



The Social Development Committee - Haifa

Annual Narrative Report 2025

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Dear partners and allies of the Social Development Committee (SDC),

We are pleased to share with you SDC's annual report for 2025. This year, like the year before it, unfolded in a difficult and unstable context for Arab Palestinian residents in Haifa and for civil society organizations working to protect civic life. Still, our determination remained strong. SDC continued to carry its responsibility toward the community with commitment, flexibility, and care.

As the only local Arab communal NGO in Haifa, SDC holds a unique role in the city. We are a civic and community-based actor working to strengthen community organizing, social cohesion, solidarity, and resilience among Arab residents. This role brings both challenges and opportunities. It requires us to remain close to the community while continuing to learn, adapt, and strengthen our professional capacities.

In 2025, this ability to adapt was essential. The conditions around us did not allow us to work as if things were normal. We had to adjust our methods, strengthen our internal coordination, support staff and facilitators, and remain in close contact with activists and community partners even when public participation became more difficult. This was not only a practical adjustment; it was part of our responsibility to sustain civic life and community engagement during a period of pressure and uncertainty.

Throughout the year, SDC continued to invest in its people, partnerships, and organizational learning. We strengthened staff and facilitator capacities, deepened cooperation with community actors and civil society organizations, and continued to reflect on how our work can remain responsive, effective, and grounded in the realities of the Arab Palestinian community in Haifa.

Toward the end of the year, we also began a strategic thinking and planning process with staff, board members, and external experts. Although this process continued into early 2026, its beginning was already significant. It created a shared space to examine our priorities, partnerships, and direction for the coming three years, and reflected SDC's commitment to working not only responsively, but strategically. This same commitment was also reflected in our continued work on shared-city life in Haifa, where SDC and its partners helped sustain activist engagement, coordination, and civic responsibility during a complex and difficult period.

This report reflects the efforts of many people: staff members, board members, community activists, educators, parents, women, youth, partners, and donors. Each contributed to SDC's ability to continue working in a difficult time. I would like to thank all of them for their commitment, trust, flexibility, and belief in the importance of this work.

As we look ahead, SDC remains committed to strengthening Arab civic presence in Haifa, supporting community resilience, and advancing social change rooted in dignity, justice, and collective responsibility.

With warm regards,

Fathi Marshood

Director, Social Development Committee

INTRODUCTION

In 2025, as Arab public life in Haifa faced prolonged pressure, the role of the Social Development Committee as a trusted communal address became more visible and more necessary. The consequences of war, surveillance, incitement, and civic restriction continued to shape daily life for Arab Palestinian residents in Haifa and other mixed cities. In schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, and public institutions, participation itself often required caution, protection, and collective strength.

Guided by a responsibility to protect Arab civic presence, SDC worked throughout the year alongside residents, parents, educators, activists, professionals, and partner organizations to sustain community spaces, respond to emerging threats, and keep open the channels of dialogue and advocacy that are essential to a just and shared city. This work was not limited to moments of public action. It also took place through careful coordination, accompaniment, and relationship-building when visibility carried risk.

As the effects of the war continued to shape civic life, SDC's work required both flexibility and care. The organization adapted its priorities, pace, and methods while remaining anchored in its core goals and responsibilities toward the community. This included strengthening the capacity of staff and facilitators to support people working through fear and anxiety, maintaining contact with activists and community members when public gathering became more difficult, and deepening cooperation with relevant organizations and community actors.

Much of SDC's work in 2025 unfolded in the space between emergency and long-term change. The organization supported civic frameworks that could respond to tension without deepening fear. It strengthened educational spaces where young people could feel safe enough to reflect, think critically, and express themselves. It also accompanied community actors working to address inequality in schools, services, and public planning. At the same time, SDC invested in the internal systems, staff capacities, and strategic thinking needed to remain stable, adaptive, and effective in the years ahead.

Across these fields, the year affirmed that civic resilience is built not only through visible initiatives, but through relationships that hold under pressure, through educators and parents who insist on better futures for young people, and through community-rooted organizations that continue to learn, adapt, and prepare.

This report tells the story of that work. It reflects the organizing, advocacy, education, coalition-building, community accompaniment, and organizational development that shaped 2025, and the values that guided SDC through it: dignity, responsibility, community-rootedness, and the belief that shared life must be built through justice, presence, and sustained collective effort.

CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A SHARED CITY

In 2025, SDC and its partners worked to strengthen the civic infrastructure needed to protect shared public life in Haifa. What had emerged as a response to fear, incitement, and rising tensions gradually became a more organized network of residents, activists, civil society organizations, municipal actors, and community partners. Its purpose was not only to call for shared life, but to create the practical tools, relationships, and mechanisms that allow it to hold under pressure.

This work was built around a clear understanding: in a mixed city, moments of tension cannot be addressed only after they erupt. They require trusted channels of communication, people prepared to intervene responsibly, and public messages that can reduce fear rather than deepen it. Throughout the

year, SDC worked with partners including Beit HaGefen, the Community Work Unit of the Welfare Department, and House of Grace to maintain coordination during sensitive periods, strengthen communication with municipal and relevant public actors, and create spaces where community concerns could be raised before they turned into wider conflict.

One of the network's most important developments was the creation of practical response mechanisms. Volunteers monitored harmful content and misinformation in several languages, while a smaller operations team helped coordinate responses and share verified information. In some cases, this work led to the removal of harmful posts and helped prevent online rumors from escalating into real-life tension. This digital work was not treated as separate from community organizing; it became part of a wider effort to protect public space, reduce incitement, and encourage responsible communication.

At the same time, the network developed practical tools for everyday shared spaces, including shelters, workplaces, and public settings. Public campaigns, guidance materials, and facilitated conversations helped residents and activists think through how to act responsibly when fear and political tension entered shared spaces. These tools offered practical language for communication, de-escalation, and mutual responsibility, while also addressing what could be legally safe or risky in moments of heightened sensitivity.

The year also included structured work with activists. Conflict de-escalation workshops helped form a committed group of residents who began to see themselves as people able to respond thoughtfully in tense situations. Alongside these trainings, cultural events, dialogue evenings, tours, and public gatherings created opportunities for people to meet, listen, and think together about the meaning of shared civic life in Haifa. These spaces did not erase political differences, but they helped build habits of communication and cooperation that are especially important when trust is fragile.

A significant moment in this process was the public conference held in September 2025. The gathering brought together activists, academics, NGO representatives, and residents to reflect on the role of civic networks in shaping Haifa as a shared city. It gave public visibility to a model that had been built through many smaller acts of coordination, response, and relationship-building throughout the year.



"Keeping Haifa Shared" Conference, September 2025

By the end of 2025, this work had moved beyond individual activities. It had created working teams, communication channels, campaign materials, response mechanisms, and institutional relationships that strengthened Haifa's capacity to face moments of tension more responsibly. It also positioned SDC and its partners as contributors to a wider model of shared-city organizing, one rooted not in symbolic coexistence, but in practical civic responsibility, community trust, and the daily work of keeping public life open to all.

STRENGTHENING CIVIC NETWORKS AND SHARED LEARNING

As SDC's work in Haifa developed, the organization also continued to engage with wider civil society spaces and professional networks. This engagement reflected an understanding that the challenges facing Arab communities in Haifa are not isolated. Questions of civic participation, community resilience, education, youth work, and shared-city life are also being addressed by organizations, activists, and professionals in other localities. Maintaining these connections allowed SDC to learn from others, share its own experience, and contribute to broader efforts to strengthen community-based work under difficult conditions.

This wider engagement was shaped in part by the closing phase of Madinati ("My City"), which concluded its 18-month cycle in February 2025. The final gathering at SDC's office in Haifa served as a moment to consolidate what had been learned across the participating mixed cities and to reflect on how the relationships, tools, and civic practices developed through the project could continue beyond the formal cycle. Through Madinati and other professional exchanges, SDC brought lessons from its local work into wider conversations about organizing, advocacy, education, facilitation, and community response. Its experience in Haifa offered practical insights into how community organizations can sustain trust, respond to changing needs, and keep civic spaces active during periods of pressure.



Madinati concluding gathering, February 2025

Within these wider civil society spaces, SDC engaged with other Palestinian civil society organizations and shared lessons from its work in Haifa. While each organization brought experience from its own field, SDC's contribution was rooted in its work on shared-city organizing and its efforts to protect Arab civic presence while sustaining channels of communication and cooperation in Haifa. This allowed SDC to connect its local experience to broader professional learning among organizations facing related

challenges. SDC's wider engagement also included exchange with actors beyond Haifa who were interested in its experience in community-based education, facilitation, shared-city work, and civic organizing. These exchanges reflected growing interest in the practical knowledge developed through SDC's work, especially in contexts where public participation has become more difficult and organizations are seeking grounded ways to continue working with their communities.

This area of work remains important because it connects SDC's local experience to wider learning and cooperation. By engaging with civil society networks and professional spaces, SDC strengthened its own work while also contributing to the shared knowledge needed by community organizations facing similar challenges. This wider engagement supports SDC's long-term role as a grounded organization in Haifa and as part of a broader civil society field committed to community resilience, dignity, and meaningful participation.

EDUCATION AS A SITE OF VOICE, RIGHTS, AND BELONGING

Education remains one of the clearest arenas where the broader struggle for equality in Haifa became visible. For Arab students and families, the challenges were not only academic. They were connected to access, infrastructure, recognition, language, identity, and the right of young people to learn in environments that see them fully and support their development. Against this background, SDC's educational work moved across several levels: supporting parents and school communities, advancing advocacy for equal opportunities, strengthening youth voice, and creating spaces where Arabic language and cultural expression could be experienced with pride.

One of the most significant developments of the year was the strengthening of SDC's role in community-based education advocacy. Through its work with parents' committees, SDC helped transform concerns around access, equality, and educational opportunities into organized civic action. A key example was the case of Arab students who were denied access to a recognized full scientific track in Haifa's secondary schools. Working with the parents' committees, SDC helped frame the issue as part of a wider question of educational justice, connected the families with relevant professional and legal partners, and supported a process that eventually reached court.



Parents' committee meeting, Haifa, January 2025

This case also reflected a broader direction in SDC's education work: strengthening cooperation with partners who can help connect local school-level concerns with wider legal, educational, and policy frameworks, including Adalah - The Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel and the Arab Follow-up Committee on Education. More broadly, it demonstrated the importance of organized parents' committees, strategic partnerships, and community-rooted advocacy in addressing structural inequalities in Arab education.

Alongside this advocacy work, SDC continued to invest in youth civic learning through the 2024-2025 cycle of #ACT4CHANGE, which concluded in June 2025. Implemented under difficult conditions marked by war, school disruption, and emotional strain, the cycle reached students across six Arab schools in Haifa. Through a structured workshop process, students explored issues connected to identity, social norms, gender, digital safety, economic pressures, and community responsibility. Each participating class developed a student-led initiative rooted in concerns they identified from their own lives and surroundings.

The final event, held in May 2025, gave students a public platform to present their work to peers, educators, school leaders, families, and community members. Their projects included awareness videos, visual campaigns, presentations, a class-based fundraising initiative, and a printed storybook. These were not only final products; they were expressions of a learning process in which students practiced critical thinking, teamwork, public speaking, and creative communication. For many participants, the program created a rare space inside school to discuss issues that are often difficult to raise in ordinary classroom settings.



#ACT4CHANGE Celebratory Final Event, May 2025

A major lesson from this year's educational work was the importance of engaging schools as institutions, not only as places where activities take place. SDC worked closely with educators and school staff throughout the year, and piloted broader professional development workshops in two schools, reaching 46 teachers. These sessions introduced participatory and student-centered methods, encouraged reflection on the role of language, dialogue, and creativity in teaching, and helped build a shared educational language within school teams. This approach was also reflected in storytelling-based educational work such as "Darsi Hikaya," which explored how narrative can become a tool for learning, expression, and connection inside schools. Together, these efforts pointed to a wider understanding of

impact: meaningful change in schools depends not only on students' experiences, but also on the adults, methods, and institutional cultures surrounding them.



Darsi Hikaya storytelling workshop, 2025

SDC's educational work in 2025 also extended to Arabic language, creativity, and cultural belonging. Through school-based Arabic language activities and storytelling-based pedagogy, students and educators engaged with Arabic not only as a subject, but as a living space of imagination, identity, and expression. Workshops in storytelling, poetry, drama, calligraphy, rhythm, murals, and creative writing helped connect language to students' sense of self and community. These activities affirmed that strengthening Arabic in schools is also part of strengthening dignity, belonging, and cultural confidence.



Arabic-language activities in Haifa Arab schools, December 2025

Taken together, SDC's education work in 2025 reflected a broad understanding of educational justice. It included the right to equal access to academic tracks, the right to safe and dignified learning environments, the right of students to express themselves and shape their surroundings, and the right of Arabic language and culture to be visible and valued in school life. Through parents, students, educators, legal partners, and school communities, education became a field where voice, rights, and belonging could meet, and where community action could begin to create concrete change.

WOMEN'S CIVIC PRESENCE AND COMMUNITY CONTINUITY

This year, SDC continued to nurture spaces where Arab women in Haifa could meet regularly, reflect together, and remain connected to one another and to the wider community. In the context of ongoing war, fear, and public caution, the continuity of these spaces carried particular importance. At a time when many forms of public participation became more difficult, the ability to gather, speak, learn, and maintain relationships was itself a meaningful form of community resilience.

Through the Haifa Women's Forum, SDC supported a steady framework for women's presence and participation. The forum offered a familiar and trusted space where women could discuss issues connected to everyday life, family, rights, wellbeing, culture, and identity. These conversations were not separate from the wider political and social context. They reflected the ways in which war, uncertainty, and pressure enter family life, emotional life, community relations, and women's sense of safety and belonging.



Haifa Women's Forum on a heritage tour to Akka, 2025

The forum's regular gatherings helped sustain social ties at a time when isolation and hesitation were strongly felt. They created room for women to exchange knowledge, ask questions, share experiences, and take part in cultural and community life without needing to separate personal concerns from public realities. In this sense, the forum strengthened a form of civic participation rooted in daily life: quiet, relational, and continuous, but deeply connected to the ability of the community to remain present and organized under pressure.

This work also affirmed the importance of culture and memory as sources of strength. Through shared learning, reflection, and connection to Palestinian Arab heritage, the forum helped women locate their experiences within a broader story of identity, place, and continuity. Cultural belonging became part of how women sustained themselves and one another during a difficult year. By maintaining this regular women's space, SDC strengthened an essential part of the community fabric in Haifa. The forum helped preserve relationships, confidence, knowledge, and shared belonging during a difficult year. In a context shaped by war and uncertainty, this continuity mattered. It supported women's civic presence and contributed to the broader resilience of Arab community life in the city.

STRENGTHENING THE ORGANIZATION FOR THE YEARS AHEAD

As the external context remained unstable, SDC also invested in strengthening its internal foundations. Sustaining community work in such conditions requires more than strong programs; it requires a team that can adapt, document, communicate, reflect, and continue working with clarity and care. For SDC, organizational development was therefore not separate from its mission; it was part of the work of remaining present and responsible to the community.

This year's internal work focused on strengthening the systems that support learning, accountability, and continuity. SDC advanced efforts to improve documentation, monitoring and evaluation, digital tools, visibility, and communication. These areas are often less visible than public activities, but they shape the organization's ability to understand its impact, share its work with partners, and make informed decisions in a changing environment.

SDC also invested in staff development and professional accompaniment. Spaces for training, reflection, and support helped the team and facilitators adapt their methods, respond to emotional and practical pressures, and sustain their work with care and professionalism. This was especially important as the organization continued to work with residents, activists, educators, and community partners in conditions that required flexibility, sensitivity, and close accompaniment.



Facilitators working together on program development, September 2025

At the strategic level, SDC launched a strategic thinking and planning process toward the end of the year, bringing together staff, board members, and external experts to reflect on the organization's priorities,

partnerships, and direction for the coming three years. While the process continued into early 2026, its beginning was already significant: it created a shared space for reflection and helped connect immediate demands with longer-term organizational thinking. The process also strengthened cooperation between staff and board members, reinforcing shared responsibility for SDC's development and future direction.

By investing in its people, systems, and leadership, SDC strengthened its ability to remain a stable and trusted communal address for the Arab Palestinian community in Haifa. In this sense, organizational development was part of the same commitment that guided SDC's public programs: to act with responsibility, professionalism, and long-term care, even in uncertain conditions.

LOOKING AHEAD

This year showed that SDC's role remains both urgent and long-term. In a period shaped by war, fear, and civic restriction, the organization continued to act as a trusted communal address for Arab Palestinian residents in Haifa: sustaining relationships, protecting spaces for participation, supporting young people and educators, strengthening women's community presence, and building the internal capacities needed to continue working responsibly.

The year also clarified the importance of adaptation. SDC's work did not remain fixed in one form. It changed according to the needs of the moment, while remaining rooted in the same commitments: dignity, justice, community responsibility, and the belief that shared life must be built through equality and presence.

As SDC looks toward the coming years, the organization will continue to strengthen its programs, partnerships, and internal systems so it can respond to emerging challenges while building toward deeper and more sustainable change. The relationships, tools, and lessons developed throughout 2025 will continue to guide SDC's work as it prepares for the next stage of community action in Haifa.



The Social Development Committee - Haifa

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