

# 2019-2020 IMPACT REPORT



sulam

Unlimited Learning.



***We believe Sulam is important to this community because every Jewish child, regardless of his or her disability, deserves a Jewish education. Sulam is the only local program that ensures this.***

*Aaron & Ahuva Orlofsky  
Parents of Elana '23*



## MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT



**I support Sulam because I believe that every child deserves the best education possible in an inclusive environment. I continue to support Sulam and serve on the Board of Directors because for the past seven years, I have had the opportunity to personally witness the inspiring stories of students who've experienced real success, overcoming obstacles and challenges, and teaching us all a lesson about resilience and determination.**

Steve Schram, Treasurer,  
Sulam Board of Directors



Dear Friend,

It is my distinct pleasure to present our community of supporters and friends with Sulam's annual report for 2019-2020.

This year has been one of growth and development, both educationally and organizationally. Under the very talented leadership of our Executive Director, Lianne Heller, supported by the Sulam educational leadership team, Sulam expanded the reach of its outstanding and important services to an ever-growing number of students and educational institutions. We continue to implement the very latest and best educational practices and take great pride in the accomplishments of our students.

Organizationally, we expanded the membership of our board by adding highly accomplished board members who are committed to our mission. In this regard, Sulam's Strategic Planning Committee, under the chairmanship of Naomi Baum, developed a strategic plan for Sulam which will guide Sulam's future development and expansion.

The pandemic has and continues to present educational, organizational and financial challenges for Sulam. The challenges notwithstanding, Sulam's unified team, led by Lianne Heller, Sulam's educators, administrative professionals and lay leaders have guided Sulam through the many complicated COVID-19 issues we have faced. With G-d's help, and the dedication of Sulam's team and the generosity of our supporters, we will continue to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

It has been and continues to be an honor and a privilege to be a part of Sulam. There is nothing more rewarding than seeing the smiles on the faces of our students as they grow and achieve. You, our friends and supporters, make these accomplishments and smiles possible. Thank you so very much.

Sincerely,

Judah Lifschitz  
President

# SULAM MISSION, VISION, VALUES

## MISSION

Sulam, a K-12 Jewish special education inclusion program, provides high quality educational, social, and emotional support for students with disabilities while teaching the entire community that everyone belongs and can make a vital contribution to the world.

## OUR VISION

Sulam aspires to create an educational approach where people with learning differences are recognized as vital contributors to a diverse world and are integrated naturally into the fabric of a school community and broader society.

## OUR VALUES

### We believe:

- Every student has the right to a rigorous Jewish education alongside his/her peers.
- Every student can be a contributing member of the Jewish community and society at large.
- Every student has strengths and wants to be successful.
- Everyone benefits from an inclusive classroom environment in which there are diverse learning styles.

Before coming to Sulam, every day was a struggle for Shoshi M. She was incessantly bullied by others who didn't understand her learning needs. Her efforts to complete homework assignments ended in tears.

Today, our inclusion-driven teachers have facilitated her growth, helping Shoshi thrive in advanced-level classes with ongoing support. Her parents say, "Sulam gave us our happy girl back. We will be forever grateful."

Shoshi has become a proud, independent student with an unlimited future.



# FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends and Supporters of Sulam,

Students who struggle with school; learning, socializing and feeling part of a community, face daily challenges that are overwhelming. The indignity of failure and social exclusion can result in a lifelong struggle to realize and accomplish the purpose of one's life. No child and no parent should have to experience the pain of this predicament.

At Sulam, our purpose as an organization is to create a warm, accepting and inclusive environment in which each student's academic, social and emotional growth is facilitated by a team of dedicated and knowledgeable special educators. Students learn to embrace who they are, and know that they too have the right to become productive members of society. They are taught to become powerful self advocates, while advocating for others too. Sulam students demonstrate that each individual is valued, no matter their learning style. In turn, the school community learns that every individual has worth, capability and a purpose in life.


This past year has been a challenge, with COVID-19 testing us, and the world, to the core. But special education is a field in which challenge is routine. With a team of determined, passionate and relentless problem solvers, Sulam was poised to meet the difficulties inherent in virtual learning, social distancing and constant change. Out of challenge comes innovation, and we have learned new methods of instruction, new uses for technology and new ways to solve problems.

Prior to the outbreak of the pandemic, Sulam underwent a deep and intense process to develop a meaningful strategic plan. A group of formidable lay and professional leaders worked together to clearly define the organization, its challenges and areas of growth. The result is an exciting, creative and ambitious strategic plan that will raise the bar for our students and our community (see page 8).

Throughout the pages of this annual report, you will read the words of some of our committed donors, some of whom have children in the program, and some who do not. Their commitment is steadfast because they believe that a strong community takes care of and values every individual.

Your support is vital to our continued service. You are making an enormous difference not only to our students, but to their parents, to the entire school and broader community. When every child is included, welcomed and given the education they deserve, every person is elevated in compassion, understanding and love for our fellow man.

With deep appreciation,

  
Lianne Heller  
Executive Director



**Sulam is a unique organization in our community. I support Sulam because Sulam starts with yes. Yes, we welcome your child and will ensure that he/she will get the best possible Jewish education. Yes, we will come up with a creative solution if necessary to make this a reality, and yes, we will always think outside of the box. Sulam is a model for other organizations, and our family is proud to support them in all they do.**

Sara Solomon, LMSW, Community member and long-time supporter

# PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

**“When facing chaos and uncertainty, and you cannot possibly predict what’s coming around the corner, your best ‘strategy’ is to have a busload of people who can adapt to and perform brilliantly no matter what comes next. Great vision without great people is irrelevant.”**

– Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*

Sulam has a braintrust of leaders in education and special education who have demonstrated remarkable flexibility and problem solving skills to ensure the success of our students. They met the challenge of COVID-19 head on, and quickly pivoted to provide students with continued support in their educational progress. The great vision of Sulam is made possible by it’s great people.



**DR. DEBRA DRANG, DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EDUCATION**

Dr. Debra Drang, in her capacity as Director of Inclusion at Inclusion Education Services (IES) fills the role of Director of Special Education. Currently in her 24th year in education, she holds a Ph.D. in Special Education

from the University of Maryland. She has served in a variety of capacities including classroom teacher, itinerant teacher, mentor, teacher trainer/coach, and researcher. Debra has a strong record

of applying current, research-based best practices to everyday classroom life. Her areas of expertise include inclusion, universal curriculum design, tiered instruction/intervention, classroom management and progress monitoring.

**“[During COVID], our teachers transformed their educational practices and were also transformed in the process. They experienced firsthand how it feels to struggle with learning- the discomfort of not knowing, the frustration when effort does not yield results, the pressure to perform and produce under limiting conditions- and yet the ultimate joy of achievement, mastery and success.”**



**MRS. BETH SCHOEN, SHEARIM DIVISION CHAIR**

Beth Schoen is Sulam’s Shearim Division Chair. The Shearim program, specifically designed for students with Intellectual Disability (ID), teaches students life skills and job coaching, while planning for independent living. Beth is a clinically trained social

worker, educational consultant and advocate, with over 20 years of experience working with children and adolescents. In Los Angeles she served as an Inclusion Specialist and later as an Educational Support Coordinator, providing advocacy, educational tools and consulting services at YULA and Shalhevet High Schools.

**“We frequently use the term flexibility with our students in Shearim. This year, with COVID, it became the mantra in our classroom. One area we all had to develop flexibility was with our cooking program. No longer able to cook together in our Sulam kitchen, each student, with the help of their parents, gathered and prepared the ingredients to cook from home on Zoom. The outcome was a wonderful collaborative effort, and lots of delicious food!”**



**MRS. RACHEL SUSHNER, UPPER SCHOOL DIVISION CHAIR**

Rachel Sushner, a long-time Sulam professional of more than 17 years, oversees the Upper School Division at Sulam. Rachel holds a Masters Degree in Special Education from Johns Hopkins University and has been

responsible for the creation of the Shearim program at Sulam as well as many other exciting initiatives.

**“The pandemic forced us to be creative with our graduating students this year. After a year of pivoting to a virtual platform and adopting unprecedented approaches to learning, our seniors grew to a new level of resilience, adaptability and**

## SULAM SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING SPECIALIST TEAM

It has long been established that emotion and cognition are interdependent, and all students need to be supported socially and emotionally to gain academic progress. Our Social Emotional Learning Specialist team consists of a clinical psychologist, **Dr. Rachel Ravin**, Social Workers **Laura Hardy** and **Yiscah Baldinger**, and **Nancy Kohl** — all of whom provide daily support and explicit training in Social Thinking and other resources to support each student in their social emotional and behavioral goals.

**flexibility. Knowing that they had a whole new set of tools they had learned during this challenging year, their online graduation ceremony was particularly moving and inspiring.”**



**MS. MICHELLE KERBEL, LOWER AND MIDDLE SCHOOL DIVISION CHAIR**

Michelle Kerbel is in her second year leading Sulam’s Lower and Middle School programs. Currently in her 8th year in school-based education, she holds a Masters degree in Instruction and Learning from the University of Pittsburgh.

Michelle brings her experience of special education and formal and informal education to our Sulam team.

**“During the pandemic we have learned to provide support digitally, in real time, without any other students being aware of the support being provided. It has become even more confidential, and personalized. Students have been able to use chat features, second devices, and shared documents to speak with their teachers and instructional assistants. They privately receive prompts, additional directions, suggestions and answers to questions. This shift has allowed students to access and accept support more readily, and develop increased agency in their learning.”**

# MEET OUR LAY LEADERSHIP



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Doctor of Medicine in Dentistry



Sulam made a world of difference for our son Adam. The faculty and staff were remarkable, in that they really got to know him and his needs. The program that they designed was transformational, allowing him to develop his skills and put him on the path to independence. We continue to support Sulam because we hope to bring this same opportunity to others in our community.

Jeff and Shelly Kupfer,  
Parents of Adam '17

Jeff Kupfer serves on the Sulam Board of Directors and is the Chair of the Development Committee.





I am proud to be part of a community that values an organization like Sulam; an inclusive, nurturing environment where every child receives a rich education. Sulam is a place where students are given unlimited learning opportunities and in turn see learning as a positive experience.

Liza Levy, Community member and long-time supporter

Liza served as the former president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington. She also co-founded the Tikkun Olam Women's Foundation and the Jewish Coalition Against Domestic Abuse (JCADA).



## STRATEGIC PLAN

This year the Sulam Strategic Planning Committee concluded its work on developing a three-year strategic plan which will focus on two main ideas to develop and grow Sulam, fulfilling both its mission and vision.

**1. EDUCATIONAL PILLARS** sets forth the programmatic goals in delivering an excellent education for students while also enhancing the role that Sulam plays in the community and field of education and special education. These pillars are the following:

- Providing Excellence in Special Education
- Building Inclusive Communities
- Transforming Models of Educational Practices

**2. INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS** present the organizational goals that ensure a strong leadership structure and the future sustainability of the program. The three institutional foundations that serve as priority areas designed to ensure a strong and sustainable non-profit organization are in the areas of:

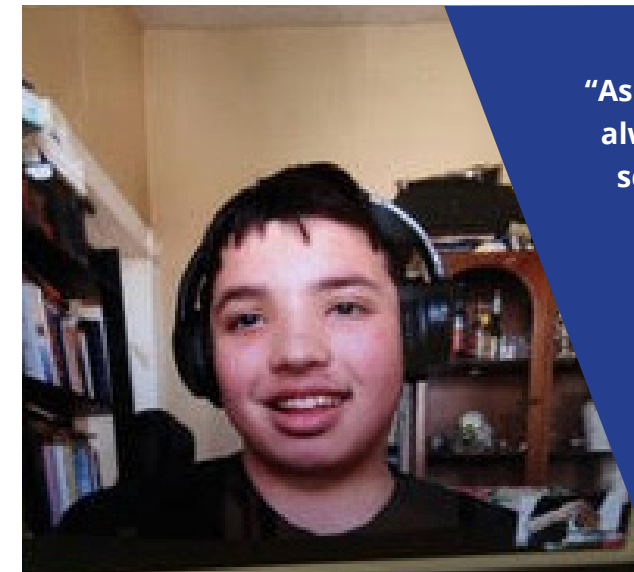
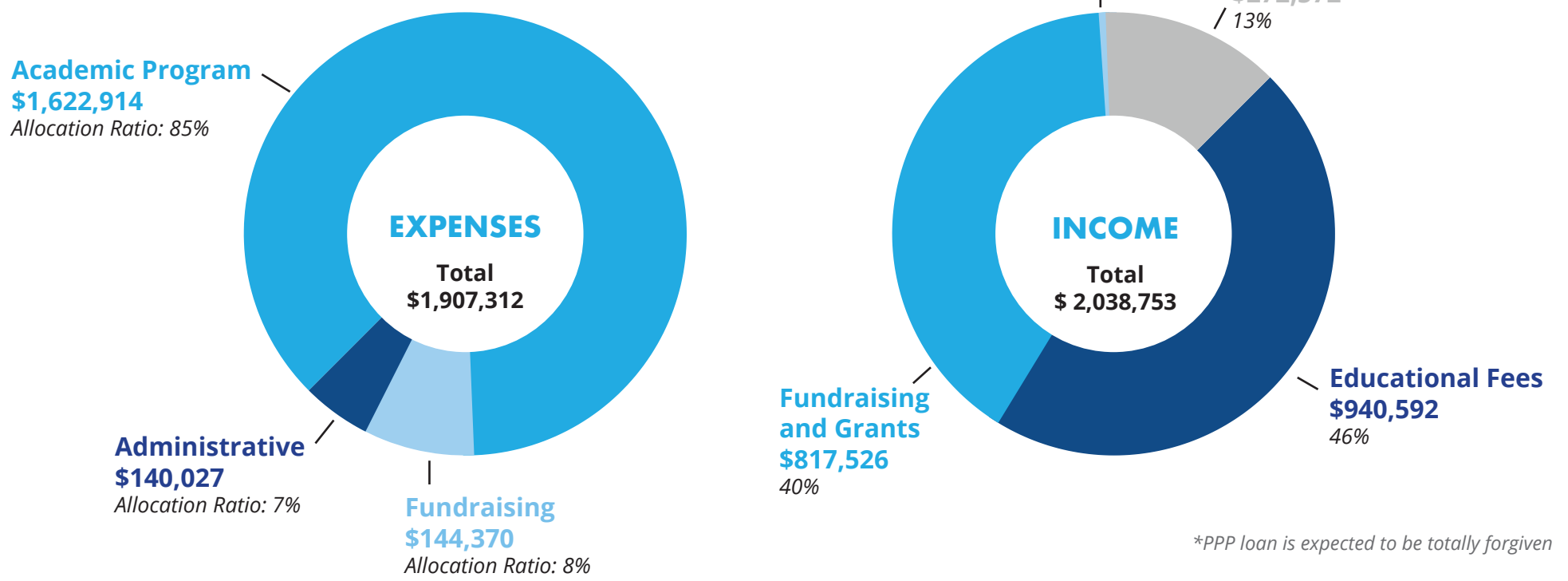
- Governance
- Administration
- Financial Sustainability

With thanks to Strategic Planning Committee for their wisdom, experience and innovation to guide Sulam in producing a plan that is both realistic and ambitious!

- Naomi Baum, Chair
- Eddie Snyder
- Seth Kaplan
- Sharon Freundel
- Rachel Sushner
- Debra Drang
- Adina Kanefield

## FY 2019-2020 FINANCIALS

We are committed to serving each and every student. That's why 85% of our funds are allocated to supporting our academic program.



"As a Baltimore family, we had heard about the Shearim program at Sulam for a few years and always hoped we would be able to send Rafi when the time was right. Finally, in the 2020-2021 school year, we were able to find a way to make it happen. Even in a pandemic, with Rafi learning remotely, we have seen the tremendous progress he has made!

Learning has always been hard for him, but with the help of the dedicated staff at Sulam, Rafi has blossomed in a way we have never seen before. He is participating in class discussions, asking questions and showing real confidence in his abilities. As parents, we want Rafi to feel safe and loved at school, and he is getting that and so much more."

— Ruth and Dovid Berman

# THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

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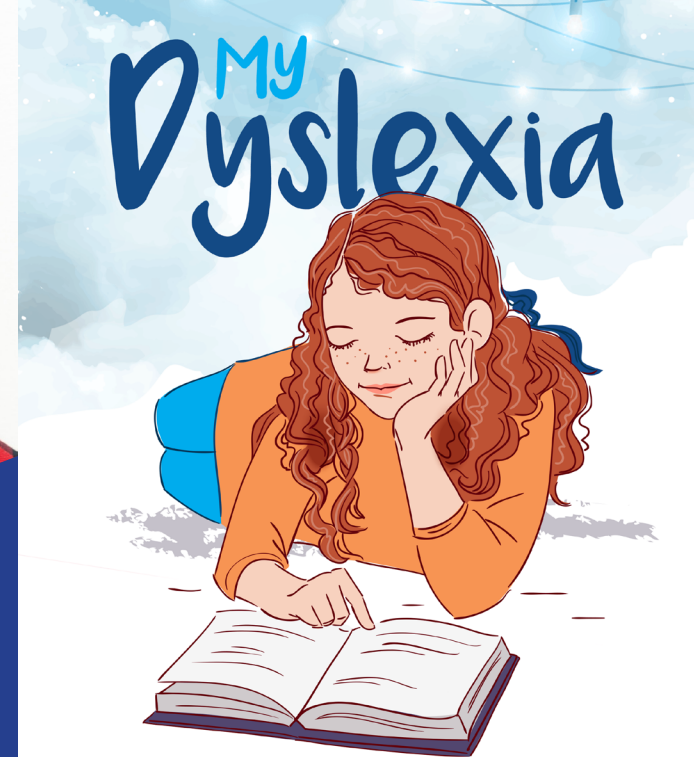
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 Yosef and Malka Rubin  
 Pauline Rubinstein



**Meet Emma H., a determined student with dyslexia. Although she is only an eighth grader at Sulam, Emma is already looking toward the future, hoping to shape a more inclusive and accepting world as an activist for people with disabilities.**



**I am a dyslexic girl.**

I wonder if people think I am stupid.

I hear myself read.

I see big words.

I want to read big words.

I am a dyslexic girl.

**I pretend not to be self conscious.**

I feel like people judge me.

I touch my other fingers when I get nervous.

I worry that I will never read good enough.

I cry when people are mean to me about my dyslexia.

I am a dyslexic girl.

**I understand more than you think.**

I say I am smart.

I dream that I will be an activist on disabilities.

I try my best.

I hope to read amazing.

I am a dyslexic girl.

— Emma H.  
 8th grade student at Sulam

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 Jerome and Sarah Sandberg  
 Ronald Sann  
 Gideon and Debbie Fisch Sasson  
 Diana Schemo  
 R' Yitzchak and Aliza Scher  
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 Scott and Anne Schlesinger  
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