



INCLUSION IN ACTION

Transforming Jewish Camps with the Yashar Initiative

AN EVALUATION OF INITIATIVE IMPACT: SUMMER 2023

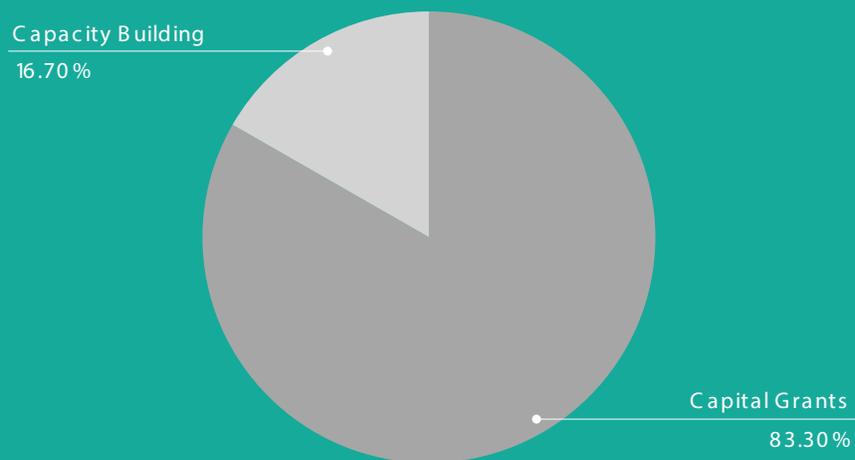


Background

Foundation for Jewish Camp’s (FJC) Yashar Initiative, generously funded by The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, is an ambitious project with a range of goals relating to increasing accessibility for campers and staff with disabilities at Jewish summer day and overnight camps. The initiative’s goals focused primarily on awarding \$10 million in capital grants. These grants went toward a variety of projects, including “universal” spaces (such as more accessible dining halls), program spaces (such as splash pads, playgrounds, and enhanced indoor facilities), infrastructure improvements (such as ramps), sensory spaces (areas specifically designed for campers with disabilities) as well as living spaces (such as more accessible bunks).

Additionally, Yashar funds were used for capacity building grants. Participating camps were able to make use of a capacity-building grant (which ranged from \$20,000 to \$30,000 depending on the size of the camp) to cover costs for activities such as:

- Supporting high-quality inclusion training at camp during staff week/training;
- Participating in FJC’s Satisfaction Insight surveys for both campers and staff;
- Expanding the inclusion staff team;
- Supporting costs associated with raising the additional capital fundraising required to support the capital projects.



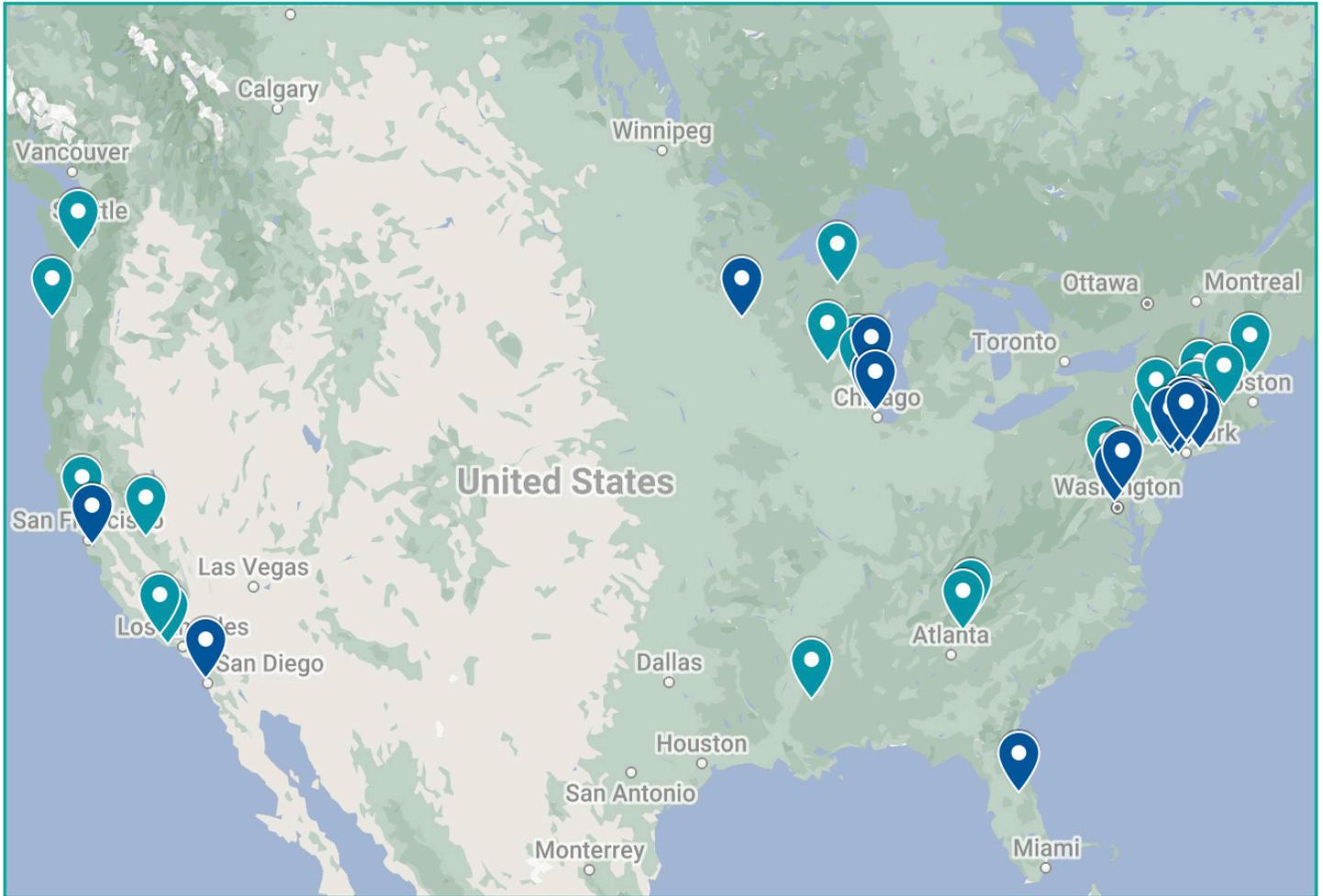
Yashar began with its first round of grantees in 2019 and has since expanded to a total of 59 grants to 23 day and 23 overnight camps.

Beginning in September 2022, EMC Consulting partnered with FJC to evaluate the Yashar Initiative. A report on the first year of evaluation findings can be found by clicking [here](#), and a two-page summary of the report can be found [here](#).

Map of Yashar Camp Locations

 Overnight Camp

 Day Camp



Methodology and Data Sources

This report synthesizes quantitative and qualitative data collected by FJC and EMC Consulting. Data sources include:

- **Fall Grant Reports** - In October 2022 and 2023, each camp participating in the Yashar Initiative completed a survey with open-ended questions from FJC.
- **CSI and SSI Yashar questions** - All Yashar camps participated in FJC's CSI (Camper satisfaction Insights) and SSI (Staff Satisfaction Insights) surveys after Summer 2022 and 2023. These instruments have specific questions relating to the Yashar Initiative specifically and disabilities and inclusion generally and include responses from:
 - » **4,468** parents of children in day camps
 - » **9,026** parents of children in overnight camps
 - » **1,661** day camp staff
 - » **4,213** overnight camp staffA copy of the survey questions relevant to the evaluation of the Yashar Initiative can be found in Appendix B.
- **FJC Annual Census data** - In the fall of 2022 and 2023, FJC collected data from all camps across its network, with specific questions about disabilities and inclusion.
- **Interviews** with Directors and senior-level Inclusion staff at 12 Yashar camps in early 2023.
- **Focus groups** (two) of parents of campers with disabilities at Yashar camps in early 2024.
- **Site visits** (four) to Yashar camps (two day camps and two overnight camps), including observations and interviews with camp administrators and staff, by EMC conducted in Summer 2023.

Limitations

Our evaluation of the Yashar Initiative has had two main limiting factors:

First, fall grant reports were written directly to FJC in response to their questions about each Yashar camp. This data source is subject to each camp's bias toward reporting positive data directly to their grantmaker, FJC.

Second, EMC Consulting was not involved in all of the data collection processes. While we advised and collaborated with FJC in drafting data collection instruments, none of the camps that provided survey or census data interacted directly with our team.



A Note about the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Yashar Initiative took place during the very challenging years of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic has impacted every industry, it was especially unkind to camps, many of which had to close their doors completely in summer of 2020. Thankfully, all camps that received Yashar funding were able to operate successfully throughout the summer of 2021, though not without complications, capacity restrictions and additional protocols.

The pandemic pushed FJC to find creative and flexible solutions for camps needing to modify their timelines. Moreover, most camps were under an incredible amount of stress during the summer of 2021 as they reemerged from the pandemic. This resulted in FJC offering two deadlines for Round 3 and Round 4 of Yashar applications, creating more flexibility for camps.

Finally, it's worth noting that while the Yashar Initiative has certainly been - and will continue to be - highly impactful, it is also likely that COVID-19 stunted some of its growth and momentum. As we examined data from these summers, particularly summer 2021, this could not be overlooked.

Report Structure

This is a final report that seeks to analyze and synthesize FJC's and EMC's data collection efforts over the last two years and offer important recommendations.

At the conclusion of this report, we list several key takeaways, as well as some recommendations for the future of the Yashar Initiative and its evaluation.

Additionally, the conclusion of the report (**Appendix C**) contains our four case study reports from our site visits, as well as charts, tables and figures of important census data relating to inclusion in the field of Jewish camping (**Appendix A**).

How to Read This Report

The majority of this report is based on findings from our analysis of qualitative data. Where relevant, we have included figures from our analysis of FJC-collected quantitative data. Before each chart and figure, we have included a “Headlines” box, which guides readers in understanding practical takeaways from our quantitative analysis.

At the start of this document, we have included an executive summary that reviews our key findings, areas for growth, and recommendations.





Inclusion in Action: Transforming Jewish Camps with the Yashar Initiative

Executive Summary

Finding #1: Inclusive Spaces Yield Powerful Results. There Isn't Necessarily One "Type" Of Project That Is More Impactful Than Another Across All Yashar Camps.

The vast majority of capital projects were designed as accessible and inclusive multipurpose spaces: pools, splash pads, indoor programming areas, health centers, ropes courses, etc. No matter the type of project, each sends a powerful message about the value and place of inclusion within the broader camp community and encourages the types of interactions between campers of all ages, stages, and abilities that camp is working to foster. **This is one of the most important takeaways from the Yashar Initiative.** (To learn more, see **page 11**, as well as the Case Studies in **Appendix C**)

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It has helped create a true sense of wonder and has given our community so much joy...It has become a center for gathering and community and ritual. We are able to practice and share our Jewish values and see our children grow!

Finding #2: Yashar Has Helped Strengthen The Field, Enabling Camps To Connect And Learn From Each Other.

Overall, Yashar has significantly impacted the field of Jewish camping. Camps across North America have increased the ways and the amount that they invest and prioritize inclusion efforts. Inspired by Yashar, many have hired additional inclusion staff. The Yashar cohort and FJC's field-wide trainings were a unique opportunity for camps to learn from each other and share best practices. Camps report the meaningful impact these experiences have had on their thinking about the practice of inclusion. (To learn more, see **page 24**)

Finding #3: The Yashar Initiative Has Yielded Improved Outcomes For Campers With Disabilities In The Following Ways:

INCREASED INDEPENDENCE

Camps' accessibility improvements have enabled campers to participate in camp programming and navigate campgrounds with less support and/or accommodations. Campers feel a tremendous sense of pride and freedom with their newfound independence. (To learn more, see **page 13**)

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Campers who previously needed help walking through the uneven terrain of camp were able to walk independently from activity to activity, increasing their self confidence and independence.

THE YASHAR CAPITAL PROJECTS HELP TO CREATE SAFER CAMPS FOR CAMPERS WITH DISABILITIES (AND OTHERS)

Campers can navigate the camp buildings and grounds with greater ease (To learn more, see **page 13**). Survey data indicates that staff feel more strongly in 2023 than they did in 2022 in regard to how their camps have become more physically accessible (though this is not a statistically significant difference, it marks an important trend in the right direction). This data supports our qualitative findings.

CAMPERS FEEL MORE INCLUDED IN THE CAMP COMMUNITY

Survey data shows that campers with disabilities and those without feel similar levels of belonging, indicating that they are having positive, inclusive experiences. They are able to participate more fully in camp programming and have greater opportunities to socialize with their peers. At Yashar overnight camps, this is especially evident - as we did not observe a significant difference between the two groups (in response to a survey question about the extent to which they felt their child experienced a sense of belonging at camp). Overall, this indicates that Yashar overnight camps might be doing an even better job at creating environments and spaces that are conducive to all campers feeling a similar sense of belonging.

At day camps, there is no difference between Yashar and Non-Yashar camps - encouragingly, both have similar levels of belonging amongst campers with disabilities and without. (To learn more, see **pages 14** and **20**)

THE YASHAR INITIATIVE HAS ALLOWED CAMPS TO PROVIDE A DEEP SENSE OF DIGNITY TO CAMPERS WITH DISABILITIES

Camps describe how campers can now participate in the camp program with *dignity*. They can engage with their peers with little to no outside assistance and logistical hurdles are minimized. The focus can, instead, shift to relationship-building and growth. (To learn more, see **page 15**)



Campers are able to be successful members of our community and navigate throughout our site with dignity and ease.

-Yashar Camp Director

Finding #4: Camps' Readiness Is A Key Factor In The Success Of Camps' Projects.

The impact of each capital investment was highly dependent on where the camp was in its inclusion trajectory. We observed how the camps that were more "ready" were more immediately successful. Readiness includes a number of factors, such as: Those with more experienced inclusion staff, inspired/invested leadership, skilled inclusion coordinators, and excellent staff training, could maximize the impact of their capital investments earlier. For some camps, the full potential will not be realized for another few summers. (To learn more, see **page 17**).

Finding #5: Strong Leadership Is A Necessary Ingredient For Success.

A committed senior leadership is instrumental in enabling camps to reach their inclusion goals. The Yashar camps for which inclusion was an expressed core value embraced by the entire leadership team reported even greater impact from the capital improvements and training and capacity building grants. (To learn more, see **page 18**)



Everyone feels it. It's total inclusion. You're accepted here...And the leadership practices what they preach. They are involved; they care.

-Yashar Camp Staff

Finding #6: Through Yashar’s Capacity Building Funding, Many Camps Have “Professionalized” Their Inclusion Roles And Improved Inclusion Staff Training.

Camps were able to increase the number of inclusion staff, both on the summer and year-round teams, and offer more extensive training and support to staff throughout the summer. (To learn more, see **page 23**)

Based on the above findings, recommendations include:

Customized Support:

Camps are at different points on their inclusion journeys and, therefore, have varying needs. Camp-specific support would ensure camps get targeted assistance to meet their particular needs and would enable them to better further their inclusion goals. This could take varying forms: individual mentoring for camps, smaller camp cohorts, etc.

Vocational Education:

Further exploration of post-camper initiatives is an important next step in considering the ways in which camps might become increasingly welcome, accessible, and support individuals with disabilities along the developmental continuum.

Continue Providing Guidance And Support Based On Where Camps Are In Their Inclusion Journeys:

The Yashar Initiative has, without question, raised the bar for inclusion at Jewish summer camps. The investments have yielded powerful returns, in the areas of camp culture and camper experience, in particular. It is recommended that camps’ readiness and leadership be considered when considering future funding cycles and that there is guidance and support as needed wherever camps are on their inclusion journeys.

A few additional areas of growth were also identified:



Funding:

Yashar grants have been inordinately helpful in camps’ furthering their inclusive vision, and they are eager to continue to grow and expand upon the important work they are doing. Additional funding is often necessary to continue to make these impressive strides.



Staffing:

All camps described the challenge of hiring staff for their inclusion programs. Camps explain that any support in this area would be immensely appreciated and helpful.



Staff Training:

Camps are looking for additional resources and support to further their inclusion training throughout the year, during staff training and throughout the summer.



Inclusion in Action: Main Findings

Our evaluation findings are organized around three main areas of inquiry: capital improvements, culture change, and areas for growth.

As capital improvements are at the heart of the Yashar Initiative, we have included these findings first.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS, CULTURE CHANGE, AREAS FOR GROWTH

1. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Capital improvements lie at the heart of the Yashar Initiative. Our evaluation sought to answer important questions, including:

- Have capital improvement projects led to camps being able to support campers and staff with a broader spectrum of needs? **(See Section 1-A)**
- Which specific investments, funded by the Yashar Initiative, had the biggest impact on campers and staff with disabilities? **(See Sections 1-B & 1-C)**
- Are camps better able to serve campers and staff with disabilities because of the capital investment? **(See Sections 1-D & 1-E)**
- What other contextual factors affect the level of impact of a capital project? **(See Section 1-F)**
- What types of future investments should be prioritized? **(See Sections 1-F & 1-G)**

The pages that follow detail our findings relating to these questions.

1-A. Inclusive Spaces Yield Powerful Results.

The vast majority of capital projects were designed as accessible and inclusive multipurpose spaces: pools, splash pads, indoor programming areas, health centers, ropes courses, etc. The expressed purpose of these capital projects was to create areas in camp that would have natural and regular use by a wide range of campers, including campers with and without disabilities. These thoughtful decisions - by design - enabled and encouraged authentic interactions between campers and, particularly for neurotypical campers, providing opportunities to develop “patience, understanding, and compassion as they are automatically equals” (as one Yashar camp professional said). For campers with disabilities, not only could they more fully participate alongside their peers but conditions were ripe for new friendships to develop.

As one camp shared,



The upgraded cabins offer an exterior space conducive for informal, social gatherings. The cabin is amenable to campers with disabilities and preferable to the greater camp community due to excess space. Shares the camp director, “The expanded porches have provided a space where campers spend more quality times together; a communal place and a positive for all.” Not just a home base, the accessible cabins have become “the” gathering place for the entire village. This has brought more awareness to both campers and staff. Continues the director, “[The accessible cabins] have really reaffirmed that we are an inclusive space - you see it all around camp.”

-Yashar Camp Director

Spaces that promote organic interactions between campers with and without disabilities are highly successful in meeting inclusive goals. When integrated into camps’ existing physical space and program design, new buildings and initiatives can more easily promote camps’ inclusive vision. Furthermore, when centrally located, a camp’s inclusive vision is further promoted and reinforced. It sends a powerful message about the value and place of inclusion within the broader camp community, and it encourages the types of connections between campers of all ages, stages, and abilities that camp is working to foster.

1-B. Significant Investments In Large Capital Projects Can Pay Immediate Dividends.

Yashar’s impact is clearly and immediately felt when observing major building projects. These significant capital investments become central and vital parts of a camp’s physical facilities. Such physical improvements can often enable camps to take important steps toward being fully inclusive. While these projects are the most costly, they can also be the most immediately impactful, especially when the new space is so central to the camp community. Furthermore, these larger buildings are generally used for several purposes and camp populations. Organic interactions between campers are therefore encouraged in these spaces; they become regular sites for connection and community-building. **These projects are clear signals to the camp community, both internally and externally, of camps’ efforts to take concrete steps in advancing their inclusion goals.**

Moreover, staff seem to notice and appreciate their camps’ efforts over time. As can be seen below (Figures 1 & 2), staff feel more strongly in 2023 than they did in 2022 that their camps have become more physically accessible. This data supports our qualitative findings.

Headlines from Figures 1 & 2:

Staff respondents were asked to evaluate, on a scale from 1-5, “The physical accessibility of camp (i.e., infrastructure, equipment, transportation) for campers and staff with disabilities.”

*Mean scores at day camps went up from 2022 to 2023 (an encouraging sign). There continues to be no difference between those who work with campers with disabilities and those who do not. **Overall, this indicates that staff perceive their camps to be creating more accessible spaces with each passing summer.***

Figure 1: Yashar Overnight Camps: Physical Accessibility of Camp - Staff Perception

NOTE: Not a statistically significant difference	Work with Campers with Disabilities?	2022		2023	
		N	Mean	N	Mean
The physical accessibility of camp (i.e., infrastructure, equipment, transportation) for campers and staff with disabilities	Yes	534	3.35	603	3.44
	No	585	3.21	730	3.44

Figure 2: Yashar Day Camps: Physical Accessibility of Camp - Staff Perception

NOTE: Not a statistically significant difference	Work with Campers with Disabilities?	2022		2023	
		N	Mean	N	Mean
The physical accessibility of camp (i.e., infrastructure, equipment, transportation) for campers and staff with disabilities	Yes	327	3.82	330	4.07
	No	209	3.78	203	4.04

1-C. “Smaller” Projects Have A Meaningful Impact On The Camper Experience.

Camps have completed a range of larger- and smaller-scale projects (i.e. a new building versus paving roads). While the former might appear to have an initial “bump” in terms of impact, the latter has an equally significant impact on campers’ experiences in the short and long term. As one camp explained:



In some ways, the walkways are the most significant contribution to the camp vis-a-vis inclusion. Whereas previously the uneven dirt terrain made access to the various spaces in camp a real challenge for individuals with disabilities, the newly paved paths ensure safe travel to and from the various camp areas. In this way, campers can access a wider range of camp activities, and families with parents and grandparents with physical disabilities and limitations can more similarly enjoy programs throughout the camp grounds.

Other camps shared similarly:



The ramp up to camp, the walkways around the perimeter of the campground, and the access ramp to the stage, and the lift for the pool, provided new access to camp to campers, staff, families, and community members of all abilities in ways that previously were significantly more challenging. These physical and structural improvements made a huge improvement to camp’s accessibility and clearly demonstrated to our community our commitment to inclusion and accessibility for all.

One of the greatest challenges for children with special needs has been navigating the campgrounds. Being able to improve our pathways has made it much easier for children to walk between program areas. Spending less time traveling across the grounds means more time in enriching programs.

The significance of these investments cannot be overstated: accessibility upgrades make a real difference in the day-to-day experiences of campers with disabilities and other mobility impairments.

1-D. Yashar Has Yielded Improved Outcomes For Campers With Disabilities.

The Yashar capital projects have yielded remarkable camper-level outcomes:

Increased Independence

Camps describe far greater independence for campers with disabilities as a result of the Yashar capital improvements. Whereas previously campers might need variable degrees of staff assistance getting to and from and navigating camp buildings and spaces, camps' accessibility improvements have enabled campers to do so with less support and/or accommodations. By and large, campers can now maneuver the grounds with relative ease and, as a result, can more fully enjoy the camp programming for extended periods and with greater success. Also, as they are less reliant on outside help, campers feel a tremendous sense of pride and freedom with their newfound independence.

Camps reported increased camper independence resulting from a wide range of capital investments. Accessibility within new and existing facilities and the addition of ramps and paved roads were all noted as critical in campers' ability to navigate camp spaces and travel between programming sites. That said, cleared roads and pathways were especially helpful in enabling campers to move more freely throughout the campgrounds, furthering their sense of accomplishment and autonomy.



Campers who previously needed help walking through the uneven terrain of camp were able to walk independently from activity to activity, increasing their self confidence and independence.

Celebrating Success

Anecdotal and empirical evidence suggest that tremendous growth happens at camp across a number of domains. This is true for all campers, regardless of ability: campers try new things; they push themselves outside their comfort zones, and safely take risks and tackle challenges. Data from Yashar camps indicate that campers with disabilities have even more opportunities for such experiences as a result of camps' capital improvements. A wider array of activities is available, including having access to camp pools and slides, climbing the ropes course, using the zipline for the first time, etc. In turn, camps report that campers have more experiences of success. Campers feel proud and confident and they joyfully recognize their accomplishments within the loving embrace of their camp community. As one staff member remarked, "Any camper can do something here, and it is celebrated."

Safety

The Yashar capital projects help to create safer camps for campers with disabilities (and others). Buildings are easier to navigate with widened doorways, accessible bathrooms, and smooth, flat surfaces. Campers feel more comfortable, confident, and independent when engaging in camp programming in these inclusive spaces. Also, camps that invested in roads or paths share that campers are now able to travel with greater ease throughout the grounds. Many camps noted that not only have parents and campers shared this sentiment but that they, as camp staff and professionals, also felt less concerned about camper falls and/or accidents given the accessibility improvements.

Belonging

Campers feel an even greater sense of belonging as a result of the capital improvements. They can participate more fully in camp programming and have greater opportunities to socialize with their peers; the quantity and quality of these interactions have both meaningfully improved. Campers have a, "stronger feeling of connection and one-ness" with these newly accessible, inclusive spaces.

Campers with disabilities and those without feel similar levels of belonging, which indicates that they are having positive, inclusive experiences. (See Figures 3 and 4).

Headlines from Figures 3 & 4:

Parent respondents were asked (on a scale from 1-5) to rate the extent to which they felt their child's camp cultivated a sense of belonging.

At Yashar overnight camps, we did not observe a significant difference between parents of campers with disabilities and those without. At Non-Yashar overnight camps, we observed a statistically significant difference. (despite the scores appearing similar to the naked eye, our statistical analysis nonetheless detected a difference ($p < .05$). Overall, this indicates that Yashar overnight camps might be doing an even better job at creating environments and spaces that are conducive to all campers feeling a similar sense of belonging.

At day camps, there is no difference between Yashar and Non-Yashar camps - encouragingly, both have similar levels of belonging amongst campers with disabilities and without.

Note - this data is explored further in Figures 8 & 9 below.

Figure 3: Yashar vs. Non-Yashar Overnight Camps: Sense of Belonging - Campers with Disabilities and without

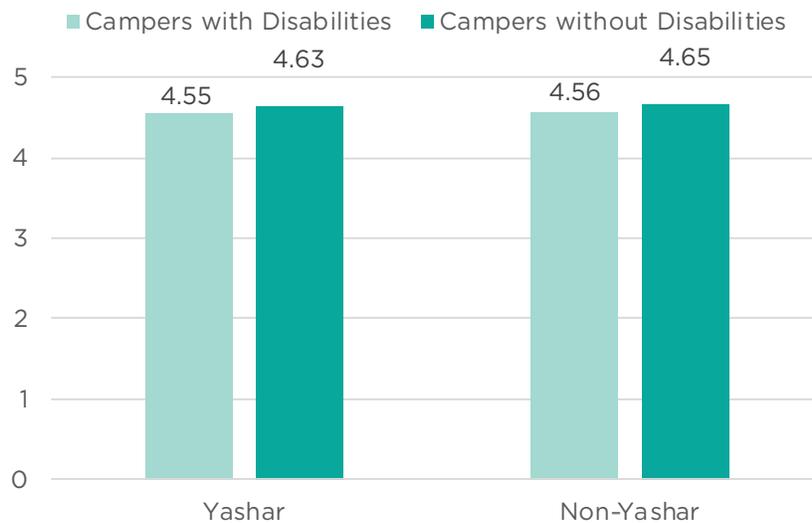
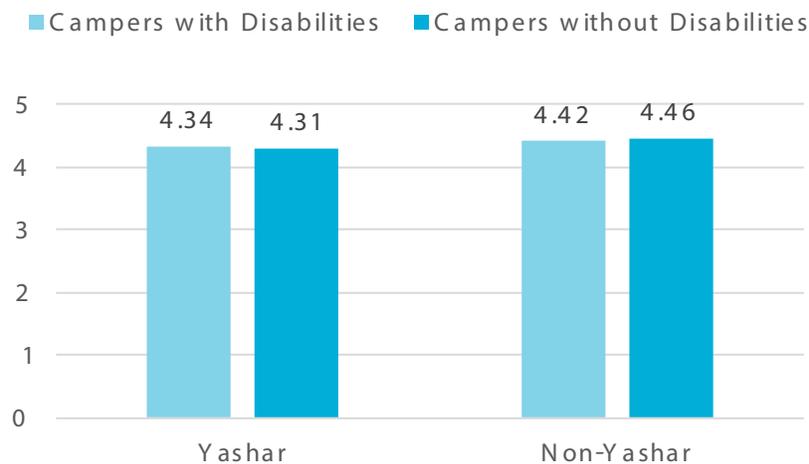


Figure 4: Yashar vs. Non-Yashar Day Camps: Sense of Belonging - Campers with Disabilities and without



Active and Full Participation

As a result of the carefully designed capital projects, campers with disabilities can more easily and comfortably access camp facilities and engage more meaningfully in camp programming. Previously inaccessible spaces now welcome the active and full participation of campers with a wide range of needs; campers are afforded opportunities similar to that of their neurotypical peers to experience all that camp has to offer. Additionally, the accessibility improvements have enabled staff to spend less time managing the logistics of their campers' care and more time nurturing their campers' social-emotional growth and providing them with meaningful camp experiences.

Dignity

Camps described how campers, as result of the capital improvements, could now participate in the camp program with *dignity*: they can engage with their peers with little to no outside assistance and logistical hurdles are minimized. The focus can, instead, shift to relationship-building and growth. Some reflections from camps include:



Since accessibility has been built into the design of these villages and into the core of camp, all features feel intentional and natural in the space. It would be easy for some of these intentional choices to go unnoticed by those without disabilities, simply because they fit right into the design. That means that those who need these important features due to their disability can easily benefit from them in a truly dignified way, right alongside their peers without any necessary additional accommodations. They are more easily able to integrate into the community and feel they are part of everything.



While at camp, campers are able to be successful members of our community and navigate throughout our site with dignity and ease. They are treated with new levels of respect and care by our incredible staff due to our capacity-building funding that has supported increased inclusion training and support structures. Being part of this initiative has spurred increased intentionality on all fronts when it comes to further supporting those in our community with disabilities. We feel better equipped to grow this population in our community.



Campers with disabilities could physically access camp with dignity, and camp has made progress in destigmatizing disability and differences.



The location of the pools made it much easier for campers to get to and from swim. Campers with disabilities no longer needed to be taken to and from the pools on a golf cart, since they are now so much closer than the pools they used to use. This allowed them to enter and exit the pools the same way as their typically developing peers, eliminating stigma and providing them with a sense of dignity and belonging that was previously lacking.

As evidenced in the above excerpts, “dignity” was a recurring theme in camps’ reporting. The Yashar investments have, no doubt, positively influenced campers’ sense of self, pride, and belonging.

Social Inclusion

Having truly accessible and inclusive spaces enabled campers, regardless of ability, to interact organically with each other. Camps reported that the opportunities for connection increased significantly, and campers enjoyed stronger relationships with each other. This was true for both campers with disabilities and their neurotypical peers. All benefited from sharing these inclusive spaces.

High Levels of Satisfaction

Finally, parents of campers with disabilities and without (at Yashar camps) express similar levels of satisfaction with their camp experiences. The fact that campers with disabilities aren't any less satisfied is significant and indicative of strong and successful cultures of inclusion at Yashar camps (Figures 5 & 6)

Headlines from Figures 5 & 6:

Respondents were asked, on a scale from 1-5, "How would you describe your overall satisfaction with this camp?" Mean scores in response to this question are consistent with the numbers from the previous two summers. Overall, this indicates:

- High levels of satisfaction from parents (reflecting on their child's experience);
- Similar levels from both parents of campers with disabilities and without (at Yashar camps);
- At overnight camps, the fact that campers with disabilities aren't any less satisfied is significant and indicative of strong cultures of inclusion at Yashar camps. At day camps, there was a statistically significant difference between campers with disabilities in 2022 but not in 2023.

Figure 5: Yashar Overnight Camps Overall Satisfaction - Disabilities vs. No Disabilities, 2021/2022/2023

Yashar Overnight Camps *=statistically significant, p<.05	Campers with Disabilities			Campers without Disabilities		
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
How would you describe your overall satisfaction with this camp?	4.50	4.39	4.46	4.52	4.46	4.53

Figure 6: Yashar Day Camps Overall Satisfaction - Disabilities vs. No Disabilities, 2021/2022/2023

Yashar Day Camps *=statistically significant, p<.05	Campers with Disabilities			Campers without Disabilities		
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
How would you describe your overall satisfaction with this camp?	4.33	4.39*	4.30	4.18	4.24*	4.38

This was true both in camps with established as well as newer inclusion programs (See Figure 7).

Headlines from Figure 7:

Parent respondents were asked to evaluate the camp environment in two specific ways, both on a scale from 1-5:

- The overall camp experience created a sense of belonging.
- An environment that supports your child's mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being.

Yashar overnight camps that have had inclusion programs for **fewer than 15 years** saw statistically higher scores ($p < .05$) than those that are over 15 years old on two important measures: Camp creating a sense of belonging, and camp creating an environment that supported a child's wellbeing.

Overall, this indicates that **newer** programs might not always be at a disadvantage. While older programs have more structures in place to advance inclusion goals more effectively, newer programs are certainly able to cultivate robust cultures of inclusion. That said, at more established camps expectations and assumptions about inclusion programs might have been very high, whereas in newer camps, a commitment to these values might have been more of a novelty.

Figure 7: Yashar Camps: Older Inclusion Programs vs. Newer Inclusion Programs

*= statistically significant difference, p<.05	Over 15 years /Under 15 years of inclusion program	2023	
		N	Mean
The overall camp experience created a sense of belonging	Under 15	1407	4.69*
	Over 15	1829	4.57*
An environment that supported your child’s mental, emotional, social and spiritual well-being	Under 15	1293	4.55*
	Over 15	1801	4.44*

1-E. Serving More Campers Disabilities.

Most camps share that, as a result of the Yashar funding and the capital improvements they were able to make, they can now serve more campers and a broader spectrum of needs. The number of campers with disabilities have, in many cases, steadily increased. **This was particularly true at Yashar Day camps, where the number of campers with disabilities rose from 1,078 in 2021, to 1,172, in 2022 and 1,352 in 2023. Yashar Overnight camps also saw growth, with 1,504 campers with disabilities in 2021, 1,768 in 2022 and 1,809 in 2023. See Appendix A for full Census data.**

In addition, the multipurpose spaces that camps have built enable all campers to be more successful, whether or not they have been formally identified as inclusion campers. For example, sensory rooms are utilized by all campers that require a sensory break or quiet space.

In contrast, a few camps feel they have not been able to attract a wider diversity and/or increase the number of campers with disabilities they are serving. As one director explained, “I know there are populations we’re missing, and it’s not because we’re turning them away.” These camps require additional training and support in how to maximize the impact of the Yashar grant and extend their current reach through marketing and recruitment efforts. These camps tend to be earlier in their inclusion journeys.

1-F. Camps’ Readiness Is A Key Factor In The Success Of Camps’ Projects.

The Yashar capital projects seem to have an even greater impact on camps further along in their inclusion journeys. With an already strong camp culture and successful inclusion programs, the renovations and accessibility improvements enabled camps to continue on their inclusion trajectory and grow in meaningful ways. They have the resources, infrastructure, and experience to understand what changes are needed, identify the next steps, and implement their strategic vision with intentionality and fidelity. The projects are also a natural outgrowth of their inclusion ethos; they align seamlessly with their inclusive mission.

Camps earlier on in their inclusion journeys seem to have a more difficult time identifying how to make optimal use of the Yashar capital funding to expand their programs, attract more campers, and reach more families. When inclusion was a newer or less significant priority, the ability to meet their inclusive mission was less organic and clear.

1-G. Strong Leadership Is A Necessary Ingredient For Success.

A committed senior leadership is instrumental in enabling camps to reach their inclusion goals. The Yashar camps for which inclusion was an expressed core value embraced by the entire leadership team reported even greater impact from the capital improvements and training and capacity building grants.

One camp professional explained that their inclusion success directly correlates to the strength of their administration vis-a-vis inclusion. “It stems from the top and trickles down,” she shared; “we’re all modeling it...And there is no pushback at this point. There is no ambiguity that this is a value.” Another echoed her assessment: “Everyone feels it. It’s total inclusion. You’re accepted here...And the leadership practices what they preach. They are involved; they care.”

Strong leadership matters and is a meaningful component of any cultural change initiative.

2. CULTURE CHANGE

Yashar capital grants aim to not only improve camps’ facilities but also to enhance their cultures of inclusion. Our evaluation sought to answer the following questions about “culture change” at each Yashar camp.

- What does culture change look like at camps that are at various stages in their inclusion work? **(See Sections 2-A & 2B)**
- What are the short-term impacts and the potential longer-term impacts of the Yashar Initiative on camp culture? **(See Sections 2-C & 2-D)**
- How do camps model inclusivity? **(See Section 2-E)**
- How has the diversity of the camp community and camper care teams changed due to the Yashar Initiative? **(See Section 2-F)**

The findings detailed below provide answers and insights into these important evaluation questions. It’s important to note, at the outset, that culture change can take many years at summer camps, and as such, the findings below focus on short-term achievements.



2-A. Inclusion Is Core To Each Yashar Camp’s Mission, Even Those With Newer Inclusion Programs.

Inclusion is an expansive ideal that informs camps’ work and culture in meaningful and manifold ways; camps describe their commitment to inclusion and how it is integrated into their broader camp mission. As many interviewees noted in some form or another, “inclusion is part of who we are;” it is, “what society is supposed to look like;” “we want this; we feel this is incredibly important...it’s not on the backburner.”

Even camps earlier along in their inclusion journey discuss inclusion as a core value; although they may have questions about how to deliver their program to a wider diversity of campers, the significance and centrality of this value to their camp community is clear.

2-B. Yashar Has Helped To Strengthen The Field, Enabling Camps To Connect To And Learn From Each Other.

Overall, Yashar has significantly impacted the field of Jewish camping. Camps across North America have increased the ways and the amount that they invest and prioritize inclusion efforts. Inspired by Yashar, many have hired additional staff for disability inclusion.

Moreover, the Yashar cohort and FJC’s field-wide trainings were a unique opportunity for camps to learn from each other and share best practices. Nearly all camps reflected on how the training and off-line conversations they spurred encouraged them to think about inclusion differently and expand their professional toolboxes. For some camps, this led to more expansive thinking about the inclusion model they employed and their broader vision; for others it led to practical improvements in their inclusion program.

Below are a few reflections from camps (from open-ended survey responses) on the changes these relationships and discussions spurred:



Conversations with other camps throughout the year helped shape our approach to our inclusion training.



The FJC Community of Practice calls informed how we did our intake for campers with IEPs, which now represent about 20% of our camper population. The specifics of these IEPs then directly informed the scenarios we role-played during training.



The Community of Practice created a network of professionals with whom to share ideas. Listening to what is going on in other places helps to ‘normalize’ inclusion, and our conviction that it should be widespread. It gave additional credibility and affirmation when bringing the concepts and messaging to our colleagues.



We are creating a hybrid model for inclusion that allows campers not to be classified as one or the other, but allows them to move freely with support between both programs seamlessly. This is a program that parents have been requesting. Up until now, we have not felt that we were prepared to offer it, but thanks to our inclusion in the Yashar Initiative and our ability to grow our capacity and expertise in this area, we now feel ready to move ahead with this programming.



We have always benefited from these cohort learning experiences. The opportunities and materials provided by FJC allow us to learn with and from the other camps that have received the Yashar grant. These cohorts are a mix of thoughtful professionals and wonderful educators, and provide focused time to engage on topics of importance to us all.

These are but a few notable excerpts that express the meaningful impact that the cohort experience and FJC trainings had on camps’ thinking about the practice of inclusion.

2-C. Campers With Disabilities Feel A Sense Of Belonging At Yashar Camps

Parents notice Yashar camps’ commitment to inclusive values, as they overwhelmingly rate Yashar camps with a “4” or a “5” on the question, “The overall camp environment created a sense of belonging and a positive camp experience.” (See Figures 8 & 9)

Headlines from Figures 8 & 9:

Parents were asked to evaluate, on a scale from 1-5, “The overall camp environment created a sense of belonging and a positive camp experience.” At Yashar **day** camps, there was no statistically significant difference between parents of campers with disabilities and those without. Having similarly high scores in response to this question indicates a strong culture of inclusion. At Yashar **overnight** camps, there was a statistically significant difference in 2023 (though not every summer). That said, it should be noted that parents of campers with disabilities still have consistently high scores in response to this question, even at overnight camps. The statistically significant difference at overnight camps is likely due these camps fostering a sense of belonging more effectively than day camps.

Figure 8: Sense of Belonging at Camp (Parent Perception) - Overnight Camps

The overall camp environment created a sense of belonging
(1=poor, 5=excellent) - Overnight Camps

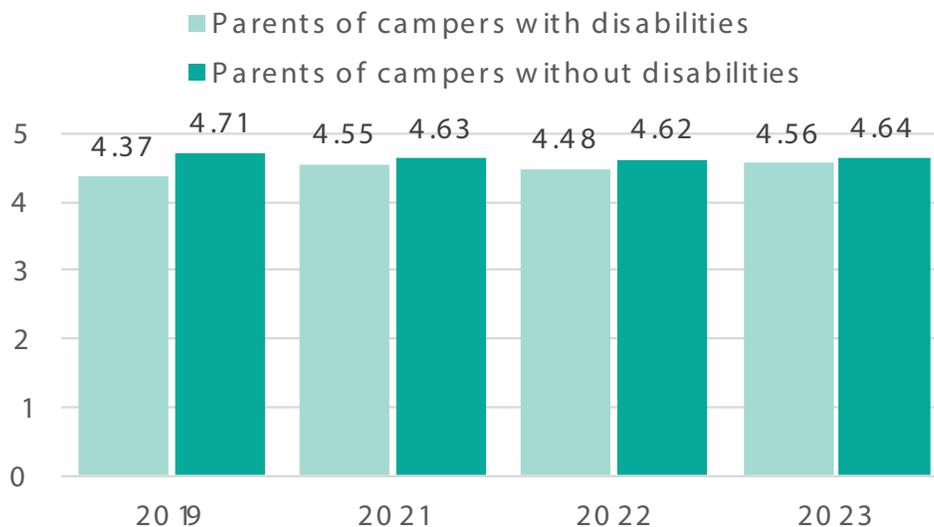
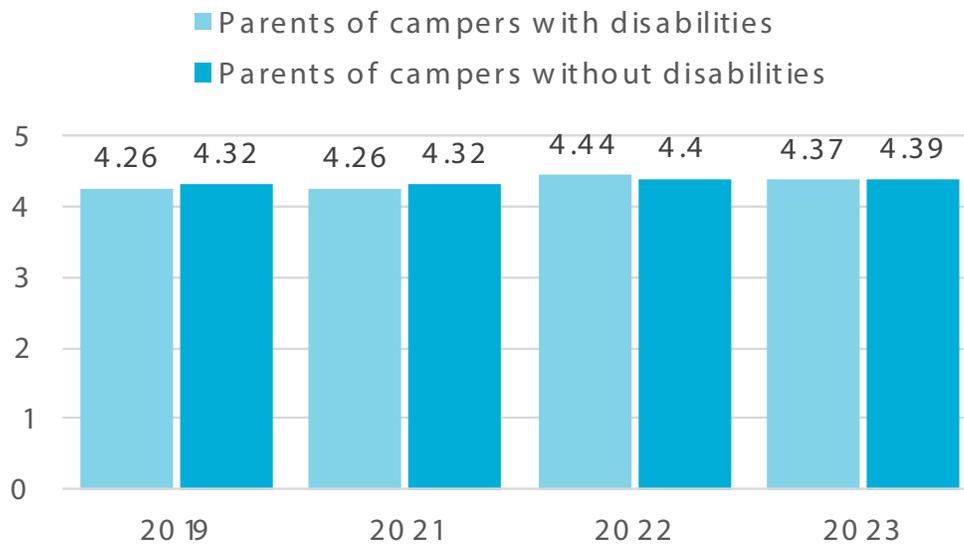


Figure 9: Sense of Belonging at Camp (Parent Perception) - Day Camps

The overall camp environment created a sense of belonging
(1=poor, 5=excellent) - Day Camps



2-D. Yashar Has Helped Camps Identify New And Increased Funding Sources To Support Inclusion Efforts.

Some camps noted that their overall fundraising has increased as a result of the success of their Yashar capital projects. As one camp explained,



We have leveraged our funding from the Yashar Initiative to raise awareness and inspire additional philanthropic giving in our community. With the encouragement of Foundation for Jewish Camp, we specifically marketed ways that our Capital Campaign advanced our inclusion work. In all public-facing campaign materials, we emphasized ADA compliance in our new buildings, ramps in our cabins, roads that are now more easily accessible for those with mobility issues and dedicated spaces for neurodivergent campers to decompress. We believe these talking points made an even more compelling case to give for the average camp family...We have been able to garner community support to cover expenses that include the salaries of more inclusion counselors and therapists as well as costs associated with inclusion-related trainings.

Another shared that the grant, “provided the catalyst for us to reach out to private funders and the government to move forward on this needed project. For some, knowing we already had some money committed created the opportunity for them to join us.” Many other camps expressed their gratitude to The Weinberg Foundation for “highlighting inclusion as a philanthropic priority for the larger Jewish community” and to Foundation for Jewish Camp for supporting inclusion at their sites.

2-E. Yashar Investments Have Enabled Camps To Better Communicate Their Inclusive Vision And Values To Their Camp Communities.

The Yashar Initiative helps recommit camps to their inclusive values. By investing in accessible camp facilities, capacity building, and staff training, camps increase their attention to and focus on inclusion. The capital projects also help demonstrate, both internally to the camp community and externally to prospective families and funders, camps' priorities and commitments. Below are some reflections from camp professionals on their Yashar projects:



It reaffirms that we are an inclusive space.



The physical and structural improvements...demonstrate to our community our commitment to inclusion and accessibility for all.



We can better live out our values.



It has helped create a true sense of wonder and has given our community so much joy...It has become a center for gathering and community and ritual. We are able to practice and share our Jewish values and see our children grow!

Practically, the capital improvements give camps “something to talk about and touch” that represents their inclusion vision and values. The projects send powerful and tangible messages to campers, staff, families, and other stakeholders about what matters to the camp and the ways in which they are actively working to become more inclusive spaces. As one Yashar Overnight Camp Director explained,



Upon giving tours of camp, it is quite apparent to all that we are committed to our work on inclusion and creating a space, both physically, programmatically, and values-wise, that is accepting and welcoming of all. The feedback we have received from families is incredibly positive and in awe of our commitment. We could not have achieved any of this without the generous support, on multiple levels, through the Yashar grant.”

Others shared similar successes:



Campers and their families can clearly see that camp is an accessible environment as soon as they enter our campus. The loop road, paved roads throughout camp, ADA parking placed strategically throughout, ramps and pathways through the core of camp...and other accessibility improvements funded by this initiative are clearly visible and make all feel welcome when they enter our property. We are able to refer to these features when helping a family to determine whether their child will feel comfortable at camp. Families are able to feel confident that their child will have a very positive experience.

The projects also encouraged camps to bring the language of inclusion into their everyday work.

One camp reflected that their capital investment, “served as a segue into conversations about the diverse needs of our camp community...the subject of supporting others to be woven into camp-wide programming, and inclusion is now less of a stigmatizing concept than in previous years.” The new spaces serve as springboards for conversations about camps' inclusive values and the ways in which they are realizing these values in tangible ways.

2-F. Staff Training Can Amplify A Culture Of Inclusion

The understanding that, “inclusion isn’t a program, it’s a mindset” was evident in many of our conversations, particularly as it relates to camps’ staff training efforts and initiatives. Specifically, the majority of camps noted the significance of training *all* staff to work with campers with disabilities, not just the inclusion counselors, and found opportunities to further their staffs’ understandings and expertise throughout the summer season. For most camps, several sessions on inclusion were included in the pre-summer training for the *full* camp staff, including counselors and specialty staff. “If an inclusion counselor is out,” one camp explained, “anyone can jump in. Everyone is an inclusion counselor.” As another camp staff shared, “all staff are inclusion staff. Every staff member can manage all kids.”

Importantly, staff trainings seemed to be effective in furthering camps’ inclusion goals. At Yashar camps there is no statistical difference in satisfaction levels between staff who work with campers with disabilities and those who do not (See Figures 10 & 11).

Headlines from Figures 10 & 11:

Staff respondents were asked to evaluate a series of statements about their experience working at camp (all on a scale from 1-5). Overall, in the last two summers, staff at day and overnight camps have been consistently satisfied with their working experience, regardless of if they work with campers with disabilities. Staff seem to be more highly satisfied at overnight camps than at day camps.

An **overnight camp** finding which stands out in particular: Staff who worked with campers with disabilities were more likely to be satisfied with their work in 2022 than those who did not. In 2023, there were no statistically significant differences in satisfaction levels between these two groups.

Two **day camp** findings that stand out in particular:

1. Staff rated more highly in 2023 vs. 2022 the staff week training they received on how to work with campers with disabilities.
2. Those who did not work with campers with disabilities felt more supported by the ongoing staff training they received during the summer relating to working with campers with disabilities.

Figure 10: Yashar Overnight Camps: Staff Satisfaction and Feeling Appreciated

*= statistically significant difference, p<.05	Work with Campers with Disabilities?	2022		2023	
		N	Mean	N	Mean
How satisfied were you with your overall experience working here?*	Yes* (sig. in 2022)	583	4.08	666	4.06
	No* (sig. in 2022)	729	3.98	906	4.12
Evaluate: Staff week training on working with campers with disabilities	Yes	498	3.20	552	3.28
	No	523	3.14	643	3.28
Evaluate: Support system of camp professionals in place to assist staff with challenges related to campers with disabilities	Yes	548	3.69	612	3.72
	No	562	3.58	705	3.75
Evaluate: Ongoing staff training related to working with campers with disabilities	Yes	511	3.13	579	3.26
	No	514	3.16	648	3.31

Figure 11: Yashar Day Camps - Staff Satisfaction and Feeling Appreciated

*statistically significant difference, $p < .05$	Work with Campers with Disabilities?	2022		2023	
		N	Mean	N	Mean
How satisfied were you with your overall experience working here?	Yes	354	3.79	544	3.83
	No	286	3.73	388	3.80
Evaluate: Staff week training on working with campers with disabilities	Yes	292	3.58	309	3.78
	No	178	3.51	199	3.90
Evaluate: Support system of camp professionals in place to assist staff with challenges related to campers with disabilities	Yes	328	3.95	332	4.05
	No	208	3.97	201	4.16
Evaluate: Ongoing staff training related to working with campers with disabilities	Yes	293	3.43	312	3.58*
	No	171	3.46	191	3.84*

2-G. Many Camps Have “Professionalized” Their Inclusion Roles And Improved Inclusion Staff Training (Oftentimes Through Yashar).

Through Yashar’s capacity building funding, camps were able to increase the number of inclusion staff, both on the summer and year-round teams. As a result, staff could better meet the needs of their campers with disabilities and enable them to have a more successful camp experience.

Camps describe the ways in which their Inclusion work has professionalized in recent years. Camps have part- or full-time inclusion and/or camper care staff on their year-round team and, with the support of FJC and their colleagues in the field, have improved their programs in measurable ways (i.e. a more thorough intake process, more rigorous staff training, etc.). These new hires often have a background in social work, psychology, and/or special education and many have years of experience in the field. Camps explain that these staffing additions were, “key in moving us along our inclusion continuum. We needed someone to focus on inclusion and help us move the needle.”

The Yashar grants have also enabled camps to offer more extensive training and provide ongoing support to staff throughout the summer. Camps have offered more sessions before and during camp to all camp staff, including staff who do not work directly and/or explicitly with campers with disabilities. In many cases, they have used both their in-house professionals as well as outside speakers and consultants. Some have partnered with local organizations to further expand and improve their trainings.



3. AREAS FOR GROWTH

The Yashar Initiative seeks to establish and solidify growth at camps for years to come. Our evaluation focused on answering key questions, including:

- What are the opportunities, barriers and changing needs that will enable camps to serve more children with disabilities at camp? **(See Section 3-A)**
- Do camps have the physical capacity to accept more campers with disabilities? **(See Sections 3-B & 3-C)**
- Where have staff increased their knowledge and skills? Where do they need more development? **(See Section 3-D)**

3-A. Deepen Awareness And Education Of Parents Of Children Without Disabilities

While Yashar camps have been able to more effectively communicate about their cultures of inclusion, there is still work to be done to educate and inform parents of campers without disabilities. As can be seen below, parents of campers with disabilities continue to feel more strongly that it is important for camp to be welcoming and accessible to all campers. They also feel more strongly that it is beneficial for their child to live in a community that models inclusivity. In an ideal world these scores should not be statistically different. Meaning, ideally, a camp’s culture of inclusion and its messaging should encourage all parents to feel strongly about these issues (See Figures 12 & 13).

Headlines from Figures 12 & 13:

Parent respondents were asked two questions which aimed to assess their attitudes toward inclusion (scales from 1-5):

- To what degree is being enrolled in a camp that is welcoming and accessible to all campers a priority for your family (regardless of ability or special needs)?
- How beneficial was it for your child to live in a community that models inclusivity?

The mean scores in response to these questions have remained consistent - now three summers in a row. The bottom line (and unsurprisingly): Parents of campers with disabilities feel more strongly that it is important for camp to be welcoming and accessible to all campers. They also feel more strongly that it is beneficial for their child to live in a community that models inclusivity. This is true at both overnight and day camps.

In the ideal world - these scores should not be statistically different. Meaning, ideally, a camp’s culture of inclusion and their messaging could / should encourage all parents to feel strongly about these issues.

Figure 12: Yashar Overnight Camps: Parent Attitudes about Inclusion

Yashar Overnight Camps *= <i>statistically significant, p<.05</i>	Campers with Disabilities			Campers without Disabilities		
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
To what degree is being enrolled in a camp that is welcoming and accessible to all campers a priority for your family (regardless of ability or special needs)?	4.79*	4.75*	4.81*	4.13*	4.14*	4.26*
How beneficial was it for your child to live in a community that models inclusivity?	4.83*	4.69*	4.66*	4.58*	4.53*	4.48*

Figure 13: Yashar Day Camps: Parent Attitudes about Inclusion

Yashar Day Camps *=statistically significant, p<.05	Campers with Disabilities			Campers without Disabilities		
	2021	2022	2023	2021	2022	2023
To what degree is being enrolled in a camp that is welcoming and accessible to all campers a priority for your family (regardless of ability or special needs)?	4.82*	4.80*	4.77*	4.07*	4.16*	4.06*

3-B. Funding Of Existing And New Programs And Projects Remain Areas Of Concern.



Many camps shared their inclusion wish lists: other capital improvements they hoped to make, programming changes, plans to attract more campers, hiring additional staff, etc. All these efforts required additional funding and support. The Yashar grant has been inordinately helpful in camps furthering their inclusive vision, and they are eager to continue to grow and expand upon the meaningful work they are doing.

3-C. Appropriate Staffing for Inclusion Efforts.



All camps described the challenge of hiring staff for their inclusion programs. This includes both finding staff and funding these positions. For some camps, this meant they were unable to accept as many campers with disabilities as they would like due to their staffing constraints. Any support in this area would be immensely appreciated and helpful. (Note that while this may be a particular challenge for inclusion programs, staffing is an issue in all areas of camping.)

3-D. Camps Continue To Request Support In The Area Of Staff Training.



Camps have vastly improved their staff training in the area of disability inclusion. Most notably, a wider swath of camp staff receive professional development in this area, not only specified inclusion counselors. The belief that “we’re all inclusion staff” has taken hold, and camps are looking for additional resources and support to further this important work.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4-A. Tiered Support Would Further Camps' Particular Inclusion Efforts.

Camps with more years of experience offered campers and families more stable, well-developed, and integrated programs. They, understandably, have differing needs than camps with newer efforts and initiatives. It, therefore, is likely that tiered and targeted support for camps might help maximize Yashar's impact. Tiered and targeted support can take a number of different forms depending on camps' needs and might include individual mentoring for camps and/or smaller camp cohorts depending on where camps are in their inclusion journeys. These camp-specific supports and interventions could go a long way in ensuring that camps move the needle on inclusion at their site.

4-B. Vocational Education Is An Important Area For Future Growth.

Some camps described having staff with disabilities and/or a vocational program for young adults with disabilities. Those who didn't lamented the fact that they had nothing to offer families once their children aged out of the camper inclusion program. As is documented elsewhere on research in Jewish education, the need for supports throughout the lifespan is critical. Further exploration of post-camper initiatives is an important next step in considering the way in which camps might become increasingly welcome, accessible, and inclusive.

4-C. Continue To Support Camps' Efforts; Investments Yield Powerful Returns.

The Yashar Initiative has, without question, raised the bar for inclusion at Jewish summer camps. The investments have yielded powerful returns, in the areas of camp culture and camper experience, in particular. It is recommended that camps' readiness and leadership be considered when considering future funding cycles and that there is guidance and support as needed wherever camps are on their inclusion journeys.

4-D. Many Camps Would Benefit From Additional Support Amplifying Their Inclusion Mission And Message.

There is a lot of wonderful work being done for inclusion at Jewish camps. Some camps are masterful at sharing their successes and communicating their inclusive values to their camp communities and beyond. Other camps struggle to market their programs effectively, and they would benefit from targeted support in the area of marketing and recruitment.

4-E. The Jewish Values Connections Can Be Strengthened.

Few camps discussed the Jewish imperative in doing this work. This feels like a missed opportunity, and Foundation for Jewish Camp is uniquely positioned to help camps develop language around these important Jewish values.

5. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5-A. The Data Would Be Enriched With Campers' Voices.

There are clear challenges to collecting meaningful data that captures the experience of children with and without disabilities. Still, this is a critical group that is underrepresented in the current research. Efforts to amplify children's voices would be inordinately beneficial in determining the state of the field, the efficacy of inclusion efforts, and identifying future initiatives.

5-B. A Comprehensive Mapping Of The Field Would Be Instructive.

While the efforts to convene Jewish camps and strengthen capacity are notable and significant, a more thorough accounting of who is and isn't being adequately served across North American Jewish camps would be an enormous contribution to the field and for families with a child with disabilities seeking a Jewish camping option. This would enable the field to devise a comprehensive game plan for future investments, determining who needs services and programming and in which geographic regions. It would also provide families guidance and clarity as they explore camping options for this child with disabilities.



Appendix A

Census Data: Summers 2019-2023

Overnight camps - # campers w/ disabilities served	2019	2021	2022	2023
# Camps	164	152	136	136
# serving campers w/ disabilities	97 (59%)	89 (59%)	87 (64%)	83 (61%)
Total # Campers	77,000	65,402	63,336	64,907
# Campers w/ disabilities	3,744 (5%)	2,902 (4.4%)	2,970 (4.6%)	3,050 (4.7%)

Yashar overnight camps - # campers w/ disabilities served	2021	2022	2023
# Camps	21	23	23
# serving campers w/ disabilities	21 (100%)	23 (100%)	23 (100%)
Total # Campers	13,691	18,189	18,325
# Campers w/ disabilities	1,504 (11%)	1,768 (9.7%)	1,809 (9.9%)

Day camps - # campers w/ disabilities served	2019	2021	2022	2023
# Camps	152	133	110*	110*
# serving campers w/ disabilities	133 (88%)	111 (83%)	99 (90%)	100 (90%)
Total # Campers	75,454	54,093	56,045	58,481
# Campers w/ disabilities	4,145 (5.5%)	3,246 (4.6%)	3,418 (6.1%)	3,892 (6.6%)

*Number of camps decreased in 2022 and 2023 due to fewer camps providing data

Yashar day camps - # campers w/ disabilities served	2021	2022	2023
# Camps	18	23	23
# serving campers w/ disabilities	18 (100%)	23 (100%)	23 (100%)
Total # Campers	10,442	12,932	13,862
# Campers w/ disabilities	1,078 (10.3%)	1,172 (9.5%)	1,352 (9.8%)

Day camps serving campers with disabilities by size of camp	2021		2022		2023	
	#Camps	# Campers w/Disabilities	#Camps	# Campers w/Disabilities	# Camps	# Campers wDisabilities
Under 300	53	767	36	510	34	547
300-499	35	621	29	537	26	565
500-699	14	660	20	714	23	731
700+	19	1,198	25	1,657	29	2,049

Overnight camps serving campers with disabilities by size of camp	2021		2022		2023	
	# Camps	# Campers w/ Disabilities	# Camps	# Campers w/ Disabilities	# Camps	# Campers w/Disabilities
Under 300	51	566	50	457	48	146
300-499	32	1,144	36	825	37	1,223
500-699	15	336	23	512	26	547
700+	29	856	27	1,176	25	1,134

Overnight camp staff and campers with disabilities and inclusion professionals	2019	2021	2022	2023
# Camps hiring staff with disabilities	41	46	60	56
# Staff with disabilities	-500 (>2%)	220 (1%)	232 (1%)	239 (1%)
# Inclusion professionals at camp	Data not collected	359 (2%)	1,105 (5%)	1,701 (7%) - includes camper care and medical staff.
Ratio of campers w/ disabilities to inclusion professionals	Data not collected	8:1	2.7:1	1.8:1 (including camper care and med team).

Yashar Overnight camp staff and campers with disabilities and inclusion professionals	2021	2022	2023
# Camps hiring staff with disabilities	17 (81%)	20 (87%)	17 (74%)
# Staff with disabilities	131	137	117
# Inclusion professionals at camp	128	532	750 (including camper care and medical teams).
Ratio of campers w/ disabilities to inclusion professionals	12:1	3.3:1	2.4:1 (including camper care and med team).

Day camp staff and campers with disabilities and inclusion professionals	2019	2021	2022	2023
# Camps hiring staff with disabilities	Data not collected	60 (45%)	65 (59%)	66 (59%)
# Staff with disabilities	-297 (~2%)	189 (2%)	212 (1.8%)	296 (2%)
# Inclusion professionals at camp	Data not collected	716	857	1,412 (including camper care and med team).
Ratio of campers w/ disabilities to inclusion professionals	Data not collected	5:1	4:1	2.8:1 (including camper care and med team).

Yashar day camp staff and campers with disabilities and inclusion professionals	2021	2022	2023
# Camps hiring staff with disabilities	15	18	21
# Staff with disabilities	73	63	108
# Inclusion professionals at camp	219	332	558 (including camper care and med team).
Ratio of campers w/ disabilities to inclusion professionals	5:1	3.5:1	2.6:1 (including camper care and med team).

VOC ED Number of participants	2022			2023		
	Yashar	Non Yashar	Total	Yashar	Non Yashar	Total
Overnight camps	55	78	133	186	141	327
Day Camps	141	86	227	89	49	138
Total	196	164	360	275	190	465

VOC ED Number of camps	2022			2023		
	Yashar	Non Yashar	Total	Yashar	Non Yashar	Total
Overnight camps	11 (48% of camps)	12 (11% of camps)	23	13	14	27
Day Camps	7 (30% of camps)	10 (12% of camps)	17	10	9	19
Total	18	22	40	23	23	46



Appendix B

Camper Satisfaction Insights Survey (CSI) and Staff Satisfaction Insights Survey (SSI) Instruments

Camper Satisfaction Insights Surveys are the property of Foundation for Jewish Camp. Do not copy without permission.

The next questions are about campers with disabilities or special needs. For our purposes, disabilities and special needs include individuals with intellectual, developmental, physical and/or sensory disabilities. Examples include Autism Spectrum Disorder, Asperger's syndrome, blindness, Down syndrome, hearing impairments, seizures, and other physical disabilities. Include campers with ADHD only if they require extra staff support or accommodations to be successful at camp.

Do NOT include campers who function independently and require no additional support or modifications, or campers whose challenges are limited to daily/weekly medications, campers who need support for mental, emotional, social or spiritual health, or campers with food allergies or special diets as disabilities or special needs.

Do you have a child with a disability or special need who attended [pipe: hCamp] this summer?

Yes No

(For those who answer Yes to having a child with a disability or special need)

How successful was [pipe: Camp] in providing a positive camp experience for your camper with a disability or special need?

Very Unsuccessful Somewhat Successful Neutral
 Somewhat Unsuccessful Completely Successful I don't know

If positive, ask: Tell us which camp facilities specifically helped meet your child's needs.

If negative, ask: Tell us what camp facilities could have been better to specifically meet your child's needs.

How inclusive was the environment at [pipe: hCamp] for your child?

Not Inclusive Somewhat Inclusive Neutral
 Inclusive Highly Inclusive I don't know

Please evaluate the camp based on [CHILD NAME]'s experience...

Select one in each row

	Don't Know N/A	Poor	Fair	Neutral	Good	Excellent
Willingness and success in dealing with the specific needs of your child (such as food allergies, medical issues, disabilities, etc.)						
The overall camp environment that created a sense of belonging and a positive camp experience						

(if Q above on belonging is negative or neutral)

What could camp have done to create a sense of belonging and inclusion and a positive camp experience for your child? Please be as specific as possible.

OR if Q above is positive What did camp do well that created a sense of belonging and inclusion and a positive experience for your child? Please be as specific as possible.

To what degree is being enrolled in a camp that is welcoming and accessible to all campers a priority for your family, regardless of ability or special needs?

1- Low Priority
 2
 3
 4
 5- High Priority

STAFF INSIGHTS SURVEY
YASHAR/DISABILITIES SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

2023 SSI Yashar Questions

For the purposes of the questions below, disabilities are defined as any combination of autism spectrum disorder, intellectual, developmental, physical, and sensory disabilities. At camp, this might be a camper who receives care from an inclusion specialist or camper care coordinator, or who gets support to move through camp throughout the day.

In your job at camp, did you work closely with or have responsibilities for campers or individuals with disabilities?

Yes No

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about camp...

	Don't Know N/A	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Was able to manage challenging behaviors of campers.						
It is important that I ensure an inclusive camp experience for everyone.						
Having people at camp who are different than me at camp improves the camp experience.						

Please let us know if you have any feedback on camp's commitment to or progress toward becoming a more inclusive space for every person in camp equally---regardless of disabilities or special needs. (If not, just click on Continue.)
Please be as specific as possible.

FOR YASHAR CAMPS ONLY

How would you evaluate the camp's ability to be inclusive of campers and staff with disabilities, in terms of...

	Don't Know N/A	Poor	Fair	Neutral	Good	Excellent
The staff week training on how to work with campers with disabilities						
The ongoing staff training related to working with campers with disabilities						
The support system of camp professionals in place to assist staff with challenges related to campers with disabilities						
The physical accessibility of camp (i.e., buildings, bunks, program spaces, pathways) for campers and staff with disabilities						

In what ways, if at all, has camp become more physically accessible for campers and staff with disabilities? If this is your first summer, feel free to leave this question blank.

Appendix C Case Studies

In the summer of 2023, our research team visited four camps participating in the Yashar Initiative. At each site visit, we interviewed the senior leadership team, inclusion team, and counselors who work with campers with disabilities as well as those who do not, and when possible, we spoke to campers about their own experience in their camp's inclusion program.

The following pages detail our main findings from each camp as well as the main takeaways that can be applied to the field more broadly.



CASE STUDY

Camp Ramah New England

QUICK FACTS



**Palmer,
Massachusetts**



**900
Campers**



**100+ Campers
with disabilities**

Camp Ramah New England is an overnight camp located in Palmer, Massachusetts. Ramah New England has extensive programs for campers and staff with disabilities. In addition to their self-contained Tikvah program for campers, Amitizim, they have a robust vocational education program for Tikvah graduates, Tochnit Avodah. They also have a transitional program, Voc-Ed Maavar, that bridges Amitzim and Tochnit Avodah and allows participants to enjoy both vocational internships as well as camper programming. Finally, they have a number of campers with disabilities who participate in the main camp program and receive necessary accommodations from the camper care team.



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In summer 2023, of the roughly 900 campers served, over 100 were campers with disabilities. There were 18 Amitzim and 27 young adult participants in Voc Ed Ma'avar and Tochnit Avodah. Ramah New England also hired 17 staff members with disabilities who had been through their Voc Ed or regular camp programs for a range of staff positions (i.e. working in the mailroom, office, across specialty areas, etc.).

Ramah New England employs a year-round Tikvah director who works closely with the camp directors and director of camper care in preparation for and during the summer months. *Amitzim* and *Tochnit Avodah* directors are also part of the summer team, providing direct support for campers and staff during the camp sessions. The summer team also includes counselors for campers and young adults with disabilities.

Background relevant to inclusion work

Founded over 50 years ago, the Tikvah Program at Ramah New England is a pioneer in Jewish camping for children and young adults with disabilities. In its half-century history, the camp has evolved its efforts to meet the needs of a wide range of campers, including campers with developmental and intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, ADHD, learning differences, and neurological impairments.

Both inside the larger Ramah community and in the camping field more broadly, Ramah New England is well-known for its exemplary commitment to inclusion and its stellar inclusion programs. Ramah New England, in many ways, sets the standard for what is possible in the vocational education space - and, arguably, needed - for children with disabilities once they “age-out” of camper-age programming, allowing young people to continue in their camping journeys while learning essential life, social, and vocational skills in an immersive, committed Jewish environment. There is a “long path” for individuals with disabilities in the Ramah New England community, a path that is comparable to that of their neurotypical peers.

Everyone at Ramah New England, from the CEO down to the youngest campers, is on-board with the camp’s inclusion commitments and understands inclusion as a core camp value. It is “part of camp at this point...part of the culture.” Campers and staff with disabilities are integrated in formal and informal ways throughout the camp day. They participate with their neurotypical peers in camp activities, enjoy meals and camp-wide programs, and, with bunks centrally located on the sprawling campus, are afforded numerous opportunities for spontaneous, organic interactions.



Yashar Capital Projects

Ramah New England participated in one round of Yashar funding and used the grant to expand their vocational education building. The project was completed in 2023 and was in use for the first time that Summer.

Vocational Education Building Expansion

Amongst the camper cabins and staff housing units sits the newly expanded vocational education building for *Tochnit Avodah* participants. The expansion project added four new sleeping rooms to the existing structure. Rooms accommodate up to four people each and are ADA compliant; they are equipped with their own private bathrooms and air conditioning units and have ample sleeping and living space. Three of the rooms house program participants, and the fourth is reserved for program staff.

In addition to housing, the building functions as a “home-base” for the participants: It is used for classes, meetings, and socializing, and it has a laundry facility and residential-scale kitchen. The multi-purpose building is a “game-changer” for the program; participants have more opportunities to learn vocational, social, and independent living skills alongside their *Tochnit Avodah* peers, and the additional staff room ensures that the program director and counselors are not only more available to the participants but, in sharing a living space, can more naturally support the participants’ socialization and learning goals.

Up until this point, participants were housed in a number of different buildings. Not all were accessible, and for the program staff, coverage, communication, and behavioral control were especially challenging. The vocational education communal spaces were also underutilized, limiting the opportunities for learning and socialization. With everyone under the same roof, however, logistical challenges are minimized, and there is a greater “*kehilla*-feel,” a stronger sense of community and belonging.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Creating **accessible residential spaces** allows participants to have **“housing with integrity.”** It reduces logistical challenges and ensures that participants have the structure and support needed to succeed.

Summary of staff training for inclusion

Ramah New England provides intensive training during staff week and three to four times per week throughout the summer. Workshops and classes focus on providing all staff, regardless their role, with tools and techniques for addressing the needs of a wide array of campers. The themes of staff training for Summer 2023 were “accessibility” and “belonging,” creating activities that are designed to accommodate a spectrum of needs and abilities and ensuring campers and staff “feel special...that they are where they are supposed to be.” Staff in the Tikvah programs - *Amitzim*, *Voc Ed Maavar*, or *Tochnit Avodah* - receive additional training appropriate to their roles. This includes supervision and mentorship from the Tikvah director and individual program directors.

In conversations with camp leadership and staff, the importance of inclusion is clear. It is a value strongly embraced by the camp community and is a source of tremendous pride. They are deeply committed to their work in this area and are eager to improve and expand.

Overall Findings

- ✔ **Ramah New England benefited greatly from Yashar funding.** The grants have enabled the camp to **reach new heights** in terms of their **inclusion** work.
- ✔ **Location, location, location:** When centrally located amongst existing cabins and housing spaces, camp’s inclusive vision is further promoted and reinforced. It sends a powerful message about the **value and place of inclusion** within the broader camp community.
- ✔ **With its years of work in the disabilities space, inclusion is a “given” at Ramah New England.** It is central to how camp defines itself and its **Jewish educational mission**. The **success of their Yashar project** is in no small measure a reflection of the camp’s leadership and commitments in this area.
- ✔ **Even camps with years of success cannot afford to rest on their laurels.** Recruitment of younger campers with disabilities is a challenge for Ramah New England, and with increased marketing and direct outreach to local communities, they are working diligently to attract new families. Vocational education programs fill an essential and growing need for programming and support for individuals with disabilities across the life-span. It also keeps the door of the Jewish community open to individuals with disabilities and their families beyond the camper years.
- ✔ **Mitzvah goreret mitzvah:** One *mitzvah* leads to the next. Camp’s culture of inclusion has expanded beyond the disabilities sphere to include other dimensions of diversity. Its leadership in the disabilities arena has inspired initiatives in a range of other areas, (i.e. gender and sexuality).



CASE STUDY

Camp Ruach

QUICK FACTS



**Bridgewater,
New Jersey**



**640
Campers**



**40 Campers
in their inclusion program**

Camp Ruach is located in Bridgewater, New Jersey. It is part of the Bridgewater JCC and uses the JCC facilities and grounds to run their summer camp program. In Summer 2023, Ruach served roughly 640 campers. This included 40 campers in their inclusion program, more than 20 non-inclusion campers that receive additional support, and 22 adults in their day and vocational training program. The JCC employs a year-round special services director who works closely with the camp director in preparation for and during the summer months. A summer inclusion director is also part of the Ruach team, providing further support for campers and staff. Summer staff also include one-on-one counselors for campers with disabilities.



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Background relevant to inclusion work

In its 25 year history, Bridgewater JCC has always been committed to inclusion. In the last 10-15 years, its efforts have ramped up considerably. In addition to hiring a full-time, year-round special services director who works across the JCC with all constituency groups and programs, they house a year-round day program for adults with disabilities. Through their considerable marketing campaigns and stellar reputation, the JCC has become known in the larger community as the most desirable and well-regarded destination for families with kids with disabilities. Ruach is part of this broader success story. They collaborate with local public and private schools and organizations to recruit families and ensure they have considerable reach and impact.

The commitment to inclusion is so pervasive at Camp Ruach and is initiated from the senior JCC team. Every administrator, from the director down, as well as the members of the Board of Trustees, is fully on-board with the JCC's inclusive mission.

The JCC website's homepage boldly promotes this important value:

“We welcome everyone to our JCC.”

In their mission statement, inclusion is celebrated:

“Here at the JCC, we're devoted to fostering an atmosphere that is inclusive, safe, understanding, and accepting. We celebrate diversity in all its forms and cordially invite individuals and families from every race, religion, culture, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, economic background, and ability to join our cherished JCC family.”

Further down the homepage, the JCC highlights three upcoming programs, one of which is their 10th annual prom for adults with special needs.

Yashar Capital Projects

Camp Ruach participated in two rounds of Yashar funding. In the first round, Ruach built a splash pad, and in the second round, they created the “Etz Chayim Center,” an outdoor exploration area and sensory garden.

Splash Pad

Adjacent to the camp pool and water slides is a fully accessible, zero-depth entry splash pad. In addition to the water features are toys and games that children of all ability levels can enjoy. In the midst of the camp day, it is quite a remarkable scene: children with and without disabilities are going back and forth between the pool and splash pad, laughing and playing together. It is designed specifically for such natural interactions between campers to occur, and the camp program supports this goal. As the assistant executive director explains, “Having the splash park [enables] all children to be together.” She contends that “this enhanced interaction,” encourages campers to “play cooperatively, negotiate space, and share equipment while gaining a greater appreciation of one another.”



The splash pad is open throughout the Spring, Summer and Fall to all JCC members. It is most heavily used by the camp groups: it is an activity that is included in campers' weekly schedule, and children with individualized plans are often allotted additional time slots in this programming area. In many ways, it is at the heart of the Camp Ruach space and program experience; it is centrally located, a beloved part of the day, and demonstrative of the camp's inclusive values.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Spaces that promote **organic interactions** between campers with and without disabilities are highly successful in meeting inclusive goals. When integrated into camps' existing physical space and program design, new buildings and initiatives can **more easily promote camps' inclusive vision.**

Etz Chayim Center

The Etz Chayim Center is an outdoor exploration area and sensory garden. It includes a stage, seating, a music area, a water play station, an art play station, balance bikes, recreation areas, and an herb and vegetable garden. Like the splash pad, the Etz Chayim Center is utilized by the entire JCC community. It is, also, a space that is thoughtfully designed to encourage maximal interaction between children and adults with and without disabilities. Over the course of a camp day, the space is used for music classes, performance arts, gardening, and structured free play. Given its central location, it is also used when kids need down-time away from the larger group. Children are able to go safely to the center to decompress while still being within eye-sight and earshot of their counselors and peers.

In addition to the Etz Chayim Center, accessible walkways were built as part of this grant cycle. In some ways, the walkways are the most significant contribution to the camp vis-a-vis inclusion. Whereas previously the uneven dirt terrain made access to the various spaces in camp a real challenge for individuals with disabilities, the newly paved paths ensure safe travel to and from the various camp areas. In this way, campers can access a wider range of camp activities, and families with parents and grandparents with physical disabilities and limitations can more similarly enjoy programs throughout the camp grounds.

Finally, all the above projects are visual manifestations of camp's values. As one JCC professional explained, "Upon giving tours of camp, it is quite apparent to all that Camp Ruach is committed to our work on inclusion and creating a space ... physically, programmatically, and values-wise, that is accepting and welcoming of all."



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Multi-use spaces further camps' inclusion goals.

New walkways and accessible paths are meaningful and significant contributions in creating an inclusive community for campers and families.

Summary of staff training for inclusion

The summer inclusion director explained that all staff are inclusion staff and are trained to work with campers with a range of abilities. This includes at least one designated session on inclusion, although the value of inclusion is emphasized and infused throughout the entire training program. The counselors hired to work one-on-one with campers are given two additional training sessions. They also meet individually with the inclusion director and the camper and their family.

In conversations with staff, it is clear the importance of inclusion is strongly communicated and embraced by the camp community. They are deeply committed to their work in this area and proud of their successes.

Overall Findings

- ✔ **Spaces that encourage natural interactions between children with and without disabilities are especially meaningful.**
- ✔ **Leadership matters.**
The entire JCC leadership—from the senior administration down—is deeply committed to inclusion. It is a core value of the institution and central to its vision; the centrality of inclusion and its efforts in this area are felt in all JCC programs, including Camp Ruach.
- ✔ **As a year-round facility, the benefits of the capital improvements extend beyond the summer months.**
- ✔ **Camp Ruach—and the entire Bridgewater JCC—benefited greatly from Yashar funding.**
The grants have enabled the camp to reach new heights in terms of their inclusion work.
- ✔ **Camp Ruach has a strong vision for inclusion at their site.**
The capital projects have, therefore, been a natural extension of this already staunch commitment. This is likely part of why the projects have been so successful; they build on the camp's solid foundation and are seamlessly integrated in the existing camp program.



CASE STUDY

Round Lake @ NJY Camps

QUICK FACTS



Milford, PA



**140
Campers**



80 Staff
Worked specifically
with Round Lake
campers

New Jersey Y's Round Lake @ NJY Camps is an inclusion program that takes place at Camp Nah-Jee-Wah (for rising 1st-6th graders) and Cedar Lake Camp (rising 7th-9th graders), which are both housed on a large campsite in Milford, PA. Its model is based on full integration of campers with disabilities into the general camp program. A large percentage of Round Lake @ NJY campers have social communication disorders, ADHD, learning disabilities, and anxiety, though they have the capacity to cater to a very wide range and types of disabilities and pride themselves on rarely turning campers away.



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Campers enrolled in Round Lake @ NJY participate in the same programs and activities and are included in all aspects of camp life. In fact, many campers are not aware of any distinction between Round Lake @ NJY and the “general” camp program. As stated on their website, “Campers are simply Nah-Jee-Wah and Cedar Lake campers, and are a part of the Round Lake @ NJY program, in which staffing and housing are structured to meet their needs.”

In Summer 2023, 140 campers were enrolled in the program. There are roughly 70 staff each summer who are assigned to work specifically with Round Lake @ NJY Camps (a 1:3 ratio). Additionally, this past summer there were six inclusion supervisors and six inclusion coordinators, who helped to oversee the 45 general counselors who were specifically hired to care for Round Lake @ NJY campers. For older campers, Round Lake @ NJY has a voc-ed program as well as a newly launched inclusive Israel trip (piloted in Summer 2023).

Round Lake @ NJY Camps has a year-round director and social worker, as well as a seasonal assistant director. In addition to their primary responsibilities of running the inclusion program, these staff members work closely with the senior staff of Nah-Jee-Wah and Cedar Lake Camp. In fact, their offices share a building (more on this below).

Background relevant to inclusion work

Round Lake @ NJY Camps was established in 1981, on a separate campsite from the Milford location, 50 miles away. While the program was successful in its early years, camp leadership determined that in order to be as inclusive as possible, they needed to strive for full integration with the general camp program. In 2013, Round Lake @ NJY relocated to Milford. In the initial years of this switch, it functioned as a “camp within a camp,” and with the exception of some camp-wide programs in which they participated, they maintained their own program.

Throughout the last ten years, Round Lake @ NJY has integrated more and more each summer into the general camp population. One staff member reflected that Summer 2023 is “night and day” from Summer 2013 (in regards to the camp’s ability to be fully inclusive). Starting in summer 2024, campers in Round Lake @ NJY will be charged the same tuition as their peers in the general program – despite the greater expenses incurred by Camp (in the form of increased staffing). This signifies a further step towards complete integration and inclusion.

Summary of Camp spaces that support inclusion

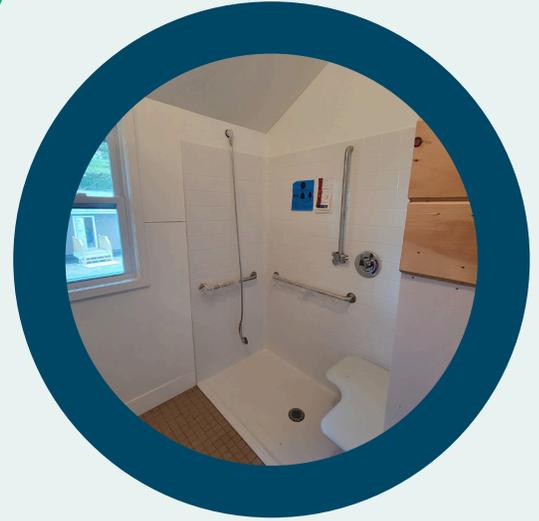
The Milford Campus is vast, and maintains many spaces that are assets for all campers - especially those in the Round Lake @ NJY program. Round Lake @ NJY campers (most often) live in their own bunks, which allow for smaller ratios and enable their counselors to offer more individualized support. As one makes their way throughout camp, it is often not possible to determine where the “inclusion” areas are and where the “general” areas are, which speaks to the camp’s dedication to full integration.

In recent years, through grants awarded as part of the Yashar Initiative, Round Lake @ NJY built several new spaces, which are described in detail below.

Retrofitted, more physically accessible bunks

(one for summer 2023 and one for summer 2024)

A retrofitted bunk enables Round Lake @ NJY to be substantially more inclusive of campers with physical disabilities. It is fully wheelchair accessible, including an entry ramp and an ADA-compliant shower. This space did not serve any campers with physical disabilities this past summer, however, it will allow Round Lake @ NJY to serve these campers in the future. Round Lake @ NJY is proud to have created a space in camp that further widens the already-wide range of campers that they can accommodate. Importantly, this bunk is located amongst several other bunks - consistent with Round Lake @ NJY's dedication to full inclusion and integration.



KEY TAKE AWAYS

The retrofitting of the bunk signals to the camp community and its stakeholders their commitment to inclusion -not just of campers who are currently part of the camp community, but also those who might not have been able to be part of camp until now. It enables camp to serve even more needs in the future.

Retrofitted, more physically accessible program space

Similar to the retrofitted bunk, the program space, previously referred to as the "Den" (which now houses a makerspace activity) now has a ramp that makes it much more physically accessible than before. Additionally, the space has a new deck, which is roughly the same size as the indoor space. The deck is not only physically inclusive (as it connects to the ramp), but also enables campers with sensory needs to have a quieter space to work. During our visit, we met one camper in the Round Lake @ NJY program who was enjoying working with his counselor on the deck in a calmer environment. This space reflects camp's commitment to universal design, as they construct spaces that are accessible to everyone - both campers with a wide range of disabilities and those without.

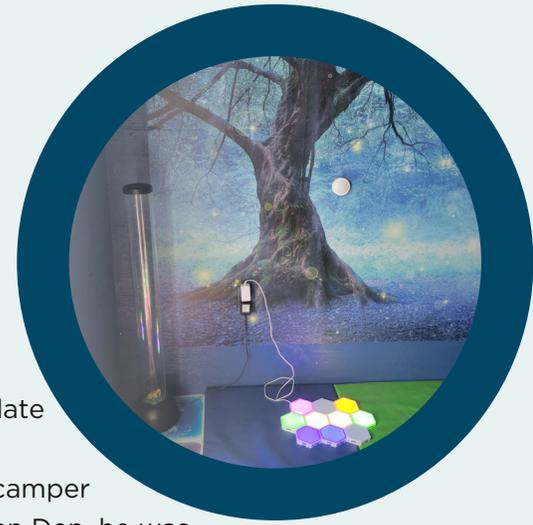


KEY TAKEAWAYS

Similar to the retrofitted bunk, the Den now signals camp's commitment to inclusion (and is centrally located for all to see!). While the improvements to the space may seem subtle, it is sometimes these types of projects that can have significant and immediate impact. The Makerspace is regularly used each day, and its improvements have been quickly incorporated into the rhythm of camp life.

Indoor sensory space - the “Zen Den”

Located near the center of Cedar Lake Camp, the Zen Den is a small structure that is used primarily for campers with sensory needs to rest, relax, and recharge (though campers without disabilities are also welcome to use and benefit from the space). The structure needed to be small because of Pennsylvania zoning laws, however the size of the structure does not limit its impact. The air conditioned space has soft seating throughout, as well as a “calming wall.” It is designed to accommodate 1-2 campers and their staff members at once. One Round Lake @ NJY counselor told us that the Zen Den “saved her life.” She described for us a camper that had great difficulty integrating into camp - and once he entered the Zen Den, he was able to calm down and feel anchored. He recognized the space as an area where he could manage his anxiety. His counselor speculated that she was not even sure if the camper would have been able to continue at camp had the Zen Den not been available to him.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Truly inclusive communities need spaces that can address the *full* range of its members’ needs. While the Zen Den may only impact a small number of campers on a daily basis, its vitality cannot be underestimated. The space functions as a key resource for a small number of campers whose camp experience is completely transformed because of it.

Outdoor sensory playground

Opened in Summer 2023, the sensory playground is an impressive space with a variety of special equipment and structures. It is centrally located and easily accessible, yet still tucked away from the general business of camp. The playground is primarily designed to help campers who need to regulate, crave vestibular or proprioceptive input. That said, the playground was designed with elements that would be enticing to mainstream campers, including a big spider web and a large ring for balance / running (as can be seen in the picture). The playground can be (and was!) used by all campers, which is another example of camp’s commitment to universal design. In this way, it is a fully inclusive space that is welcoming and enjoyable for all campers. As the space is brand new, it is still being integrated into the camp’s culture of inclusion (when we visited during the second week of camp, the playground had just started to be used).



Even during our visit early in the summer, one Round Lake @ NJY senior staff member already reflected on the importance of this new space. When asked about which spaces at camp that were most helpful for her inclusion work, she immediately brought up the playground. She told a brief story about a Round Lake @ NJY camper who was very upset in the initial days of camp. Instead of having a conversation in the office, they brought the camper to the playground instead. The counselor said, “We had the same chat as we would have had in the office - but it had a huge impact. It probably cut the time of the conversation in half, just from having that sensory input [during the conversation].”



KEY TAKEAWAYS

The sensory playground is a new space, which certainly brings with it challenges of integration into the camp facility and culture (ironically, the challenge is in including an inclusive space). That said, while it remains to be seen precisely how the playground will be integrated into camp culture in future summers, it is already evident that this type of space makes a significant impact on camp's culture of inclusion. The playground simultaneously serves as a place where campers with disabilities can have their individual needs supported, and at the same time, can also serve as a location that all campers, regardless of their needs, can come together.

Round Lake @ NJY Camps Offices

While not a project that used Yashar funds, it is worth noting that the building that houses one of Round Lake @ NJY Camp's offices is also home to the Cedar Lake Camp offices. Previously, there was a wall separating the two spaces in the building. In recent years, camp decided to remove this wall - which both literally and figuratively removes barriers to inclusion at camp. While this was a small project, its impact is significant, as staff can now more freely interact with one another. This change also signals the importance of inclusion to the entire camp community.

Summary of staff training for inclusion

All staff at NJY Camps, whether they are part of Round Lake @ NJY or not, undergo extensive training during staff week. Training on inclusion is also required for non Round Lake @ NJY staff, as the fully integrated model sometimes necessitates cross-over between staff members in each program. For example, a Cedar Lake Camp counselor informed us that he took a Round Lake @ NJY camper to the infirmary this summer, which he was certain would not have happened even five years ago, as only Round Lake @ NJY staff members used to interact with Round Lake @ NJY campers.

Round Lake @ NJY benefits from its own senior staff, many of whom have years of experience at camp as well as professional careers in Special Education during the year. In addition to training provided by Round Lake @ NJY staff, each summer camp also brings in external educators to facilitate training sessions during staff week. This past summer, camp used Jay Frankel's "True to Life" training program, as well as Bright Moose Training with Emily Golinsky. When we visited camp in early July 2023 (only a couple of weeks after staff training week), the Round Lake @ NJY senior staff were very satisfied with both of these training sessions, both of which provided behavior management, problem solving, and communication skill building for all Round Lake @ NJY staff.

Overall Findings

✔ **Some spaces are for everyone, some are not - and both are needed:**

The wide range of inclusion spaces at Round Lake @ NJY is truly impressive. Some spaces, such as the new playground, are open and accessible to the entire camp population, yet still serve specific needs for Round Lake @ NJY campers. On the other hand, spaces such as the Zen Den are primarily designed for Round Lake @ NJY campers (even as mainstream campers are welcome to use the space). It is important for camps to be able to build and make use of spaces that can cater to all campers, as this truly makes a space inclusive. And at the same time, it is important that camps also carve out spaces that are specially designed for campers in an inclusion program, as these spaces can often provide a much-needed respite and refuge.

✔ **Thoughtful, Intentional and Brave Leadership:**

Throughout our visit, we were struck by the thoughtful and intentional leadership of all Senior Staff at Round Lake @ NJY. It is through their vision that camp has dramatically changed in the last ten years, shifting from an inclusion model that was still very much separate (“a camp within a camp”) to one that is fully integrated. Moreover, the many new inclusion ideas and projects they have spearheaded require a certain degree of bravery in order to implement - as many camp communities are initially resistant to change.

✔ **Creativity in Capital Improvements:** Many Yashar capital improvement projects are creative, though the Zen Den at Round Lake @ NJY stands out. Faced with complex zoning laws in Pennsylvania, camp needed to build a smaller structure. The staff’s creativity in designing this small

space in such a warm, welcoming and inclusive way is clearly evident. This creativity brings the capital project to the “next level.”

✔ **Culture is Key:** At Round Lake @ NJY, a strong and inclusive culture is embedded into all aspects of camp life. A variety of factors influence this culture - including strong senior leadership, as well as a large and well trained inclusion staff. It’s also clear that non inclusion counselors are “bought in” to the project of full integration and inclusion, especially in the last ten years. This was even true for the campers we spoke with - many of whom were able to appreciate the importance of inclusion, at a young age (one camper succinctly told us: “It just is.”).

✔ **Culture and Capital:** While it is not possible to assess how successful the Yashar capital projects at Round Lake @ NJY would be if the culture of inclusion was less robust, it seems clear that the impact would likely be less impressive. For example, the sensory playground was immediately and obviously seen as an inclusive space at camp by all (not just by those in the inclusion program), even in its first summer. Additionally, the Zen Den is utilized regularly by staff who truly value its presence. It’s possible that at camps with less developed cultures of inclusion that these two projects would not be as immediately impactful and valued.



CASE STUDY

Lessans Camp JCC

QUICK FACTS



Rockville, MD



**578
Campers**



**95 Campers
enrolled in
the inclusion
program**

Lessans Camp JCC, located in Rockville, MD, is a Day Camp serving the Washington DC suburban area. They serve campers entering pre-K through age 21. In Summer 2023, 578 campers were enrolled in the general program and 95 campers enrolled in the inclusion program. There were 84 counselors working in the inclusion program (not all worked the entire summer). The camp employs seven senior level inclusion staff who work seasonally, and three senior-level inclusion professionals who work year-round and full time. Senior level staff are individuals who are highly qualified and experienced educators (with decades of experience between them), who work in the inclusion space during the year. Additionally, the JCC employs a full-time Director of Inclusion who works for the entire Bender JCC year-round.



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Background relevant to inclusion work

Lessans Camp JCC's inclusion program opened in 1979 with 10 campers, and was the first Jewish summer camp in the Washington DC area to accommodate campers with disabilities. Until 1994, inclusion campers participated in a distinct program and only sometimes were integrated into activities with the rest of camp. Today, the program is fully integrated.

The inclusion program is well regarded by many in the field, and attracts several visitors during the course of each summer who hope to learn more about best practices.

As stated on the home page of their website (not under a special "inclusion" section), "Lessans Camp JCC is a place where every child in the greater Washington D.C. area — regardless of developmental ability — can experience the joys of summer camp. Our nationally recognized inclusion program makes each individual feel connected and that they belong in our community." As one staff member remarked during our visit, the inclusion program at Lessans JCC "is what society is supposed to look like."

Summary of Camp spaces that support inclusion

One of the many assets of the Lessans Camp JCC inclusion program is its many accessible indoor and outdoor spaces. Camp is housed in the JCC building which is a modern facility with many rooms, wide hallways, elevators, an indoor/outdoor pool, as well as many indoor areas that can be used as quieter / calmer spaces for campers. Additionally, the outdoor areas are flat, with a recently updated and large accessible playground, as well as ramps and wide sidewalks.

In recent years, Lessans Camp JCC has improved its already impressive facilities with Yashar funding. They constructed a new rock wall, a new ramp leading to the main JCC building, a new "sportsplex" (known at camp as the Pavillion) which functions as a large, shaded outdoor area for full-camp opening / closing programs and sports activities for smaller groups throughout the day, as well as new accessible restrooms . Overall, the physical space is highly conducive to an inclusive camp program, with many indoor and outdoor locations that are accessible, as well as multiple rooms and locations that are supportive for those with sensory needs.



Rock Wall

Upon encountering the rock wall, it is immediately apparent that all campers are engaged, full of joy, and included. One staff member remarks that the ethos of this space is that “any camper can do something here, and it is celebrated.” Staff are specially trained to find ways to include each and every camper, no matter their skill, ability, or comfort level with the elements on the course. A series of ropes and pulleys allow for greater access to the climbing wall for campers with physical disabilities. Campers with developmental and intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, ADHD and learning differences are also afforded greater access to this space than at other rock walls, as staff are specially trained to engage campers and allow each child to feel a sense of accomplishment while climbing. One staff member remarked that the rock wall is a space that “allows campers with disabilities to focus on who they are as humans.” Another remarked that one time, a camper with disabilities was able to elevate themselves a few feet - leading all of the staff and campers nearby to erupt in cheers.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Camps with strong cultures of inclusion can transform spaces that are not “inclusive,” per se, into key locations that are part of the backbone of their inclusion program.

New Ramp

The inclusion benefits of the ramp are obvious to anyone who encounters it. This ramp connects the main JCC building to the playground / Pavilion outdoor area. Previously, campers and staff needed to walk a much longer distance in order to access the building, to a ramp located in another area. Now, with a new, high quality ramp, it is possible for all campers and staff to transition between the outdoor and indoor camp spaces with ease. It’s obvious that this type of project has the potential for immediate impact for campers with physical disabilities. The ramp’s presence signals that Lessans JCC Camp is a place that takes inclusion seriously.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Inclusion spaces that clearly address physical disabilities are incredibly helpful, both because of the campers that are supported, and also because of the strong messaging associated with the project.

Pavilion / Sportsplex

This is perhaps the most impressive structure at camp, and has had an immediate and clear impact on Camp’s ability to be inclusive. Previously, camp-wide programs were held in a large tent (which occupied the same space that the Pavillion currently does). The tent was not physically accessible for all campers as it required climbing down a hill to enter the space. Additionally, the tent posed a great challenge to campers with sensory needs, as it was very loud and uncomfortable. Many campers with disabilities used to congregate near a large hill near the tent, which was referred to as “inclusion hill” by camp staff.

The Pavillion is a vast improvement over the tent. It provides a larger area, with ample space on the perimeter for campers with sensory needs to participate in programs and activities from a distance, yet still feel part of the camp community. Additionally, with the new pavilion that has been constructed, everyone can feel welcome, comfortable, and included.

Numerous programs were held in the Pavillion throughout the summer, including opening and closing camp-day activities, sports, shabbat programs on Fridays, and other camp- wide gatherings.

Adjacent to the Pavillion are newly renovated and accessible restrooms. Staff members have described this addition as a “game changer,” as counselors no longer need to take a lengthier path back inside the JCC building. This has enabled campers with disabilities to more fully participate in camp-wide activities.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Spaces that are central to camp-wide programs are among the most important and crucial improvements a camp can make. When investing in these areas, camps signal that inclusion is a core part of their mission. While sometimes the most costly to renovate and adapt, camps cannot be truly inclusive until these spaces are open to all campers.

Summary of staff training for inclusion

All staff members at Lessans JCC go through training that relates to inclusion - this is a crucial component of creating a culture of inclusion at camp. The staff members that specifically work in the inclusion program receive six additional hours of training during staff week - as one of the members of the senior team reflected, this training is about “demystifying” inclusion. Counselors work with the camp’s Director of Inclusion and the full inclusion leadership team. They spend time training on both practical elements, such as how to care for campers’ specific needs, as well as “bigger picture” areas such as breaking down stigma related to individuals with disabilities and viewing inclusion as an expression of Jewish values. Speaking with inclusion staff members during the site visit, it is clear that they find meaning and fulfillment in their work.

Overall Findings

✔ Significant investments in large capital projects can pay immediate dividends:

Yashar’s impact is clearly and immediately felt when observing the brand new Pavillion. This significant capital investment is now a central and vital part of the physical facilities. It enables camp to be a truly inclusive space, fully living up to their vision. While these projects are the most costly, they can also be the most impactful, especially when the new space is so central to the camp community.

✔ The decades of inclusion work that led up to Yashar funding laid an important foundation to enable Yashar’s success with funding capital projects:

As one staff member reflected, “success breeds success.” It’s possible that the physical improvements made at Lessans would not have been as successful in camps with newer inclusion programs.

✔ Culture can build capital, and capital can build culture:

Yashar capital improvements require a strong culture of inclusion already in place to succeed. For example, the new rock wall that was constructed might have not reached its potential to be a fully inclusive space if it was built in a camp that had a less developed culture of inclusion. The fact that staff and campers alike rally around this space as one where all are welcomed speaks to a culture at Lessans that was already in place for decades before the rock wall was built. That said, some capital projects can also create *new* cultures at camp that did not exist beforehand. In this sense, capital “builds” culture. For example, the new Pavillion created a new phenomenon at camp in which all campers and staff are fully included in *all* camp-wide activities. This was (perhaps surprisingly) not the case beforehand. Introducing this new phenomenon added an important cultural layer to an already robust culture of inclusion.



**EVALUATION OF THE YASHAR INITIATIVE
INCLUSION AND DISABILITIES AT
JEWISH SUMMER CAMPS
A SNAPSHOT OF SUMMER 2023**

