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# INCLUSION TRAINING GUIDE FOR JEWISH SUMMER CAMPS

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## Chapter 2:

# Successful Inclusion in Jewish Summer Camp

### Inclusion is an Attitude and Approach, not a Place or a Program:

#### Inclusion Opportunities throughout Camp

Whether your camp's program for campers with disabilities is fully inclusive or separates campers for bunking and certain activities, there are numerous opportunities to facilitate organic and intentional interactions among all campers.

During staff week and repeatedly thereafter, it is important the camp director convey the camp's expectations regarding facilitating an inclusive community. The director might begin by discussing how wide-ranging the camp's admissions practice has been regarding camper differences. Some types of inclusion are quite obvious and expected: campers and staff members come from different geographic locations, religious backgrounds, and family structures including single parent families, two mom or dad families, children who are adopted, etc. People in the camp community have a wide range of physical features, too: some are taller than others, some have lower pitched voices, and some have blonde, red, or brown hair. Each camper learns uniquely and has a unique temperament and personality. The director can discuss embracing and valuing differences from the value concept that we are all created *B'tzelem Elokim* (in the image of G-d). It is up to the director to make clear to the camp staff the strength of this priority: Is inclusion the rule? Then let staff members know up front. Will exclusion be tolerated, and if ever so, under what limited conditions and in what manner?

On the most basic level, all campers share the facilities and walk the same foot paths. These are perfect opportunities for informally inclusive interactions. Camp-wide activities are natural opportunities for full inclusion and may include meals, Shabbat services, camp-wide field trips, Maccabi/Color War, camp plays, song and dance festivals, and more. There are many opportunities for bunk-to-bunk or division-to-division activities including art projects, evening activities and athletic events. Some camps offer peer mentoring/buddy activities, which have proven beneficial for all campers involved.

Remember that **inclusion begins with an attitude and approach** and should guide camp planning, regardless of the activity being offered. Staff members should get into the habit of asking such questions as: Will all campers be able to participate? How can we facilitate full participation by campers with relevant disabilities? What accommodations can we make so that campers who would benefit from them can take breaks and/or have alternative options? Inclusion benefits everyone!

### General Group and Activity Planning Guidelines for Inclusion/Shadow Counselors

Camp inclusion should be viewed as an on-going process; getting it right takes time, planning, action and reflection. Appropriately involving the counselors and campers in each cabin/bunk in the process is one important key to success.

The job of a counselor is to create opportunities to involve his/her campers with disabilities in all aspects of camp life. (It is not to be their friend, just as it is not the counselor's job to be typically-abled campers' friend.) What constitutes appropriate support depends on each individual situation. Here are some aspects of planning to consider when inclusion is a priority:

- **Grouping or arrangements:** For any given activity, there are a number of combinations from which to choose. Counselors or peers can take the lead and then the counselor can step back to assist or engage with other campers. What may work best for fullest inclusion of all your campers?
- **Modify the activity:** Use specialized equipment to adapt the activity and modify the expectations and/or time on task for all campers who might benefit (not only those who come to you labeled with a disability).
- **Use Visual Aids:** Share with campers a visual schedule of each day, in pictures and/or words, and discuss what the day will look like. Revisit this frequently throughout the day to keep expectations

realistic. The same approach may be used for behavioral expectations such as bunk clean up, quiet hours and personal hygiene routines.

- **Positive Behavior Plan:** Personalize positive reinforcers for each camper and schedule rewards during the day. One example is to have a treasure box from which campers can pull as a reward for accomplishing their behavioral goals for the day, half day, etc.
- **Social stories:** Use social stories to pre-teach a game, what the rules are and how it is played. Role play or use visual representations. Social stories will help campers learn and use socially appropriate responses. The Wikipedia entry on Social Stories gives enough information for most counselors to write and use them: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_Stories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Stories)
- **Sit campers together:** Be sure to seat campers with disabilities with bunkmates during all activities; do not allow them to be isolated and do not seat them elsewhere solely with a counselor. Counselors can sit with the camper and bunkmates, and should facilitate conversation as needed.
- **Model participation in activities:** Get involved as appropriate so that you can model positive participation for your camper. In facilitating inclusion, it is particularly important for counselors not to sit on the sidelines of activities chatting together.
- **Encourage peer conversation and interaction:** If/when a camper asks a question pertaining to another camper's abilities or limitations, direct the questioner to the ask the questions directly of the camper with the disability, supervising such exchanges at first and providing such guidance in framing the question and answer that will facilitate a friendly, respectful exchange.
- **Foster Independent Communication:** Look for opportunities to step back when a camper with a disability is interacting with peers. Let all your campers explore taking appropriate social risks, as such independence is among the goals of inclusion.
- **Blend in:** If you are serving as a one-to-one shadow for a camper, try to blend in with the bunk. Interact with all campers and counselors to be less conspicuous in your focus on one child.
- **Making choices:** Encourage your camper(s) to express preferences and, as appropriate, to make choices. When two or more desired options are presented, the camper will feel in control and a positive outcome will be a more likely result.

## Self-Assessment on Inclusion

Self-assessment is essential developing a comprehensive approach to serving campers with disabilities. These key questions were inspired by material developed by the JE & ZB Butler and Ruderman Family Foundations:

1. Does your camp have clear policies and/or existing programs to support meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities?
  - a. Are the policies and programs prominent on your website and in printed materials?
2. Do you have a disability advisory committee/inclusion committee?
  - a. If so, does it include adults with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities?
3. Are Jewish children and youth with *any kind of disability* welcomed to participate?
  - a. If yes, how do you plan to identify, reach and welcome these children to your camp?
  - b. If not, have you defined the types/range of disabilities currently being addressed?
  - c. If not, have you identified the barriers to serving others?
  - d. If not, is there a plan in place to expand the scope of disabilities addressed?
4. Are your programs for campers with disabilities:
  - a. Inclusive (full participation in a program with typically developing campers)?
  - b. Partially inclusive (some activities are separate, or housing and/or meals are separate)?
  - c. Mostly separate ("camp within a camp," with scheduled opportunities to be part of the full camp community, such as meals, Shabbat services and/or evening programs)
  - d. Designed outside of the camp structure (vocational programming, family camps)?
5. Has someone using a wheelchair personally checked the physical accessibility of your offices, bunks, bathrooms, dining hall, waterfront, pathways and program spaces?
6. Has a blind person, who uses sight adaptive computer technology, checked your website and facilities for accessibility?
7. Has a deaf person checked your communications for accessibility to those with full and partial hearing loss, and/or reliant upon adaptive technology? (Do your videos include captions?)
8. Do you employ individuals with disabilities?
  - a. If so, what are their jobs?

- b. If so, do they receive equal compensation and benefits as all other employees in like positions?
  - c. If not, have you identified the barriers to employment in various positions?
  - d. If not—or if yes, but in limited jobs—is there a plan in place to make more camp jobs accessible to people with disabilities? Is there a plan to attract potential employees?
9. Do you currently educate and train your staff, board of directors, trustees, and other key people about serving and partnering with people with disabilities?
- a. If no, is there a plan in place to include an education/training program on serving campers with disabilities?

Like many Jewish organizations, you probably must answer “No” to many of these questions. However far along you are or however far behind you feel, do not be discouraged: You are taking action now. Follow this road map and you will be on your way to achieving full inclusion.

## Steps to Achieving Full Inclusion<sup>1</sup>

### 1. LEADERSHIP AT THE TOP NEEDS TO BUY IN AND SHARE THAT VISION

In your camp or movement community, the vision of inclusion may develop among current parents or parents of excluded children. It may be the brainchild of the camp director or the passion of a board member. It may be sparked simply by awareness that the field of Jewish camp is moving toward inclusion. In whatever circles the ideas start percolating, it is up to you, as the camp’s leadership, to validate their importance, to assess the camp’s current status regarding inclusivity, and to develop, implement and communicate a plan of action.

Academic studies show that for inclusion of people with disabilities to be truly successful there must be buy-in from top leadership. The camp’s director and lay leadership must communicate the message that all campers and their parents are of equal value and must be respected and heard fairly. The board of trustees must set the camp’s vision regarding inclusion of people with disabilities into camp life and hold the expectation that this vision is advanced through camp policies, practices, budget and staffing. The camp director and leadership team are responsible for implementation, training and developing feedback/improvement strategies to ensure that the vision becomes reality.

As an agency, we at the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC) followed a similar path. We took our lead on examining the issues of inclusion and exclusion of people with disabilities both from member camps that were already passionate about inclusion and from parents who were frustrated for their children who were excluded from the immersive Jewish camp experience. Our leadership heard and validated the importance of an inclusive vision of Jewish camp. The FJC’s board and professional leaders then bought into the vision of Jewish camps that are inclusive of campers with a broad span of physical, cognitive and emotional disabilities, and developed its own vision of our agency applying its resources and influence to support all of our member camps in becoming inclusive. Work toward inclusivity in camps became a priority in FJC’s programming, budgeting and training.

The FJC has just begun the journey to full inclusion of children with all abilities in member camps. By working strategically and with the full support of our leadership, we hope to set an example not only for Jewish camps, but also for Jewish day schools, synagogues, human service agencies and Federations. We honor those whose early work advances our cause. This year, Howard Blas and the Tikvah program at Ramah Camps won well-deserved recognition from the Covenant Foundation for their pioneering work in inclusive Jewish camping, where children with and without disabilities are welcomed as equals.

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<sup>1</sup> This adaptation of an excerpt from an article appearing in the Fall 2014 issue of *The Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, shared here with the permission of the JPRO Network, has been edited for specific relevance to Jewish summer camps. **Subscribe to the journal at [JPRO.org](http://JPRO.org).**

Among the federations, Combined Jewish Philanthropies in Boston, the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, and the UJA-Federation of New York are making important efforts to build support for inclusion. In addition, The Associated in Baltimore has created a user-friendly website where Jewish parents of children with disabilities can easily find agencies that will welcome and serve their children. Some individual Jewish Community Centers have had successful inclusion programs. The Reform Movement, which has long benefited from the able work of Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, now has the added voice of its top leader, Rabbi Rick Jacobs. Yachad, a youth inclusion program through the Orthodox Union, and Friendship Circle, both of which bring together teenage volunteers and children with special needs, have provided quality access and dignity to Jewish children with disabilities for years. Vocal and visible leadership from the top matters tremendously.

## **2. NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US**

People with disabilities need a seat at the table and must be involved in decision making: organizations must work WITH people with disabilities, not FOR them. If currently there are no Jews with disabilities participating in your decision-making process, then bring them in. Value their experiences and opinions. Remember that even people who cannot physically speak have opinions that must be shared and heard. For camps and other organizations that offer children and youth programs, the parents of those with disabilities must also be heard and be represented in decision-making.

## **3. USE “PEOPLE-FIRST” LANGUAGE**

Take the time to learn People-First Language, which respects human beings and their right to be appreciated for the strengths they have and which does not define them by their disabilities. For example, using people-first language, you would call a child with Down syndrome by his or her name, not “the kid with Down syndrome” or, worse yet, the “Down syndrome kid.” A person who uses a wheelchair is a person first, and that wheelchair is a tool of liberation: he or she is not “wheelchair bound.” The focus is on “people with disabilities” not the “handicapped” or the “disabled.”

## **4. WALK THE WALK**

It is one thing to announce big goals and a plan. Implementation is another. NJY Camps, which has nine camps under its umbrella, decided to merge its Round Lake Camp for children with disabilities with three of its camps geared toward typically developing children, to make the entire organization more inclusive. As a result, children with disabilities are no longer in a separate institution and children without disabilities benefit from connecting in a fun, Jewish context with a fuller diversity of Jewish people that God put on this earth. Every camp and movement moving toward inclusion should look closely at how NJY Camps implemented this change: they prepared well and provided significant training to their staff. It worked. This is a true example of walking the walk, in a big way!

## **5. BUDGET ENOUGH TIME AND MONEY TO DO IT RIGHT**

Inclusion is a lot less expensive than most people think, but it takes the right team with the right training to do it effectively. To ensure success and to develop an accurate budget, camps/schools/synagogues need to know how much money is needed to have the right staff in place, give them the training they need to be effective and make the needed accommodations to the physical plant.

## **6. ESTABLISH TRUST THROUGH YOUR REGISTRATION FORMS AND INTAKE PROCESS**

Trust is vital—and it is won or lost before you even meet face-to-face with children with a disability or their parents. Every sign-up form for every program must ask what accommodations are needed for people to participate fully in your program. When participants indicate a needed accommodation, their form must go straight to the inclusion director/coordinator so he or she can ensure that their needs can be met. Parents can be your best assets, because they are already experts in meeting the needs of their child and can help you, too, serve their children successfully.

It is completely acceptable to indicate that you need advance notice of any disabilities so that you can offer needed accommodations or special services at your events. For example, tracking down a good sign-language

interpreter or making a “behavior plan” takes time. Have a ready list of providers or volunteers whom you can call on to meet key needs.

## **7. HIRE AN EXPERIENCED INCLUSION DIRECTOR/COORDINATOR**

An expert inclusion director/coordinator can ensure that you are ready to meet the needs of Jews with disabilities. This person does not need to work full time, but does need to be available as needed. Some institutions use highly qualified volunteers. For others this is a paid position. There are many special educators/therapists/social workers who work in public schools or other institutions who are available on a part-time basis. Below is a sample job description from the URJ camps that can easily be adapted for Jewish schools or synagogues.

## **8. TRAINING SEMINARS AND MANUALS**

When the Foundation for Jewish Camp asked its member camps in 2013 what was the “most significant challenge to serving campers or more campers with disabilities/special needs,” the most frequent answer was that they were “only able to accept a certain level of disability and can’t have campers with more severe issues.” The next most frequent response was “we don’t have enough properly trained staff for it.” Parents also cited the cost of camp programs and the need for staff trained to assist children in developing peer relationships and building social skills, as well as to help other campers learn to respect and accept campers with disabilities. Professional training sessions and materials are vital. These are essential training topics:

- Participant assessment/intake process
- Accommodation/inclusion plans
- Adaptations
- Inclusion support staff
- Preparing non-disabled peers
- Facilitating peer interactions/aid and fade
- On-site technical support
- Program evaluation

All groups need an inclusion training manual for staff. MATAN ([www.matankids.org](http://www.matankids.org)), which focuses on professional development and mentorship of current and future Jewish leaders, has good materials on its website, and other groups have helpful resources as well (see the resources list, below). A manual of best practices would be a welcome addition to the field. Here are three excellent training manuals:

1. “Let’s All Play Inclusion Recreational Programs,” National Inclusion Project: <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/11/18/the-decline-of-marriage-and-rise-of-new-families/>
2. Community Recreation and People with Disabilities, by Stuart J. Schleien: <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1557662592/rehabtheraonlinm>
3. Including People with Disabilities in Camp Programs: A Resource for Camp Directors, by Glenn Roswal et al.: <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED422152>

## **9. PROMOTE “EXPECTED BEHAVIORS” TO REDUCE TANTRUMS/MELTDOWNS**

One of the main reasons that Jewish institutions deny access to children with disabilities is that they do not yet understand how to promote “expected behaviors” (the PC way of referring to reducing tantrums and meltdowns by children with disabilities). Thus, they are afraid of group and activity disruption.

To expand your capacity to serve participants with more involved disabilities (note they are not called “crippling” or “severe”), staff members need professional training so they can understand the difference between “can’t” and “won’t,” and they need to be given the tools to promote expected behaviors. Simple tools like effective methods for handling transition between activities can eliminate tantrums and keep a group together as a team. Training can make all the difference!



## **10. MARKETING: GETTING THE WORD OUT**

One of the hardest things for families challenged by disabilities is to find out what is available in their communities. Your website is an important tool for letting people know what you offer. Part of the challenge is that, in many cases, the current state of play is “accidental inclusion” instead of “intentional inclusion.” In other words, many Jewish institutions serve who they serve because they were approached by a person with a disability and correctly made accommodations to include them. While this effort should be applauded, inclusion should not stop there. Make intentional inclusion your camp’s goal, then publicize it widely, to get the word out. If you already have inclusion programs, put your diversity policy on your website. Make your website easy to navigate and accessible to people who are blind or deaf.

## **11. FOCUS ON PROVIDING CHILDREN WITH SOCIAL SKILLS AND POSITIVE PEER RELATIONSHIPS**

Parents of children with disabilities want professionals to be trained in assisting their children to develop peer relationships and build social skills at camp. Parents also want counselors and camp leaders to help other children learn to respect and accept their peers with disabilities. In many Jewish institutions the one-to-one CIT/counselor/para-educators who provide support to children with more involved disabilities mistakenly think their job is to be the child’s big brother/big sister/friend. But the best practices role should be to “AID AND FADE,” to facilitate peer relationships, not replace them.

A key purpose of inclusion is to enable children with disabilities to make friends and have experiences with their typically developing peers. The job of a staff member or counselor is not to fix every problem or to constantly hover over participants; it is to help children discover solutions on their own. There will be times when a counselor will need to assist them, either physically or in a conversation, in meeting their needs. Once the immediate need is met, however, it is important that children are given the space to go right back to being as independent as possible. Their support person needs to step away, perhaps gradually to ensure success, allowing more freedom and the space for real friendships to happen.

Stepping back may be difficult for inclusion counselors/shadows, in part because success rests not only on their camper, but also on the developmentally typical campers, who are being asked to strive to be friends with a child who may have limited social skills. But the hard work will pay off for all the children. Nothing is more important to families than enabling a young person with a disability to be able to self-advocate and to become independent. After all, parents eventually will die. They want their child with a disability to have people who will care about them and vice versa, and who are not necessarily paid to do so. And the pay-off for the typically developing children? Greater empathy, a broader pool of potential friends, and an understanding that each person, him/herself included, has gifts and challenges and that, sometimes, even the challenges are gifts.

The AID AND FADE approach for inclusion counselors/shadows is especially important, and more difficult to accomplish, with older campers/students. In telephone interviews with camp directors, we heard repeatedly that it is far easier to provide one-to-one support when campers are young. With older campers, it is more obvious to the bunkmates that the child with disability has personal support. Good training can minimize that difficulty; the support person should understand that he or she is a helper to the whole group, and “aids and fades” as needed for the camper with disabilities and others in the bunk (e.g. aid a very short camper to reach something on a top shelf then fade).

Many groups hire young people to be counselors or aides who have been to camp or religious school for many years and have an affinity for helping kids with disabilities, yet have no educational background or practical experience in working with people with disabilities. At a minimum, these staff members need intensive training before camp begins. At best, they could benefit from a program similar to CLASSP (Consortia of Learning and Service to Special Populations) and College CLASSP, year-long programs in more than 20 UJA-Federation of New York’s Jewish Community Centers and day camps. Both provide hands-on training and academic learning, provided by Ramapo for Children’s Training Institute, to high school and college students who work in their afterschool and weekend programs and in their summer day camps. Participants earn a stipend and college credits. Many subsequently are hired to help staff the agency’s programs, bringing their rich experience and skill and enabling the agencies to enhance their programming for youngsters with disabilities. Their CLASSP experiences have led many students to choose professions directly related to serving people with disabilities.

Moreover, as a result of this rich experience, they are more compassionate individuals who often act as strong advocates for people with disabilities in their daily lives.

An added benefit of these peer relationships was pointed out by Rabbi Steven Weil, in Jewish Action (see [www.ou.org/jewish\\_action/11/2013/inclusion](http://www.ou.org/jewish_action/11/2013/inclusion)), the magazine of the Orthodox Union, about his son's participation in Yad B'Yad, Yachad's inclusive travel program in Israel: by teaching children and teens about inclusion, we educate the parents as well.

## 12. HIRE STAFF MEMBERS WITH DISABILITIES

According to congressional testimony, fully 70% of working-aged Americans with disabilities do not participate in the workforce (compared with 28% of people without disabilities). Camps should be a model for hiring people with disabilities: both Jewish young people who can become program and group staff leaders and from among the broader labor pool, for facilities, kitchen and office positions.

## 13. PROVIDE SCHOLARSHIPS TO JEWISH CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES

Disabilities can impoverish people. Paying for treatments, therapies, equipment, and services that help people with disabilities adapt to daily life places extraordinary financial burdens on families because these services are not fully covered by insurance or public funds. Taking advantage of financial assistance is often the only way these families can have any of their children, with and without disabilities, participate in camp and summer programs. Your intake process should make it comfortable for people to ask about financial assistance.

## 14. CREATING A HOME AWAY FROM HOME: MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT OR AFFINITY GROUPS

Support groups for children with disabilities can provide emotional support as they grapple with issues they face during the long days of camp. Parent groups can empower parents who can then become active volunteers, which helps ensure that the programming will be well attended and successful. These support groups do not need to be facilitated by social workers; existing staff and volunteers can be trained to lead them.

Families will join those camp communities that offer their children—all of their children—the most services and are most welcoming. In reaching out to these parents and engaging both their disabled and typically-abled children, your camp helps ensure that as adults, these people with disabilities will be as independent as possible and their typically-abled siblings will not be alone in supporting their welcomed inclusion in the Jewish community.

**The bottom line: Open our doors to Jews with disabilities and we will be enriched by their abilities.** Every person with a disability has strengths, purpose, equal value and a place in the Jewish community. Let's open our tent!

### RESOURCE LIST:

[http://www.amazon.com/Including-People-Disabilities-Faith-Communities/dp/1557667438/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1390264133&sr=8-3&keywords=inclusion+faith+disability](http://www.amazon.com/Including-People-Disabilities-Faith-Communities/dp/1557667438/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1390264133&sr=8-3&keywords=inclusion+faith+disability).

[http://www.jewishfederations.org/local\\_includes/downloads/61299.pdf](http://www.jewishfederations.org/local_includes/downloads/61299.pdf).

<http://www.njcd.org/blog/news/yachad-announces-hineinu-partnership-across-jewish-spectrum-promote-inclusion/>.

[http://www.boardofrabbis.org/files/Jewish\\_Text\\_ResourcesResources.pdf](http://www.boardofrabbis.org/files/Jewish_Text_ResourcesResources.pdf).

<http://rac.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=21379>.