



*Executive Summary*

# The Hard Work Behind the Magic of Camp





Results & Learnings from the FJC Specialty Camps Incubator II

*Prepared for The Jim Joseph Foundation & AVI CHAI Foundation | Prepared by Informing Change*

## INTRODUCTION

With a \$10.2 million combined investment from the AVI CHAI Foundation and the Jim Joseph Foundation (the funders), the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC) incubated four new Jewish specialty camps from October 2012 through November 2016, turning ideas into actual, functioning camps.

The funders engaged Informing Change in October 2012 to design and implement a five-year evaluation of this second cohort of FJC’s Specialty Camps Incubator (the Incubator). We evaluated the extent to which the new camps developed the capacities needed to run strong summer programs, deliver intended camper outcomes, become sustainable nonprofit entities, and expand the number of Jewish youth attending camp. The evaluation findings are based on surveys from campers and parents, as well as interviews, site visits, observations, and materials reviews. This Executive Summary provides key takeaways from this full evaluation report: “The Hard Work Behind the Magic of Camp.”

FJC II SPECIALTY CAMPS INCUBATOR II PARTICIPANTS	
 <p><i>Science and technology</i></p>	 <p><i>Business and entrepreneurship</i></p>
 <p><i>Healthy and active living</i></p>	 <p><i>Sports and athletic skills</i></p>

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Across their first three summers, the Incubator camps served **1,614** unique campers. Opening in summer 2014 with a total of 520 campers, the four camps nearly doubled their combined enrollment numbers over the following two years, serving 1,025 campers in summer 2016. Many parents say the Incubator camps provide new options that align well with their families' needs and interests.

### Incubator camps attract middle and high school youth who wouldn't otherwise be at Jewish camp

The Incubator was designed to accelerate the development of new specialty camps that would attract a market of middle school and high school youth ages 11–18 (as opposed to just younger campers), particularly those who are new to Jewish camp. In each of the three summers, **over 75% of campers fell within the target age range of 11–18 years old**. Among the new campers each summer, 57% had not previously attended a Jewish overnight camp. Moreover, among all campers, regardless of prior camp experience, two-thirds of parents (66%) say their child would not have attended another Jewish camp had the Incubator camp not existed.

*“It was the perfect fit for our summer schedule and a way for [Camper Name] to go to their first Jewish sleep away camp even at the age of 14, and not feel like an outsider.”*

– 6 Points Sci-Tech Academy Parent

### Incubator camps successfully reach youth with low to moderate levels of prior Jewish experiences

The Incubator camps are attracting campers from varying levels of Jewish experiences. **About two-thirds of Incubator campers fall in the “moderate” level of prior Jewish experiences**, meaning they have had three to five Jewish experiences such as going to Jewish day school, participating in a Jewish youth group, attending Jewish camp before (day or overnight), traveling to Israel, or regularly going to synagogue. Most campers (69%) are from families where all members are Jewish, but **Incubator camps attract more campers from interfaith families** than other Jewish summer camps (27% vs. 14%). Designed with a pluralistic culture in mind, Incubator camps create an inclusive environment where campers and counselors with many types of Jewish backgrounds can feel comfortable.

### The camps' specialties drive camp enrollment and help keep campers coming back

Across all three summers, **89% of campers say the specialty is the reason why they attend the Incubator camp**. The specialty aspect offers something that campers may not find at other Jewish camps. It's also among the top reasons why campers return each year. In addition to the specialty, other common reasons campers give for returning to camp are the opportunity to spend time with campers and staff and the fun they have at camp. The Incubator camps have done well in diversifying the specialty programming to make each summer's experience positive and memorable for first-time as well as returning campers.

## Camps are shaping campers' lives in all three intended outcome areas

In addition to enjoying their camp experience and feeling a sense of belonging, campers and parents say the Incubator camps contributed to campers' growth in each of the three intended outcome area: Jewish experience, learning, and growth; specialty knowledge and skill; and personal development (Exhibit 1).

*“A big change that happened in my life because of Camp Zeke was becoming much more appreciative of Judaism and Israel overall.”*

– Camp Zeke Camper

**Incubator camps help campers from all types of Jewish backgrounds continue on their Jewish journeys.** Many campers have felt camp's influence on their Jewish life, particularly in learning more about camp's core Jewish values, about Judaism, and how important being Jewish is to the camper. Campers and their parents describe campers as being more curious and excited about Judaism and taking initiative to create their own connections to Judaism.

**The more summers campers attend camp, the more likely they are to report camp changing their Jewish knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.** Campers who attend camp for more than one year are more likely to say camp changed how many Jewish friends they have and how interested they are in learning more about Judaism. Going to camp for three summers further helps campers learn more about Judaism and recognize its importance to them, compared to going for one or two summers.

**Campers also enhance their specialty skills and become more independent and self-confident.** More campers say their specialty skills and interests have changed because of camp than any other outcome area.

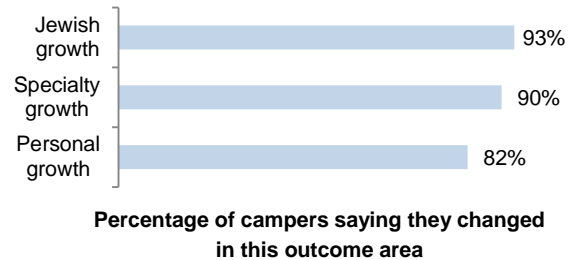
*“She matured by leaps and bounds during her sessions at JCC Maccabi! It increased her independence, confidence, and emotional flexibility!”*

– JCC Maccabi Sports Camp Parent

Incubator camps have found creative ways to integrate Jewish values with entrepreneurship, science, sports, and healthy living and thus offer campers a more holistic experience than a specialty camp alone. Furthermore, parents describe their children as more mature, more comfortable doing things on their own, and more responsible because of camp. Campers (particularly those who have never been to camp before) note how momentous the experience is for them and express excitement to return summer after summer.

### Most campers grew in each outcome area because of camp.

Exhibit 1 | n=738-754



*“Before going to Camp Inc., I had a very small idea of what entrepreneurship was. After attending, it seems like something really cool that I want to do in my life.”*

– Camp Inc. Camper

## Campers make a camp survive and thrive

As Incubator II ends, it is clear that the **campers that are most successful and lasting are the ones that demonstrate a pattern of steady enrollment growth in their first three summers.** Quick camper enrollment growth in the first three years stimulates positive development of multiple areas of camp operations. Incubator camp directors work hard to retain families and campers as active customers from one summer to the next. Annual retention rates for the individual camps range from a low of 27% for one camp after its first year to a high of 73% for two camps after their second year. **Incubator camps with higher camper retention clearly benefit from having a stable starting platform from which to grow the next year's camper enrollment.**

## With Incubator guidance, the four camps quickly developed the infrastructure necessary for organizational growth and stability

One reason the Incubator camps were able to attain market and outcomes goals is the incremental development of critical organizational infrastructure and multiple areas of organizational capacity. The Incubator's coaching and guidance fueled intensive development. **In fall 2016, the Incubator camps as a group received an average rating of "highly developed" in 22 of 28 areas on the organizational capacity assessments they completed for the evaluation.**

## Incubator camps infuse Jewish content into the camp experience in many ways

***"I tell camp directors that in the places where Jewish learning can add to the experience and help campers understand what they are doing in new ways, they should explore a fully integrated model. However, if the Judaism is just an 'add-on' and doesn't fit comfortably with [the specialty] or what they are doing, it is much better to choose other places to add in Jewish learning."***

– Michelle Shapiro Abraham

Incubator camps **experimented with how to integrate Jewish content into their specialty areas.** With their mission and values, camps could envision Jewish life at camp. Working with the Incubator's Jewish Life consultant, Michelle Shapiro Abraham, each camp incorporated their chosen Jewish values into their specialty programming. Actualizing the vision of an integrated Jewish camp experience requires leadership from the camp director, intentional staffing, and infrastructure.

**Creating supportive, inclusive camper-focused Jewish communities facilitates a camp's ability to reach its intended outcomes.** Camps' pluralistic approaches to Judaism have meant that campers from all Jewish backgrounds and denominations have felt comfortable and welcomed. Further, Incubator camp communities are safe,

youth-centric places for campers to actively explore Judaism and what it means to them in their own way—asking questions and hearing from other campers and the young adult staff about what being Jewish means to them. In addition to staff training and program activities specifically designed to create a sense of belonging, camp directors added staff positions dedicated to addressing camper care and inclusion. The camp communities continue to some degree throughout the year; **over 70% of campers report staying in touch with other campers when they are back at home.**

## The camps raced to sustainability at different speeds

All four Incubator camps had long-term sustainability as a goal, but each pursued it with a different camp model. The variations in the camp designs and the components of their models affected the speed at which each camp is progressing to sustainability. A number of factors affected a camp's progress to sustainability, including:

- Enrollment growth coupled within reasonable expenses
- Accelerating the financial learning curve
- Reaching a desired minimum camper census
- Maximizing camp model characteristics that support camper recruitment and retention
- Early, aggressive fundraising
- Enlisting Board leaders with decision-making, planning, outreach, and fund development

### INSIGHTS FOR FJC & THE BROADER JEWISH CAMPING FIELD

The full report includes several recommendations for the Incubator, its camps, and the broader Jewish camping field, including the following:

**Integrated Jewish Learning:** The different ways Incubator camps approach integrating Jewish learning, values, and reflections into their programming are working. The camps have tailored their Jewish curriculum to engage campers of all levels of Jewish knowledge.

**The Importance of “New:”** The opportunity for a “new” experience is especially appealing to Jewish teens who have many competing interests for their summer time: school, work, internships, and spending time with family or friends. To make camp appealing, Incubator camps need to continue marketing their newness, to new campers coming for their first experience and returning campers who want to do something different from last summer.

**Get the Campers:** Focusing on enrolling campers in the early years allows for quickly and efficiently testing out program elements and operations. Camps with lower enrollment in the first two summers never quite caught up with their own initial goals and with the other camps. Campers from the first two years also help with word-of-mouth recruitment.

**The Value of Data:** New camps need data to inform strategic decisions and monitor early activities so that they identify wins and losses for course correction. The Incubator evaluators provided camps with data from their campers and families. In addition, Incubator staff and camp stakeholders measured each camp's progress toward sustainability semi-annually to ensure the camps were on track to exit the Incubator out of the startup stage.

**Incubation Works:** An Incubator model does work for new Jewish specialty camps. The Incubator's financial and non-financial support propelled camps into existence in less than two years after being selected. The Incubator's timely, expert support steered the new camps away from potential pitfalls.

### CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE OF JEWISH CAMPING & CAMPERS' LIVES

With the addition of Incubator II camps to the Jewish camp world, the field has accepted specialty camps as a worthy strategy to attract and retain older campers. Each summer, the Incubator II campers carry home unforgettable memories and foundational elements for building a joyful Jewish life. They leave camp feeling bonded to a vibrant, active community of Jewish youth and cool adults, with a belief that there exists a Jewish community to which they see themselves belonging—increasing the possibility that they will believe this into the future as well.