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The Power of Language, The Strength of Community Annual Report

2024-2025

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Sameera Hamani, advanced student

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Dear friends and supporters,

It has now been four months since I joined Lissan as Acting CEO during Talia's maternity leave.

After many years as principal of the Hand in Hand high school in Jerusalem, I see Lissan as a natural continuation of my lifelong work: promoting gender equality, advancing language skills as a tool for personal and social change, strengthening the agency of Palestinian women in Jerusalem, and improving Israeli-Palestinian relations.

I stepped into this role at a time when our city and region were facing immense challenges. I am proud to see Lissan's ongoing achievements this past year - maintaining regular classes for hundreds of women, expanding programs that promote access to rights, offering Hebrew courses for a variety of organizations, and developing new initiatives that continue to grow and take shape. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to take part in this important work, while also helping to strengthen and prepare the organization for the years ahead.

The past months have taken us from the difficult days of war to a slow and fragile sense of recovery. Even as we wait to see if the war is truly over, we are entering a phase of rebuilding, and I am deeply proud that Lissan served as a solid place of connection and hope during the war, and will continue to do so now.

Thank you for your trust, partnership, and belief in our shared mission. Together, we can keep building spaces of connection, dignity, and possibility for a better reality in Jerusalem.

With gratitude,

Efrat Meyer

Acting CEO, Lissan



About Lissan

Lissan (Arabic for "language" or "tongue") is a grassroots nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting gender and social equality in Jerusalem. We work to bridge the divide between East and West Jerusalem by advancing linguistic justice and envisioning a bilingual, Hebrew-Arabic city. Our practical, accessible Hebrew language courses are tailored to meet the needs of East Jerusalemité Palestinian women, equipping them with the language skills necessary to navigate Jerusalem's public sphere independently and access essential resources, rights, and opportunities for personal and professional growth.



Iman Yigmor, advanced student, and her teachers Katya Oleskevich and Seham Triaqi

Our shared, multicultural community of Jewish Israeli and Palestinian staff and volunteers collaborates to foster a more just and equitable Jerusalem. With over a decade of experience, Lissan has equipped over 3,500 women with language skills to access rights, resources and opportunities; built a community of hundreds of Israeli and Palestinian volunteers and teachers; and developed specialized pedagogical materials tailored to the needs of the East Jerusalem communities we serve.

Jerusalem: A City Divided by Walls and Words

Jerusalem is a city divided by walls, by services, and by language.

Home to over **1 million residents**, Jerusalem is shaped by deep inequalities between East and West. While the city's residents share hospitals, workplaces, and municipal offices, they do so in parallel worlds, separated by history, politics, and the ability to speak the other's language. East Jerusalem's over **435,000 Palestinian residents** - about **39% of the city's population** - live under structural neglect, with marked gaps in infrastructure, services, and economic opportunity compared to Jewish neighborhoods. A large majority of Palestinian families live in poverty which affects **75.4% of Palestinian residents** and **70% of children in East Jerusalem**.

For women, the challenges are even greater.

In East Jerusalem, **74% of Palestinian women are unemployed**, and roughly **75% report weak to no Hebrew proficiency**. Without Hebrew, mothers struggle to advocate for their children in hospitals, young women cannot access higher education, and jobseekers face closed doors in almost every sector. This language gap limits independence, reinforces reliance on male relatives, and keeps families trapped in cycles of poverty.

The war has intensified these challenges.

Since October 2023, fear and mistrust between communities has grown, police presence and checkpoints have increased, and movement restrictions have deepened isolation. Many Palestinian women have lost jobs or income; others have chosen to stay home out of fear. Public spaces have become more difficult and sometimes unsafe to navigate.

In this environment, Lissan works to address these challenges, bridging divides and expanding access to rights, opportunity, and connection.



Our Theory of change



Long-time volunteer teacher Anat Yagil, and student coordinator Yasmin Gharib

Together, these pillars create a cycle of change: skilled, confident individuals strengthen communities; communities build trust; and institutions open the way for lasting justice.

At Lissan, we believe that language can transform lives, strengthen communities, and shift institutions. Our approach rests on three interconnected pillars:

1

Agency and Independence through Language

If we create a supportive community for Palestinian women and girls in East Jerusalem, and provide them with practical language and communication skills, knowledge of their rights, and tools for workforce integration and personal and professional growth, **then** they will navigate daily life with greater confidence, independence, and security, gaining meaningful access to rights, resources, and opportunities.

2

Building a Multicultural Community

If we create safe, shared spaces where Israelis and Palestinians can meet, learn together, and reduce mutual fear and mistrust, **then** more people will develop a stronger belief in and commitment to working toward a just and equitable future for all who share Jerusalem, and the region beyond.

3

Creating Institutional Change

If we engage authorities, service providers, and policymakers to consider the needs of East Jerusalemite Palestinian women through the lens of linguistic and gender justice, and share our expertise in language education, East Jerusalem, and cultural and political sensitivity, **then** institutions will adopt more just, responsive, and inclusive policies that promote equality in practice, not just in principle.

Lissan in Wartime



Amal Bazlmit, Director of Medabrot Ivrit, and Etta Ehrman, past student coordinator

90% of students chose to continue classes in December 2023, after the war broke out.

All programs remained active throughout the war.

Expanded need for Hebrew from basic daily needs, accessing rights and opportunities to **safety and security**.

The war has affected every member of Lissan's community - students, volunteers, and staff alike. Yet throughout this time, Lissan continued operating at full capacity, maintaining all programs and even launching new pilots.

Choosing Connection in a Divided City

Keeping Our Community Connected

Just weeks into the war, our staff participated in a mediated process with the **Jerusalem Intercultural Center** to renew communication and establish policies for maintaining safe shared spaces for Israelis and Palestinians. These practices have since become part of our organizational culture.

When we asked our students whether to continue their studies, **90% chose to keep learning**, even under wartime conditions. Classes briefly moved online before resuming in person when Hebrew University reopened - a collective decision that became a statement of resilience and hope.

Adapting to New Realities

The war changed the role of Hebrew in daily life. Beyond rights and opportunity, many women now study for **safety and security** - to communicate at checkpoints, with police, and in other sensitive public settings.

Resilience and Community

Despite fear and uncertainty, students, volunteers, and partners continued showing up. Our Community Iftar, now held for the second consecutive year, has become a powerful symbol of connection - moments of light and unity amid division.

Even in wartime, Lissan remains what it has always been: a space for learning and hope in the heart of Jerusalem.

Lissan at a Glance 2024-2025



Raneen Kurt speaking at graduation

"Today, if a stranger speaks to me, I no longer run away. I answer easily, with confidence. Lissan is not just a place to learn, it is a community, a place where every woman feels she has a voice and belongs."

- Raneen Kurt, advanced student

740 Students



Enas Sob Laban speaking at graduation

85 Teachers



Volunteer teachers and coordinators at graduation

"The encounter was very important and impactful. It broke fears and hesitation."

- Rachel Millstein, volunteer teacher

"I walked out of the store with nothing. That's when I knew I had to learn Hebrew...Now I'm no longer afraid to leave the house. I can shop, take my kids anywhere, and I feel confident."

- Enas Sob Laban, advanced student

50 Classes

5,130 Class Hours

Medabrot Ivrit

Women Speaking Hebrew

Lissan's flagship project, in partnership with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Willy Brandt Center, and Mini Active, offers practical and culturally sensitive Hebrew courses for Palestinian women from across East Jerusalem. The program builds confidence and independence, enabling participants to navigate daily life, access rights and opportunities, and strengthen their roles within their families, communities, and workplaces.



First week of Medabrot Ivrit 2024-2025 - Lavie and Taleen's class

2024-2025 Highlights in Photos



Classrooms

Week after week, hundreds of women filled our classrooms with energy, determination, and the drive to learn. When the war with Iran broke out towards the end of the year, we shifted courses to Zoom to ensure that students could complete their courses. The year closed with over 450 students from 30 classes with over 50 volunteer teachers.



Coordinator Training

Our dedicated university student coordinators who ensure the day-to-day implementation of Medabrot Ivrit, came together for training that equipped them to support students and teachers with skill, sensitivity, and care throughout the year.



Teacher Training

Over 50 Israeli and Palestinian volunteers participated in our annual start-of-year training, exploring Lissan's pedagogy, the context of East Jerusalem, and ways to foster meaningful shared learning spaces even during wartime.



Ameera Bazlmit, volunteer teacher and Lamia Rabaya, beginners student at our community Iftar

Community Iftar

During Ramadan, more than 200 students, teachers, families, and partners gathered to break the fast - sharing food, song, and solidarity, and bringing light into difficult times.

Graduation Ceremony

Our annual graduation celebrated the achievements of our students with over 800 people - students and their families, volunteers, staff, partners, and supporters - in attendance. Each diploma reflected persistence, courage, and the power of education to open doors.



Prof Liat Kozma and Hiba Iselah, co-chairs of Lissan's executive board, speaking at graduation



Siham Odat Allah, advanced student, teaching Palestinian embroidery at our teacher appreciation event

Teacher Appreciation Event

At the close of the program year, we honored our over 50 volunteer teachers - the heart of Medabrot Ivrit - Women Speaking Hebrew - for the time, care, and passion they invest in every student. During the event, we had the opportunity to create art together, and teachers shared some of their experiences from the year.

Impact in Numbers

The strength of our students, teachers, and community



82% of student survey respondents were satisfied with their course
89% of respondents were satisfied with their teachers



79% of respondents reported feeling more confident and independent in navigating the public domain



70% of respondents reported that the Hebrew gained helped them better navigate bureaucracy



74% of respondents said that the Hebrew course helped them better understand and communicate with doctors and navigate the healthcare system

*Above numbers based on our 24-25 end-of-year student survey



31% of new registered students are employed
23% are looking for work
29% are high school or university students
17% are homemakers

*Based on 25-26 new student registration

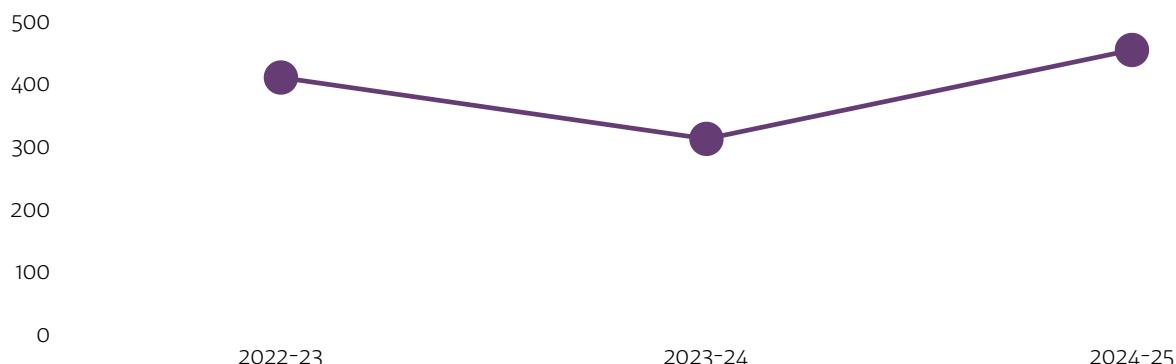


Teachers rated their teaching experience at an average of 4.6 out of 5
67% (29 out of 43) of teachers working in pairs were satisfied with the partnership
32 new teachers joined in 2024-25 year, alongside 16 returning teachers

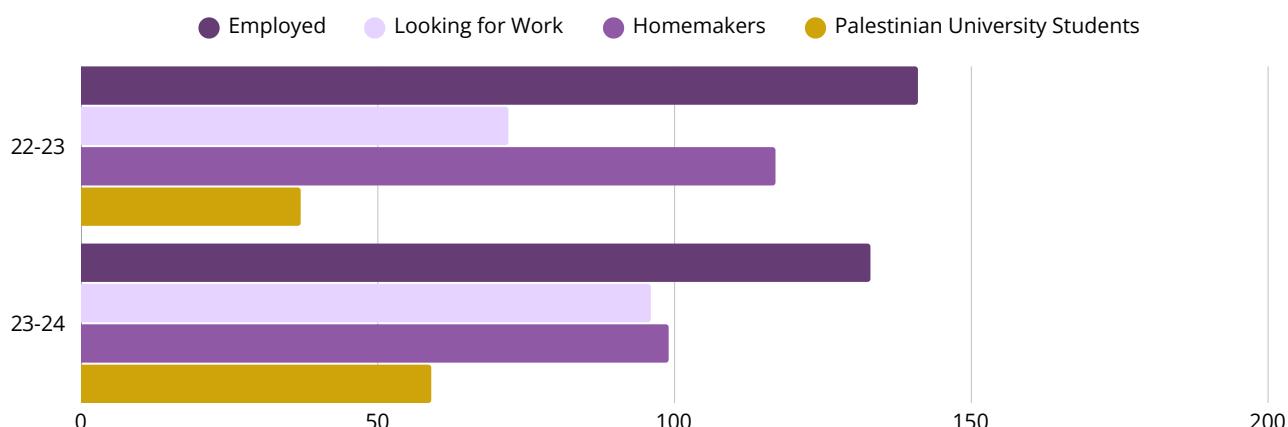
Trends Over Time

Beyond this year's results, we continue to track long-term trends that show the program's lasting impact.

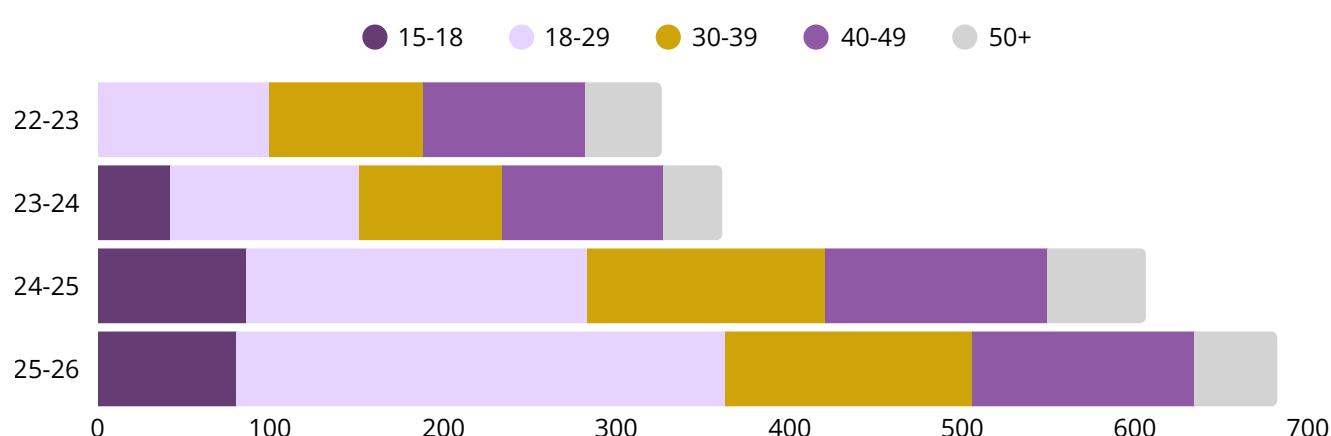
Students Who Received Diplomas



Personal and Employment Status of Students



Age of Students
at time of registration



Spotlights from the Lissan Community



Behind every number is a person whose life has been shaped by language, connection, and courage. This year, we share two stories, one student and one teacher, that capture the heart of Lissan.

Student Spotlight: Iman Yigmor

Iman, a B1 level student and mother of six from East Jerusalem, married young and devoted many years entirely to her family. Yet she often found herself asking: **"But what about me?"** That question set her on a journey of self-discovery.

She discovered a passion for pastry and dreamed of becoming a dessert chef. Iman enrolled in a local culinary program, and later took advanced courses in Tel Aviv, even as she struggled with a daunting obstacle: Hebrew. At first, she relied on her husband to translate. But she longed to succeed on her own. **"I wanted to be independent, to do this in my own strength,"** she recalls.

As her career advanced, Iman found work as a pastry chef at a Jerusalem hotel and was soon promoted to manage her department. But she hit another wall - Hebrew at work: recipes, orders, and daily communication. That's when she joined Medabrot Ivrit - Women Speaking Hebrew.

Through Lissan's courses, Iman found exactly what she needed: supportive teachers, a community of women like her, and the chance to build real confidence in Hebrew. Today, she speaks, writes, and works in Hebrew with pride. She continues to run her own small business alongside her job in the hotel. **"Lissan opened the door for me to write my story, in my own words,"** she says. **"Now I am proud of myself."**

Teacher Spotlight: Marit Danon

Marit came to Lissan after retiring from a long career at the Prime Minister's Office. Like many retirees, she wanted to stay active, but more than that, she wanted to use her time for something that truly mattered. Volunteering as a Hebrew teacher quickly became, in her words, **"one of the most significant things I've ever done."**

From the very beginning, she was inspired by the determination of her students, Palestinian women from across East Jerusalem, who showed up week after week to learn. The classroom soon became more than a place for grammar and vocabulary - it was a space of trust, laughter, and connection. **"The women give me so much,"** she says. **"Their determination, their humor, their warmth, it strengthens me, too."**

Even in the shadow of war, Marit's classroom was an anchor. No one dropped out, and the women continued to progress. She recalls how, during a missile attack, her students reached out to check on her safety: **"That touched me deeply."**

For Marit, Lissan has been both a gift and a mission. She came to give her time and skills, but found that she received just as much in return: purpose, friendship, and hope. **"I thought I was coming to help them,"** she says, **"but in the end, they helped me too."**



Access Your Rights

From the classroom to the community: equipping women to exercise their rights and support their families.

Lissan's Access Your Rights project complements our Hebrew courses by addressing the needs voiced by our students. The program provides knowledge and tools to navigate healthcare, education, employment, and social services. Through rights-based workshops, practical resources, and partnerships with local institutions, the program enables Palestinian women in East Jerusalem to access rights and information for themselves and their families, strengthening their independence and their role within the community.

2024-2025 Highlights

Over **500 women** from across East Jerusalem participated in **26 workshops and lectures**, gaining practical tools and knowledge to advocate for themselves and their families.

Workshops and lectures covered topics such as:

- Looking for work
- Family financial management
- Navigating Social Security
- Property tax
- Disability rights
- Child support and rent assistance
- Using Zoom
- Completion of studies
- Municipal services
- Reading a pay slip
- Studying at Hebrew University
- Computer literacy
- A tour of the municipality

Delivered in partnership with **Job 360, WAAC-MAAN, MATI, the Ataa Center, the Abu Tor Center for Innovation, Rayan Center, and Al Bashayir**, ensuring accurate, up-to-date information and stronger community reach.

“Now, after learning about the services available to me and how to access them, I feel that I can take care of them myself, without asking my husband or one of my friends to do it for me.”
(A course participant reflecting on her experience)

Hebrew for Organizations

Expanding Access through Partnerships

Lissan's Hebrew for Organizations partners with nonprofits and institutions across and beyond Jerusalem to provide practical Hebrew courses tailored to specific fields and needs. Taught by paid professional teachers, these courses reach diverse groups including women, youth, and professionals, ensuring that more people in East Jerusalem gain the language tools they need for daily life, work, and study.

2024-2025 Highlights

20 courses held across **13 partner organizations**, including: Roots, Jinnovate, Community Court, Project Rozana, and community centers across East Jerusalem.

We held **2 Arabic courses for Lissan community members** to encourage more equitable communication.

12 professional Hebrew and Arabic teachers reached 290 participants

Courses included:

- Women needing Hebrew on a daily basis
- Women seeking employment
- Courses for men with an emphasis on literacy skills
- Medical professionals
- Alumni of tech-oriented dialogue programs
- Teachers from East Jerusalem participating in Shared Learning through the municipality
- At-risk youth



Final meeting of Jinnovate Techclinic Hebrew course for medical professionals

Looking Ahead



Aliza Schoffman Land, Lissan staff and teacher, and Enas Sob Laban at graduation

At Lissan, our future plans grow directly from the voices of our community. Each new initiative responds to the evolving needs of our students and community, ensuring that Lissan remains a place of trust, connection, and shared growth.

Strategic Directions

Expanding and Strengthening Our Core

We recognize the growing demand for Medabrot Ivrit - Women Speaking Hebrew and the continued dedication of the volunteers who make it possible year after year. Lissan is now working on a strategic plan to ensure the program's long-term sustainability, strengthening partnerships with the Hebrew University, David Yellin College, and other institutions, and expanding collaborations across Jerusalem to ensure that this flagship project continues to thrive.

Community at the Center

Every Lissan program is designed with and for our students, ensuring that learning strengthens both individual agency and community ties.

Can-Do Approach

We are deepening our adoption of the CEFR action-oriented framework for language learning, positioning Lissan as a national leader in innovative, relevant, and needs-based Hebrew instruction for Arabic speakers.

Upcoming Pilots and Programs

Yes, She Can Incubator for Professional Development: Supporting Palestinian women students and graduates of Medabrot Ivrit as they take their next steps toward employment through group coaching, mentorship, and career development.

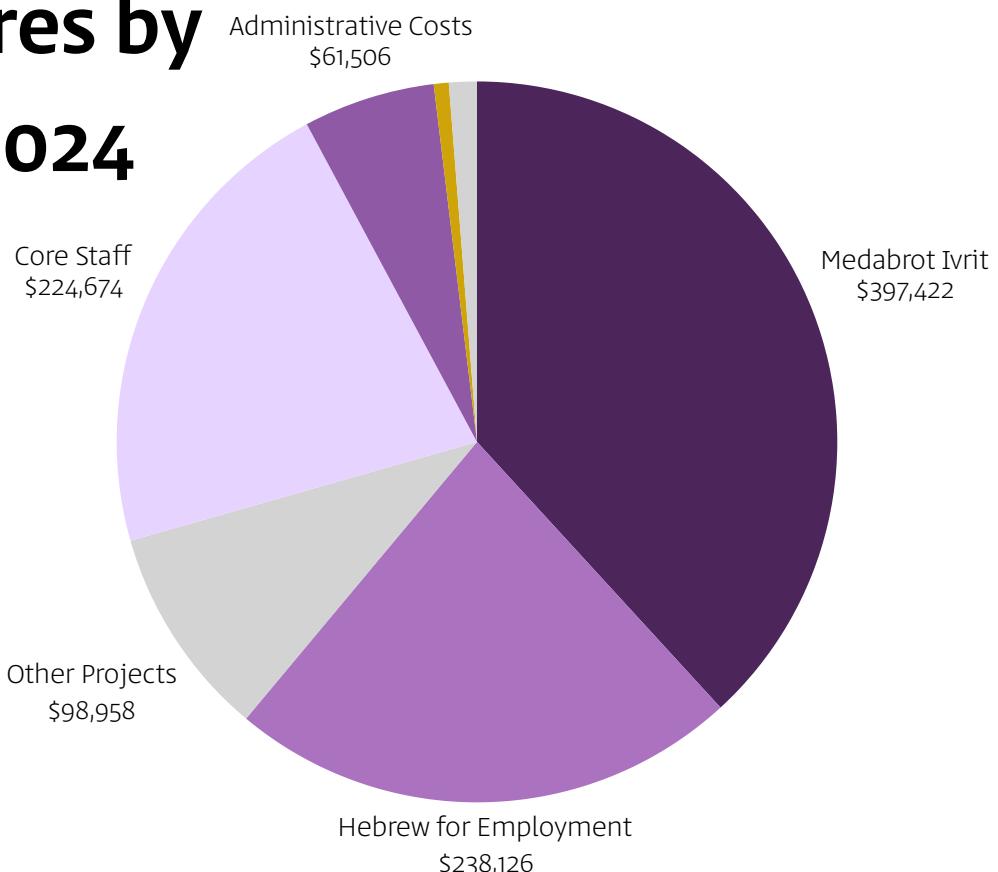
Ambulance Drivers Course: In partnership with Project Rozana and Magen David Adom, this bilingual program will train Palestinian and Israeli women as certified EMTs and ambulance drivers, combining professional training, Hebrew instruction, and hands-on experience.

Men's Literacy Course (Expansion): With support from the Mandell L. and Madeleine H. Berman Foundation, we are expanding Hebrew literacy courses for men in East Jerusalem, enabling fathers, husbands, and brothers to support their families and participate more fully in public life.

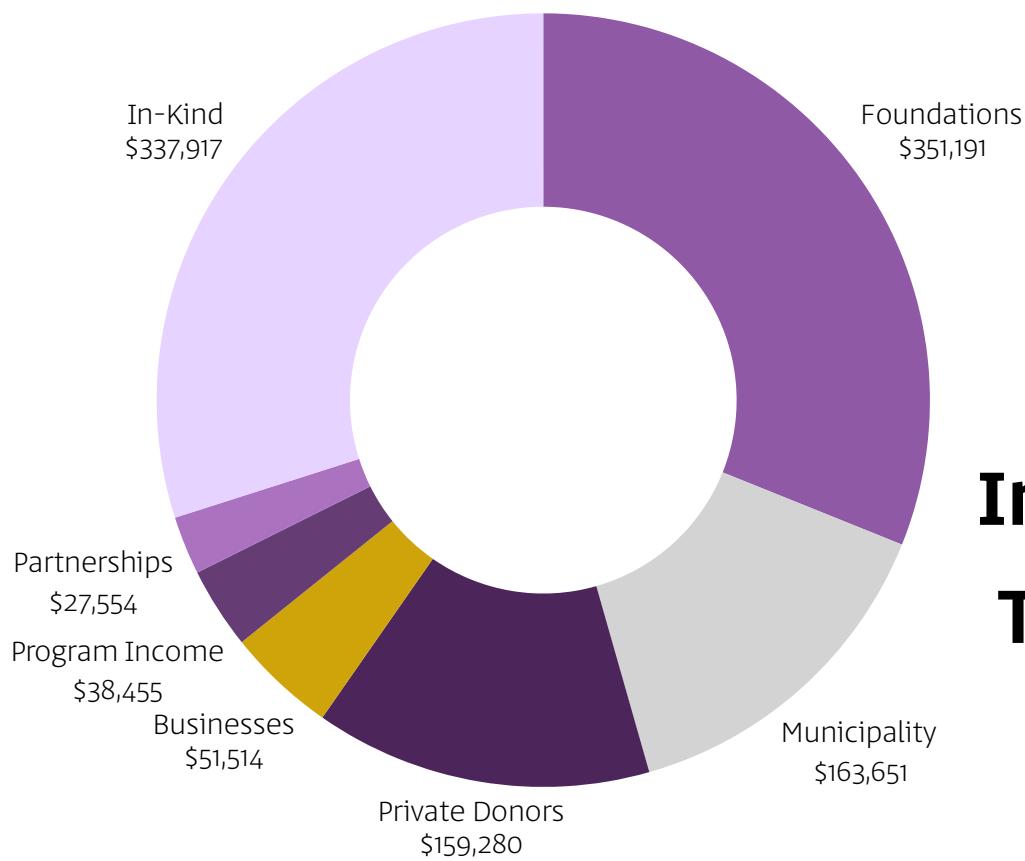
Collaboration with The Equalizer Group - Sha'ar Shiyon: In partnership with The Equalizer Group - Sha'ar Shiyon, which promotes equal opportunity through education across Israel, Lissan is developing a new Hebrew learning program for diverse youth communities. Based on Lissan's **Can Do approach**, this pilot connects language learning to students' real-life experiences and marks our first direct engagement with youth - a model we aim to expand nationwide.

Financial Report 2024

Expenditures by Project 2024



Income by Type 2024



The People of Lissan

Lissan Staff

Talia Vekshtein, CEO

Efrat Meyer, Interim CEO, maternity leave

Zahieh Abu Ghannam, Program Director

Aliza Schoffman Land, Director of Partnerships and Strategic Development

Sireen Smoom, Community and Finance Director

Ronit Ben Ari, Director of Pedagogy, Medabrot Ivrit

Amal Bazlamit and Inbal Harel, Medabrot Ivrit Co-Directors

Chaya Fischer, Director of "Can Do" Pedagogical Development

Noam Shoval, "Can Do" Project Coordinator

Samar Khales, Course Coordinator

Executive Board

Liat Kozma - Co-chair

Hiba Iselah - Co-chair

Alumah Florsheim Dor

Dr. Samira Alayan

Yoni Levy

Roni Matus-Miller

Marcia Shamo

Ameera Jabr

Hanan Salinger



Lissan staff at Medabrot Ivrit graduation

Partners and Supporters

Supporters

Sally Gottesman | Aviv Foundation | B8 of Hope | Anonymous Foundation | Bader Philanthropies | Dear Foundation | Miss Fix the Universe | Rayne Foundation | Emmanuel Snatager Foundation | Mandell L. and Madeleine H. Berman Foundation | WWDP (Women's World Day of Prayer) | The Leichtag Foundation | Intel | Enlight Energy | SIPP (Sustainable Israeli-Palestinian Projects) | Olivestone Trust



Medabrot Ivrit graduation



Siham Odat Allah, advanced student, and long-time volunteer teacher Chani Green

Partners

Hebrew University of Jerusalem | Willy Brandt Center | Mini Active Job 360 | WAC-MAAN | MATI East Jerusalem | The Attaa Center The Abu Tor Center for Innovation | Rayan Center | Al Bashayir Roots | Jinnovate | Community Court | MEET | PIP | 50:50 Startups Project Rozana | Shared Learning | Safa | Hila Center Shuafat Ras Hamis Community Center | Kafr Aqab Community Center | Beit Hanina Community Center | Beit Tzafafa Community Center | ALLMEP | Amal Tikva | Jerusalem Foundation Tolerance Coalition | The Jerusalem Model

To our dear supporters and partners - your commitment changes lives. Together, we are giving women the language and confidence to access rights and opportunities, strengthening families, building community, and creating real connections across Jerusalem. Thank you for making this possible.