



Annual Program Report

Year ending August 31, 2025



HillelBC 

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A Letter from Our Executive Director and Board President

Dear Friends of Hillel,

This past year on campus, we did not allow crisis to define us.

Amid the ongoing reverberations of October 7th, Jewish students faced a campus climate fraught with tension. Antisemitism didn't fade, it shifted. It was in the classroom, the student union, and the quiet calculations students made about what they wore, said, or shared. Finding their place in this environment was often challenging and exhausting for our students.

And yet, they kept showing up. And we did too.

At Hillel BC, we held space for grief, for pride, for disagreement, and for growth. We welcomed students wrestling with what it means to be Jewish after October 7th and supported those who were targeted for their identity. We didn't shy away from the hard conversations nor did we permit them to define us: joy, tradition, and connection remained our cornerstones. After a year of simply surviving, we moved from triage to tenacity. We looked ahead and began to build.

This report tells that story.

It's a story of students stepping into leadership, of Israel engagement that was both proud and nuanced, of a community that dug its roots in deeper. And it's a story made possible by you—our donors, partners, families, and friends.

The road ahead remains steep but our purpose has never been clearer. Jewish life on campus matters. And thanks to your support, it's thriving.

With gratitude and hope,



Ohad Gavrieli
Executive Director



Gordon Brandt
President, Board of Directors

Jewish Identity Presence with purpose

Above: UBC Shabbat Dinner with Holocaust Survivors.

This year, Hillel BC nurtured Jewish identity not as something hidden or reactionary but as something intentional, joyful, and deeply personal. Across our campuses, students found the space to reconnect with tradition, express themselves authentically, and be confident in who they are—even when it felt like the world was asking them not to.

It was a year of record-breaking engagement. On every campus, our Welcome Back Shabbat Dinners saw the highest turnout in Hillel BC's history, setting the tone for a year defined by pride and participation. The introduction of "Brisket Shabbat" brought a new energy to our Friday night gatherings, consistently drawing large crowds and generating excitement across our campuses.

We began the year grounded in reflection, with a meaningful Rosh

Hashanah Dinner and Tashlich, and High Holiday services that brought students together to mark the Jewish new year with hope, community, and renewal. From there, the rhythm of the Jewish calendar came to life as opportunities to gather and grow.

During Sukkot, students came together for both Pizza in the Hut and Sushi in the Sukkah, transforming the sukkah into a festive hub of connection. Later in the year, students explored Jewish ritual in a creative and personal way at our Challah Bake and Challah Cover Decorating events.

From Greek Shabbat with sororities and fraternities to our Mizrahi Shabbat exploring heritage and identity; from the lively Israeli Shabbat to the deeply moving Shabbat Dinner with Holocaust Survivors (attended by over 100 students and 10 survivors), each of

our Shabbat Dinners wove together past and present and reflected the diversity and vitality of our community.

We also created space for shared experiences with our wider campus community. At our Multifaith Shabbat, Comedy for Peace brought the house down with laughter that helped to bridge differences and strengthen bonds. During Purim, students donned costumes and played games, donating foodstuffs in support of our Jewish Family Services' Food Drive and reveled in the season's twin spirits of freedom and responsibility.

This year, we saw students go beyond simply expressing their Jewish identity. They claimed it, explored it, and shared it, shaping campus Jewish life in way that felt relevant and vital. In doing so they reminded us all that Jewish identity on campus isn't just alive, it's flourishing.

+2,000
Shabbat
meals served



From top to bottom: Emerging Campus Shabbat Dinner, UBC Shabbat Dinner, UVic Shabbat Dinner.

Jewish Education

Learning that grounded us

In a year when so many students were being told what to believe—about their identity, their history, and their people—Hillel BC offered something rare and powerful: the space to ask, explore, and learn Jewishly.

We met them in the different ways they connected to Judaism.

Jewish education on campus happened in classrooms, over bagels, in basements, at lunchtime, and in moments of deep dialogue that students carried with them long after the conversations ended.

Our Jewish Learning Fellowship (JLF) cohorts flourished, with three unique tracks and record-breaking participation. These intimate learning circles gave our 24 student participants the space to ask life's big questions through a Jewish lens. From purpose and wellbeing to tradition and community, they explored many topics while forming tight-knit groups rooted in trust and curiosity.

Throughout the year, we offered monthly Lunch & Learns, drawing students into discussion on everything



Above: Jewish Learning Fellowship at UBC.

from ancient texts to contemporary dilemmas. These sessions gave students the flexibility to engage on their own terms, sometimes deeply, sometimes casually, often somewhere in between.

Learning took on creative forms, too. At Talmud and Tacos, students unpacked age-old questions about justice and responsibility while sharing a meal—reaffirming our treasured cultural belief that meaningful Jewish learning can be as delicious as it is profound.

During Jewish History and Bagel Making, students kneaded dough while diving into the stories and struggles that have shaped Jewish communities around the world.



Above: History and Bagel Making at UVic.

Our Holocaust Education Week was the cornerstone of this year's Jewish educational offerings. Through workshops, student-led conversations, and intergenerational dialogue under the theme L'dor V'dor – Legacy and Healing, we helped students connect historical memory to present-day responsibility. It was about remembrance and how remembrance shapes action.

We saw continued growth in our partnership with Hillel International, which brought additional educational resources, training opportunities, and leadership development for both students and staff.

Our Multilingual Tabling showcased the vibrancy and diversity of global Jewish life, inviting students to explore Jewish texts and sayings in Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, Ladino, and more. Our Yiddish Nights blended language, music, and history into evenings of delight, nostalgia, and discovery.

Whether deep in Talmud or sharing a story in song, students this year were

absorbing and claiming their Jewish knowledge. Jewish education at Hillel BC empowered students not only to understand their tradition, but to own it, challenge it, and carry it forward in ways that reflected their own experience and respected what came before them.

Rabbi Kylynn always goes above and beyond to support me in connecting to my Judaism. Whether it's through answering halachic questions or facilitating moments for prayer, I know Rabbi Kylynn will always have my back. I will always cherish the memory of wrapping tefillin for the first time, which wouldn't have been possible without Rabbi Kylynn's guidance and support.

Rachel Zylberman Gore, UBC

Israel and Advocacy

Courage shaped by complexity

Above: October 7th Vigil at UVic.

This year, as the conversation around Israel became more polarized on campus, more and more students turned to Hillel for support.

Hundreds of students participated in advocacy workshops, cultural nights, and speaker events.

For many, Hillel BC was the only space where they felt they could express their relationship to Israel without fear or judgment. While we welcomed nuance and dialogue, our commitment remained firm: to empower students who wished to engage with Israel proudly, meaningfully, and on their own terms. We provided them with tools, knowledge, and a supportive community so they could speak up with strength and stand tall in the face of misinformation and hostility.

The year began with student leadership at its most powerful. To mark the one-year anniversary of the massacres of October 7th, students at UBC, UVic, and SFU organized moving commemorations and vigils. Without fanfare, they gathered peers, staff, university administration, and faculty to honour the lives lost, hold space for grief, and reaffirm the value of

every human life. That moment set the tone for the months that followed: thoughtful, grounded, and student-led.

Throughout the year, we hosted an incredible roster of guest speakers who shared insights and the wisdom of lived experience with our students. We were proud to welcome Amy Albertson, Avi Melamed, Gil Troy, Amanda Berman, Uri Goldflam, Mor Sapir, and Nova Festival Survivors Raz Shifer and Inbal Binder. Each guest provided students with a deeper lens into Israel's history, politics, society, and ongoing challenges. These voices brought nuance, personal connection, and strength into conversations that are too often dominated by extremes and division.

Our Kol Yisrael Learning Cohort expanded dramatically, with two record-breaking cohorts offering students the chance to engage deeply with Zionism and Israeli identity and peoplehood. The conversations were raw, shaped by what students were living and seeing every day.

Through Israel Life and Culture Weeks, we brought celebration back into the conversation. These campus-wide events featured food, learning, music, and community—reminding students

that connection to Israel is also joyful, proud, and life-affirming. From Israeli Exchange Student Wine and Cheese Nights to our Hebrew Cafés, we helped students experience Israel through language, taste, and personal relationship; something tangible and strong that offered a reality not shown in the endless, and often negative, news cycle.

This year was about building fluency, finding confidence, and cultivating pride.

Our students learned how to hold grief, joy, complexity, and conviction all at once. In doing so, they became stronger advocates and

Top to bottom: SFU October 7th Commemoration, Q&A with Nova Survivors Raz Shifer and Inbal Binder.

Below left to right: UBC October 7th Commemoration.



902 Unique students engaged

216 Programs and events offered

Social Belonging

Making space to just be



Top: Welcome Back Dinner at UBC.
Bottom: End of Exams Dinner at UVic.

In a year that felt heavy Hillel BC created spaces that felt light, where students could simply be Jewish, together. We offered a counterweight to the urgency outside our doors, something quiet and essential.

Across all campuses, we recorded over 9,000 student touchpoints, one of the highest in Hillel BC's history.

Our weekly Bagel Days became iconic—offered twice each week, every week, each semester. The consistency of these gatherings gave comfort and a sense of routine to students; it was an event they could count on, return to, and share. We expanded on this success with Make Your Own Pizza Tuesdays, turning lunch into a creative and light-hearted affair that welcomed new faces and regulars alike.

At the start of each semester, our Jews and Schmooze Welcome Back Events facilitated easy entry into the Hillel community, especially for first-year students or those reconnecting after time away. The tone was casual, the food was good, and the atmosphere was always warm.

Throughout the year, we hosted an exciting mix of social programs that helped students unwind and build friendships outside the pressures of campus life. From lively Saturday Night Socials to fan-favorite JProm, from cozy Bagels and Bubbly Brunches to community-building Pub Nights with Rabbi Kylynn Cohen, our calendar reflected the diverse ways students find their people.

One standout was our All-Campus Arcade Night, where students from across our B.C. campuses came together for a night of play, laughter, and unfettered entertainment.

Whether over cream cheese or karaoke, Hillel BC built a foundation of shared experiences for students that enabled them to be themselves without fear, without pressure, and without feeling the need to explain. This year reminded us that belonging doesn't always start with big questions. Often, it's the small moments that build the strongest bridges.

Top: UBC JProm.

Bottom left: Uvic Apple Picking.

Bottom right: SFU Lunches.



Student Support and Wellness Grounded in care

After a year that tested the mental and emotional well-being of Jewish students across the province, Hillel BC took steps to build something lasting and intentional.

Our goal was to ensure that every student—no matter their campus, background, or level of involvement—had somewhere to turn.

One of the most important initiatives we developed this year was the “[We Are Here – הנה](#)” [toolkit](#), which we built and launched in direct response to the surge in antisemitism following the October 7th attacks. This trauma-informed, identity-affirming resource is focused on student wellness and addresses urgent needs on campus. It offers grounding practices, strategies for navigating hostile environments, and ideas for how students can use language to advocate for themselves and each other. Within weeks, these resources were being shared, quoted, and carried by students, providing a source of confidence and clarity.

Our Soup for the Soul Program, a grassroots initiative rooted in the Jewish value of bikkur cholim (visiting and caring for the sick), began as a simple soup delivery service for students feeling under the weather.



Above: Emerging Campuses Shabbat Dinner.

It quickly blossomed into a cross-campus ritual of care and connection. While the homemade soup was nourishing, it became clear that students were coming for more than just a meal. Each week, the growing number of orders reflected more than appetites—it reflected a desire for calm, comfort, and community. Students were seeking a sense of home and the reassurance that someone cared. As the Jewish Home Away from Home on campus, we responded—bowl by bowl, conversation by conversation—meeting students where they were with warmth, presence, and support.

Access to professional care grew significantly this year. Hillel BC expanded our on-campus mental health counselling services to include a virtual option, making it possible for students across all our serviced

campuses to access timely, Jewish-informed support. Whether they needed a one-time check-in or ongoing therapeutic support, Hillel was a bridge to help.

We also supported wellness through creativity and conversation. Our new Hillel Book Club gave students a way to slow down and reflect together, while programs like Mindfulness and Judaism explored emotional grounding through ritual and tradition. For those preparing for life beyond university, the Headshots and Handshakes Career Panel offered both practical resources and confidence-building conversations, along with a professional headshot.

Sometimes, however, care looked like crayons and hot glue. Our New Students’ Craft Night gave incoming students an easy and fun entry into the Hillel community, a space to make something, meet someone, and feel welcome.

Across all campuses and in every format—from soup bowls to Zoom sessions—wellness at Hillel BC solidified into a cornerstone of our work. Beyond responding to crises and ensuring student safety, we created tools for resilience and pathways for healing that enabled students to feel supported and whole.



Top to bottom: UBC AEPI Bunnies, UVIC Mindfulness Beach day, Soup for the Soul.



3,840

Bagels served



120

Soups delivered with
Soups for the Soul



1,500

Slices of pizza devoured

Community and Leadership

From showing up to stepping up

Leadership at Hillel BC is practiced in relationships, nurtured in community, and built through experience. This year, we empowered students not just to participate but to lead with empathetic, clear-headed conviction.

We began with intentional investments in growth. Two immersive Leadership Retreats in Vancouver and Victoria gave students the space to pause, reflect, and develop the skills to guide their peers through a year of complexity and opportunity. These retreats were incubators for building trust, self-reliance, and vision.

Throughout the year, our Student-Faculty Mixers created important bridges between students and the academic community. In a climate where Jewish students sometimes felt invisible in their classrooms, these gatherings built mutual understanding, celebrated achievement, and reminded everyone that being Jewish and being a scholar go hand-in-hand.

We also launched a new chapter in student leadership with the addition of campus internship roles. These hands-on positions allowed students to contribute directly to Hillel programming, outreach, and advocacy efforts. In the Winter semester alone, we welcomed a record six interns across multiple campuses, reflecting student demand and excitement for deeper engagement and responsibility.

Top to bottom: Student Retreat from UVic, JMABC networking, UBC Student Antisemitism Task Force, Political Round Table - Hillel x CJPAC.



OUR PARTNERSHIPS

The success of our student leadership was strengthened through partnerships. And this year, they were nothing short of extraordinary. We are deeply grateful to the many organizations that stood with us.

Allied Voices for Israel

Alpha Epsilon Pi (AEPi)

Canadian Jewish Political Affairs Committee

Chabad UBC

Hebrew Free Loans

Hillel on Campus at UVic,
Israel on Campus at UBC

Jewish Academic Alliance of BC

Jewish Family Services

Jewish Federation of Greater Vancouver

Jewish Federation of Victoria and Vancouver Island

Jewish Medical Association of BC

Jewish Student Associations at UBC and SFU

MASA

StandWithUs Canada

The Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs

The Jewish Law Students' Association

Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre

These collaborations brought new voices, resources, and opportunities to our students and amplified the work we do together.

**Because where students lead,
our community follows.**

75 Leadership meetings held



517 Coffee chats brewed

The Night of Resilience

Honouring strength as a community

Some moments hold more than just meaning—they hold our collective memories, our momentum, and a mirror to the times we live in.

On March 27th, students from across campuses gathered at UBC's Hillel House for the Night of Resilience Gala. A student-led event, the Gala brought over 300 people together to reflect, honour, and celebrate what it meant to show up for Jewish life when doing so wasn't always easy.

This was not a night of looking back with sorrow; it was a night of looking ahead with clear purpose. A night to name the challenges, the fear, and the fatigue, and still show up with pride. Our students gave voice to the achievements of their peers, who were recognized for the quiet work of organizing, advocating, and caring for one another behind the scenes.

Student awards acknowledged those who had taken on leadership roles, not for applause, but for impact. Community members, faculty, and alumni stood in support. Through speeches, storytelling, and presence, we gave shape to what had been felt all year long: that our students were carrying so much, and that they were not alone.

The Night of Resilience wasn't just an event. It was a collective exhale. A reminder that in the midst of difficulty, there was also courage, compassion, family, and community. And that those things—when held together—are what carry us forward.



Scan or click the code to watch students share their experiences of antisemitism on B.C.'s campuses.



300 People attended the Night of Resilience

150 Students attended the Night of Resilience

The Year Ahead Empowering students together

Last year, our students stepped up, programs expanded, and our community continued to grow in size and spirit. Filled with challenges and successes, it was a year of profound achievement that also brought new demands. As we look to the year ahead, we see the need for Hillel BC only rising—to be there for more students, on more campuses, in more moments.

Together with you, our incredible community, we supported students in ways that deeply benefited them and enhanced their lives. With your continued support, we will build on this foundation and ensure that Jewish students across British Columbia continue to find safety, meaning, and belonging on campus.

Thank you for all that you do, for standing with us, and for making this work possible.



Being part of Hillel Emerging Campuses has given me a place to connect, opportunities to embrace and learn more about my culture, and take on more leadership roles such as JSA advocacy rep. It's provided a supportive community that feels like another home.

Maya Sontz, SFU

Hillel is more than a Jewish home away from home. It's a Jewish family for anyone away from home. It gives light, friendship, and positivity through the sea of darkness, while also showing students of other cultures the incredible family feel to our people and community.

Jacob Rosser, UVic

Our Mission

Enriching the lives of Jewish students so that they may enrich the Jewish people and the world.

Our Vision

We envision a world where every student is inspired to make an enduring commitment to Jewish life, learning, and Israel.

Hillel BC empowers young Jewish adults to explore their Jewish identity and their relationship with Israel in a safe, pluralistic, and inclusive community. Our programs and events reflect the diverse interests and needs of our students, instill valuable leadership skills, and create long-term, positive impacts on campus, in our community, and across the world. With permanent facilities at the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria, and comprehensive outreach and programming to students on B.C.'s "emerging" campuses, Hillel BC strives to engage all Jewish students to explore and celebrate their identities in ways that are authentic and meaningful to them.

Staff

OUR TEAM, 2024-2025

Ohad Gavrieli, Executive Director

Einat Livni, Operations Director

Ellie Sherman, Director of Student Life

Rabbi Kylynn Cohen, Senior Jewish Educator

Talia Chivo, Lead Campus Professional, UVic

Laura Soda, Lead Campus Professional, UBC

Ishmaeli Goldstein, Campus Advocacy Specialist

Josh Switzer, Springboard Ezra Fellow, UVic

Charlie Cleugh, Lead Campus Professional, Emerging Campuses

Board of Directors

Sam Hyman, President to February 2025

Gordon Brandt, Vice President to February 2025, President from February 2025

Jessica Lithwick, Secretary

Eric Andrew, Treasurer

Jocelyn Brown

Frank Cohn

Aaron Devor

Shannon Gorski

Talia Magder

Alexis Pavlich, Term Ended, February 2025

Bruce Raber

Rebecca Recant, Vice President from February 2025

Alex Shiff

Ania Switzer

April Nowell, Term Began, February 2025

Lianna Philipp, Term Began, February 2025





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