

AN INTERNATIONAL HONOR:

US Library of Congress Honors Grinspoon Literacy Programs in Israel



In 2009, as PJ Library was first expanding across the United States and Canada, PJ Library's founder Harold Grinspoon launched a partnership with the Israeli Ministry of Education and other funders to bring books to children living in Israel. Today that partnership makes it possible for Grinspoon's Israel-based foundation — Keren Grinspoon Israel (KGI) — to distribute 3.5 million books annually to more than 500,000 Israeli children in preschool through second grade. The partnership supports two book programs: Sifriyat Pijama (Hebrew for "Pajama Library"), a program akin to PJ Library that distributes Jewish-themed stories in Hebrew, and Maktabat al-Fanoos (Arabic for "Lantern Library"), an Arabic early literacy program designed for Arab-Israeli children. In addition to Grinspoon and the Ministry, Price Philanthropies is a longtime generous supporter of Maktabat al-Fanoos.

In September 2020, KGI became the first organization in Israel to be selected as a Library of Congress Literacy Awards Program Best Practice Honoree. The Library of Congress recognizes 15 organizations around the world each year for their promotion of literacy.

KGI received the honor based on a recommendation from Professor David K. Dickinson, Ed.D., the Margaret Cowan Chair of Vanderbilt University's Department of Teaching and Learning. He noted that KGI's programs "provide exactly the type of supports known to nourish early development" through their high-quality books and associated activities.

As part of KGI's programs, once Israeli children are introduced to select books in school, they each receive a personal copy for their home library to enjoy with their family. Just like PJ Library, KGI's programs aim to strengthen children's language skills, values, and ethnic identity; create shared moments of parent-child reading; and stimulate and instill a love of reading.

We are grateful to the generous donors who have joined us and the Israeli Ministry of Education to support these Israel-based programs: the Abraham & Sonia Rochlin Foundation; the Azrieli Foundation; the Baron de Hirsch Fund; the Crown family; the Goldring Family Foundation; the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc.; the Jewish Federation of Broward County; the Jewish Federation of Greater Orlando; the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago; the Koppelman Family Foundation; the Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation; the Miriam Yellin-Steklis Memorial Legacy; the Mitzi and Warren Eisenberg Family Foundation; the Morris and Rosalind Goodman Family Foundation; the Naomi Ruth Fund; Price Philanthropies; Gerald Ronson and the Ronson family; the Salomon Family Foundation; Tmura — The Israel Public Venture Fund; and WIZO.

In early 2020, just before schools everywhere closed due to the pandemic, Harold spoke to a group of students at the Shefa School, a Jewish day school in Manhattan that serves students with language-based learning differences. He understood better than most what kind of struggles the students at Shefa face after having difficulty with reading as a child, and he didn't have the advantage of attending a program devoted to meeting his challenges. He has succeeded beyond most people's wildest imaginations — his own included.

"It was an incredible meeting," says Dana Raucher, a parent who attended that talk at Shefa. "Harold connected eye to eye with those kids. He spoke openly and honestly about growing up as a kid who's dyslexic and how that frustration can so easily turn to anger. You can't let that anger guide you." That is, after all, one of the secrets to Harold's successful life story: The best way to get around anger at what you *can't* do is to figure out what you *can* do. "I think the most significant thing is to understand the beauty and nature of what we can all do with our genius," Harold explains. ***"We all have genius in our lives. It's all about having the opportunity to express yourself in the way that's right for you, which I didn't have as a kid. But I have it now."***