Highlights



Shared Society at Leo Baeck Education Center

The need	Creating meaningful and lasting relationships between Arab and Jewish communities in today's increasingly polarised Israel
Our answer	Educational, leadership, and community programmes, which bring Arabs and Jews together to build trust, resilience and a truly shared society
Time frame	Annually, from September to August
Target population	Hundreds of Arab and Jewish children, young people, adults, and community leaders from across Haifa.
Impact	Transforming dialogue into lasting partnerships, empowering community leaders and strengthening social cohesion across generations.

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Leo Baeck Education Center

Founded in 1938, the Leo Baeck Education Center is one of Israel's leading educational institutions and the country's largest center for Liberal Judaism. Located in a diverse Haifa neighborhood, it serves Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Druze, and Bahá'í communities, many from disadvantaged backgrounds. Our campus spans nursery to 12th grade and includes programs for students with ASD and gifted learners, alongside a synagogue, community center, and sports facilities. Rooted in humanistic values and Progressive Judaism, we promote Tikkun Olam, social justice, and multiculturalism, fostering a shared and equitable Israeli society.

Shared Society and Shared Existence

The programming of our Shared Society Department is inspired by Dr. Leo Baeck's values. We aim to provide high-quality educational and cultural programs for the Arab and Jewish residents of our mixed neighborhoods – opportunities that were previously unavailable to them. In collaboration with the dedicated Arab-Jewish Residents' Committee, neighbors meet throughout the year to foster dialogue, empathy, and resilience, even in challenging times. The impact is profound, breaking down barriers, dispelling stereotypes, and transforming lives. By bringing children, youth, and adults together, we create a community where understanding replaces fear, shared progress becomes possible, and living together becomes natural.

For over 15 years, the Shared Society Department at Leo Baeck has been at the forefront of fostering coexistence and social change. The department is now led by Ms. Raefa Hakroush, a dedicated Muslim social worker and activist, who brings extensive experience in working with families, children, and at-risk youth. Raefa is a certified family and couples' therapist, as well as a skilled group facilitator specializing in topics close to her heart: women's empowerment, shared society, interfaith dialogue, and conflict resolution. She holds a master's degree in Social Work and an additional master's degree in Criminology.



The Shared Society Department is one of our organization's pillars, and every year, we look for ways to develop it and impact more Arab and Jewish people through the following key initiatives:

Building Shared Communities and Multiculturalism – Arab-Jewish Leadership Groups



In Arab and Jewish cities, where diverse populations often live in proximity but remain socially siloed, the Building Shared Communities program serves as a proactive, high-impact intervention. As our flagship leadership initiative, it is designed to cultivate the next generation of Arab and Jewish changemakers in Haifa. By providing a structured framework for activists, educators, and students to collaborate, we translate the abstract ideal of multiculturalism into tangible civic action and shared social capital.

The Model – Empowering "Connector Leaders": The program equips participants with a sophisticated toolkit for navigating a complex society. Through a curriculum rooted in facilitated dialogue, interfaith literacy, and social entrepreneurship, we empower individuals to become "Connectors" – leaders who are capable of articulating a shared vision for the city and mobilizing their respective communities toward collective goals.

Community Voices – Arab and Jewish Women in Dialogue



The social fabric of Israel is a complex mosaic, often marked by deep-seated tensions and cultural divides. Within this reality, women frequently navigate a dual challenge: the systemic pressures of social segregation and the persistent hurdles of gender inequality. The *Community Voices* program was established as a strategic response to this need, creating a resilient, multicultural sanctuary where Arab and Jewish women from across Haifa can engage in transformative dialogue and emerge as catalysts for peace within their families and the wider public sphere.

The Model – Women as Agents of Change: This initiative brings together a diverse community of approximately 50 Arab and Jewish women from different backgrounds, cultures, and faiths. At its core is a dedicated leadership group of 8-10 women, graduates of Leo Baeck's Women's Leadership Program, who have demonstrated both the vision and commitment to drive meaningful change within their communities.
Guided by Raefa Hakroush, the program harnesses the unique power of a "feminine lens" to address communal challenges. By centering women's voices and lived experiences, it moves beyond political divides toward shared humanity, trust-building, and collective responsibility. By the end of the program year, this growing network of women leaders identifies pressing community needs and leads the development of targeted social projects, creating tangible, lasting change on the ground.



Arab-Jewish Summer Camp





In recent years, especially since the events of 7 October, polarisation between communities in Israel has deepened, highlighting the growing need for educational spaces that foster authentic, shared experiences between Arab and Jewish children and families in Haifa. The Leo Baeck Education Center is committed to promoting equality, partnership, and mutual respect, and for over thirty years, our Arab-Jewish Summer Camp has been a cornerstone of this work.

Each August, the camp brings together 100 children, 50 Arabs and 50 Jews, aged 6 to 11, for ten days of shared learning, play, creativity, and dialogue in both Hebrew and Arabic. Led jointly by Jewish and Arab co-directors and a mixed team of counsellors, the camp provides a safe and engaging environment that nurtures friendship, empathy, and cross-cultural understanding while modelling positive cooperation for the wider community. Its consistently high demand reflects both its proven impact and the increasing need for meaningful frameworks that strengthen a shared society.

Arab-Jewish Community Garden



Established in 2010, this initiative remains the only Arab-Jewish communal garden in Haifa. Spanning 2.25 dunams, the garden functions as a dynamic hub for intercultural diplomacy and environmental stewardship. It is currently powered by 80 dedicated activists tending to 30 individual and collective plots.

The garden transcends traditional agriculture; it is a living laboratory for social cohesion. Weekly communal breakfasts and cross-cultural holiday celebrations serve as informal diplomacy platforms, where "tending the land" serves as a powerful equalizer. As a premier destination for international delegations and local students alike, the garden demonstrates how common values and shared labor can dissolve long-standing cultural misconceptions.

Special Interfaith Holidays





As part of our ongoing commitment to fostering shared living among all religions and cultures in Haifa and across Israel, we mark key holidays and host interfaith gatherings on our campus with the active involvement of religious and community leaders from the city's diverse faith traditions. Our annual events include the "Sukkah of Peace Among Nations" during Sukkot, a multi-faith celebration of light during Hanukkah (embracing Hanukkah, Christmas, and Ramadan), and a communal Iftar that reflects universal values of generosity, peace, and compassion.

Haifa's rich cultural mosaic is reflected within the Leo Baeck Education Center community itself, where many continue to champion values of peace, tolerance, and acceptance.

Celebrations reaffirm our belief in humanity and in the power of individuals to repair the world through simple acts and open hearts.

Spoken Arabic Course – a Bridge to Understanding

Language is more than a tool for communication; it is a gateway to empathy and a foundational pillar of a Shared Society. In the wake of the profound challenges facing our region since October 2023, we have seen a groundswell of interest among our Jewish activists and staff to learn spoken Arabic. What began as a grassroots pilot led by dedicated Arab community volunteers has evolved into a cornerstone of our intercultural programming. By breaking down linguistic barriers, we are equipping our community with the skills to move from living *alongside* one another to living *with* one another.



The Model – From Dialogue to Fluency: Recognizing the growing demand for high-quality instruction, the 2025-2026 cycle marks a strategic professionalization of the program. We have integrated a professional pedagogical lead to ensure that our participants don't just learn vocabulary, but also the cultural nuances and social contexts that foster genuine connection. The course is designed as a safe space for curiosity, where language serves as the bridge for reimagining our shared public discourse.

Peace Drums – Interfaith Youth Steel Drums Band

Peace Drums is one of our most compelling initiatives for bringing together young people from different cultural and religious backgrounds through regular, meaningful encounters. Founded in 2012 in partnership with Peace Drums (USA & Israel) and developed by Harvey Price, a retired University of Delaware professor, the programme uses the steel drum, an instrument originally forged out of conflict in Trinidad and Tobago, as a powerful symbol of harmony and hope. Through joint rehearsals and performances across Israel, students from our centre and from St John's schools in Haifa share a living message of coexistence with diverse audiences, demonstrating that cooperation and peace are achievable. The programme's impact endures well beyond the music itself: friendships formed within the band often last for years, and participants carry forward the values of respect, dialogue, and collaboration, helping to shape a more inclusive and connected Israeli society.



Strengthening our Shared Society initiatives

The Shared Society Department is a cornerstone of the Leo Baeck Education Center, encompassing a wide range of programs and initiatives that reach a diverse audience across age groups, religions, and cultures. We are deeply committed to the values of shared living and coexistence, and we work tirelessly to reshape public discourse and promote a more inclusive, just, and connected Israeli society.

We invite you to join us in supporting our initiatives and bring a better future for the Arab and Jewish residents of Haifa and Israel.

With your support, we grow. Together, we create lasting change.

With respect and appreciation,

Rabbi Ofek Meir
Headmaster and Managing Director
Leo Baeck Education Center






