

# Including Campers with Disabilities

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LEARNING FROM THE WORK OF INCLUSION COORDINATORS AT  
JEWISH SUMMER CAMPS



Edited by

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## Editors' Introduction

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*What can possibly be a better place than summer camp for the inclusion of youth with disabilities?!* Camp is a place at which creating community and fostering positive relationships are always on everyone's minds. Even in camps in which campers participate in structured, curricularized Judaic and/or Hebrew education, it would be a stretch to call the educational offerings "academic" or "high stakes." Learning happens through experience; campers are supported in trying new activities and in building on current strengths.

*What can possibly be a more challenging place than summer camp for the inclusion of youth with disabilities?!* Campers face constant social pressures. A lack of structure, at least to some extent, is an intentional part of the culture. The primary care-takers of campers are themselves adolescents. The "rustic" physical plant may make it physically inaccessible. Camp traditions can be remarkably resistant to change, creating impediments to accommodations. At overnight camps, contact with parents is limited, and consultation with a youth's school teachers and counselors is uncommon.

The push and pull of opportunities for, and challenges to, inclusion at camp has never been more relevant. Camp itself is taking a more prominent place in the Jewish educational landscape, as research findings continue to support the efficacy of camp in promoting personal growth and Jewish engagement. Whether due to a market-based response to demand, a feeling of communal responsibility, or both, camps are increasingly welcoming the involvement of youth with disabilities. What definition or category of "disability" are characteristic of youth who are welcomed in any given camp? What model(s) of inclusion is (are) used at a camp? The response to both these questions is the same. There is great variability among camps. In fact, there may be variability within individual camps from summer to summer.

In order to best meet the needs of campers with disabilities, the position of Inclusion Coordinator (IC) is becoming increasingly common. The specifics of this position also vary from camp to camp, but generally involve recruitment and screening of campers and staff; administrative responsibilities such as budgeting; planning the camp's overall inclusion plan; staff training and supervision; crisis intervention; and ongoing monitoring of camper progress.

In order to support the work of ICs, the Foundation for Jewish Camp secured a grant to create a community of practice. Lisa Tobin, former Director of Inclusion Initiatives of the FJC, together with Drs. Abby Uhrman and Jeff Kress of the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education – Jewish Theological Seminary, launched the initiative with a webinar in November 2015. After some attrition due to changes in employment, a cohort of 15 fellows met monthly for webinars during which they shared questions and advice with one another and

with guest presenters. In addition, each fellow completed an on-site project structured around an action-inquiry approach. Each fellow also met regularly with mentors. The CoP met regularly over the two-year course of the grant.

The CoP facilitators, mentors, and fellows recognized that while some of practitioners have been doing pioneering work at camp for decades, camp-based inclusion as a “field” has been increasingly gathering momentum. Along with building expertise among their peers within the CoP, we were in a unique position to share our work more widely.

This compendium was created with this in mind. Our overall goal is to share the wisdom of practice of the CoP members – fellows, mentors, and coordinators – with the field at large. The compendium consists of two sections:

### Project Profiles

These first-person narratives of change describe the action-inquiry projects undertaken by their authors. The profiles provide approaches to common challenges faced by ICs. Moreover, they demonstrate the possibility of innovation and change even within the omnipresent challenges of limited funds, time, and human resources. The profiles are not meant as “how to” guides – any camp-based change effort needs to be tailored to the unique affordances and constraints of the individual setting. Rather, they are meant to inspire the creative thinking needed to propel the field ahead. The authors did, however, provide specific examples when possible. Though we lightly edited the Project Profiles, we made sure to maintain each author’s voice. We believe that the inconsistencies in tone and wording among the write up are more than justified by the preservation of the passionate descriptions of the authors’ work.

### Voices of Experience

Each meeting of the CoP contained spirited discussion and sharing among participants. While it is true that each camp is a world unto itself, there were some recurring themes regarding the challenges faced by the participants and about which the CoP members shared their struggles and suggestions. In this section, we provide the culled from our notes and transcripts the wisdom of the group in the form of a summary of the different pieces of advice that emerged, categorized by theme. The reader should see this as a supplement to other resources for inclusion at summer camps, such as [The Inclusion Training Guide for Jewish Summer Camps](#) by Lisa Tobin and Howard Blas.

# Acknowledgements

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In the spirit of *hakarat hatov* – an expression referring to gratitude which involves, literally, “recognizing the good” – we give our deep appreciation to those without whom neither the CoP nor this compendium would have come to be. First, we thank The Ruderman Family Foundation and Joan and Stanford Alexander for their generous support, along with the William Davidson Foundation and the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education – Jewish Theological Seminary for enabling this work to take place. Laura Herman and Miles Greenspoon (List College-JTS) provided needed support in collating information for this compendium.

Second, this project benefited greatly from the wisdom and input from our mentor group. The mentors were important guides on the journey both as mentors to the fellows and in their help shaping the CoP as a whole.

## Inclusion CoP Mentors

Eva Cowen, Inclusion Consultant

Laura Herman, Wm. Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education – JTS

Meredith Englander Polsky, MATAN

Most importantly, while the three of us edited this compendium, we are in no way its “authors.” That title belongs to a larger group of which we were only a part – the extraordinarily passionate, talented, insightful, and creative group of Inclusion Coordinators that participated in this community of practice.

## Inclusion CoP Fellows

Franki Bagdade, Tamarack Camps

Aryn Barer, NJY Camps

Sara Berlin, Camp Louise

Becky Borak, Camp Judaea & Keeping It

Specially Simple

Amy Kagan, URJ Kutz Camp

Laurie Gross-Kammer, Mandel JCC

Audra Kaplan, Camp Ramah Darom

Rachel Kurinsky, Camp Young Judaea

Beth Levenson Praver, Eden Village Camp

Jennifer Lieb, Michael-Ann Russell JCC

Jessica Ochs, JCC Austin

Debbie Morris, B'nai B'rith Beber Camp

Jennifer Phillips, Camp Chi/Keshet

David Sharvit, Camp Kaylie

Heather Strauss, JCC of Greater Washington

In this section, we hear the firsthand accounts of inclusion coordinators who instituted a change through their CoP action-inquiry project. These narratives address challenges faced by many camp-based inclusion coordinators.

The camper intake process can help get the summer off to a strong start. Inclusion staff benefit from information about their campers so they can be as proactive as possible in addressing their needs. **Amy Kagan**, of URJ Camp Kutz, shares the tools and techniques she used to provide her staff with more information about campers with disabilities and to track progress throughout the summer.

While inclusion staff members often experience their work as immensely rewarding, they also experience significant challenges. The experience has the potential to be isolating to staff, who may need to function with schedules and responsibilities that limit their connection to their peers. **Jennifer Phillips** of JCC Camp Chi and **Franki Bagdade** of Camp Tamarack each address this issue through projects that create community among inclusion staff, and help bolster their standing at camp.

Anyone who has been to a summer camp knows the potential for sensory overload, even for neurotypical campers and staff. While camps are increasingly instituting policies that allow for campers with sensory challenges to remove themselves from intensely stimulating environments, **Sara Berlin Schreurs** of Camp Louise describes the process of developing a “Chill Zone” that served the needs of a wide range of campers while diminishing the stigma involved in the use of such an outlet.

Finally, **Dr. Audra Kaplan** of Camp Ramah Darom implemented a project related to the dual challenges of staff training and social inclusion. Departing from a more common “buddies” model, she developed an ongoing process of training and supervision for campers in the older age group. As the participants develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes for successful interaction with neuroatypical peers, they are poised to continue on as staff members well versed in working with a wide range of campers.

## Increasing Available Camper Information & Providing Staff Training

Amy Kagan  
URJ Kutz Camp

At camp, I serve as the Summer Assistant Director, managing the Resident Advisors (Counselors) and our Inclusion Program as well as overseeing the Wellness Team (Mental Health/Nursing Staff). Our main program at camp serves about 200 Jewish teenagers from across North America who are entering the 10th – 12th grades. We also have participants from Israel, Europe as well as other parts of the world.



*Gibush*, our inclusion program, is designed for teens with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The unique asset of the “camp within a camp” model is that motivated neurotypical high school students serve as peer-engagers, enabling *Gibush* campers to participate fully in the Jewish camp experience in a safe and nurturing environment that fosters positive self-esteem and social skill development. *Gibush* also has a fabulous team of dedicated staff with a high staff to camper ratio. Our ratio of staff assigned to particular campers ranges from 1:1 to 1:4 based on each camper’s needs and level-of-functioning. *Gibush* counselors who work directly with the campers are motivated college students who receive a 2-week intensive training in working with teens who have ASD and related characteristics.

In addition, neurotypical teens who need extra attention but do not need the support given to those in the *Gibush* program have access to the Wellness Team and other supports within camp. All staff who directly work with the teens receive training on mental health and disabilities prior to camp.

For summer 2017, my project focused on collecting more extensive background information on our campers, delivering more in-depth professional development for our staff, and tracking the information during the summer to ensure appropriate support. The goals for this project were to increase our staff’s knowledge level about our teens—based on the insights we amassed prior to camp (changing the camper application to gather additional information from each camper) and enhancing the trainings delivered prior to camp opening. Throughout the summer, we also tracked each teen that the Wellness Team worked with to see if the teens who needed support were the ones whose parents shared information on the application versus those who did not. The main idea was to be able to give the staff enough prior knowledge of who they would be interacting with that they could triage many of the issues that arose, freeing the Wellness Team to support the staff, as well as work with the teens who needed more support during the session.

In preparing this project to be successful, our first step was to assess our camper application to identify information gaps. I had the opportunity to speak with some of my colleagues to expand our application to become more comprehensive. The second part of the project, also initiated prior to camp, was finding and adapting trainings for the staff specifically surrounding adolescent mental health. The last part of preparing for camp was hiring the Wellness Team and collecting and organizing the camper information we compiled from the camper application and conversations with parents and, where applicable, therapists.

Prior to summer 2017, our camper application addressed medical history, including allergies, physical limitations, medications, and one question in the area of mental health. In contrast, other camps used their application to explore mental health in greater depth; this included specifically asking parents to indicate other disabilities, including ADHD, eating disorders, learning disorders, or behavioral concerns, as well as including asking if their teens had an Individual Education Program, Behavior Intervention Plan, or a Section 504.

Another area that we found to be highly important to add to the application was camp's expectations of having a successful summer. Some of these include: our teens will not threaten harm to themselves or others or engage in self-injury, our teens will eat while at camp so that they can stay nourished and healthy and will be able to self-advocate if they are having challenges with food, and be able to understand and follow multi-step directions.

During staff week, an organization called Mental Health, First Aid came to camp to do an 8-hour training course with our Resident Advisors, *Gibush* Staff, and Wellness Team. The course's goals were to teach our staff how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders. The training would give our staff the skills they needed to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis. The course introduced common mental health challenges for youth, reviewed typical adolescent development, and taught a 5-step action plan on how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations.

The organization's training evaluation form was broken down into three sections: an overall course evaluation, presenter evaluations, and the practical application of the material. All three areas used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The overall course evaluation section included the following questions and scores:

- (1) Course goals were clearly communicated—4.08;
- (2) Course goals and objectives were achieved—3.77;
- (3) Course content was practical and easy to understand—4.04;

(4) There was adequate opportunity to practice the skills learned—3.96.

The staff struggled with the duration of this training; the anecdotal feedback I received indicated that the information was informative and important, but feedback on the instructors and their delivery were not as positive. The staff did not feel that the 5-step action plan was clear enough to incorporate into the camp environment; I would like to talk with other camps about their experience with this training. Specifically, was their training more tailored to the camp environment for them? How did the presenters share the information to grab the audience and excite them about using the model provided? In the future, I would ask more questions about the training to see if the organization could align the training more to the camp environment. Overall, I was pleased with the feedback about the information presented at the training, but I would have liked to walk away with a more positive staff afterwards.

The other part of this project that was ongoing throughout the summer was to keep a Wellness Log of each teen the wellness team worked with to compare this to the information we gained from the camper applications. The camp uses Daily Camper Reports (DCR) that the cabin staff fills out daily, enabling the wellness team and senior camp staff to monitor the overall welfare of the teens. The cabin staff can indicate on the DCR if a teen needs a wellness check-in; the wellness team will then meet with a teen to discuss any concerns and then follow through with the support that is needed. Out of the 53 sessions that were reported on, 83% of the sessions conducted were informed by background information provided on their application.

During the second week of camp, I had the cabin staff fill out an additional survey to follow up on supplemental trainings or questions that were done after staff week. Two main questions were asked on the survey. The first question was: How well equipped do you feel from the Mental Health Training and any information /conversations we have had since camp started? The staff could choose 1 (still having questions), 2 (average), 3 (well-prepared). The average for the 15 staff members who completed the survey was 2.5. The second question was: What areas do you still want additional training on throughout the summer? The majority of staff's responses were anxiety/panic attacks, depression, and social deficits.

Overall, I feel this project was very successful. Over the course of the summer, we were able to give much more support to the teens because of the information we already had. For the 17% of teens whose application did not provide us with extra information regarding mental health history, the information needed to support these teens was not significant enough to warrant additional resources. Going forward, I will continue to look at the application to see if we can adjust or add any other questions to gather more useful information. I would also like to provide additional trainings on core topics and to find other ways that our staff to expand their knowledge to better prepare them for the summer. The more training the staff has prior to

camp about issues they may face, the better prepared everyone will be. It will also be important to reinforce a consistent set of trainings given the transient nature of our staff.

I am most proud of the level of support we give our teens each and every summer. Two summers ago, there was a teen who had a difficult time transitioning into camp and I was able to speak with her physician from home to help with the transition. He shared his feedback after the situation had been resolved, providing the following insights. “Most camp professionals would look at this situation and send the teen home because she presented as a behavior issue. It shows that you understand the mental health field, and demonstrates the support you are providing her is remarkable.” These situations taught us all that each situation presented is unique and needs to be treated on its own. This is why it has been so important for camp to gather as much information about each individual before coming to camp—to deliver the knowledge and support needed to help all teens achieve a safe, positive, and enjoyable summer.

The part of this project that surprised me the most was how the Mental Health First Aid training has been very successful at a sister camp, but was less successful for us. The training itself was new for the county where our camp is located; thus, the trainers were new to presenting the information. This seems to have impacted the momentum of the training and the staff’s attitude about it. I also know that the other camp does the training over two days. This also may have impacted our staff’s ability to take in the information most effectively.

Overall, networking with other Inclusion Coordinators from other camps as much as possible will benefit all involved. There are so many good things already happening in the camping world, that re-inventing the wheel is not necessary. For us, gathering information from other colleagues and modifying the information to meet our needs were the best ways for us to improve our support for our teens. Of course, a camper’s needs are always changing, so keeping up with the population at camp and knowing what to be prepared for is the most crucial part.

**Amy Kagan** is the Summer Assistant Director at the URJ Kutz Camp. During the school year, she works as a School Social Worker and a Case Manager for children with disabilities. Amy lives in New Jersey with her husband and two children.

**URJ Kutz Camp** is a welcoming and engaging summer camp experience for teens from around the world to live in an environment that celebrates each individual, is committed to deep learning and leadership development, lifts up the opportunity for reciprocal learning between teens and adults, and celebrates Judaism with passion and joy. The Kutz program helps teens broaden their perspectives and spheres of influence through an intentional focus on leadership development through a lens of Reform Jewish values.

## Mid-Summer Survey

1. How well equipped do you feel from the Mental Health Training and any information/ conversations we have had since camp started?

1

2

3

Still having questions

Average

Well prepared

2. What areas do you still want additional training on throughout the summer?

Autism

Anxiety

Social deficits

Depression

Panic Attacks

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Are there any tools or strategies that you would like to learn more about?

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## Added Camper Application Information

It is our goal to make sure that every teen has a successful experience at camp. For this reason, please indicate below if there are things that would be helpful for us to know so that we can work with you and your teen before camp to help ensure a meaningful summer.

There are basic expectations that we have of our teen participants. While we recognize that each of our teens is unique and may require different levels of support, clear information from parents is very helpful for us as we plan how to best support each of our teens.

1. We expect that our teens will be willing to participate in camp activities.
2. We expect that our teens will be able to communicate their needs.
3. We expect that our teens will not threaten harm to themselves or others or engage in self-injury.
4. We expect that our teens will be able to understand and follow multi-step directions.
5. We expect that our teens will be able to follow the camp schedule.
6. We expect that our teens will eat while at camp so that they can stay nourished and healthy, and will be able to self-advocate if they are having challenges with food.
7. We expect that our teens are able to manage their own self hygiene.
8. We expect that our teens will be able to manage challenges they may have with the tools and skills that have been successful in the home setting, and that they will be amenable to applying those tools and skills at camp.
9. We expect that our teens will be non-violent, will not be physically aggressive toward others, and will understand boundaries of language and physical space with other participants.
10. We expect that our teens will not require one on one supervision or "shadowing."

Are you concerned about your child's ability to meet these expectations? Yes                      No

Does your teen have any challenges that could impact their camp experience? (You will have an opportunity to share information about allergies and dietary restrictions on the Camper Health History form, so please do not share that information here).

Yes                      No

Other disabilities, including ADHD, severe allergies, asthma, eating disorders, learning disorders, or behavioral concerns:

Check any that apply. My child has an:

IEP (Individual Education Program)      BIP (Behavior Intervention Plan)  
Section 504 Accommodations

If there is any additional information that you feel is crucial and would like to have it shared with our Wellness Team, please include these details below. If you feel more comfortable discussing this by telephone, please contact our camp office. This information will help us to best prepare and train our staff in order to support your child effectively.



<b>RA Coord.</b>	<b>Wellness Team</b>
<b>Initials</b>	<b>Initials</b>

Please provide more information for any health-related boxes CHECKED (above)

Is there follow-up needed for any camper issues? What steps have already been taken or are planned?

Please provide OTHER INFORMATION about teens that you feel is important:

## Village Teams: Building Community Among Inclusion Staff

Jennifer Phillips  
Camp Chi/Keshet



I am lucky enough to have the best job in the world. I get to enjoy watching campers experience the magic of overnight camp! For the past 12 summers I have worked as the Inclusion Coordinator at Camp Chi and have recently become part of the year-round staff. I have implemented our new Camper Care Team at Camp Chi, while continuing to run our Keshet Inclusion Program. Camp Chi is and continues to be a true example of what an inclusive camp community should be.

It is hard to believe that this past summer was my 25th year providing inclusive camping for children with disabilities.

What started as a job as a counselor for a camper with autism grew into a lifelong passion. Camp was one of the single most important parts of my childhood and helped me to understand the importance of every child being able to go to camp. Making friends, learning to live with others, gaining confidence and independence, and being part of a community is what camp is about for ALL children.

Camp should be a place that every child who wants to participate can do so. Siblings, cousins, classmates, and neighbors should all have the opportunity to attend camp together. No matter what your disability, there is a place for you at camp. I have the mindset of saying yes and working on a plan to get there. I look at the campers and develop a strategy to make camp successful for them. This may mean we would look at the appropriate length of stay at camp or how to structure their day at camp.

At Keshet, we have a team that works together to implement modifications, adaptations, and individual camper plans. If you have a positive attitude that a camper will be successful, you will find a way to make it work. Motivating your staff to stay positive is the best way to create a culture that is willing to say “Yes” and make camp a place for everyone.

Sometimes it hard to imagine how things will work and other times you have a feeling of exactly what you need to do to make it work. Each summer I feel as though I want to make camp the best it can be. That means I always need to be looking at how to change things around and make camp better. This summer I focused on how to make our Inclusion Counselors more a part of the camp staff, the village team, and help them better get to know the campers in their cabins.

For the past years, we staffed camp with a few extra counselors to cover breaks, days off, and times we needed to fill in for assigned staff. The model worked in many ways and the staff had support that they needed most of the time. However, there were plenty of times that the few floaters we had were hard at work. This meant the other counselors could not always have help when they needed it. If a floater was covering a day off they could not cover the times that other staff needed assistance.

Also, many of the floaters did not know the campers they were working with and did not know the staff in their villages. Counselors did not want to leave their campers with substitute staff who did not know their campers. They wanted to make sure that they were being included, happy, and did not want them to feel anxious when they were gone. It was clear to me that I needed to look at what we could do to better support our staff, provide success for campers and make camp more inclusive.

I started thinking how I could help my staff get the down time and days off they needed, and, at the same time, give the campers the support they need. I considered what my vision was for my campers. I wanted them to be in a fully inclusive camp setting, and at the same time give them the support that they need. For some campers this means a staff member with them always and for others it means a staff to support them at times that are challenging for them.

Camp Chi is a large camp and has many villages that act as individual communities. I needed to make sure that each village had enough support. Each village needed a team with the knowledge to support the staff and campers within that village. They would be part of the Camp Chi village staff and model what inclusion should look like.

This all meant that I had to commit to changing the structure of my summer staff chart. This would not be as easy as just making this decision. I needed to look at staff numbers from the past summer and look at how many more I would need to hire. I had to see what registration was looking like, how many campers we were expecting, what ages, and what level of support they needed. The two main obstacles were the increased cost in salaries for the added staff and whether we would have enough room to house them. These obstacles were in addition to my general concern about finding enough skilled staff. However, I knew in my heart this was the best thing to do. This would allow for our vision of a seamless inclusive camp community with adequate support for our staff and campers.

I developed a plan to budget for the extra staff. I had to cut costs in a few places and I also found a few small grants to cover some of the additional costs. My team and I carefully sat down and looked at how many staff we would need for each village. Then we looked at how we would house these staff. We came up with a few great ways to add more staff to each of the cabins and have a few live-in villages close by. They would however spend their entire time with

their village from wake up until they went to sleep. The plan was set, and we decided it was a “YES!”

You could see the positive effect from the very first day. Each village was staffed sufficiently to help and support all the children as they moved into their cabins. They worked as a cohesive team to help campers unpack, encourage some homesick campers, and helped support all the campers whatever their individual need may be. There was no confusion about their job role. They were there as staff for *all* campers. At times it was difficult to tell who the cabin counselors were, who the one-on-one counselors were, and who the floaters were. The availability of additional support staff made camp the beautiful picture of inclusion that it is.

This structure also allowed our one-on-one counselors to attend village meetings each day. They could be part of what was happening in the village such as obtaining information about evening programs, discussing issues that may be arising in the cabins, and receiving all the information the other staff was getting. Staff were also able to problem-solve with the Camp Chi staff about campers that were having difficulty. Their experience of having extra training with campers with disabilities gave them some tools and strategies they could share.

The additional floater staff also allowed our counselors the time they needed to have a break and relax and refresh. Being a one-on-one counselor at overnight camp can be physically and mentally exhausting and knowing that you can have a break and that someone who knows your camper’s needs will be there is critical to keeping staff positive and motivated.

The floaters were able to get to know the campers in the village. So, when they had to fill in for breaks or days off, it made it much more efficient. They knew the campers and their needs, and the campers knew the staff. This allowed our campers to continue to participate in camp activities with a staff member that knew what support they needed.

These changes also led to another important result. We saw an increase in our campers meeting their goals, such as gaining independence, social skills, and confidence. As a team we felt that this new model made a huge impact in this area. Also, having a staff available made it possible for all campers to get the support they needed so they could be with their camp groups, even if their counselor was on a break or a day off. This had such a positive impact on our camp community and helped make our goal of full inclusion a reality.

Overall, I feel so much pride that I was able to watch this vision become a reality. It was a highlight of my summer to see it play out. I have a smile on my face when my campers are just “campers” and not viewed as campers with Keshet support. Many years of work went into making this happen and I am proud of it. Having a camp team that believes in inclusion and working together to make sure it happens is the key.

Achieving successful inclusion programming comes from the top, with setting examples and letting your staff know what your vision is. I have learned that you should trust your instincts and always believe that your vision is possible! I feel so proud of what I accomplished, and that I have been able to watch the magic of inclusion happen before my eyes. What is even better is that I get to watch the same beautiful thing happen again in just short of six months. I feel like the luckiest camp director!

**Jennifer Phillips** is an accomplished special education professional with more than 25 years in the field. She has extensive experience as an administrator, trainer, consultant and direct service provider. She currently is working as the Director of Recreation for Keshet and the Inclusion Coordinator for Camp Chi. In her current position at Keshet, Jennifer oversees over 200 campers who are included into 15 day and overnight camps each summer. At Camp Chi she heads of the Camper Care Team and works to make Camp Chi an inclusive community for all campers. From hiring staff to assisting a camper in adjusting to camp life, Jennifer is actively involved in every component of creating an inclusive experience for campers with disabilities. Jennifer consults with many camps all over the country helping camps include more children with disabilities to experience the magic of camp. She has spoken all over the world spreading the word of Inclusion and its importance in all recreational programs she oversees at Keshet.

**Camp Chi** and **Keshet** work in partnership providing a successful inclusive experience for campers with disabilities in an overnight camp setting. For nearly a century, generation to generation, Camp Chi has delivered summer experiences beyond compare. Camp Chi is so much more than beautiful grounds, outstanding facilities, and extensive activities.

## Elevating the Inclusion Staff Position

Franki Bagdade  
Tamarack Camps

As Director of Support Services and Special Needs, I oversee our Camper Care Team (social workers, division heads, and parent liaisons) and coordinate our Yachad (camper inclusion) and Avodah (young adult inclusion) programs. During the “off-season,” I am busy screening all of our applications and talk with families to ensure that our programming gives each child the extra support they need to be successful at camp. For some campers, the best fit is our inclusion program; for others, it is an occasional social work check-in, and for others, it is giving their supervisors and counselors some extra tips and tools to keep them emotionally and behaviorally healthy at camp.



Tamarack Camps has been running inclusion programming since the early 1990s. Campers are fully integrated into their age groups (villages) and cabins with their same-aged peers. A third, specially-trained counselor is added to their bunks. These counselors are part of our disabilities intern program. They receive additional training from camp and are required to be studying a related field in their universities and/or have extensive volunteer experience working with those who have disabilities. Our young adults live in cabins together as a small community and are integrated with their same-aged peers (staff) throughout the morning in their work placements in our specialty activity areas.

When I started working for Tamarack Camps in 2015, we were struggling as an agency to recruit dynamic and qualified staff for our disability programs. Our camper alumni eagerly returned as staff, however they felt that our inclusion programs were an undesirable area to work in. Interested in learning more about why this was the case, I spent my first few months on the job interviewing past staff and asking for feedback. The staff felt that there was not enough support from our senior leadership, as our social workers and heads of side were spread too thin. It was for these reasons that we created my current position. In order to recruit and retain talented staff, we needed to “recreate” the staff experience and support system for this group.

Because our camp is so large, often times one staff member will be the only designated staff for campers with disabilities in their village and therefore feel very isolated. I knew that I needed to build community amongst the entire group of staff working in our programs, Yachad (for youth) and Avodah (for young adults). One way we did this was by offering regular, ongoing training, both direct and organically throughout the camp session. We also changed

the staff title to “intern.” We felt that changing their title to “intern” better reflects the learning experience and would be an appreciated resume boost for these staff members. It also signaled the high expectations we have for these staff members that often work dual roles as a bunk counselor and a 1:1 staff for their Yachad camper.

Creating this internship program also helped us to market to area universities. Many local universities including University of Michigan and Michigan State will offer credit to participate in our program. We meet as a team for two days before staff pre-camp to learn and bond as a group. We also met 3 times per session (approximately once a week) as a community throughout the summer.

I set the meeting time during the “off-season” in order to assure that the meetings remained consistent throughout the summer. I picked Wednesday mornings because Tuesday nights are staff meeting nights and staff are not allowed to take their days off Tuesday-Wednesday. I explained the expectation to the interns and the village supervisors that disabilities interns participate in these meetings. I asked supervisors to help coordinate proper coverage of the Yachad campers so that they could attend. It became tradition of for me to spoil the interns with “non-camp” food including donuts and fresh fruit and coffee. This helped to build comradery and show staff appreciation. I held these meetings in my camp home, one of the few buildings throughout camp with air conditioning which was greatly appreciated. In the second year of our internship program, we hired an Avodah supervisor. She met with that group separately as we found that their roles at camp were quite different.

The summer of 2017 was a great success for our internship program. In the fall of 2017, I had more staff come to me than ever before asking to be part of this program. The attitude about working in this position for our staff has completely shifted. Each of our Yachad staff members shared that these meetings helped build community and that they felt supported by me and their peers. They felt less isolated and enjoyed learning from each other. They were happier, working harder, and felt truly appreciated. This summer I will replicate the program entirely with one small tweak, hoping to pull Avodah and Yachad staff together once a session to celebrate the entire community and their incredible work.

I am proud that we are “growing” staff that understand the reward of working with this special population. Not only are we attracting staff members who are pursuing education and social work, but I am being approached by staff who have never worked with the disability community before but are eager to learn. I feel that being part of the Foundation for Jewish Camp Community of Practice pushed me and supported me to create this successful program and I am truly grateful!

**Franki Bagdade** joined Tamarack Camps in February of 2015, though Tamarack Camps has been part of her life for over thirty years! She spent 7 summers as a camper there, 3 as a staff kid at Camp Tamarack Brighton and 1 as a Drama specialist at Camp Maas. Currently, she is thrilled to be at camp in the position of Director of Support Services and Special Needs and honored to be part of a camp that values an amazing overnight camp experience for campers of different abilities. She has been working as a Special Needs teacher and consultant for over 15 years, having previously taught at Eton Academy and run the middle school Student Education Support program at Hillel Day School. Franki has conducted several workshops a year for teachers in the area of special needs and am a consultant in the Detroit Jewish Federation, Alliance for Jewish Education's Opening the Doors program. She graduated from Wayne State with a Masters in learning disabilities and Michigan State University with a BA in Elementary Education. Her husband Jeff and three kids Ruby, Gabi and Avi love spending their summers at Camp Maas.

**Tamarack Camps**, established by the Fresh Air Society, builds a vibrant community by providing enriching Jewish camping experiences for children and families, respectful of financial ability. Tamarack Camps is more than a camp – we are your home, your community. Through a wide-range of special overnight programs, including Camp Maas, Teen Travel Trips, Outpost Camps and Family Camps, we offer enriching, life changing experiences.

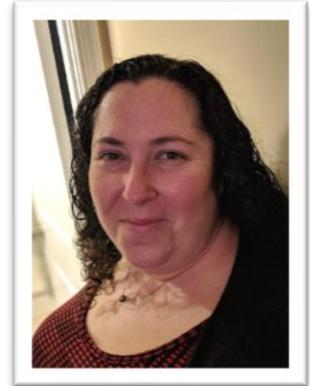
## The “Chill Zone:” Creating a Sensory Space

Sara Berlin Schreurs

Camp Louise

Camp Louise is a residential summer camp serving Jewish girls in second through twelfth grades, located in the beautiful mountains of Cascade, Maryland. Summer 2016 was our first summer being formally inclusive, and I formally took on the role of Inclusion Coordinator in addition to already being the role of Senior Camp Division Head.

While we have always had girls with disabilities at our camp, we recently decided to formalize our practice and become an inclusive camp. To get the program off the ground, our alumni organization gifted us money to use for our inclusion program. Camp Louise has generously given us the funding for our inclusion staff, so this money could be used for whatever we needed to support the program and the campers we were serving. As I reflected on what we might need, I knew that we had campers with sensory needs. I approached our camp director, Alicia Berlin, about the possibility of building a sensory area, and she quickly agreed. Suddenly, creating a sensory space became my CoP project, as it was such a natural fit for where we were in our journey at camp. As with many camps, space at Louise is at a premium, so Alicia and I agreed to work together to find an appropriate location. After some discussion, we agreed on an outdoor space, near a pavilion where the materials could be stored. As we got closer to camp starting, we realized the space we had originally planned to use was not going to work, so we had to quickly shift gears. Though it threw us for a bit of a curve, we found an even better space to use.



Then it came time to figure out how to begin to implement my project, how to take it from idea to a real, usable space. Before even creating the space, we needed to decide what we wanted the space to be, how we wanted it to be used. Alicia and I both felt strongly that we wanted the space to be a calm space that was accessible to anyone who needed it, not only to our campers with disabilities. We wanted this to include staff as well, as we felt that having a space available to everyone reduced the possible stigma that could become attached to only having certain people access the space. Residential camp is an amazing experience, but it offers unique challenges. There is never a break, never a true escape from your bunk or a group of people. My goal was to create a space where campers and staff could come to take a break if they needed and where campers could learn to self-regulate and have a safe place to decompress.

I relied on my background as a Special Educator, and my work with students with extensive sensory needs, to create a wish list of items for the space. I spent time researching where I could find the items I wanted for the best prices, looking to maximize the money that we were given. I was able to compile an extensive array of items that I hoped would meet any of the different sensory needs that our campers and staff were experiencing when they came to this space. I included items to help calm campers who were in an escalated sensory stage, such as a weighted blanket, weighted shoulder wrap, stress balls, bean bag chairs, fidget toys, etc. I also included items to help campers who were in a more lethargic place, such as a trampoline, a variety of lighted toys, sensory tubes, a slime toy, etc. The next step was to order everything and wait for it to come in!

During our staff training week prior to campers arriving, I provided a basic training for all of our camp staff about the sensory area. I wanted our staff to know about the sensory area, what was in it, and my goals for how it was to be used. We began by talking about its name – we would be calling it “The Chill Zone,” instead of the sensory area, again looking to reduce any possible stigma. We also set the expectation that while any camper was allowed to be in it, they must be accompanied by a counselor or Camper Care staff member. I wanted the space to be accessible, however I did not want it to be a place where anyone could go to get out of activities they did not want to attend. Staff seemed excited by the new space, and I was eager to see how it would be used.

Over the course of the summer, the space proved to be a welcome addition. It was primarily used by our inclusion campers, though a few other campers and staff did use it. While I worried that the space would become more of a hang-out zone, that was not the case. The only real challenge we faced was that we had one camper who began to request access to the Chill Zone multiple times a day, as she was facing challenges within her bunk and around camp, and the Chill Zone became a space where she could escape the challenges she was facing without having to deal with them. We addressed the issue by putting a time limit of ten minutes per visit, and limiting her visits to three times per day. The camper agreed to this and eventually asked to visit the space less and less.

We happened upon a wonderful teachable moment one afternoon. One of our Camper Care team members was walking with a camper, and they saw a counselor in the Chill Zone. The camper got worked up at first, thinking the counselor was breaking the rules by being in there. The Camper Care specialist motioned to the counselor, to see if they could talk to her, and the counselor agreed. They asked the counselor what she was doing in the Chill Zone, and the counselor explained that she was feeling anxious and had a free period, and felt that she needed to come to the space to calm herself down and get herself back into a good space. The Camper Care member asked her what she was using to help her calm down, and they talked

through the strategies she was using, and showed the camper the items she had chosen. The camper got excited because she liked to use the same things to relax, and was so excited that they had something in common. This camper often talked about how she was different, and here was a counselor who was "just like everyone else" using strategies like she did. It was a wonderful, natural, teachable moment.

Throughout the summer, we collected basic data on what items the campers liked, how they felt when they entered the Chill Zone and when they left, and if there was anything they wished we had in the space. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. The only feedback we got about missing items were that campers wished that there were items that they could take back to their bunks with them, as we required the items to stay in the Chill Zone. What the data say to me is that we met our goal, we created a safe space for campers and staff to access when they need it, learn to self-regulate, and help them advocate for their needs. Moving forward, our next step will be to look into what items camp can provide for campers to take back to their bunks with them, as a way to honor that feedback. I want to keep this project growing and adapting to the needs of our campers, and by taking this next step, I feel like it is one way for us to do that.

Overall, I could not be prouder of the journey that Camp Louise has officially started this past summer. In moving from supporting our campers naturally to becoming formally inclusive, we have taken what we have always done well and embraced it as a community. By building our Chill Zone, we have continued to grow and address the needs that our campers bring. One of my big takeaways from this project is that a wonderful sensory space that meets the needs of our campers can be built for a reasonable price and utilized in a way that is accessible, meets their needs, and, so far, has no stigma attached to its use. What felt like a big project to take on became something truly manageable, and I could not be prouder of our camp community for embracing the space and our Inclusion journey.

**Sara Berlin Schreurs** teaches for Baltimore County Public Schools in Maryland, with a concentration in the field of Autism. She currently is serving as a mentor teacher for new special educators and low-performing tenured teachers. In addition, Sara is the Inclusion Coordinator and Senior Camp Division Head for Camp Louise.

**Camp Louise** is a Jewish residential camp for girls entering 2<sup>nd</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade, located in Western Maryland.

## Supporting Peer Allies for Inclusion

Dr. Audra Kaplan  
Camp Ramah Darom



At Camp Ramah Darom, inclusion is a way of thinking and planning. We work to provide the individual supports that a camper may need and balance that with trying for the highest level of social and programmatic inclusion. We train staff throughout camp in how to support and promote inclusion. We have campers that reside within mainstream bunks, with a range of supports and we have campers that reside in our smaller bunks, with a lower camper to counselor ratio, flexibility of schedule and rest and recovery time. The staff in these bunks received additional training in supporting campers with autism and intellectual disabilities. In addition, each age group in camp has an Inclusion intern attached to their group, to be a resource for counselors and to provide individual support for campers if needed. We also work with all of the specialty areas to develop their skills at differentiation and inclusion.

For my summer project I ran a Disability Ally program with our Nivonim (10th grade) eidah (age cohort), informally referred to as Nivo, with the goal of developing young adults who are allies of the disability community. This was achieved through fostering knowledge, as well as familiarity and appreciation of people who have disabilities. We used a combined approach of didactic and experiential experiences. The didactic components consisted of three eidah sessions on disability issues. The experiential component was achieved through physical, social and program inclusion of campers with disability in the eidah. Throughout the session, the staff encouraged discussions and many naturalistic opportunities for interaction for their campers.

One of my goals is to ensure that the Tikvah program and inclusion of campers with disabilities is the whole camp's responsibility. In choosing one of the older age groups to work with, I hope to influence their thinking as they develop into camp leaders and ultimately staff. They are also an age group that can also impact their home communities, including their synagogues and youth groups. I hoped that the project would lead to increased knowledge of disabilities and inclusion of people with disabilities. There would also be an increased comfort in interacting with others with disability. Meaningful interaction and exposure to those with disabilities is a key way to increase comfort and familiarity with others with differences. For many teenagers, this type of exposure changes their view of teens with disabilities, seeing them as people with many attributes and not just as someone with a disability. Meaningful exposure

and opportunity for dialogues will help to increase insight into one's own views and prejudices on disability.

Beyond camp, my hope is that these teens will be more likely to integrate an approach of inclusion as a way of thinking and approaching others, advocating for disability rights and advocating for others. The teens are encouraged to bring concepts, such as universal design and inclusion back to their home communities. A final goal is to expose the teens to consider working with or advocating for those with differences in their future career choices.

### **Project Design**

During summer 2016, I held what we called Nivo University in which six 10th grade campers met for 15 hours per week for three weeks. Nivo University consisted of a combination of dyadic program development for the participants' projects, and integrated activities with Tikvah campers. There were many benefits to this model. The participants felt a great deal of ownership of their projects, including developing a universal design project in camp. This project was the development of visual number cues for *t'filah* (prayers) to be used throughout camp. This benefited campers who may have needed visual cues, but also any camper who did not have fluency in Hebrew or who had hearing impairments. Many adult staff in camp commented on how this also helped them to stay connected to the service. One of the camp yoga teachers commented that she brought back the visual number cue idea to her home synagogue to adopt.

The participants, along with campers with disabilities, also developed and ran an activity for a younger eidah, who were active learners and enjoyed the integrated activities. This activity had stations which reflected different ways of processes (visual, physical, sensory etc.). The ideas were developed between peers with and without a disability and they were co-led. The participants of the activity all shared both enjoyment and also a new appreciation for each other. The teens with a disability were able to be leaders with their peers.

Challenges to this model were that it only worked with a small group of campers, held the risk that participants view campers with disabilities as a project as opposed to a friend, and took the campers with disabilities, who are so highly integrated into camp, out of their camp routine in a way that felt artificial.

In our second summer, I decided to expand the disability ally program to reach a larger group of campers. These campers also already had campers with disabilities integrated within their age group for the prior two summers. For them it is natural to have integrated activities and experiences. We ran two - three session didactic curriculum with the whole eidah

(approximately 60 campers per session; the session outlines are included at the end of this profile).

In addition to these sessions, we also designed activities that could be enjoyed by both campers with and without support needs, such as modified floor hockey, tennis, or games such as Legos. Or might have had a modified tennis lesson at the same time that other campers were enjoying their tennis lessons, so that there was a shared experience.

One challenge of the project involved collecting data. Since this is a camp milieu, collection of data is not a norm for our campers. I did not want to make them view interactions and friendships with peers with disabilities as a project or academic assignment, but more naturalistic. Therefore, the best way for me to collect outcome data was through observation and conversations. First cohort completed informal questionnaire and provided verbal feedback. During the second summer, we assessed through observations of interactions of peers, as well as, verbal feedback. A particularly personal reflection from a staff member is included at the end of this profile. Another challenge was to find balance of fostering social opportunities, but not wanting the peers to feel that it is a “volunteer” or mitzvah project.

There were several indicators of the success of this initiative. First, the teens fully participated in the activities, as active learners. They shared about what they had learned as well as about their awareness and biases regarding disabilities, demonstrating their increased knowledge, awareness, and comfort with disabilities. Second, additional social opportunities were provided through the integrated activities, having peers with disabilities in all of their activities, sharing meals, *t’filah* (prayers) and all camp programs.

I plan to run the all group program again this summer. The teens were fully engaged. I would like to monitor how last year’s participants carried the skills and ideas forward into their CIT summer. Assessing how they have internalized inclusion this summer in the way they relate to both peers and other campers with disability will be a means of assessing success of this project. Longitudinally, I would like to assess the level of these teens incorporation of inclusion when they are on staff. Perhaps, administering an attitudinal assessment to see how young adults who participated compare to those who did not participate in the Disability Ally program.

I am proud of the teens and how mature they were in the process. I am also proud of myself for developing and running a program from concept to implementation, including tweaking the design after year one to meet the needs of the teen group and to expose the disability ally program to more campers. And I am proud to have planted the seed for disability allies in camp and in the community. I was surprised by how receptive and engaged the teens

were and how much they enjoyed developing projects and universal design for camp. I am inspired for future opportunities of developing ideas in camp; next summer, I may add a component like the “make-a-thon” to solve an accessibility issue in camp.

One take away from the project is to go beyond peer buddies. View the teens as allies in the process, teach them about universal design, have them examine their beliefs, challenge media, and have them partner with you to solve barriers in camp. Allow for natural social opportunities. Learn together with campers with disabilities, everyone has something to offer.

**Audra Kaplan, Psy.D.** is the Director of the Camper Care and Director of the Tikvah Support Program at Camp Ramah Darom. Dr. Kaplan has her Doctorate in Clinical Psychology and has worked with children and adults with disabilities throughout her professional career. Prior to joining Ramah Darom, she worked as a clinical psychologist and supervisor at Jewish Child and Family Services in Chicago and was the Director of Camp Firefly, a partnership program of JCFS and Camp Chi. She has a private practice in clinical psychology.

**Camp Ramah Darom** is a part of the National Ramah network and is rooted in a strong foundation of Jewish culture and tradition. Ramah Darom views inclusion as a way of thinking and living. The Tikvah Support Program at Camp Ramah Darom invites campers with Disabilities to be integrated members of the camp community; providing a continuum of support for a variety of needs, from inclusion in a mainstream bunk to living in a smaller cabin if a camper requires a higher level of support. This enables children and teens with a range of disabilities to enjoy camp to its fullest.

## Session Outline

### Session 1

Value of inclusion to individual and community- include quotes from Jewish texts- have them make connections between.

- i. Discussion “what is Tikvah,” “what is inclusion?”
- ii. Video “I am not your inspiration”
- iii. (second session) Conversation with Aimee Halstrup, Tikvah counselor who is a person with a disability, about her experience with inclusion and Jewish communities
- iv. Take away: Solicit *creative ideas* for social inclusion from participants with and without disabilities

### Session 2

Jewish values and Universal design

- v. Review of Jewish Texts on inclusion
- vi. Explain universal design- value to individual and community
- vii. Activity- accessibility scavenger-hunt
- viii. Brainstorm in small groups how we can make camp more universally accessible and then connect to home communities (youth groups, synagogues, schools, homes)

### Session 3

The language we use. They participated in an activity that looked at language in the media and the impact on our beliefs.

- ix. Allison Davis, Cornerstone fellow and our inclusion specialist lead program
- x. Cornerstone Project - use of headlines and articles, social media format
- xi. Handout - people first language
- xii. Closing discussion on their take-away on inclusion

## **Staff Reflection**

Here is a reflection from one of our staff members (used with her permission), Aimee Halstrup, a counselor who is diagnosed with C.P. She spoke to the teen group about her disability and her experiences in the Jewish community and in a Jewish camp as a camper.

### Nivonim Inclusion Presentation Thoughts: Summer 2017

Social inclusion is a feeling of a connection to others that help people feel included in their community and the world around them. Most people experience little social exclusion or isolation simply because they fit society's idea of the dominant discourse. However, there are many individuals who do not fit the social and cultural ideals of the mainstream. For example people with disabilities. People with disabilities often don't have the pleasure of experiencing much social inclusion because of society's lack of understanding of the abilities that people with disabilities possess.

The Tikvah program is increasing social inclusion for children who have developmental disabilities not only by including them in mainstream camp activities but also by educating the campers and staff about all types of disabilities; and that people are more alike than different. This education is increasing social relationships for both the campers who do not identify as having a disability and the campers who do. Watching these social relationships develop was an absolute joy this last summer. I noticed when campers with disabilities were included in the mainstream camp culture they became more empathetic to others and naturally gained independence. Now for my take on my presentation to the Nivonim age group.

When I was given the opportunity to present to the Nivonim age group about inclusion and my experience living with cerebral palsy I expected the campers to ask more questions about my life growing up with cerebral palsy, however, I was thrilled that they were more interested in learning how they could help others in camp who identified as having a disability and create a more inclusive environment. It was wonderful how not one camper framed or discussed disability as a hardship or a burden to others. The campers genuinely see people with disabilities as a whole person and want to ensure campers with disabilities are having as much fun as them in the overnight camp setting. Slowly but surely, Ramah Darom is creating a community of full social inclusion. Each year that the Tikvah program and Disability Allies continues, campers with disabilities will become even more included in camp allowing them to reach their fullest potential.

The Nivonim campers appeared very interested in my social inclusion in the Jewish community both growing up and presently. I am glad I shared my honest experiences of social exclusion when I was school age so they can then take the experiences of exclusion I discussed and apply them to their home Jewish communities to diminish social exclusion for people with disabilities.

# Voices of Experience

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Each CoP meeting was, in essence, a peer consultation among those who have been striving to make inclusion work at Jewish summer camps. The CoP members, mentors, and leaders brought to the conversation not only the theories and frameworks that they earned along with their degrees and certifications, but also the wisdom of practice that results from work in the field. And, most have been engaged in the area of inclusion (at camps, schools, and other communal settings) for years or even decades.

In this section, we summarize recurring themes and innovations that emerged from these conversations. We organized these within these headings:

- Guiding Principles and Core Values
- Staff Development
- Mental Health and Camper Care
- Working with Families
- Funding

Of course, the boundaries between these categories are permeable; the actual suggestions are what really matter. We suggest that these be read as inspiration for creative thinking. How can these ideas, or some adaptation of them, be used in your setting to address the needs involved in creating inclusive communities?

## Guiding Principles and Core Values

The Inclusion Coordinators regularly discussed the values that guide their work. These values were well-articulated and served as the foundation - and inspiration - for their ongoing commitment to inclusive Jewish camping. Having a strong and clear vision was seen as central to their success; it offered structure and support to their own programs and helped to spread to their message to and improve practices across to the camp at large.

- Every child has a place at camp. It is important to work with each camper to individualize their experience and ensure that they can be successful in the camp environment. Recognize that the key is to consider each child's unique needs and strengths and develop a program for them accordingly.
- Never say "no" immediately. Always strive for "yes, and..."-- how can we make this work together? Always listen to the situation first and then evaluate what the camp can do - with the guidance and support of the family - to help that camper.
- Inclusion in any activity is a camper's right. For every part of the camp day, consider: How might this work for all campers? How might all be included and successful in this activity?
- Every camper is everyone's responsibility. Staff need to think of themselves as a team that cares for all campers.
- Provide positive behavioral supports to understand and address challenging behaviors.
- View disability as a mismatch between a person and their environment.
- Work to articulate the underlying principles of the inclusion program and camp in general. Make the implicit ideas explicit so that they can be communicated to different camp stakeholders and constituencies.
- Develop relationships with families so you can understand what they are looking for and work together as a team to support their child.
- Collaborate with other camps that may have a focus that is more interesting to a particular camper. Then, if your program is not what the camper is looking for, you can direct them somewhere else.
- Be realistic about what you can provide for each camper and be honest about a situation that you don't think will work. Be supportive and offer alternatives.

## Staff Development

Staff development was a focus of the CoP. Early on, Inclusion Coordinators identified this as an area in which they needed additional support and resources. Given the nature of camp, all found training counselors and specialty staff a distinct challenge. The staff is generally young and inexperienced, and there is often little time before or during camp to adequately prepare them to work with campers with disabilities. Furthermore, when staff are not sufficiently equipped to support these children, the Inclusion Coordinators are regularly called on to step in and help. While they certainly see this responsibility as central to their role, the demand on their time can be onerous and can make it difficult for them to complete their other work. The CoP was interested in sharing best practices and learning new and innovative ways to support and empower staff to work successfully with a wider range of campers.

### Staff Recruitment

- Try to share data with other camps about where alumni go to college to recruit from Hillels or other campus organizations.
- Utilize local university job boards.
- Think about what Israel programs might align with the denomination/mission of your camp). Target graduates of those programs as potential staff members.

### Pre-camp/Staff training week

- Role-playing:
  - Write and create common scenarios to use with staff during training sessions, and ask staff members to role play how they would respond. This training strategy does not need to be limited to thinking about campers with disabilities. For example, no matter the makeup of the group of campers, many counselors struggle to get their campers to keep the bunk clean.
  - Role-playing and responding to different scenarios often work best with small groups of staff members who can engage in conversation and learn from each other.
  - This technique can be used to discuss general behavior management, as well. The leader can ask staff members, “What is the behavior you are most concerned about dealing with?” They can then ask one staff member to play the role of the camper who is exhibiting that behavior, and one to play the role of the counselor who is responding to the camper, and discuss the scenario.
- Research possible outside organizations that have established disability awareness/training programs. Think about hiring them to do a workshop with staff.

- When soliciting feedback from staff members about their training, do it during the activity or as a wrap up at the end of the summer. Ask staff members to take ten minutes at the end to fill out the survey or comment card and collect their responses before they leave.
- Pre-camp is an opportune time to gather baseline data about staff. For example, develop a short questionnaire to measure staff attitudes towards inclusion in a pre-survey. Administer the same survey at the end of the summer and compare responses.
- Write and distribute a flow chart for counselors so they know who to go to when certain issues arise.
- Include all staff in inclusion training - specialists, song-leaders, counselors, etc. Everyone needs to know these skills!
- Provide counselors information about their individual campers. This does not need to include a diagnosis. It should include what challenges the campers may have, suggestions for managing difficulties that may arise, the child's strengths, etc.
- Offer a pre-camp webinar. It could be mandatory for certain staff members and optional for others depending on their particular role at camp and the topic.

#### **During the camp season**

- Office hours: Let staff know when and where the Inclusion Counselor will be available to discuss camper issues.
- The dining hall is often a good place to check in with staff. Generally, the Inclusion Coordinator can pull certain counselors aside to give them feedback or follow up with them about an issue during mealtime since there is coverage for their campers.
- Pull counselors aside after bedtime or during rest hour, close enough to the cabin so that they can monitor campers, but far enough away that the conversation cannot be heard.
- Communicate with staff members through "camper care cards." Collect information from their counselors in a checklist on these cards, make sure to include a place where they can indicate if they need additional help. Write them short notes in response to their questions/concerns and put these in their mailboxes.
- The Inclusion Coordinator can go to unit meetings or other staff meetings and speak for 10-15 minutes on a particular topic or take questions from counselors.
- Give cards to counselors so they can complete the sentence "I needed more help in this area today." Collect these cards and use them as a way for targeted follow-up with certain staff members.

- Meet with specialty staff once-a-week to help them develop their programming and brainstorm accommodations and modifications.
- Bring a sign-up sheet to meals so counselors can indicate if they need extra help. That way, the Inclusion Coordinator knows who to follow up with.
- Find time during the camp week to meet regularly with staff for ongoing training.
- Ask staff members at the end of the summer how prepared they felt and what they wished they had known more about before the summer. Use these responses when crafting the training for the following summer.

## Mental Health and Camper Care

While not a core focus of Inclusion Coordinators' work, the issue of campers' mental health emerged as an ongoing theme throughout the CoP discussions. It has received greater attention throughout the camp community and, often, the camp Inclusion Coordinators are called on to consult and/or manage mental health questions/issues as they arise. Most camps have a "camper care" team for this reason but, still, the Inclusion Coordinator is regularly the first line of intervention, both for campers with disabilities and their neurotypical peers.

- In addition to the Inclusion Coordinator and camper care team, some camps have elected to hire an on-staff therapist that, with parental permission, can work with campers. In these cases, parents could pay for this additional support for their child.
- The camper care professionals can work with individuals or groups of staff members to brainstorm strategies to provide targeted support to particular campers.
- Create "camper care cards" with a short checklist for counselors to fill out each day. These could include information on how the camper is doing socially, in activities, and in the bunk. Include space for counselors to write details outside of the checklist for campers who might be experiencing a specific issue. It can also include a place for the staff member to indicate if they need help.
- Recognize and be honest about the limits of what you can provide support for at camp. If there are campers who are self-harming, camp may not be the right place for them to receive the support they need. It is important to communicate with families and acknowledge when the camper may be better served at home.

## Working with Families

Working with parents is an important part of Inclusion Coordinators' jobs. From the intake process before the summer to the ongoing contact during the camp season to the follow up after, inclusion coordinators are regularly engaged with parents. Strong communication and a commitment to collaboration is critical in campers' success. Parents need to be engaged as partners in their child's summer experience, and camp personnel expend significant time and energy to ensure that this happens effectively and with a smile.

### Intake

- Set up conversations with parents prior to camp about their child. Develop a comprehensive intake form, and review this with parents, asking questions and seeking clarifications.
  - If not explicit on the intake form, be sure to inquire about a child's sensory needs. Consider the times and spaces at camp that might be difficult -anticipate challenges ahead of time and, together, brainstorm solutions/alternatives.
  - If not explicit on the intake form, ask parents whether their child receives any mental health supports and, if so, what the camp needs to know and what accommodations need to be considered to best support the child over the summer.
- In pre-summer parent conversations, it is helpful to outline common scenarios that happen at camp and talk through these with the parents. Ask them how their child might respond in a particular situation and how camp can accommodate their needs. This is also an opportunity to ask parents how their child responds when their angry, disappointed, overwhelmed, etc. To that end, be sure to also probe about children's positive behaviors: What helps your child feel comfortable/a sense of belonging?
- In addition to a parent intake form, it is useful to put together an information form for people who interact with the child and are not his/her primary caregiver to complete. With parental permission, this can be sent this to therapists, babysitters, leaders of activities in which the kids might participate, and/or teachers. Use these individuals as resources who can help camp staff brainstorm the best supports for the campers.
- As early as possible in the process, inform parents if the camp cannot meet the needs of their child and support them in exploring alternatives.

### Ongoing communication

- Camps have different approaches to how they interact with parents throughout the summer. Regardless of the particulars, it is crucial that camp staff communicate with parents throughout the summer about how their child is doing. Not only does this offer

parents a sense of their child's growth and accomplishments, but it also ensures that the channels of communication are open should any challenges arise.

- At times, despite camp's best efforts, a child is unable to complete the session. Should this occur, try and celebrate the time the camper was at camp as a success and, with parents, consider what supports should be in place to better support the child in future summers.

### **Post-camp follow-up**

- Flag campers at the end of the summer who may need additional supports. Follow up with them and their caregivers during the school year.
- Create a form for each camper at the end of the summer that includes information about their successes and challenges. If possible, share this with the parents as a way to reflect on the summer and plan for the following year. Also, this offers parents a record of their child's growth over the summer that they can then share with their child's year-round support team (e.g., teachers, therapists, etc.).
- Write a family/camper evaluation for the end of the summer ("camper satisfaction insights"). This could be short (i.e., five questions) and include visuals for campers who need. This is a way to solicit their feedback and learn what worked best for them.
- Give counselors/other staff a short survey about the campers at the end of the summer. This survey could ask about how well the camper made friends and rate the camper's sense of belonging.

## Funding

In addition to conversations about the day-to-day running of camp, there were a number of discussions about how to find additional funding and support for the programs and inclusion coordinators' work. This included suggestions for funding opportunities both inside and outside the Jewish community and covered a range of funding areas.

### **Within the Jewish community**

- It is worthwhile to check with local Jewish Community Centers and Federations. There might be some funds available through these institutions for individual campers and/or specific camp programs. They also might be able to suggest potential donors with whom to connect.
- When soliciting individual donations, be prepared: Look into who in their family might have a disability and other connections they may have to the disability community. Also, if affiliated with a foundation, check Guidestar to find out more about their giving habits and preferences.

### **Funding sources outside of the Jewish community**

- Research state, city, and county grants for children with disabilities. Look for recreational grants and state disability offices. These grants might be used for a particular cost/need, e.g., providing a bus for a camper with disabilities.
- In certain states, parents can receive tuition support if the camp is registered through the state program. New Jersey is one such state that provides funding to parents through this type of program.
- Some companies offer funding and support for people with disabilities. For example, CVS.
- Look into local family foundations that may work with children with disabilities.

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