



# Expanding the Circle of Jewish Camp

*An Evaluation of the RSJ Camper  
Outreach Initiative*

APRIL 2018

Prepared for  
Genesis Philanthropy  
Group

Prepared by  
Informing Change

INFORMING   
CHANGE

# Table of Contents

---

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>The RSJ Campers &amp; Families</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>RSJ Campers’ Experience</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Jewish Outcomes for RSJ Campers &amp; Counselors</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Recruitment, Retention &amp; Financial Aid</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Implications of Evaluation Findings</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Appendix A: Methods .....	A1
Appendix B: Enrollment by Year .....	B1
Appendix C: Enrollment by Camp .....	C1
Appendix D: Camp Director Suggestions for Changes & Additions .....	D1

# Introduction

---

## THE INITIATIVE

Created by the Genesis Philanthropy Group and conducted in partnership with the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC), the Russian-Speaking Jewish Camp Outreach Initiative (RSJ Initiative) works to engage more campers and staff from the Russian-speaking Jewish (RSJ) community in North American Jewish camps. A grant from Genesis Philanthropy Group to FJC supports 15 camps in building capacity to recruit RSJ campers as well as provide the campers with a high quality camp experience.

FJC, in consultation with Genesis Philanthropy Group, chose the camps for the Initiative based on a number of factors, including proximity to RSJ population, type of Jewish content provided by camps, and camp interest in participating in the Initiative. FJC supports these camps with outreach to and recruitment of RSJ campers, staff training, program planning, and consultation on strategies for marketing to RSJ families. In addition, FJC has worked to increase recruitment of RSJ campers through the One Happy Camper® (OHC) incentive program and camp scholarships.

## THE EVALUATION

In August 2017, the Genesis Philanthropy Group engaged with Informing Change to evaluate the RSJ Initiative, guided by the following four questions:

1. To what extent have the camps in the Initiative **created camp experiences that attract and retain RSJ campers?**
2. To what extent have the camp experiences increased **RSJ campers' and their families' connection to and engagement with the Jewish community?**
3. To what extent have the camp experiences increased **RSJ staff's connection to and engagement with the Jewish community?**
4. How have camps **adapted to successfully work with RSJ campers and their families? Which practices and approaches are more successful** for creating a camp culture that values RSJ campers and their families?

### One Happy Camper® Grants

In addition to scholarship funds and financial incentives made possible by the Initiative, most RSJ camper families applied for and received One Happy Camper® (OHC) grants. OHC provides need-blind grants ranging from \$700–\$1,000 to children attending a Jewish overnight camp for the first time. The OHC program is managed by Foundation for Jewish Camp.

To answer these questions, Informing Change surveyed campers identified by the Initiative camps as part of the RSJ Initiative; camps could choose either an online version or a paper version for their campers. We interviewed camp directors from the camps in the RSJ Initiative, RSJ camp counselors from participating camps, and FJC

staff. In addition, we analyzed camper enrollment data from camps and a subset of FJC's One Happy Camper® Parent Survey data that included all identifiable RSJ campers and families, based on parents' country of origin, between 2014 and 2017 (n=99).<sup>1</sup> A more detailed look at the data collection methods used in this evaluation can be found in Appendix A.

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, OHC Parent Survey data always refer to the subset of data for identifiable RSJ campers and families (n=99).

---

# The RSJ Campers & Families

---

## DATA ON RSJ CAMPERS & FAMILIES

### Highlights:

- **A similar proportion of girls and boys from RSJ families attend camp; however, boys go to camp at a younger age than girls do.**
- **A significant number of RSJ campers have attended an Initiative camp more than once.**
- **The majority of RSJ families are engaged in some Jewish activities prior to their child attending a Jewish overnight camp. Families practice Jewish customs or celebrate Jewish holidays at home, although only some are connected to organizations or institutions in the Jewish community.**
- **Results from the RSJ Camper Survey indicate that going to camp has a larger impact on campers' beliefs and attitudes, and less of an impact on their behaviors.**

Since 2013, the RSJ Initiative has helped 15 camps enroll approximately 1,300 new and returning RSJ campers in their programs.<sup>2</sup> In order to get a clearer understanding of these campers, their motivations, and their experiences at camp, the evaluation team collected information from the RSJ campers themselves as well as information about their families. We collected new information through Informing Change's RSJ Camper Survey, and we conducted new analyses of information previously collected from RSJ families through FJC's One Happy Camper® (OHC) incentive program.<sup>3</sup>

- The RSJ Camper Survey provides information from the campers themselves. It captures information about the RSJ campers' motivations for attending camp, their experiences at camp, and what impacts, if any, camp had on their attitudes or behaviors.
- The OHC Parent Survey, administered after a family has applied for the OHC grant, but before camp begins, provides information on the RSJ families' personal background, financial situation, and prior engagement with the Jewish community.

The RSJ family response rates for the OHC Parent Survey by camp are generally similar to response rates by camp of the RSJ campers for the camper survey, giving us some confidence that the family data analyzed and included in this report generally represents the same population as the data from the camper evaluation. Using both of these data sources—camper data from the RSJ Camper Survey and RSJ family data from the OHC Parent Survey—we can compile a more complete picture of the typical RSJ family and their children who attended Initiative camps.

---

<sup>2</sup> This figure represents the number of camper-summer, not unduplicated individual campers (e.g., one individual who attended camp for three summers is counted three times).

<sup>3</sup> Additional information on enrollment numbers by camp is available in Appendix B.

---

## MEET THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING JEWISH FAMILIES

<b>The Typical RSJ Family...</b>	<b>Has roots in Eastern Europe, and currently lives in the United States.</b>	<b>Has limited connections to the organized Jewish community, but celebrates Jewish holidays and participates in cultural events.</b>
	<b>Has two children, though only one is applying to attend camp, generally during the middle school years.</b>	<b>Reports earnings ranging from less than \$50,000 to \$149,999 annually.</b>

The subset of OHC Parent Survey data describes RSJ families that have roots in Eastern Europe, report a wide range of incomes, are minimally engaged in Jewish activities outside of the home, and generally not connected with Jewish camp prior to receiving the OHC grant.

Anecdotal data from camp directors and FJC staff suggest that a significant portion of the RSJ families have been in the United States for some time. Though these families have roots outside of the United States (Exhibit 1), camp directors primarily describe interactions with RSJ families and children who are well established in their communities and schools, and even an RSJ parent who had attended Jewish camp in the U.S. as a child. Data from the OHC Parent Survey seem to support some of these staff observations. Although many children from RSJ families attended camp for the first time with the help of an OHC grant, a segment of the population reported connections to the camp community through their own or another family member’s participation in camp. Even though some families have members who speak only Russian and need translators, camp directors note that most of their RSJ families communicate solely in English and might even feel offended if they received materials in Russian as part of this evaluation. The RSJ families that camps are targeting today seem to be different from the RSJ families that came to the United States in the 1990s and were disconnected from their Jewish heritage and the Jewish community.

Exhibit 1

### The majority of RSJ families are from Russia or Ukraine.

OHC Parent Survey | n=198<sup>4</sup>

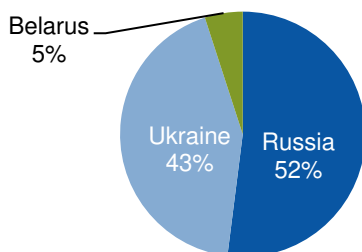
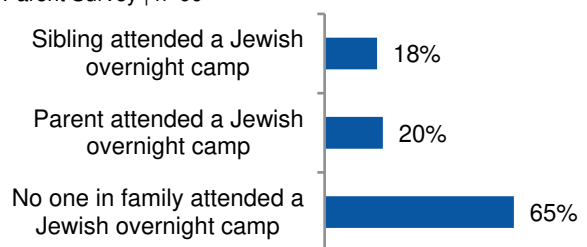


Exhibit 2

### Most families do not have a connection to the Jewish camp community.

OHC Parent Survey | n=99



More than one-third of the families indicate that someone in their family, either a parent or a child, had previously attended camp (Exhibit 2), and more than one-third report that they are members of a temple or synagogue (Exhibit 3). Though a significant number of families report few connections to Jewish institutions like a synagogue or a JCC, the families are not completely disconnected from Judaism (Exhibit 3). Most of the families indicate that they celebrate Jewish holidays or participate in cultural events, and almost half say their children participate in Jewish youth group activities. The changing makeup of RSJ families in North America, from recent

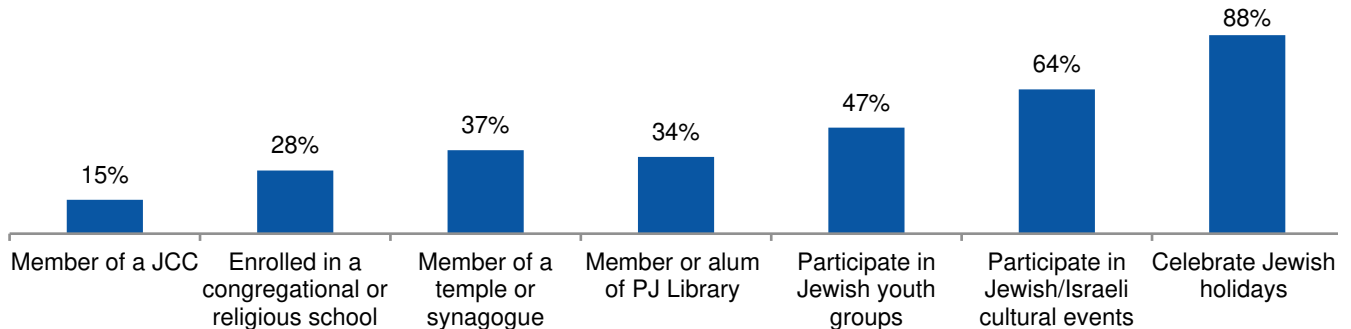
<sup>4</sup> Country of origin was collected for both parents from all 99 respondents.

immigrants to established families, has important implications for camp recruitment and retention, and is discussed in more depth later in this report.

Exhibit 3

**RSJ families have some connections to the Jewish community.**

OHC Parent Survey; n=99



When asked about their child’s frequency of engagement in Jewish activities, fewer RSJ OHC recipients report that their child participates in organized Jewish activities on a regular basis (ranging from daily to every few months) compared with the general OHC population. Most notably, only 43% of RSJ families say their child is attending a Hebrew or religious school compared with 81% of families in the general OHC population that report their child is attending a Hebrew or religious school. In addition, only 55% of RSJ families report that their child attends synagogue or temple services compared with 89% of families in the general OHC population. RSJ families and the general OHC population report that their child participates in Jewish youth group activities at similar rates (47% and 55%, respectively) and in JCC programs at the same rate (33% each).

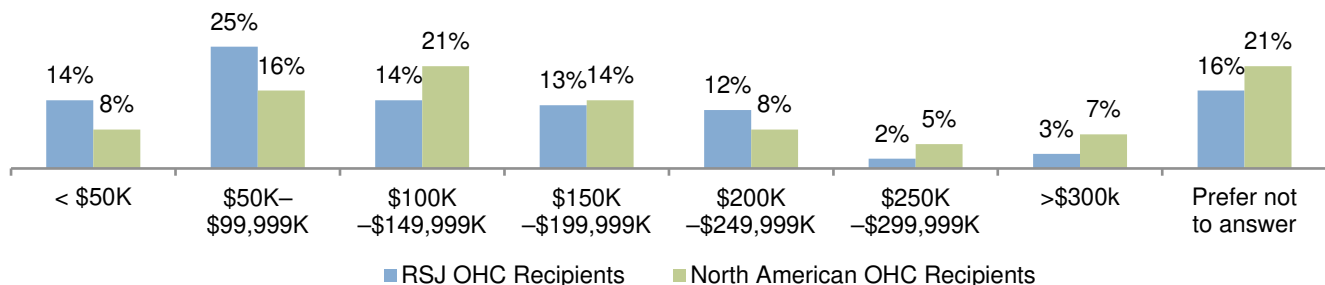
According to the OHC Parent Survey, the majority (60%) of RSJ families have two children; however, generally only one child is being sent to camp. Of the children attending camp, slightly more than half are of middle school age (54%), and about one-third are in high school.

RSJ families report varying income levels, with slightly more than one-third (39%) of RSJ families that answered the question reporting incomes ranging from less than \$50,000 to \$99,999, and roughly one-quarter (27%) reporting incomes between \$100,000 and \$199,999. The remaining survey respondents that reported an income (17%) said their income ranged between \$200,000 and \$300,000 (Exhibit 4). Overall, RSJ families that completed the OHC Parent Survey report similar income levels as the rest of the North American families that completed the OHC Parent Survey, with only slightly more RSJ families (66%) than North American families (59%) reporting incomes of \$199,999 or less.

Exhibit 4

**RSJ families have a wide range of income levels.**

OHC Parent Survey North American Data n=3,181 | OHC Parent Survey RSJ subset n=83



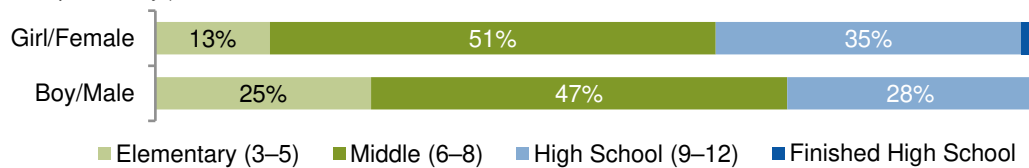
## RSJ Campers

From the RSJ Camper Survey, we get a closer look at the RSJ campers themselves. A roughly similar percentage of campers who completed the survey describe themselves as boys (44%) or girls (55%). Similar to the data provided by parents in the OHC Parent Survey, the RSJ Camper Survey data showed that the majority are in middle school. In the middle and high school age range, the proportions of girls and boys are similar, but at the elementary school level there are slightly more boys than girls (Exhibit 5). This seems to suggest, maybe not surprisingly, that RSJ families feel comfortable sending boys to camp at a younger age than girls.

Exhibit 5

### Among RSJ campers of elementary school age, more boys than girls attend camp.

RSJ Camper Survey | n=126<sup>5</sup>



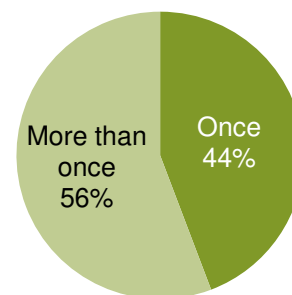
Slightly more than half of the campers responding to the RSJ Camper Survey indicate they attended an RSJ Initiative Camp two or more times between 2013 and 2017 (Exhibit 6). The remaining survey respondents indicate they attended an RSJ Initiative Camp only once since the Initiative began in 2013.

The descriptions of RSJ campers and their families in this section accurately reflect the information obtained through Informing Change's RSJ Camper Survey and FJC's OHC family surveys. It is worth noting, however, that the RSJ camper community in North America extends beyond those who have participated in RSJ Initiative camps, and encompasses families that have sent their children to non-Initiative camps, with and without OHC grants.

Exhibit 6

### The majority of RSJ campers attended an RSJ Initiative Camp more than once.

RSJ Camper Survey | n=141



<sup>5</sup> One camper in the ninth grade prefers to self-describe their identity.



# RSJ Campers' Experience

## Highlights:

- RSJ campers are having great camp experiences that extend beyond just the camp session.
- Most RSJ campers are returning to camp in subsequent years.
- By training staff and equipping them to build a culture of general inclusivity at camp, camps ensure that RSJ campers feel welcomed and comfortable.

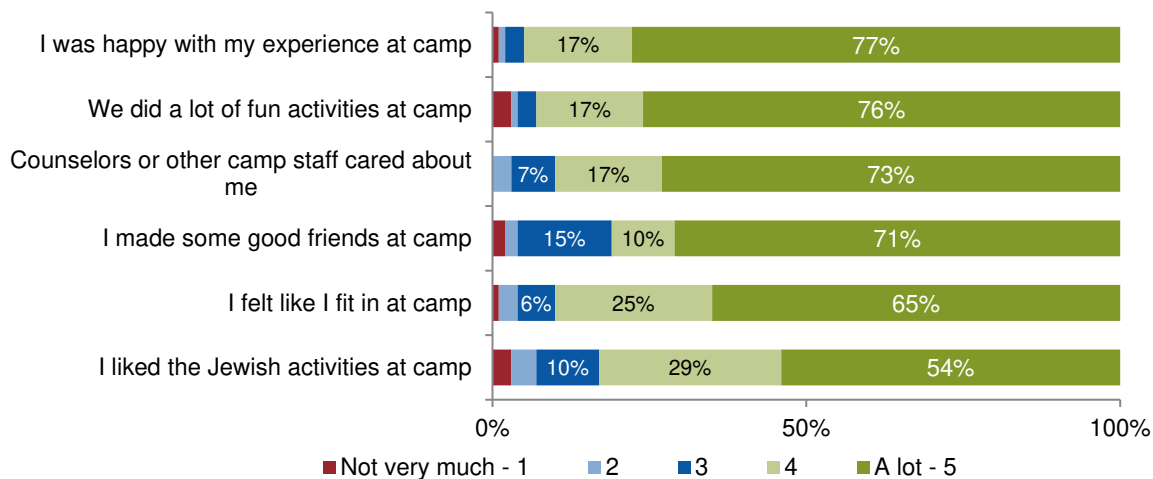
## CAMP IS FUN

**Overall, RSJ campers are very happy with their camp experience.** Almost all campers report that they had fun and felt included within the camp community. Approximately three-quarters of campers who responded to our survey (71–77%) agree that they were happy with their experience at camp, that they did a lot of fun activities at camp, that camp staff cared about them, and that they made good friends at camp (Exhibit 7). Looking at all of the types of camp experiences respondents were asked about, 93% of survey respondents gave all of their experiences a “3” or higher, and one-third (33%) gave every single experience a “5”, indicating very high satisfaction with their camp experience.

Exhibit 7

### RSJ campers have fun and connect with peers and adults at camp.

RSJ Camper Survey | n=136–140



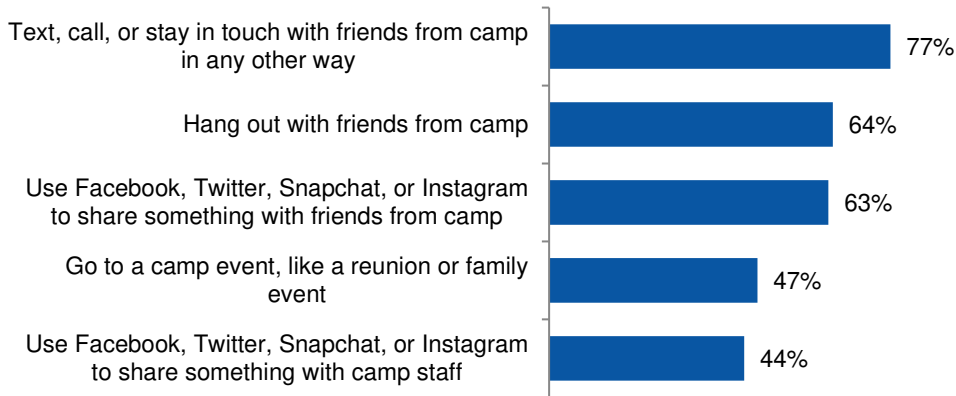
**Not only do RSJ campers have great experiences while at camp, they also remain engaged afterward.**

Almost all (89%) of campers report that they stayed connected to camp in some way, particularly with their community of Jewish peers. Texting, calling, staying in touch with, and hanging out with friends from camp are the most common ways RSJ campers stay connected to that community (Exhibit 8). In addition, the majority of campers also use social media to stay in touch with their friends. Impressively, **almost half of RSJ campers say that after camp they attended a camp event, such as a reunion or family event**; this proportion is substantial considering the logistics of attending a camp event versus staying in touch on social media.

Exhibit 8

**RSJ campers stay connected after camp ends, both virtually and in person.**

RSJ Camper Survey | n=137–141



*“Although I only went to camp for one year so far, I have made friends that forever changed my life! I have already visited my camp friends in Oregon multiple times and they come to visit me. I call my camp friends on the phone literally every night and I come to them with every one of my problems.”*

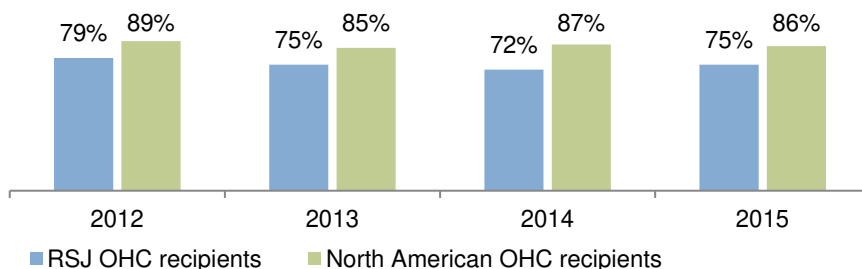
– RSJ Camper

In addition to staying in touch with camp friends and staff, RSJ campers are also returning to camp the next year to continue the fun. Based on the data from One Happy Camper® (OHC), **three-quarters of RSJ campers receiving OHC grants return to camp for another summer** (Exhibit 9). Initiative grant reports and camp director interviews indicate a slightly lower rate of retention, roughly 65%, for RSJ campers enrolled through the Initiative. Camp directors we spoke to in interviews were satisfied with their RSJ camper retention rates—all but one said that retention rates were similar or just a bit lower than their general camp population. One camp director said their camp has a higher rate of retention among the RSJ campers.

Exhibit 9

**A high proportion of RSJ OHC recipients return to camp the following summer.**

2017 OHC Retention Survey | North American OHC recipients n=1,014–1,480 | RSJ OHC recipients n=19–44



While the retention rates reported to OHC by RSJ campers are lower than those for all North American OHC recipients, these rates are still **high compared with typical retention rates** at Jewish overnight camps and at summer camps in general. Data collected by JData at Brandeis University from more than 100 of FJC’s member camps in 2015 shows an average camper retention rate of 72%<sup>6</sup>; looking exclusively at new campers from the previous summer, JData found the retention rate to be lower, at 62%.<sup>7</sup> An American Camping Association survey of 295 of its camps in 2017 found that only 38% of those camps could report retention rates of 70% or higher.<sup>8</sup>

Camp seems to be having indelible impacts on campers’ lives. When asked to name something big that changed in their lives because of going to camp, many campers identified changes in their knowledge and attitudes about Jewish life (described in detail in “Jewish Outcomes for RSJ Campers and Counselors,” beginning on page 12); 39% of campers reported making lasting social connections; 23% described improving their social skills, confidence, and independence; and 11% reported feeling like part of a community.

*“I made a vast network of friends from Israel to DC to Minnesota to California. I know Jewish people of all ages from college grads to little kids. I know Jews going to colleges all over the U.S. and Israel and because of camp I have greatly improved my connections and made many friendships.”*

– RSJ Camper

*“My whole life changed. At first I was a very shy person who didn’t have many friends, but after my first year of camp I was able to break out of my shell, and make new eternity-lasting friends that I talk to every day.”*

– RSJ Camper

## CULTIVATING INCLUSIVITY AT CAMP

As part of the Initiative, camps are asked to have at least two North American RSJ camp counselors on their summer staff. Camps can send these counselors to the annual Hadracha Institute training put on by FJC. Meeting the target of sending two North American RSJ counselors to the institute was difficult for most of the camps in the Initiative; however, most camps that sent staff to the Hadracha Institute describe positive benefits for their camp, the RSJ counselors, or both. Topics addressed at the Hadracha Institute include:

- Russian Jewish heritage, including migration history
- Jewish and Israeli history
- Jewish experiential education at camp
- Building community at camp
- Making Jewish education at camp relevant to campers who are not observant or have low levels of Jewish engagement
- Songs, games, and evening activities suited to camps that have RSJ campers

*“[Working at camp] is incredibly exhausting—you put in so much time and energy for the kids—and so much fun and so rewarding as well.”*

– RSJ Camp Staff

---

<sup>6</sup> The average camper retention rate in the Brandeis study may or may not have excluded those who were too old to return to camp, and therefore may not be directly comparable to OHC data.

<sup>7</sup> JData. (2016). Foundation for Jewish Camp: Summer 2015—Census Report. Retrieved April 4, 2018, from [https://www.jdata.com/documents/pages/Overnight\\_Camp\\_Report\\_Summer\\_2015.pdf](https://www.jdata.com/documents/pages/Overnight_Camp_Report_Summer_2015.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Povilaitis, V. (n.d.). Camper Enrollment Report 2017. Retrieved April 4, 2018, from [https://www.acacamps.org/sites/default/files/resource\\_library/2017\\_CamperEnrollmentReport.pdf](https://www.acacamps.org/sites/default/files/resource_library/2017_CamperEnrollmentReport.pdf).

- Typical RSJ parent concerns about sending their children to camp
- Camper care (e.g., dealing with children’s homesickness, sadness, bunk conflicts, quarrels)

## Ensuring Camper & Parent Comfort

According to the Initiative camp directors, the biggest reason to have North American RSJ camp counselors is to reassure some of the RSJ families who like knowing they can speak in Russian with a counselor if needed. A few directors report that when an RSJ camper had a problem, they made sure the child had a chance to talk with an RSJ camp counselor, in anticipation of a possible call from the parent. A couple of camps also report that their Russian-speaking administrative staff members and their RSJ recruiter successfully handled calls from concerned parents during camp sessions.

*“When kids come to camp, they’re campers, regardless if they’re part of an RSJ community, a Hebrew-speaking population, any of those identifiers. They’re at camp and just happy to be there. Sometimes it’s nice to have a conversation with someone who also had parents who were born in FSU, that might create some comfort. But I think [having RSJ staff] is more reassuring to the family, because it gives that credibility of ‘Okay, this place is good, this place is okay.’”*

– Camp Director

However, the consensus about RSJ campers was that they just want to fit in with their peers and do not want to be singled out as different. They have little to no interest in the presence of RSJ counselors. Interestingly, a few directors also note that their young adult RSJ camp counselors worry about becoming labeled as “the RSJ staff,” and do not want to be perceived as different from other counselors. In fact, one director was unaware the camp had two RSJ staff members until it came up during an icebreaker game. The camp now asks for language skills on its staff applications to help identify staff with RSJ backgrounds.

Some camp directors report that the Hadracha Institute training helped to increase overall camp awareness of inclusion issues. Attending the training helped their young adult counselors reflect on their RSJ identity, which in turn made them more thoughtful about their camp role.

*“We have someone who speaks Russian as part of our full-time [year-round] team. She’s very good with the families and if there’s ever any challenges with the RSJ kids, we have her and other resources ... to communicate with kids we may have challenges communicating with.... But she doesn’t want to be known as an RSJ staff member when we’re at camp.”*

– Camp Director

## Inclusive Programming

Although the North American RSJ camp counselors were meant to serve as a resource and support for RSJ campers during their camp experience, neither they nor their camp directors saw that as their most important contribution to camp. Camp directors say that the counselors who attended the Hadracha training were more aware of inclusion issues and knew what to do to create an inclusive atmosphere at camp. The RSJ camp counselors describe their most important work as serving all campers. When describing their responsibilities during their interviews, these RSJ camp counselors recall being conscientious about keeping their assigned groups of campers safe, supervising their activities and always knowing their whereabouts, and providing security at

night by sleeping in the cabins. These counselors say they supported all the campers by getting to know them, helping them to have fun, building community, and making sure everyone was treated equally.

Camp directors and FJC staff believe the RSJ Initiative motivated and supported camps to be more inclusive of campers from diverse backgrounds, not only RSJ campers. For example, one camp director says the Initiative made them aware their prayer services needed to accommodate a wider range of Jewish knowledge and observance levels, which then led them to examine other program areas. Through this examination, a decision was made at the camp to hire a Director of Jewish Education charged with making all Jewish life elements comfortable for the full range of camper backgrounds. Another camp added a “Jews around the World” short program for its middle school age campers. Camp directors at a few camps say they have more “telling your story” moments, when all campers are invited to share something about their background, where their grandparents and other family members are from, and examples of family traditions. Inclusion has also become a new focus for camp staff trainings—most camp directors say they incorporate RSJ awareness into the trainings, along with more attention in general to inclusion.

### Activities for RSJ Campers

A few of the RSJ camp staff we spoke to in our interviews initiated specific activities for RSJ campers. They included:

**An RSJ tea time** during which RSJ campers were welcome to bring non-RSJ friends

**A weekly Russian cultural club** featuring tea, cookies, Russian cartoons and games, and Russian language lessons

What seems to have the biggest impact on an RSJ camper’s experience is being at a camp where staff are equipped with the training, ability, and knowledge to build a culture of inclusivity at camp for all. In addition to their heightened awareness created by Initiative training and coaching, camp leaders say they are paying more attention to inclusive policies and programs because of a more diverse Jewish camp population overall and a greater interest in pluralistic environments. In Jewish camps across North America, FJC staff say they are observing a greater awareness of diversity and inclusion, resulting in program additions or adjustments.

# Jewish Outcomes for RSJ Campers & Counselors

## Highlights:

- The majority of campers report some Jewish changes after attending camp.
- About one-third of campers report big changes for many of the Jewish items asked about on the survey.
- RSJ campers report more changes in their feelings or knowledge about Judaism and being Jewish than they report changes to Jewish behaviors after attending camp. Campers who have attended camp more than once generally do not report more changes than campers who have attended camp only once.

## POSITIVE JEWISH CHANGES FOR RSJ CAMPERS

As described earlier, some RSJ campers come to camp already connected to Judaism in some way, whether formally through an organization or informally through family practices. Even so, roughly one-third of campers report that attending camp made a big change in how they feel or think about Jewish things.

Campers report the most amount of change, either a little or a lot, in how much they know about Judaism, and report similar changes in other items related to gaining knowledge about Judaism or their family’s history (Exhibit 10). On the other hand, RSJ campers report slightly fewer changes in how they think or feel about certain activities, especially involvement in Jewish things like youth groups, volunteer opportunities, or other camps, or engaging in Jewish actions such as celebrating holidays, talking about Judaism with their parents, or saying prayers (Exhibit 11).

Exhibit 10

### Attending camp increased most RSJ campers’ knowledge and interest about Judaism.

RSJ Camper Survey | n=116–125

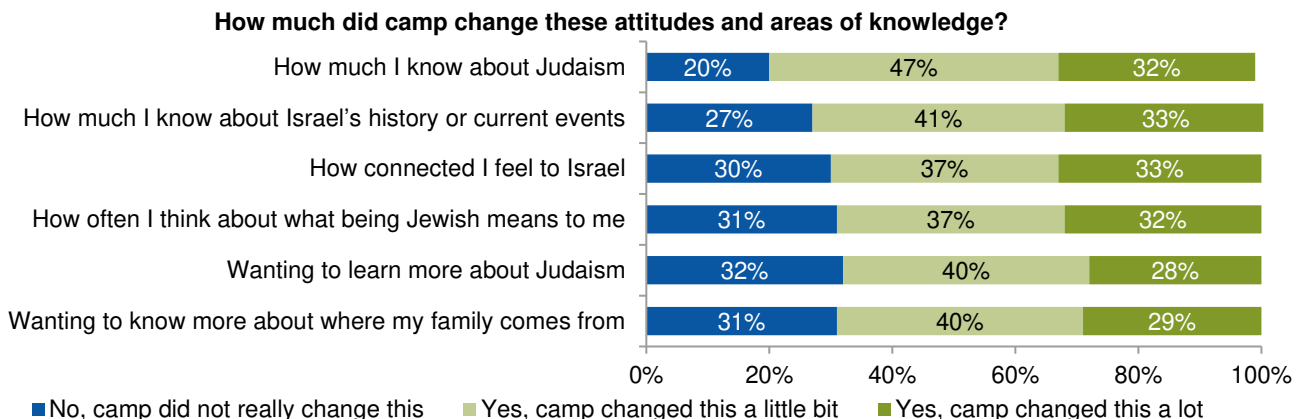
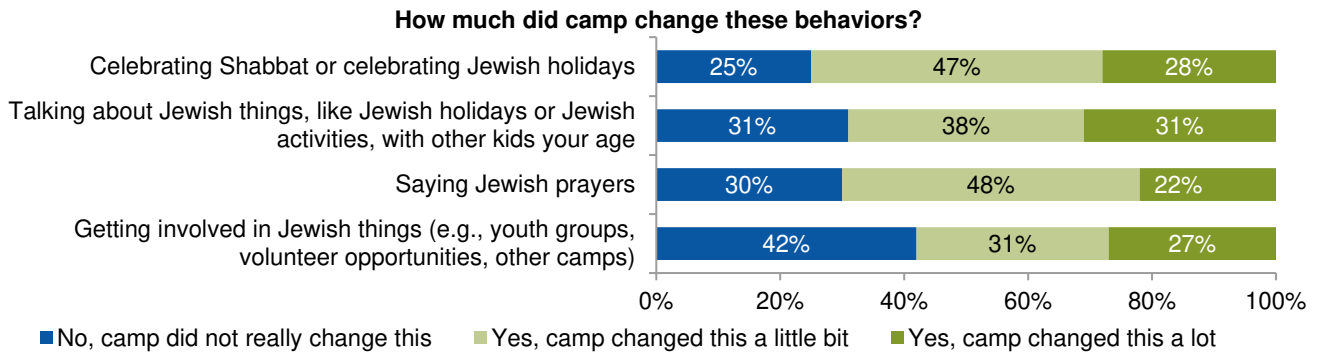


Exhibit 11

**About half of the RSJ campers say camp changed the level of their involvement in Jewish activities and actions.**

RSJ Camper Survey; n=116–125

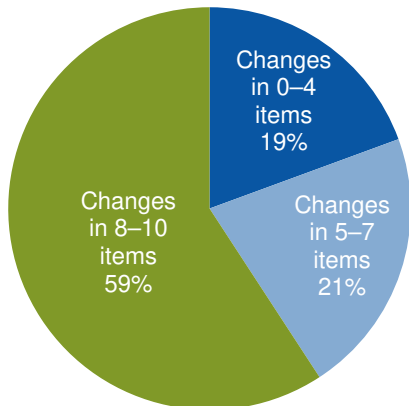


Interestingly, there were no significant relationships between camp attendance (how many times a camper attended an Initiative camp) and how many items campers reported a change in because of camp. That is to say, those campers who attended an Initiative camp more than once did not report more changes than campers who attended an Initiative camp only once. Even so, looking across all of the items that could have changed for campers because of camp (i.e., items listed in Exhibits 10 and 11), we see that many of the campers report a little or a lot of change in how they think or feel about the majority of topics. More than half of campers report a little or a lot of change to eight or more of the ten items (Exhibit 12).<sup>9</sup>

Exhibit 12

**RSJ campers report changes in their feelings and knowledge about Judaism and being Jewish.**

RSJ Camper Survey | n=98



In addition to changes in perception of Judaism and Jewish activities, many campers report continued engagement in Jewish behaviors, some report adopting new behaviors since returning home from camp, and some report interest in engaging in new Jewish activities (Exhibit 13).

The majority of RSJ campers report that they were already engaged in some Jewish activities at home before camp, such as celebrating Jewish holidays or talking to their parents about Jewish things. Given that the majority of RSJ campers were already engaged in these behaviors, it is not surprising that only a few (6%) report changes after camp.

Approximately half of the RSJ campers say that they did not engage in Jewish volunteer activities, youth groups, or any other Jewish-related thing outside their home, and that attending camp did not change their engagement

levels. Only about one-quarter to one-third of campers (26%–31%) report that they did participate in new Jewish activities outside the home because of camp, or that they want to participate in new Jewish activities since returning home from camp.

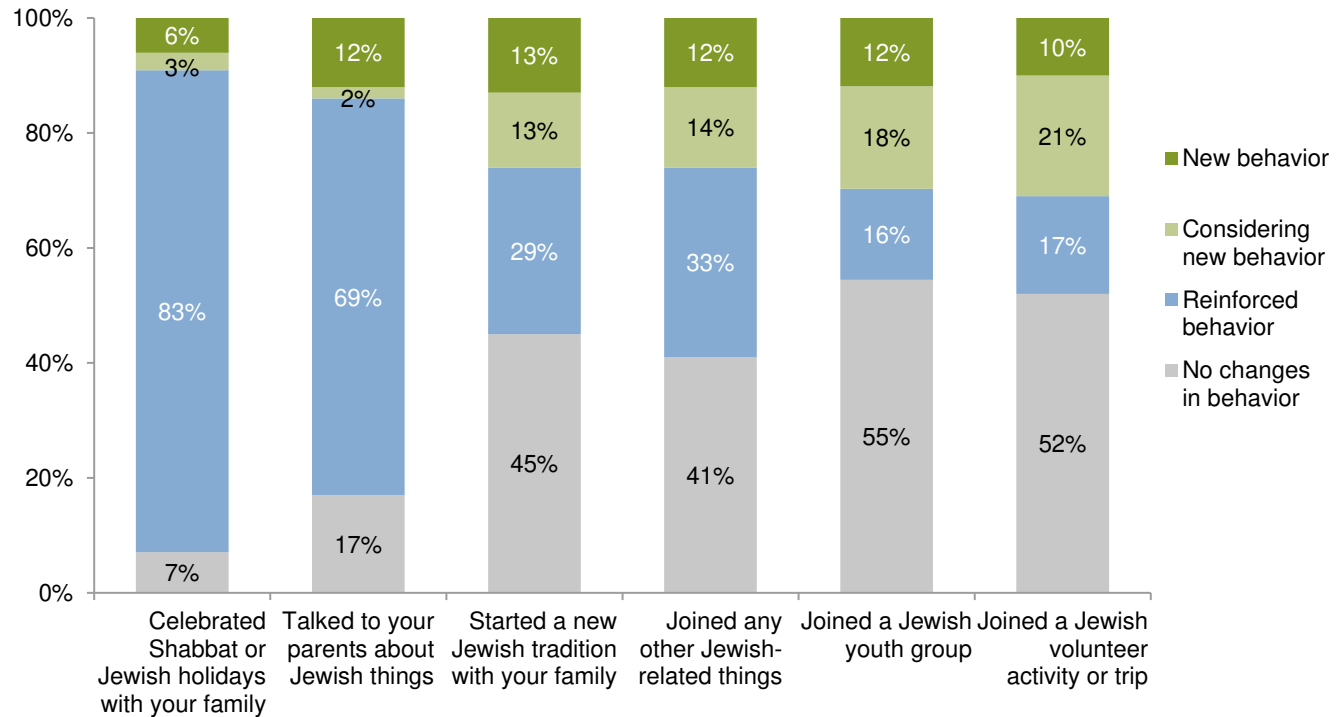
<sup>9</sup> The 10 items are: 1) Wanting to know more about where my family comes from; 2) Wanting to learn more about Judaism; 3) How often I think about what being Jewish means to me; 4) How connected I feel to Israel; 5) How much I know about Israel's history or current events; 6) How much I know about Judaism; 7) Getting involved in Jewish things (e.g., youth groups, volunteer opportunities, other camps); 8) Saying Jewish prayers; 9) Talking about Jewish things, like Jewish holidays or Jewish activities, with other kids your age; and 10) Celebrating Shabbat or celebrating Jewish holidays.

Overall, camp appears to be supportive of youth’s previous connections with the Jewish community, and to some extent is piquing the interest of some campers to engage in Jewish activities. This points to an opportunity for camps to help their RSJ campers make connections to other Jewish organizations and activities outside of camp, so that the RSJ campers who are interested can further engage with the Jewish community.

Exhibit 13

### Camp prompts 3 out of 10 RSJ campers to join or consider joining a Jewish youth activity or youth group.

RSJ Camper Survey | n=117–125



### RSJ CAMP COUNSELORS

Changes to Jewish attitudes and behaviors are not limited to the RSJ campers. All of the North American RSJ camp counselors interviewed for this evaluation described positive Jewish experiences at camp. However, the influence of camp on the counselors’ Jewish identity and their connection to the Jewish community varies, and largely depends on their Jewish connections prior to camp.

For example, a couple counselors report having been active in Jewish groups prior to working at camp, including having attended Jewish camp as campers. These counselors talked about traditions and prayers learned at camp and integrated into their daily lives. Another counselor credits camp for helping her reconnect to Judaism after years of disconnection while in college. For another counselor, who had never been to camp, working at camp allowed her to gain a new and more positive perspective on Judaism.

*“A mom called me and said, ‘I want you to know that my son just walked out of a Bar Mitzvah at a synagogue wearing a kippah. He didn’t just shove it in his pocket. I’ve never seen him keep a kippah on his head. Because of camp, he felt more comfortable and he was okay wearing it. That’s a huge step for my son.’”*

–Camp Director



All of the counselors described strong friendships and bonds with other camp counselors. All say they continue to stay in touch with friends from camp through texts, phone calls, social media, and getting together in person to spend time together. Similar to campers, the RSJ counselors left camp with a strong sense of belonging to the Jewish community they created together while at camp.

It is not clear from the interviews whether the counselors' experiences at camp changed their level of participation with Jewish organizations or the broader Jewish community. Their camp experiences seem to have had greater influence on their attitudes and beliefs than on their behaviors, such as engagement with the Jewish community outside of camp.

*“[Camp] taught me different aspects of Judaism. My Judaism can be very different than others’ ... At the beginning it was weird for me and now I’ve learned to appreciate it and I think it’s cool.”*

– RSJ Camp Counselor

*“[Camp] reminds me of what I love about Judaism—the community, the song, the feeling [of] sending out this energy. It’s a very magical place with a Jewish aspect and it helps me keep my Judaism alive.”*

– RSJ Camp Counselor

## Recruitment, Retention & Financial Aid

---

### Highlights:

- In addition to recruiting new campers, camps in the Initiative gained lasting benefits from building relationships in the RSJ community and expanding the circle of RSJ families who can talk about the benefits of camp.
- The two commonly reported challenges in recruitment are the need for multiple interactions to build RSJ families' trust in the camp and its director, and overcoming RSJ parents' resistance to sending their child away from home for a week or more.
- Initiative camps demonstrate a successful rate of retention for RSJ campers, just a bit lower than their overall camper retention rate.
- RSJ families of all economic levels put forward a much smaller proportion of family funds to pay for camp than camp families overall, putting a greater burden on the camps to provide financial aid.

### OUTREACH & MARKETING TO AN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITY

Camp directors say the greatest benefit of the Initiative has been that it allowed their camps to invest in tailored marketing to reach the RSJ community. Without Initiative funding for marketing, the camps would not have focused on understanding this population or developed an outreach plan to reach the RSJ families.

Camp directors have learned that marketing in this community takes more than just advertising and scholarships. Having marketing dollars from the Initiative to hire recruiters and try different marketing activities in a given year was a huge benefit, but the greater benefit has been the word-of-mouth support built among RSJ families and the connections made with the RSJ community, which are now a platform for continued recruitment.

Only 6 of the 15 camp directors say that they had tried to reach RSJ families prior to the Initiative, and that their goal in the Initiative was to better serve their community's RSJ population. For the other camps, the Initiative's appeal was the potential to reach a new population, especially one that seemed to be underserved, and bring the joy of Jewish camp to a wider audience.

FJC staff as well as a few camp directors note that the experience of developing and practicing tactics for reaching the RSJ community provided camps with transferable skills for outreach and recruitment of other target populations.

### What Attracts the Campers

Almost all campers say they attended camp because it sounded fun, they wanted to do the activities at camp, or they wanted to try something new. Though not the top reasons for attending camp, more than three-quarters of

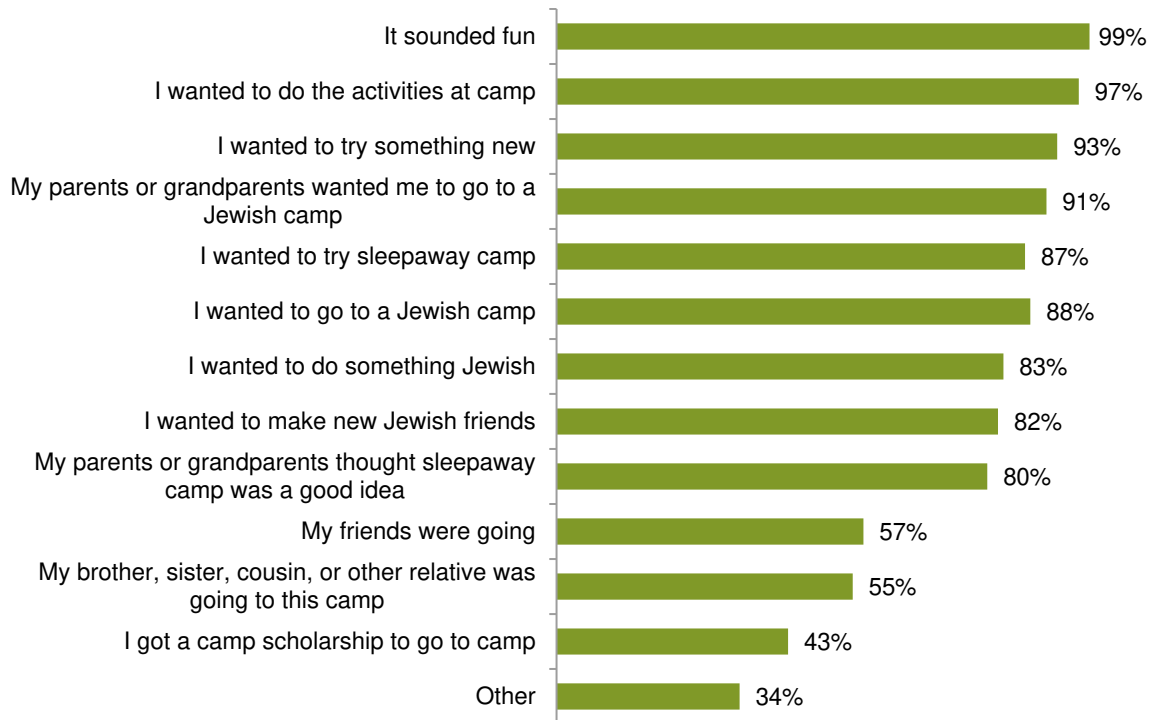
them say they wanted to go to a Jewish camp, wanted to make Jewish friends, or wanted to do something Jewish (Exhibit 14).

Only about half of the campers who completed our survey say they attended camp because a friend or family member was also attending. However, the majority say the wishes of a parent or grandparent was one of the reasons they went to Jewish camp.

Exhibit 14

**RSJ campers are attracted to camp by the activities, the novelty, family encouragement, and the belief that it will be a fun experience.**

RSJ Camper Survey | n=37-135



**REACHING RSJ FAMILIES**

Reflecting on their experiences with recruitment, camp directors emphasize that personal relationships are the key to recruiting RSJ campers. The objective is to build parents’ level of comfort with camp staff, and nothing works better for that than having shared experiences. Joining RSJ families at events, sharing meals and celebrations, conducting personalized tours of the camp site—all of these activities effectively build the comfort and trust needed before the family will enroll their child for the first summer.

At the encouragement of the Initiative, each camp in the Initiative has created its own unique recruitment strategy. Some camps include both parent ambassadors and RSJ family recruiters in their strategy; some camps use only one of these approaches. The role for the camp directors or year-round administrators varies by camp—some directors have low involvement in outreach and financial aid decisions, and others are deeply involved in all aspects of the work, including outreach, handling inquiries, follow-up, financial aid, and finalizing sales.

*“The parents want to know us; they want to know who will be taking care of their child.”*

– Camp Director

## RSJ Family Recruiters

Each camp has determined how to engage an RSJ family recruiter, and therefore the position description and responsibilities vary—from a short-term, part-time position assigned to follow a plan developed by the camp administrators, to a “finder’s fee” model in which the individual recruiter uses his or her own network to promote camp attendance.

Some RSJ family recruiters started in this role with great community connections but no previous camp connections. Others already had a personal connection with the camp—the roster of RSJ recruiters at Initiative camps includes parents and grandparents of RSJ campers, a parent of an RSJ staff member, and someone who was an RSJ camper years ago.

Regardless of the model in use, camp directors recommend finding a recruiter who already has his or her own network of contacts in the RSJ community. Camp directors and FJC staff say it takes either time or luck to find the right person as the recruiter. Several camps report they found a great recruiter their first year in the Initiative, while others say it took two years for their recruiter to fully understand the work. A few describe a difficult first year, followed by redesigning their approach, often redistributing responsibilities across multiple people. Camp directors seek a recruiter who can “sell” the camp experience. For example, after one camp replaced its first recruiter, an experienced outreach worker in the RSJ community, with a Russian speaker who had fewer RSJ connections but “knew camp,” the actual enrollment of RSJ campers increased.

A few camps chose not to bring on a separate RSJ recruiter or transitioned away from having one after the first year in the Initiative. The camp directors at these camps say they encountered no language barriers to communicating with RSJ parents, most of whom were born in the United States. These camps preferred to do RSJ family outreach and recruitment with their regular camper recruitment team.

What is clear, regardless of how a camp does outreach and recruitment, is the importance of having designated, trained individuals to build and maintain relationships with RSJ families in the first year and answer their questions. This can be a part-time RSJ recruiter or a designated, trained administrative staff member who speaks Russian.

## Parent Ambassadors

Several camps are recruiting and retaining RSJ campers with the help of other RSJ camp families, called “parent ambassadors.” Parent ambassadors identify prospective RSJ families in their communities, hold house parties for new families, accompany prospective families on camp visits or at family camp weekends, conduct follow-up calls and meetings with interested families, and introduce the camp director to key communicators in the ambassador’s RSJ community. In return, the family receives some benefit; the different financial benefits include stipends, finder’s fees, and discounted camp fees.

Camp directors who endorse this approach like the exponential nature of the structure: as the number of RSJ camp families grows, the size and reach of their parent ambassador network also grow.

*“The families of RSJ kids who are already campers are great parent ambassadors. They are like our other parent ambassadors who do open houses, and they do just a little bit more to connect us to their community.”*

– Camp Director

## Recruitment Tools

In addition to building person-to-person relationships, the camps need tools (e.g., brochures, videos, websites) that help the families envision the camp activities and environment.

Several camp directors say family days at camp are their most effective recruitment tool because RSJ parents' comfort level with camp staff and the location increase as they see the camp facilities, watch their children participate in typical camp activities, and spend casual time with the camp staff and director. Many of the camps offer or would like to offer an RSJ family camp weekend.

Off-season events—for example, a camp-sponsored Shabbat or Hanukkah party—have also been useful for renewing connections among RSJ campers and their families, as well as providing a chance to be introduced to new families.

Camps' experiences with social media and print advertising varied from good to bad. It is difficult to know whether the variance is due to the skills of the RSJ recruiter, the amount of time spent on media placements, the demographics and social patterns of the local RSJ community, or the types of RSJ media available in different communities. Two camps that are satisfied with their social media recruitment have a paid RSJ recruiter keeping an active presence on RSJ family websites and on Russian-language social media.

*“Advertising was useless.”*

– Camp Director

*“We actively outreach and engage in RSJ online groups, and it brings a lot of leads.”*

– Camp Director

## Parent Patterns

Camps have found some common patterns in their conversations with first-time RSJ camper families. Directors say the RSJ parents ask more questions than families in general. The RSJ parents want more information up front, before making the decision about signing up for camp.

Parents of first-time RSJ campers are very interested in camp safety and supervision. It is important for them to understand what their children will be doing all day, with whom, and the nature of the instruction or supervision. Directors say that RSJ parents seem to have a hard time envisioning having their children completely away and out of sight for a week or longer.

RSJ parents express high interest in program content and program quality, and are pleased to know that their children will gain lasting skills in arts, physical fitness and sports, and science.

The camp directors say the RSJ families often inquire about the Jewish nature of camp (i.e., “How Jewish is your camp?”, “Is your camp religious?”), but no more than other new families. Camp directors say the families are usually satisfied with the description of Jewish life at camp, and about the level of religious observance of the other campers. RSJ families' primary concern is that their child be comfortable with the other Jewish campers. Directors say they rarely get questions about Jewish life from the families referred by other camp families, so they assume that new RSJ families have already asked these questions in their conversations with other camp families.

The concept of camp as a child-focused place separate from school and family life is unfamiliar to many RSJ parents, and very uncomfortable at first. Several directors say it is not unusual for an RSJ family to drop by during the camp session to visit their children, to call the camp for a conversation with their child, or even to expect their

*“Before an RSJ family signs up for camp, there's usually more questions, generally speaking. With most new families I have a 10 or 15 minute call. With many RSJ families, it's 30, 40, 45 minute phone calls, just to get started on ‘Okay, why is the price this way? Who will be watching the kids? What's the logistics on this activity?’”*

– Camp Director

child will keep their cell phone with them and call home at will. These parent behaviors quickly disappear if the camper returns for subsequent summers and the parent becomes comfortable with the routines of camp.

The most troubling of RSJ parent patterns, raised by the majority of camp directors in their interviews, is the resistance to put forward family funds to pay for camp. Camp directors say even after the first summer, it is very difficult to make the case that the price of a week at camp is well matched to its value. Even families with low to moderate financial need seek high levels of discounts or scholarships. This issue is discussed further in the “Role of Financial Aid” section on page 22.

## CHALLENGES IN RECRUITING RSJ FAMILIES

Enrolling new RSJ campers can be a challenge even when camps have entry into the RSJ community and dedicated help from Russian-speaking recruiters. The two most commonly reported challenges are:

- The multiple interactions needed to build RSJ families’ trust in the camp and its director—many of the first-year RSJ families do not have a trusting relationship with anyone at camp.
- The amount of time and effort needed to overcome RSJ parents’ resistance to the concept of overnight camp—sending a child away to camp is not culturally familiar as it is to many American and Western European families. Parents do not want their children to be away from home overnight.

Compared with a camp’s regular recruitment experiences, events for RSJ families turn a much smaller proportion of the “browsers” into buyers, because single events cannot fully address these two challenges. An RSJ family camp, on the other hand, can directly address these challenges by nature of its design. It is not surprising that many directors call family camp their best source of RSJ camper recruitment.

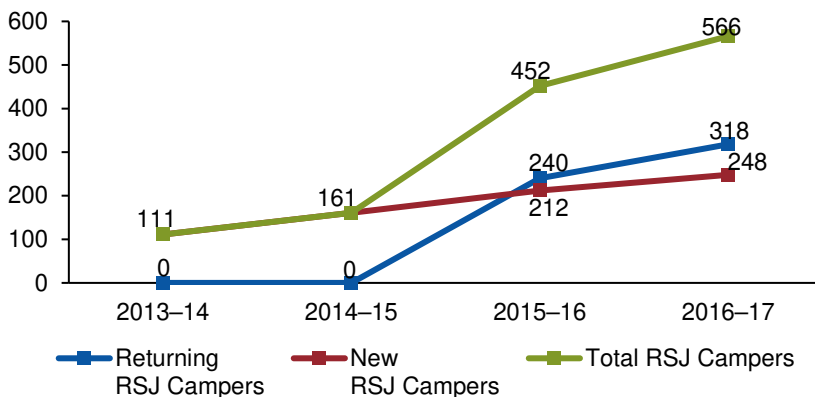
Given the year-to-year funding pattern of the Initiative, most camps contract for short-term (e.g., four to eight months) RSJ recruitment help. However, building trust and word-of-mouth is an ongoing effort, and camp directors would like to implement 12- to 18-month RSJ recruitment plans. Camps would like to have their RSJ recruiters making calls, promoting camp, and participating in RSJ community events year round.

Looking at enrollment trends of the Initiative camps, we see the rate of new RSJ camper enrollment starting to slow down by the fourth summer for the four-year camps, while returning camper numbers continue to rise (Exhibit 15). This may indicate another challenge for camps that have built up a cadre of RSJ campers and families—how to balance outreach and marketing between retaining RSJ campers while also recruiting new ones.

Exhibit 15

### Enrollment Trends of Four-Year Camps

Data from Initiative Grant Reports



Some of the older camps in the Initiative are reflecting on how to integrate RSJ recruitment into their overall camper recruitment strategies. Some approaches used by an RSJ recruiter work well with recent immigrant families that may need special attention, whereas RSJ families that have been in the United States for a long time do not want to be recruited in that way. Camp directors wonder when they should recruit an RSJ family differently, and when they should approach RSJ families like the American-style families that some are striving to be.

## RETAINING RSJ CAMPERS

### Lessons Learned About Recruiting RSJ Families

Camp directors and their staff are accruing knowledge and insight about how to engage with RSJ camper families. Their descriptions of what is working and their lessons learned mirror the advice and best practices of FJC's RSJ consultant. Camp directors shared a long list of lessons learned and advice for camps just coming in to the Initiative, including:

- Find a great recruiter—someone who is already “in” with the local RSJ community.
- Invest in building positive word-of-mouth in the RSJ community—whatever will get families talking and sharing testimonials about the camp, the camp director, or other camp staff.
- Invest time in building the relationship and skills of your first few RSJ connections, whether it is the RSJ recruiter or a couple ambassador families—their knowledge about camp and the director, and their comfort and trust in you, will pay off as their connections multiply and carry the good word forward.
- Think about the two functions needed to complete a successful recruitment: (1) outreach to families, ideally done by a Russian speaker who can find the families and make them comfortable with the idea of overnight camp; and (2) closing the deal. Ideally, the recruiter can also be a successful salesperson and close a camp enrollment deal, but only a couple of directors say this is the case.
- If you are doing specialized outreach to other populations (e.g., LGBT families, specific ethnic groups), create an umbrella outreach strategy that all the different efforts can fit within. Think through the financial incentives and scholarships and have an overall plan so that the RSJ financial aid fits with the others. It is better to invest time up front to plan this than problem solving later.
- Do not start as an Initiative camp if you do not already know someone in RSJ community who can be the camp's initial connection (not the recruiter, just a connection). Without a personal connection for a starting point, the camp will have to spend other camp resources (not grant funds) just to get set up and be able to launch the grant-funded activities.

As is clear to all camps, a healthy percentage of returning campers is critical for the camp's sustainability as well as a sign of happy campers and families: “The importance of return rate should not be underestimated,” say researchers. “Not only is a high return rate ‘good business,’ but it also means that camps have not just one summer in which to influence their campers, but sometimes as many as eight to ten years.”<sup>10</sup>

When asked about why RSJ campers and parents return to camp, directors say they hear the same reasons as from their other families. The children want to return to be with their friends and for the camp activities. RSJ parents have more understanding and confidence about camp life and the camp, and they are more easily persuaded to enroll their children.

*“In the last couple years, recruitment [of new RSJ campers] was easy because retention was so good. What I mean by that is, the word of mouth works. Basically one kid would come, they'd have a great time, they'd tell their friend, and their friend would come the next year.”*

– Camp Director

<sup>10</sup> Sales, A. L., & Saxe, L. (2004). "How Goodly Are Thy Tents": Summer Camps as Jewish Socializing Experiences. Retrieved April 4, 2018, from <http://bir.brandeis.edu/bitstream/handle/10192/26650/Sales.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

However, camp financial aid plays a much more important role in retaining RSJ campers than for the general camper population. RSJ families of all income levels tend to request significant funding support for the second year. This differs from the findings about the overall OHC population—Summation Research Group, Inc. reports that OHC recipients do not request or require higher levels of scholarship support; they receive it at the same rate as other campers.<sup>11</sup> Among the OHC recipients who do seek financial aid in order to return to camp, around 40% say they receive some financial aid from their temple or synagogue; within the overall OHC population, approximately 80% of OHC families are affiliated with a temple or synagogue. In contrast, only 37% of the RSJ families receiving OHC grants report affiliation with a temple or synagogue. It is not surprising that only a very small portion of RSJ families are aware of a temple or synagogue as a source of financial aid for camp (Exhibit 16).

Exhibit 16

**Very few RSJ parents are connected to a temple or synagogue that offers financial incentives or scholarships for overnight Jewish camp.**

N=99 | OHC Parent Survey

Yes	No	Not Sure	Total
5 (5%)	33 (33%)	61 (62%)	99 (100%)

Given the typical requests of second- and third-year RSJ families for significant financial aid packages, camps try to begin conversations about paying for camp early enough (e.g., October–December prior to camp season) for a family to budget for their share of the fees and seek local sources of financial aid. Camp directors say they hesitate to initiate financial aid conversations with RSJ families until after they receive confirmation from FJC about the amount of Initiative scholarship funds they will receive for the coming summer. Unfortunately, such delays in communicating with families and finalizing financial aid decisions often have negative effects: by April and May, certain camp sessions are full, and funds from other scholarship sources have all been awarded.

**ROLE OF FINANCIAL AID**

All camps appreciate and applaud the Initiative’s grant support that made it possible for campers to have a joyful camp experience. Two camp directors note they particularly appreciate being able to offer incentives that are not based on financial need (“need-blind” incentives).

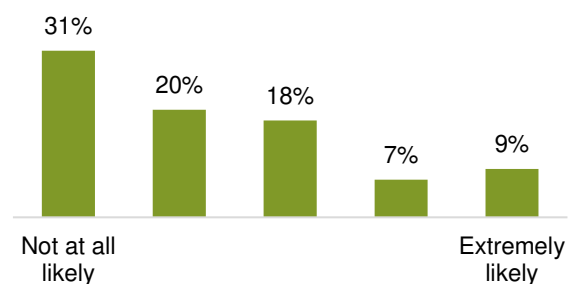
In the OHC data, most RSJ parents report that their child would not have attended a Jewish summer camp without the OHC grant (Exhibit 17). Almost half (46%) said that summer camp would have been too expensive without the grant. It is worth noting that 16% of RSJ parents thought that even without OHC, it was likely or highly likely that their child would have attended camp, indicating that there is some momentum among RSJ families to send their children to camp without a financial incentive.

Exhibit 17

**The OHC incentive greatly increases the chance of RSJ parents sending their child to camp for the first time.**

N=99

Likelihood of Respondent's Child Attending Overnight Jewish Summer Camp Had OHC Not Been Available



<sup>11</sup> Summation Research Group, Inc., & Foundation for Jewish Camp. (2014, September). North American Impact of One Happy Camper Program (OHC). Retrieved April 4, 2018, from [http://www.jewishcamp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2014-OHC-N.-American-Executive-Summary\\_0.pdf](http://www.jewishcamp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/2014-OHC-N.-American-Executive-Summary_0.pdf).

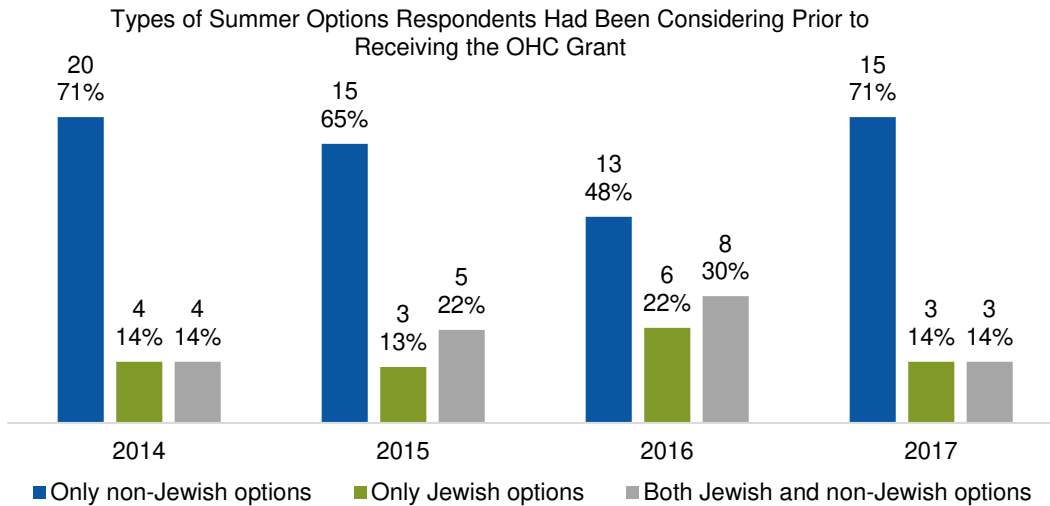


The majority of the RSJ parents (79%) rated the OHC grant application process favorably. The majority of parents say they had been considering only non-Jewish options for their children prior to receiving the OHC grant, highlighting the importance of financial aid for the decision to send their children to a Jewish overnight camp (Exhibit 18).

Exhibit 18

**Receiving an OHC grant enables many RSJ children to have some level of Jewish programming during the summer.**

N=99



**CAMP LEADERS’ PERSPECTIVES ON RSJ FAMILY EXPECTATIONS**

The deepest concerns stated by camp directors are about the cost of recruiting and retaining the campers from RSJ families. Camp directors say the RSJ families request higher levels of scholarship funding than the overall camper population. About half of the directors say that it is difficult to make the case that the value of a week at camp is worth the price—thus the need for a high amount of scholarship funding. Continuing to engage RSJ campers will require continued subsidies for scholarships beyond the OHC first-year grants. Camp directors believe it may require an unrealistic amount of fundraising by their camps to ensure continued growth in the number of RSJ campers after the Initiative.

It is not surprising to hear camp directors question the cost-benefit ratio of marketing efforts and incentives to final enrollment numbers. In Informing Change’s work with other camps, we see that camps must balance their decisions across three outcome areas: enrollment, which is the lifeblood of a camp; program outcomes for campers; and sustainability/business outcomes. Camp leaders may have joined the Initiative with enrollment and program goals in mind, but they still must consider the impact of their program and enrollment decisions on the camp’s bottom line (sustainability/business outcomes).

The Initiative camps vary in their level of concern about future financial aid, based in part on their motivation to participate in the Initiative. The camp directors we interviewed express three categories of motivation for participating in the Initiative.

- Mission driven: to serve children and youth who otherwise would not have a Jewish camp experience, even if it means additional fundraising and/or turning away other campers, even those from families paying the full fee
- Market development: to establish relationships or improve reach in a target community, with expectations of building a base of returning customers and word-of-mouth recruitment support (future benefits)

- Enrollment growth: to increase the number of campers attending their camp and put empty bed spaces to good use

Most camps had at least two of these motivations driving their involvement in the Initiative. The camp directors with the greatest concerns about financial aid were those expressing market development as a key motivator. For them, projected business outcomes over the long term were starting to tip the balance away from the immediate benefits of enrollment growth and engaging an underserved population.

In their interviews, camp directors were often reluctant to discuss their concerns about financial aid. However, by the end of each interview, all reported some degree of struggle with RSJ families' need for financial aid. Directors shared that RSJ families tend to request financial aid beyond what is typical for their camps. One director said their camp provides many families with aid equal to 50% of camp fees, but almost all RSJ families ask for 70% or more. Another camp director said their typical second-year camper financial aid package is about 25% of the fees; RSJ families are requesting 50%. The promise of the OHC program—that after the first summer families will become paying customers—is not coming true for RSJ families as compared to the general OHC population.

Directors admit, reluctantly, that RSJ families need more than a couple years as camper families—perhaps even a generation—to think of Jewish camp as a family commitment to their children, worthy of an ongoing place in the family budget, rather than a decision made year-to-year and dependent on the availability of very reduced fees.

## **OTHER IMPLEMENTATION CONCERNS**

Almost all camp directors expressed plans and ideas for continued work with RSJ recruitment and relationships with the RSJ community after the Initiative. For most of the camps completing their third or fourth year, this intention is due to their sincere enjoyment of their work to date with the RSJ community. A few of the directors of the experienced camps clearly state they are making plans because, in their opinion, they have not been fully successful with RSJ camper recruitment. These camp directors say the number of enrolled campers is smaller than what they expected given all the outreach and recruitment work they did, and they intend to find ways to be more effective. Some say they need to figure out how to grow their RSJ connections beyond their current circle of RSJ families and the networks known by their recruiters.

This concern about how to improve the effectiveness of RSJ marketing is a strong theme in the data from camps and from FJC. Directors of almost all of the smaller camps say they design and implement RSJ recruitment plans as short-term, year-to-year components within the camp's annual work plan, rather than a multi-year strategic approach. This is because they wait until they receive confirmation of Initiative funding to begin implementation and commit scholarship dollars.

Camp directors and FJC staff agree that RSJ marketing is weaker when it is not designed and implemented as part of an annual recruitment strategy. FJC's experts—from the RSJ consultant to the camp director mentor to the camp marketing guru—say a camp needs to have an active year-round recruitment strategy. Recruitment for next summer should begin even before the camper leaves camp. In thinking about the RSJ Initiative, the ideal calendar of outreach and recruitment would be a 15- to 18-month cycle that could engage prospective RSJ families with a camp visit the summer before their child might attend camp and continue the connections all the way through to follow-up conversations after the camper's first experience at camp.

Another weak spot is incomplete market data on RSJ campers. Camp directors, especially of larger camps, say they do not know how many of their campers are from RSJ families, other than those who have been enrolled through the camps' RSJ recruiters or who are being tracked through Initiative financial aid. The directors believe they should use different marketing messages with RSJ parents who have been in the U.S. for decades, compared with parents whose immigration is more recent, but the directors have no information on this. A couple of directors noted that they only recently began asking about language skills on their summer staff applications to see if they could identify RSJ backgrounds among their staff.

Most of the camp directors say they have not received much benefit from the RSJ mentors and coaches provided through the Initiative, but offer no suggestions for how that could be improved. Directors of camps in their fourth year in the Initiative said that meeting leaders of the other camps and sharing knowledge was valuable in their first and second years. Directors of a couple of camps say they needed help at the beginning to “break into the RSJ community” and wished that the Initiative consultant could have helped them more in doing so.

## Implications of Evaluation Findings

---

The findings of this evaluation hold several implications for the Initiative, its design, and future adjustments or expansion.

1. **Marketing** that is tailored for the RSJ community is essential for engaging parents who are unfamiliar or hesitant about overnight camp. Initiative funding for this aspect of a camp's work is extremely helpful: it stimulates focused outreach, allows the camps to engage RSJ culturally competent outreach helpers, and supports the additional staff time necessary for building connections in the RSJ community and trusting relationships with RSJ parents. This focused marketing work builds camps' capacity for future marketing through the RSJ knowledge and connections the camps develop. Focused marketing also builds skills and insights that camps continue to use in other outreach and recruitment efforts, not just their RSJ efforts.
2. Access to **One Happy Camper® incentives** and **camp scholarships** enable the large majority of RSJ campers to attend camp. Continued support of these recruitment tools will be essential not just for growing the number of RSJ campers but also for maintaining attendance by RSJ campers who wish to return for multiple summers.
3. RSJ campers enjoy their camp experiences and feel integrated with the larger camp community. At least two-thirds of them want to return after their first summer. The **need for programmatic support focused on RSJ campers is very low**; funding spent on marketing and scholarships has greater impact on whether campers attend camp.
4. Although RSJ North American camp counselors and their camp directors valued the opportunity to participate in the Hadracha Institute, the role of RSJ camp staff does not significantly affect the RSJ camper experience. A more direct way to support the camps as well as the older RSJ campers and the development of their Jewish identity would be to **support transitions of RSJ campers into Counselor-in-Training programs and junior counselor roles**.
5. Finding ways to change the **mindset of RSJ parents around the value of camp** would be a major benefit to camps that want to serve more RSJ campers. This challenge seems better suited for industry-level thinking with advice from communications experts, rather than asking each camp to work on it alongside their other recruitment work.
6. Camps would improve the effectiveness of their RSJ outreach and recruitment if they had **at minimum a 12-month plan** that they could begin implementing in the fall. A yearlong plan would help camps be more strategic in allocating their recruitment time and dollars.

7. Strong outreach and recruitment plans are built on good data about customers. Initiative camps would benefit from gathering a little **more data**, and more consistent data, **about their RSJ campers and families**. Initiative leaders would then have better aggregated data to use in planning and making decisions about future Initiative directions.
8. Children whose parents are the most recent RSJ immigrants and even children who are the first generation born in North America may face **the most difficult pathway to a summer at Jewish camp**, from financial need and family trust issues to narrow views of summer options and lack of familiarity with families whose children attend camp. This is the priority population for the Initiative's focus, worthy of targeted investments. In addition to providing happy Jewish camp experiences to these new campers, the positive experiences of their families are likely to build awareness of camp among newcomers in the RSJ community and contribute to a growing cultural appreciation of Jewish camp for their sons and daughters. It would be useful if FJC and camps could collect and track data to understand whether the families they are serving are relatively new to North America or longer-term residents.
9. Having even a few **early connections in the RSJ community** facilitates the first year of new Initiative camps' RSJ recruitment. Assistance with local introductions from Initiative leaders at FJC, Genesis Philanthropy Group, or the veteran Initiative camps is extremely helpful and more significant than might be obvious.
10. From interviews with camp directors and FJC staff, a picture of **two stages of RSJ Initiative work** emerged. In Years 1 and 2, camps focus on short-term recruitment needs—whatever they can do to identify and recruit campers to attend the coming camp season. But by Years 3 and 4, the experienced camps are looking at the longer term as well, assessing outreach opportunities with a more strategic eye and considering ways to have a year-round presence in the RSJ community. This marked difference raises the question of whether there would be benefit to structuring the Initiative funding in two phases: a Phase 1 (first two years) similar to the present structure that supports launching and implementing RSJ outreach and recruitment, and a Phase 2 (two more years) that encourages strategic thinking and planning so camps could exit the Initiative with a tested year-round recruitment strategy and a thoughtful plan for raising funds for continuing financial aid to RSJ families.

## CONCLUSION

The RSJ Initiative is successfully providing RSJ campers with great experiences, including, in the words of one camp director, “joyful Jewish experiences.” The campers’ enjoyment of the sense of community within camp and the ties of warm friendships that endure long after the summer build campers’ sense of belonging to a Jewish community. The Initiative’s participating camps have learned how to market to RSJ families and recruit RSJ campers, and they have increased their organizational capacity to engage with the RSJ community.

The Initiative camps have grown not just in knowledge but also in seeing themselves as partners with their nearby RSJ community in achieving shared goals for RSJ children. However, the camps’ enthusiasm for marketing to RSJ families and growing their RSJ camper enrollment is tempered by the realization that significant fundraising will be needed to meet families’ financial aid requests. The question of how a camp can sustain financial aid for returning RSJ campers is the most pressing concern facing the longer-term success of the Initiative. Additionally, there is some urgency to focus available resources on marketing to RSJ parents now, while they have identifiable linkages to their local RSJ community, and before the next generation of parents and children becomes indistinguishable from the general secular population.

## Evaluation Methods

### METHODS

With guidance from the Evaluation Advisory Team, which consists of representatives from Genesis Philanthropy Group and FJC, Informing Change collected a combination of qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources. The data collection and analysis processes were based on indicators and intended outcomes outlined in the Initiative description provided by Genesis Philanthropy Group and in the evaluation plan. The evaluation draws data from a variety of sources:

- RSJ Camper Survey, designed and administered by Informing Change
- Subset of data for RSJ families from the One Happy Camper® Parent Surveys 2014–17, designed and administered by Summation Research Group, Inc. for the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC)
- Summary of findings from the One Happy Camper® Retention Surveys 2012–15, for RSJ families and North American recipients, provided by Summation Research Group, Inc.
- Annual Grant Reports prepared by FJC, based on data reported by Initiative camps
- Telephone interviews with North American RSJ camp counselors
- Telephone interviews with directors of Initiative camps and with FJC staff

### Overview of Data Sources and Collection Methods

Method	Informants	Data Collection Timeline	Total Responses
One Happy Camper® Parent Surveys	RSJ recipient families of One Happy Camper® grants	Annually 2014–17	99
Camper Survey	Campers with Russian-speaking parents who attended an Initiative camp	December 2017–February 2018	142
	Russian-speaking camp counselors	January–February 2018	3
Telephone interviews	Camp directors or a designated associate director	January–February 2018	15
	FJC staff and RSJ consultant	February 2018	3

### DATA PROVIDED BY FJC

#### One Happy Camper® Data about RSJ Families

The One Happy Camper® (OHC) program provides incentive grants for youth to attend overnight Jewish summer camps for the first time. Each year between 2014 and 2017, all families receiving OHC incentive grants were sent an online survey, the OHC Parent Survey, distributed by Summation Research Group, Inc.

Summation Research Group, Inc. provided Informing Change with de-identified raw data from their surveys completed by RSJ families. This data set included survey data from 99 families that received an OHC grant from 2014 to 2017 who indicated at least one parent originated from Russia, Ukraine, or Belarus. Respondents were asked about their connections to the Jewish community and their engagement in Jewish activities prior to receiving the OHC grant. Respondents also noted how the grant affected their decision to attend Jewish summer

campers and their connection with the Jewish community in general. Income, age of the youngest child attending summer camp, and geographic data were also collected, among other variables.

Respondents were distributed across all four survey years:

Year of Survey	Total Responses
2014	28
2015	23
2016	27
2017	21

In addition to data from the OHC Parent Survey, this evaluation report also includes some data on camper retention rates from the OHC Retention Survey: specifically, Summation Research Group, Inc. provided *Informing Change* with a summary of camper retention rates for RSJ OHC recipients in comparison to retention rates for the overall North American population of OHC recipients.

## Grant Reports

FJC provided *Informing Change* with copies of their written reports to Genesis Philanthropy Group. These reports incorporated evaluation results from OHC evaluations and were supplemented by the Camper Satisfaction Insights study (also conducted by Summation Research Group, Inc.). The evaluation period covered in these reports ran from program years 2013–14 through 2016–17.

In the grant reports, FJC provided camper enrollment data from each participating camp, which is summarized in Appendix B of this evaluation report.

## EVALUATION DATA COLLECTED FROM INITIATIVE CAMPS

### Camper Surveys

In collaboration with FJC and Genesis Philanthropy Group, *Informing Change* created a 13-item survey to measure campers' experience with Jewish camp and changes in Jewish behavior. Camps were given the option of distributing the survey electronically, by paper, or using both methods.

Camps were responsible for generating a list of names and addresses of eligible campers, as well as distributing the surveys and coordinating follow-up reminders. *Informing Change* provided sample reminder language and technical assistance in increasing response rates. *Informing Change* also provided an information letter for parents describing the evaluation and the purpose of the survey; this letter was available in English and in Russian.

Based on reports from the 14 camps, the total number of families sent a print survey or email survey invitation was 686. A total of 142 survey responses were received. Some response was received from all camps that distributed the survey.

The proportions of camper survey responses by Initiative camp, received by *Informing Change* from RSJ campers, are similar to the proportions of the OHC Parent Survey responses received by Summation Research Group, Inc. from RSJ parents for each camp.

## Comparison of Distribution of Camper and Parent Survey Responses

Camp <sup>1</sup>	RSJ Camper Survey Respondents (n=142)	OHC Parent Survey RSJ Parent Respondents (n=99)
JCC Camp Chi	26%	27%
Camp Zeke	13%	11%
JCA Shalom	11%	16%
BHE Camp	9%	4%
Camp Herzl	9%	0%
Camp Judaea	8%	2%
CYJ Midwest	6%	4%
BB Oregon	6%	3%
Camp Tawonga	5%	14%
CBB Montreal	4%	4%
Camp Avoda	2%	4%
Eden Village	1%	3%
JCC Ranch	1%	4%
Pinemere Camp	0%	1%

### Interviews

Informing Change conducted interviews with a camp director or associate director of every camp participating in the Initiative, for a total of 15 interviews.

Informing Change also interviewed a small set of North American RSJ camp counselors. Each camp was asked to provide the names and contact information of two RSJ camp counselors. Informing Change invited all 15 staff names we received for interviews. To increase the number of informants in this category some staff were also given the option of answering questions via email. Four interviews were completed, three by phone and one by email. Camps explained they had difficulty connecting with RSJ summer staff.

### LIMITATIONS

While the data presented in this report are robust, the data are not without some limitations. First, the primary data sources used in this evaluation are self-reported (e.g., surveys and interviews), which may present some bias. Second, changes in camper attitudes and behaviors since attending Jewish camp may be due to a variety of reasons, including or not including their Jewish camp experiences. Unless we directly asked about the influence of attending Jewish camp, the results show only possible contribution, not attribution.

In addition, campers responding to the survey attended different camps, with similar but not identical programs. Approaches to Jewish education also differed to some degree by camp. Lastly, since respondents attended camp during any one or multiple summers between 2014 and 2017, their responses draw on experiences that occurred as recently as six months ago and as long ago as three and a half years ago.

---

<sup>1</sup> Enrollment data for Camp Zeke's and Eden Village Camp's first year in the Initiative was not available in grant reports.

---



## RSJ Initiative Camps: Enrollment by Year

Year	Year of Tenure	Camp	Returning RSJ Campers	New RSJ Campers	Total RSJ Campers by Camp	North American RSJ Staff by Camp
2013–14	1st	BHEC	0	13	13	2
2013–14	1st	Camp Tawonga	0	31	31	3
2013–14	1st	CYJ Midwest	0	10	10	1
2013–14	1st	JCC Camp Chi	0	32	32	5
2013–14	1st	Surprise Lake	0	25	25	5
<b>Annual Total</b>			<b>0</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>16</b>
2014–15	2nd	BHEC	0	24	24	2
2014–15	2nd	Camp Tawonga	0	38	38	2
2014–15	2nd	CYJ Midwest	0	14	14	1
2014–15	2nd	JCC Camp Chi	0	35	35	7
2014–15	1st	BB Oregon	0	18	18	1
2014–15	1st	Camp Herzl	0	17	17	4
2014–15	1st	Camp Judaea	0	15	15	1
<b>Annual Total</b>			<b>0</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>18</b>
2015–16	3rd	BHEC	41	17	58	2
2015–16	3rd	Camp Tawonga	32	21	53	2
2015–16	3rd	CYJ Midwest	6	6	12	1
2015–16	3rd	JCC Camp Chi	55	38	93	7
2015–16	2nd	BB Oregon	14	7	21	2
2015–16	2nd	Camp Herzl	31	9	40	2
2015–16	2nd	Camp Judaea	17	3	20	2
2015–16	2nd	Camp Zeke	27	33	60	1
2015–16	2nd	Eden Village	8	4	12	2
2015–16	1st	Camp Avoda	5	6	11	0
2015–16	1st	CBB Montreal	0	18	18	6
2015–16	1st	JCA Shalom	0	26	26	5
2015–16	1st	Pinemere Camp	4	24	28	1
<b>Annual Total</b>			<b>240</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>452</b>	<b>33</b>

Year	Year of Tenure	Camp	Returning RSJ Campers	New RSJ Campers	Total RSJ Campers by Camp	North American RSJ Staff by Camp
2016–17	4th	BHEC	38	13	51	0
2016–17	4th	Camp Tawonga	35	16	51	1
2016–17	4th	CYJ Midwest	10	10	20	1
2016–17	4th	JCC Camp Chi	68	40	108	8
2016–17	3rd	BB Oregon	18	7	25	3
2016–17	3rd	Camp Herzl	17	10	27	3
2016–17	3rd	Camp Judaea	11	10	21	1
2016–17	3rd	Camp Zeke	46	38	84	1
2016–17	3rd	Eden Village	8	7	15	0
2016–17	2nd	Camp Avoda	14	16	30	0
2016–17	2nd	CBB Montreal	16	19	35	1
2016–17	2nd	JCA Shalom	19	32	51	5
2016–17	2nd	Pinemere Camp	18	12	30	1
2016–17	1st	Camps Airy & Louise	0	10	10	0
2016–17	1st	JCC Ranch	0	8	8	2
<b>Annual Total</b>			<b>318</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>					<b>1290*</b>	<b>94**</b>

\* This figure represents the number of camper-summerers, not an unduplicated count of individual campers (i.e., one individual who attended camp for three summers is counted three times).

\*\* This figure includes duplicated counting of a few counselors (i.e., one RSJ counselor who worked at camp for three summers is counted three times).

## RSJ Initiative Camps: Enrollment by Camp

### FOUR-YEAR CAMPS

Year	Tenure	Camp	Returning RSJ Campers	New RSJ Campers	Total RSJ Campers by Camp
2013–14	1st	BHEC	0	13	13
2014–15	2nd	BHEC	0	24	24
2015–16	3rd	BHEC	41	17	58
2016–17	4th	BHEC	38	13	51
<b>Total</b>			<b>*79</b>	<b>67</b>	
2013–14	1st	Camp Tawonga	0	31	31
2014–15	2nd	Camp Tawonga	0	38	38
2015–16	3rd	Camp Tawonga	32	21	53
2016–17	4th	Camp Tawonga	35	16	51
<b>Total</b>			<b>*67</b>	<b>106</b>	
2013–14	1st	CYJ Midwest	0	10	10
2014–15	2nd	CYJ Midwest	0	14	14
2015–16	3rd	CYJ Midwest	6	6	12
2016–17	4th	CYJ Midwest	10	10	20
<b>Total</b>			<b>*16</b>	<b>40</b>	
2013–14	1st	JCC Camp Chi	0	32	32
2014–15	2nd	JCC Camp Chi	0	35	35
2015–16	3rd	JCC Camp Chi	55	38	93
2016–17	4th	JCC Camp Chi	68	40	108
<b>Total</b>			<b>*123</b>	<b>145</b>	

## THREE-YEAR CAMPS

Year	Tenure	Camp	Returning RSJ Campers	New RSJ Campers	Total RSJ Campers by Camp
2014–15	1st	BB Oregon	0	18	18
2015–16	2nd	BB Oregon	14	7	21
2016–17	3rd	BB Oregon	18	7	25
<b>Total</b>			<b>*32</b>	<b>32</b>	
2014–15	1st	Camp Herzl	0	17	17
2015–16	2nd	Camp Herzl	31	9	40
2016–17	3rd	Camp Herzl	17	10	27
<b>Total</b>			<b>*48</b>	<b>36</b>	
2014–15	1st	Camp Judaea	0	15	15
2015–16	2nd	Camp Judaea	17	3	20
2016–17	3rd	Camp Judaea	11	10	21
<b>Total</b>			<b>*28</b>	<b>28</b>	

## TWO-YEAR CAMPS

Year	Tenure	Camp	Returning RSJ Campers	New RSJ Campers	Total RSJ Campers by Camp
2015–16	1st	Camp Avoda	5	6	11
2016–17	2nd	Camp Avoda	14	16	30
<b>Total</b>			<b>*19</b>	<b>22</b>	
2015–16	2nd	Camp Zeke	27	33	60
2016–17	3rd	Camp Zeke	46	38	84
<b>Total</b>			<b>*73</b>	<b>71</b>	
2015–16	1st	CBB Montreal	0	18	18
2016–17	2nd	CBB Montreal	16	19	35
<b>Total</b>			<b>16</b>	<b>37</b>	

Year	Tenure	Camp	Returning RSJ Campers	New RSJ Campers	Total RSJ Campers by Camp
2015–16	2nd	Eden Village	8	4	12
2016–17	3rd	Eden Village	8	7	15
<b>Total</b>			<b>*16</b>	<b>11</b>	
2015–16	1st	JCA Shalom	0	26	26
2016–17	2nd	JCA Shalom	19	32	51
<b>Total</b>			<b>19</b>	<b>58</b>	
2015–16	1st	Pinemere Camp	4	24	28
2016–17	2nd	Pinemere Camp	18	12	30
<b>Total</b>			<b>*22</b>	<b>36</b>	

## ONE-YEAR CAMPS

Year	Tenure	Camp	Returning RSJ Campers	New RSJ Campers	Total RSJ Campers by Camp
2016–17	1st	Camps Airy & Louise	0	10	10
2016–17	1st	JCC Ranch	0	8	8
2013–14	1st	Surprise Lake	0	25	25

\* These cumulative totals of returning campers may not be an unduplicated count of individual campers (i.e., one individual who attended camp for two summers is counted twice).

# RSJ Initiative

## Camp Director Suggestions for Changes & Additions

---

This is a compilation of the recommended changes, suggestions for improvement, and considerations for the future offered by RSJ Initiative camp directors in their interviews. Fourteen camp directors or associate directors were interviewed for the evaluation.

- Announce funding decisions earlier to allow for better design and planning of marketing.
- Issue multiyear grants so camps can develop plans and strategies.
- Increase funding for scholarships to support returning campers.
- Time funding to allow camp recruitment to begin in the fall. This will avoid:
  - Missing high-return marketing events like family camps and holiday gatherings.
  - Delays in promising financial aid to returning RSJ campers who are ready to enroll in the fall.
  - Unrealistic, too-short timelines for families to budget and save for a share of camp fees.
  - Desired camp sessions being full by the time RSJ families are ready to sign up.
- Help camps find recruiters and initial entry points into RSJ community—it can be very difficult to find a good recruiter and make the initial connections in the first year.
- Brainstorm with the experienced camp directors (those with three to four years in the Initiative) about ways they could sustain as well as grow their RSJ enrollment. For example, how do camps budget for scholarships for a growing number of RSJ families? Would offering families a two-year financial aid package be a good idea? Would families respond to a matching-fund proposal?
- Ask FJC to prepare messaging for the RSJ community that all camps can use; provide copy for articles and ads for the RSJ press.
- Support family camps and family days at camp as marketing tools for summer camp; commit funding for these before September, if possible, for best timing and planning.
- Consider providing funding to experiment with programmatic changes to attract RSJ families; a few camps are interested in testing whether ballroom dancing, physical fitness, chess, and other program additions would attract RSJ campers.
- Focus the RSJ consultant on developing customized strategies for a camp's outreach and messaging. Coaching has been too general, say several camp directors; coaches tell recruiters what they already know, or their description of the RSJ market is too general or does not match the local situation. Camp directors want coaches to research and know the specifics of their regional RSJ landscapes.
- Have recommendations for marketing that will work in less concentrated RSJ populations than large urban areas, for example in the Midwest and West.
- Instead of having camp administrators attend an in-person training session, do webinars about recruiting, or provide a list of successful marketing techniques used by camps in the past couple of years.
- Ask FJC to coordinate a centralized website and some targeted outreach to recruit RSJ camp counselors for the Initiative (e.g., visit Hillels).
- Consider a regional initiative to market on behalf of a group of camps in the region (e.g., camp fairs, synagogue visits, tables at RSJ events), perhaps even referring potential campers to the camps that match their interests, availability, and family requirements, instead of having each camp do its own outreach.



---

2040 Bancroft Way, Suite 400  
Berkeley, CA 94704  
tel 510.665.6100  
fax 510.665.6129

[informingchange.com](http://informingchange.com)