



# Inclusion in Action: Transforming Jewish Camps with the Yashar Initiative

Executive Summary

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

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

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

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

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

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

### INCREASED INDEPENDENCE

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

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

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

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

## CAMPERS FEEL MORE INCLUDED IN THE CAMP COMMUNITY

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

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

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

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



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

*-Yashar Camp Director*

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

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

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

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



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

*-Yashar Camp Staff*

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

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

### Based on the above findings, recommendations include:

#### Customized Support:

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

#### Vocational Education:

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

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

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

### A few additional areas of growth were also identified:



#### Funding:

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



#### Staffing:

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



#### Staff Training:

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