

2025



Early J

Annual Report



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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REFLECTIONS

"Our preschool is wonderful. Every day there are children laughing, singing, and learning Jewish values," shared Rabbi Menachem and Adina Landa in October, 2025. Earlier in the year, EarlyJ awarded them a grant to launch Aleph Preschool of Marin in Novato, an area previously without a Jewish preschool. The preschool is now poised to welcome new families to Jewish Early Childhood Education (Jewish ECE). This story encapsulates EarlyJ's 2025 impact and our long-term vision: strategic grant-making to equip communities with the tools they need to nurture Jewish children and families. Throughout this annual report, I look forward to highlighting further stories like the Landas', illuminating the bold steps we have taken to transform the reach, quality, and impact of Jewish ECE.

In 2025, EarlyJ focused on enriching our core pillars: growing preschool capacity, investing in educators, and centering family engagement. To support the pillars' impact, we distributed 60 grants totaling \$4,357,294 and added 565 new enrollment spots to the Jewish ECE ecosystem. These grants underpinned our foundational efforts to welcome more young learners into Jewish ECE.

In the Bay Area, we doubled-down on our time-proven investments for children, families, and educators. This year, we reached new regions of the Bay Area that previously lacked Jewish ECE options, helping launch preschools and strategically pouring into the retention and training of leading talent.

Beyond supporting new preschools and other early childhood programming, as we did with Aleph Preschool, we prioritized elevating Jewish ECE as a key conversation in the broader Jewish community. From funding nine new Jewish parenting centers, to investing in infant and toddler programs, to sponsoring an ECE Leadership Lab at the national Z3 Conference, to launching the inaugural EarlyJ Impact Award, we dared to push Jewish ECE to the forefront of national Jewish thought leadership.

Throughout the year, EarlyJ also continued participating in Project Aleph Bet, a watershed initiative to increase Jewish day school enrollment across North America. We are honored to be the sole Jewish ECE organization participating in this historic convening and are dedicated to spotlighting Jewish ECE's critical role in laying the foundation for robust Jewish learning.

To further amplify Jewish ECE's presence, in February 2025, EarlyJ took the leap of scaling our impact to Los Angeles. This first expansion beyond the Bay Area was guided by research, community input, and generous funding from local partners and donors. Over the course of the year, we have been thrilled to begin planting roots in LA by meeting with Jewish educators, community stakeholders, and families. It has been an honor to provide responsive grants to preschools across the LA region, including serving the community after the devastating January 2025 wildfires. The expansion has reinforced our commitment to transforming the Jewish ECE field nationwide, and we are already seeing the fruits of our initial investments.

EarlyJ's 2025 growth and successes were only possible thanks to our generous funding partners. Their dedication to our shared vision of thriving Jewish ECE ecosystem, activated a year of higher impact than ever before. We also extend our gratitude to our Board for their investment, wisdom, and passion. EarlyJ is thankful for the leadership of Yana Kalika, Elana Rodan Schuldt, Shai Weingarten, and Zack Bodner.

In 2026, we look forward to continuing to lead this collective journey of investing in Jewish ECE because this is where Jewish life truly begins. High-quality, accessible Jewish preschool is not optional for our future; it is essential. Together, we must boldly and urgently work toward a world where every Jewish child and their family can connect with their local community, where children spend their days laughing, singing, and learning Jewish values while immersed in vibrant Jewish life.



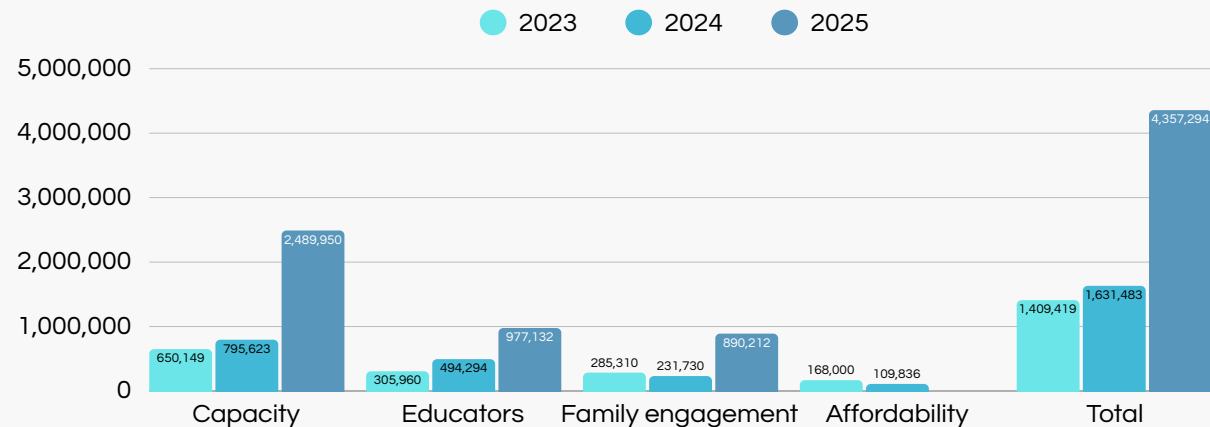
Sharona Israeli-Roth

Founding President &
Executive Director of EarlyJ

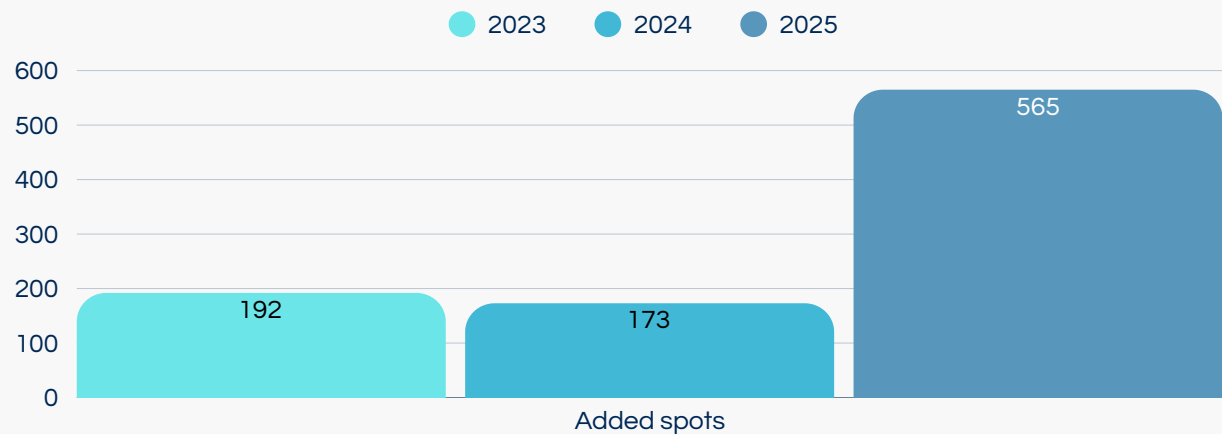
EARLYJ’S CUMULATIVE IMPACT: 2023–2025



Grant Amounts Awarded Per Pillar – Bay Area and Los Angeles



Additional Enrollment Spots: Bay Area and Los Angeles



2025 IMPACT

Year at a Glance: Bay Area

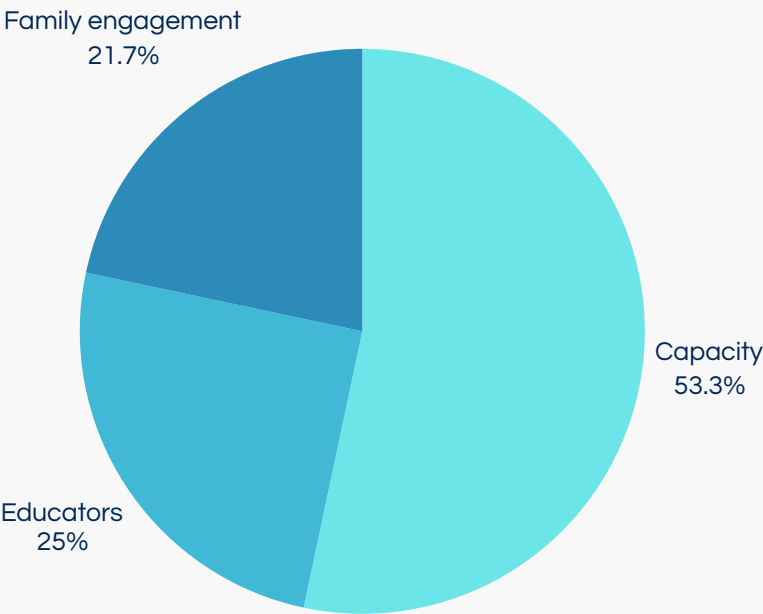
41	\$2,449,328	150	9	3	25%	2
Grants	Total investment	Additional enrollment spots	New Jewish parenting centers	New Bay Area preschools	Bay Area Jewish ECE educators participated in training programs	RFPs: parenting centers, extended hours

Year at a Glance: Los Angeles

19	\$1,907,966	415	2.5%	1
Grants	Total investment	Additional enrollment spots	LA Jewish ECE educators participated in training programs	RFP: infant and toddler

2025 Total Grants: Bay Area and Los Angeles

Number of grants – 60



VISION, MISSION, AND PURPOSE

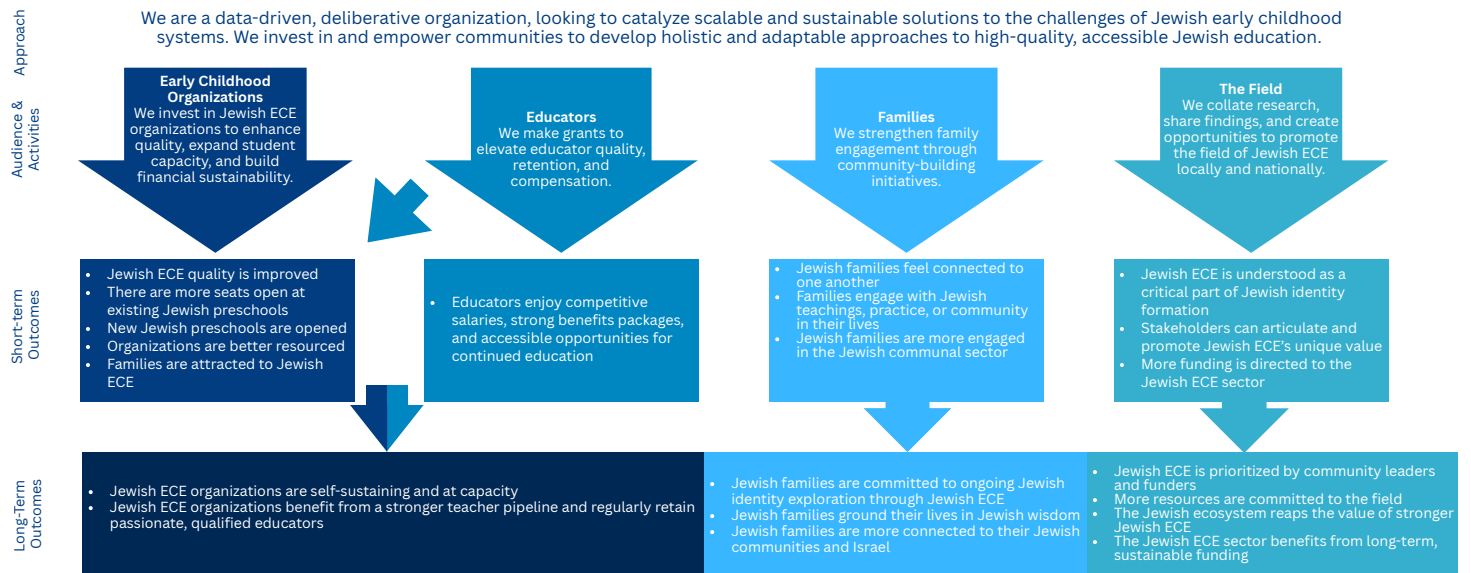
In 2025, we published a [strategic plan](#) outlining how we will advance and scale high-quality Jewish ECE in the longterm. The plan includes our refined mission, vision, and purpose:

VISION	MISSION	PURPOSE
The next generation of Jews is activated by a Jewish ECE system that fosters transformative and enriching experiences for families.	EarlyJ is a catalyst for the Jewish ECE ecosystem by accelerating reach, quality, and impact through strategic investments.	EarlyJ activates local ecosystems by investing in Jewish ECE early on, enabling communities to better nurture Jewish children and families. Through adaptable resources, a focus on sustainability, and tailored support, we equip communities with the tools and frameworks to drive their own growth and thrive both during and long after our partnership.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Our theory of change demonstrates how our approach and activities will produce the outcomes that lead to our vision.

EarlyJ is a catalyst for the Jewish ECE ecosystem by accelerating reach, quality, and impact through strategic investments.



The next generation of Jews is activated by a Jewish ECE system that fosters transformative and enriching experiences for families.

BAY AREA IMPACT

To bring our vision, mission, and purpose to life, EarlyJ continued to allocate resources in alignment with our foundational pillars within the Bay Area. These pillars of growing preschool capacity, investing in educators, and centering family engagement have guided EarlyJ since its inception and remained our priority in 2025.

GROWING PRESCHOOL CAPACITY

Since EarlyJ's launch fewer than three years ago, expanding preschools' capacity has been at the heart of our investments. In 2025, we proudly awarded 17 capacity building grants to Bay Area preschools, totaling \$839,950. These grants created 150 new spots for children to enroll, and were distributed through key initiatives:

We supported the opening of three **new Jewish preschools** in the Bay Area, two of which are in communities that previously had no Jewish ECE options. These preschools now have the capacity to welcome new families to Jewish ECE in the coming years, opening up invaluable pathways to community for young Jewish families.



"Every day there are children laughing, singing, and learning Jewish values and stories. Just last week, we hosted a children's challah bake, all of our preschool families joined! For many, it was their first Jewish event, and their first time participating in our community."

Rabbi Menachem and Adina Landa, Aleph Preschool of Marin

We also awarded a tranche of grants to preschools looking to augment their programming with innovative offerings, including **infant and toddler programs, outdoor learning environments**, and a **Hebrew language learning** pilot.

In the summer of 2025, we launched a Request for Proposal (RFP) to help preschools extend their operating hours. This initiative drew on the success of our previous extended-hours grant awarded to Helen Diller Family Preschool, which contributed to a 10% overall enrollment increase, and aimed to meet the needs of busy working families. Through the effort, we awarded a total of \$300,000 to seven Bay Area preschools.

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT

Beth El Nursery School, Berkeley:

Our \$58,000 grant supported the expansion of BENS's Early Childhood Education program to include a new toddler classroom. This addition for toddlers bridges the age gap between the preschool's Katanchicks program, a parent-child program for infants ages 0-24 months, and the preschool's early childhood classrooms. The new toddler classroom is now fully enrolled.

Shir Hadash Early Childhood Center, Los Gatos:

Our \$81,500 grant enabled the opening of 2 new toddler classrooms, both now fully enrolled, increasing capacity and achieving a 100% re-registration rate.

INVESTING IN EDUCATORS

EarlyJ's vision of a sustainable Jewish ECE ecosystem depends on uplifting and retaining our dedicated preschool educators. We remain committed to funding increased compensation opportunities, professional development pathways, and Jewish learning initiatives to retain and cultivate the quality of top Jewish ECE talent. To this end, in 2025, we awarded 11 grants totaling \$719,166 to fund supportive initiatives for educators:

EARLY CHILDHOOD HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Our partnership with American Jewish University accelerates the future generation of Jewish ECE leadership by funding master's degrees in Jewish ECE and offering significant salary increases. The program's second cohort of eight Bay Area educators graduated in the spring of 2025, each receiving a \$12,000 salary increase fully funded by EarlyJ. Ten new Bay Area educators embarked on the program in the summer of 2025, pursuing a 2027 graduation. This initiative has:

- helped 4.5% of Bay Area Jewish early childhood educators earn a master's degree, and
- supported an average of 19% increase in graduates' compensation.



The second Early Childhood Higher Education cohort gathers with EarlyJ leadership at their graduation event

ENHANCING EXPERTISE

Understanding that educators need space, time, and resources for continued learning, EarlyJ awarded a grant to Jewish LearningWorks to facilitate three regional Days of Learning. As part of the program, alumni of EarlyJ's Early Childhood Higher Education program were invited to lead workshops, paying forward their leadership training. EarlyJ also provided a grant to Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco to offer tailored mentoring to preschools across the Bay Area. Looking ahead to winter of 2026, a group of our Early Childhood Higher Education alumni is taking the lead in planning an Educator Retreat to deepen knowledge-sharing and strengthen educators' networks.



The third Early Childhood Higher Education cohort meets with Program Facilitator, Zehava Dahan

IMPACT AWARD

In May 2025, EarlyJ, along with a committee of lay leaders, proudly presented our inaugural Impact Award to Esty Marcus, Director of Chai Preschool in San Mateo. This Award celebrates Jewish early childhood educators who bring passion, creativity, and purpose to shape the future of our communities. Esty received a \$10,000 prize to support her professional and personal growth, while Chai Preschool received \$5,000 to launch an initiative of her choice. We surprised Esty with an on-site celebration and a recognition event with donors and supporters.



The Impact Award Committee celebrates award recipient Esty Marcus at the inaugural EarlyJ Impact Award ceremony

We are already seeing the impact of our investment in educators: retention in preschools participating in EarlyJ's initiatives has risen from the field average of 80% to 92%.

This remarkable boost illustrates the efficacy of our programs in stabilizing the Jewish ECE community and improving continuity for children and families.

CENTERING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

We believe preschools are underutilized spaces for cultivating community among Jewish families. This year, we tapped into this opportunity to foster long-term participation in Jewish life, investing \$890,212 through 13 family engagement grants. To enhance the connections between families, preschools, and the broader Jewish community, we awarded the grants through four initiatives:

JEWISH PARENTING CENTERS

We awarded nine Bay Area preschools with grants to open Jewish parenting centers, totaling \$474,000. These hubs serve as warm convening spaces where parents with children ages 0-2 and expecting parents can find resources, community, and a natural pathway into Jewish preschools. To strengthen this work, EarlyJ assembled a cohort of grantees that meets regularly to share best practices and deepen the impact of their centers.



Little Learners Jewish Parenting Center, South Peninsula Hebrew Day School

SHINSHINIM

To enrich Bay Area Jewish preschools with Israeli culture, Jewish life, and Hebrew, we fully funded four *Shinshinim* (Israeli high school graduates taking a gap year of community service before joining the army) to work full-time in eight preschools. These *Shinshinim* brought Jewish traditions and Israeli life into preschools. Moreover, EarlyJ also convened participating preschools into a cohort that meets throughout the year to reflect on best practices and strengthen how *Shinshinim* integrate into classrooms, both now and in future years.



Music by Heart annual Day of Learning

MUSIC BY HEART

Doubling the impact of our 2024 pilot, we brought this Jewish music learning program to 10 Bay Area preschools in the 2025-2026 school year. The program continues to offer accessible and creative connection points to Israel and Jewish traditions for children, families, and educators.



Music by Heart annual Day of Learning

PJ LIBRARY PARENT CONNECTOR PROGRAM

In 2025, we funded Parent Connector positions for ECE at eight Bay Area centers serving 14 preschools. These Parent Connectors catalyze peer-to-peer family outreach and have now introduced new families across the Bay Area to Jewish preschools.



“It was so heartwarming to see our young learners connecting, exploring the toys and room, and making new friends. Equally special was witnessing the bonding and connections forming between the new moms in our community.”

Yana Tiv, Assistant Director and Program Manager for its Little Learners Family Center, South Peninsula Hebrew Day School

LOS ANGELES EXPANSION AND IMPACT

Following our strategic planning process and generous new funding, we expanded our evidence-based initiatives into Los Angeles in February 2025. This milestone marked our move from a regional Bay Area model to a multi-city initiative poised for elevating Jewish ECE nationwide. We have since met with preschools across LA to map the community's needs and assess opportunities for strategic investment. We are proud of this leap in broadening our reach and have made tremendous progress in building relationships with local partners.

To sow our initial seeds of impact in LA, we launched an RFP to expand infant and toddler programs. This initiative responds to enrollment losses driven by public transitional kindergarten, while meeting the needs of working families by bringing children into Jewish preschools earlier. Through this effort to create a sustainable Jewish ECE pipeline, we awarded \$1,000,000 in grants to 13 preschools, supporting the opening or expansion of infant and toddler classrooms and creating 235 new spots for young children in the years ahead.



“Our toddler program serves as a gateway into lifelong Jewish connection and belonging. This investment expands access for families, strengthens our educators, and creates meaningful spaces where our youngest children can explore, wonder, and thrive.”

Floryn Rosenberg, Director, Erika J Glazer Early Childhood Center

We carried forward this momentum by awarding infrastructure-supporting grants, totaling \$650,000, to two LA preschools. The grants have supported the construction of a state-of-the-art early childhood center and the renovation and expansion of an early childhood education facility. Not only have these grants added 180 new spots for children, but one of the grants helped serve families displaced by the 2025 Southern California fires.

IMPACT ACROSS REGIONS

2025 also encompassed the exciting bridging of our work in the Bay Area and LA, as we welcomed educators from each region to join together in two professional development cohorts.

EARLY CHILDHOOD JEWISH & ISRAEL CULTURAL AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

We welcomed 20 educators from both the Bay Area and LA to join the program's second cohort in the summer of 2025. Grouped into a track for educators and a track for lead educators and directors, the cohort traveled to Israel for a transformative 17-day professional development seminar. There, they honed their teaching expertise, nourished their Jewish identities, and immersed themselves in Israeli culture. When the war with Iran broke out just days after the cohort's arrival, the educators continued their studies with Oranim College professors while sheltering in place. Our team executed a highly complex operation to return the entire cohort to safety in the US, and many of the educators will return to Israel in summer 2026 to complete their studies.

90%

of the program's participants report feeling more confident teaching Judaism and more connected to a professional Jewish community.



"At Oranim College, the learning was profound. Even as the war unfolded around us, the learning continued, bravely, purposefully, and with heart. I came home changed: more grounded, more inspired, and more ready than ever to teach and lead."

Chana Fox, Director, The Rose Engel Early Childhood Center at Adat Ari El

Z3 EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP LAB

Inspired by last year's success, we funded 26 educators from across the Bay Area and LA to participate in the November 2025 Z3 conference. The conference included a two-day ECE Leadership Lab to train educators on how to incorporate Zionism into their preschools and elevate them as collaborative leaders within the broader Jewish community.



"It was an incredibly inspiring experience, the sessions, speakers, and conversations sparked so many new ideas and perspectives, and truly ignited my passion for Israel advocacy and education."

Amy Leibovitch, Site Director, Mann Family Early Childhood Center



FUTURE PLANS

2025 was a year of growth, as we expanded into a new region and solidified a data-driven strategic plan. Now, EarlyJ looks forward to ensuring our investments flourish and multiply in 2026.

We will continue our foundational work across the Bay Area and Los Angeles, holding true to our goal of an interconnected and self-sustaining Jewish ECE ecosystem. Iterating on our proven grantmaking and programs, we will ensure that our reach extends to more children, families, educators, and preschools. We are committed to this mission, understanding that when we prioritize our youngest learners, the whole Jewish community thrives.

2026

EARLYJ IN THE MEDIA

Our 2025 initiatives captured the attention of publications such as eJewishPhilanthropy, The Jerusalem Post, and The Jewish News of Northern California. The following are highlights of articles showcasing our impact on students, educators, and families across the Bay Area and LA.

- “Grants from Israel aim to strengthen Jewish education in [the] Bay Area.” [Read here.](#)
- “Bay Area’s EarlyJ Expands to L.A. with \$3 million grant to boost city’s Jewish preschools.” [Read here.](#)
- “Los Angeles Area Jewish Preschools and Early Childhood Centers Receive \$1 Million in Grants from EarlyJ Program.” [Read here.](#)
- “Preschool director who ‘values excellence’ wins EarlyJ’s first award.” [Read here.](#)
- “Jewish parenting centers launch at 9 Bay Area preschools to offer support.” [Read here.](#)
- “Early childhood will be the foundation of a Jewish Renaissance.” [Read here.](#)
- “EarlyJ doubles down on Los Angeles expansion with \$1 million in fresh grants.” [Read here.](#)

TEAM BEHIND THE WORK

A key to our success in 2025 has been the dedication of our Board and expanding professional team. In 2025, EarlyJ welcomed a new Bay Area Director and a Project Manager to support our growing impact. Both staff bring additional Jewish education and community-building experience to our robust leadership. In 2026, we will recruit a Los Angeles Director to further deepen our presence and strengthen partnerships across the region.

BOARD



Elana Rodan Schuldt
President of the Rodan Family Foundation



Yana Kalika
President of the Koum Family Foundation



Shai Weingarten
Executive Director and co-President of the Weingarten Foundation



Zack Bodner
CEO of the Oshman Family JCC

PROFESSIONAL TEAM



Sharona Israeli-Roth
Founding President & Executive Director



Maayan Sorek
Director of Operations



Annie Wilkins
Bay Area Director



Sarah Turteltaub
Project Manager



Zehava Dahan
Early Childhood Higher Education Program Facilitator

THANK YOU



EarlyJ

We extend gratitude to our donors who have made this year of immense growth and impact possible. We could not have lifted Jewish ECE to new heights without your generous partnership.

DONORS:

Laura & Justin Alanis
Arcadia Foundation
Ronit and Zack Bodner
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Rob and Eileen Ruby Philanthropic Fund
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Taube Family Foundation
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Weingarten Foundation

As we enter 2026, EarlyJ welcomes additional funding partners to invest in our community's future. [Join us](#) in building a lasting legacy of transformative Jewish education. Together, we are planting the seeds for the future of the Jewish community.

The full list of EarlyJ's awarded grants can be found [here](#).

Follow EarlyJ on social media.



[EarlyJ.org](https://www.earlyj.org)