

A Study of Summer Camps for Israel



SUMMER CAMPS

הקיץ

Summer 2021

This study was commissioned by SCI – the Summer Camps Israel forum,
at the initiative of the Morris and Rosalind Goodman Family Foundation.
The research was conducted by the Do-Et Institute.

Camps participating in the study:

Camp Dror | Masa Israeli – Israeli Camp | Tel-Aviv-Jaffa Leadership Camp (Kimama) | Tovanot Ba'Chinuch - Insights in Education (Big Idea) | Ha'Shalem - The Whole Educational Space - 24/7

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Commissioned by:

Forum for Summer Camps Israel

Morris and Rosalind Goodman Family Foundation

With support of Schusterman Family Philanthropies

Conducted during:

July-August 2021

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Summer camps – what's it all about?

Summer Camps Israel aims to dramatically expand the boundaries of the summer camp market in Israel – which today is very small (with about 10,000 campers) -- and make it accessible for all Israelis.

In our vision, we see summer camps in Israel helping to strengthen Israel's social fabric with a bold investment in non-formal education and meaningful leisure, providing a summer experience that the campers will want to repeat year after year.

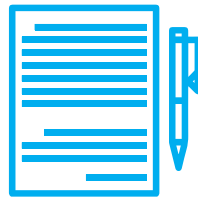
Israeli children will discover the benefits of experiential summer camps with cohorts drawn from the entire spectrum of society in a values-based community, deepening each child's own identity and their connection to Israel and the Jewish world, and enhancing their social skills, independence, and leadership ability.

Summer camp will replace the aimless, boring summer of inactivity so many Israeli children are accustomed to and give tens of thousands of youngsters a summer filled with content and meaning.

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Executive Summary



Introduction

This report presents the findings of evaluation research on five summer camps that are partners in the work of the Summer Camps Israel forum. The forum functions as an ecosystem of summer camps and was founded at the initiative of the Goodman Foundation (www.summercamps.co.il).

The research conducted for the forum was intended to provide more in-depth information and understanding of all aspects of the theoretical and social context in which the camps operate, and mainly to clarify the impact of the camps on the campers – the young people who participate.

The study was conducted by the Do-Et Institute, an applied social research institute with more than 15 years of experience in social evaluation research, much of it in the field of non-formal education. The purpose of the study was to clarify the influence of summer camps as defined by SCI, which commissioned the research.

The report has four parts:

1. A review of the theoretical literature:

This first section positions the activity in context – theoretically, socially and historically, and addresses relevant areas of the research literature.

2. Quantitative findings:

Section 2 summarizes the results of a survey conducted among more than 600 campers from all five camps. The findings address metrics of success defined by the forum and include: **Level of satisfaction** with the activities (fun and enjoyment), **sense of competence** (coping with challenges), **life skills, social skills, particular abilities** (exercise, hiking, science and technology, and so on), **identity** (including the Shabbat experience at camp), **tolerance and inclusion** (toward youngsters from other groups) and attitudes toward **detachment from screens**.

3. Qualitative findings:

Presented in Section 3, these are based on interviews with camp staff (15), campers (25), and parents (20).

4. Attachments:

This additional material presents in greater detail the quantitative and qualitative breakdown of the findings by individual camp.

The participating camps are: Camp Dror | Masa Israeli – Israeli Camp | Tel-Aviv-Jaffa Leadership Camp (Kimama) | Tovanot Ba'Chinuch - Insights in Education (Big Idea) | Ha'Shalem - The Whole Educational Space - 24/7.





The vision of Summer Camps Israel

Summer Camps Israel aims to dramatically expand the boundaries of the summer camp market in Israel – which today is very small (with about 10,000 campers) – and make it accessible for all Israelis.

In our vision, we see **summer camps in Israel helping to strengthen Israel's social fabric with a bold investment in informal education and meaningful leisure, providing a summer experience that the campers will want to repeat year after year.**

Israeli children will discover the benefits of experiential summer camps with cohorts drawn from the entire spectrum of society in a values-based community, deepening each child's own identity and their connection to Israel and the Jewish world, and enhancing their social skills, independence, and leadership ability.

Summer camp will replace the aimless, boring summer of inactivity so many Israeli children are accustomed to



What are summer camps?

As defined by the Summer Camps Israel forum, a summer camp has the following characteristics:

- An educational, values-based and experiential sleepaway camp during the summertime.
- A camp intended for children aged 11-17 (graduates of grades 6 through 11).
A camp of 10 days or more (including Shabbat) with sleeping quarters.
[* For children with special needs – hosting for a few days within a 10-day camp / in several cohorts / a shorter camp stay of fewer days.]
- The camp functions to integrate campers from diverse sectors of Israeli society.
- The camp content integrates activities and experiences from the Jewish-Israeli world (along with other unique activities).
[* For campers who are not Jewish – activities and experiences involving their particular identity as well as Israeli identity.]
- The camp has a policy of no screens and no cellphones.
- The camp has a multi-year program enabling campers to develop and grow from year to year in age-appropriate ways.

An important note: We are not talking about the other excellent work that exists in the field – day camps, forest camping with the youth movements, week-long sports camps, summer schools, summer programs run by community centers or municipalities – but rather about the dedicated activity of experiential, long-session camps that include sleeping quarters.





Key points from the literature

In order to present the findings in their appropriate theoretical context, a review of the academic literature was conducted (see the first part of the full report). The survey was based on studies and articles from Israel and elsewhere dealing with the field of non-formal education and summer sleepaway camps. It emphasizes the characteristics of non-formal education, a camp's ability to create

an adventure-filled, life-changing experience, and so forth. In addition, the review presents theoretical background and data on summer camps in the Jewish world and in Israel. It also addresses issues of screen time and the use of electronic devices by young people, and Israel's high score in that regard relative to other countries around the world.

Below are the main points of the review:

- In Israel, summer vacation from school, beginning in June and extending through July and August ("the long vacation"), is a significant period for young people in Israel. During that time, they are maturing, separating from the age group to which they only recently belonged, and preparing to enter the next grade level.
- One of the main sources of inspiration and influence for summer camps in Israel is the longstanding tradition of summer camps in North America (also prevalent in Europe and the former Soviet Union).
- Summer camps practice a type of informal education. Their informal setting allows campers to acquire information through all of their senses and not solely via the cognitive dimension. Non-formal space allows for experimentation with matters like identity, coping with challenges and social relations.
- Non-formal education can produce meaningful experiences that serve as key life lessons.
- Summer camp experiences (like journeys) can potentially offer both adventures and self-discovery.
- In recent years, young people have devoted more and more time to their screens. Israel is at the top of the charts on the use of electronic devices by its children. The effect of so much time with screens is not yet fully known, but there is some evidence of real harm to children's normal development.
- A large proportion of Israeli youth participate in organized summer activities of some kind, but for the most part these lack the characteristics of a summer sleepaway camp.



Quantitative findings

The quantitative findings were gathered using a survey conducted for all the campers at the participating camps, with 603 responding. The survey is based on an attitudinal questionnaire addressing the metrics of results defined for

the study: personal growth, life skills, sense of competence, social skills, various special abilities, tolerance and inclusion, sense of identity, and the detachment from cellphones. All metrics are on a scale of 1-5.

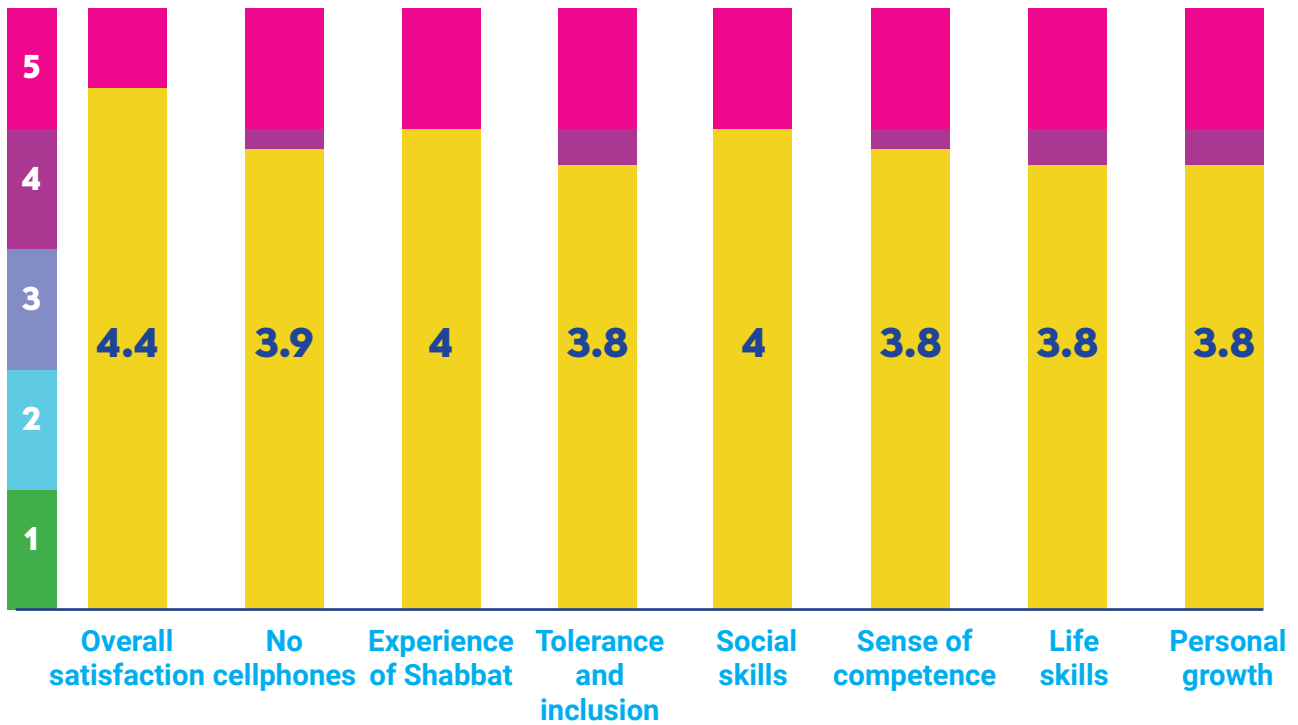
The main insight is clearly about how the camps influence the campers' social skills and the importance of their exposure to different groups from Israeli society. Another key finding is that positive attitudes emerged from all the camps concerning the curtailment of screen time. The study demonstrates that young people can and did spend ten days or more without screens for most of the day, and that they were happy to exchange their phones for other kinds of social interaction and activity.

Additional findings showed that the summer camps had a multifaceted positive impact:

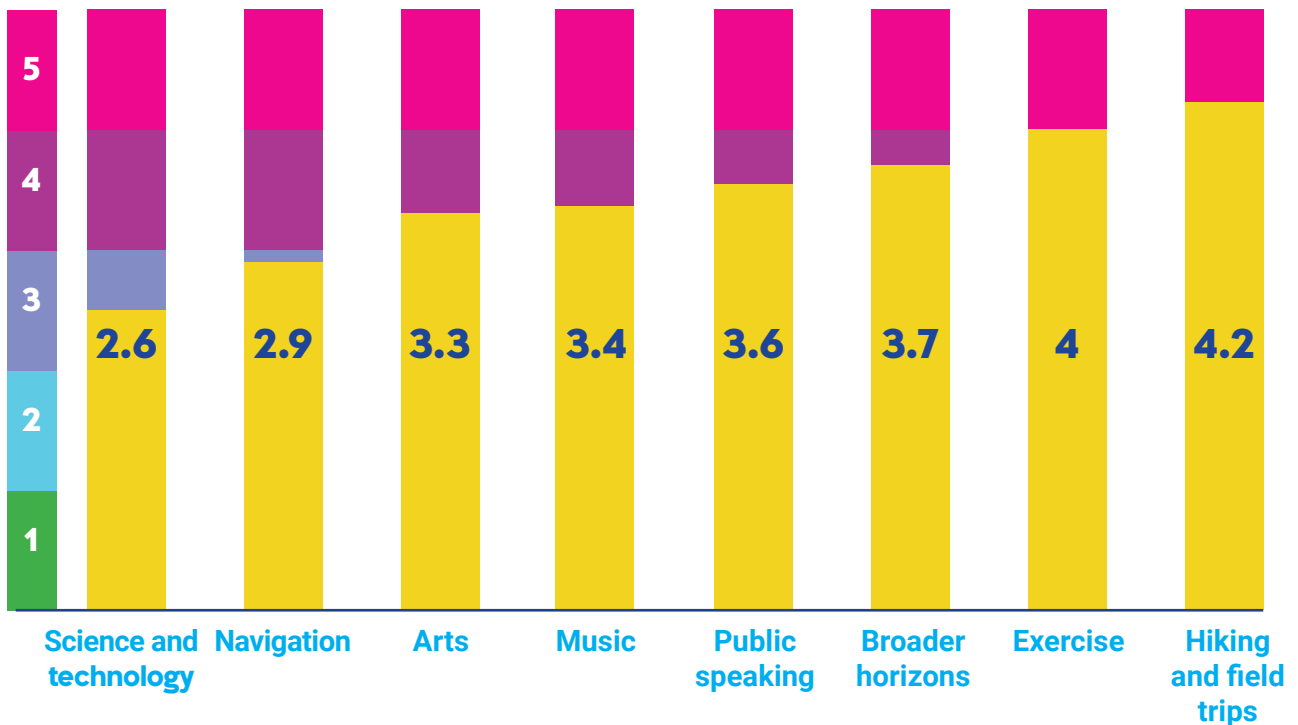
- High impact on campers in terms of personal growth.
- High impact on campers' life skills
- High impact on campers' sense of competence.
- High impact on campers' social skills.
- High impact on other abilities in "hiking and field trips" and "exercise"), high impact to a lesser extent on "broader horizons" and "public speaking", medium impact on the subcategories of "music," "arts" and "navigation", and medium to low impact on the remaining subcategories: "technological tools" (2.6), "preparing PowerPoints or lectures" (2.6), "science and technology" (2.5) and "computer skills" (2.2).
- Medium-high impact on campers' tolerance and inclusion. Campers felt a high level of freedom to express their opinions and to be who they are at camp.
- Campers had high levels of satisfaction regarding their experience of Shabbat.
- The weighted average on campers' attitudes toward no cellphones was high.
- The weighted average on overall satisfaction (with various areas of camp life) was high (4).
- The weighted average on campers' concluding attitudes toward the camp experience was high to very high (4.4).



Impact of summer camps on campers



High impact on other abilities





Qualitative findings

The qualitative section is based on in-depth interviews conducted with three staff members, five campers and four parents from each camp. The interviews provided a dimension of depth and validity for the quantitative findings (see Attachment 2). Below are the main insights from the interviews with interviewees from the three target populations.

Highlights from the interviews with campers:

- All the campers from all the camps described a very positive experience. The subjects most significant from their point of view were the social encounter with other young people and the experience of maturing and being independent.

It was really nice making friends from other backgrounds. Like secular people, people from the north I would never have met otherwise. Hearing other people's stories is interesting

young male camper, Israeli Journey

- Another important subject to emerge in the interviews with campers was the experience of being independent and growing up.

I became responsible. At home I don't do anything; here I did laundry [...] and we were creative, we set up clotheslines and we hung cola from the air conditioner so it would be cold

young male camper, Kimama Leadership

- Most of the young people did not feel anything was lacking and even saw many advantages in being cut off from their screens.

It was fun to unplug [...] If there had been telephones I wouldn't have made so many friends and it would just have ruined the experience

young female camper, Insights in Education

Highlights from the interviews with staff:

- At all the camps, the staff we met with were dedicated and professional, and they worked very hard, both prior to and during the camp.
- All the camps invested in preparing the staff and in preparations for the camp sessions.
- In some of the camps, the counselors and other staff were graduates of those same camps, so that they had knowledge and experience about what to expect.
- All the staffers were familiar with the goals of their camp, the values they were interested in promoting, and the working methods and accepted practices unique to their camp.
- The staffers we interviewed reinforced what we had observed about the campers (concerning the experience of growing up and of independence, social encounters, and detachment from screens) and described the dynamics from their own perspective.
- A significant proportion of the staffers, mainly younger ones, spoke of having their own experiences of coping with challenges, maturing, and being independent



Highlights from the interviews with parents:

- Parents saw a special value in the camp, especially after the period of Covid-related closures and quarantining
- Parents described an experience that was meaningful for their children in the encounter with youngsters from other backgrounds, and they added that some of the children had overcome social challenges that had been part of their lives for a long time.
- Many parents described a process of maturation and independence that continued after the end of camp.
- Parents portrayed a positive process undergone by their children in terms of the curtailment of screen time.

For her, this was some kind of challenge and a special summer experience, especially after a year of the Coronavirus when they never went anywhere [...] and they missed that a lot

When she came home, she told me, 'Mom, I'm gonna fold the laundry.' That was a significant change [...] The camp supplied something that was missing.

My son is usually on his phone and he told me that they never noticed there were no phones. He took a board game with him and he had his friends there and they taught each other.



Summary

The study shows that the summer camps create the possibility of a very powerful summer experience that utilizes the advantages offered by the principles of non-formal education and experiential learning. The youngsters enjoyed being there and enjoyed the activities; they greatly expanded their circle of friends and their social skills; they learned to cope with challenges and to manage their days independently; and they

learned that one can enjoy quality time without screens. All of that suggests important added value for their activities at summer camp – for the children, the parents, and possibly for additional circles (in the classroom, among friends, family members, and so on). The main challenge we see is making connections between the non-formal educational summer camp activity and their formal education during most of the year.





Part 1

Literature survey



Introduction

In Israel, summer vacation from school, from June through July and August (known as “the long vacation”), is a significant period for young people in Israel. During that time, they are maturing, separating from the age group to which they only recently belonged, and preparing to enter the next grade level. This is also, of course, when they take a rest from the school year. Summer typically includes going places, family trips, enjoyable activities and sometimes inactivity. Still, the long summer vacation also has the potential for risky situations. Dr. Tal Snir of health services company B-Well cites some aspects of summer vacation either promoting, or lessening, risky behaviors:

1. **Switching daytime with nighttime** | This can have an impact physically, but the risk is mainly in nighttime activities far from parental supervision and lacking social defense mechanisms.
2. **Alcohol consumption** | There is a sharp rise in alcohol consumption among young people during summer vacation. Many factors are behind this increase, including boredom, lack of parental supervision, and participation in various frameworks that enable it.
3. **Risk of suicide** | This arises from reasons tied to adolescence combined with a lack of supervision and oversight by parents.
4. **Youth movement activities** | The author of this study notes that this characteristic of summer vacation is a positive factor that contributes to a sense of independence and a positive experience of the vacation.¹

Organizers of summer programs in Israel defined the main activities of young people over the summer according to the following categories:



For ages 16-18, studying for matriculation (bagrut) exams (Goldstein et al., 2020).



Participation in youth movement organizations as campers or counselors.



Noar Oved (an organization facilitating summer job placements for teens).



Going on a family vacation in Israel or abroad.



At home, meeting up with friends, at the beach or at a pool.

1 | <https://www.tasmc.org.il/Be-Well/InterestAreas/kid/Pages/summer-vacation-Adolescents.aspx> (Hebrew)

One of the summer activities gaining in popularity in recent years is the summer camp. That term is inspired to a great extent by the tradition of summer sleepaway camps in the United States (despite the considerable differences in content and modes of activity) as well as from other sources rooted in Israeli culture. Although this is about “fun” activities for the summer months, these frameworks can also have a big impact on the participants. Yair (2006) found that although the duration of participation can be one week per year, or a few weeks in all, attending a summer camp during one’s teens can be a central and life-changing experience that continues to influence the participants later on in their adult lives.

This survey addresses the theoretical and empirical background necessary to understand

the context in which the summer camps – the focus of this study – operate. The relevant context is provided by non-formal education as an educational approach and the possibilities it encompasses: learning by trial and error, self- and social discovery, identity work and other powerful experiences that affect the participant over the long term. We will look at the subject of travel and journeys, concerning which there is more research available than for the more focused subject of summer camps. From the standpoint of empirical data, we offer data mainly from a study by the Szold Institute for the New York Federation. That study presents more horizontal data about the types of organizers and the activities, participant characteristics and costs, and fewer findings about influence or impact.



Summer camps in North America

As noted, one major source of inspiration and influence for summer camps in Israel is the longstanding tradition of summer camps in North America. Summer camps for Jewish teens first began appearing in the United States at the start of the 20th century. At that time, activities that included sleeping away from home were becoming more popular alongside a well-established tradition of holiday venues and summer retreats for American Jews – mainly as a response to antisemitism and the exclusion of Jews from mainstream tourist sites. During the

1940s and 1950s, the summer camps began gradually adding explicitly “Jewish” content, including teaching campers about Judaism as well as Hebrew or Yiddish, for example (Cohen, 2016). During the 1970s, the camps began arousing considerable interest as subjects of research, notably about their impact on participants. The camps were found to provide a meaningful experience in a Jewish environment, a peer group social experience, and role models – all of which encouraged active participation by the Jewish community (Ibid., 2016). Moreover,

longitudinal studies have found that many graduates of summer camps went on to become educational consultants, teachers, principals or other kinds of education-related professionals. In recent years increasing numbers of Israelis have attended Jewish summer camps in the US, some even becoming counselors later on. Furthermore, Jewish Agency emissaries returning to Israel after having been exposed to the summer camp world in America often serve as ambassadors for the field in Israel.

Jewish summer camps in the US place great emphasis on the connection to Jewish identity, and most camps also stress the connection to Israel. Jewish identity is also expressed in involvement in the Jewish community and in Jewish leadership, hence these subjects have been a priority in the research. Several longitudinal studies have been conducted to examine the impact of summer camps on these measures of Jewish identity and on involvement in Jewish community life (Cohen, 2000, 2011, 2005; Cohen & Colter-Berkowitz, 2004; Keysar & Kosmin). Most studies found that camps significantly affected the sense of identity and of belonging, and involvement in Jewish life. In a 2006 Jewish Educators Survey, Jewish leaders were asked which activities they participated in during their teens had had the greatest effect on their Jewish identity. The most common response (over 22%) was participation in summer camps. A study by Wertheimer (2010) found that 71% of young Jewish leaders in the United States had attended a summer camp in their teens. This finding was criticized, however, on the grounds that the impact demonstrated

was short-term and that insufficient consideration was given to intervening variables that might explain the impact, such as parental involvement or commitment to Jewish identity.

To address that criticism, a longitudinal study in 2011 analyzed 26 surveys of Jewish communities; these considered Jewish identity, maintaining a Jewish lifestyle, and attitudes toward Israel. The experimental group included adults who had attended summer camps and the researchers compared them with a control group of adults who did not attend camps. The study also made use of linear regression – controlling for intervening variables and enabling a focus on the influence of the summer camps. This study found a particularly high impact of the summer camps in the following areas: opinions about Israel (camp participation as a teenager increases the prospects for more positive attitudes toward Israel by 55%), monthly attendance at a synagogue (45%), lighting Shabbat candles (37%), and contributing to a Jewish Federation (30%). Moderate influence was found regarding the following: membership in a synagogue (26%), a mostly Jewish social circle (25%), contributing to a Jewish charity (25%), and a sense of being Jewish as very important (21%). Low impact was found regarding the following statements: “I did not have a Christmas tree” (11%), “I am in a mixed marriage” (10%), “I always or often attend a Passover seder” (8%), and “I always or often light Hanukkah candles” (5%).

Along with the Jewish summer camps, there are large networks of summer camps in the US not dedicated to any one specific population.

Research into these camps put more emphasis on their impact on social skills, abilities, and personal traits of the campers. In a study conducted of 167 participants in camps in Arizona, California, and Colorado, the camps were found to have a high impact on social skills, whether from the perspective of the campers or that of the parents. The highest ratings in the survey were accorded to statements like “I learned new things about my friends”, “I enjoyed spending time with new friends”, “I met new people I’d like to keep in touch with”. Moreover, the campers and the parents reported

that following their participation in the camp, campers became “happier” (Monke, 2015). A comprehensive study with 1,288 participants from 16 camps in Canada that also looked at both campers and parents found that the camp had a positive impact on all five areas examined: (1) social ties and integration, (2) environmental awareness, (3) attitudes toward physical exercise, (4) emotional intelligence, and (5) personal growth and self-confidence. That study found that the impact was greater on girls and increased as the age of respondents increased (Chapeskie et al., 2010).



Informal education and learning through experience

John Dewey (1960) defined informal education as the entirety of social and cultural influences that comprise the context within which a school operates. Informal education enables the learner to acquire information in a way that involves all the senses and not solely through the cognitive dimension. Silverman-Keller (2007) argued that information in informal education appears via a mixture of methods, texts, rituals, visuals, and more. Keller (1996) emphasized a lack of construction and flexibility on the one hand, and an educational outlook and intentional ideology on the other. Kahana (2000) defined eight measures for what he termed “components of the non-formal compass” (all these eight components are manifest in summer camps):

1. Volunteerism

A relatively free choice of goals or courses of action. Kahana argues that voluntary activity increase the commitment to values.

2. Multidimensionality

Expressed in a broad range of activities that differ from one another but are equal from a values standpoint. Kahana argues that multidimensionality functions to establish a sense of self-worth.

3. Symmetry

Relates to interaction and balanced reciprocity amongst the participants themselves and between them and the team of counselors. Symmetry requires agreement on universal

values which, in turn, Kahana argues, facilitates the development of personal trust and extra-contractual relationships, which are necessary to any social exchange activity.

4. Dualism

This concerns the simultaneous existence of trends that can be different from or even contrary to or mutually exclusive to one another. Participants in a non-formal activity can try different alternatives and execute one selectively in a variety of situations.

5. Moratorium

Suspension of value judgments. This situation allows for trial and error with no autonomic punishment for activities that are “wrong” from a normative standpoint. This is at the midpoint of the continuum between utter permissiveness at one end and very precise definitions of behavior at the other.

6. Modularity

Having bits of content or values that can each be transmitted independently of the others and in varying order, congruent with the situation and the circumstances.

7. Expressive instrumentalism

Generally, a distinction is made between expressive and instrumental aspects in group settings. Expressive instrumentalism offers an integrative approach and presents actions both as objectives in their own right (expressive) and in terms of their future value (instrumental).

8. Pragmatic symbolism

The use of symbols and actions that are interrelated and lend importance to the

symbolic dimension of an activity in a way that broadens its overall meaning.

Summer camps in Israel are categorized as non-formal educational activities. Non-formal education offers a space for freer learning than that usually occurring in formal education. This space allows for experiencing and examining subjects like identity, coping with challenges, and social relationships. When an informal space is professionally managed, by a suitably trained team, it can serve as an effective platform for improving academic achievements, social skills, feelings of belonging, life skills, self-confidence, a sense of competence, and so forth (Weisblay, 2015). Non-formal education is typified above all by participation as a matter of free choice and the willingness of a youngster to take part in the activity (Kahana, 2007, Yair, 2006). Additional characteristics of non-formal educational space include flexibility, dynamism and lack of rigidity. These characteristics facilitate learning through trial and error, through experience, as distinguished from formal education. Non-formal education encourages young people to utilize different types of intelligence, with an emphasis on creative, artistic, or bodily-kinesthetic intelligence – elements that are less evident in regular classrooms (Goldstein et al., 2020).

Another characteristic of non-formal education in general and summer camps in particular is experiential learning. Gross & Rutland (2016) defined experiential learning as a process by means of which knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Other scholars have argued that apart from the acquisition of knowledge, experiential learning

also encompasses learning in terms of skills, abilities and values (Jacobs, 1999). Bernard Reisman (1991) defined four characteristics of experiential learning: (1) the learner's need, (2) creation of an effective group context, (3) an atmosphere of trust, and (4) encouraging participants to explore. Other investigators have emphasized additional elements: the need for

a "fun" environment, continuity, an emphasis on trying things out, and so on (Kress, 2014). The environment of a summer camp as an informal learning space provides a large share of these conditions, and hence has the potential to serve as a platform for learning through experience that touches on personal and interpersonal skills, abilities, values and identity.



Meaningful experience

Meaningful instances of experiential learning in a non-formal educational space influence their participants in a variety of ways. The key factors that give rise to such learning include: (1) an experience that breaks with routine, (2) identification with counselors and other significant figures, (3) experiential learning by trying things out, (4) feedback and group experiences (Shish, 2015). Perkins (1998) defined learning from meaningful experience as "active and connected knowledge created in a social situation and comprising the basis for further learning". Such knowledge, Perkins argues, will be retained over time and be useful in many contexts, beyond the original context in which it was acquired. A positive emotional climate created by the group is an important additional part of building a meaningful learning experience. Shish (2015) argued that the acquisition of basic social skills is a condition for the creation of such an experience. Yair (2006) argued that in order for an activity to become a key experience capable of serving as a turning point in the lives of those experiencing it, it must

be challenging, freely chosen, and encompass investigation and discovery, competitiveness, authenticity and gradual development toward surprising peaks. Yair (2006) also argued that three mechanisms connect the activity and its results: a cognitive mechanism, an emotional mechanism and one of self-discovery – to which he adds a physical aspect related to a sense of self-worth and of difficulties overcome.

When a meaningful and very powerful experience of that kind occurs, it can become what Shish (2006) defines as a "life lesson". In his analysis he is discussing trips and journeys, but one can draw a parallel here to summer camp experiences. A "life lesson" is an outcome of a highly powerful experience that creates profound changes in participants' awareness and behavior. When the experiential activity touches a very "deep" place in the participants' identity and enables processes of self-discovery, the adoption of a positive image and recognition of new capabilities – the experience can be a "life lesson".



Models of summer camps

Based on interviews with organizers of summer programs, Goldstein et al. (2020) distinguished among definitions for three models of summer camp.



The first definition is by length of the camp session, and the subcategories are:

1. Continuous and long-term camp.
2. One-time annual camp.
3. Multiple-session annual camp.
4. Other time frames.



The second definition is by types of population, and the subcategories are:

1. Homogeneous camps.
2. Heterogeneous camps.



The third definition is by demographic expansion, and the subcategories are:

1. Expansion by age.
2. Specific target group.

The distinction by duration of sessions concerns the way the camp operates throughout the year. The continuous long-term model is a camp that combines a broad range of activities throughout the year. This is the model characteristic of the youth movements and youth organizations. The target population of participants is the same every year and the camp is an inseparable part of the sponsoring organization's leisure activities throughout the year. The one-time annual model refers to a separate event that takes place once a year. The number of participants is not known in advance and the organization must market the event and recruit participants again each year. The multiple-session model is a camp that brings together young people several

times a year. The activities take place mainly on weekends and school holidays and during summer vacations. The model using other time frames is generally in the nature of an optional model. The interviewees in that study proposed options for holding camps (1) on weekends, (2) throughout the year apart from holidays, (3) during Hanukkah, and (4) at Tisha B'Av.²

The definition by type of population relates to the differences between camps that try to bring together young people with homogeneous characteristics from the standpoint of their sociocultural and socioeconomic background versus camps that aspire to heterogeneity. Within the category of heterogeneous camps, one may distinguish between camps that

2 | Quoting from the Szold Institute report: "This is an opportunity to bring people together for shared dialogue. Actually Tisha B'Av [...] always turns out to be a very meaningful experience because it offers an amazing opportunity to talk about the history, about the historical narrative."

bring together young people from different backgrounds and different groups in Israeli society versus camps that deal with encounters between Israeli young people and Diaspora Jewish young people.

The definition by demographic expansion relates to the potential expansion of camp

activities more than to an existing operating model. Age expansion means an expansion of camp activities by discrete or common age groups. Expansion by target audience refers to expanding the activity for a group with specific characteristics.



Camp as an adventure in self-discovery

The field of research into summer camps in Israel is just beginning, and a lot of work will be needed to arrive at solid insights. In this context, the research by the Szold Institute liberally cited in this review is the first major attempt to take an organized look at the field, including quantitative and qualitative data and findings (but preceded several decades earlier by the doctoral dissertation of Tamar Rapoport in 1980). In recent years, several studies of youth movements have been conducted, and they included some examination of the camping experiences of the youth movements. The study by Heiman-Zehavi and Gertal (2017) used qualitative methods to examine the educational experiences at camp. In their study, they emphasized the camp as “a world” in which the campers are exposed to a diversity of

empowering experiences. They noted that campers “experience the arrangement of space, the arrangement of time, the definition of different arenas of activity, social life, coping with rules and active participation in society”. They showed how participation in camp life involves personal and social empowerment, leadership development, belonging, and so on.

Research literature from a closely related field deals with experiences of “the trip” or “the journey” as educational tools or life-altering experiences. There are more than a few differences between a journey and a summer camp, but there are also many similarities. According to Neumark et al. (2017), the journey is rooted in the traditions of the Palmach (they were specifically discussing the Masa). The

physical challenges, sleeping outdoors in the field³ and the social encounter turn the journey into an experience in self-discovery. Nonetheless, they also stressed the importance of the group experience, mainly in terms of the group of fellow campers and of counselors. Participants must together cope with shared challenges while utilizing the unique power of group effort. The place of the group is also expressed in dialogue circles in which participants are exposed to different ideas and different attitudes about identity, while preserving an egalitarian structure and the right of each person to make their voice heard. This is a rare opportunity for participants who come from various backgrounds in Israeli society to hear and get to know participants whose backgrounds are unlike their own. Neumark et al. (Ibid., 2017) quoted a young woman from Emek Hefer, according to whom this was one of the most meaningful experiences of the journey: “I suddenly noticed people who think differently than I do. And listening, being quiet so that everyone can express themselves, that was very meaningful” (Ibid., 2017).

This unique pattern of solidarity emerges at ceremonial events where everyone is equal, forging what anthropologist Victor Turner (2004) termed *communitas*. The concept is taken originally from an analysis of the liminal stage in rites of passage. This is a unique phase during which the participant is

between a previous identity and the identity to follow and hence is not attached to any identity. The situation generates a special feeling of partnership and elevation, followed by identification with the new identity. The experience of the journey and of summer camp both aspire to arrive at moments of *communitas* – to lead participants to feel a special closeness and solidarity based on their shared experience.

A key role in the unique experience created by the journey (and by the camp) is played by the counselors. Relative to teachers in the formal education system, the counselors are younger and closer in age to the participants. Still, they are adult enough to be perceived as authority figures and role models. They have life experience and knowledge that campers see as admirable. One of the participants in the Masa Israeli – Israeli Camp program described his counselor as “a kind of spiritual mentor”. Furthermore, the counselors find it easier than do teachers to create solidarity and bond with the participants because, unlike the teachers at school, they have no prior acquaintance with the students and no baggage concerning their status or their prior behavior (Neumark et al., 2017).

The uniqueness of the journey (or camp) includes detachment from everyday life, adherence to a clear schedule, being outdoors in nature, detachment from parents and the usual social environment and, these days, also detachment from screens. These

3 | Not every camp involves physical challenges.

conditions accord the journey (or camp) the characteristics of an “adventure” in its sociological sense (Simmel, 2012). An “adventure” is an event at which someone is detached from their ordinary life for a well-defined period of time and undergoes experiences dealing with essential life issues (identity, self-image, discovery, and so on). What differentiates an ordinary school trip from a journey (or camp) is the possibility of failure, of not meeting the challenge, which is also what empowers the adventure dimension of the experience. In an adventure, so Simmel argued, the participant “is likely to depart as one person and return as someone else” (in Neumark et al., 2017). The experience of self-discovery and personal growth rests, again, in no small measure on the exposure to challenges and the subsequent coping with them. This exposure gives participants faith in themselves, improves their self-concept and persuades them of their ability to deal even with unexpected new challenges in future. For many participants, the experience of sleeping outdoors is such a challenge. For others, the challenges might be social or physical, or anything else that takes them out of their comfort zone and “forces” them to call on parts of their personality that they may not have been aware of or that were not expressed sufficiently in their normal living environment.

Another important part of the journey (or camp) experience as an adventure in self-discovery relates to participants’ encounters

with people from different parts of Israeli society. There is no need here for an expanded description of the divided structure of Israeli society in recent years, from a cultural-demographic standpoint or in terms of class, socioeconomic status or social factors. Teens generally tend to keep to themselves and spend little time outdoors or with friends (Leon, 2016). The time they do spend with friends usually involves people much like themselves. The journey (or camp) enables them, sometimes for the first time, to get to know and interact with young people from different groups. According to Neumark et al. (2017), experiences of discovery in the social dimension take place along three main axes: the first is about discovering new aspects of the group already familiar to the participant (including her/himself). The second is about discovering participants hitherto unknown, whether due to lack of interest or lack of opportunity. The third is about participants strengthening their self-identity by presenting it and receiving reinforcement from others. These three aspects of social discovery contribute to the individual undergoing the process and also strengthen the connection between members of the group. In their research on Israeli Journey, Neumark et al. quoted participants who, after the experience of the journey, understood that “everyone is a human being”, “everyone can teach you something in life”, “you shouldn’t judge people without knowing them” and so on. Teachers who participated in such a journey

described a real transformation in students in this context in their ability to see the other and accept diverse opinions and attitudes involving identities different from their own. Encounters between participants from the center of the country and the periphery, from different classes and from different cultural groups led the young people to reexamine stereotypes and prejudices and forge ties that would not have been feasible for them earlier.

As noted, many of the findings presented in this section come from a comprehensive study of the Masa Israeli – Israeli Camp program, which has many similarities with the summer camps and their declared goals

that are being evaluated in the current study. Dealing with physical and other challenges and developing a positive self-image and sense of competence, recognizing the power of the group and the unique social solidarity of the peer group, looking more deeply at issues involved in identity clarification, and the exposure to participants from different groups while reexamining stereotypes and prejudices – all these are certainly summer camp goals. In addition, summer camps also seek to create the sense of “adventure” that imbues a journey of self-discovery and social discovery, a formative experience for participants that will stay with them for many years.



Screen use among teens

Children and adolescents spend their lives in two parallel and mutually complementary spaces, the real and the virtual (Eisenkot, 2017). The virtual space includes social networks like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and TikTok, as well as various applications for games, drawing and art, and for posting ads. A social network is an

internet site that enables communication, content sharing and community-building (Brennan, 2006). The technological developments that have made it possible for these sites to appear as applications (apps) on mobile phones have greatly expanded the scope of their use, especially among children and teens (Eisenkot, 2017).

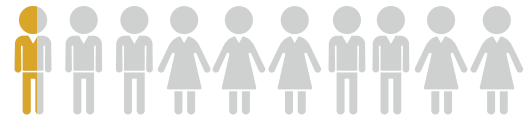
A WHO (World Health Organization) survey on HBSC (Health Behavior in School-aged Children) compared schoolchildren aged 11-15 from 41 countries and found that Israel ranks first with four hours of daily use

of computers, cellphones and the Internet (Ibid., 2017). The gaps between Israeli youth and peers of their age in other countries are substantial. For instance:

31% of the students in Israel in that age group surf the Internet

compared with

9% in the United States (Ibid., 2017).



Another study from the EU Kids Online initiative gathered data on 25,000 children and adolescents aged 9-16 from 33 European countries; that study found that

Their main activities while surfing include looking at social network profiles (Ibid., 2017)



28% of children aged 9-12 and

63%

watching videos

59%

using messaging apps

49%

using the Internet for their studies

33%

and playing games with other children or teens

28%



60% of adolescents aged 13-16

use the Internet daily via mobile phones.

As noted, the scope of such use in Israel is even greater



of students in grades 4-11 reported that they use the Internet at least once a day, and the average use is for 2.8 hours a day (Shemesh et al., 2014)



of the children and teens check for updated Internet content within 15 minutes of getting up in the morning (National Council for the Child, 2015).

Smartphones now represent the main tool for accessing the Internet for whatever purpose. In 2015 about 83% of Israeli children had a smartphone. The youngest age at which children began using a mobile phone was six, while the most common was nine. A fourth of the children reported using a mobile phone more than five hours a day. The study found that the most common uses among children in Israel aged 8-15 were for WhatsApp, games and conversation (it is probably fair to assume that TikTok is currently in the lead). About 46% of young people aged 12-17 reported that they surf the Internet four hours or more a day (National Council for the Child, 2015).

It is still too early to evaluate the long-term impact of the intensive use of the Internet and of screens in general on the processes of adolescence and personality structure.

Still, even at this stage, troubling evidence is accumulating with regard to two main areas. The first involves high tendencies to grandiose narcissism (Sela, 2019). Social networks encourage norms of self-presentation in terms of lofty images – successful, attractive, smart, and so on. Youngsters growing up in this normative environment find themselves in constant competition with the peer group and under pressure to compensate for lower than expected abilities by creating fake identities. Sela (201) argues that the greater the gap between social expectations and the actual situation, the more will young people oscillate between grandiose fantasies and feelings of inferiority, shame, and fear of failure. This pattern increases the need for positive reinforcement from others to buttress one's self-esteem (the culture of "likes") and

intensifies the adolescent's dependence on social media (Ibid., 2019).

The other troubling aspects of an adolescence spent with screens is the extreme degree of information overload. The impact includes problems with concentration, being distracted, regulating behavior and impulse control. The unceasing dissemination of content has contributed to the FOMO syndrome (fear of missing out), manifest among teens as continual updating, so that screen use becomes difficult to give

up. (Ibid., 2019). Among the evidence of this is the high correlation between ADHD and Internet addiction among children and teens (Evren et al., 2018). Another finding is that the brain's reward centers are overactive during computer games. These mechanisms operate in a manner reminiscent of their activity among substance abuse addicts (Weinstein, 2017). The preliminary findings indicate the potential impact of intensive screen use among young people.

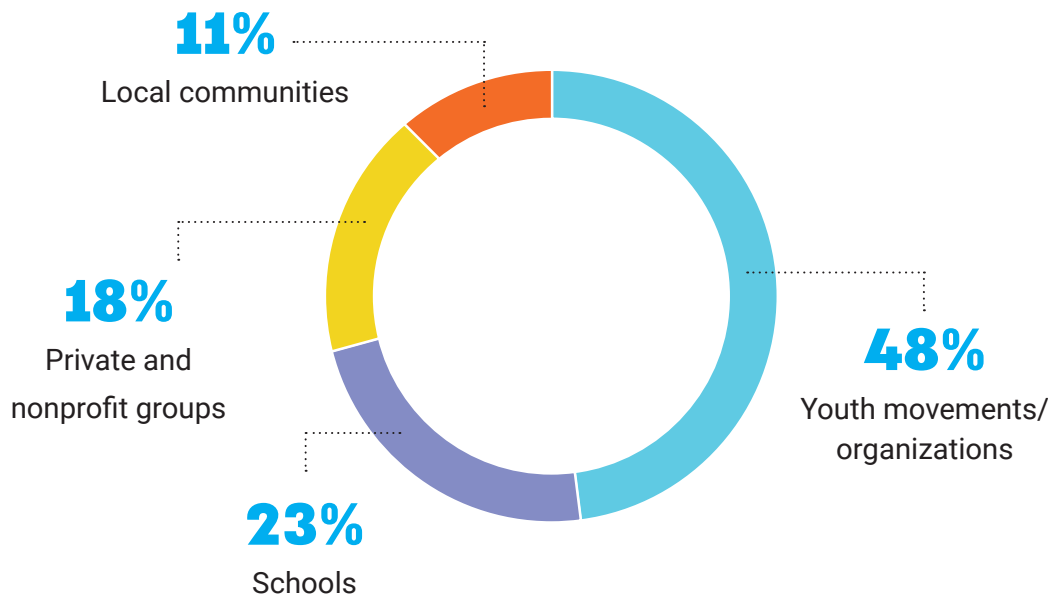


Basic data on summer camps in Israel

In general, a large proportion of youth in Israel participate in organized summer activity of some kind, but most of the activities do not have the characteristics that summer camps do. Interviews with young people in the Szold Institute study reveal that as these youngsters get older, their willingness to participate in summer activities declines (Goldstein et al., 2020). The survey found that about 64% of Israeli young people participate in an organized framework during summer vacation. 38% of all youths participated in program that included sleeping outdoors overnight, generally under the aegis of a youth

movement or some other youth organization. In Israel there are 13 youth movements recognized by the Ministry of Education and a list of 22 member organizations in the Israeli Council of Organizations for Youth. According to the Szold survey, the youth movements and other youth organizations operate about half the summer programs in Israel (Ibid., 2020). Apart from these youth movement and other youth organization programs, several additional organizations run programs using a “summer camp” model. Below is a breakdown of the entities that organize summer camps in Israel (Ibid., 2020):

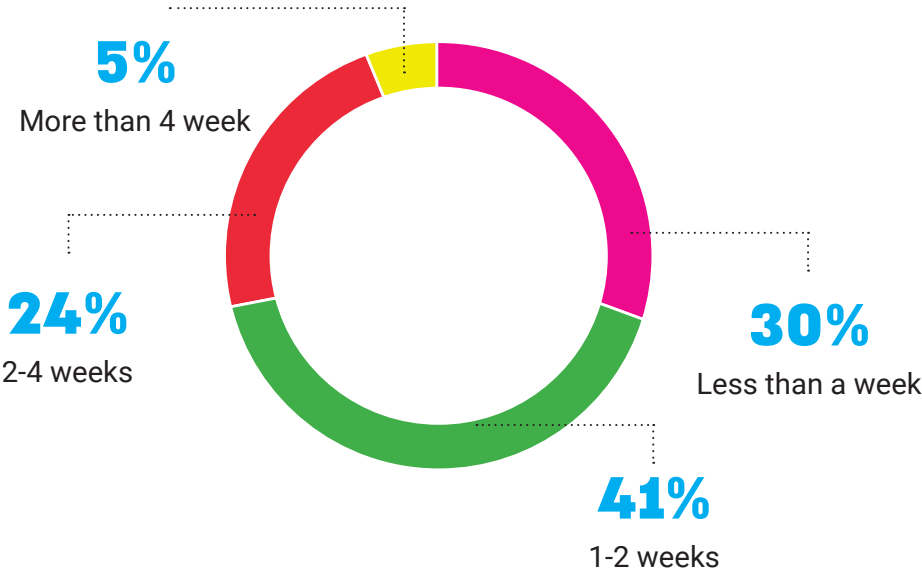
Breakdown of the organizing entities



The Szold study found that youth movements and other youth organizations offer content relating only to Zionist and Jewish identity along with pluralistic values. Local governments and

schools (at local day camps), in contrast, offer less content about identity and less overnight camping. Nonprofits offer much more identity-related content and less overnight camping.

Duration of participation at summer programs

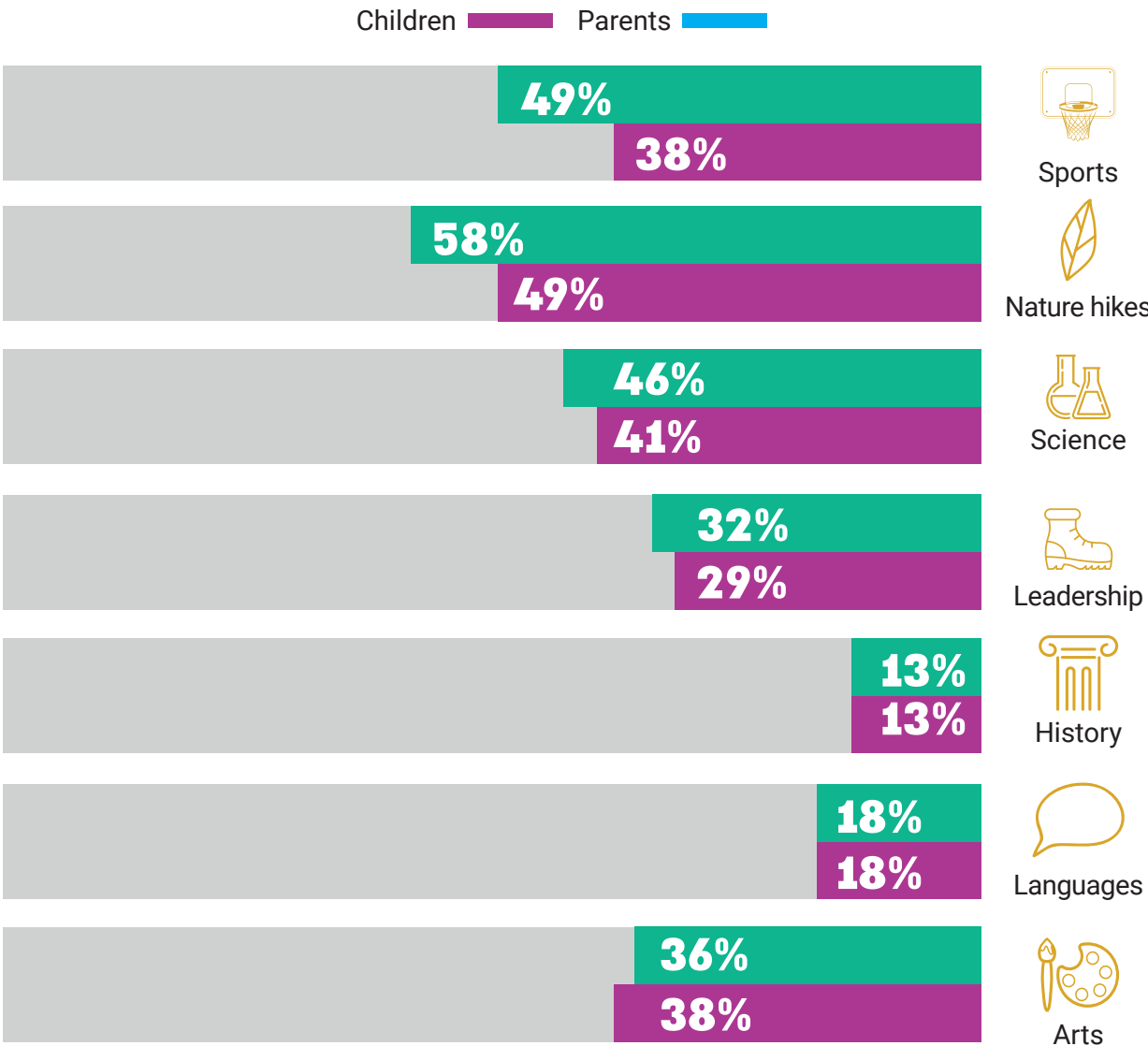


The desirable duration from the standpoint of parents is about 15 days on average for a day camp (without sleeping overnight) and about 7.5 days on average for a camp with where campers sleep overnight. Young people would prefer a 10-day program on average for

day camps and about 9 days on average for overnight camps.

Another subject the study considered is parental and teen preferences about the type of camp activities. Below are the findings (from Goldstein et al., 2020):

Areas of interest for children and parents



We can see that most interesting for parents and children were nature hikes, sports and science. In all those categories, the parents' interest level was higher than that of the children. Possibly the fact that the survey did not ask about "fun" could explain the relatively low levels of interest expressed by the young people in each of the activities listed above. In the interviews with participants done by the researchers who conducted the survey, they mentioned the following subjects as most desired: (1) loving the land, (2) acquiring skills and doing activities in nature, (3) social skills (Ibid, 2020).

Regarding the cost of participation, the Szold Institute survey found that the average cost per participant for diverse kinds of summer programs was NIS 1,705. Through a mapping process conducted in parallel, the Institute found that costs ranged from NIS 500 to NIS 3,500. Young people from religious backgrounds who are involved in youth movements paid the lowest fees, about NIS 1,300 on average. In comparison, young people from a secular/traditional background who are not involved in youth movements paid the most, about NIS 2,580 on average (Ibid., 2020).⁴



Summary

This review reveals some key insights about summer camps in Israel. First, it is evident that the research literature in the field, mainly in the context of evaluating the effectiveness and measuring the influence of summer camps, is relatively sparse. Most of the research in Israel addressed trips and journeys, along with some studies of youth movements, but research on summer camps as a separate field of its own is still embryonic. Second, we can see that combining principles of non-formal education with principles of meaningful experience and the "adventure of self-discovery" can provide a high-quality solution with long-range impact on the risks

of summer vacation and excessive screen use by young people. Summer camps offer an experience of growing up and being independent, encounters with young people of different backgrounds from diverse parts of Israeli society and the opportunity to practice social and other skills, inclusion and identity work in a safe environment with supervision and guidance. Moreover, camps can potentially promote personal empowerment as campers cope with physical and other challenges as they experience being away from home and living in a quasi-independent environment while under protected and controlled conditions.

4 | Suitable caution is warranted regarding all the findings in this chapter, including costs. They are based on a study conducted by the Szold Institute about 4 years ago and many things have changed since then.



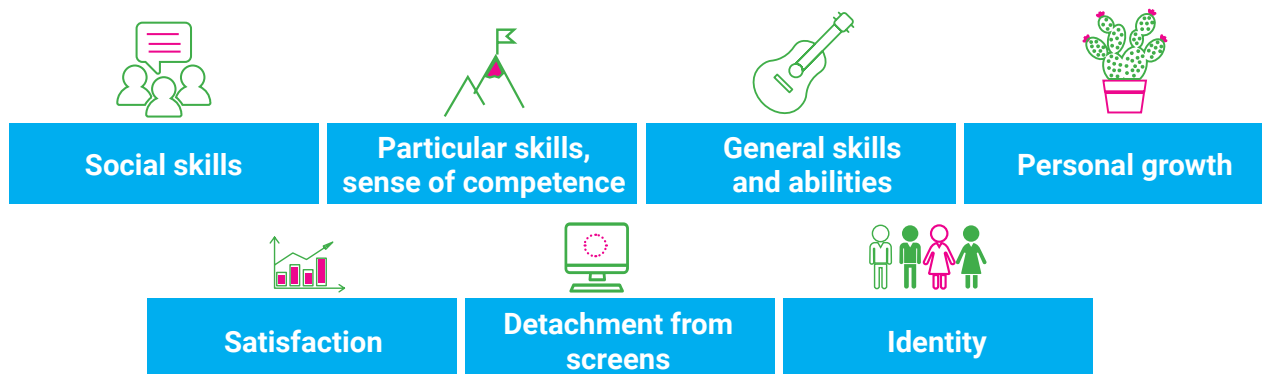
Part 2

Quantitative findings

In this section we will present a summary of the quantitative findings for all the camps. The quantitative part of the research included a questionnaire constructed specifically for

this study. The questionnaire included a series of statements and questions based on the metrics of success defined during the research preparation process.

The measures chosen for investigation are



(feedback on the camp experience)

These categories were selected congruent with what the Israel Summer Camps forum has defined as necessary for a high-quality summer camp:

Diversity - an encounter among the Israelis.

Addressing personal, community, and Israeli identity.

A values-based experience and a "utopian" children's community – the campers lead areas of the camp.

In addition, all of the camps have a policy of participation without screens and all mark

a Jewish-Israeli Shabbat in a manner determined by camp staff.

All the responses to survey questions are ranked on a scale of 1-5: 1 indicates very much disagree, 3 indicates moderate agreement, and 5 indicates very much agree. Some of the questions are inverted, meaning that 1 indicated the "positive" direction from an impact standpoint and 5 indicated the opposite.

Parents of campers at all participating camps signed an authorization allowing their children to complete a questionnaire.



Characteristics of the respondents

A total of 605 participants responded to the survey from five summer camps: Camp Dror | Masa Israeli – Israeli Camp | Tel-Aviv-Jaffa

Leadership Camp (Kimama) |Tovanot Insights in Education (Big Idea) | Ha'Shalem - The Whole Educational Space - 24/7.





About the summer camps participating in the study



Tovanot Ba'Chinuch - Insights in Education
(operated through Big Idea)



Insights in Education is a new camp established at the initiative of the Israel Summer Camps forum and the Schusterman Foundation.

The nonprofit association Insights in Education is an innovative initiative working to strengthen the public school system. The association offers school principals a professional and managerial platform they can use to transform their school toward building community, promoting excellence and providing inspiration thanks to its level of educational and social achievements. The association uses a holistic model. This model encourages the identification of educational, social and emotional solutions while identifying every student's strong points. During the 2020-2021 school year, the association worked with 37 schools and then chose to focus on seven of them located in the social and geographic periphery of Israel. Outstanding students in these seven schools were identified: students who had completed grades 7 to 10 – the grades hardest hit by the Coronavirus era.

To operate the camp, the association chose the Big Idea company, which is very experienced in

running tech-oriented summer camps.

Big Idea was established to nurture a curious, investigative, thoughtful and creative generation and equip each student with tools to realize their individual potential and provide inspiration for big, change-making ideas, stressing values of community, multiculturalism, initiative and Israeli innovation. Big Idea has operated its unique model featuring authentic freedom, empowering experience and personal development for the last 14 years.

Children aged 7-18 from 30 countries.

Two weeks away from home, without phones, in a pastoral youth-village setting.

A huge variety of fascinating technology workshops.

Experiential empowerment activities taking participants out of their comfort zones.

Lots of English.

In partnership with participating associations that work for the advancement of youth (Educating for Excellence, Olim Beyahad, Insights in Education, Ofanim, etc.).



Camp Dror



For over 25 years, since 1995, students in grades 6-10 attend a camp on the Golan Heights every summer. Camp Dror provides teens with an unforgettable experience of fun, values, and personal growth. Camp Dror belongs to the OU, an educational youth organization in Israel and the Diaspora, connecting young people in Jewish communities all over the world and exposing them to the physical and spiritual beauty of Israel. Every year some 300

boys and girls from Israel and abroad enjoy a unique combination of fun, deep Zionism, trips, kayaking, swimming, sports, arts and crafts, and so on – alongside prayer, Torah study, acts of kindness and a central Torah theme. The camp's special atmosphere provides each camper with ideal conditions for personal growth and building connections with new friends from among the best youth anywhere.



Tel-Aviv-Jaffa Leadership Camp (operated by Camp Kimama)



The Tel-Aviv-Jaffa Leadership Camp is a relatively new camp established at the initiative of the Israel Summer Camps forum and the Schusterman Foundation.

The director of education on the Tel-Aviv-Jaffa City Council built the agenda for the camp and chose the target groups. He decided that the camp would utilize a model that relies on schools and establishes connections with them, and that the group of students selected to attend would operate as a municipal leadership team. The student participants would be youngsters going into the 9th grade (on the assumption that that age group was hardest hit by the Coronavirus period), and would come from ORT Singalovski, Ironi Tet, Ironi Zayin and the School for Nature, Society and the Environment

– all of them located in south Tel Aviv and Jaffa neighborhoods.

The managing company chosen by the City Council to run the camp is Camp Kimama – which has substantial experience in the professional operation of summer camps. Kimama summer camps welcomed their first campers 13 years ago. Their team of facilitators and youth counselors, Israeli emissaries who had led camps in the United States, understood the enormous importance of the Israel-based encounter among young people from around the world and established the original Camp Kimama. The only one of its kind, Kimama is an international summer camp held every year in Israel for thousands of children and teens aged 6-17 from 40 different countries.



Masa Israeli – Israeli Camp



Masa Israeli – Israeli Camp is an educational dialogue organization focusing on strengthening participants' connections and sense of belonging to their people, the Land of Israel and the State of Israel. The organization's flagship program, Israeli Journey, utilizes a distinctly Israeli pedagogy featuring a journey of six days, taking place in high schools. It features dialogue circles, identity-challenging activity, and the translation of values into the practice of volunteer activity. It preaches the legitimacy of diverse opinions and a pluralistic awareness of diverse Israeli identities. Thousands of

participants have already experienced this uniquely Israeli Journey.

Israeli Summer Camp is a new program offered by Israeli Journey. Hundreds of young people from all over Israel and all sectors of Israeli society participate. The camp stresses identity, and the campers forge connections to self and others and discuss the meaning of connecting with the land, the country and the people of Israel. Questions of identity are addressed in terms of one's responsibility as citizens, Zionism, love of the land, and social activity, in a spirit of fun that enables an unforgettable summer experience.



המרחב החינוכי השלם 24/7



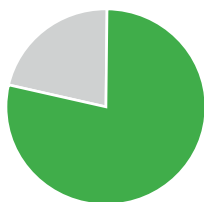
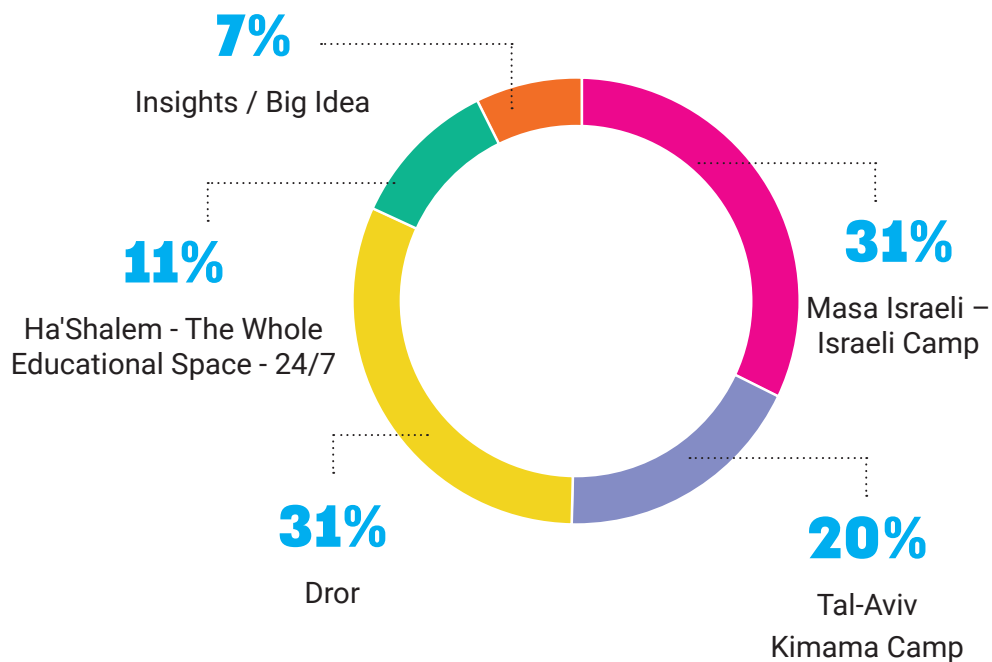
Ha'Shalem - The Whole Educational Space, 24/7 is an educational initiative seeking to create comprehensive educational continuity for youngsters by forging the right kind of connection between the various parts of their lives, merging the diverse connections between school and other life spaces into one single platform – the school. School is the only place where everyone shows up. It is the central space where students are supposed to find and experience a complete educational continuum, encompassing core studies as well as soft skills, 21st century capabilities and a connection to the community in which they live. All of that, during the entire day, from eight in the morning until the evening, in school

and by their own free choice. To that end, the school operates during class hours, during the afternoon leisure hours and during vacations.

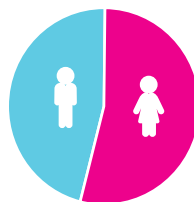
In 2020-2021 Ha'Shalem - The Whole Educational Space, 24/7 operated in 12 schools in socially and geographically peripheral areas of Israel. Six of them were chosen to continue into the summer by means of a dedicated summer camp. The Whole Educational Space summer camp that ran in Kfar Galim created a school team that will continue to work together in 2021-2022. The camp featured leadership, a formative summer experience, community service, time in nature, trips and learning about the land, surfing (at the sea), social activities, sports, and so forth.

The number of campers responding to the survey from each camp was affected by the number of campers attending and various other circumstances. Below is the breakdown of respondents by camp:

Diagram 1 | Breakdown of respondents by camp



82% of respondents had never before participated in a summer camp longer than 10 days.



56% of respondents were girls
44% were boys



The average age of respondents was

15



Personal growth

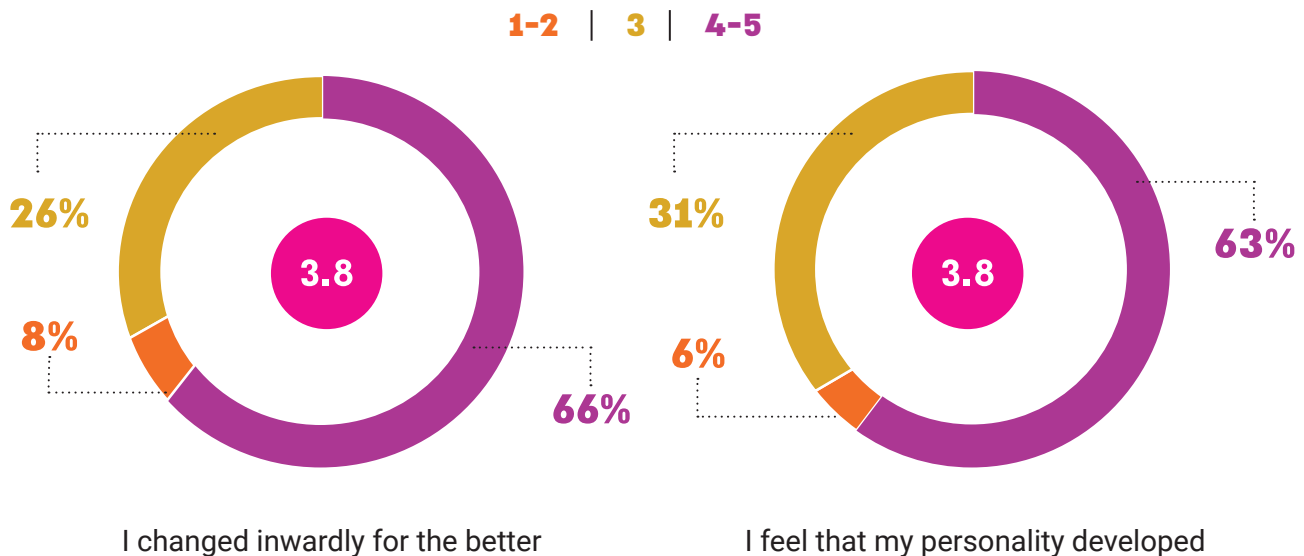
One clear goal of the summer camps is personal development – that there be processes of growth, maturation and even positive personality changes among the campers.

From the study it emerged that over 60% of participants rated as either high or very

high their sense that their personalities had developed and that they had changed inwardly for the better following their camp experience.

Diagram 2 presents the findings on personal growth. Note that for both statements, the average rating was high (3.8 on a scale of 1-5).

Diagram 2 | Personal growth





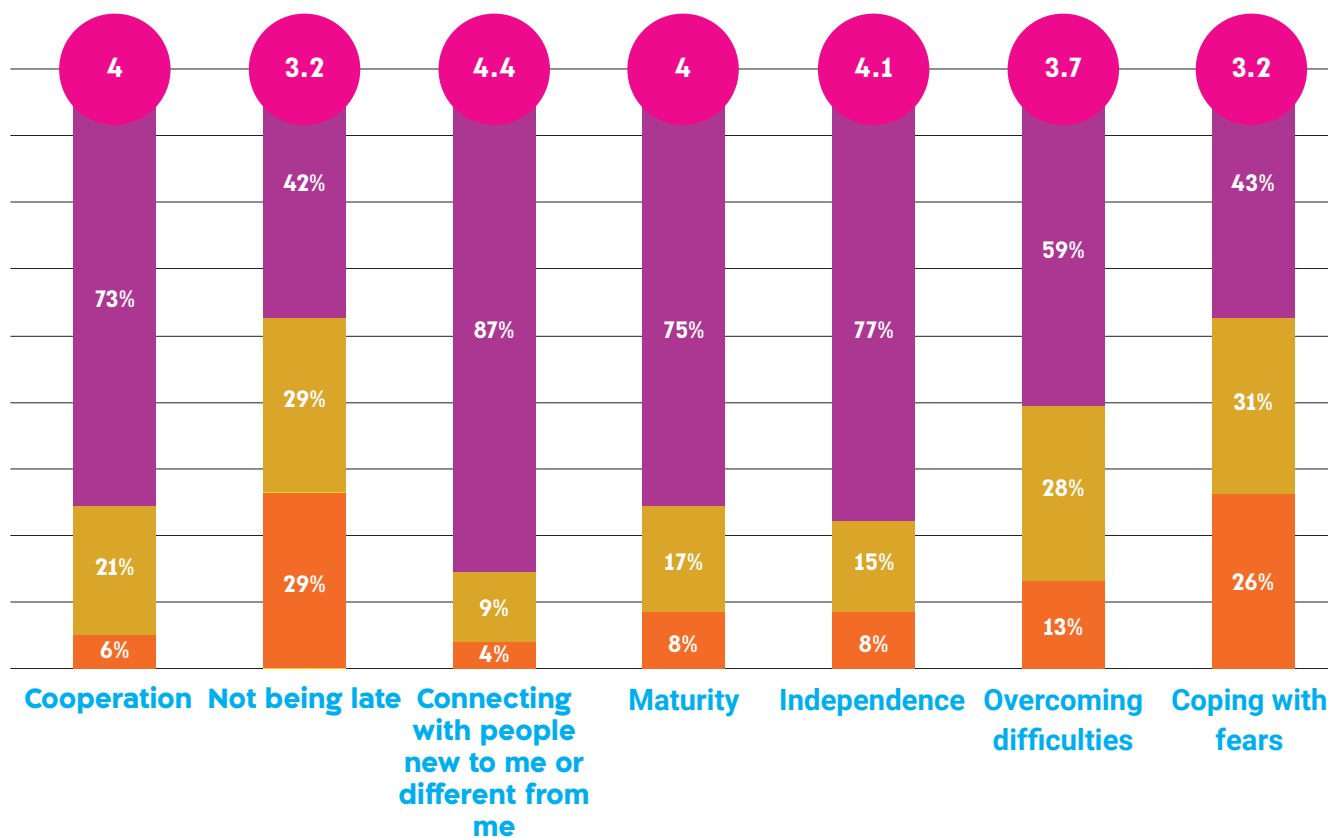
Life skills

In the life skills category (skills crucial to achieving goals in life, to personal advancement and leadership), the area where the impact was high, almost very high, was “connecting to people different from me”. In the other areas examined, too, such as “cooperation”, “maturity”, “independence” and

“overcoming difficulties”, the impact was high. Diagram 3 presents the impact of camp on life skills in various areas. Note that in addition to the highly influenced skills cited above, the skills influenced to a moderate extent (3.2 on a scale of 1-5) were “coping with fears” and “not being late”.

Diagram 3. Life skills

1-2 | 3 | 4-5





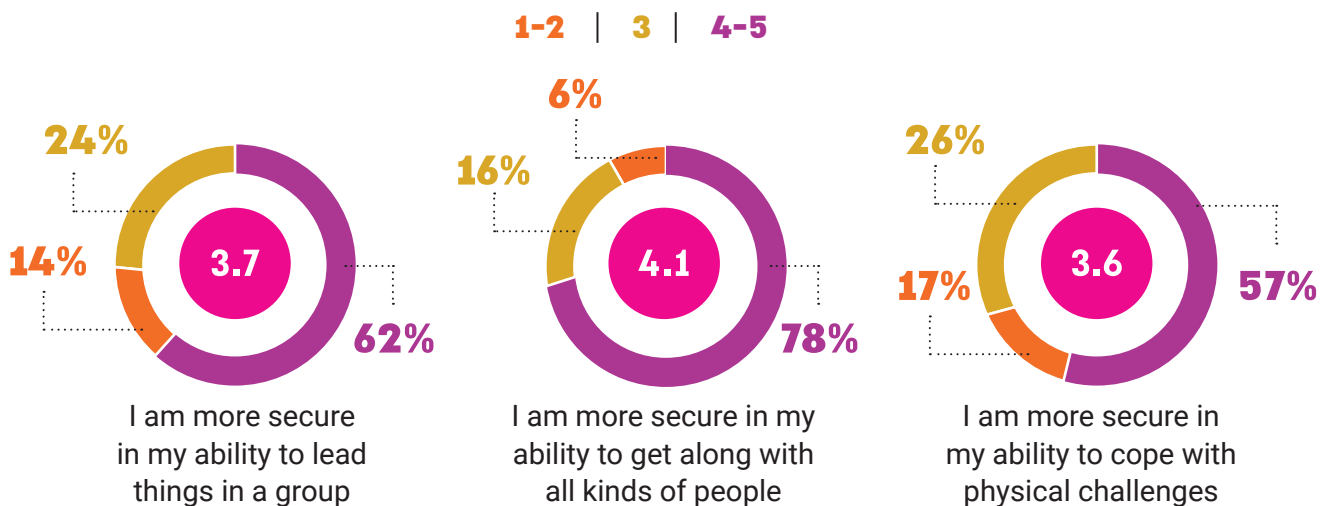
Sense of competence

Summer camps have enormous potential for instilling a sense of competence. Through meaningful experiences and trying out new and challenging things that campers never before confronted, they can acquire a sense of competence and a self-concept about their ability to cope with new challenges, with uncertainty, with fear and with new spaces.

Diagram 4 presents the impact of summer

camp attendance on campers' sense of competence. Note that the greatest impact (4.1) was in the area about interpersonal relations: "After attending the camp I am more confident of my ability to get along with all kinds of people". Regarding the sense of being able to lead group processes and to cope with physical challenges, the impact was medium-high (3.7 and 3.6, respectively).

Diagram 4 | Sense of competence



Social skills

Nonformal education has been proven by research to be an advantage for socialization processes, team building and developing social skills. **Summer camp, as an intensive experience in non-formal education, has a greater advantage for enhancing social skills and for practicing in a protected environment the ability to cope with a diverse group and with shared living.**

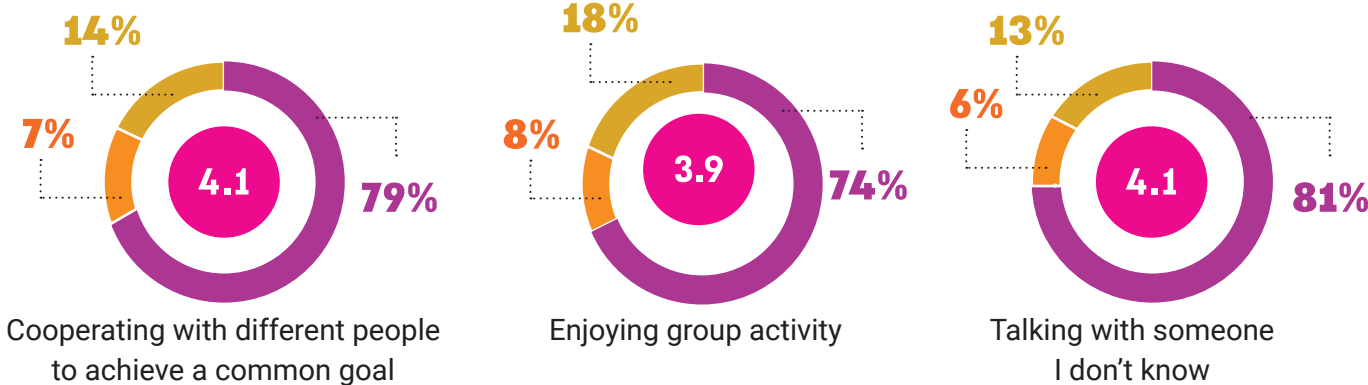
It is thus unsurprising that all the average figures here are at the high end for impact. After participation in summer camp, the campers feel much more confident about talking with someone they don't know (4.1 on a scale of 1-5), cooperating with different people to achieve a common goal (4.1), and enjoying group activities (3.9).

Diagram 5 presents the impact of summer camp participation on social skills. These findings consistently sustain

the pattern we saw throughout the study concerning the high impact of summer camps on campers’ social skills. For some campers, as we shall see later in this report, it was a real revolution.

Diagram 5 | Social skills

1-2 | 3 | 4-5



Tolerance and inclusion

Summer camp is a protected environment. Children and teens from all over Israel come together for at least 10 days. The diversity and degree of difference in participants’ individual backgrounds may create a tense social situation or it may provide a safe space for practicing the ability to accommodate differences.

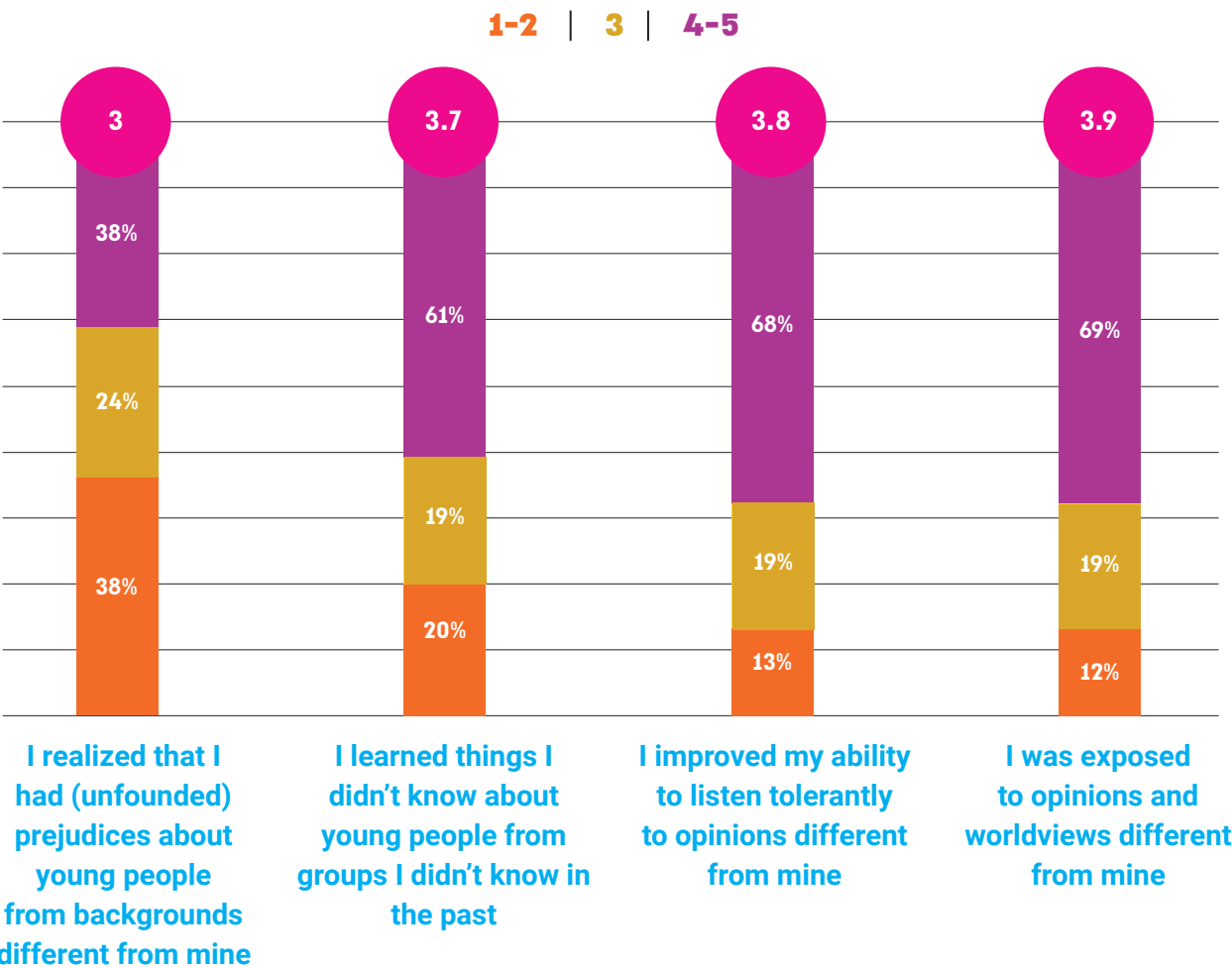
Diagram 6 presents the impact of the summer camp experience on participants’ tolerance toward young people from different groups and

their ability to be inclusive toward opinions and people different than those they are familiar with from their daily lives. Note that all the averages here are high except regarding one statement – “I understood that I had prejudices about young people from a different background” – where the average was medium. This may be because some of the campers (38%) really did not harbor solid prejudices even prior to the camp. Meanwhile, 38% rated this a 4 or a 5, and those

numbers suggest a high to very high impact even on this issue. The remaining statements have to do with the extent of exposure to different opinions and worldviews, the ability to listen tolerantly to other ideas, and learning new things about young people from unfamiliar groups. The averages here are in the high range (3.9, 3.8 and 3.7 respectively). In terms of a

breakdown, some 60% of respondents gave a high rating (a rank of 4 or 5) to statements about learning about unfamiliar groups and improving the ability to listen and be tolerant, and nearly 70% chose those options about the first statement ("I was exposed to opinions and worldviews different than mine").

Diagram 6 | Tolerance and inclusion





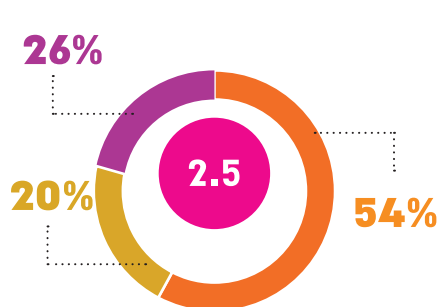
Identity

A diverse camp must succeed in being a safe space for identities. The campers must feel safe enough to be who they are without being embarrassed or afraid and without wanting to hide. The questions concerning identity included two statements, one with a reverse scale. Note that **the campers felt, to a very**

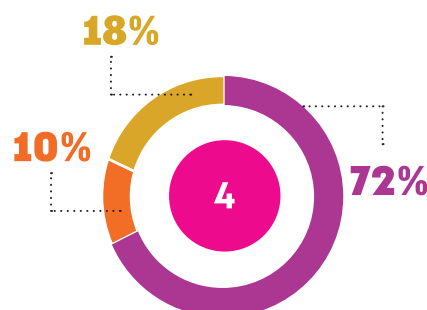
high degree, free to express who they are (4 on a scale of 1-5), and most of them did not agree with the statement that “I have opinions and attitudes that I was afraid to express at camp”. 74% of respondents agreed with that statement only to a moderate degree or lower.

Diagram 7 | Identity

1-2 | 3 | 4-5



I have opinions and attitudes I was afraid to express at camp



During the camp I felt free to express who I am



The Shabbat experience

Since identity (personal, community, Israeli and Jewish) is a defining component of summer camps, and since Shabbat has the potential to be an experience perceived by everyone as positive and as a meaningful group experience, we decided to examine the Shabbat experience at camp from the viewpoint of the campers. The camps investigated differed greatly from one another in their identity and in the kind

of Shabbat they chose to observe (from a camp with a secular lifestyle, where Shabbat is about heritage and culture, to a camp with a religious lifestyle, where Shabbat is part of a faith-based, spiritual experience).

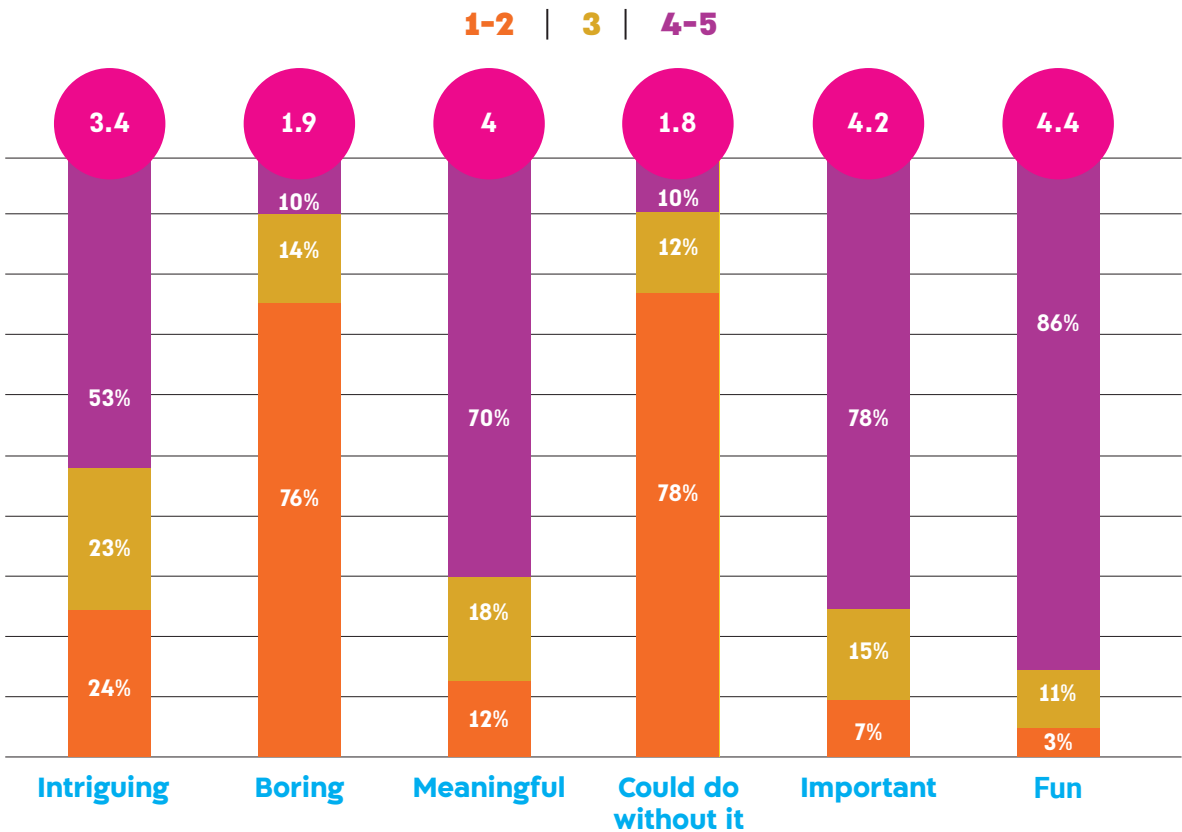
Diagram 8 presents campers' attitudes toward the Shabbat experience. At each camp this experience was constructed differently, but all emphasized that this time was special, quiet,

and “sacred”, and involved ceremony and rest. We also wanted to test for any opposition to a “forced” experience of Shabbat and to find out how Shabbat was experienced as it was actually commemorated at the camp.

For a negative take on the Shabbat experience, two of the statements are rated with an inverted scale; in both of those, there is a low level of agreement with the description of the Shabbat experience as boring or as something dispensable (1.9 and 1.8 on a scale of 1-5,

respectively). The campers gave a high ranking to the description of the Shabbat experience as “meaningful”, “important” and “fun” (3.4, 4.2 and 4.4, respectively). Regarding the description of the experience as “intriguing”, the average agreement was medium (3.4). Overall, it would seem that the Shabbat experience was positive and meaningful and that there is a place for it in the camp program, if only to provide a change in routine, a day of rest or time with the group.

Diagram 8 | The Shabbat experience





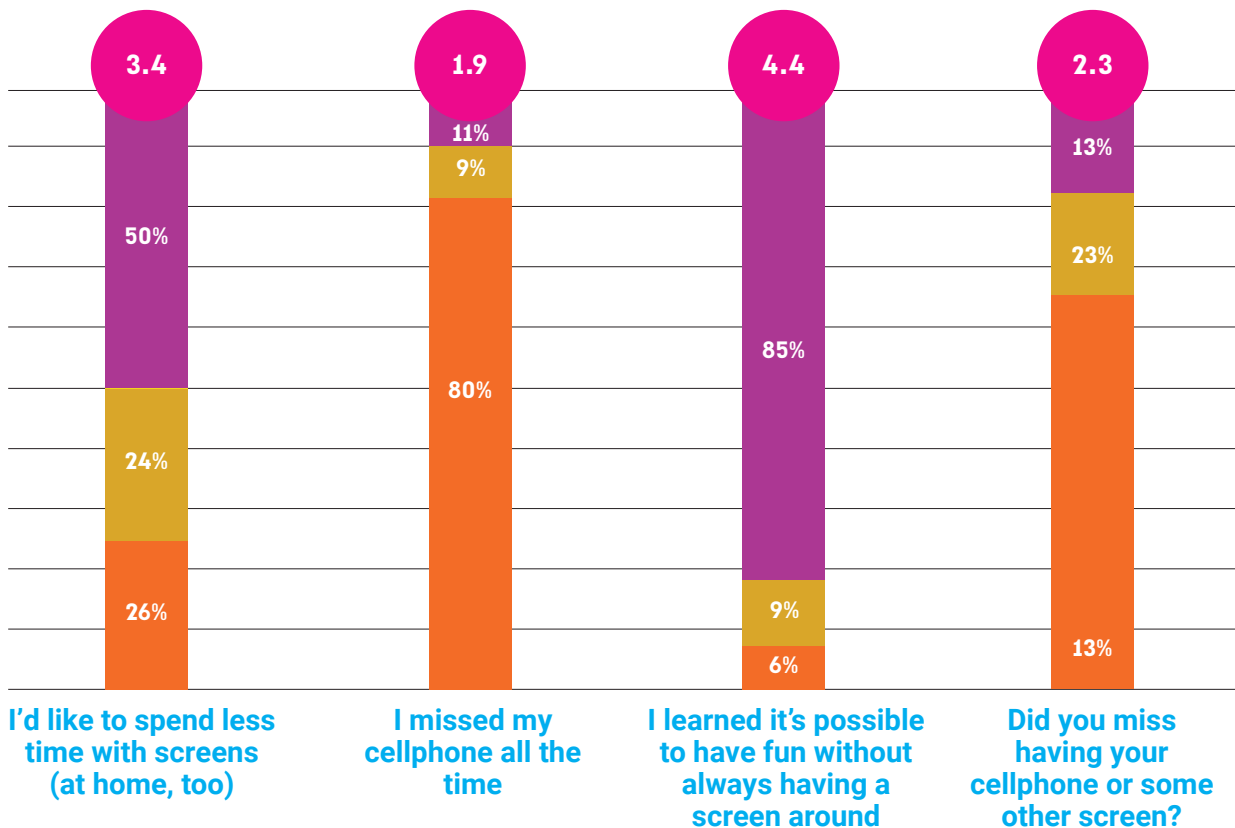
Detachment from screens

One important goal of all the camps and from the standpoint of the Summer Camps Israel forum was **for campers to get the message that they can have fun and enjoy themselves without a cellphone (or tablet or laptop) as a constant companion**. Thus, we sought to learn whether the absence of any mobile device translated into a negative experience for participants. This section included two statements scaled inversely: "I missed having a cellphone or some other device with a screen" and "I constantly

missed having my cellphone". For both those statements, agreement was low (2.3 and 1.9 on a scale of 1-5, respectively). The campers clearly agreed, at nearly a "very high" level (4.4), that they had learned that they can have fun without screens. Half the campers indicated a strong or very strong desire to also reduce their screen time at home, and another 24% agreed moderately. On the whole, it would seem that **this goal was impressively achieved**.

Diagram 9 | Detachment from screens

1-2 | 3 | 4-5





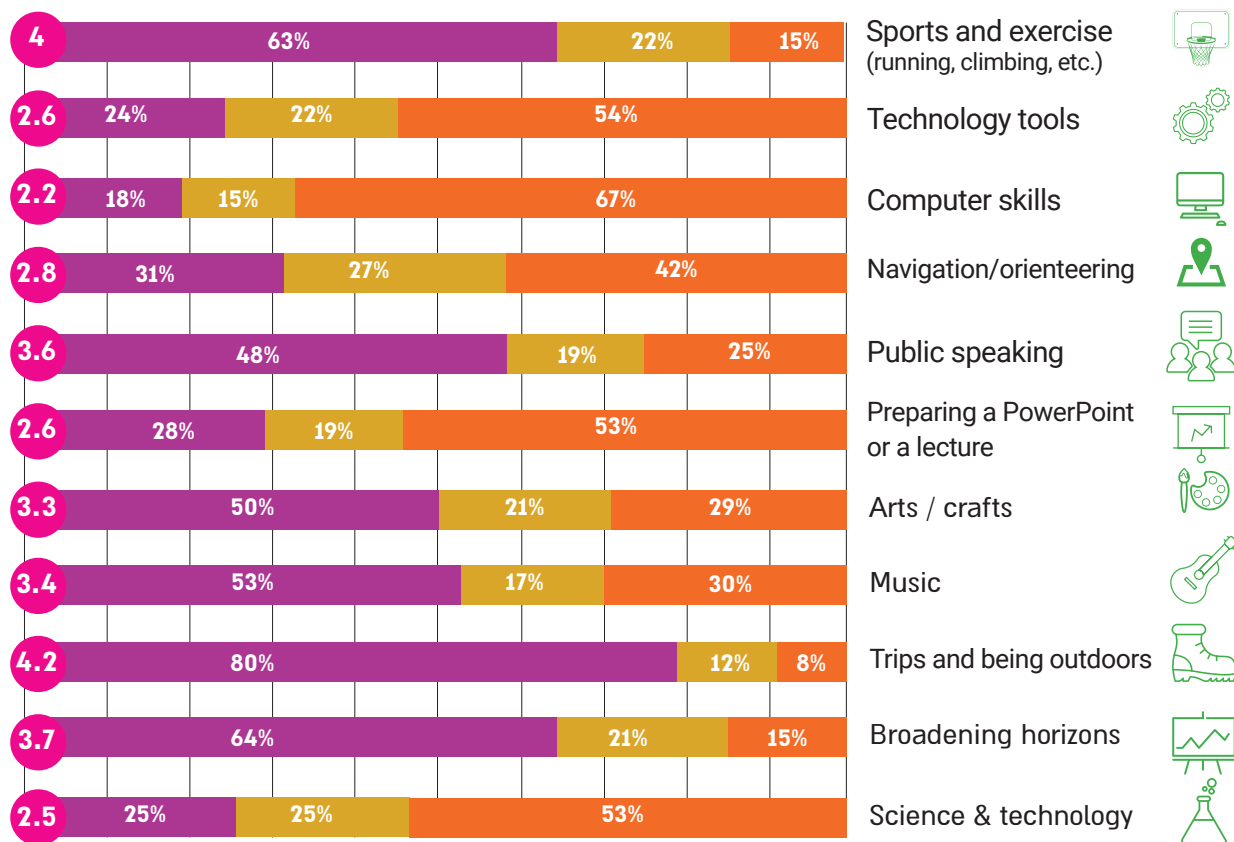
Skills and specializations

Since some of the camps focus on particular areas (technology, languages, sports, science, and so on), as part of the study we examined the impact of summer camps on a long series of skills. From the outset it was clear that there are different areas of emphasis at the camps, and we did not expect to see a high level of impact on every item on the list. Some camps, for example, do not address science or technology at all, while at others this is the principal focus. From the standpoint of the overall impact of all the camps, one can see which areas were clearly influenced by camp participation: trips and being in the outdoors (4.2 on a scale of 1-5) and sports and exercise (4). Also averaging relatively high scores

were the statements on broadening horizons and public speaking (3.7 and 3.6, respectively). Next, with a medium level of impact, were the statements on music and on arts/crafts (3.4 and 3.3, respectively). The impact on other areas examined ranged from medium to low. Unsurprisingly, we found that when a camp has a special area of emphasis and campers are given intensive and professional exposure to that area, it earns a positive response in the findings on impact, whereas when a subject appears in the camp's syllabus but is not given much attention in practice, the response on its impact is weaker.

Diagram 10 | Skills

1-2 | 3 | 4-5



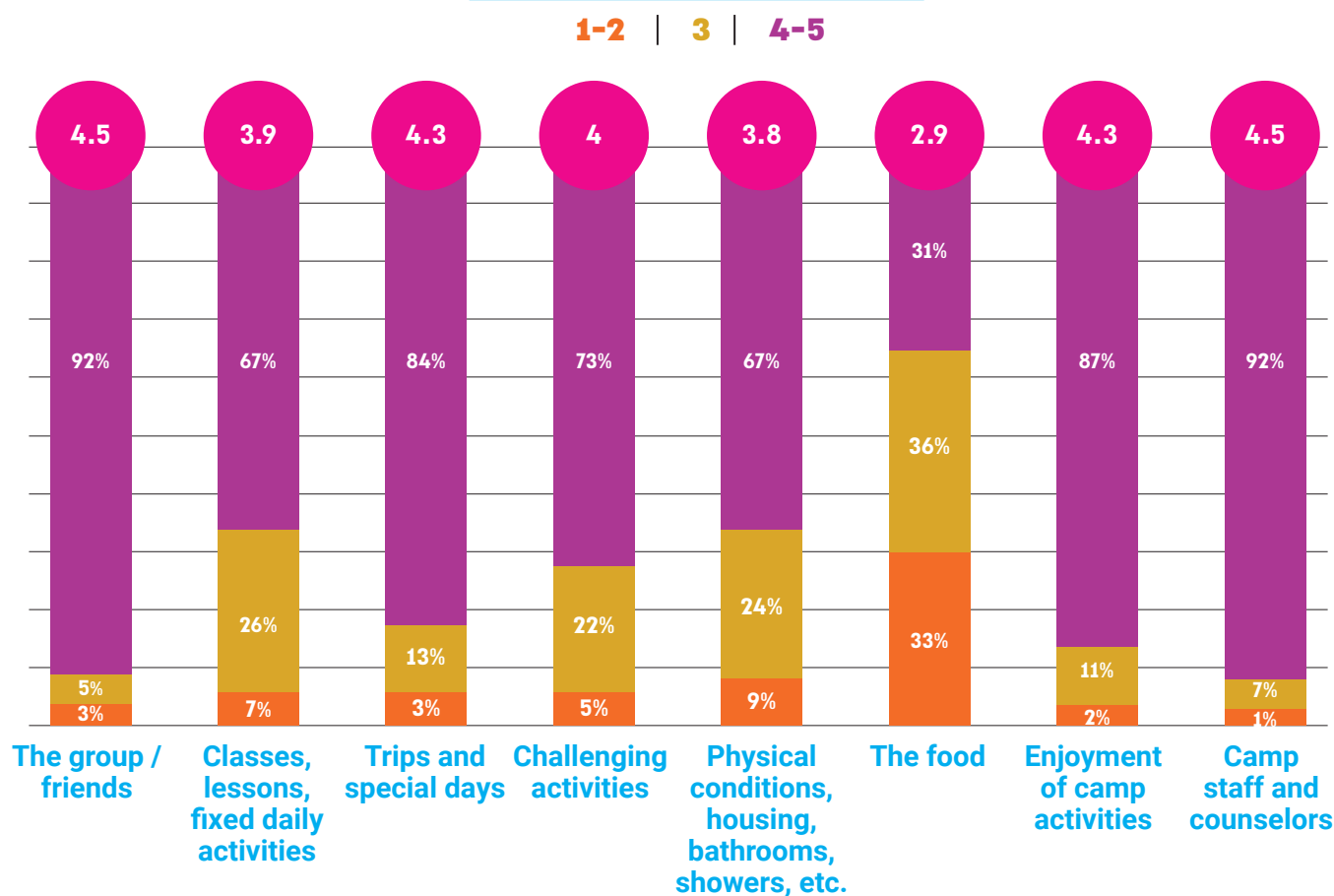


Satisfaction

Diagrams 12 and 13 present the findings on overall satisfaction with various areas of camp life. **The highest averages (4.5 on a scale of 1-5) were for satisfaction with the staff and with the group and friends.** Also achieving high satisfaction scores were camp activities, trips, and special days. Likewise scoring high in satisfaction were challenging

activity, lessons in specific areas, and the physical conditions at the camp (4, 3.9 and 3.8, respectively). The only area scoring a medium grade for satisfaction was the food. On that, the breakdown was a third not satisfied at all, a third somewhat satisfied, and a third very satisfied. Overall, the satisfaction with the five camps we examined was high.

Diagram 11 | Satisfaction





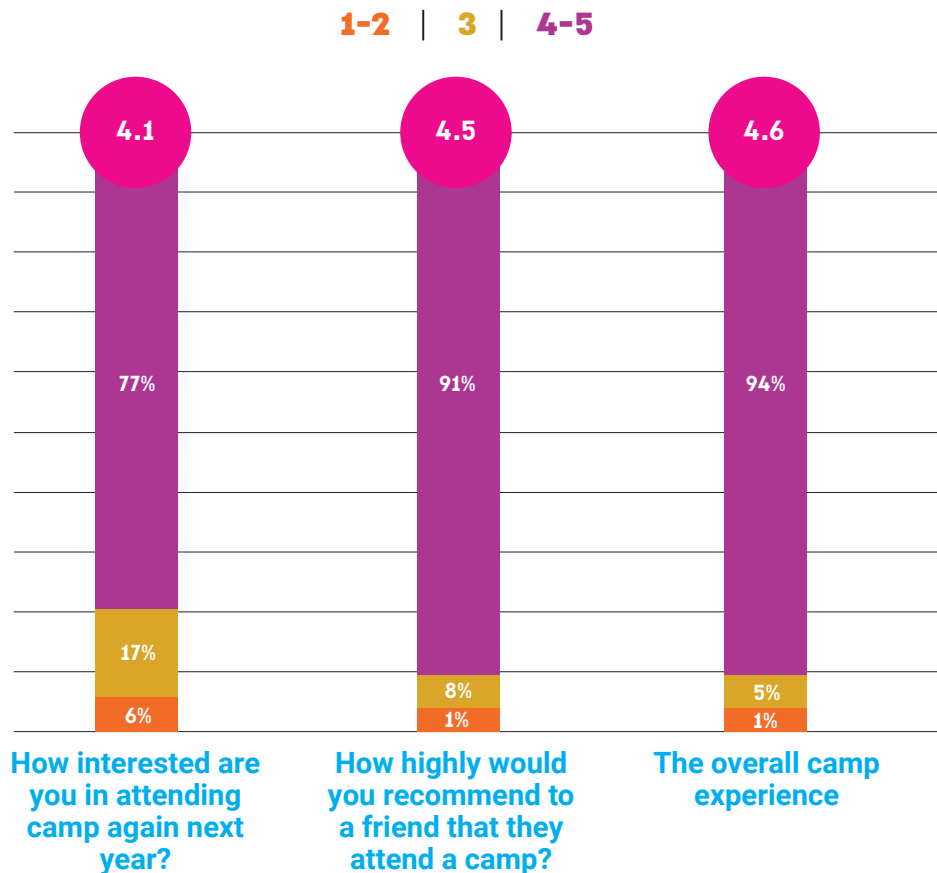
Concluding opinions

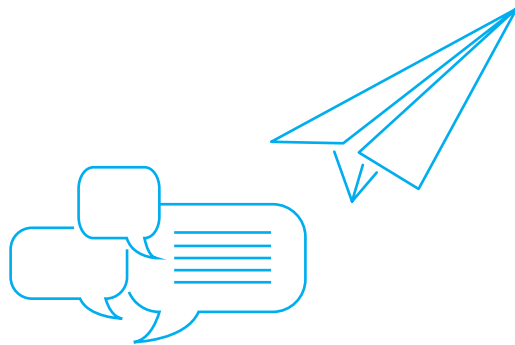
The concluding opinions about participation in the camp experience are positive to very positive.

The campers rated the general camp experience very highly, at **4.6** (on a scale of 1-5). They would recommend very highly (**4.5**)

that a friend attend a similar camp. **77%** of the campers were interested / very interested in going to a summer camp again next year.

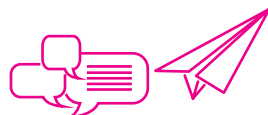
Diagram 12. Concluding opinions





Part 3

Qualitative findings



Qualitative findings

Alongside the quantitative findings, we thought it important to hear directly from the field and afford deeper meaning to the numbers – with the authentic voices of the campers, their parents and the staff.

In this section we will present the main

qualitative findings. From each camp, we interviewed five campers and three staff as well as three parents. In addition, we conducted two observations of camp life on site. The key findings appear below for each group: campers, staff and parents.



Campers

All the campers at all the camps described a very positive experience. The matters they deemed most important were the social encounter with other young people and their experience of growing up and being independent. **Social encounters** clearly provided the central experience for most of the participants. Most reported meeting young people they had not known beforehand, from different population groups and with different socioeconomic backgrounds. They got to

know them, talk with them, live with them in the same room, perform tasks together and spend time together. They realized that there were fewer differences between them than anticipated, although in cases where there were differences, they learned to accept them and absorb them. They discovered that they could have fun together and make friends despite the differences. Below are some examples of things that participants from different camps said in this regard:

I enjoyed that we had free time to spend with other groups, too, because that allowed us to open up more to people since our own group wasn't large, and it gave us a chance to get to know a lot of new people

male camper, Israeli Journey.

I'm going home a more accepting person. **Everyone arrives towing their baggage, their prejudices, and they have to deal with that a lot more.** Here I learned to be more open and accepting. Now I can sleep overnight with girls I didn't even know last week...

female camper

Where we live in Beit Shemesh everyone is from one community and here you meet girls from somewhere new. The girls are different and they come from different places and that's fun

female camper, Camp Dror

It was fun to meet people, we discovered that we all live in the same neighborhood and decided to meet up after camp ended, and we are planning to hang out together on breaks, too. I met other girls who like the Beatles and Queen, like I do...

Female camper,
Tel-Aviv-Jaffa Leadership Camp

Another significant topic that came up in the interviews with campers is the sense of **growing up** and **being independent**. This was an outcome of finding themselves detached from screens and away from home and having to take care of themselves, starting with keeping to the schedule (getting up in the morning, showing up on time for activities) and

right on through cleaning their rooms, doing their laundry and generally being in charge of themselves. Clearly this aspect of camp life was deemed a meaningful experience by the campers; most of them noted that it would also affect their behavior after they returned home. Below are some examples:

We got more responsible. At home I don't do anything, here I was doing laundry [...] and we became more creative. We put up clotheslines and we hung cans of cola from the air conditioner to cool them

male camper,
Kimama Leadership

We came out more mature. We learned a lot of things that school doesn't teach you about life. Like for instance, time management, being responsible for yourself and for your behavior

male camper,
Israeli Journey

Camp changed me and made me more independent [...] We had a soccer training camp and I had to organize the clothes and the laundry

male camper,
Ha'Shalem 24/7

The campers mentioned many other areas in their interviews. In this concluding section we think it is important to mention another area that was significant for the campers – the **detachment from screens**. It was evident from the interviews that most of the young people did not miss them and even saw many advantages in being without their screens. Because there were many different

kinds of activities and because they were very interested in getting to know one another and spending time together, the absence of screens was barely noticed; many campers actually said that it was a good thing they had no screens because otherwise they would not have had time for all the other things that interested them. Here are a few examples:

“This is without a screen [...] **I don't miss the phone and don't want it because I am very busy**. A friend was at a different camp two weeks ago and she had her phone with her and it wasn't really fun and got in the way of connecting personally. If I'd had the phone at camp, I wouldn't have known who the girls here were and wouldn't have had fun [...] **every hour here is full**
female camper, Dror Camp

“Here I spent an hour on the phone but at home a whole lot more. At home there's nothing to do and here there was always something to do. My phone alerted me that I used a lot less screen time. I went from six hours a day to one hour here

male camper, Israeli Journey

“It's fun to detach [...] If I had a phone with me, I wouldn't have made so many friends and it would just have ruined the experience

female camper, Educational Insights



Staff

The staffs we met at all of the camps were dedicated and professional, and they worked very hard beforehand and while camp was in session. Staffers had to provide what was required by all the operational demands of camp activities on a very tight schedule, to offer emotional support for the various needs of the campers, from youngsters who were homesick, to parents, to disciplinary problems and social challenges, and to be in touch with parents, with counselors, with suppliers, and so forth. All the camps invested in preparing the staff and their deployment at the camp itself. At some of the camps

the counselors and other staff were former graduates of the same camp, so they were experienced and knowledgeable about what was expected of them. All the staffers were familiar with the goals of their camp, the values they were interested in promoting and the particular working methods and approach to management at their camp. This gave us a positive impression of the professionalism and dedication of all the staffers we interviewed. Below are some examples from the observations conducted of the various camp activities:

“The campers are spending time in the plaza between classes. There is cheerful music and something that looks like hip hop improvisation that one of the counselors is teaching. When an activity starts, the tumult stops all at once and everyone disperses to the classrooms, with the help of the counselors. In the first classroom there is a robotics workshop going on. The youngsters are paired up, the counselor hands out the robots that they started working on last time and he asks them to continue. He says that today they will start working on programming the robot, and each pair that finishes putting theirs together comes to him to be given guidance on the programming. The robots they are building require creativity and thought. They consult each other: “Where should we put the sensor?;, “How high should the wheels be?” There’s a friendly atmosphere while the counselor keeps busy with the pairs who have finished and come to him for guidance” (Insights in Education).

There are children who are afraid of jellyfish and they go into the water. In the morning they joined in a circle and talked – “What are your fears?” – and they marked them, then at the end of the day they revisit the question: “How did you cope? And how did you grow during the coping?” There is a boundary to a fear and one can jump over it – it’s crazy. On Shabbat, we played a game of O.D.T. – “or die trying” – as a form of group work. There was some shouting [...] They realized that they would not be leaving until we managed to work together and we finally got there. Their lives won’t change in the day-to-day, but I can see them at age 26 and that’s my goal

counselor, 24/7

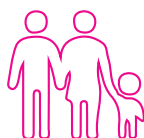
In the interviews, staffers spoke from their perspective about all the issues that the campers raised and had already mentioned: positive social encounters, the experience of growing up, learning about their ability to detach from mobile devices, feeling pleasure, growing from challenges posed by the activities, and so on. In that sense the things that staffers said reinforce the patterns we saw during the interviews with campers. In some of the camps, counselors are close in age to the campers and they themselves also feel that they are experiencing something meaningful:

I am only 16 myself, and I have so much responsibility [...] I am leaving here a different person. I came as a girl and I'm leaving as a 'mom and dad' to 16-year-old girls. I'm responsible. I learned the most from teaching them

counselor, Dror Camp

Staffers mentioned various points for improvement. Below is the gist:

- The staffs need reinforcements. At many of the camps, the counselors felt that the burden on them was too heavy. Many claimed that they were hardly sleeping at night.
- At some of the camps, a need became apparent for special advance training in dealing with youngsters who raise unique challenges, sometimes in terms of behavior and disciplinary problems and some involving individual characteristics that demand more professional handling.
- Provide team-building for the staffers. The camps invest in many ways in building good dynamics among the campers. Some of the interviewees expressed the need for team-building activities for the staff.



Parents

The interviews with parents took place about two weeks after their children returned home from camp. The rationale was to hear parents' impressions of changes in their children's behavior at home following the camp experience. In general, one can say that all the parents we interviewed were very **satisfied**

with the way the camps operated, the way the staff functioned and the experience their children had at camp. The parents were happy that the children **had a meaningful summer experience**, especially after the Coronavirus period and its traumatic effect on so many children (and parents).



So, there was Covid for a while, and that was a private kind of challenge. I saw the child shut himself in, just on a screen all the time. I felt that I wasn't reaching him, I felt that he opened up less, that he wasn't going out with friends [...] I started to worry [...] After Covid receded, he was himself again. He seemed in control again. From all the activities of the Whole Space (24/7), he was blooming, he stopped just hanging out on the street because he was participating in this project. I got my boy back and I wanted to say thank you for that
mother, 24/7

For her it was some kind of challenge and a special summer experience, and after a year of the Coronavirus when they didn't go anywhere [...] they had missed that terribly
mother, Kimama Leadership

Another point made by all the parents was about **the social encounters** their children had benefited from at camp **and the social skills** they acquired there. We decided to share comments from a unique case involving a girl suffering from social problems prior to the camp who underwent a real transformation thanks to her camp participation. This may be a special case, but it also exemplifies the atmosphere of empowerment typical of all the camps:



She was an introvert and very closed with a lot of social problems before the camp. Lately she had been shut up in her room, alone [...] That's what she was doing until the camp, and she wasn't going out with her friends. I can count on the fingers of one hand how many times she went out. I had a lot of fears. She was suffering anxiety. I said that I was going to send her no matter the cost because it was the last resort; if she didn't manage to reconnect there, I didn't know what I would do [...] She is seeing a psychiatrist regularly. I am sure that they were in touch that day [...] There were two difficult days when I sent her a sedative for her anxiety and the staff told me they had sat with her at night, they even showed me pictures. They said, 'Look, see what fun it is going to be' [...] In the end she came home with a whole lot of new friends (mother).



She (the same girl whose mother we interviewed) said that it was amazing – apart from the first two days when it was hard, the other girls embraced her and helped, they slept alongside her [...] the next day she told me about what happened there – in the past, she never shared that kind of thing with me.



She (the same girl) said that there were counselors who resonated with her, they laughed together, they listened to music [...] You don't understand. She described conversations with girlfriends, something that had never happened to her before, I was in shock. She even said that one of the boys in her class at school said, 'Aren't you in my class? This is the first time I ever heard you speak'

mother, Kimama Leadership



Another subject that came up repeatedly in the interviews with parents is the matter of **growing up and being independent**, and some of that, as we can see from some of the statements, trickled down into patterns of behavior at home, too:

Yes, for sure. **She is more mature because of the positive experience she had there.** It also helped her self-confidence [...] She went there on her own and she coped [...] She made new friends

mother, Camp Dror

When she came home she told me, 'Mom, I'm gonna fold the laundry.' This is a real change [...] The camp filled a void. Usually in the summer I'd be hearing, 'I'm bored, what'll I do today, how will I spend the day?' When she got home, she just seemed really fulfilled. No more of that 'What, I'm gonna to sit here in the house and watch my sisters?'

mother, 24/7

To conclude this section, we will offer some examples of parents' attitudes toward the **detachment from screens**. First, according to what staffers reported, in many cases the detachment from screens was harder for the parents than for the children. For the parents, a mobile phone represents a direct connection to their child and the ability to watch over them and take care of them even from a distance. There were parents who themselves needed to undergo a process of "liberation" from the cellphones. Some of the camps prepared for this by updating the parents with photos and videos, and others hired a special staffer whose role was to update parents on what was happening at the camp, including a frequent stream of visual reports. Beyond that, the parents were of course happy about the children's demonstrated ability to get along without mobile devices. Below are some examples:

It's really for the best that they did not allow phones, a number one success. A little in the morning and a little in the evening. You can see they weren't available

mother, Israeli Journey

My son is usually attached to the phone, and he said they didn't even notice that they didn't have them. He took a board game and so did his friends, and they taught each other

mother, Kimama Leadership



Conclusion

This report began with a literature survey that emphasized several issues. Now, to wrap up the findings we have presented here, we would like to go back to those focal points and examine the findings in light of them. The first subject the literature survey addressed is the fact that summer is a season that symbolizes freedom, passages and growing up, but also a period when young people are exposed to different kinds of risks or, in the best case, spend most of their time with their screens doing not much of anything. In this context **the findings point to the fact that summer camps can be frameworks providing a solution and reinforcing the positive elements of summer – an experience of personal growth, and growing up, and at the same time limiting the exposure to risky situations** and expanding the exposure to content that is positive, empowering and instructive. All the parents interviewed were glad that their children spent a significant chunk of their long school vacation at summer camp instead of lounging around with their screens.

Another focal point that emerged from the literature survey is about “meaningful journeys”. That kind of journey creates an experience of adventure that turns into a formative memory that lingers for many years and has a positive impact on a youngster’s development. In that sense, as with summer camps in the United States, it would seem that **all the camps we examined succeeded in creating a powerful and formative experience of adventure that will long be remembered**

by the campers. Some of them evidently will return in the coming years, either as campers or as counselors. We saw in the quantitative section and in some of the qualitative material that the camps offer a platform that combines guidance and a set of rules with independence and self-management. **This integration led many of the young people to discover their own abilities and sense of responsibility** that not had a way of being manifest in their ordinary lives at home, or within the family, and sometimes not even at school. Nearly all the campers interviewed noted with pride that they cleaned their own rooms, did their own laundry, made sure to get up on time in the morning and be on time to activities, watched out for their friends, and so forth. We also saw what the parents said – that some of these patterns continued to manifest even after the young people came home again.

From an educational standpoint, the chief characteristic of the summer camps is that they are nearly ideal spaces for non-formal education. They integrate, precisely as claimed in the literature, **spaces for learning, for social encounters that are empowering, for values education and for coping with challenges – and all that takes place in an experiential setting featuring peer learning, a flexible hierarchy and other characteristics of non-formal education.** The research shows that this integration succeeds in reaching the campers, piquing their interest and desire to learn, all qualities that are sometimes absent in formal education. The 24/7 camp most



clearly illustrates the integrative approach that merges the space of formal education with that of non-formal education, but there were also other camps where the connection with the campers began through a connection with schools (Insights in Education) and other camps where there is a potential for this kind of integration. In terms of the educational message, the summer camps have proven that the kind of criticism often leveled at today's teens (about how they are a generation of screens, emotionally detached, lacking in social interaction, and so on) may not necessarily be accurate and may say more about the world of adults than about the desires of teens. The principle of detaching from mobile devices and the responses to it illustrate this point better than anything else. No one has illusions (or really wishes) that screens will completely disappear from the lives of young people, but summer camps have shown that given an environment offering experiential, intellectual and especially social stimuli, young people are happy to relinquish their screen time and exchange it for worthwhile activities.

This conclusion is also appropriate with respect to the social dimension. **Despite all the discourse about polarization in Israeli society, and even perhaps because of it, and partly due to the fact that young people grow up mainly through encounters with people who resemble them, clearly they harbor enormous curiosity about encountering different groups**

in Israeli society and are able to navigate such interactions with great success. The young campers made new friendships, supported one another, coped together with challenges and stayed in touch after the camp ended. Without a doubt, participation in the camps strengthened the participants' social skills and abilities, made them more tolerant and more receptive to hearing different ideas. It's true that such encounters are also arranged in other programs and even in formal educational programs, but there is no doubt that two weeks spent sharing the same room or with the same group, while going through a series of shared experiences, leaves a unique imprint on the participants from a social standpoint.

In conclusion, summer camps offer a relatively new model for constructively "exploiting" the summertime for non-formal educational activities under the unique conditions of being away: away from home and away from screens. Those conditions create an environment conducive to experimenting, learning, growing, and maturing. The main challenge in our opinion is to create multiple interfaces and organic connections between these summertime successes and the rest of the year. That would be the best way to ensure that the summer camp experiences, rather than being dismissed as somehow foreign to ordinary life, are accurately perceived as integral to a healthy and optimal adolescence.



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