLLED**



## MAKOM ATID (GRADES 6-8)

The name of our middle-school program, ATID, means "future" in Hebrew. As an acronym, ATID stands for: Afterschool Torah Im Derekh-Eretz (Torah with Ways of the World). Makom ATID offers substantive, nuanced, and pluralistic Jewish learning for its own sake, making Jewish learning meaningful and relevant to contemporary Jewish youth.

We bring together diverse Jewish pre-teens and teens with different Jewish backgrounds and approaches, including those who identify as secular, religiously liberal, and traditionally observant.



*“Thanks for all you did to make ATID not the after-school program I attended! Norah never complained about going to ATID. I love what she shared about Judaism and how to live a more Jewish life.”*



This year, our fifteen middle-school students studied the Jewish holiday cycle and closely read the entire first book of the Torah in their weekly lessons with Rabbi Aaron. Many students also opted into conversational modern Hebrew classes with our fluent, experienced Hebrew teachers.

## FINANCIAL AID FUND

We firmly believe that 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 their financial situation; we never turn away a student due to lack of funds.

As the cost of living crisis hits families ever harder, we find that more and more families are in greater need of support. This year, we gave out nearly \$38,000 in financial aid, enabling 18 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.

We are grateful to the Julia and Henry Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Education of UJA Federation and our 40 generous donors, who covered \$15,629 of these scholarships. The remainder was funded by Makom's general budget.



*“Having my children attend the Hebrew program is an absolute gift. Not only will it allow them to connect with our cultural heritage, but it will also provide them with valuable life skills and a sense of belonging to our community.*

*Your assistance not only lightens my financial burden but also fills my heart with gratitude.*

*I promise to make the most of this opportunity and ensure that my children fully engage in the program, learn, and grow. Your support will have a lasting impact on their lives.”*

## JEWISH YOUTH GROUPS FOR PRE-TEENS & TEENS

Building on the success of **Downtown Jewish Teens**, our youth group for Jewish highschoolers, this year we launched **Hativah**, a youth group for Jewish pre-teens. (Hativah is Israeli slang for middle school.) The aim of each group is to foster Jewish community and engage participants in meaningful and fun Jewish experiences.

Both are explicitly pluralistic and inclusive of Jewish teens or pre-teens of all backgrounds and identities, including those with liberal and traditional approaches to Jewish practice, LGBTQ+ and straight/cis identities, Sepharadi and Ashkenazi heritage, and interfaith/intercultural families.



Each age group came together to socialize, celebrate Shabbat and Jewish holidays, and connect with Jewish peers.

Downtown Jewish Teens and Hativah are much-needed initiatives, filling a gap in Toronto's downtown Jewish scene.

## ART & CULTURE

With support from an Ontario Anti-Hate Security Grant, Makom commissioned local artist Talie Shalmon to paint a **mural** in our entryway!

*Mekomot's* vibrant decorative patterns are inspired by synagogues around the world.



PHOTO CREDIT: MICHAEL RAJZMAN  
@OUTFRONTPHOTO

ARTIST: MEICHEN WAXER  
PHOTO: BRITTANY CARMICHAEL



**FENTSTER** (meaning "window" in Yiddish) is an independent, artist-run exhibition space located in Makom's storefront window. Fentster presents rotating, site-specific installations of contemporary art connected to the Jewish experience.

Makom also hosted two Fentster exhibition openings and a "Crafternoon," at which the public was invited to create upcycled, wearable art.

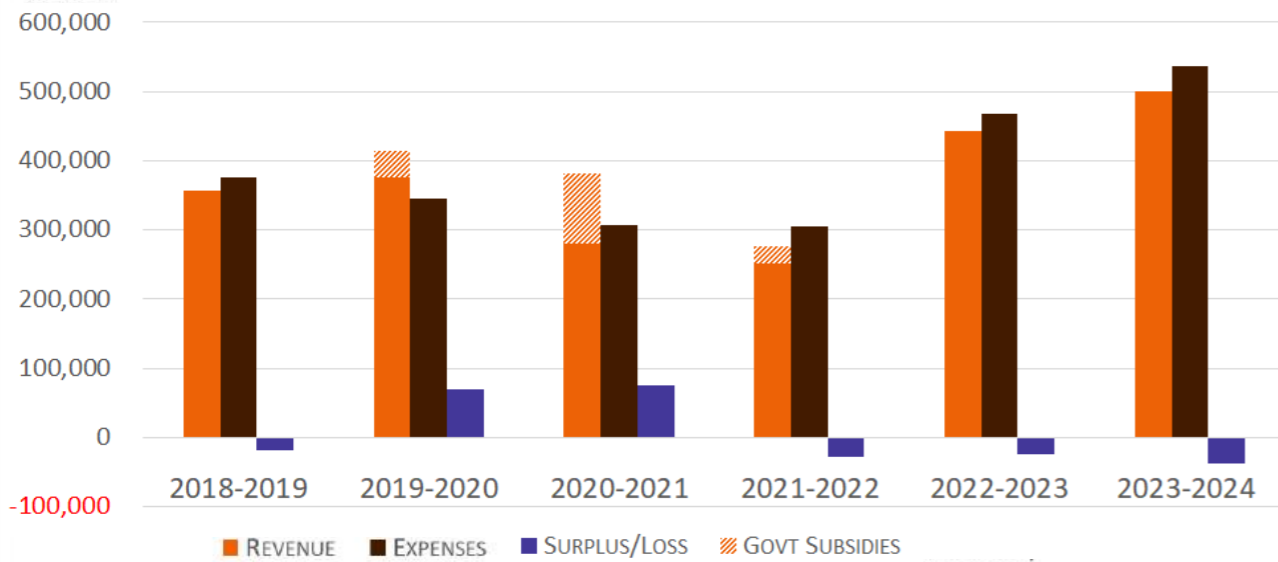
# FINANCIAL INFORMATION

This year saw our highest ever fundraising revenue, and we're incredibly grateful for the support of every single one of our donors. We impact hundreds of lives every year and we couldn't achieve all this without you.

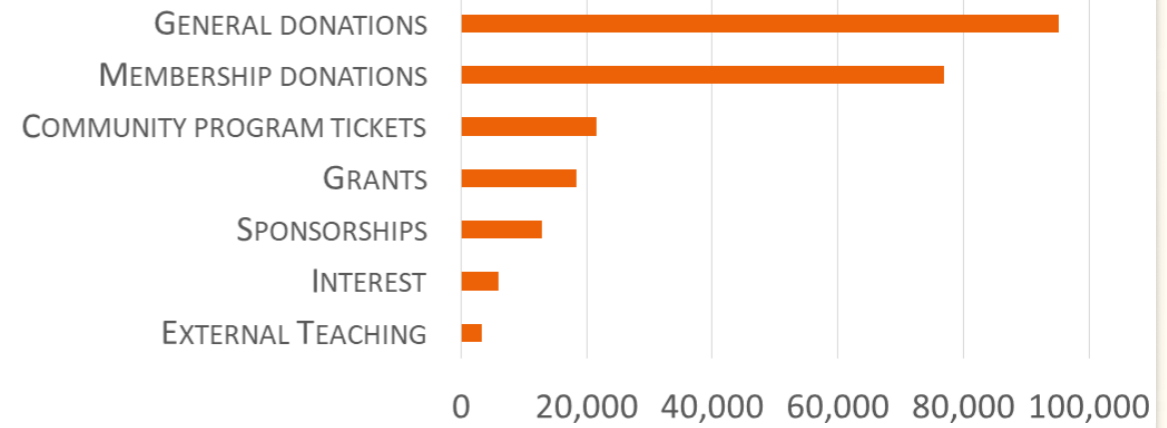
We're running more programs and serving more people than ever before, and between that and the increasing cost of living, we're also reporting our highest ever annual expenses.

In the coming year, we must continue to grow our fundraising capacity to support our current offerings in a financially sustainable way.

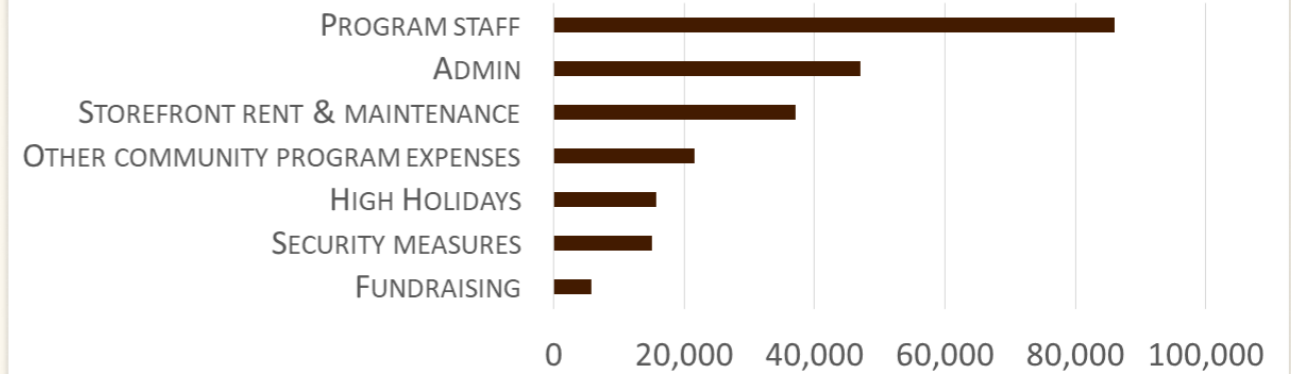
**SURPLUS/LOSS BY FISCAL YEAR**



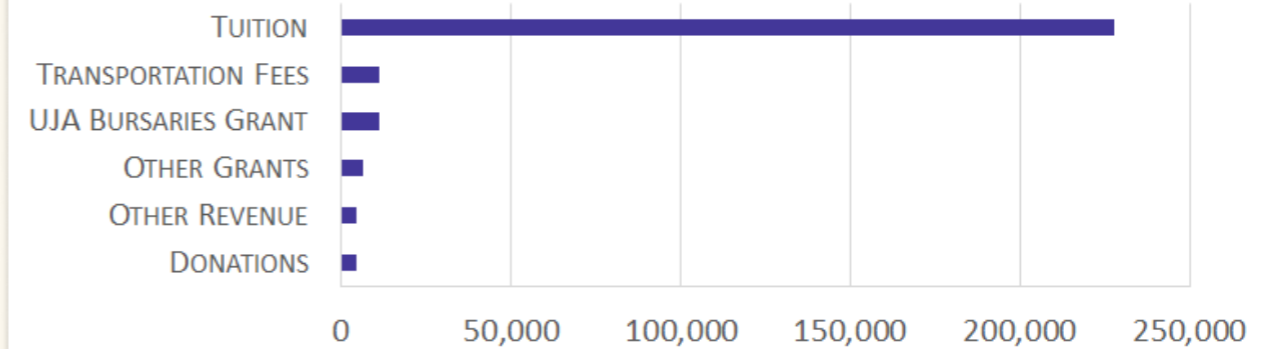
## COMMUNITY REVENUE SOURCES



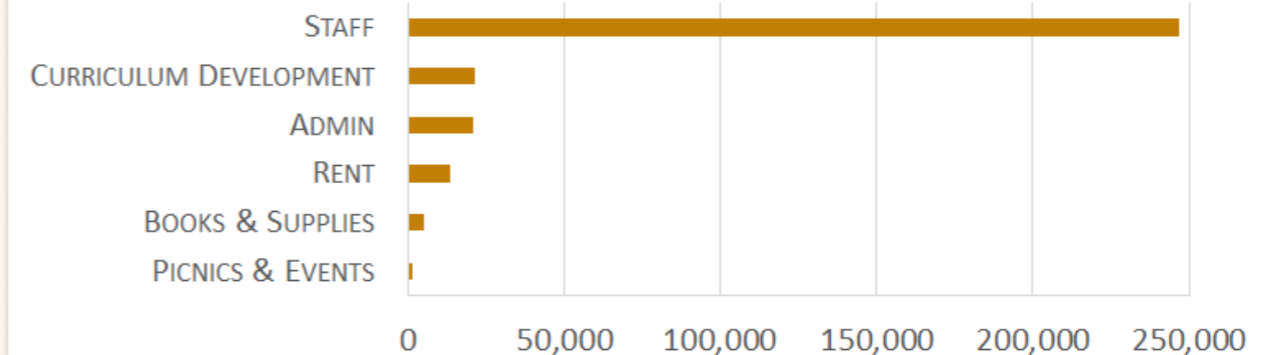
## COMMUNITY EXPENSE CATEGORIES



## AFTERSCHOOL & ATID REVENUE SOURCES



## AFTERSCHOOL & ATID EXPENSE CATEGORIES



|                     | AFTERSCHOOL & ATID | COMMUNITY        | TOTAL            |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|
| <b>REVENUE</b>      | <b>\$265,189</b>   | <b>\$234,271</b> | <b>\$499,460</b> |
| <b>EXPENSES</b>     | <b>\$309,197</b>   | <b>\$228,297</b> | <b>\$537,494</b> |
| <b>SURPLUS/LOSS</b> | <b>\$-44,008</b>   | <b>\$5,974</b>   | <b>\$-38,034</b> |

## LEADERSHIP

Makom is overseen by a Board of Directors, who are responsible for the governance and strategic direction of the organization.

Day-to-day operations are handled by our staff team.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Racheli Mandelker  
**DIRECTOR OF YOUTH EDUCATION  
AND PROGRAMMING**  
through March 2024



Sarah Eligberg  
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Rachel Manson  
**COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR**  
since November 2023



Garrett Theriault-Ryan  
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