



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preliminary Research on Special Needs in Jewish Overnight Camp

The field of Jewish camp has become increasingly aware of and responsive to the numbers of children with special needs and physical disabilities in recent years. As a first step towards initiating field-wide changes in this arena, Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC) is engaged in a research project mapping current, potential, and desired services available to children with emotional, intellectual, and physical disabilities at nonprofit Jewish overnight camps across North America

Laszlo Strategies delivered the results of the research (conducted in early 2013), the first of its kind in the Jewish community. The survey garnered results from 170 camp staff members (from 124 camps), 262 parents, and 141 campers.

We are pleased to share that the majority of those involved in camp – including staff, campers, and parents - care about this issue and agree that every Jewish child, regardless of a disability or special need, should be able to attend a Jewish camp. Most involved prefer an inclusion model, with clear recognition that not every camp is able to serve every need and that, in some cases, a separate program might be preferable.

While the field is making progress in the types and amounts of services offered, there is still more to be done. Below are the highlights from the survey. The full findings are available at jewishcamp.org/research

ABOUT THE CAMPERS SERVED

The field of Jewish camp is serving 2340 - 2590 children with special needs - more than originally estimated.

- The majority of the special needs population in Jewish camp have neurological disabilities. Few camps are equipped at this time to properly serve children with more significant/complicated disabilities.
- 43% attend public school, 4% of these children attend Jewish day school, and 24% attend a specialty school for children with disabilities. 43% attend a synagogue based religious school and 47% had attended a Jewish day camp.
- 93% of parents were satisfied/extremely satisfied with their child's experience at Jewish overnight camp.

ABOUT CAMP STAFF & PROGRAMMING

36% of camps offer special programs for this population.

- 55% of camps have a designated staff member (part time or fulltime) to oversee campers with special needs. This staffer engages with the family during the intake process, selects and trains camp staff, acts as a support during crisis situations, communicates with parents and other outside supports, creates and evaluates individual camper plans.
- Inclusion camp staffs appear to want the non-inclusion staff and campers to have a better understanding of their population.
- Parents of special needs campers are extremely satisfied with the way camps are infusing Jewish values/learning for this population of campers.

BARRIERS AND PERCEPTIONS

- The biggest barriers to serving more children with special needs are not attitudes or wheelchair ramps– rather lack of training and knowledge followed by funding. 75% of camps report that tuition for special needs campers is the same or lower than typical campers. 47% of parents report the cost of overnight camp as a barrier.
- It is not as important as previously thought that siblings attend the same camp. 43% of parents report “it would be nice, but it is more important that they go to the camp that best serves their individual needs.
- Parents report the biggest factor in choosing a camp for a child with special needs are:
 - 43% - the camp offers good supports and accommodations for children with a disability like my child
 - 34% - It is a Jewish camp where my child can connect to our heritage and community
- More camps are serving children with disabilities/special needs than are advertising it to the public through their websites and marketing materials.

NEXT STEPS

FJC is currently creating a plan of action to advance the field of Jewish camp in this arena including convening experts in the field of camping and special needs which will take place in the fall of 2013. This plan will be revealed in the winter of 2014.