



# American Camp Association **Camp Research Forum** **Book of Abstracts - 2025**



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January 8, 2025

Dear Colleagues:

The ACA Research Forum is an opportunity for researchers and camp professionals to share and discuss new research related to campers, camp staff, camp programs, and a wide variety of other camp-related topics.

This book includes 30 abstracts that will be presented at the 2025 American Camp Association (ACA) Research Forum to be held during the ACA annual conference from February 18-21 in Dallas, TX. Abstracts have been grouped into similar areas and will be presented across five verbal sessions and one poster session. All abstracts will be on display as posters.

We are pleased to recognize the recipients of two research awards in 2025:

- Marge Scanlin Award for Outstanding Student Research: *Katie Thurson*
- Eleanor P. Eells Award for Excellence in Research in Practice: *Camp Boggy Creek and Camp Woodcraft (see their posters on pages 129–130).*

The Camp Research Forum has grown in quantity and quality over the past two decades. ACA's Research and Evaluation Advisory Committee (REAC) and the previous Committee for the Advancement of Research and Evaluation (CARE) have been instrumental in advancing camp research. Staff at ACA have been enthusiastically supportive, especially Dr. Laurie Browne and Melany Irvin. Two external reviewers provided peer-reviewed evaluations for the selection of these abstracts. We thank these reviewers for their time, expertise, and energy.

We look forward to presenting these papers at the 2025 Camp Research Forum, but also recognize that many people cannot attend the annual meeting. We hope these short abstracts and poster images will provide information for those not able to attend. Please contact the authors if you have further questions.

Best wishes,



Ann Gillard, Ph.D.

2025 ACA Research Forum Co-Coordinator

The proper way to cite these abstracts using APA 7<sup>th</sup> edition is:

Author name(s). (2025, February 18-21). Title of abstract. In A. Gillard (Chair), *ACA Camp Research Forum Book of Abstracts* [Symposium]. American Camp Association's 2025 Camp Research Forum, United States.

***Reference list example:***

Arkin, M. & Lubeznik-Warner, R. (2025, February 18-21). Creation and validation of a burnout scale for overnight camp staff. In A. Gillard (Chair), *ACA Camp Research Forum Book of Abstracts* [Symposium]. American Camp Association's 2025 Camp Research Forum, United States.

***Parenthetical citation:*** (Arkin, et al., 2025)

***Narrative citation:*** Arkin, et al. (2025)

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# INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF CAMPER ENJOYMENT AND SELF-DETERMINATION ON CAMP ATTENDANCE

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At its foundation, self-determination theory (SDT) assumes that all people evolve and change over time. While hopefully, these changes are oriented toward growth, growth requires certain social or environmental supports. Deci and Ryan (2018) suggest that support or hindrance of the SDT constructs (i.e., competence, relatedness, and autonomy) can affect personal growth, motivation, performance, and overall well-being. Participation in camp programs can be a formative experience for participants with numerous benefits (Henderson et al., 2007). Camp supports for positive outcomes are unique across programs, and there is interest in exploring how camp characteristics influence participants. Constructs of SDT offer one avenue for exploring camper experiences and their associated outcomes. Previous research shows that campers perceived camp participation as supporting their basic psychological needs in an overnight camp setting (Ramsing & Sibthorp, 2008). Scholars have called for further research regarding campers' feelings of competence, especially at camps emphasizing the importance of skill building (Henderson et al., 2007). Likewise, researchers can examine the relationship between a programmatic emphasis on belongingness and independence or choice through relatedness and autonomy, respectively. To better understand potential camper growth over time, we consider how camper enjoyment of programs impacts aspects of self-determination to promote positive camper outcomes and ongoing yearly attendance.

## Methods

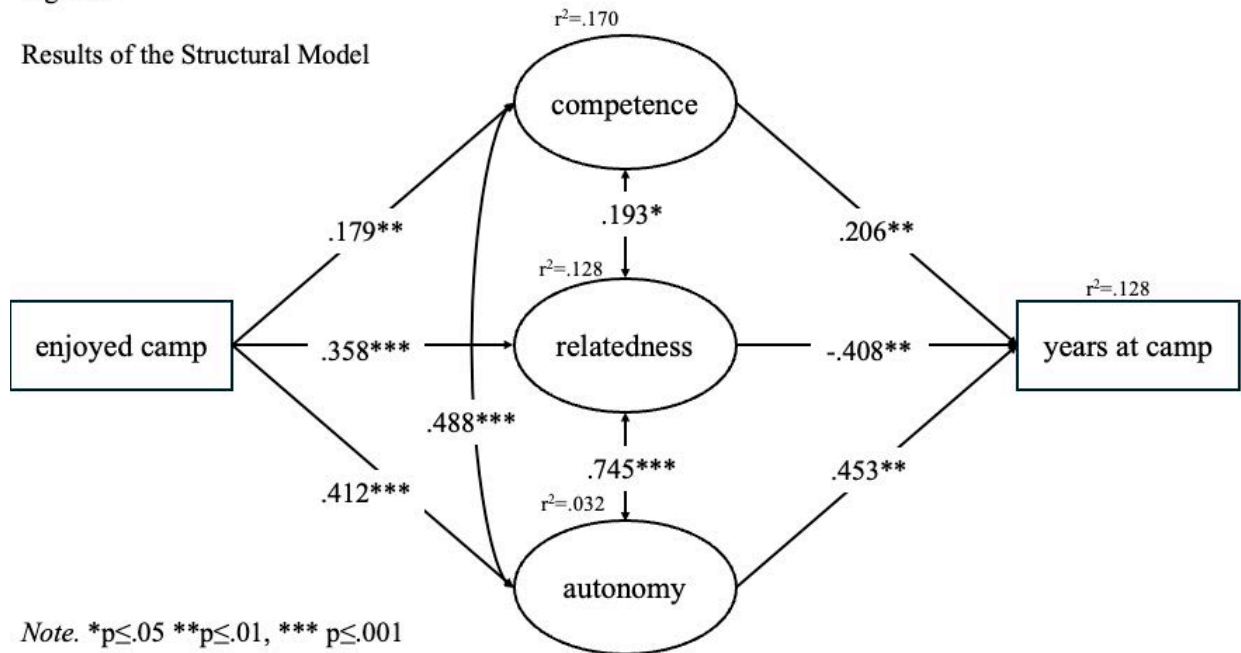
Data were collected from campers, ages 9-16, at four overnight camp programs, at the end of camper sessions (summer 2024,  $n = 332$ ). Through an in-person survey, campers reported years of attendance ( $m = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 2.24$ ) and level of enjoyment during camp programming (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*;  $m = 4.52$ ,  $SD = .95$ ). To explore self-determination theory, an adapted version of the Learning Climate Questionnaire (Deci et al., 1996) and the Camp Contextual Support of Basic Needs Scale (Gillard et al., 2009), were used (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). This scale looks at three domains: camp support of competence ( $m = 5.83$ ,  $SD = .92$ ), peer support of relatedness ( $m = 5.51$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ), and autonomy control ( $m = 5.84$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ). Data were cleaned, and structural equation modeling was used following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step approach to examine the impact of camper enjoyment on competence, relatedness, and autonomy and, in turn, the influence of these constructs on years of attendance. All statistical analyses were conducted in IBM's Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) v.29 and the lavaan package in RStudio v. 2023.12.1+402 (Rosseel, 2012).

## Results

The measurement model fit the data well ( $\chi^2 = 171.73$ ,  $df = 86$ ,  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = .066, 90% C.I. [.051, .080]; CFI = .950). Following adequate fit, a structural model was specified, and the adequate fit was supported ( $\chi^2 = 212.52$ ,  $df = 111$ ,  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = .063; 90% C.I. [.050, .076]; CFI = .943). As seen in Table 1, enjoyment of camp experiences positively predicted each of the three SDT components, namely, camp support of competence ( $\beta = .412$ ,  $p = .01$ ), peer support of relatedness ( $\beta = .358$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and autonomy control ( $\beta = .412$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Both competence and autonomy positively predicted years of attendance ( $\beta = .453$ ,  $p = .002$ ;  $\beta = .206$ ,  $p = .004$ ). However, peer support of relatedness negatively predicted years of attendance ( $\beta = -.408$ ,  $p = .003$ ).

Figure 1

Results of the Structural Model



### Discussion

All paths in the measurement model were significant. When exploring how enjoyment at camp affected each SDT component, findings suggest that enjoyment positively predicts competence, relatedness, and autonomy. This means camp practitioners should ensure that campers are “enjoying their time” and, thus, have a higher likelihood of feelings of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Camper enjoyment can be gauged in many ways but may be done most effectively by midweek camper surveys or daily counselor check-ins.

When analyzing relationships between years at camp and SDT components, feelings of competence and autonomy are positive predictors of the years of attendance of a particular camper. For example, campers with higher feelings of autonomy and competence have likely attended that program longer. Thus, camps may want to consider how to create opportunities for skill building within programs (competence) and opportunities for choice (autonomy), to promote program retention.

An unexpected result of the study was that relatedness negatively predicted years of attendance, meaning the greater participants’ feeling of relatedness, the less amount of time they have likely spent at camp. Opposite to practitioner assumptions, this is similar to work by Bean and colleagues (2016), who saw a dip in interpersonal relationship scores between first- and second-year campers in their study of diverse peer relationships and prosocial norms. More research is needed to explore this phenomenon. Current explanations may be that first-year campers experience relatedness in a novel way as opposed to school or other extracurricular environments while returning campers experience a loss of relationships they established in previous years of attendance. Additionally, camps may place greater programmatic emphasis on integration and inclusion for new campers instead of returning campers. A mixed-methods study may help both researchers and practitioners better understand the changes in peer supported relatedness throughout campers’ attendance.

### Implications for Practice

As practitioners consider the results of this study, one notable implication is the need for continuous opportunities for skill building and choice. The positive relationship between competence, autonomy, and years of attendance would indicate that ongoing support for these two components is important. It is particularly important for programs to consider if their skill-building opportunities “top out” for certain activities after a few years of participation. To mitigate that, they may want to offer add-ons or specialty camps that allow campers to build advanced skills in a specific activity (e.g., horseback riding or water sports).

Additionally, opportunities to ensure continued enjoyment throughout camp programming may be beneficial as it is a positive predictor of all three SDT domains. As previously discussed, daily check-ins or mid-week surveys may allow for quick adjustments throughout the program that could improve the overall enjoyment of programs and subsequently create greater opportunities for feelings of competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

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# Investigating the Impact of Camper Enjoyment and Self-Determination on Camp Attendance

Daniela Berry<sup>1</sup>, Dan Pilgreen<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Self-Determination Theory suggests that support or hindrance of competence, relatedness, and autonomy can affect personal growth and motivation. Self-determination is a worthwhile construct when exploring the benefits of camp attendance for youth.



## Study Variables

**Enjoyment of Camp Session**  
(1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree;  $m = 4.52$ ,  $SD = .95$ )

**Years of Attendance**  
( $m = 3.49$ ,  $SD = 2.24$ )

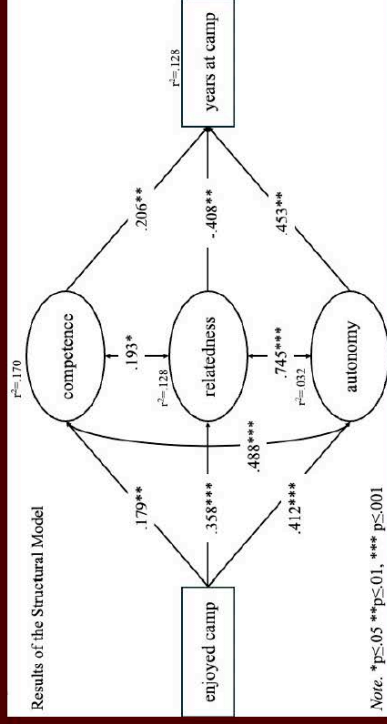
**Self-Determination - Camp**

**Contextual Support of Basic**

**Needs** (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; Gillard et al., 2009)

- Camp Support of Competence ( $m = 5.83$ ,  $SD = .92$ )
- Peer Support of Relatedness ( $m = 5.51$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ )
- Autonomy Control ( $m = 5.84$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ )

## Results



## Study Purpose

To better understand potential camper growth over time, we consider how camper enjoyment of programs impacts aspects of self-determination and ongoing yearly attendance.

## Methods

Summer 2024 ; survey at four overnight summer camps across the US South;  $n=332$ ; ages 10-16  
**Data Analysis** – Structural Equation Modeling



## Future Research

Future research should utilize a mixed-methods study design to help better understand changes in peer support of relatedness throughout campers' attendance.

## Practitioner Implications

Prioritize continuous opportunities for skill building and choice for campers throughout their years of attendance.

Consider add-ons or specialty camps to ensure campers can continue to build skills within their favorite activity areas.

Check-in with campers throughout the session. Campers enjoying their time at camp have greater opportunities for feelings of competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

## LEAN ON POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES TO BOOST YOUR IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

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“How can I make a lasting impact on young people in my program?” Camp professionals across the country ask themselves this question. At its core, this is a question about the evidence-based practices that camp professionals can *feasibly* adapt and use in their contexts. Here, we argue that their best bet is to focus on the relationships they build with young people. Research shows that the quality of these relationships is a better predictor of a program’s impacts than fidelity or dosage (e.g., Catalan Molina et al., 2022; Hill & Erickson, 2019).

This presentation will focus on Positive Youth Development (PYD) experiences, a key set of research-based practices shown to have lasting impacts on young people. First and foremost, PYD experiences are about building positive relationships with adults and peers in a program (Pekel et al., 2018). Positive relationships are so critical because they create a safe and supportive environment where young people feel valued and understood (Sabo-Flores & Catalan Molina, 2024). This creates trust, which makes young people more likely to try new, more challenging things and learn during the program.

We leveraged data from a larger study of outdoor education programs led by the YMCA, Children and Nature Network, Annie E. Casie Foundation, and Hello Insight. This study sought to uncover the impacts of outdoor programs on young people’s social and emotional (SEL) growth. Using propensity score matching (Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1983), we created two comparison groups (general afterschool vs outdoor education) of almost 9,000 young people nationwide. Here, we leverage data from the larger study to answer the following question: What is the causal effect of PYD experiences on young people’s SEL growth?

### Methods

Almost 9,000 young people ranging from 12 to 18 years of age were selected through propensity score matching (4,743 were assigned to a *general afterschool* group and 4,743 were assigned to an *outdoor education* group). Across both groups, 49% identified as boys, 19% as Latine, 18% as African American, 16% as two or more races, and 32% as White.

Young people responded to a survey developed by Hello Insight. This survey has been used by more than 6,700 programs over the last 10 years to learn about their impacts on young people’s SEL. It assesses five SEL Capacities: academic self-efficacy, contribution, self-management, social skills, and positive identity. The survey also measures six PYD experiences: Engage Authentically, Promote Peer Bonds, Manage Goals, Challenge Growth, Share Power, and Expand Interests.

We used instrumental variables models (instrument: group assignment via propensity score matching; Angrist, Imbens, & Rubin, 1996) and Bayesian estimation to show the impact of PYD Experiences (ranging from 0% to 100% implementation) on young people’s SEL growth (0 = no growth, 1 = growth).

### Results

Overall, we found that young people’s experience of PYD at a high rate increases their SEL growth. Across capacities, the impact of PYD experiences ranged from 0.31 and 0.37 units (logit). Table 1 shows the impacts of PYD experiences on Academic Self-Efficacy as an illustration (impacts on other SEL capacities had similar magnitudes). These impacts translate into 15-20% differences in the probability of growing SEL capacities between young people who experienced strong implementation of PYD experiences (+1 SD) and those who experienced low

implementation (-1 SD) of these practices. For example, young people who experienced strong implementation of Promote Peer Bond practices (+1 SD) improved their academic self-efficacy by almost 20% more than those who experienced low implementation (-1 SD) of these practices.

Table 1  
*Impacts of PYD Experiences on Academic Self-Efficacy Growth*

| PYD Experience       | <i>B</i> (logit scale) | 95% CI      |
|----------------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Engage Authentically | 0.35                   | 0.29 - 0.41 |
| Promote Peer Bonds   | 0.37                   | 0.32 - 0.42 |
| Expand Interests     | 0.37                   | 0.32 - 0.43 |
| Challenge Growth     | 0.31                   | 0.26 - 0.37 |

*Note.* In Bayesian estimation, credible intervals represent a parameter's range of credible values. In this case, credible intervals suggest the impacts of PYD experiences are likely positive.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Our findings support the idea that one of the most important things a camp professional could do is to build positive relationships with young people. This study aimed to contribute to the field by showing the importance of measuring and learning from PYD experiences as indicators of implementation quality at scale. Here, we used a measure that captures both PYD experiences and SEL outcomes, is widely used by programs in the US, and is meant to help leaders and staff learn about their impacts and improve programs. Overall, this study shows that the field can aspire to measure and learn from implementation quality at scale. Working at scale allows program leaders and staff everywhere to learn from one another and improve practice as a larger community.

### **Implications for Practice**

Our findings suggest that camp leaders can focus professional development efforts on building capacity to promote PYD experiences. Curricula and activities change over time and daily emergencies can easily derail camp professionals' plans. So, investing too much professional development time in specific curricula may not be the best strategy. Yet promoting the capacity of camp professionals to build positive relationships with young people is likely to pay off, regardless of the content of the program activities.

Similarly, our results suggest that camp leaders can gain valuable information by focusing their monitoring and evaluation efforts on tracking the implementation of PYD experiences in their programs. They can learn about the overall level of relationships across their program, identify *bright spots* of effective practice, and discover opportunities for improvement across their team. Even if the only data they can collect is related to PYD experiences, they can take action on a key factor that will drive lasting impacts.



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## Lean on Positive Youth Development Experiences to Boost Your Impact on Young People



DIEGO CATALÁN MOLINA, PHD & KIM FLORES, PHD

### STUDY QUESTION

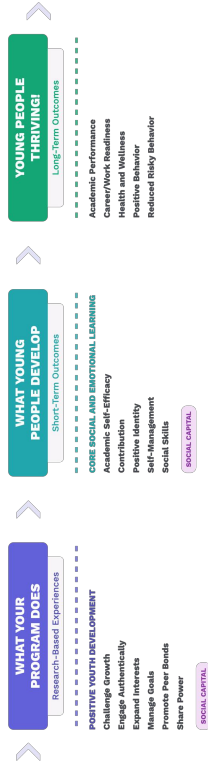
What is the causal effect of PYD Experiences on Young People's SEL growth?

### METHODS

~9,000 young people (12-18) completed a Hello Insight survey (49% identified as boys, 19% as Latine, 18% as African American, and 16% as two or more races) while participating in afterschool programs nationwide.

We used an Instrumental Variables model to show the impact of PYD Experiences (ranging from 0% to 100% implementation) on young people's SEL growth (0 = no growth, 1 = growth).

### HELLO INSIGHT: SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING - LOGIC MODEL



### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

1. Focus professional development efforts on building capacity to promote PYD experiences.
2. Focus monitoring and evaluation efforts on tracking the implementation of PYD Experiences.

### IMPACTS OF PYD EXPERIENCES ON ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY GROWTH

| PYD Experience       | B (logit scale) | 95% CI      |
|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Engage Authentically | 0.35            | 0.29 - 0.41 |
| Promote Peer Bonds   | 0.37            | 0.32 - 0.42 |
| Expand Interests     | 0.37            | 0.32 - 0.43 |
| Challenge Growth     | 0.31            | 0.26 - 0.37 |

Note. In Bayesian estimation, credible intervals represent a parameter's range of credible values. In this case, credible intervals suggest the impacts of PYD Experiences are likely positive.

### THE IMPACT OF IMPLEMENTING PROMOTE PEER BONDS ON SOCIAL SKILLS GROWTH



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# **THE IMPACT OF GENDER STEREOTYPES ON WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES AS LEADERS WITHIN SUMMER DAY CAMPS**

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Although women represent approximately 50% of outdoor experiential education (OEE) professionals, they are sorely underrepresented as leaders (Henderson, 1996; Loeffler 1996a; Mitten et al., 2018; Warren et al., 2018) and often face sexism, negative stereotypes, and gender discrimination during their leadership journeys (Cousineau & Roth, 2012; Henderson, 1996). Women seeking leadership roles “face prejudices and are less likely to be hired...or promoted, thus reinforcing the perception that men are better suited for leadership,” (Cousineau & Roth, p. 431). Those who lead in OEE and camp spaces are often overlooked in both research and praxis (Mitten et al., 2018). While feminist researchers have long attended to the inequities women face in outdoor leadership, much of the work thus far has focused on adventure education, higher education-based programs, and residential camps (e.g., Cousineau & Roth, 2012; Mackenzie & Raymond, 2021). Day camp spaces are notably absent from literature on this subject, despite representing at least 55% of the American Camp Association’s accredited camps (ACA, 2021) and their popularity around the United States and beyond.

Understanding women’s experiences and leadership needs in day camp settings can help current camp leaders create spaces that offer equitable and systemic resources and support systems for aspirant leaders. To that end, this study asks following: 1) How is leadership constructed within and across different types of day camps (e.g., coed recreation, all-girls camps)? 2) How do the variations within and between sites influence women’s abilities to access and implement camp leadership in these contexts?

## **Theory**

To frame her analyses, the researcher used role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), which posits social constructions of leadership align with the gender binary in a way that expects leaders and men to behave agentially, while women are expected to behave communally. The incongruence between the gendered expectations of leaders and of women creates dissonance when women enact leadership skills that defy either constriction ascribed to them, whether by leading communally (i.e., breaking alignment with being a “good” leader) or leading agentially (i.e., breaking alignment with being a “good” woman). The pushback from this trap, which Weiner and Burton (2016) name the “double bind”, often finds women disenfranchised through systems as hiring/promotion, pay, or professional development, and can ultimately lead to women opting out of leadership due to constrictions on their abilities to lead authentically and on their access to equitable leadership support.

## **Methods**

This study expands on a previous, single-case study (DeVona & Weiner, 2024) through a comparative analysis across four summer day camps, which included interviews with leaders from two coed and two all-girls camps. Participants were identified through snowball sampling, asking the executive director at each camp to identify 3-4 other leaders interested in participating. Thirteen participants were women; two were men; one was nonbinary. They ranged in age from 21-62 years old, and all held leadership-level roles within their respective day camp. Of the 16 participants, 12 (75%) identified as White, three as Black, and one as Latina. This disproportionate racial sample was not intentional but reflects the racial imbalances in the field. The researcher conducted three, 60-minute interviews with each of the 16 total participants, yielding 48 total interviews across the

four camps. All participants provided written, informed consent prior to participating, and the study was approved by a university institutional review board prior to its conduction.

The researcher transcribed, deidentified, and coded each interview using a hybridized inductive-deductive approach, beginning with deductive codes drawn from relevant literature and the theoretical framework. Inductive codes reflected participants' experiences not included in the initial deductive set. The researcher also included a "miscellaneous" code to mark interesting or notable data that did not fit within the rest of the coding scheme or would help identify unexpected themes within the interviews. The researcher used analytic memos (Saldaña, 2016) and evidence from the data to revise the codebook and add inductive codes as necessary. The researcher facilitated member checking (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) by sharing findings with the participants to confirm they portrayed their lived experiences.

## **Results**

Women faced stereotypes and expectations that consistently ascribed them caretaking and relationship-focused roles. For example, at both camps, women were stereotyped as more emotionally attuned than the men in leadership roles, creating expectations that women should take on more responsibility for emotional labor on behalf of the campers and staff. In contrast, when men exhibited emotional intelligence or aptitude, they were often lauded as exceptional leaders and received praise and recognition for their work—which women did not receive. Women in both types of camps also shared an awareness of stereotypes that might label them as "bitchy" or "pushy" if they asserted their expertise too boldly, though at all-girls camps women reported that having high levels of trust and emotional intelligence in their relationships with co-leaders created more supportive environments where they felt comfortable sharing constructive criticism or pushback about camp operations.

A primary difference between the coed and all-girls camps was the role of relationships in supporting leadership culture. Participants who led in all-girls settings named relationship-building as a primary source of support within their organizations, which aided their ability to hold authentic and potentially difficult conversations, develop trust among colleagues, and share their goals and needs openly with their leadership teams. This culture of support created a work environment where, according to one participant, "everyone at camp gets respect from each other." Another shared that she builds strong relationships with her staff so that "there's a vulnerability. I think I can be vulnerable with [them], and [they] can be vulnerable with me, whether we agree or when we disagree." In contrast, women who led in coed spaces often second-guessed bringing their ideas or concerns to their leadership team because they felt they wouldn't be taken seriously. When one participant from a coed camp needed help addressing an issue with staff behavior, she lacked the support she needed: "I [felt] really unsupported and not really listened to, and scared because I didn't have anyone to confide in...they're almost looking for little errors that I'm doing [instead of helping me]."

Unsurprisingly, the difference in how supported leaders feel within their teams was also reflected in their access to mentorships and professional development opportunities. Leaders from coed camps frequently reported lacking access to mentors and feeling like they weren't fully in charge of their work, while women who led in all-girls programs had access to national or organization-wide professional development opportunities, were often recognized by upper leadership for their accomplishments, and were often able to name at least two or three mentors within their organization. Women leaders in all-girls camps had access to role models and mentors because they were encouraged, throughout their organization, to *be* role models and mentors for other women and girls. Furthermore, while both types of camps identified leaders based on noting who was "seen" enacting leadership qualities, women at coed camps reported experiencing a

higher presence of homophily and hiring practices based on social proximity (i.e., friends, past coworkers) compared to more socially neutral hiring at all-girls camps, suggesting women at all-girls camps might have more equitable access to leadership pipelines.

### Discussion and Implications

The impact of gendered leadership constructions in day camp and the resultant organizational biases that perpetuate systemic discrimination against women imply the need for multifaceted, systemic attention. Beyond implications for future research, this study offers important implications for practitioners. First, implementing explicit training on gender biases is essential for camps to identify it within individual and organizational cultures and norms. Second, camps can promote gender equity for leaders by identifying and changing harmful program policies related to hiring, promotion, and staff development. Third, implementing policies that value relationship-building, such as mentorship programs and affinity support groups, may empower women in their pursuits of leadership.

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# The Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Women's Experiences as Leaders Within Summer Day Camps

## Study Purpose

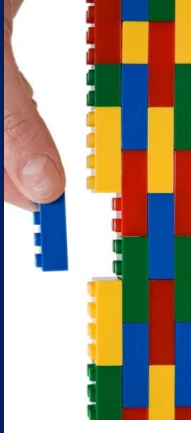
1. How is **professional leadership constructed** in different types of day camps (i.e., **all-girls, coed**)?
2. How do those constructions influence **how women can access and enact leadership** in each setting?

## Method: Comparative Analysis

1. Four camps: two all-girls, two coed
2. Total of 48 interviews with 16 participants (8 from each type of camp; 3 interviews each)

## Findings

- Women **still** face stereotypes about caretaking, "motherly instincts", and being "too pushy" at both coed and all-girls camps...
- ...but all-girls camps are intentional about creating environments where **women feel listened to** when they voice their concerns, without being seen as "too emotional"
- Strong relationships with other leaders, alongside access to mentors and professional development opportunities, **encourages women to lead authentically** without fear of judgment



## ...So What?

### Implications for Practitioners

1. Prioritize relationship-building: *establish mentorship programs and affinity groups, particularly for women and other marginalized groups*
2. Implement explicit trainings: *identify and disrupt gender biases within individual and organizational cultures and norms*
3. Review camp policies regularly: *including those related to hiring, promotion, job descriptions, and PD*

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# CAMP HEALTH CARE PRACTICES: A SCOPING REVIEW

Authors: Ali Dubin, PhD, Alexandra Skrocki MS, Barry A. Garst, PhD

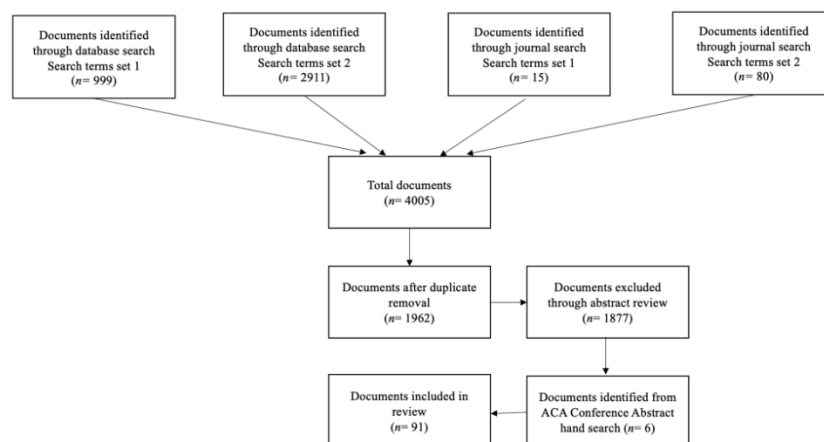
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Summer camp is a youth development setting where a wide range of healthcare and wellness activities occur (Garst et al., 2013; Rauckhorst & Aroian, 1998). While literature on camp healthcare services and practices exists, no reviews of the scope and focus of the literature have been published. Therefore, camp practitioners lack a useful way to understand and utilize evidence related to camp health care services. A scoping review provides a research synthesis of literature on a given topic to identify gaps and inform future research (Munn et al., 2018). Scoping reviews are particularly useful where limited studies may exist or no previous reviews have been completed on a topic (Booth et al., 2016). As no studies have explored the literature regarding camp healthcare, the purpose of this scoping review is to analyze the breadth and depth of the literature regarding camp healthcare to synthesize available evidence related to camp health care services and identify trends and gaps. The synthesis of this evidence will allow camp professionals to gain understanding into best practices for health care services at camp, as well as greater knowledge of the resources available to manage healthcare at camp.

## Methods

This project was informed by Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) process for conducting scoping reviews, the Joanna Briggs Institute's scoping review guidelines (JBI; Peters et al., 2020), and the PRISMA-ScR recommendations (Tricco et al., 2018). The initial search protocol started with database identification guided by Warner et al. (2020) and list refinement using an expert panel from the Alliance for Camp Health, a leading camp industry intermediary. Inclusion criteria were defined using Peters et al.'s (2020) *person, concept, context* model. To capture trends and emerging issues, the scoping review examined literature from 2000 to 2023. The process of reducing the data prior to analysis is illustrated by Figure 1.

Figure 1  
*Data reduction process*



Data extraction was completed by a three-person research team, starting with a sample of 20% of the data to establish interrater reliability, with the remaining articles coded independently. Data extracted from the articles consisted of topic/focus, description of methods, classification of

methods, sample size, population, setting, camp type, care team, findings, suggestions for future research, and suggestions for practice. Articles were divided into empirical and grey literature for open coding to generate themes based on saliency.

### **Results**

The final sample was 91 articles consisting of 55 empirical studies, 6 conference abstracts, 4 policy statements, and 26 grey literature articles. Methods used were primarily quantitative, with 45 articles incorporating quantitative methods and 30 articles not specifying the method or not being a research study. Articles were approximately balanced over the years of the publication inclusion criteria, with the highest number of articles (12) published in 2021. Five themes were generated from the empirical literature: *Serious and Acute Chronic Condition Management*; *Organizational Healthcare Practices*; *Communicable Disease*; *Injury*; and *Medication*. *Serious and Acute Chronic Condition Management* encompassed articles related to the management of serious medical conditions, such as diabetes or seizure disorders, in the traditional camp setting, as well as interventions and feasibility studies at medical specialty camps. *Organizational Healthcare Practices* represented a variety of organizational level concerns such as immunization policies, recordkeeping and transition of care communication, and compliance/education. *Communicable Disease* was focused on the prevention, response, planning, and surveillance of communicable diseases in the camp setting, while *Injury* focused on the prevention, response, and surveillance of injuries for safer camps. Finally, *Medication* focused on the provision and safeguarding of medication at camp. Four themes were generated from the grey literature which reflect topics aimed towards practitioners: *Practice Guidelines, Standards, and Policy Statements*; *Surveillance, Management, and/or Prevention*; *Staffing*; and *Youth with Special Medical Needs*. *Practice Guidelines, Standards, and Policy Statements* encompassed statements from experts such as the American Academy of Pediatrics as well as guidelines regarding documentation or communication. *Surveillance, Management and/or Prevention* addressed communicable disease, other illnesses, and injuries. *Staffing* reflected questions about appropriate staffing ratios, and well as roles and responsibilities of various healthcare and other staff. Finally, *Youth with Special Medical Needs* encompassed a variety of concerns related to serving the population in different camp settings.

### **Discussion and Implications**

The results of this scoping provide valuable insights into the primary areas of interest for researchers and practitioners regarding healthcare in summer camp settings. The management of serious and acute conditions in the camp setting is reflected in both empirical and grey literature, as camp has long served a respite for campers with serious illness and disabilities (Devine & Dawson, 2010) in both medical specialty and traditional camp settings. The literature illustrates that serving campers with serious conditions is a focus of continued academic study, as well as an area where practitioners would look for practical guidance in both academic and grey literature. For example, blood glucose level (BGL) management has always been a key concern for diabetes camps. In 2006, a critical implication for practice was that BGL management would remain an important focus of camps until continuous real-time BGL monitoring was available (Gunasekera & Ambler, 2006). By 2018, studies were focusing on integrating BGL sensor readings into clinical decision making (Hansen et al., 2018). Similarly, communicable disease is reflected in both empirical and grey literature, with the COVID-19 pandemic producing a dramatic emphasis on communicable disease management, evidenced by the sharp uptick of publications in 2021. A notable gap in the literature is qualitative research, with only eight qualitative studies and nine mixed methods studies present within the search. This gap may represent a lack of attention on research questions requiring qualitative study. Future research utilizing qualitative approaches may enable the camp community to better understand the depth of experiences of campers, staff, or healthcare providers

in the camp setting. Additionally, many studies called for broader research, using larger more diverse samples for more generalizability, deeper research using more robust methods such as longitudinal studies or control groups, and simply more research on certain underrepresented topics such as the use of non-pharmacological interventions (NPI's) in communicable disease management.

Practitioners can refer to the findings of this scoping review to deepen their understanding of camp healthcare services and best practices in areas reflected in the constructed themes. Key topics, such as managing serious and chronic conditions and preventing and responding to communicable diseases, represent significant elements of the delivery of health care within the camp setting. Findings from this review can inform training for camp health care staff and frontline program staff responsible for the care and safety of camp participants.

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## Camp Health Care Practices: A Scoping Review

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**Purpose:** To analyze the breadth and depth of the literature regarding camp healthcare to synthesize available evidence related to camp health care services and identify trends and gaps

**Methods:** Scoping review protocol informed by standard processes such as the PRISMA-ScR recommendations (Tricco et al., 2018).

Inclusion criteria were defined using Peters et al.'s (2020) *person, concept, context* model.

### Final Sample: 91 articles

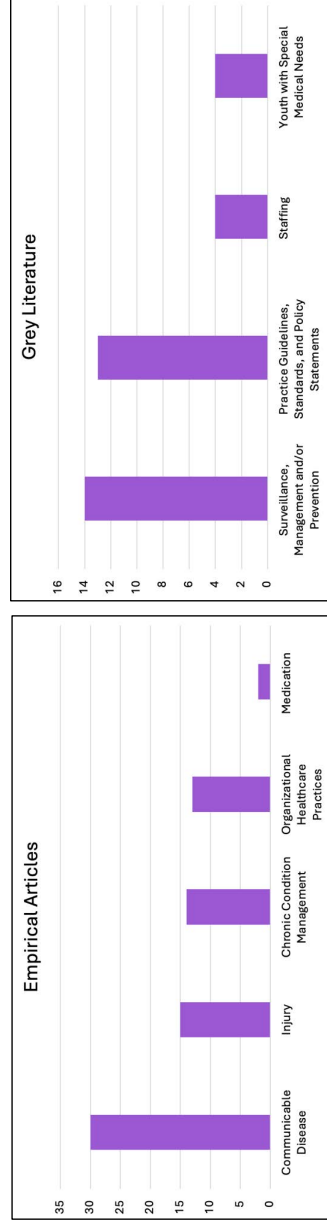
- 55 empirical studies
- 6 conference abstracts
- 4 policy statements
- 26 grey literature articles

### Methods used in articles:

- 44 quantitative
- 8 qualitative
- 10 mixed methods

**Key Finding:** A small yet robust literature informs camp health care practices, creating a foundation for future research.

## Research Gaps: Lack of qualitative and longitudinal studies



## Empirical Themes



Communicable Disease

Communicable Disease is managed using a variety of NPI's, vaccines, and sometimes medications



Injury

Documented rates of injury show that camp is very safe and has led to injury reduction protocols



Serious and Acute Chronic Condition Management

Camps safely serve a wide range of campers with medical conditions in medical specialty and traditional camps



Organizational Healthcare Practices

Organization wide practices such as immunization policy, recordkeeping, and compliance effect camp health



Medication

The safe and effective management and distribution of medication is critical to a safe camp experience

**Grey Literature Subthemes**  
include topics such as:

- Staffing Ratios
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Communicable Disease
- Communication
- Health Forms



## EXPERIENCE DESIGN IN TRAVEL CAMPS: STRATEGIES FOR ELEVATING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVING LEARNING OUTCOMES

Authors: Gary Ellis, Darlene Locke, Dottie Goebel, Billy Zanolini, Parisa Paymard, Jingxian Jiang, Kelly Rankin

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Travel camps are a form of specialty camp in which campers are transported to “geographic and topographic places of interest” (<https://www.acacamps.org/press-room/camp-trends/specialty>). Destinations for travel camps are selected to focus on specific themes and learning outcomes. The National 4-H program, *Citizenship Washington Focus*, for example, brings youth from across the United States to Washington, D.C. to “learn leadership and communication skills through history, democracy, and our amendments,” (<https://4-h.org/events/citizenship-washington-focus/>). Numerous other travel camps are offered by state 4-H affiliates, with programs focusing on themes relevant to youth development, citizenship, leadership, agriculture, culture, wildlife, and natural resources management. Extension educators who lead travel camps are charged with providing meaningful and impactful learning experiences at the attractions travel campers visit. This paper describes two studies sharing the goal of identifying specific strategies educators can use to facilitate positive and impactful on-site experiences at places visited during travel camps.

### Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

Both studies were conducted in 4-H travel camp programs but were founded in different bodies of theory. Study 1 was founded in narrative transportation theory (Gerrig, 2018; Green, 2021) and Calvi et al.’s (2024) application of storytelling principles to heritage interpretation. Narrative transportation theory posits that stories transport people through imaginary journeys to other places, times, and sets of circumstances. As story receivers visit those imaginary places, they construct *narrative*. Narrative is thus the *performance of the story receiver* in creating meaning. Narrative is comprised of mental images of the places, times, and circumstances of the story and emotions, states of motivation, thoughts, intentions, and aspirations receivers ascribe to the story’s characters. Story receivers return from their journey with new knowledge, insight, attitudes, beliefs, and opinions. Effects of narrative transportation among adults are well documented through meta-analysis (van Laer, 2014) and individual experiments (see Gerrig, 2018). Study 1 introduces the concept, *narrative revisitation*. We wanted to know if historical fiction stories told *the evening before* site visits impacted learning outcomes of actual visits occurring on the following day. Youth thus *revisited* sites they had visited previously in their imagination, through narrative transportation.

Study 2 addressed the question of whether educators can facilitate awe experiences among youth participants of a travel camp experience. Awe is a powerful emotion that travelers seek and value, and it has implications to travel camp learning. Keltner (2024) explains that awe is an emotion with “inside and outside” effects. Inside effects are unobservable impacts on emotion, attention, motivation, and mindfulness. People who experience awe are subsequently more mindful, curious, and inquisitive. Thus, experiencing awe at a given travel camp site has potential to facilitate engagement and learning at subsequent sites. Outside effects of awe are also important. Awe facilitates cheerful actions and positive interactions with other people. Awe has not been studied among the populations of children and youth, nor in the context of travel camp experiences. The need for such research is emphasized (Kelter, 2024).

### Method

Study 1 was conducted during a 4-H travel camp to Costa Rica. Participants were 17 high school age youth who visited seven attractions during a travel camp to Costa Rica. Their experiences included a visit to a natural hot spring, a community cultural dance, a culturally relevant community service activity, a tour of an educational farm, a tour of a waterfall garden, a rainforest and chocolate production tour, and a white-water rafting trip. The evening before three of these campers were told historical fiction stories about the site they would visit the next day. Immediately after the story ended, campers completed a six-item questionnaire. Questions such as ‘I was mentally involved in the story while listening to it’ were used to measure their narrative transportation during the story. On the following day, after visiting the site, campers completed a measure of narrative revisitation and the anticipated impact of their experience at that site for a camper-selected learning outcome of the travel camp. Campers also completed questionnaires after visits to sites about which no stories were told. We tested two hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub>: Narrative transportation before a visit increases narrative revisitation when onsite.

H<sub>2</sub>: As narrative transportation and narrative revisitation increase, acquisition of learning outcomes increases.

Study 2 also involved a 4-H travel camp. Over 11 days, 35 4-H high-school age youth visited agriculture and natural resources sites in the mountain west of the United States and Canada. Experiences included visits to ranches, rodeos, a meat processing plant, a national park, and a grizzly bear and wolf center. At four sites, the educator provided brief interpretation emphasizing the vastness of the attraction (Keltner, 2024). We tested three hypotheses:

H<sub>3</sub>: Youth experience awe at travel program destinations.

H<sub>4</sub>: Extension educator interpretation emphasizing vastness increases youth awe.

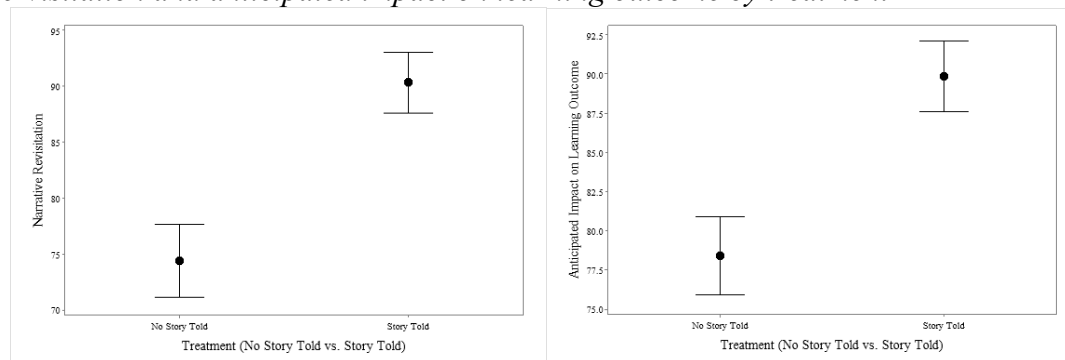
H<sub>5</sub>: As awe increases, experience value-after-use increases

## Results

Results of both studies support educator use of the respective techniques. In Study 1, the experimental treatment (story provided vs. story not provided) had a significant ( $p < .05$ ) positive effect on both narrative revisitation ( $F_{1,95.73} = 10.90$ ;  $M_{\text{provided}} = 89.75$  vs.  $M_{\text{not provided}} = 76.78$ ) and anticipated impact on the learning outcomes of the travel camp ( $F_{1,94.58} = 10.25$ ;  $M_{\text{provided}} = 88.70$  vs.  $M_{\text{not provided}} = 80.82$ ). H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>2</sub> were supported.

Figure 1

*Narrative re-visitation and anticipated impact on learning outcome by treatment*



Study 2 results support H<sub>3</sub>-H<sub>5</sub>. For H<sub>3</sub>, we provided participants with a definition of awe (Keltner, 2024) and then asked, “Did you experience awe” at each site visited. Campers responded “yes” on 313 of 402 occasions (78%). We used Multilevel Generalized Linear Modeling to test H<sub>4</sub>, which proposed that awe would more likely occur when the educator began each site visit with

interpretation of the vastness of that site. This binary measure of awe was the criterion variable in the model we tested. The effect of the treatment (i.e., vastness interpreted vs. vastness not interpreted vs. baseline) was significant ( $F_{2,399} = 6.87, p < .01$ ) and the model classified ninety-one percent of the experiences correctly. Odds ratios showed that interpretation of vastness increased the probability of awe experiences by 74% compared to baseline. The probability increased 33% for sites at which vastness was not interpreted, as compared to baseline. Awe was also a significant predictor ( $p < .05$ ) of downstream effects: proclivity to recommend ( $R^2_{PRE} = .57$ ) and perceived value of time spent at the site ( $R^2_{PRE} = .44$ ).

### Implications

All hypotheses were supported by data in our two studies. Educators facilitating travel camp programs can increase educational value by structuring narrative revisitation experiences (Study 1) and providing interpretation of vastness to elicit awe (Study 2). Youth have awe experiences, interpretation emphasizing vastness increases the probability of awe experiences, and awe experiences increase experience value-after-use. Pending confirmation via future studies addressing limitations and delimitations, results suggest the following:

- Camp leaders can facilitate narrative revisitation through stories.
- Narrative revisitation elevates engagement and camper attainment of learning outcomes.
- Impactful stories are characterized by a) camper self-relevance, b) verisimilitude (rich description of people, places, circumstances, emotions, actions), and c) optimistic outcomes. We used these principles to structure stories we told in Study 1.
- Camp leaders may facilitate awe by emphasizing vastness of sites, attractions, or artifacts. Awe is amazement “at things outside ourselves” (Keltner, 2024, p. 26).
- Existing theory and research about awe suggests that experiencing awe at a site yields valuable downstream effects that facilitate learning and group cohesiveness.

Our Study 2 methods did not include direct measures of awe effects on learning outcomes. A notable delimitation is that we did not test sociological, psychological, economic, or anthropological theory necessary for testing hypotheses about possible mediating or moderating effects related to inclusivity, diversity, equity, access, or support. Future researchers might develop such a foundation by drawing on the works of eminent and influential anthropologists, sociologists, economists, or social psychologists.

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# EXPERIENCE DESIGN IN TRAVEL CAMPS: STRATEGIES FOR ELEVATING EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVING LEARNING OUTCOMES

Authors: Gary Ellis, Darlene Locke, Dottie Goebel, Billy Zanolini, Parisa Paymard, Jingxian Jiang, Kelley Ranly



## Study Aim/Purpose

Two studies about strategies travel camp leaders can use to facilitate positive and impactful on-site experiences at places visited during travel camps.

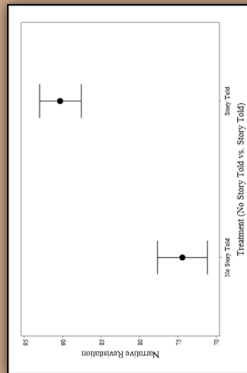
- Study 1: Narrative Re-visitation and Learning Outcomes
- Study 2: Can camp leaders elicit awe?

## Methods

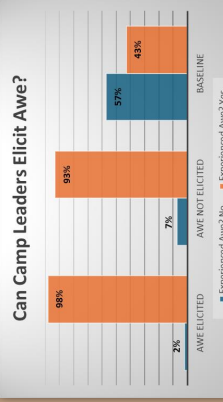
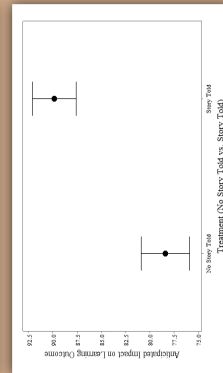
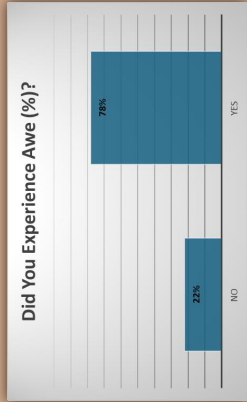
- *Study 1*: 17 campers visited attractions in Costa Rica. Listened to stories about three of nine sites **before** visiting the site. Completed questionnaires **after** all visits.
- *Study 2*: 35 campers visited agriculture attractions in the US and Canadian Mountain West. Camp leader elicited awe experience at the beginning of visits to 4 of 12 sites.

## Results

*Study 1 Results:* Narrative Re-visitation and Learning Outcomes



*Study 2 Results:* Do youth experience awe? Can adult camp leaders elicit awe?



## Implications

- ✓ Camp leaders can facilitate narrative re-visitation through stories.
- ✓ Narrative re-visitation elevates engagement and camper attainment of learning outcomes.
- ✓ Impactful stories are characterized by a) camper self-relevance, b) verisimilitude (rich description of people, places, circumstances, emotions, actions), and c) optimistic outcomes.
- ✓ Camp leaders may elicit awe by emphasizing vastness of sites, attractions, or artifacts.
- ✓ Existing theory and research about awe suggests that experiencing awe at a site yields valuable downstream effects that facilitate learning and group cohesiveness.



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## **INVESTIGATING HOW CAMP EXPERIENCES CAN BENEFIT STUDENTS IN A PUBLIC SCHOOL SETTING: A UNIVERSITY AND PUBLIC SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP**

Authors: Ashton Eyler, Eddie Hill (Weber State University), & Ben Prall (Weber County Schools)

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Camp serves over 26 million youth and adults annually (ACA, 2024). Summer camps have long been a source of fun and friendship for campers, but the benefits are endless. Camp can offer youth connections with others as well as counselors or other staff who may act as role models who advocate for their campers. According to Wilson et al. (2019), camp can serve as a “north star” at which youth can look to understand themselves. While camp acts as an outlet from school and other aspects of life, it also compliments it by continuing a child’s learning and personal growth. Positive Youth Development (PYD) establishes the framework for out of school experiences, including camp (Hill et al., 2016; Hill, 2022). This theoretical approach (PYD) supports the growth and development of youth by focusing on their strengths to promote success. Hill et al. (2016) list positive identity, social skills, positive values/spiritual growth, and thinking and physical skills as four distinct areas to categorize outcomes that support PYD through camp programming. This framework, developed in psychology, has become an integral part of studying youth development in recreation and educational settings.

In the state of Utah, education leaders have attempted to outline the attributes and knowledge public high school graduates should demonstrate and termed these desired outcomes as “competencies” in a *Portrait of a Graduate* (Utah State Board of Education, 2020). Using these competencies as a guide, camp experiences can help youth in public schools achieve better success in their progress towards becoming an ideal high school graduate. However, many of these outcomes are difficult to measure due to the enormous amount of time and responsibilities of camps to provide a safe space for our youth (Kirchhoff et al., 2024). To further examine the impact of camps, partnerships are often used to ease the burden of additional work from camp staff. Swanson’s North Fork Discovery Center opened a camp in summer 2024 to offer these benefits to youth in Weber School District. Partnering with a local university, the new camp built off existing camp on campus research to evaluate its effectiveness (Hill, 2022). The partnership fostered the high-impact practices of community-engaged learning, practicum experience, and undergraduate research (Goff et al., 2020). The Discovery Center’s mission is to allow “students to safely discover the workings of nature, themselves, and to build positive relationships with each other and the natural world.” The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a new nature-based camp as its impact on youth, their growth towards high school graduate goals, and the university partnership.

### **Methods**

The first camp serving youth in Weber School District was held at Swanson’s North Fork Discovery Center in Eden, Utah. Partnering with a local university, the camp ran for four days in June 2024 for youth grades 3-5 and four days in July 2024 for youth grades 6-8. Staff were made up of teachers from Weber School District who led and assisted campers in various classes including subjects such as plants, wildlife identification, archery, hiking, art, and games. Additional staff were high school students who provided community-engaged learning hours, faculty from the university, and undergraduate students who spearheaded the data collection. The campers were surveyed at the end of the camp week using the American Camp Association’s Youth Outcomes Battery. In this study we used the retrospective 14-item Camper Learning Scale (unidimensional measure of the original seven outcomes) for 3rd-5th graders and Basic version for grades 6th-8th.

These three areas of the Basic version (e.g., interest in exploration, problem solving competence, and perceived competence increase) were specifically chosen as they most closely align with competencies defined in *Portrait of a Graduate*.

### **Results**

Fifty-eight out of the 80 campers in grades 3-5 completed the questionnaire (73% response rate). The average age of participants was 9 years old; 45% identified as female. Forty-seven percent said they would return to camp next year, and campers ranked camp 9 out of 10 (highest) on average how much fun was had. The top three favorite camper activities were: art, everything, and meeting friends. Thirty-four percent of campers made five or more friends. The YOB Excel sheet automatically summed the total, and produced the percentage of campers who “*Learned a Little or A Lot*” about the ACA seven outcomes. Sixty-six (66%) of campers learned a little or a lot about the seven ACA CLS outcomes.

Thirty-seven out of the 43 campers in grades 6th-8th completed the questionnaire (86% response rate) with the average age being 12 years old. Fifty-one percent of campers were male. Seventy-eight percent identified as Caucasian, 5% African American, 3% Asian, 3%, Hispanic/Latino, and the remaining did not answer. On average, campers ranked Swanson’s Discovery Camp 8.6 out of 10 (being the highest) on how much fun was had. The top three favorite camper activities were: art, field games, and hiking. Twenty-five percent of campers made five or more friends. When asked how the outcomes changed since camp, responses were as follows. Sixty-five percent (65%) of campers felt “problem solving competence” increased, 76% felt “interest in exploration” increased, and 81% felt “perceived competence increase” since the beginning of camp.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Through a partnership, this study investigated how the summer camp experience can help support, and even improve student growth in the public school system. Utah education leaders have worked to outline the competencies expected by public school high school graduates, competencies outlined in the *Portrait of a Graduate* (Utah State Board of Education, 2020). Competencies expected of graduates that best align with the camp experience include critical thinking/problem solving, creativity/exploration, and hard work/resilience. The areas evaluated for this camp study supported these competencies and may help improve students’ abilities, as 81% of participants reported higher perceived competence after their summer camp experience and 76% of participants reporting an increase in interest in exploration. These areas relate directly to the goals of public education in Utah as outlined in the *Portrait of a Graduate* and recommended further exploration to determine how the camp experience can help support these goals (Utah State Board of Education, 2020). In addition to this unique partnership, the camp is intentionally designed to reach youth who might not be able to attend camp. Specific strategies were providing transportation to camp and subsidizing the camp fee through Weber County School District. When students engage in outdoor learning, they can develop a newfound motivation to seek out opportunities, and all youth need access to camp (Hill, 2022). Camp can help youth become better at working with others, personal resources, solving problems, and readiness to contribute to society (Kirchhoff et al., 2024). Outdoor learning can also help youth develop emotional regulation skills and increase their overall well-being (Mann et al., 2022). With these potential benefits, it could be argued the camp experience should be used by all school districts.



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## Investigating How Camp Experiences Can Benefit Students in a Public School Setting: A University and Public School Partnership

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### Introduction

- Camps serve over 26 million youth and adults annually (ACA, 2024).
- According to Wilson et al., camp can serve as a "north star" at which youth can look to understand themselves. While camp acts as an outlet from school and other aspects of life, it also complements it by continuing a child's learning and personal growth (2019).
- Positive Youth Development (PYD) establishes the framework for out of school experiences, including camp (Hill et al., 2016; Hill, 2022).
- The mission of Swanson's Discovery Camp is to allow youth to discover nature and themselves while building positive relationships.
- The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a new nature-based camp as its impact on youth, their growth towards high school graduate goals, and the university partnership.



### Methods

- The first camp serving youth in Weber School District was held at Swanson's North Fork Discovery Center in Eden, Utah.
- Partnering with a local university, the camp ran for four days in June 2024 for youth grades 3-5 and four days in July 2024 for youth grades 6-8.
- Staff were made up of teachers from Weber School District who led and assisted campers in various classes including subjects such as plants, wildlife identification, archery, hiking, art, and games.
- The campers were surveyed at the end of the camp week using the ACA Youth Outcomes Battery.
  - 14-item Camper Learning Scale for 3rd-5th graders and Basic version for grades 6th-8th (i.e., interest in exploration, problem solving competence, and perceived competence increase) were specifically chosen as they most closely align with competencies defined in the Utah *Portrait of a Graduate*.



**WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY**  
Moyes College of Education



**100% of campers in grades 3-5 made at least one friend.  
66% of campers in grades 3-5 learned a little or a lot about**

**the seven CLS outcomes.**

**65% of campers in grades 6-8 reported an increase in  
Problem-Solving Confidence, 78% in Interest in Exploration,  
and 81% in Perceived Competence.**



### Results: Sample 1

- 58 out of 80 campers in grades 3-5 participated in the survey (73% response rate).
- The average age was 9 and 45% identified as female.
- Campers rated camp a 9 out of 10 and 47% said they would return to camp next year.
- Their favorite parts of camp were art (19%), everything (16%), and making new friends (12%).
- 100% of campers made at least one new friend.
- 66% learned a little or a lot about the seven CLS outcomes.

### Results: Sample 2

- 37 out of 43 campers in grades 6-8 participated in the survey (86% response rate).
- The sample was 51% male and 78% white.
- They rated camp an 8.6 out of 10.
- Their favorite activities were art (19.5%), field games (17%), and hiking (14.5%).
- 92% made at least one friend.
- 65% reported an increase in Problem-Solving Confidence.
- 76% reported an increase in Interest in Exploration.
- 81% reported an increase in Perceived Competence.



### Discussion and Implications

- We evaluated how the summer camp experience can help support, and even improve student growth in the public school system.
- Utah education leaders have outlined the competencies expected by public school high school graduates, competencies outlined in the *Portrait of a Graduate* (Utah State Board of Education, 2020).
- Camper areas of improvement directly relate to the goals of public education in Utah (e.g., creativity/exploration).
  - The areas evaluated for this camp study supported these competencies and may help improve students' abilities (e.g., 81% of reported higher perceived competence).
- When students engage in outdoor learning, they can develop a newfound motivation to seek out opportunities (Hill, 2022; Kirehloff et al., 2024).
- Outdoor learning can also help youth develop emotional regulation skills and increase their overall well-being (Mann et al., 2022).
- It could be argued the camp experience should be used by all school districts.

# **EXPLORING SUMMER CAMPS AS A PALLIATIVE INTERVENTION FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS OF CHILDREN WITH SERIOUS ILLNESS: A RAPID SYSTEMATIC REVIEW**

Authors: Barry A. Garst, Tracy Fasolino, Janice Withycombe, Alexandra Skrocki, Ryan Gagnon, Robert Hollandsworth, Clemson University; Ben Parry, University of California, Berkeley; Ann Gillard, SeriousFun Children's Network  
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Children with serious illnesses (CwSI) face unique challenges, often requiring specialized care to reduce caregiver burdens that include psychological distress, financial difficulties, strained family relationships, adverse personal health impacts, and decision-making challenges regarding their child's care (Feudtner et al., 2015; Schor & Cohen, 2016). Research indicates that summer camps can be highly beneficial in offering specialized therapeutic care and enhancing the quality of life (QOL), especially for CwSI and their families (Gagnon et al., 2019; Gillard & Allsop, 2016; Rea et al., 2019). QOL is a multidimensional and subjective concept inclusive of physical, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being dimensions as well as elements of autonomy and life satisfaction (Jocham et al., 2006; Murphy et al., 2014; Sneddon, 2017). Supporting parents and caregivers of CwSI involves addressing their psychological and emotional needs, including managing their illness perceptions and helping them cope with distress (Heller & Melnikov, 2024).

Although summer camps may be a valuable resource to support respite needs of parents and caregivers of CwSI (Meltzer, 2004; Rea et al., 2019), studies have identified gaps and inconsistencies (Epstein et al., 2005). Further, while evidence supports the benefit of camp for both CwSI and their caregivers, there is little research evaluating summer camps as an intentional palliative care (PC) intervention. PC is specialized medical care that improves the quality of life of individuals and their families who face challenges associated with serious illness (Knapp et al., 2011). Thus, the purpose of this study was to complete a rapid systematic review of literature associated with camp as a PC intervention for caregivers to answer this research question, "What is the impact of overnight camps as a PC intervention on QOL of life for parents caring for CwSI?"

## **Methods**

Rapid review methodology utilizes a systematic process in an accelerated, resource-efficient manner to produce knowledge that is both timely and reproducible (Hamel et al., 2021). Due to expectations of our funder, our rapid review methodology, data extraction, and dissemination were to be completed within 12 months. To maintain methodological rigor within a compressed timeline, we followed guidelines by Garritty et al. (2020), registered the rapid review protocol with International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (CRD42024564954), and integrated Johanna Briggs Institute's critical appraisal tools (2017). The study team focused on ensuring the synthesized literature would inform camp providers of the role of overnight camps as a palliative intervention for parents caring for CwSI.

A literature search strategy was created based on the PICO framework (Population, Intervention, Comparison/Control, Outcome). From May-June 2024, four databases were searched (CINAHL, PubMed, PsychINFO, and Web of Science) for peer-reviewed articles from 2000-2024. This search resulted in articles unrelated to the research questions and also failed to pick up selected articles identified as essential prior to the search. A refined search using the same databases and including Google Scholar (see Table 1) resulted in 28 peer-reviewed studies identified through title and abstract review. After reviewing, 11 were removed, as they did not meet the identified criteria. Three team members conducted a full article review of the remaining 17 and

completed the data extraction data from which seven studies were excluded. A hand search of references was then completed to identify additional articles. A total of 10 studies were used to inform the impact of overnight camps as a PC intervention on QOL for parents caring for CwSI. Data from these articles were analyzed using a narrative synthesis, whereby two members of the research team constructed themes to capture similarities and differences across study contexts, data collection methods, and findings reported (Popay et al., 2006).

Table 2

*Rapid systematic review search strategy*

|  |
|--|
| illness AND (caregiver OR parent) AND camp AND respite<br>also<br>illness AND (caregiver OR parent) AND palliati* AND camp AND respite |
|--|

## Results

Four themes were identified in our preliminary review. First, child-only overnight summer camps serve as a form of “respite” for caregivers. Second, family overnight camps most commonly facilitate social well-being benefits for caregivers, reflected through experiencing socio-emotional outcomes (e.g., feelings of belonging and acceptance), informal networking and building a sense of community. Third, summer camp intervention dosage (i.e., the amount of participation in the program needed to provide caregivers with targeted benefits) is unknown. Perceived benefits are short-term in nature with unclear sustainable benefits for caregivers. Fourth, psychosocial measures, such as depression, overload, anxiety, separation anxiety, and/or caregiver burden, may be variables for assessing QOL for caregivers of CwSI. A subtheme in the review was the definitional and programmatic variability of camps serving caregivers of CwSI.

### Discussion and Implications

The rapid review findings affirm camp as a PC intervention that provides caregivers of CwSI with therapeutic benefits, including respite and social well-being. This study also highlighted gaps in our understanding of summer camp’s influence on such caregivers, as variability in summer camp dosage, programs/mission, and limited follow up with caregivers introduce complexity to this area of research. Moreover, heterogeneity across measures for psychosocial variables, coupled with smaller sample sizes, makes it challenging to determine which measures may be most appropriate to capture caregiver outcomes. This study provides evidence to inform further study of summer camps as a PC intervention supporting caregiver needs.

While the benefits of camp participation for youth with serious illnesses are well established, the potential advantages for caregivers remain largely overlooked or understudied. This review highlights the critical role camps can play in offering a respite experience for caregivers with associated caregiver outcomes. Camp providers may consider marketing their programs as palliative spaces not only for youth but also for those who care for them. Training for camp staff in caregiver respite and associated outcomes may increase camp readiness and capacity to understand and support caregiver needs. By clearly communicating the respite and support your camp offers, practitioners can help parents, healthcare providers, and policymakers better understand how camps provide crucial PC for caregivers, thereby enhancing the overall impact and reach of your programs.

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## Exploring Summer Camps as a Palliative Intervention for Parents and Caregivers of Children with Serious Illness: *A Rapid Systematic Review*

### Background and Purpose

- Children with serious illness (CwSI) need specialized care to address family caregiver burdens, including psychological distress and financial challenges.
- Evidence suggests that out-of-school time (OST) programs, such as summer camps, can serve as a palliation intervention for CwSI, but the impact on family caregivers is less well known.
- This rapid review is part of a larger initiative to examine the role of summer camps as a palliative intervention for caregivers of CwSI to address the urgency for support outlined by U.S. federal, state, and private policy initiatives
- RQ: **What is the impact of overnight camps as a palliative care (PC) intervention on QOL of life for parents caring for CwSI?**

### Rapid Review Methods

#### Protocol Registration

- Registered w/the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO) (CRD42024564954)

#### Search, Eligibility, and Screening

- Used the PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison/Control, Outcome) framework
- Four databases searched (CINAHL, PubMed, PsycINFO, and Web of Science) along with Google Scholar

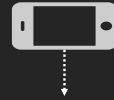
#### Data Extraction and Results Synthesis

- Three team members extracted data using a standardized tool
- Camp information, participation demographics, study outcomes, and theoretical frame
- Quality appraisal informed by the Johanna Briggs Institute's critical appraisal tools.

**KEY FINDING:** Camps act as a form of palliative care for caregivers of CwSI, providing therapeutic benefits such as relief from caregiving responsibilities, opportunities for social connection, and access to a supportive community.



**RESEARCH GAPS** (1) variability in camp dosage, (2) diversity in measurement of psychosocial variables, and (3) limited long-term evidence on quality -of-life (QOL) caregiver benefits.



How relevant is this research to your work?  
Please take our 3 min survey



### Themes from Data Extraction

- Child-only overnight summer camps serve as a form of respite for caregivers.
- Social wellbeing benefits: sense of community, social support, and information networking.
- Improvements in psychosocial measures (e.g., depression, anxiety, perceptions of child's well being) suggest QOL benefits.
- Summer camps were relatively brief and reported outcomes were short-term.

### Implications for Practice

- Benefits of camp participation for CwSI are well-documented, but caregiver advantages remain understudied.
- Camps can play a critical role in providing caregivers with respite and emotional relief, and camps should be positioned as providing these benefits for families including CwSI.
- Camp providers should market programs as palliative spaces for both youth and caregivers.
- Camps can also communicate the respite and support camps offer to parents, healthcare providers, and policymakers.
- As an industry, we should emphasize camps' role in meeting caregiver needs to enhance program impact and reach.

### PRESENTERS

- **Barry A. Garst, Tracy Fasolino, Janice Withycombe, Alexandra Skrocki, Ryan Gagnon, Robert Hollandsworth - Clemson University**
- **Ben Parry - University of California, Berkeley**
- **Ann Gillard - SeriousFun Children's Network**

# **EFFICACY OF A PRE-CAMP ONLINE COURSE FOR INFLUENCING STAFF KNOWLEDGE OF TICKS, TICK-BORNE ILLNESS, AND TICK PRACTICES: YEAR 1 OF FIGHT THE BITE**

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Despite the increased incidence of ticks and tick-borne illnesses in the last decade, studies have found that individuals grossly underestimate their own perceptions of tick bites, prevention practices, and responses (e.g., Beaujean et al., 2013; Gould et al., 2008). Additionally, while tick prevention and exposure practices have been studied across diverse human-nature settings (Lyons et al., 2022), very few have investigated ticks within residential camps (Crim et al., 2018). The multi-year Fight the Bite program (FtB) was established to educate camp participants about ticks and reduce the public health burden of tick-borne diseases in children through staff training and camp provider resources. Incorporating tick education into pre-camp staff training is essential as ticks carry infectious diseases like Lyme disease, and building staff confidence in tick-related knowledge ensures their preparedness to act quickly if someone gets bitten by a tick, thereby keeping campers safe and reducing the chance of illness.

The purpose of this study was to assess staff knowledge and confidence outcomes associated with completion of the FtB pre-camp tick education course. The Year 1 research questions were: (RQ1) How many tick encounters and bites did camps experience in Year 1?, (RQ2) How does completion of a pre-camp online tick education course influence staff knowledge of ticks, tick-borne illnesses, and tick exposures?, and (RQ3) How does completion of a pre-camp online tick education course influence staff perceived competence in learning course content? This study utilized Anderson and McFarland's (2018) community-as-partner model, framing the camp environment as a community system where campers, staff, and natural surroundings interact. The model emphasizes assessing risks (e.g., tick exposure) while fostering prevention and health protection strategies that actively involve the entire community in reducing tick-borne diseases.

## **Methods**

Thirteen Wisconsin camps were recruited to participate in Year 1 of the three-year FtB study conducted in collaboration with the Alliance for Camp Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), through funding provided by S.C. Johnson. Approved by Clemson University's Institutional Review Board, Year 1 of the study utilized a pre-post design to assess FtB implementation and outcomes. Sixty staff were recruited to complete an online course and a pre-post Qualtrics survey. Survey items were modified from Beaujean et al. (2013), Bayles et al. (2013), Gould et al. (2008), Mitchell et al. (2020), and items received directly from CDC (2024) and addressed *staff knowledge of ticks, tick-borne illness, tick exposure knowledge, and tick-post exposure practices*. Respondents also completed an adapted 4-item perceived competence scale (e.g., "I am confident I learned this material"; Williams et al., 1998; Williams & Deci, 1996). In addition, twelve of the 13 participating camps completed a weekly report form administered through Qualtrics to report the incidence of tick encounters and tick bites.

## **Results**

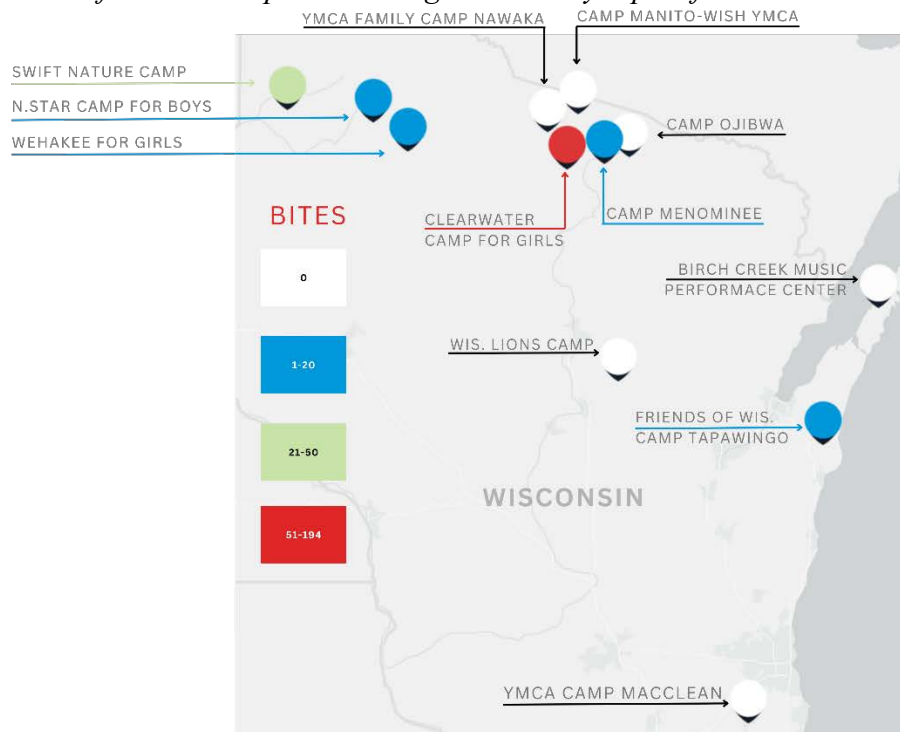
Following data cleaning (e.g., outlier screening, missing data analysis using Little's test of missing completely at random) and pre-post survey response matching, a sample size of 46 responses was yielded. Respondents were predominately female (78.3%, 36) and White (84.8%, 39). The average staff member age was 35, with 41.3% (19) of respondents being first-year

employees. Most respondents reported working at an overnight camp (69.6%, 32), with 39.1% (18) employed by an independent not-for-profit camp.

RQ1 examined the number of tick encounters and bites experienced in Year 1. Reported tick encounters ranged from 4 to 149, with an average of eight encounters per week. Reported tick bites ranged from 0 to 194 (Figure 1), with an average of 35 tick bites per week.

Figure 1

*Total number of tick bites reported through the weekly report form.*



RQ2 explored how online course completion influenced staff knowledge of ticks, tick-borne illnesses, and tick exposure. Paired t-tests indicated increases in *tick knowledge* following the completion of the online course. The reported means for *tick knowledge* increased from pre- to post- test for all 7 items (5 point scale, where 1= “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”). A statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) increase in respondents understanding of “*how to effectively remove a tick*” ( $d = 1.09$ ) was identified. With respect to *tick-borne illness knowledge*, all respondents (100%) reported an awareness of tick-born disease (Lyme disease) following the online course. To examine *tick exposure knowledge* respondents were asked about their level of confidence and understanding for four items (5 point scale); “*I feel comfortable recognizing the erythema migrans skin lesion as a sign of early Lyme disease*” ( $d = 1.19$ ); “*I feel comfortable detecting the erythema migrans skin lesion among parents with all skin tones*” ( $d = 1.15$ ); “*I feel comfortable removing an embedded tick*” ( $d = 1.16$ ); “*I can list two common symptoms of tick-borne illness*” ( $d = 1.41$ ). All four items had statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) increases from pre- to post-test.

RQ3 evaluated whether completion of the online course influenced staff perceived competence. Results from the post-evaluation indicated very high levels of staff confidence (7 point scale); “*I am confident I learned this material*” ( $M = 6.50$ ), “*I was capable of learning the*

material in this course” ( $M = 6.63$ ), “I was able to achieve the goals of the course” ( $M = 6.63$ ), and “I felt able to meet the challenge of performing well in this course” ( $M = 6.54$ ).

### Discussion and Implications

Year 1 of the FtB program showed that a targeted and well-designed tick education initiative implemented in summer camps can successfully improve critical health and safety knowledge for frontline staff. FtB results from Year 1 provide a strong foundation for the continuation of the multi-year program. Thirteen of the thirteen recruited camps engaged in an initiative targeting tick education, thereby establishing successful implementation. The findings demonstrate significant increases in staff members’ tick knowledge, proper tick removal skills, and comfort in handling tick exposures. Such findings also speak to the positive improvement of safe and healthy camp practices related to camper care. Further, the course content was effective in enhancing staff confidence in learning the targeted tick education content. These findings provide evidence for continuing tick-related education through a community system perspective.

Study limitations include the lack of a control group and potential biases like—such as response shift bias—where participants’ perceptions of their knowledge evolve—and social desirability bias, where participants may exaggerate improvements to align with perceived expectations. Selection bias and testing effects may have artificially inflated post-training scores. Building on the Year 1 results, our Year 2 plans include engaging a greater number of camps in FtB Bite and enhancing the study with a longitudinal design.

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## EFFICACY OF A PRE-CAMP ONLINE COURSE FOR INFLUENCING STAFF KNOWLEDGE OF TICKS, TICK-BORNE ILLNESS, AND TICK PRACTICES: YEAR 1 OF FIGHT THE BITE

Barry A. Garst, Alexandra Skrocki, & David White; **Clemson University**  
Tracey Gaslin; **Alliance for Camp Health** | Ashley DeHudy; **Cherry Creek Pediatrics**

### KEY FINDINGS:

- AVERAGE NUMBER OF TICK ENCOUNTERS WAS 8 PER WEEK AND AVERAGE NUMBER OF TICK BITES WAS 35 PER WEEK ACROSS THE 13 CAMPS.
- Significant ( $p < .001$ ) increases were found in staff members' tick knowledge, proper tick removal skills, and confidence in handling tick exposures.

### BACKGROUND

Despite the increased incidence of ticks and tick-borne illnesses in the last decade, studies have found that individuals grossly underestimate their own perceptions of tick bites, prevention practices, and responses. Further, very few studies have investigated ticks within residential camps.

The multi-year Fight the Bite program was established to educate camp participants about ticks through staff training and camp provider resources.

### PURPOSE

To assess staff knowledge and confidence outcomes associated with completion of the Fight the Bite pre-camp tick education course.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- RQ1) How many tick encounters and bites did camps experience in Year 1?
- RQ2) How does completion of a pre-camp online tick education course influence staff knowledge of ticks, tick-borne illnesses, and tick exposures?
- RQ3) How does completion of a pre-camp online tick education course influence staff perceived competence in learning course content?

### METHOD

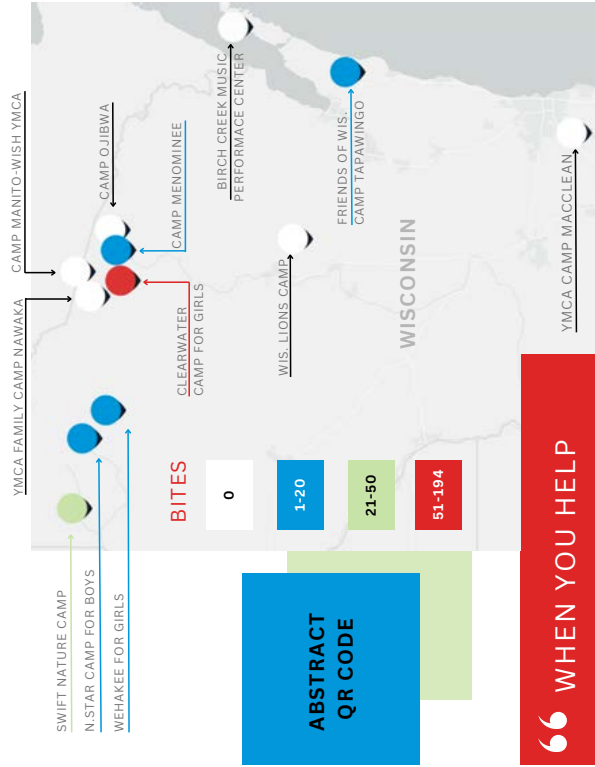
Year 1 utilized a pre-post design to assess implementation and outcomes across 13 recruited camps located in Wisconsin. 66 staff completed an online course and a pre-post survey addressing staff knowledge of ticks, tick-borne illness, tick exposure knowledge, and tick-post exposure practices

- 12 of the 13 camps completed a weekly report form to capture the incidence of tick encounters and tick bites

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Year 1 demonstrated a targeted and well-designed tick education program delivered within the summer camp context can successfully improve critical health and safety knowledge for frontline staff. FtB results from Year 1 provide a strong foundation for the continuation of the multi-year program.

**BUILDING ON THE YEAR 1 RESULTS, OUR YEAR 2 PLANS INCLUDE ENGAGING A GREATER NUMBER OF CAMPS IN FIGHT THE BITE, ENHANCING THE STUDY WITH A LONGITUDINAL DESIGN, AND IMPROVING THE GENERALIZABILITY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS.**



“ WHEN YOU HELP YOUNG PEOPLE BUILD THEIR KNOWLEDGE, BUILD THEIR SKILL AND BUILD THEIR CONFIDENCE, YOU’RE TRANSFORMING THEIR ABILITY TO BE EFFECTIVE AND SAFE AND SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN.”



WATCH THIS VIDEO ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE FIGHT THE BITE INITIATIVE ON THE CAMPS THAT PARTICIPATED IN YEAR 1.

# EXAMINING CHARACTER AT CAMP THROUGH PERFORMANCE, INTELLECTUAL, CIVIC, AND MORAL VIRTUES: RESULTS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY

Authors: Kevin Geoghegan, Soumya J. Mitra, Robert P. Warner, University of Utah.

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Fostering “character,” defined as “a set of personal traits or dispositions that produce specific emotions, inform motivation, and guide conduct” by the Jubilee Center for Character and Virtues (n.d.), has long been a priority of educators and youth development professionals. Contemporary researchers and legislators alike emphasize character’s role in holistic development (Elias & Moceris, 2012). As a result, there is a growing movement to explicitly cultivate character in applied or informal educational settings, such as camp. These settings provide an underappreciated context for studying character development, as they exemplify the broader ecological systems within which character education thrives (Urban & Trochim, 2017).

While numerous character development models exist (e.g., Seider et al., 2017), the Jubilee Center for Character and Virtues, an interdisciplinary research center on character and virtues, and their associated character development model (JCCM) aligns with the goals for the American Camp Association (ACA) Character at Camp Initiative. Camps often help align the strengths of youth with the resources available in the community (Lerner et al., 2021), allowing youth to apply ethical principles and moral insights in practice—which the JCCM emphasizes. This alignment equips campers to contribute positively to a relevant context, creating an ideal environment for character development. However, a lack of coherence in the field and reliance on folk wisdom over empirical evidence (Seider et al., 2017) creates the need to identify a framework that aligns with applied contexts in which to effectively study character development. Accordingly, this study aims to identify how camp professionals conceptualize character through the lens of performance, intellectual, civic, and moral virtues (Jubilee Center, n.d.).

## Method

In early 2024, the ACA disseminated a survey seeking camp professionals’ thoughts concerning character ( $n = 1,786$ ). If the camp reported focusing on character development, they were asked (1) in what ways character is focused on; and (2) how the camp describes character to stakeholders. Word counts were generated from the open-ended survey responses camp professionals provided in explaining how their camp focuses on character development, and words referring to character-related outcomes mentioned more than 50 times were retained for analysis. These words were deductively coded a priori by the first author based on JCCM definitions to identify character concepts used within the camp community and to inform the ACA’s Character at Camp Initiative. Table 1 outlines the four virtues in the JCCM.

Table 1  
*JCCM Building Blocks of Character*

| Virtues      | Jubilee Center Definition  | Examples  |
|--------------|--|---|
| Intellectual | Character traits necessary for discernment, right action, and the pursuit of knowledge, truth, and understanding | autonomy; critical thinking; curiosity; judgement; reasoning; reflection; resourcefulness |
| Performance  | Traits that have an instrumental value in enabling the intellectual, moral, and civic virtues                    | confidence; determination; motivation; perseverance; resilience; leadership; teamwork     |

|       |   |   |
|-------|---|---|
| Civic | Traits necessary for engaged responsible citizenship, contributing to the common good | citizenship; civility; community awareness; neighborliness; service; volunteering |
| Moral | Traits enabling us to act well in situations that require an ethical response         | compassion; courage; gratitude; honesty; humility; integrity; justice; respect    |

*Note.* <https://www.jubileecenter.ac.uk>.

## Results

The survey did not require mandatory responses, so sample sizes vary by survey item. Of 1,786 respondents representing camps, 75% (1,333) reported focusing on character development. Of these, approximately 37% (665) represented overnight camps, 20% (354) represented day camps, and 30% (544) represented a camp that provided both day and overnight camp programming, with the remaining 12% (223) representing other camp programming.

In reporting how their camp focuses on character development, nearly 87% of camp professionals reported that character development was implemented through staff training to promote specific character outcomes. Approximately 85% of camps reported designing programs to target or support the development of specific character outcomes. Meanwhile, only 58% and 59% of camps claimed they explicitly named character development in their mission statement and marketing materials, respectively. Only 34% of camps reported using an existing character education curriculum, and 27% of camps reported partnering with an organization to support character development (e.g., a school).

### Camp Conceptualizations of Character

Of 790 responses from camp professionals explaining how their camp organization describes character development to the stakeholders they serve, 15 character-related outcomes were identified, with nine outcomes mentioned in over 10% of responses. These outcomes are categorized in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Common Terms Describing Character at Camp and Relevancy to Model*

|                   | Prevalence of Virtue in Survey Responses ( <i>n</i> =790) | Corresponding Virtue Domain (JCCM) |
|-------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| <b>Respect</b>    | 172 (21.77%)  | Moral                              |
| <b>Community</b>  | 167 (21.14%)  | Civic                              |
| <b>Leadership</b> | 165 (20.89%)  | Performance                        |
| Responsibility    | 146 (18.48%)  | Civic                              |
| <b>Confidence</b> | 136 (17.22%)  | Performance                        |
| <b>Courage</b>    | 107 (13.54%)  | Moral                              |
| Learning          | 81 (10.25%)   | Intellectual                       |
| Caring            | 98 (12.41%)   | Moral                              |
| <b>Honesty</b>    | 96 (12.15%)   | Moral                              |
| Independence      | 71 (9%)   | Performance                        |

|                   |              |             |
|-------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Empathy           | 66 (8.35%)   | Moral       |
| Kindness          | 63 (7.97%)   | Moral       |
| <b>Integrity</b>  | 50 (6.33%)   | Moral       |
| <b>Resilience</b> | 49 (6.20%)   | Performance |
| Relationships     | (55 (6.69%)) | Civic       |

*Note.* Outcomes in bold are character virtues specifically in the JCCM.

### Discussion and Implications

Analysis of camp survey respondents' character definitions revealed 15 common character outcomes used across camps, with eight explicitly named as virtue examples in the JCCM, underscoring the relevance the JCCM's in the camp context. With seven of the 15 commonly reported terms relating to moral virtue (47%), the data suggest that camp practitioners prioritize moral virtues, contrasting with the emphasis seen in contemporary character development research in schools. Situated within a broader ecology of character development, this highlights the unique potential for summer camps to fill gaps in holistic character development, particularly in other contexts where moral development may be underrepresented. The JCCM, as a perspective rather than a rigid blueprint for character development, allows camp practitioners to tailor their programming, to embrace a holistic approach to character development or focus on specific virtues aligned with their priorities. Moreover, its emphasis on the dynamic interaction between individuals and their context allow it to be applied at various camps to various youth demographics and socioeconomic statuses.

The alignment of the data with performance, intellectual, civic, and moral virtues underscore the potential applicability of the JCCM in understanding character development in the camp context. Future analysis may entail a more in-depth qualitative examination of the survey data to better understand how camps conceptualize character in relation to the JCCM. This may clarify the nuances of terms (e.g., *responsibility*, *caring*) and how they compare to more defined concepts in the literature (e.g., *compassion*), reducing ambiguity and improving alignment with existing and accepted models of character.

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# EXAMINING CHARACTER AT CAMP THROUGH PERFORMANCE, INTELLECTUAL, CIVIC, AND MORAL VIRTUES: RESULTS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY

Kevin Geoghegan  
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University of Utah  
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American Camp Association

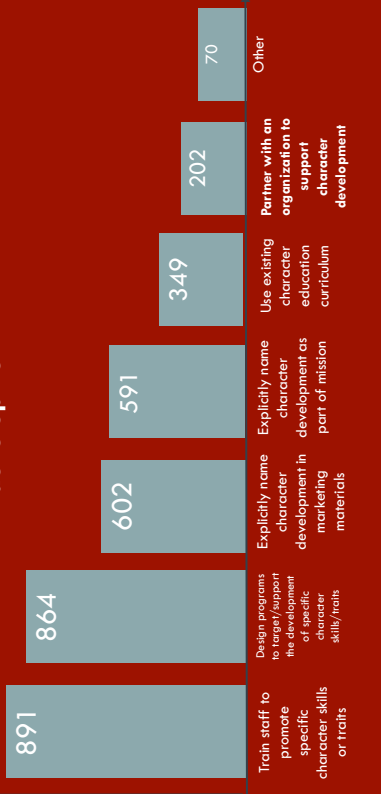
Summer camps offer unique, underappreciated opportunities for fostering character development for young people to build virtues that contribute to personal and social flourishing.

## BACKGROUND

- The ACA surveyed 1,786 camp professionals to explore how camps conceptualize and implement character development practices.
- Camps were asked about their methods for fostering character and how they communicate character development to stakeholders.
- The Jubilee Center for Character and Virtues provides a comprehensive model of performance, intellectual, civic, and moral virtues, aligning the American Camp Association's character at camp initiative.
- A shift from reliance on folk wisdom to evidence-based frameworks is crucial for coherently studying character development in camps, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between individuals and their contexts.



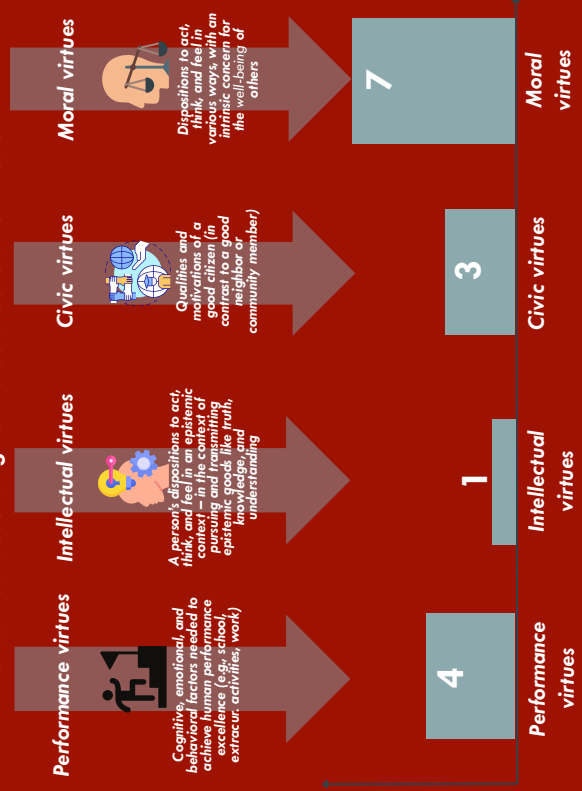
## In what ways does your camp/organization focus on character development?



## Common words camps used to describe Character to stakeholders

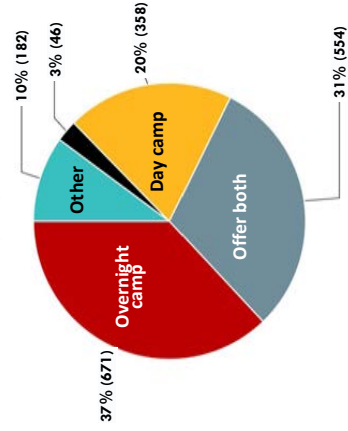


## Classified according to the Jubilee Center Model

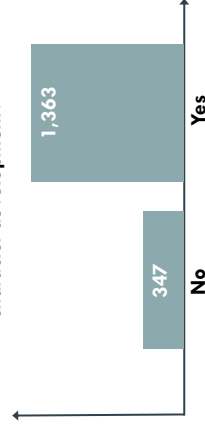


## RESULTS

### What type of program/organization do you work for?



### Does your camp/ organization focus on character development?



## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

- Camps prioritize moral virtues (47%), addressing gaps in character education underrepresented in schools.
- The JCCM framework allows camps to tailor character development programs to diverse contexts and youth demographics.
- Future research can refine concepts like responsibility and caring, aligning camp practices with established character models.

## CONTACT

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# WHERE TO START: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE POPULATIONS AND OUTCOMES STUDIED IN MEDICAL SPECIALTY CAMP LITERATURE

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Medical specialty camps serve campers with a variety of health conditions. Their format can be either for campers with a specific diagnosis such as sickle cell disease or for campers with a variety of diagnoses grouped together. Even as researchers have found that campers of all kinds can benefit from attending medical specialty camps (Gillard et al., 2011; Lake et al., 2021), the exact outcomes are often considered “short-term psychological benefits [with] little evidence of any sustained impact” (Moola et al., 2013). Epstein et al. (2005) describes how “all chronic illnesses can negatively affect [quality of life], each disease presents unique challenges.” Gillard and Allsop (2016) found that at a camp session for children with serious illnesses, different aspects of camp mattered more based on the camper’s specific diagnosis.

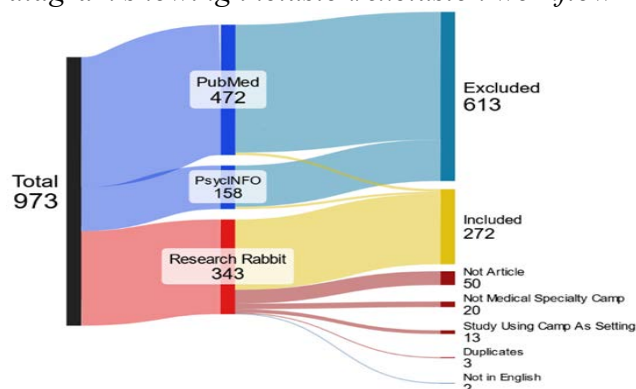
Taken together, these ideas point to the need, reiterated many times in the discussions of these articles, for further work on the specific outcomes for specific populations. As each diagnosis brings unique challenges, attending a medical specialty camp session impacts the camper in different ways. While there are findings found across populations such as campers appreciating being around similar others, having supportive counselors, and trying adaptive activities (Gillard et al., 2011), going beyond those elements of medical specialty camps is necessary to understand the longer-term impacts of attending camp.

This review seeks to categorize the medical specialty camp literature by the camp population’s diagnosis, the types of participants, and the outcomes measured into a publicly accessible database (developed by [Morgan Vickery](#)). This would allow for tailoring future research and program evaluations aims to a specific population or outcome.

## Methods

To begin with, Gillard et al.’s (2023) article was put into ResearchRabbit (Cole & Boutet, 2023), a citation-based literature mapping tool, as a seed paper to find lists of earlier, later, and similar publications. Then I used Cochrane guidelines for system reviews to search PubMed and PsycINFO (Higgins & Green, 2011). The inclusion criteria were articles published in a peer-reviewed journal between January 2005 and September 2024, written in English, set in medical specialty camp contexts. I reviewed the titles and abstracts gathered from the initial search and, when necessary, the full text, for inclusion in the current review.

Figure 1  
*Sankey diagram showing inclusion/exclusion workflow*



The data extracted included the medical categorization of campers served by the camps, the types of participants (campers, siblings, parents, medical staff, or camp staff), and the outcome measures (social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physiological). Utilizing a social model of disability, I included the medical categorization to encapsulate the variety of embodied conditions that have informed the design and implementation of camp programming (Barnes, 2016). Diagnoses were grouped into larger categories when applicable, such as all types of cancer being grouped as cancer. Articles reporting on participant outcomes were categorized using a scheme informed by sociocultural conceptualizations of individual engagement as spanning across four dimensions: social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral (Humburg, 2022) with the addition of a physiological dimension to account for the unique objectives of medical specialty camps.

## Results

Of the 973 articles viewed, 272 were included for review. Table 1 shows the diagnoses of the campers served by the camps within the studies. Studies on camps serving campers with diabetes and cancer are much more numerous than any other population. As 28 different health conditions have under 10 articles, it can be difficult to find relevant findings for less studied populations. When exploring medical specialty camp research, studies about camps serving youth with diabetes or cancer often appear more prominently in search results.

Table 1

### *Medical specialty camp studies on specific populations*

| <b>Studies</b> | <b>Medical Categorization</b>  |
|----------------|--|
| 14+            | Diabetes (68), Cancer (61), Asthma (17), Burns (16), ASD (14), Cerebral Palsy (14) |
| 10-13          | Gastrointestinal, Blood Disorders, HIV/AIDS, Visual Impairment                     |
| 3-9            | 17 different health conditions (ex. Spina Bifida, Tourette Syndrome)               |
| 1-2            | 11 different health conditions (ex. Huntington's Disease, Renal Disease)           |

Looking beyond the population diagnoses, the outcomes measured help explain differences in the individual population needs shown in Table 2. Of the total 62 articles that had physiological outcome measures, 33 were set in camps for those with diabetes. Many studied measure blood glucose levels as outcomes, they demonstrate how this population has different needs and therefore different measures for those needs. Their outcome measures are appropriate and applicable for them, but not for most other populations. Similarly for camps serving individuals with cancer, outcomes have been more focused on the emotional/ psychological impacts of attending the camp such as self-perception and loneliness (Meltzer & Rourke, 2005).

Table 2

### *Outcomes and participants measured in medical specialty camp articles*

| <b>Dimension</b> | <b>Emotional</b> | <b>Social</b> | <b>Cognitive</b> | <b>Behavioral</b> | <b>Physiological</b> |
|------------------|------------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Total Articles   | 152              | 131           | 124              | 68                | 62                   |

These different dimensions have been measured with the wide variety of stakeholders associated with medical specialty camps: campers, siblings of campers, caregivers of campers, medical staff, and camp staff (both seasonal and full time). While the campers are typically the participants to measure the impact of camp attendance, their families and the staff members are also impacted. Many studies focus on the campers' caregivers as the camp session serves as a respite for them and they often complete measures about the impact on their camper and family.



Combining these three types of information can allow for filtering down to studies on a specific diagnosis population, specific participant group, and specific dimensions of outcomes measured.

Table 3

*Participant categories measured in medical specialty camp articles*

| Groups         | Campers | Siblings | Parents | Medical Staff | Camp Staff |
|----------------|---------|----------|---------|---------------|------------|
| Total Articles | 200     | 23       | 63      | 18            | 36         |

For example, filtering by spina bifida provides eight studies and further filtering by parents and campers provides three studies, then filtering by emotional outcomes provides two studies. This system allows for identifying and then synthesizing the research on these specific groups to minimize doing redundant work and instead allow for focusing on targeted outcomes. All the information about these studies' data is currently publicly available as a database on <https://jonathangerth.github.io> in a filterable format.

### Discussion and Implications

Beginning research and evaluations about medical specialty camp requires knowing what we already know and what has already been done. This often means consulting research literature which can be difficult due to its fragmented nature. I aim to expand the information from these articles to include the measurement scales used, the number of participants, and the demographics of the participants, as well as the location, duration, and type of medical specialty camp. This is meant to provide an informed starting point for developing future research studies and program evaluations tailored to specific camps and the populations they serve.

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## Study Aims

This review seeks to categorize the medical specialty camp literature by the camp population's diagnosis, the types of participants, and the outcomes measured into a publicly accessible database. This would allow for tailoring future research and program evaluations aims to a specific population or outcome. While previous reviews have focused on specific populations, they have not been consolidated together for synthesizing all of the medical specialty camp research.

## Findings

Table 2. Medical specialty camp studies on specific populations

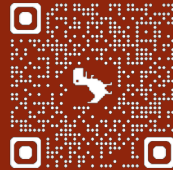
| Studies | Medical Categorization   |
|---------|--|
| 18+     | Diabetes (68), Cancer (61)   |
| 14-17   | Asthma, Burns, ASD, Cerebral Palsy                                       |
| 10-13   | Gastrointestinal, Blood Disorders, HIV/AIDS, Visual Impairment           |
| 3-9     | 17 different health conditions (ex. Spina Bifida, Tourette Syndrome)     |
| 1-2     | 11 different health conditions (ex. Huntington's Disease, Renal Disease) |

Table 3. Outcomes measured in medical specialty camp articles

| Dimension     | Total | Diabetes | Cancer |
|---------------|-------|----------|--------|
| Emotional     | 152   | 23       | 41     |
| Social        | 131   | 16       | 35     |
| Cognitive     | 124   | 26       | 28     |
| Behavioral    | 68    | 15       | 9      |
| Physiological | 62    | 33       | 8      |

Table 4. Participant categories

| Groups        | Campers |
|---------------|---------|
| Campers       | 200     |
| Siblings      | 23      |
| Parents       | 63      |
| Medical Staff | 18      |
| Camp Staff    | 36      |



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Medical Specialty  
Camp Research

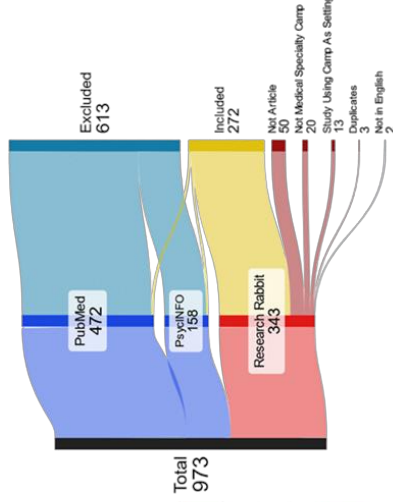
## Methods

Retrieve 973 articles, cut down to 272 based on inclusion criteria, and summarize them

- Medical Population
- Participant Focus
- Outcomes Measures

Table 1. Criteria for articles included

| Inclusion                                  |
|--|
| Published between Jan. 2005 and Sept. 2024 |
| Written in English                         |
| Setting was a medical specialty camp       |
| Exclusion                                  |
| Not an article in a research journal       |
| Study at a camp unrelated to the camp      |



## Medical Specialty Camp Literature Database

Medical Specialty Camp Literature Database

Reset Filters

Articles

Using Rock Climbing for Recreation Among Youth with Type 1 Diabetes: A Case Study of the REACH Program

Focus: camp / programming, camp staff, campers, framework / practice, literature review, medical staff, research.

Medical Population: congenital hand differences, craniofacial differences, diabetes, down syndrome, epilepsy, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, intellectual disability.

Findings: (incl.) behavioral outcomes, (incl.) cognitive outcomes, (incl.) emotional outcomes, (incl.) physiological outcomes, (incl.) social outcomes, camp/program description, camp/program evaluation.

Reset Filters

Articles

Assessment of the Effect of Summer Camp on the Life Quality of Diabetic Children

Focus: camp, campers, diabetes, research.

Medical Population: congenital hand differences, craniofacial differences, diabetes, down syndrome, epilepsy, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, intellectual disability.

Findings: (incl.) behavioral outcomes, (incl.) cognitive outcomes, (incl.) emotional outcomes, (incl.) physiological outcomes, (incl.) social outcomes, camp/program description, camp/program evaluation.

Reset Filters

Articles

Blood glucose levels in children with Type 1 diabetes during a 2-year review

Focus: camp, campers, diabetes, research.

Medical Population: congenital hand differences, craniofacial differences, diabetes, down syndrome, epilepsy, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, intellectual disability.

Findings: (incl.) behavioral outcomes, (incl.) cognitive outcomes, (incl.) emotional outcomes, (incl.) physiological outcomes, (incl.) social outcomes, camp/program description, camp/program evaluation.

## **MOVING BEYOND A CAMP DIGITAL DETOX: PILOTING A DIGITAL WELLBEING INTERVENTION AT AN OVERNIGHT SUMMER CAMP**

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A mental health crisis exists among U.S. youth and it may be linked to use of technology and digital media (TDM; U.S. Public Health Service, 2021). However, TDM use may also provide youth with benefits, such as community and identity formation (Radtke et al., 2022).

Given the relative newness of TDM research, its perpetual advancement, and increasing presence, there is a need to understand how it impacts youth's wellbeing, how they experience settings with limited TDM access, and how to support their digital wellbeing (National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2024). Digital wellbeing is a person's subjective experiences of digital technologies that maximize benefits and reduce harm (Vanden Abeele, 2021). Digital wellbeing moves beyond a digital detox toward more sustainable beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Camp often has limited TDM access; yet little research has examined staff and camper experiences with limited TDM and its post-camp impact (cf. Megret et al., 2023; Povilaitis, 2019). To this end, we grounded our study in the Dynamic Systems Approach of Digital Wellbeing (Vanden Abeele, 2021), which conceptualizes digital wellbeing as a balance between connectivity and disconnectivity emerging from the interactions between individuals, devices, and their contexts, modeled as pathways within a dynamic system. In our study, we aimed to capture staff and campers' complex, evolving relationships with digital media during camp and to understand how these relationships influence their overall wellbeing. In this study, we sought to understand 1) staff and camper experiences of being at camp without constant TDM access; and 2) staff and camper perceptions of a digital wellbeing intervention.

### **Methods**

We used an instrumental case study design (Stake, 1995) with staff and campers from a traditional overnight camp affiliated with a large youth-serving organization in a Midwest state in the USA. A total of 48 staff ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20.78$ ;  $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.69$ ) participated in the study. About 73% of staff identified as white, 20% identified as Hispanic or Latinx, 3% identified as African American or Black, one participant identified as Asian, and one participant identified as multiracial. About 50% of the staff identified as women, 38% identified as men, and 12% identified as non-binary. A total of 85 youth campers ( $M_{\text{age}} = 11.64$ ;  $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.05$ ) participated in this study. About 88% of the campers identified as white, 5% multiracial, 4% Asian, and 2% Black. About 59% of the campers identified as girls, 39% boys, and 1% non-binary. The digital wellbeing intervention began when the Executive Director (ED) completed a digital wellbeing trainer experience. Then during staff training, the ED led a 1-hour training on digital wellbeing and LiveMore ScreenLess led a digital wellbeing facilitated conversation and training about how to hold these conversations with campers. After the training, the ED asked staff to facilitate digital wellbeing conversations weekly with campers.

Our study used three data sources: staff surveys, camper surveys, and ED field observations. Camp staff completed surveys before staff training; after the digital wellbeing training; mid-summer; and after camp employment. The surveys asked staff about their camp experiences without TDM (e.g., "What was it like to not have access to digital devices while you were at camp?"; "Being at camp helped me to appreciate the value of making time to be away

from technology” with options ranging from “Not at all true” = 1 to “Totally true” = 5), and the digital wellbeing intervention (e.g., “What is one key takeaway for you from this conversation?”; “Before participating in the digital wellbeing training at the beginning of the summer, had you considered talking to campers about their tech use? If not, what about the training may have changed your mind?”; “Think back to your summer and the digital wellbeing conversations you had with campers. Please tell us about what that experience was like for you? Share about what you learned, any challenges you experienced, and successes you had. If one moment during a conversation stands out to you, what was that moment and why did it stand out?”). Two weeks after sessions, caregivers received an email invitation for their children to complete an online survey about their camp experiences without TDM (e.g., “What was it like to not have access to digital devices while you were at camp?”, “Have your feelings about using digital devices changed since attending camp?”; “Being at camp helped me to appreciate the value of making time to be away from technology”[same as staff]), and the digital wellbeing facilitated conversations (e.g., “During this conversation, I thought about how tech use can affect my overall wellbeing”). We analyzed open-ended survey responses using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) inductive thematic analysis approach. The camp’s ED (the first author) lives at the camp and observed staff and campers at different times throughout the summer’s entirety.

### Findings

Staff and campers reported benefits of limited TDM access at camp, including connecting in person and being present in engaging activities which left them unconcerned about needing TDM access. Staff ( $M = 4.47$ ;  $SD = .82$ ) and campers ( $M = 3.37$ ;  $SD = 1.19$ ) said that being at camp helped them appreciate the value of making time to be away from technology. One camper noted, “It was great to be away from the screens and enjoy nature.” Another camper said, “it was a nice break, even if I did have time to use a digital device, I don’t think I would have because I was having so much fun”. Some campers reported unexpected benefits, such as better sleep: “It worried me at first to not have immediate contact to my family or friends but I noticed that I had better sleep and could fall asleep faster. Another benefit was that I was less tired and more motivated without the distraction of a device.” Staff shared similar sentiments, with one describing the experience as “really refreshing... camp is a place where there is always something going on and there are lots of opportunities for social interaction. It makes interacting through a digital device feel not as genuine or real”. Another said, “I felt disconnected in the best way possible. I felt more present and connected to my job”. Although staff and youth identified benefits of limited TDM at camp, they also identified challenges. Some campers found it difficult during specific moments: “It was hard at bedtime or downtime,” or missed using devices for practical purposes: “I wish I could use my phone just because I wanted to take pictures, not for anything else.” Staff also reported difficulties, such as maintaining contact across time zones or staying connected with loved ones: “It was tough at times, as I could only contact my family at certain points in the day due to the big time difference.” The ED observed staff’s perspective about TDM use change over the summer, as some staff initially reported the benefits of limited TDM access, but as the summer progressed, reporting missing it and the loss of connection to others not at camp. Staff and campers reported challenges in maintaining momentum toward digital wellbeing after camp, often due to TDM-dependency and social environments at home.

One staff member said, “It’s hard to stop using my phone, even though I know the benefits. At camp, I didn’t need Instagram to hang out with my friends or Google Maps to get from one place to another. But now, there’s always an app to make daily life easier”.

Staff positively evaluated the digital wellbeing training reporting that it was informative and motivated them to be role models; however, their intentions to adopt digital wellbeing practices did not appear to manifest the entire summer. Staff and youth responses, as well as ED observations, suggested mixed use of digital wellbeing facilitated conversations; however, when they occurred, staff and youth identified the value of having a space for open sharing and listening to others about TDM use. Staff and youth reported that it was valuable to learn they were not alone in their TDM concerns and experiences. They reported appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on their TDM use and their digital wellbeing strategies. The ED observed staff discussing digital wellbeing concepts, not previously present at camp.

### Discussion

These findings extend knowledge about staff and camper experiences at camps with limited TDM access (e.g., Megret et al., 2023; Povilaitis, 2019) and highlight how camps can move beyond the benefits of a digital detox through digital wellbeing interventions that include staff training and facilitated conversations. Camps are positioned to support staff and campers' digital wellbeing through limited access to TDM and supportive social environments that elevate youth voice and leverage near-peer mentoring opportunities for meaningful conversations about TDM use after camp. While campers did not struggle with limited TDM access during camp, limited behavior changes after camp suggest that a digital detox alone may not foster long-term behavioral shifts, reinforcing the need for addressing digital wellbeing beyond camp via a holistic approach with resources for campers and their families. Camp staff struggles to maintain a commitment to limited TDM use suggests a need for integrated, ongoing support. Future studies should examine how pre-camp preparation (e.g., emails to families, staff training), in-camp supports (e.g., weekly check-ins, facilitated conversations), and post-camp integration (e.g., digital wellbeing clubs) support sustainable digital wellbeing. This study's limitations (e.g., single camp, no intervention fidelity measure, homogenous samples) suggest the need for more robust research designs and more diverse samples to increase generalizability and determine the intervention's feasibility and applicability from a culturally responsive practice lens.

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## Moving Beyond a Camp Digital Detox: Piloting a Digital Wellbeing Intervention at an Overnight Summer Camp

Jana Graczyk, Robert P. Lubeznik-Warner, & Katherine Myers



### Background

- o The mental health crisis among U.S. youth may be linked to technology and digital media (TDM) use, which can both harm and benefit youth.
- o Summer camps offer a unique setting to explore how youth and staff adapt to a limited TDM environment and understand their digital wellbeing.
- o Grounded in the Dynamic Systems Approach of Digital Wellbeing, the study explored how staff and campers navigate their relationships with digital media during camp and evaluated their perceptions of a digital wellbeing intervention.

### What we did...

- o Instrumental case study with 48 staff and 85 campers at a traditional Midwest overnight camp.
- o Staff surveys, camper surveys, and Executive Director field observations.
- o Surveys included quantitative and open-ended questions on TDM experiences and digital wellbeing.
- o Open-ended responses analyzed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis.
- o Staff training on digital wellbeing, followed by weekly camper conversations facilitated by staff.

### Who participated?

- o 48 staff
  - o About 73% identified as white ( $n = 35$ )
  - o About 50% identified as women ( $n = 24$ ), 38% men ( $n = 18$ ), and 12% non-binary ( $n = 6$ )
- o 85 youth campers
  - o About 88% identified as white ( $n = 75$ ).
  - o About 59% identified as girls ( $n = 50$ ), 39% as boys ( $n = 33$ ), and 1% as non-binary ( $n = 1$ ).

Table 1. Results of Limited TDM

| Aspect   | Staff   | Campers  |
|--|---|--|
| Benefits of Limited TDM Access                       | Increased appreciation for being present and social interactions. "I felt disconnected in the best way possible. I felt more present and connected to my job."  | Better sleep and enjoyment of nature. "It was great to be away from the screens and enjoy nature."     |
| Challenges of Limited TDM Access                     | Difficulty maintaining contact across time zones or with loved ones. "It was tough at times, as I could only contact my family at certain points in the day."   | Missed TDM during specific moments. "It was hard at bedtime or downtime."                              |
| Post-Camp Digital Wellbeing                          | Struggled with maintaining momentum due to TDM dependency. "It's hard to stop using my phone, even though I know the benefits. At camp, I didn't need Instagram... but now, there's always an app to make daily life easier." | Limited behavior changes post-camp. "I'm used to coming back from camp and returning to my usual life" |
| Digital Wellbeing Training/Facilitated Conversations | Valued training but mixed implementation. "The training was informative and motivated me to be a role model."   | Found facilitated conversations valuable. "It was good to hear others share their experiences"         |

### What do our findings mean?

- o Facilitated conversations can promote reflection on digital habits.
- o Staff are critical role models, suggesting their training and buy-in are essential for intervention success.
- o Ongoing support may be needed to sustain digital wellbeing practices beyond camp.

### Camp professionals may use our findings...

- o To design staff training that includes both practical strategies for facilitating digital wellbeing conversations and personal reflection on technology use.
- o To integrate structured digital wellbeing discussions into camp programming, creating space for campers to reflect on their relationships with technology.
- o To highlight the benefits of limited TDM environments in marketing materials, emphasizing the opportunity for meaningful connection and self-discovery.
- o To explore how to support campers and families in maintaining digital wellbeing practices post-camp, like providing resources or additional programming.



### We learned that...

- o Staff and campers **adapted to limited TDM**, often highlighting benefits like **stronger in-person connections and increased engagement**.
- o Staff and campers also identified **challenges** with limited TDM, such as **difficulty during downtime, camera access, and maintaining contact** with people outside of camp.
- o Although most staff and campers **appreciated the experience of limited TDM**, most **did not maintain a reduction** in tech-use after camp.



2025 American Camp Association Research Symposium – Dallas, Texas

## **NAVIGATING FOOD CHOICES: A QUALITATIVE DIABETES CAMP STUDY**

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According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 304,000 youth younger than 20 years of age have type 1 diabetes (T1D) (CDC, 2024), and the number of affected individuals continues to grow (Gregory et al., 2022). T1D is an autoimmune disease that is caused when the body's immune system attacks the beta cells in the pancreas, preventing them from producing insulin (Syed, 2022). Insulin helps regulate the body's blood glucose levels, making it vital for the human body. People with T1D require insulin replacement therapy. A diagnosis of T1D results in a significant shift in the life of an individual and their family, requiring careful management of glucose levels through dosing insulin and making appropriate nutrition choices. Nutrition and exercise play critical roles in managing T1D, helping to create a foundation for improved quality of life (Monaghan et al., 2022). Although research recognizes the impact of nutrition on T1D management, little qualitative research exists on how youth with T1D experience the challenges of nutrition decisions.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the experiences and perspectives of youth with T1D regarding food choices, especially in social settings, using an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) research approach. IPA is a qualitative research methodology aiming to deeply understand individuals' perspectives and meanings attributed to their experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2007). To assess youths' experiences with food choices in the context of T1D, we interviewed participants from a year-round evidence-based recreation diabetes camp.

### **Methods**

REACH Weber, a year-round recreation experience for youth with T1D, hosted a week-long day camp for youth (ages 11-17) with T1D in August 2024. Camp activities included rock climbing, whitewater rafting, nutrition classes, and taste tests. The program was designed not only to offer fun and recreational activities but also to equip youth with essential life skills that promote healthier lifestyles and greater self-efficacy in managing T1D.

Eight of the 36 campers volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews, with each interviewed once during the week. The IPA approach emphasizes in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, typically involving three to ten participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Interviews focused on the impact of T1D on food choices, nutrition education, and barriers to healthy eating, particularly in social settings. We identified three overall research questions, 1) How does a T1D diagnosis influence the food choices and experiences of youth with T1D? 2) What are the experiences of young people with T1D regarding education on healthy eating? 3) What barriers do young people with T1D encounter regarding healthy eating in social settings? From these, we developed ten interview questions to ask each interviewee.

We analyzed the interview data using a phenomenological data analysis procedure (Smith & Osborn, 2007). This involved a multi-stage, iterative process. First, three researchers independently read and re-read each transcript to gain a deep understanding of the participant's narrative. Subsequently, descriptive codes were assigned to segments of text that captured the essence of the participants' words. These codes were then grouped into broader conceptual categories. Themes emerged as we identified patterns and connections across participants'



narratives. Finally, a faculty member reviewed all data and the identified themes to ensure consistency and rigor in interpretation.

### **Results**

Of the eight campers interviewed, a majority were female (75%), white (100%), and had an average age of 13.25 years. Three themes emerged: Food and insulin dosing, challenging food environments, and nutrition education, resources, and support.

Theme one: food and insulin dosing. Youth with T1D share the experience of carefully monitoring food intake and adjusting insulin dosing accordingly. One youth notes, "I've been measuring a lot more and paying close attention, to, like, the certain sizes instead." Another youth said, "I like a lot of sweets, a lot of sugar, so that's had to change a little bit." Little changes in diet and food preparation were described to better help them manage their blood glucose levels. Overall, the youth didn't see T1D as limiting their food choices, only making them more complicated. Another youth explains that she can eat what she wants as long as she doses enough insulin, "It was kind of hard, sometimes you want more, but you like, do it anyway, but you still dose for it, and sometimes it's worth it."

Theme two: challenging food environments. Many of the youth struggle to manage their diabetes in social settings, such as at parties. One youth notes, "I'm so distracted with talking to my friends and doing all the stuff that's there." Another youth said "It was a big change. I mean, I was always having to wait to eat...it's kind of awkward sometimes". Many youth shared the same response that it can be a burden to dose when they are around friends. They lack confidence when they don't have access to accurate dietary information, such as at restaurants and with school lunches. One youth describes, "...these parties where they throw away the labels, like, and so my mom has five years of experience, so she's pretty good at guessing... so you usually just text her or something when you're in those situations." Another youth mentioned that "Eating out is a little bit trickier." When not having access to nutrition labels, many youth expressed uncertainty about their ability to manage their diabetes. Many of the youth often face bullying and isolation, sometimes due to misconceptions about the condition, evidenced in this quote: "they think maybe it's contagious."

Theme three: nutrition education, resources, and support. The youth talked about their lack of nutrition education from doctors and school. One respondent commented on learning about nutrition in school, "I haven't really talked about it much." Most of the youth receive nutrition education from their parents. One youth explains, "I'm not very like, you know, fully independent, so I'm still learning some things about my diabetes. My mom still helps me with some of the things." Another youth said, "If I am not sure about carbs, I will call my parents and ask them for help." Multiple cited diabetes camp as one of the places where they learned the most. Another participant explains, "I've definitely got a bunch of help from here... there's all these people with diabetes around you....I can see how other people eat with diabetes. And I'm like, okay, maybe I could do that." Another youth reported "I really like diabetes camp because, you know, there's a lot of people who have diabetes and they understand."

### **Discussion and conclusion**

This study explored the experiences of youth with T1D regarding food choices, especially in social settings. The findings suggest that despite awareness of healthy eating, they often struggle to adhere to their diabetes management plan due to distractions in social settings and a lack of nutrition education. This is consistent with existing research suggesting that youth



with T1D are aware of healthy eating but may struggle to adhere to their diabetes management routine, especially when stressed (AlBurno et al., 2022; Hapunda et al., 2015). The study identified social settings, such as parties, schools, and restaurants, as challenging due to distractions and difficulties in accurately estimating carbohydrate intake and adjusting insulin dosing.

### Implications for Practice

While youth with T1D may be aware of the importance of healthy eating, they often need more nutrition knowledge, especially when away from parents or in social situations. This study highlights the need for comprehensive parent and family education as this is the primary source of nutrition knowledge for youth. Diabetes camps emerged as a venue for effective nutrition education, incorporating focused nutrition instruction and teachable moments alongside peer support to promote healthy lifestyle habits, consistent with previous findings that diabetes camps encourage proper diabetes management and psychosocial well-being (Monaghan et al., 2022).

Nutrition education is important for all youth and can be beneficial to be included in all camps. Finally, IPA proved to be an effective method for gaining a deeper understanding of participants' experiences with eating in the context of T1D. This approach may be a useful strategy for exploring the experiences and perspectives of youth in other settings and on other topics.

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# Navigating Food Choices: A Qualitative Diabetes Camp Study

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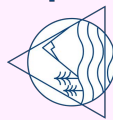
## INTRODUCTION

- According to the CDC, 304,000 youth younger than 20 years of age have type 1 diabetes (T1D) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024).
- A diagnosis of T1D results in a significant shift in life of an individual and their family, requiring careful management of glucose levels through dosing insulin and nutrition choices (Monaghan et al., 2022).
- Although research recognizes the impact of nutrition on T1D management, little qualitative research exists on how youth with T1D experience the challenges of nutrition decisions.
- This study aims to explore the experiences and perspectives of youth with T1D regarding food choices, especially in social settings.



## METHODS

- Interviews were conducted with eight youth with T1D at a week-long summer camp.
- Questions focused on the impact of T1D on food choices, nutrition education, and barriers to healthy eating.
- To understand and interpret the participants' experiences, we used an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach.
- This analysis entailed (a) reading and re-reading the transcripts, (b) highlighting phrases, coding them into meaning full labels, (c) grouping the codes into thematic clusters that captured common experiences across participants, and (d) compiling descriptions of the themes and subthemes.



**WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY**  
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## Theme 1- Food and Insulin Dosing

"I don't feel like it stops you from eating the meals that you want."

"...it's tough, because you see all your friends eating it, and they're like, you want some? Oh no, I can't have it. Why? I have diabetes."

## Theme 2- Challenging Food Environments

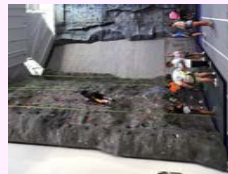
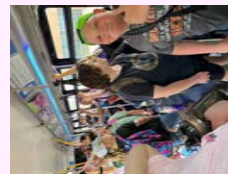
"Eating out is a little bit trickier."

"Sometimes people think that diabetes is an excuse."

## Theme 3- Nutrition Education, Resources, and Support

"I'm not very like, you know, fully independent, so I'm still learning some things about my diabetes. My mom still helps me with some of the things."

"I really like diabetes camp because, you know there's a lot of people who have diabetes and they understand."



ALAN AND JEANNE HALL ENDOWMENT FOR  
**COMMUNITY OUTREACH**



## RESULTS

**Demographics:** Of the eight campers interviewed, a majority were female (75%), white (100%), and had an average age of 13.25 years.

### Theme 1: Food and Insulin Dosing

- Properly managing T1D requires youth to balance the food they eat with the insulin they take.
- Some of the participants reported changes to their diet while others did not significantly modify their diet and managed primarily with taking insulin.

### Theme 2: Challenging Food Environments

- Many young people with T1D struggle with social situations, especially those involving distractions or a lack of accurate dietary information, like parties, restaurants, and school lunches.
- Many of the youth face bullying and isolation, sometimes due to misconceptions about the condition.

### Theme 3: Nutrition Education, Resources, and Support

- Youth with T1D, more than their peers, need nutrition education, resources, and support. Yet, they report minimal education from schools or doctors.
- Instead, most learning comes from parents and diabetes camps offering both professional guidance and peer support.



## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

- Despite awareness of healthy eating, youth with T1D often struggle to adhere to their diabetes management plan due to distractions in social settings and a lack of nutrition education or accurate nutrition information.
- This is consistent with existing research highlighting difficulty with adherence, especially when stressed (AlBumo et al., 2022; Hapunda et al., 2015).
- Youth with T1D often need more nutrition knowledge, especially when away from parents or in social situations, highlighting the need for comprehensive parent and family education.
- Adding to previous research stating that diabetes camps encourage proper diabetes management (Monaghan et al., 2022), diabetes camp emerged as a venue for effective nutrition education.

# **A DELPHI STUDY TO DEFINE QUALITY COUNSELOR-IN-TRAINING PROGRAMS**

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Many camps scaffold youth leadership opportunities by allowing campers to complete training requirements prior to camp staff employment (Riley et al., 2021). This structure often includes a role between camper and counselor/staff roles known as a “counselor-in-training” (CIT). Youth campers interested in pursuing camp careers are often recruited for CIT programs (Kendellen et al., 2016), and such participation provides youth with workforce knowledge and experience (Riley et al., 2021). In practice, CIT programs target a variety of goals and outcomes, implement diverse program structures, and serve unique populations (Riley et al., 2021). Few studies exist regarding CIT and other camp leadership programs, and research exploring CIT program design, goals, and outcomes is limited (Riley et al., 2021). No recognized framework exists for these programs. This study examined how top-tier CIT programs are operationalized and identified characteristics deemed necessary by industry experts for program success.

## **Methods**

This study used the e-Delphi methodology to synthesize expert opinions through online communications (Keeney et al., 2011). In this methodology, the researcher manages the process, asks an expert panel a set of specific questions regarding the targeted topic, synthesizes expert feedback, and enables a group consensus (Cole et al., 2012). An initial Qualtrics survey was used to recruit participants and assess their expertise. An “expert” in this study was defined based on industry knowledge, overall camp experience, and experience working with CIT programs. Demographic information was not prioritized when establishing the expert panel; generating opinions from knowledgeable and experienced camp professionals was the prioritized outcome. Twenty-one participants were selected to take part in the study. Prior to data collection, expert panel email communications and online surveys were pilot tested and refined (Toronto et al., 2017).

Three rounds of e-Delphi were conducted via Qualtrics (Perera-Diltz and Sauerheber 2017). In round 1, participants were asked to consider CIT programs they have worked with to identify five characteristics they have seen or experienced that reflected successful CIT programs. Participants were also asked to consider the weaknesses they have seen in CIT programs and identify five characteristics that would make these programs more successful. After cleaning, round 1 identified 87 characteristics related to successful CIT programs. In round 2, participants evaluated the 87 characteristics based on how valuable each element was for top-tier CIT programs and ranked each characteristic on a five-point Likert scale (1 = “lowest importance, unimportant as it relates to the success of a CIT program” and 5 = “highest importance, very important as it relates to the success of a CIT program”). The participants’ scores were averaged for each characteristic, and those characteristics with an average score of 4.5 or higher (32 items total) advanced to round 3.

Round 3 focused on panel consensus confirmation (Perera-Diltz & Sauerheber, 2017), during which the final 32 items from round 2 were sent to the expert panel for confirmation as representative of a successful, top-tier CIT program.

## **Results**

Participants were mostly white (90.48%), female (71.43%), and an average of 38 years old. In addition, all participants were employed at an ACA accredited camp, had knowledge of ACA accreditation standards, and reported being “extremely familiar” with CIT programs with prior CIT work experience. Ten participants considered themselves to be experts on CIT programs, while 11 participants reported they might be an expert.

After round 3, the criteria presented in table 1 were unanimously considered essential for top-tier CIT programs by the expert panel.

Table 1

*Characteristics for top-tier CIT programs*

| Theme                   | Characteristics confirmed by panel<br>(truncated for abstract)  |
|-------------------------|---|
| Authentic engagement    | Top-tier CIT programs require all staff members to understand the expectations of the CIT program. Staff members are expected to treat all CIT program participants equally. Staff should allow CITs to be their authentic selves and foster a safe environment for exploring identity.                       |
| Intentional structure   | Top-tier CIT programs have an intentional structure, training schedule, and/or curriculum. Their structure incorporates a skill-challenge progression, and all activities are age-appropriate.  |
| Supportive camp culture | Top-tier CIT programs include CIT program participants in the camp environment, with mutual respect demonstrated between CITs and other members of the camp community. Top-tier CIT programs inspire CITs to become leaders through engagement with the camp community.                                       |
| Developmental focus     | Top-tier CIT programs promote the personal growth and development of participants. These CIT programs promote the development of interpersonal skills. Specifically, top-tier CIT programs foster collaboration, problem-solving, accountability, a strong work ethic, and teamwork among their participants. |

### Discussion and Implications

This study examined characteristics essential for successful CIT programs based on expert opinions. Participants identified four themes of program characteristics (authentic engagement, intentional structure, supportive camp culture, and developmental focus). Each theme reflected conditions deemed necessary for top-tier CIT programs. Although no comprehensive curriculum currently exists for CIT programs, experts within the camp industry agree that specific qualities contribute to program success.

Researchers have called for further investigation of the CIT experience (Riley et al., 2021), and this project is a significant step toward understanding successful CIT programs. This project highlights qualities necessary for CIT program success, and it addresses how practitioners can generate programs that contribute to positive individual and organizational outcomes. Because residential camps have proven to be a setting where positive youth development occurs (Warner et al., 2021), a deeper understanding of CIT programs can further contribute to increased positive youth outcomes within the camp environment.

Conducting this study with a more diverse panel may yield different results and should be prioritized in future research endeavors. Although the primary objective in the current project was to gain perspective from experienced practitioners regardless of their demographic information, incorporating perspectives from different genders, people of color, and differently abled individuals will likely offer extensive perspective on how diversity and equity exist within the camp space. These opinions may allow for a more inclusive CIT program curriculum.

Camp directors, administrators, and leadership staff should evaluate their CIT programs using the program characteristics synthesized in this study to identify opportunities for program improvement. Camps should ensure staff are properly trained to support CIT program goals and outcomes. Additionally, camp professionals should consider how their CIT program supports the professional growth of their CITs. Camp organizations can use the information from this study to integrate or enhance the four necessary CIT program characteristics to better support youth

outcomes. Further research can also investigate how this list of characteristics may be used within the camp space; a rubric, checklist, or validated scale may be developed in the future to allow camp organizations to create research-based decisions regarding their CIT programs. Future exploration of this topic may allow for the development of a tool to enhance CIT program outcomes and effectiveness.

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## A Delphi Study to Define Quality Counselor-In-Training Programs

**KEY FINDING AND IMPLICATION:** Camp experts agree that four characteristics enhance the quality of CIT programs: authentic engagement, intentional structure, supportive camp culture, and a developmental focus. These characteristics should be considered when developing program standards.

### Background:

Many camps include youth leadership opportunities through counselor-in-training (CIT) programs to provide youth with workforce knowledge and experience. There is limited research regarding CIT program design, goals, and intended outcomes. No recognized framework currently exists for these programs.

### Research questions:

- (RQ1) How are top-tier CIT programs operationalized?
- (RQ2) Which characteristics are deemed necessary by industry experts for CIT program success?

### Method:

- A total of 21 experts were recruited based on their knowledge, experience, and expertise surrounding CIT programs.
- An e-Delphi methodology was conducted.
  - ✓ Round 1: open-ended questions
  - ✓ Round 2: Likert scale questions
  - ✓ Round 3: panel consensus confirmation

### Characteristics necessary for top-tier CIT programs:



**Authentic engagement**



**Intentional structure**



**Supportive camp culture**



**Developmental focus**



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Leslie E. Heffington & Barry A. Garst

### Results:

- Out of the 21 panel members, 17 completed all three rounds of e-Delphi.
- 32 characteristics were unanimously confirmed as necessary for top-tier CIT programs.
- Four major themes were identified.

### Implications:

- Camp administrators should evaluate their own CIT programs using the characteristics synthesized in this study to identify opportunities for program improvement.
- Camps can use the information in this study to adjust their own programs to better support youth developmental outcomes.
- Conducting this survey with a more demographically diverse panel may yield different results and should be prioritized in future research endeavors.
- Further research can also investigate how this list of characteristics may be used within the camp space in the form of a rubric, checklist, or validated scale.

# **THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF YOUTH WITH TYPE 1 DIABETES: LESSONS FOR PRACTITIONERS**

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Annually in the US, over 18,000 children are diagnosed with type 1 diabetes (T1D), a chronic condition impacting blood glucose levels, requiring ongoing management (ADA, n.d.). Medical specialty camps offer resources/environments that help youth acquire the skills/support necessary to manage their condition (Mattsson et al., 2021; Ramfelt et al., 2023). Research indicates camp participation for youth with T1D is beneficial for short-term glucose management and competence (Nagl et al., 2022). However, we have little knowledge about the lived experience of youth with T1D and their experience participating in recreation programming.

This study explored the intersection of youth development and chronic illness using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The aim of IPA is to “explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world,” focusing on “the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants” (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 53). To learn about the lived experience, we focused on participants from a year-around, recreation diabetes camp (i.e., REACH). Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the question: What meaning do youth ascribe to living with T1D and how has participation in REACH influenced their T1D?"

## **Methods**

During REACH, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight youth (50% male) using an interview protocol to center youths' experience with T1D and the impact participation. Questions including “Can you tell me about living with diabetes?” “What are some of the successes/challenges you’ve faced while living with diabetes?” and “Can you tell me about your experience living with diabetes since participating in REACH?” prompted in-depth conversations prioritizing youth’s insight and meaning-making processes.

All data were treated utilizing a phenomenological data analysis procedure. Specifically, line-by-line thematic analysis was utilized to give meaning and structure to the participants’ experiences. This analysis entailed (a) reading and re-reading the data, (b) highlighting phrases, coding them into meaningful labels, (c) grouping the codes into thematic clusters of meaning across participants, and (d) compiling descriptions of the themes and subthemes. The researchers systematically reviewed the transcripts to discover statements that are especially relevant and meaningful.

## **Results**

After analyzing data, three themes emerged: diabetes is an added responsibility of living, youth voice, and a knowledge-based community.

Theme one: added responsibility of living with T1D. Coping with added responsibilities is an experience shared by youth, with navigation of diabetes diagnosis and attitudes towards their condition evolving as time progresses. When discussing diagnosis impact, a participant describes the juxtaposition of diabetes diagnosis: “It [definitely] made me more mature really quickly. And sometimes, I think back ... I didn't feel like I had like a huge childhood. But sometimes I think it's like a good thing to mature faster and have [like] more responsibility.” Additionally, education and skill development needed for the management of diabetes provided an additional dimension of responsibility for youth to navigate: “I’ve learned that I am a lot more capable than I thought... and I also am a lot more capable of getting over fears because I have an irrational fear of needles, but that's gone now.”



Theme two: youth voice. Youth agency is an ongoing negotiation between the physiological demands of management and the resources to act on choices confidently. One youth explains, “Sometimes I don't like telling everyone that I have it... it's kind of awkward when my continuous glucose monitor starts, like beeping. Like, I'm sorry, but I've kind of got used to it, and I know I'm gonna have it for probably forever unless they find some great technology to fix it.” While family members and health care providers provide support and guidance, disclosing their T1D diagnosis is a decision navigated by youth. While disclosure of diagnosis is encouraged, adult understanding of diabetes varies, impacting youth's experiences within various developmental contexts. When discussing time in school, a child shares various responses from various adults present in their lives: “[Some] teachers kept bugging me about it. But my gym teacher and everyone else is like, okay, cool. They focus on everyone else, and they don't bug me, which is nice. Because I hate being bugged about it. They're like, ‘are you okay?’ I'm like, I promise if I'm not okay, I'll tell you.”

Theme three: knowledge-based community. The perceived impact of participation identified by youth included tailored support, knowledge acquisition, and autonomy. Given the program's focus on youth with diabetes, shared diagnosis lent itself to implicit and explicit sharing of experiences for youth participants. One participant reflects on their experience engaging with the diabetes community and the diversity of treatment approaches observed during their time at REACH: “I like being able to talk to the kids with diabetes and [to] see the differences and what I would like to change.” The same youth continues, sharing their decision to try and move to a smaller insulin pump: “I've talked to other kids about it, and it seems better. So that's why I was thinking we should try it. Because other kids do it, and they seem perfectly fine with it.”

### **Discussion and Implications**

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of youth living with T1D and their impact of participation in REACH. Consistent with literature and the present study, youths' experience with diabetes management is an ongoing process shaped by their perceived well-being and context (Mattsson et al., 2021; Ramfelt et al., 2023). Given the unique implications of T1D for youth, access to social support through recreation programming may promote effective diabetes management (Monaghan et al., 2022). Our findings support using lived experience to understand the meaning ascribed to program participation and the prioritization of developmental opportunities for youth with T1D to thrive. Youth with T1D often have less access to recreation services (e.g., camps) due to the medical provisions. However, we know that youth need these social and recreational experiences for positive development. Their lived experiences support the high need for recreation services that provide a safe space with others and to have a voice. Evidence supports the REACH program provides such opportunities.

The study findings suggest two practical implications. First, youth-serving organizations should consider their role in promoting youth voice and community, particularly those serving youth with chronic conditions. Autonomy-supportive environments, (e.g., camps), promote positive youth development tailored to the needs of youth, can potentially translate to increased agency outside of camp (Ramfelt et al., 2023). Second, approaches such as IPA allow for centering embodied experiences when evaluating program data. Aligned with unique methods of camp research, the allowance of in-depth discussion of participant experience and the meaning-making process may provide insight into the interplay of theory and practice, a vital intersection for staff development and training (Mattsson et al., 2021). Future research should continue to explore the lived experiences of our youth and pursue effective models of participatory action research to even further give our youth with T1D a voice and assist in social change.

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# The Lived Experience of Youth with Type 1 Diabetes: Lessons for Practitioners

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## INTRODUCTION

- Over 18,000 children are diagnosed with type 1 diabetes (T1D) annually in the U.S. (Wagenvoort et al., 2023)
- Management of T1D is an ongoing process requiring additional training, resources, and support for youth and their caregivers (Nagl et al., 2022).
- Medical specialty programs can serve as a supportive environment for youth to develop the necessary skills to thrive in their daily lives (Mattsson et al., 2021; Ramfelt et al., 2023)
- Literature supports diabetes camp participation with improving short-term glucose management and efficacy in diabetes management (Nagl et al., 2022)
- However little is understood of the daily experiences of youth with T1D, and the meaning made from participating in medical specialty co-curricular programming.

Research Questions: (1) What meaning do youth ascribe to living with T1D and (2) how has participation in REACH influenced their experience with T1D?

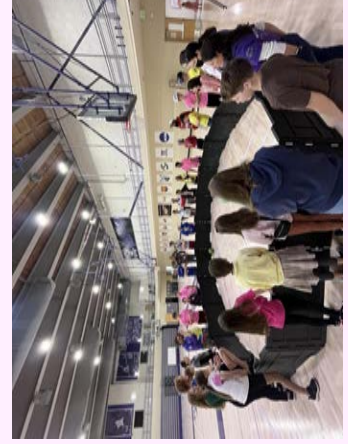
## METHODS

- This study uses Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a research approach for exploring intersection of chronic illness and youth development.
- The purpose of IPA is "exploring in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world," focusing on "the meanings particular experiences, events, states hold for participants" (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 53).
- Study participants were purposefully sampled from a year long diabetes recreation program (i.e. REACH) held on a college campus in western Utah.
- Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight youth (50% male).
- Interview protocol centered youths' experience with T1D and impact of REACH program participation.
- Line-by-line thematic analysis provided framework for data interpretation and meaning-making processes used in the iterative process.



## Main Takeaway

*Prioritizing the embodied experiences of those we serve helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, a vital intersection for staff development and training (Mattsson et al., 2021).*



## RESULTS: Three themes emerged

**1. Added Everyday Responsibility**  
*"It [definitely] made me more mature really quickly. And sometimes, I think back... I didn't feel like I had like a huge childhood. But sometimes I think it's like a good thing to mature faster and have [like] more responsibility."*

- There are "two days off" when it comes to diabetes management and the significant time demands required to "control" glucose levels given consequences of poor diabetes management.
- Ongoing management provides continuous opportunities for youth to act as steward of their wellbeing throughout multiple developmental context (e.g. home, school, co-curricular activities)

## 1. Embodiment of Youth Voice

*"Sometimes I don't like telling everyone that I have it... it's kind of awkward when my continuous glucose monitor starts, like beeping. Like I'm sorry, but I've kind of got used to it, and I know I'm gonna have it for probably forever unless they find some great technology to fix it."*

- Factors such as personal experiences, feelings towards diagnosis, and perspectives on management and wellbeing vary across participants.
- Opportunities to discuss and show their diabetes - such as displaying their pumps or checking their blood sugar out in the open - can allow for expression of shared identity amongst youth

## 1. Knowledge-based Community Access

*"I like being able to talk to the kids with diabetes and [to] see the differences and what I would like to change."*

- Knowledge and experiences shared is based in practicality; successes and setbacks is shared amongst youth participants in REACH.
- Seeing other youth take ownership of their medical decisions empowers youth to make more informed medical decisions based on their own identified goals and aspirations.



## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

- Interactions between participants, community partners, researchers, and health professionals allows for unique opportunities for sharing of resources, supports, and ideas that can work together to provide access to holistic wellbeing for this population (Nagl et al., 2022).
- Prioritizing the embodied experiences of those we serve helps bridge the gap between theory and practice, a vital intersection for staff development and training (Mattsson et al., 2021).
- Approaches such as IPA can be used to further refine policy and practice for camp practitioners, and youth development professionals, particularly when considering programs for young people with diabetes (Ramfelt et al., 2023).

# **“IT’S COMFORTABLE AT CAMP”: EMOTIONAL SAFETY AND SELF-DETERMINATION AT A SUMMER CAMP FOR YOUTH WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS**

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The expanded core curriculum (ECC) for students with visual impairments (VIs) provides additional instruction in nine areas needed to understand the world equally to their sighted peers: compensatory skills, orientation and mobility, social skills, independent living, recreation and leisure, career education, assistive technology, sensory efficiency, and self-determination (Hatlen, 2003). In literature regarding the education of students with VIs, self-determination is defined as “a person’s right to decide freely and without undue influence how he or she wishes to live his or her life” (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010, p. 341). As part of the ECC, self-determination includes the understanding of one’s abilities and limitations, feeling of control of life experiences, self-realization, autonomy, physiological empowerment, and belief in oneself (Lohmeier et al., 2009; Monson, 2009; Opie, 2018). In the results of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 of students in special education, self-determination skills were one of the strongest determining factors of high quality of life after high school graduation (Monson, 2009).

Despite evidence of the importance of self-determination, many educators of students with VIs report that ECC skills should be taught outside of the school day (Palmer, 2005) and have reported placing a lower priority on teaching self-determination skills (Lohmeier et al., 2009) during school hours. Research suggests physical education and extracurricular programming present opportunities to ensure direct instruction in the self-determination component of the ECC (Blackshear, 2014; Robinson & Lieberman, 2004). Furthermore, summer camps provide unique opportunities for positive youth development, due in part to the emotionally-safe environments they can provide (Garst et al., 2016; Henderson et al., 2005; Sibthorp et al., 2010). Emotionally-safe environments consist of “a combination of inclusion, belonging, trust, care, and the absence of bullying and exclusion” (Wong et al., 2022). Summer camp programs can also be emotionally-safe places for youth to develop self-determination skills, while school may not provide the same safety, particularly for students with VIs (Garst et al., 2011; Opie, 2018; Sibthorp et al., 2010).

This mixed methods study utilized a theoretical framework of positive youth development and situated learning to investigate self-determination and emotional safety at a summer camp for youth with VIs. A central philosophy of PYD is the “enhancement of life skills” (Garst et al., 2016, p. 183). Through PYD, youth develop five main psychological, behavioral, and social characteristics: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/ compassion (Zarrett & Lerner, 2008). If youth cultivate these five qualities, they are more likely to contribute to their families, communities, and society at large (Zarrett & Lerner, 2008).

According to Lave and Wenger’s (1990) situated learning theory, learning occurs through cultural interactions between newcomers/ apprentices and old-timers/ experts in a particular field. At a summer camp for youth with VIs, both children who have been at camp for many years and trained staff members can be seen as experts. Newcomers to the camp community may be children attending camp for the first time; very young children who therefore have little memory of previous years; and children who recently experienced vision changes, thereby changing their perceptions of camp. Experts share their knowledge of sport, movement, and empowerment with newcomers, and newcomers can learn from the entire community.

## **Methods**

Athletes at a mid-Atlantic sports camp for youth with VIs responded to the AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman et al., 1994) survey regarding perceptions of their own self-determination across three settings. Both athletes and coaches completed qualitative questionnaires



regarding opportunities to practice and learn self-determination at camp. Five randomly-selected athletes also participated in semi-structured interviews with similar questions to the written questionnaires. Out of 19 athletes and 30 coaches attending this camp, 15 athletes and 24 coaches comprised the research sample. The youngest athlete who participated in this study was 7 years old and the oldest was 16 years old. Eleven female athletes and four male athletes participated in the study. Coach participants included: two high school students who previously participated in the camp Coach In Training program; 10 university students in physical education, VI, or therapy related fields; 10 certified physical educators or teachers of the visually impaired; and 2 volunteers from the community in unrelated fields with previous camp experience. Coaches ranged in age from 16 to 62 years old. Six men and eighteen women completed coach questionnaires at the end of camp.

### **Results**

A repeated measures ANOVA on composite scores of AIR Self-Determination Scale across home, school, and camp settings revealed athletes were statistically significant,  $F_{(2,13)} = 24.24, p < .001$ . Athletes were more confident in their self-determination skills at camp ( $M = 26.6, SD = 3.33$ ) compared to home ( $M = 19.1, SD = 5.76$ ) and school ( $M = 19.2, SD = 5.21$ ). Athletes reported the camp setting allowed for development of self-determination skills by fostering positive relationships between coaches and athletes, providing emotional support, and promoting inclusion with respect to VI. Both questionnaires and interviews highlighted instances of meaningful adult interaction, emotional support, and inclusion throughout the week of camp. The data resulting from questionnaires and interviews revealed that comfort in asking questions and relationships between athletes contributed to an emotionally-safe environment. Limitations included low sample size, compounding impact of multiple years of camp attendance, differences between this camp and other similar camps, question comprehension, shortened data collection schedule, and nature of the relationship between participants and researcher.

### **Discussion and Implications**

This research contributes to literature surrounding teaching self-determination skills to children with VIs, as well as supporting emotionally-safe summer camp experiences for youth with VIs. The present study supports the prior research on summer camp, finding that low child-to-staff ratios, emotional support, and inclusion contribute to emotionally-safe environments (Garst, et al., 2011; Henderson et al., 2005). At a summer camp for youth with VIs, relationships between athletes and comfort asking questions also supported emotional safety. Low student-to-staff ratios, access to adapted sport, regular options to follow one's interests, and goal setting are aspects of camp that can promote self-determination for youth with VIs.

Athletes at the summer camp in this study reported instances of emotional support from both coaches and peers. In particular, verbal encouragement and support when asking questions provided athletes with a feeling of emotional safety. Summer camps that encourage positive feedback from staff and promote an environment where campers cheer on one another's accomplishments can create an emotionally-safe environment for children with disabilities. Regular opportunities to interact with other individuals with VIs arose as a theme with respect to both self-determination and emotional safety. In order to support meaningful inclusion of individuals with disabilities, summer camps should recruit qualified staff members with disabilities. Additionally, coaches and athletes openly talked about VI at camp. These conversations about VI normalized disability and helped create an inclusive setting for athletes. Summer camps should create environments where participants are able to respectfully discuss disability and how to support peers with disabilities.

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# "It's Comfortable at Camp": Emotional Safety and Self-Determination at a Summer Camp for Youth with Visual Impairments

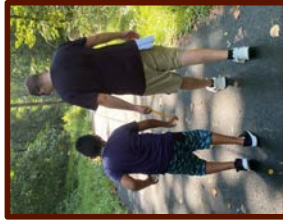


## Research Questions

1. What qualities of camp contribute to creating an emotionally safe environment to develop self-determination skills?
2. How do children with visual impairments develop self-determination skills at a sports camp?
3. What experiences at this sports camp contribute to developing self-determination skills?

## Methods

- This mixed-methods study utilized instrumental case study and survey designs.
- Qualitative and quantitative data from the AIR Self-Determination Scale and a researcher-created questionnaire provided information about the entire sample: 15 athletes ages 7 to 16 and 25 coaches ages 16 to 62.
- Five athlete interviews gave a richer narrative to supplement information from surveys.



- **Coach definitions:** "an individual's ability to complete a task or work toward a goal by themselves" and "setting goals and knowing how to make them happen."

- **Athlete definitions:** "Being yourself," "doing things for yourself," and "asking for things I need." "You ask for yourself and stand up for yourself." "You ask for what you need." "You can do anything you put your mind to blind or not disability or not."

## Camp as an Emotionally-Safe Environment

- **Meaningful adult interaction:** "The coaches were "not just trying to tell people what to do, they're trying to do it with them."
- **Emotional support:** "It's comfortable at camp and there are tons of supportive people."
- **Inclusion:** Open discussions about visual impairment
- **Comfort in asking questions:** "It helps, you know, that I can ask for help and know that if I need any help with anything, I can just ask."
- **Relationships between athletes:** "I have people with me to count on me and help me."

## Implications for Practitioners

- Low child-to-staff ratios, access to adapted sports, options to follow one's interests throughout the day, and goal-setting are aspects of camp that can promote self-determination for children with visual impairments.
- Summer camps that encourage positive feedback from staff and promote an environment where campers cheer on one another's accomplishments can create an emotionally-safe environment for children with disabilities.
- Summer camps should recruit qualified staff members with disabilities to support meaningful inclusion of campers with disabilities. Allowing young people to interact with role models who share their disability status can promote social inclusion and social engagement.
- Summer camps should create environments where participants are able to respectfully discuss disability and how to support peers with disabilities. Openness about the disability experience can contribute to emotional safety for campers with disabilities.

## Activities Promoting Self-Determination

| Activity         | Ranked 1 <sup>st</sup> or 2 <sup>nd</sup> in terms of opportunities to practice self-determination |          |
|------------------|--|----------|
|                  | Coaches  | Athletes |
| Daily sports     | 60%  | 46%      |
| Wellness lessons | 17%  | 27%      |
| Free selects     | 42%  | 40%      |
| Goal time        | 92%  | 33%      |
| Lunchtime        | 4%   | 40%      |



## Development of Self-Determination Skills

A repeated measures ANOVA on composite scores of AIR Self-Determination Scale across home, school, and camp settings revealed athletes were statistically significant,  $F(2,13)=24.24, p < .001$ . Athletes were more confident in their self-determination skills at camp ( $M=26.6, SD=3.33$ ) compared to home ( $M=19.1, SD=5.76$ ) and school ( $M=19.2, SD=5.21$ ).

Participants cited positive relationships between coaches and athletes, emotional support, and meaningful inclusion with respect to visual impairment as contributors to the development of self-determination.



"Being Yourself": Self-Determination at a Summer Sports Camp for Youths with Visual Impairments



"It's Comfortable at Camp": Emotional Safety at a Summer Camp for Youth with Visual Impairments

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## ADULTS' ACCOUNTS OF MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES AT CAMPS FOR YOUTH FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS

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Summer camps foster social-emotional learning (e.g., empathy, Spielvogel et al., 2024) and development (e.g., identity, Johnson et al., 2011). Many characteristics of camp support these outcomes, including a place apart, supportive adult-youth relationships, and experiential learning (Wilson et al., 2019). Given the opportunity gap and the high cost of camp attendance, many youth from low-income backgrounds experience financial barriers to attending camp leaving a gap in understanding these youth's camp experiences and how their camp experiences may continue to impact them years after attending (Browne et al., 2018).

Most camp research uses retrospective designs without aligning the methods with a theoretical framework requiring such a design. Narrative methods require a retrospective approach and leverage autobiographical reasoning to explain how people make meaning of experiences (e.g., Adler et al., 2016). The narrative framework suggests that what people share about experiences may be useful for understanding the experience's role in development. While few camp studies have used a narrative approach, analyzing narrative content can help researchers and practitioners identify the most impactful type of camp experiences and why (e.g., Lubeznik-Warner et al., 2024).

In this study, we used the alignment of narrative methods and retrospective research with camp alumni to achieve three aims. First, we aimed to examine evidence of *self-event connections* in alumni narratives about memorable camp experiences. Self-event connections occur when narrators link an experience to a part of the self, such as personal traits, values, attitudes, and beliefs (e.g., McLean & Fournier, 2008). Second, we aimed to identify the *types of events* adult alumni describe when narrating memorable summer camp experiences. Narrative researchers have identified five common event types: relationship, achievement, autonomy, injury, and leisure (e.g., McLean & Thorne, 2003), while experiential education research has found additional contextualized events, including environmental events (e.g., Froehly, 2024). Third, we aimed to understand how self-event connections and event types were related.

### Methods

We collected written narrative data ( $N = 332$ ) through online surveys sent to adult alumni ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20.46$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.93$ ; 64% women; 36% people of color) in April 2022 (see Povilaitis et al., 2023 for procedures). Alumni attended at least one camp session through a non-profit multisite camp organization offering free 10-day overnight camp experiences for Canadian and US youth from low-income backgrounds. To elicit narratives, we used a prompt based on other studies (e.g., Adler et al., 2016; Lubeznik-Warner et al., 2024):

Think back to your most memorable moment at [camp name]. Tell us a story about that moment. When you do so, please include details about who was there, where you were, what you were doing, what you or others were thinking or feeling at that time, and what it means to you today.

We coded narratives for self-event connections, self-event connection content (McLean & Fournier, 2008), and event type (Froehly, 2024; Garst & Whittington, 2020; McLean & Thorne, 2003). Following training, two coders rated 30 narratives before establishing inter-rater reliability ( $k > .70$ ; Syed & Nelson, 2015) using 120 narratives. We divided the remaining narratives and two coders independently rated them. See Table 1 for codes and definitions. We used Chi-square tests of association to examine the relationships between self-event connections and event types.

## Findings

The narratives revealed which camp experiences impact alumni years later. We found evidence of self-event connections in 33% ( $n = 111$ ) of narratives. Outlook and personal growth were the most common types of connections. Only one narrative had evidence of a disposition connection and no narratives had evidence of values. Alumni told narratives about relationships and leisure events most frequently. Self-event connections appeared in events at different rates ( $\chi^2(5) = 47.32, p < .001, n = 332$ ) and the connection types varied across event types ( $\chi^2(5) = 24.99, p < .01, n = 111$ ). Outlook connections appeared most frequently in environmental and relationship events. Personal growth connections appeared most frequently in achievement and relationship events. See Table 1 for narrative theme frequencies.

Table 1  
*Narrative Codes, Definitions, and Frequencies*

| Code   | Definition  | % ( $n$ ) |
|--|---|-----------|
| <b><i>Self-Event Connection Content*</i></b> |   |           |
| Dispositions                                 | Connection depicting traits or other stable behavioral characteristics                  | <1% (1)   |
| Values                                       | Connection depicting understanding of ethics or important beliefs                       | 0% (0)    |
| Outlook                                      | Connection depicting attitudes or perspectives about the world and life                 | 41% (45)  |
| Personal Growth                              | Connection depicting maturation, confidence, learning about strengths/weaknesses        | 59% (65)  |
| <b><i>Events Type<sup>+</sup></i></b>        |   |           |
| Injury                                       | An experience involved an injury or illness experienced by the narrator or someone else | 5% (17)   |
| Recreation and Exploration/leisure           | An experience involving an activity or characterized by enjoyment, recreation, or both  | 23% (78)  |
| Relationships                                | An experience focused on relationships with peers, adult counselors, or both            | 38% (126) |
| Achievement                                  | An experience focused on successfully doing something or feeling accomplished           | 17% (56)  |
| Autonomy                                     | An experience focused on independence   | 3% (11)   |
| Environmental                                | An experience focused on the weather or natural conditions                              | 13% (44)  |

*Note.* \* Percentages based on narratives with evidence of self-event connections. <sup>+</sup> Percentages based on all narratives.

## Discussion

This study contributes to the literature and offers implications for practitioners. Our use of narrative methods extends knowledge about camp by identifying the events that impact alumni years later. Other studies about how camp supports outcomes focus on specific characteristics, not event types (cf. Garst & Whittington, 2020). By focusing on events, this study provides practitioners with ideas about the experiences that extend the value of camp attendance. Our focus on alumni provides a theoretically relevant examination of how adolescent experiences impact adult alumni years later. These results can guide practitioners' communication of camp's long-term impact to stakeholders, including insight into the experiences that may nurture continued

alumni engagement. Readers should consider a few limitations, including data from one organization serving youth from low-income backgrounds; one narrative per alumni; one data collection; and a narrative prompt about memorable experiences.

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## Adults' Accounts of Memorable Experiences at Camps for Youth from Low-Income Backgrounds

Robert P. Lubeznik-Warner, University of Utah; Michael Froehly, Salem State University; Paul McGraw, Northland College; Victoria Povlatis, Tim Hortons Foundation Camps

### Introduction

- Gap in understanding how camp experiences may continue to **impact alumni from low-income backgrounds years after attending**.
- Most camp research uses **retrospective designs** without aligning the methods with a theoretical framework requiring such a design.
- Narrative framework requires a retrospective approach and suggests that what people share about experiences may be useful for understanding the experience's role in development.
- **Purposes:** 1) examine evidence of **self-event connections** in alumni narratives about memorable camp experiences. 2) identify the **types of events** adult alumni describe when narrating memorable summer camp experiences. 3) understand how **self-event connections and event types were related**.

### Methods

- Written narratives ( $N = 332$ ) through online surveys sent to adult alumni ( $M_{age} = 20.46$ ,  $SD_{age} = 2.93$ ; 64% women; 36% people of color).
- Prompt: *Think back to your most memorable moment at [camp name]. Tell us a story about that moment. When you do so, please include details about who was there, where you were, what you were doing, what you or others were thinking or feeling at that time, and what it means to you today.*



- Coded for self-event connections, self-event connection content, & event type

### Findings

- Self-event connections in 33% ( $n = 111$ ) of narratives.
- Outlook and personal growth were the most common types of connections.
- Relationships and leisure events most frequently.
- Self-event connections appeared in events at different rates ( $\chi^2(5) = 47.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $n = 332$ ) and the connection types varied across event types ( $\chi^2(5) = 24.99$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $n = 111$ ).
- Outlook connections appeared most frequently in environmental and relationship events.
- Personal growth connections appeared most frequently in achievement and relationship events.

### Discussion & Implications

- Narrative methods extend knowledge about camp by identifying the events that impact alumni years later.
- Provides practitioners with ideas about the experiences that extend the value of camp attendance.
- These results can guide practitioners' communication of camp's long-term impact to stakeholders, including insight into the experiences that may nurture continued alumni engagement.



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## YOUTH REPORTED OUTCOMES OF CAMP-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Authors: Robert P. Lubeznik-Warner, University of Utah; Victoria Povilaitis, Tim Hortons Foundation Camps

Contact: Robert P. Lubeznik-Warner, warner.robert(at)utah.edu

Summer camp has been linked to developmental outcomes such as social-emotional skills, confidence, and identity development (e.g., Henderson, 2018) and researchers have posited that program quality (PQ) is strongly associated with positive youth outcomes and thriving (Arnold & Gagnon, 2020). Theoretical frameworks such as relational developmental systems theory suggest that the mutually reinforcing coaction occurring between people and the characteristics of environments can create change (Ettetal et al., 2017). Research about the camp experiences of youth from low-income backgrounds suggests similar outcomes as their more affluent peers (Warner et al., 2021) and that alumni report a lasting impact of the experience years later (Povilaitis et al., 2023). Yet, there are often financial barriers to attending camps for youth from low-income backgrounds (Browne et al., 2019). Camp-school partnerships may be one way to create greater access for youth (Posatko & Peterson, n.d.) and negotiate constraints to further camp participation (Wycoff et al., 2024). Despite the increased interest and initial research related to these partnerships (Spielvogel et al., 2024), there is little evidence of the outcomes of the experience and what about the experience may facilitate these outcomes. We conducted this study to understand the outcomes youth from low-income backgrounds report from participating in a camp-school program and the relationships of PQ and well-being with these outcomes. We aimed to understand: 1) the extent to which youth-reported PQ predicted growth outcomes; 2) the extent to which well-being at camp predicted growth outcomes; and 3) the extent to which PQ predicted growth in outcomes through well-being at camp.

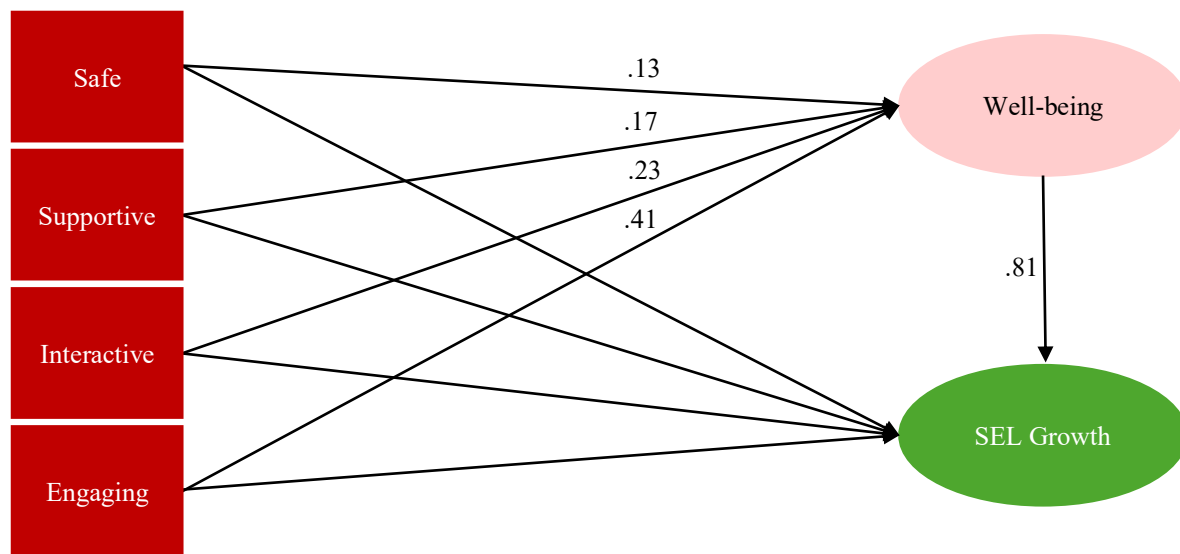
### Methods

We collected cross-sectional quantitative survey data from 511 youth ( $M_{\text{age}} = 12.32$ ;  $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.63$ ; 52% girls; 54% white) who, as part of a class field trip, attended a three or four-day camp experience at one of six camps during Fall 2023 or Spring 2024. The survey asked youth to report growth in 14 outcomes (e.g., How much do you feel that you grew in the following areas while at camp? Confidence in myself), their perceptions of program quality (e.g., On a scale of one to ten, how supported did you feel at camp?), and their well-being while at camp (e.g., During your time at camp how often did you feel calm and relaxed?). To answer research question 1, we specified a partially latent structural equation model with outcomes modeled as a latent variable regressed onto observed youth-reported PQ measures. To answer research question 2, we added a path regressing outcomes onto a latent well-being variable to the previously specified model. To answer research question 3, we added a path regressing well-being onto the PQ measures. We bootstrapped the model ( $n = 1,000$ ) for a robust indirect estimate. We then used a Chi-square likelihood ratio test to determine if the more complex model with an indirect path from PQ through well-being to outcomes fit the data better.

### Results

The PQ measures of supportive ( $\beta = .22$ ), interactive ( $\beta = .17$ ), and engaging ( $\beta = .29$ ) were statistically significantly ( $p < .01$ ) positively associated with outcomes (CFI = .93; RMSEA = .09; SRMR = .04). Adding well-being to the model had a less ideal fit to the data (CFI = .87; RMSEA = .10; SRMR = .23); however, it was statistically significantly ( $p < .001$ ) positively associated with outcomes ( $\beta = .71$ ). Adding paths from the PQ measures to well-being resulted in a better fit to the data ( $\Delta\chi^2(4) = p < .001$ ; CFI = .93; RMSEA = .07; SRMR = .04) and significant positive association between well-being and the PQ measures ( $\beta_{\text{safety}} = .13$ ;  $\beta_{\text{supportive}} = .17$ ;  $\beta_{\text{interactive}} = .23$ ;  $\beta_{\text{engaging}} = .41$ ). There were significant positive indirect effects of PQ measures to the outcome

through well-being ( $\beta_{\text{safety}} = .06$ ;  $\beta_{\text{supportive}} = .08$ ;  $\beta_{\text{interactive}} = .11$ ;  $\beta_{\text{engaging}} = .19$ ) which then resulted in non-significant direct effects of PQ measures to outcomes.



## Discussions

Our results suggest that youth from low-income backgrounds perceive participating in programming via camp-school partnerships as contributing to growth in SEL-related outcomes. This finding aligns with literature suggesting camp participation supports SEL (e.g., Henderson, 2018). We also found that experiencing well-being at camp was positively related to PQ and outcomes and that PQ was indirectly related to the outcomes through well-being. These relationships suggest that the growth in outcomes may be explained by the experience of well-being afforded by high-quality programs. This finding aligns with Arnold and Gagnon's (2020) suggestion regarding the inter-relatedness of program factors, positive youth development, and thriving. The study results contribute to the literature by making explicit links between PQ, well-being, and outcomes, as well as identifying this process and outcomes within a camp experience occurring as part of a camp-school partnership program.

This study also has implications for practitioners. First, practitioners who focus on creating a camp environment that supports youth well-being may create more opportunities for youth to grow. Second, given the potential relationship between PQ and outcomes, practitioners should focus on training staff in PQ rather than solely focusing on youth-reported outcomes. Third, camp-school partnerships may offer viable learning-rich experiences and can engage youth participants who may not have the opportunity to participate in camp otherwise (e.g., financial barriers, parent intrapersonal constraints). This is also beneficial for camps to provide year-round employment for staff, use sites during non-summer months, and potentially build a greater participant base.

Primary study limitations include the use of self-report, cross-sectional data, one organization, and the use of single items to measure some constructs. Future research should consider using multiple referent reporting (e.g., teacher, staff), longitudinal designs, multi-item scales, and expand to more than one organization serving youth from low-income backgrounds.

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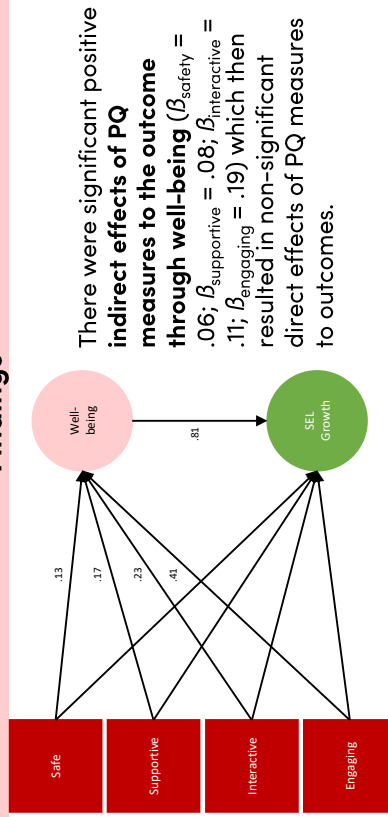
## Youth Reported Outcomes of Camp-School Programs

Robert P. Lubeznik-Warner, University of Utah; Victoria Povlaitis, Tim Hortons Foundation Camps

### Introduction

- Camp has been linked to developmental outcomes and program quality is strongly associated with positive youth outcomes and thriving
- There are often financial barriers to attending camps for youth from low-income backgrounds
- Camp-school partnerships may be one way to create greater access for youth and negotiate constraints to further camp participation
- Purposes: **1)** understand the extent to which **youth-reported PQ predicted growth outcomes**; **2)** understand the extent to which **well-being at camp predicted growth outcomes**; and **3)** understand the extent to which **PQ predicted growth in outcomes through well-being at camp**.

### Findings



### Methods

- Cross-sectional quantitative survey data from 511 youth ( $M_{\text{age}} = 12.32$ ;  $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.63$ ; 52% girls; 54% white) who, as part of a class field trip, attended a three or four-day camp experience.
- Variables
  - **Growth** in 14 outcomes (e.g., How much do you feel that you grew in the following areas while at camp? Confidence in self)
  - Perceptions of **program quality** (e.g., On a scale of one to ten, how supported did you feel at camp?)
  - **Well-being** while at camp (e.g., During your time at camp how often did you feel calm and relaxed?)

A partially latent structural equation model using *lavaan* in R

### Discussion & Implications

- Programming via camp-school partnerships may contribute to growth in SEL-related outcomes for youth who may not have the opportunity to participate in camp otherwise (e.g., financial barriers, parent intrapersonal constraints).
- Creating a camp environment that supports youth well-being may create more opportunities for youth to grow.
- Camp-school partnerships may provide year-round employment for staff, use of sites during non-summer months, and potentially build a greater participant base.



# **“YOU CAN’T FILL SOMEONE ELSE’S CUP IF YOU DO NOT FILL YOURS.”**

## **UNDERSTANDING WELL-BEING TRAINING FOR SUMMER CAMP STAFF**

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Nearly one million young adults work at camps each summer (Economic Growth Institute, 2024). Amidst declining mental health among young people (U.S. Public Health Service, 2021), there is a need to identify how camp may proactively and holistically support staff well-being (e.g., Garst et al., 2021; Wright et al., 2022). Relatively little is known about camp leadership training directed towards supporting staff well-being. Attending to staff well-being not only supports one of camps’ most critical resources, but it may also lead to experiences that support campers’ mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health (Lubeznik-Warner & Rosen, 2023). Given this knowledge gap, the present need, and the potential to influence practice, we sought to understand the implementation of CampWell, a train-the-trainer staff training model designed to prepare camps to support camp participants’ well-being. We aimed to understand: 1) how camp leaders used CampWell in their training; 2) what aspects of their well-being training camp leaders found effective; 3) what adaptations camp leaders made to CampWell for their specific camps; 4) camp leaders’ intentions to use CampWell in the future; and 5) seasonal camp staff’s perceptions of the well-being training they received.

### **Methods**

We collected cross-sectional, retrospective data from camp leaders ( $N_{\text{camp leaders}} = 54$ ) and seasonal staff ( $N_{\text{staff}} = 179$ ;  $M_{\text{age}} = 26.36$ ;  $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.02$ ; 57% returning staff) from camps (mostly overnight camp; mix of nonprofit and for-profit) as part of the evaluation of CampWell, a joint effort of American Camp Association and Alliance for Camp Health funded by the H. E. Butt Foundation. In late August of 2024, we invited camp leaders who had participated in one of four regional CampWell trainings during fall 2023 and spring 2024 to complete a brief online survey including questions about their implementation of CampWell during the summer of 2024 (e.g., “Tell us more about how you implemented the CampWell training at [camp name] last summer.”; “How likely are you to implement CampWell training at [camp name] in the future?” Extremely unlikely–Extremely likely; “What, if anything, will you change when you implement the CampWell training at [camp name] in the future?”). We also asked camp leaders to invite their seasonal staff to complete surveys about their experiences participating in well-being training at camp (e.g., “Did you participate in a well-being training as part of your work at camp this past summer?”; “To what extent was the well-being training useful to your job?” (Not at all useful–Extremely useful); “What part of the well-being training was most useful to your job at camp?”). Given the exploratory nature of this study, we focused our analysis on the open-ended questions and used Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis. We also provide descriptions of camp leaders’ and staff participants’ scale-based responses (e.g., percent of camp leaders indicating specific responses).

### **Findings**

#### **Implementing CampWell**

Nearly all camp leaders (91%,  $n = 49$ ) reported implementing CampWell training at their camp in 2024. Most camp leaders (62%,  $n = 24$ ) indicated delivering training as instructed to do (i.e., fidelity) only somewhat. Camp leaders reported using principles (e.g., safe, supported, connected, contributing), and activities during staff training and ongoing throughout the summer via mini refresher training. Some camp leaders reported infusing aspects of CampWell into their

establishment of culture at camp and how they supported staff well-being. Other camp leaders reported using the CampWell materials with mixed success (e.g., slide deck, handouts). Five camp leaders indicated that they did not implement CampWell at their camp in 2024, citing logistics (e.g., scheduling, time) and staff dynamics (e.g., new leadership, priorities).

### **Effective Aspects of Well-being Training**

Camp leaders reported that prominent outcomes of their well-being training included that staff felt more supported and a more positive camp culture. Camp leaders indicated observing that their staff appeared somewhat engaged (28%,  $n = 11$ ) to quite a bit of engagement (64%,  $n = 25$ ) during the training. Camp leaders also indicated that their delivery of CampWell was moderately (56%,  $n = 20$ ) to very effective (31%,  $n = 11$ ) in achieving intended outcomes. When considering the most important aspect of CampWell implementation, camp leaders reported the intentionality of crafting a positive staff culture, staff check-ins, and incorporation of CampWell principles at all levels of camp (e.g., campers, staffing, leadership). When considering how to improve their training for next year, camp leaders suggested that they needed greater intentionality and more planning time.

### **CampWell Adaptations**

Camp leaders reported changing aspects of the CampWell training to fit their camps' needs. For example, some camp leaders said they emphasized certain aspects of the training more than others, while others indicated shortening the training to fit within time restrictions of the training at their specific camp. Other camp leaders changed specific CampWell language to align with their camps' vernacular. Looking ahead to next summer, camp leaders reported the need for better preparation to integrate the CampWell material during staff training, incorporation of camp-specific information (e.g., examples from their camp in 2024), and greater intentionality regarding how CampWell concepts are infused into their camps' culture and throughout the summer.

### **Camp Leaders' Intentions to Use CampWell in the Future**

Most camp leaders were somewhat (30%,  $n = 13$ ) to extremely likely (68%,  $n = 30$ ) to implement CampWell in the future. When asked about what would increase their likelihood of implementing CampWell at their camp in the future, many camp leaders said that access to additional learning opportunities was important to their future implementation of CampWell. For example, many camp leaders expressed interest in participating in refresher training, accessing additional resources (e.g., lesson plans, activities), and learning from other camp leaders' experiences implementing CampWell. A few camp leaders also said they needed more time or additional evidence (e.g., impact on staff retention) to increase the likelihood of their future use of CampWell training.

### **Seasonal Camp Staff's Perceptions of the Well-being Training**

A total of 157 seasonal camp staff reported participating in a well-being training. Many of these staff also reported favorable evaluations of the well-being training they completed at their camps. For example, when asked about the extent to which the training was useful to their jobs at camp, 60% of staff reported that the training was somewhat (34%) to mostly useful (26%) to their jobs. When asked to describe the most useful part of the training, staff identified how the training helped them understand how to support personal well-being (e.g., support from leadership, self-reflection, strategies) and how to meet campers' needs during challenging behaviors or campers with specific emotional needs.

## **Discussion**

The study findings have implications for research and practice. First, the findings suggest that camp leaders prioritize well-being at their camps and seek opportunities to improve their implementation of these trainings. The themes related to implementation and adaptation point toward areas camp leaders and industry professionals may consider better supporting the broad

adoption of well-being as a central outcome of camp experiences. Second, these findings shed light on the logistical constraints associated with staff training and the potential areas for continued refinement of the CampWell training and movement. Third, to the best of our knowledge, little is known about how frontline camp staff perceive well-being training. Having a better understanding of their perspectives, especially the relative usefulness of the training to their jobs and what about the training makes them useful, provides camp leaders and industry professionals with opportunities to improve well-being training, like CampWell, to better support staff. Although the findings provide insight into CampWell implementation, they may not represent well-being training at all camps. Research is needed to assess the effectiveness of CampWell across camp types and how the training impacts seasonal staff and campers' well-being.

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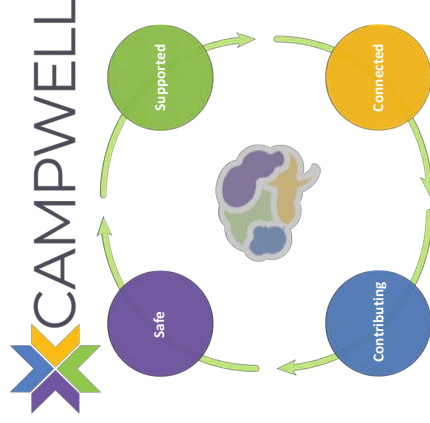
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# “YOU CAN’T FILL SOMEONE ELSE’S CUP IF YOU DO NOT FILL YOURS.” UNDERSTANDING WELL-BEING TRAINING FOR SUMMER CAMP STAFF

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 Laurie Browne, American Camp Association; John Hamilton, Alliance for Camp Health

## Background

- Amidst declining mental health among young people, there is a need to identify how camps may proactively and holistically support staff well-being
- Study Purposes:**
  - to understand how camp leaders used CampWell in their training
  - to understand what aspects of their well-being training camp leaders found effective
  - to understand what adaptations camp leaders made to CampWell for their specific camps
  - to understand camp leaders’ intentions to use CampWell in the future
  - to understand seasonal camp staff’s perceptions of the well-being training they received



## What we did...

- Collected cross-sectional, retrospective survey data
- Camp leaders ---> implementation of CampWell
- Seasonal staff ---> experience participating in well-being training
- Braun & Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis
- Descriptions of participants’ scale-based responses

## Who participated?

- Camp leaders ( $N_{\text{camp leaders}} = 54$ ) who had participated in 1 of 4 regional CampWell trainings during fall 2023 and spring 2024
- Seasonal staff ( $N_{\text{staff}} = 179$ ;  $M_{\text{age}} = 26.36$ ;  $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.02$ ; 57% returning staff)
- Camps were mostly overnight; mix of nonprofit and for-profit

## Camp leaders prioritize well-being at their camps and seek opportunities to improve their implementation of these trainings.

### What do our findings mean?

- The themes point toward areas camp leaders and industry professionals may consider better supporting the broad adoption of well-being as a central outcome of camp experiences
- Identified logistical constraints associated with staff training and the potential areas for continued refinement of the CampWell training and movement
- Staff perspectives about the usefulness of training to their jobs and what about the training makes them useful may illustrate opportunities for improving trainings, like CampWell, and how to better support staff

## We learned...

### Implementation

- Most camp leaders (62%) delivered training as instructed only somewhat
- Camp leaders used CampWell during staff training; mini refresher trainings; establishing culture at camp
- Camp leaders emphasized some parts of CampWell more than others, shortened it, or changed language to align with needs
- Most important aspects of CampWell: crafting a positive staff culture, staff check-ins, & using CampWell principles at all levels of camp
- Over 2/3 of camps leaders were extremely likely (68%) to implement CampWell in the future

### Outcomes

- Camp leaders said staff appeared engaged during the training
- Delivery of CampWell was at least moderately effective or more (86%) in achieving outcomes
- Camp leaders said staff felt more supported and perceived a more positive camp culture
- Many staff (60%) said the well-being training was at least somewhat useful to their camp jobs by promoting understanding of how to support their well-being and how to meet campers’ needs



For the full abstract  
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## **THE IMPACT OF FORMER BLACK CAMPERS AS STAFF ON BLACK YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION**

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Black youth are significantly underrepresented in summer camps, comprising only eight percent of campers (ACA National Impact Study, 2022). Systemic barriers rooted in prejudice and exclusion have led to cultural disconnects and a lack of diverse staff, which then limit Black youth attendance and engagement. Many Black families feel unfamiliar with traditional camp activities, such as hiking and swimming in a lake. The absence of Black counselors and leadership exacerbates these feelings, as families may perceive camps as unapproachable spaces that lack cultural awareness. This study examines how hiring former Black campers as staff affects Black youth engagement and retention at camp.

This study, grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Positive Youth Development (PYD) frameworks, centers on the lived experiences of Black staff and campers. CRT highlights the importance of representation and centering marginalized voices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). PYD emphasizes fostering safe, supportive environments where youth can develop critical skills such as character and confidence (Kuhlmann, Foley-Nicpon, & Mahatmya, 2024). Camp Jamison applies these principles by prioritizing representation and creating empowering spaces to combat inequities.

As the founder and executive director of Camp Jamison and a white woman, I have witnessed the systemic barriers Black youth face in accessing opportunities like overnight camp. I've also had the profound opportunity to see the resilience and brilliance of Black campers who overcome those barriers, grow within our community, and return as staff as their whole selves. This transformation highlights the critical importance of creating equitable spaces that empower Black youth and demonstrates the enduring impact of representation and leadership development support in camp settings.

Employing Black former campers as staff improves Black youth engagement and retention. In 2024, 84 percent of Camp Jamison staff and 62 percent of campers identified as Black, and 70 percent of campers were returners—a testament to the success of this model. Camp Jamison's intentional focus on representation across all levels demonstrates how camps can address systemic inequities, foster trust, and create opportunities for all youth to thrive.

### **Methods**

This study analyzed data collected from 182 Camp Jamison campers across three summer seasons (2022–2024). Age data were not collected in 2022 to preserve respondent anonymity; this was revised in later years to enable actionable insights. Participants ranged in age from 7 to 15. In 2024, the mean age was 12; in 2023, it was 11. Across the study, participants included both first-time and returning campers. In 2024, 31% ( $n = 17$ ) of respondents were first-time campers, and 69% ( $n = 38$ ) were returners. In 2023, 44% ( $n = 15$ ) were first-timers, and 56% ( $n = 19$ ) were returners. In 2022, 67% ( $n = 12$ ) of respondents were first-time campers.

Surveys were administered at the end of each camp session, and participation was optional. Response rates improved significantly over the study period: 30% ( $n = 18$ ) of 57 campers in 2022 (via online format), 57% ( $n = 34$ ) of 60 campers in 2023, and 85% ( $n = 55$ ) of 65 campers in 2024. In 2024, 55% of survey respondents identified as Black.

The 2024 survey consisted of 18 structured, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions.

Survey questions were explicitly designed to align with Positive Youth Development (PYD) principles by measuring outcomes in key domains:

- **Leadership Development:** Campers rated their leadership skills and reflected on improvements in community leadership.
- **Problem-Solving Skills:** Campers evaluated their confidence in solving problems and how the camp influenced these abilities.
- **Nature Appreciation:** Campers assessed their enjoyment of and appreciation for nature as influenced by camp experiences.
- **Character-Building Skills:** Campers identified skills learned, such as courage, decision-making, and trustworthiness.
- **Overall Experience:** Open-ended questions invited feedback on campers' favorite aspects of the camp and suggestions for improvement.

The analysis prioritized understanding how representation within camp staff fostered trust and engagement among Black campers. The integration of CRT allowed a deeper examination of how diverse staff representation influenced camper outcomes. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means and percentages) to track year-over-year trends in camper outcomes, such as leadership development and nature appreciation. Open-ended responses were sorted to identify recurring patterns related to staff impact. These qualitative insights enriched the quantitative findings, comprehensively understanding the camp's impact on fostering Positive Youth Development.

### **Results**

This study demonstrates that hiring Black former campers as staff has had a transformative impact on Black youth engagement and retention at Camp Jamison. By fostering trust, relatability, and empathy, Black staff significantly improved camper retention, with 70% of campers returning in 2024, up from 56% in 2023 and 33% in 2022. This growth highlights how staff who share campers' identities build trust and encourage families to return, creating a supportive, inclusive community that sustains long-term engagement.

Leadership and problem-solving skills grew significantly under the leadership of Black staff. In 2024, 26% of campers rated themselves as "Better than great" leaders, compared to just 5% in 2022. Similarly, 50% of campers in 2024 reported growth in problem-solving skills, up from 15% in 2022. These outcomes align with the PYD framework's emphasis on fostering confidence and character. Campers frequently cited staff as instrumental in their growth. One camper noted, "Jordan is a great person and a great leader. He keeps me going when I doubt myself," reflecting the empowering role of relatable staff in building camper confidence and character.

The presence of Black staff profoundly impacted campers' connection to nature, with appreciation levels rising from 30% in 2022 to 74% in 2024. Staff shared personal stories about overcoming hesitations with outdoor activities, inspiring campers to embrace and explore nature.

### **Discussions and Implications**

The findings from this study underscore the significant impact of employing Black former campers as staff in creating inclusive and equitable camp environments. Camp Jamison has demonstrated that intentional representation cultivates spaces where Black youth feel secure and valued as leaders. This approach strengthens cultural connections and enhances participant empathy, fostering deeper engagement and increasing camper retention.

To assist camp directors in adopting similar strategies, the following recommendations are presented:



### 1. Hire Staff Reflecting Marginalized Campers

- **Utilize Camper Data:** Analyze camper demographics to identify underrepresented or marginalized groups within your camp population.
- **Intentional Recruitment Practices:** Leverage this data to design targeted recruitment efforts, prioritizing staff candidates who share lived experiences with your campers.
- **Impact in Practice:** In 2024, Camp Jamison achieved remarkable success by ensuring 84% of its staff identified as Black, illustrating the role of representation in fostering a culturally inclusive and empathetic camp environment.

### 2. Develop Structured Pathways to Leadership

- **Leadership Pipelines:** Establish well-defined Counselor-in-Training (CIT) and Junior Counselor programs to provide a clear path for campers to transition into staff roles.
- **Role Model Visibility:** Actively highlight former campers who have risen to leadership positions, offering aspirational role models for current campers.
- **Leadership Outcomes:** Camp Jamison's structured approach to leadership development has consistently resulted in a pipeline of relatable staff who inspire trust and encourage participation among campers and parents.

### 3. Address Structural Barriers and Implicit Biases

- **Evaluate Assumptions:** Reassess the belief that Black children and adults lack interest in summer camp. Such assumptions often stem from systemic barriers rather than actual disinterest.
- **Mitigate Participation Barriers:** Address challenges such as financial constraints, underrepresentation in staffing, and outreach gaps through measures like trust-based sliding-scale payment models and intentional community engagement.
- **Case Study Example:** Camp Jamison has successfully implemented initiatives to eliminate barriers, including trust-based payments and proactive outreach strategies, ensuring accessibility and resonance with marginalized communities.

The above strategies are actionable steps for addressing systemic inequities in camp environments. Camps can replicate Camp Jamison's successes in fostering long-term camper engagement by hiring representative staff, creating pathways to leadership, and addressing barriers to participation. These practices promote inclusivity and contribute to the broader goals of equity and empowerment, ensuring every child can thrive in a supportive and affirming camp.

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# The Impact of Black Former Campers as Staff on Black Youth Engagement and Retention



## Study Aim

1. To assess how employing former Black campers as staff influences camper retention by fostering trust, relatability, and cultural connection.
2. To evaluate how representation in staffing enhances Black campers' engagement with camp activities, including leadership development, problem-solving, and connection to nature.

## Methods

1. **Data Collection:** 182 campers aged 8–15 at Camp Jamison surveyed. Conducted annually over three years during post-camp evaluations. from 2022–2024.
2. **Setting:** Camp Jamison, a culturally inclusive overnight camp.
3. **Measures:** Quantitative questions on retention, engagement, leadership, problem-solving, and connection to nature. Qualitative data collected through open-ended camper reflections.



## Findings

### Improved Retention Rates:

- Camper return rates grew steadily over the study period:
  - 2022: 33%
  - 2023: 56%
  - 2024: 70%.
- Representation among staff created a culturally affirming environment, fostering trust and retention.



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### Stronger Camper Experiences:

- 26% of campers rated themselves as “better than great” leaders in 2024, up from 5% in 2022.
- 50% of campers reported significant growth in problem-solving skills in 2024 (compared to 15% in 2022).

### Implications for Camp Leaders

1. **Hire Staff Reflecting Marginalized Campers**  
Representation matters. Employing staff who reflect the identities and lived experiences of campers fosters trust, connection, and cultural inclusivity.
2. **Develop Leadership Pathways**  
Structured programs like Counselors-in-Training (CIT) create clear pipelines from camper to staff, providing aspirational role models and promoting long-term engagement.
3. **Address Structural Barriers**  
Reassess biases and address systemic challenges like financial constraints and underrepresentation through intentional outreach and trust-based payment models.

### Increased Connection to Nature:

- 74% of campers reported a stronger appreciation for nature in 2024, up from 30% in 2022.
- Staff stories and outdoor engagement played a key role in inspiring this connection.

# AN EMPIRICALLY DERIVED FRAMEWORK FOR BUILDING STRONG CAMP-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

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Many educational decision-makers across the United States are considering policies encouraging schools to provide students with opportunities to participate in camp-school partnerships (CSPs) (e.g., Maine Department of Education, n.d.). These CSPs, where a school brings its students to camp for day or overnight programming, are seen as a strategy to address gaps in social and emotional learning and provide students with experiences that are likely to enhance their learning and increase their engagement with school (Becker et al., 2017). While a long history exists in the United States of schools partnering with camps to achieve academic goals, the opportunity to participate in these experiences has rarely been available for all students within a district, region or state. Instead, CSPs are often limited to schools capable of investing resources in building partnerships with camps (Martil-de Castro, 1999). Thus, while students in communities with financial means and a history of being able to access and engage with outdoor spaces have had greater opportunities, these students have also been disproportionately affluent and White. School, district, state or federal policies have the potential to greatly expand the number and types of students who participate in CSPs, specifically increasing the number of students of color, students with lower socioeconomic status or students representing an intersection of these identities who participate.

To expand the reach of CSPs, schools and camps in the United States will need to build strong partnerships. Most existing research on these partnerships has been conducted internationally, where CSPs are more common, and has focused primarily on outcomes (Becker et al., 2017). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to develop an initial theoretical framework of how to build strong partnerships between schools and camps in the United States.

## Methods

To understand how to build strong CSPs, we conducted a multiple case, cross-case analysis using the Eisenhardt Method to generate a series of propositions (Eisenhardt, 2021). We recruited five camps representing a range of different structures and geographic regions and conducted semi-structured interviews with 31 individuals, including administrators at camps and schools as well as staff at camps and teachers (see Table 1 for camp characteristics). A member of the research team asked participants to describe how their partnership was initiated, its structural elements, and the goals that drove the development of their partnership. They also asked participants to discuss their challenges in developing and participating in the partnership, and to share the benefits and outcomes that they perceived as arising from it.

Table 1

*Camp Characteristics*

| Characteristic    | Camp A   | Camp B    | Camp C       | Camp D             | Camp E     |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|--------------|--------------------|------------|
| Geographic Region | Mid-West | Northeast | Mid-Atlantic | Intermountain West | West Coast |

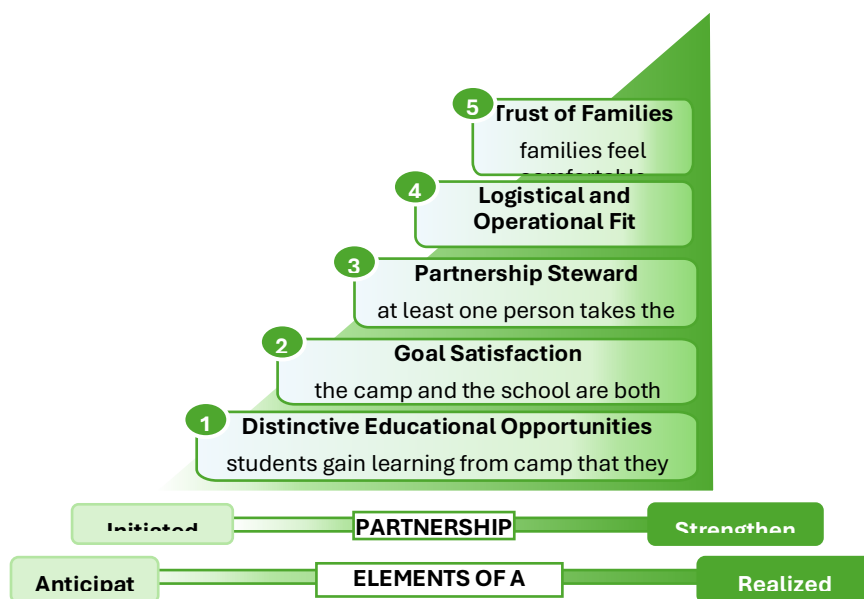
|                         |                          |                          |                          |                 |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Overnight Capacity      | 150                      | <i>Variable</i>          | 108                      | 100             | 220                      |
| School Type(s) Involved | Public, charter, private | Public, charter, private | Public, charter, private | Public, charter | Public, charter, private |
| Total Interviews        | 7                        | 5                        | 5                        | 7               | 7                        |

Interviews were conducted via Zoom. For single-case analyses, a deductive coding approach was used by developing a codebook of themes a priori pertaining to the primary research question. Two members of the research team coded the interview transcriptions and compared their findings to ensure interpretation agreement. The coders wrote up case summaries. The entire research team participated in a cross-case analysis. This process identified overarching themes and led to the propositions describing how strong CSPs are built.

### Results

The theoretical framework in Figure 1 outlines the five propositions that need to be satisfied to build a strong CSP and illustrates how they are established and sustained. To initiate a CSP, the parties involved must anticipate that each of the five elements has potential to be realized. First, they must believe that the partnership will provide distinct educational opportunities to students. Second, they must each expect to be able to satisfy their goals through the partnership. Third, they must anticipate having an effective partnership steward that can facilitate the relationship. Fourth, they must expect to have sufficient logistical and operational fit to allow the partnership to meet transportation, lodging, curricular, and other needs of each party. Fifth, they must anticipate being able to build trust with families and caregivers so that they feel comfortable sending their children to the camp. Whether a partnership is strong will depend on its ability to fully realize these five elements over time.

Figure 1  
A Theoretical Framework Describing Strong Camp-School Partnerships



In many cases, partnerships may live in the space between their initial formation and becoming fully robust and multifaceted. This occurs when the school and camp anticipate being able to realize all elements of success but are still working to achieve them. Each element is necessary and builds upon the next, although none are adequate by themselves. For example, the foundational constructs may be well-established within a partnership, but if the partnership steward leaves their position suddenly, it may leave the partnership in flux. The strongest partnerships develop clear strategies for navigating these challenges to ensure that all elements can be realized on an ongoing basis.

### Discussion

The five propositions developed through this study have direct implications for camps that play a key role in building strong CSPs. For instance, camps should consider their strengths and how they can offer students experiences unlikely to be found in a typical classroom. Identifying education standards and aligning them with the camp's programs and activities may help demonstrate how a camp can assist a school in achieving its educational goals in unique ways that are not possible inside a classroom. Before meeting with a potential school partner, it is important to identify logistical considerations, like capacity, costs, facilities, activities, staffing, food and transportation, which are critical to ensuring both camps and schools can satisfy their goals. Camps should clearly define areas where they have flexibility and where they do not. Additionally, camps can benefit from reaching out to alumni, particularly past campers who may have become educators, as they may serve as champions for CSPs and can help steward partnerships or build connections with educators who can. Camps should also start the process of building trust with schools, and eventually parents and caregivers, by creating resources and opportunities for school staff to understand the camp's programs and measures taken to ensure students' physical and emotional safety. When camps follow these propositions, they may be able to build programs that bring school groups to camp, allowing camps to serve more youth—including youth with more diverse identities--and increase operational and revenue capacity.

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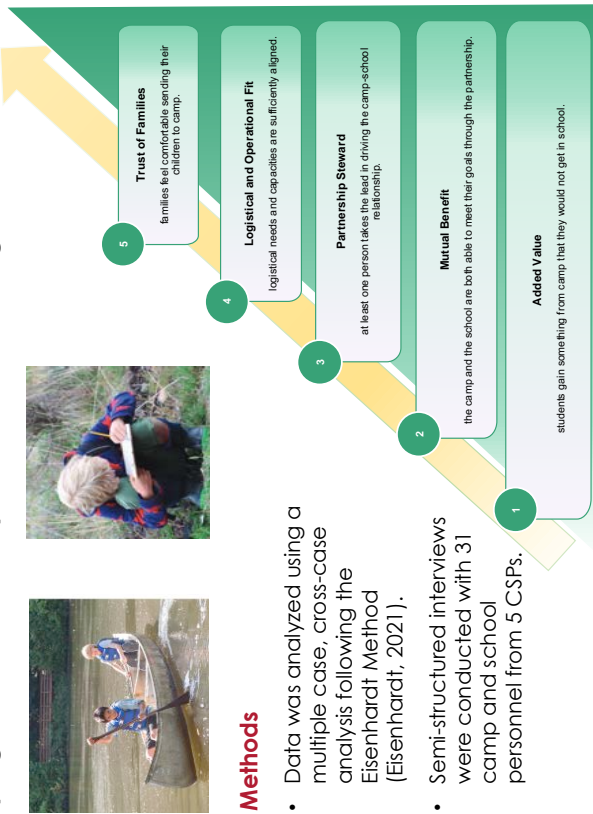
## An Empirically Derived Framework for Building Strong Camp-School Partnerships

The purpose of this study is to develop an initial theoretical framework of how to build strong partnerships between schools and camps, so that both entities can create and sustain quality programs that benefit youth with a wide range of identities.



### Methods

- Data was analyzed using a multiple case, cross-case analysis following the Eisenhardt Method (Eisenhardt, 2021).
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 31 camp and school personnel from 5 CSPs.



"Many times we refer back to the experiences the kids had at camp while we're back in the classroom...The kids bring it up."



So, it's just a tremendous benefit, the moment itself and then that moment carrying forward with these kids."

Focus Group Participant, Teacher

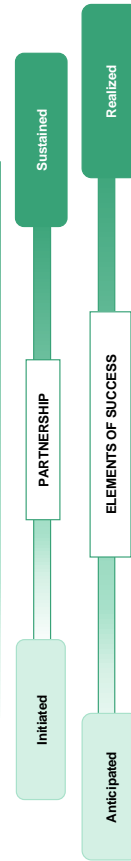


Lisa Meerts-Brandtsma, Hilary Lambert,  
Bryn Spielvogel, Sasha Mader, Jim Sibthorp

### Recommendations for Practitioners

1. Consider what your camp can offer that may suit the needs of schools.
2. Consider what your camp desires to gain from partnering with schools.
3. Work to identify one or more points of contact at partner schools who can be the partnership stewards.
4. Before talking with potential school partners, identify the logistical considerations your camp would need to address to effectively serve schools.
5. Work with schools to determine the best way to build trust with families and caregivers.

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Photos courtesy of Oregon State University Extension Service Outdoor School Office



## **CREATING EQUITABLE PATHWAYS TO CAMP EMPLOYMENT USING DISSEMINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE**

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As summer camps seek to become more diverse and inclusive, many struggle to align an increasingly diverse camper population—in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and other characteristics—with staff teams that remain predominantly White, affluent or otherwise reflective of a dominant demographic (Froehly et al., 2024). Counselor-in-training (CIT) programs are recognized as an effective strategy for preparing youth to become a camp counselor while also providing older youth with a way to stay connected to camp until they step into counselor roles. This connection is crucial, as many youth may overlook camp employment in favor of more immediately accessible opportunities if they feel disconnected from their earlier camp experience. However, most knowledge about CIT programs is based on a White, affluent audience, limiting our understanding of how these programs work for underrepresented groups. Camps are eager to leverage CIT programs to create leadership pathways for underrepresented youth, but there is a lack of research on how to adapt CIT programs to increase their reach and effectiveness for this audience. This gap hinders efforts to increase enrollment among underrepresented youth<sup>1</sup> and ensure CIT programs are effective at fostering interest in becoming camp counselors for this population.

Dissemination and implementation (D&I) science emerged as a field of study designed to bridge the gap between research and practice by examining how knowledge is translated into practice (Estabrooks, 2023). Included among its many goals are testing the potential reach and effectiveness of interventions in an applied setting, understanding how the context influences whether an intervention will be adopted and sustained, and exploring how to adapt interventions to fit different contexts without compromising their effectiveness. To date, little D&I research has been conducted in camp settings and existing studies often concentrate on specific health outcomes (e.g., camp as an intervention to reduce obesity; Burke et al., 2015). Nonetheless, researchers and practitioners in the camp industry have expressed concerns over the research-to-practice gap, recognizing that valuable research often does not reach practitioners, limiting its ability to inform and improve practice. D&I science, then, holds the potential to advance camp research by identifying the conditions under which camps adopt and adapt evidence-based practices to achieve outcomes that are meaningful to them.

The purpose of this study was to follow the steps outlined by Moullin et al. (2020) to operationalize the Integrated Promoting Action Research Implementation in Health Services (I-PARIHS) framework from D&I science for use in understanding how camps can adapt CIT programs to increase their reach and effectiveness for underrepresented youth. The I-PARIHS framework includes four interacting constructs (innovation, recipients, context and facilitation) hypothesized to influence successful implementation (See Table 1).

### **Methods**

Taking a collaborative inquiry approach, we convened a multi-disciplinary expert team of researchers specializing in D&I science and summer camp who engaged in a 10-step process

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<sup>1</sup> Underrepresented youth are those whose participation in camp is lower than their representation in the broader community. While not a perfect measure of inclusion, increased representation signals a shift in the audience camps serve.

guided by Moullin et al. (2020). Collaborative inquiry involves bringing together individuals with varied experiences and exploring a topic through discussion and reflection to answer a question (Schnellert & Butler, 2014). In this case, we sought to consider how D&I science could help us understand how camps adapt CIT programs to serve underrepresented youth. Over several months, we participated in a series of iterative discussions to map key constructs of the I-PARIHS framework on to the operational realities of camps, refining each concept for relevance and practical utility in supporting improved representation of diverse populations in CIT programs. The I-PARIHS framework was chosen for its emphasis on how inner and outer contexts interact, illustrating how events within camp are deeply influenced by external factors. After the initial adaptation, camp practitioners provided feedback to further refine a conceptual model.

## Results

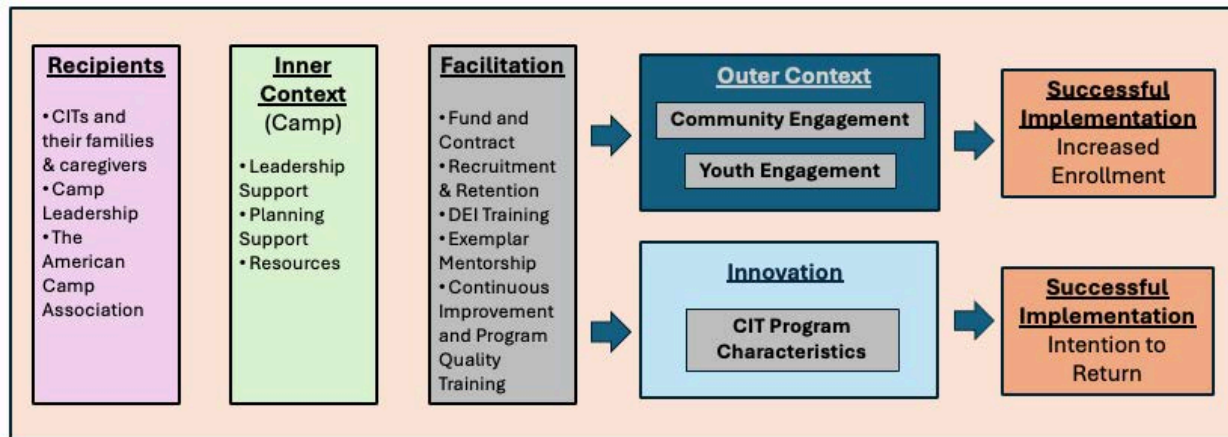
Table 1 provides the proposed operationalization of I-PARIHS constructs within the context of increasing CIT program diversity. Figure 1 outlines the hypothesized pathways towards two outcomes of successful CIT program implementation—enrollment and intention to return. Of note, facilitation is positioned as the active strategy supported by the American Camp Association (ACA) and designed to support recipients (youth, families, caregivers) in achieving stronger perceptions of community and youth engagement, which then is hypothesized to result in higher enrollment of underrepresented populations in CIT programs. Similarly, the facilitation strategies, such as exemplar mentorship and continuous quality improvement, are hypothesized to improve the characteristics (i.e., structure, principles, content) of CIT programs that create an environment that is supportive to higher return rates among historically underrepresented youth.

Table 1  
*Operationalization of I-PARIHS Framework*

|                           | I-PARIHS Definition   | Camp Operationalization  |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Innovation                | Explicit, evidence-based and practical knowledge to achieve an outcome                                    | CIT programs (i.e., a curriculum designed to develop necessary people/technical skills for an effective camp counselor; ACA, n.d.) |
| Recipients                | Individuals affected by and who affect innovation's implementation  | CITs and families or caregivers, camp leadership, the ACA  |
| Context                   | Inner and outer levels comprised of resources, culture, leadership and orientation to learning/evaluation | Inner: Financial resources, staff time, leadership support, etc. Outer: CIT community.   |
| Facilitation              | A set of strategies or actions that a facilitator enacts to implement the innovation                      | Grants (fund and contract), recruitment and retention strategies, mentorship, DEI and program quality training                     |
| Successful Implementation | Achieving project goals or results by facilitating innovation with recipients in their context            | Increased CIT enrollment among youth with diverse identities and increased interest to return to camp employment                   |

Figure 1

*Logic model using I-PARIHS to create equitable pathways to camp leadership*



## Discussion

Our collaborative inquiry approach successfully applied the I-PARIHS framework to better understand how summer camps can more effectively engaged and retain under-represented youth in CIT programs. Discussions focused on a range of topics that included exploration of (1) key players (i.e., recipients), (2) leadership, planning and resources (i.e., the camp inner context), (3) unique strategies intended to support diversity in CIT program enrollment and retention (i.e., facilitation), and (4) the mechanisms by which diverse enrollment and retention may be achieved (i.e., outer contextual factors and CIT program characteristics). Using this D&I science approach expanded our consideration of how CIT program knowledge may be adopted, implemented and sustained in summer camp settings. We also propose that this approach is generalizable to support the translation of other evidence-based interventions within the camp context to address outcomes that are meaningful to them—for instance, utilizing and adapting character-focused training and curricula from schools—and increased capacity to deliver impactful programming. Across partners in our collaborative inquiry approach, there was agreement that using I-PARIHS (and likely other D&I frameworks) provides a structured process to systematically implement innovations and ensure that these efforts align with local goals and values. We will next tailor D&I tools and resources to the camp environment and conduct empirical tests to assess whether this framework can achieve the proposed outcomes.

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# Using dissemination and implementation science can help camps identify strategies to increase pathways to camp employment for **underrepresented youth**.

## INTRODUCTION

- Summer camps want to become more diverse and inclusive.
- Camp staff team demographics are often misaligned with diverse camper populations (Froehly et al., 2024).
- Connecting research findings to professional practice at camp can help overcome the misalignment.

## OBJECTIVE & METHODS

- Use collaborative inquiry (Suigman, 2006) to map camp operations on to the Integrated Promoting Action Research Implementation in Health Services (I-PARIHS) framework.
- Understand how camps can adapt CIT programs to increase recruitment and retention of underrepresented youth.

## KEY FINDINGS

The table below shows the I-PARIHS definitions and how they appear in the camp context. These adaptations emerged from a series of iterative discussions held by the research team.

|                                  | I-PARIHS Definition   | Camp Operationalization   |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Innovation</b>                | Explicit, evidence-based and practical knowledge used to achieve an outcome                               | CIT programs (i.e., a curriculum designed to develop necessary people/technical skills for an effective camp counselor" (ACA, n.d.) |
| <b>Recipients</b>                | Individuals affected by and who affect innovation's implementation  | CITs and families or caregivers, camp leadership, the American Camp Association   |
| <b>Context</b>                   | Inner and outer levels comprised of resources, culture, leadership and orientation to learning/evaluation | Inner: Financial resources, staff time, leadership support, etc. Outer: CIT home community.   |
| <b>Facilitation</b>              | A set of strategies or actions that a facilitator enacts to implement the innovation                      | Grants (fund and contract), recruitment and retention strategies, mentorship, DEI and program quality training                      |
| <b>Successful Implementation</b> | Achieving project goals or results by facilitating innovation with recipients in their context            | Increased CIT enrollment among youth with diverse identities and increased interest to return to camp employment                    |

## CREATING EQUITABLE PATHWAYS TO CAMP EMPLOYMENT



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## DISCUSSION

Utilizing the operationalization of the I-PARIHS constructs in the camp context helped identify the relationships within and beyond camp that can increase pathways to camp employment and will guide ongoing research.

## A MIXED METHODS PILOT STUDY OF SCHOOL-BASED CAMP PROGRAMMING

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Theoretical frameworks, such as relational developmental systems, posit that youth development occurs through interactions between young people, learning contexts, and relationships with peers and leaders (Ettekal, et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2019). Research suggests that characteristics of camp programming may support SEL (Wilson et al., 2019); however, the price of camp is a barrier to attendance for youth from low-income backgrounds (Browne et al., 2019). School-based SEL programs are increasingly popular (e.g., Cipriano et al., 2023; Dowling et al., 2019; Green et al., 2021) and active ingredients of camp programming (Sibthorp et al., 2020) may be replicated in camp-facilitated school-based SEL programs for maximum effectiveness. Further, as there is a need to identify how to make camp programming accessible to youth from low-income backgrounds, delivering camp programming in schools may expand access. Currently, little is known about how the novel delivery of camp programming in schools (e.g., recreational; camp staff instead of teacher facilitated) and how this type of programming may support SEL among youth from low-income backgrounds.

To address this gap, Tims Camps piloted free (no cost to youth or schools) single and multiday camp programming in schools serving a high percentage of youth from low-income backgrounds. School board directors and superintendents were approached by a senior leader at Tims Camps to identify schools that serve low-income communities and would benefit from a SEL focused program, at no cost to them. Principals and teachers agreed to work in partnership with Tims Camps to receive this pilot program. In this study, we aimed to understand: 1) to what extent youth and teachers reported growth related to camp programming at school; 2) if there were differences in youth and teacher-reported outcomes between single and multiday programs; 3) how teachers perceive the program's usefulness in learning about students or practices relevant to their teaching.

### Methods

We collected cross-sectional survey data on-site from 29 teachers and 238 youth ( $M_{age} = 11.34$ ;  $SD_{age} = 1.33$ ; 52% girls; 36% white) who participated in single-day or multiday school-based camp programs (7 sessions; 8 schools) during Spring 2024. To answer research question 1, we examined descriptive statistics for 14 outcomes aligned with SEL approaches and the program focus (see Table 1) and themes from open-ended prompts (e.g., Tell us something you learned during the program). To answer research question 2, we used a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with outcomes as dependent variables and program length as the between-subjects factor. Given this pilot's exploratory nature, we used  $\alpha < .1$  for the omnibus between-subject test and  $\alpha < .05$  for post hoc comparisons using independent samples *t*-tests. We used Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to inductive thematic analysis for open-ended responses. This process involved reviewing the data, collaborative codebook generation, independent coding, and collaborative theme generation.

### Findings

The findings suggest youth and teachers attribute growth in SEL outcomes to participation in school-based camp programming ( $M = 2.85$ – $4.29$ ). Youth reported more growth from multiday than single-day programming for some outcomes (Cohen's  $d = .29$ – $.43$ ) but not all. There were no differences in teacher-reported outcomes based on program length. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics and statistical significance of mean differences.



Table 1  
*Growth Outcomes by Reporter and Program Length*

|                        | <b>Youth</b>  |  | <b>Teachers</b>                                       |  |
|------------------------|---|--|---|--|
|                        | Multiday<br>( <i>n</i> = 151)<br><i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) | Single Day<br>( <i>n</i> = 87)<br><i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) | Multiday<br>( <i>n</i> = 9)<br><i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) | Single Day<br>( <i>n</i> = 20)<br><i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) |
| Respect                | 3.76 (1.09)   | 3.74 (1.09)  | 3.57 (.54)  | 3.55 (.889)  |
| Listening              | 3.73 (1.06)   | 3.57 (1.25)  | 3.86 (.69)  | 4.17 (.79)   |
| Caring                 | 3.70 (1.05)   | 3.49 (1.24)  | 3.57 (.54)  | 3.35 (.75)   |
| Teamwork               | 3.61 (1.25)   | 3.54 (1.14)  | 4.14 (1.07)   | 4.22 (.81)   |
| Appreciate Differences | 3.70 (1.20)*  | 3.35 (1.22)  | 3.57 (.79)  | 3.78 (.94)   |
| Communication          | 3.61 (1.20)   | 3.36 (1.20)  | 3.71 (.76)  | 3.89 (.66)   |
| Responsibility         | 3.76 (1.16)   | 3.46 (1.27)  | 3.71 (.49)  | 3.30 (1.03)  |
| Problem-Solving        | 3.56 (1.12)   | 3.34 (1.14)  | 4.29 (.95)  | 4.16 (.90)   |
| Respectfully Share     | 3.63 (1.28)*  | 3.20 (1.29)  | 3.71 (.76)  | 3.84 (.90)   |
| Peer Relationships     | 3.34 (1.20)   | 3.23 (1.21)  | 3.71 (.76)  | 4.10 (.72)   |
| Understand Strengths   | 3.44 (1.29)**   | 2.98 (1.08)  | 3.86 (.69)  | 3.75 (.91)   |
| Adult Relationships    | 3.34 (1.25) <sup>+</sup>                                | 3.05 (1.24)  | 4.00 (.82)  | 3.75 (.64)   |
| Confidence             | 3.25 (1.26)   | 3.10 (1.25)  | 3.86 (.69)  | 3.80 (.77)   |
| Physical/Social Skills | 3.31 (1.13)***  | 2.85 (.98)   | 3.71 (.76)  | 3.65 (.81)   |

*Note.* <sup>+</sup>  $p < .1$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ; Scale items used a 5-point scale, with 1 being “not at all”, and 5 being “a ton of growth”.

In open-ended responses, the top three learnings youth reported were teamwork, respect, and communication. Teachers primarily reported that their students learned teamwork and communication skills. Teachers reported developing empathy and learning more personal things about their students and said they intended to incorporate more experiential activities into their classroom instruction because of the camp programming.

### Discussions

The pilot study findings align with the literature about positive outcomes of camp attendance (Wilson et al., 2019) and contribute to the field by identifying outcomes youth and teachers attribute to a novel camp offering, school-based camp programming. Given recent calls for SEL-focused school programs (Cipriano et al., 2023) and national initiatives focused on camp-school partnerships (e.g., Posatko & Peterson, n.d.), the results are promising as they indicate the potential positive impact of collaborative efforts dedicated to SEL development. Additionally, due to increased operational costs, camps are pressured to find low-cost methods to reach youth. This type of school-based camp program may be an attractive alternative, or year-round addition, to in-camp programming, as it offers additional opportunities for staff to stay employed by camp and continue to connect with and support youth in local communities. Finally, delivering in-community programs is an efficient way to build familial trust with camp

organizations, understand campers' unique needs, and learn more about youth who are ready for and may benefit from an overnight camp experience.

Limitations to this study include a relatively small sample size across eight schools, self-report bias from youth and staff, and potential social desirability bias from teachers as it is a free program. Although the pilot yielded encouraging findings, researchers should strive for larger samples, more complete demographic information, and more robust study designs to address this pilot's causal inference and generalizability limitations.

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## A mixed methods pilot study of school-based camp programming

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### Introduction

- Opportunity gap and campership funding available limits social emotional learning (SEL) programs for youth from low-income backgrounds; camp-school partnerships may reduce this gap
- Study purposes:
  - To what extent youth and teachers reported growth related to camp programming at school?
  - If there were differences in youth and teacher-reported outcomes between single and multiday programs?
  - How teachers perceive the program's usefulness in learning about students or practices relevant to their teaching?

### Findings

- Teachers and youth attribute growth in SEL outcomes to programming ( $M = 2.84 - 4.29$ )
- Youth reported more growth from multiday than single day programming for some outcomes; no differences in teacher-reported outcomes based on program length
- Top youth reported outcomes: **teamwork, respect, communication**; top teacher reported outcomes for students: **teamwork, communication**
- Teachers reported developing **more empathy for students** and an intention to **incorporate more experiential learning activities into their classroom**

### Methods

- Survey data collected from 29 teachers and 238 youth from single day and multiday sessions across 8 schools
- 14 SEL outcomes on a 5-point scale and open-ended responses about learning
- Descriptive statistics, inductive thematic coding, MANOVA, and t-tests



### Discussion

- Findings from this study support initiatives focused on camp-school partnerships
- Camps may consider ways to collaborate with local schools to deliver cost effective SEL programs to youth who need them most



# **CAMP COUNSELOR EXPERIENCES: THE INFLUENCE OF TRAINING, SELF-EFFICACY, AND ORGANIZATIONAL COHESION**

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Counselor-in-Training (CIT) programs, which typically target adolescent campers, can help prepare them for the counselor role (Annessi et al., 2020; McCole et al., 2012). However, the effectiveness of CIT programs across camps has not yet been explored. In the current study, we recruited a sample of 314 previous camp counselors from across the United States and Canada to a.) investigate whether counselors who completed CIT had better outcomes, and b.) examine the effects of self-efficacy and organizational cohesion on their experiences. We also wanted to examine how gender, sexuality and race-based discrimination affected counselors' perceptions of their camp environment.

Previous research has indicated that camp counselors who felt a greater connection to their camp and received better support and training were less likely to experience negative outcomes (Baker, 2018; Kendellen et al., 2016). Because CIT programs tend to include leadership training and reinforce connectedness, we hypothesized that the counselors in our sample who completed CIT programs would report higher self-efficacy, organizational cohesion, job fit, connection to their camp, and satisfaction with pre-camp training than those who did not.

## **Methods**

Participants were recruited from camp counseling forums on Facebook, Reddit, and Instagram. After consenting and confirming they were over the age of 18, they completed a survey assessing their self-efficacy and organizational cohesion at camp (Chen et al., 2001; Ruga, 2014) and other original Likert-scale items related to their experiences as first-year counselors. Then, they answered four open-ended questions about their motivations for working at camp, the skills they gained, the challenges they faced, and their overall camp environment.

## **Results**

### **Quantitative Results**

After exclusions, our sample included 314 camp counselors (130 previous CITs and 185 non-CITs) from camps across the United States and Canada. The majority identified as White (83%) and cisgender female (70%); most were United States residents (76%) with 15 countries represented in total. Seventy-one percent had attended summer camp as a camper: 51% at the same camp they counseled and 20% at a different camp.

Contrary to our hypothesis, neither the completion of a CIT program nor the counselors' age affected any variables; however, both organizational cohesion and self-efficacy correlated with almost all other measured variables, including job fit, satisfaction with training, and comfort with administration (see Table 1). Additionally, counselors who reported higher levels of discrimination at their camp also reported lower organizational cohesion.

Table 1

*Correlations between counselors' self-efficacy, organizational cohesion, job fit, satisfaction with training, connection to camp, comfort talking to administrators, and general discrimination*

| Measure                        | 1           | 2            | 3            | 4           | 5            | 6     | 7    | 8    | 9   |
|--------------------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------|------|------|-----|
| 1. Self-efficacy               | —           |              |              |             |              |       |      |      |     |
| 2. Organizational Cohesion     | .27*        |              |              |             |              |       |      |      |     |
| 3. Job fit                     | <b>.41*</b> | <b>.47**</b> |              |             |              |       |      |      |     |
| 4. Satisfaction with training  | .19*        | <b>.41**</b> | .21**        |             |              |       |      |      |     |
| 5. Connection to camp          | .20*        | .37**        | .38**        | .30*        |              |       |      |      |     |
| 6. Comfort with administrators | .25*        | .37**        | .20**        | <b>.43*</b> | .26**        |       |      |      |     |
| 7. General discrimination      | -.02        | -.29**       | -.17*        | -.22*       | -.24**       | -.29* |      |      |     |
| 8. Growth                      | .22*        | .37**        | <b>.55**</b> | .20*        | .35**        | .16*  | -.09 |      |     |
| 9. Desire to return            | .20*        | .34**        | <b>.42**</b> | .18*        | <b>.47**</b> | .17*  | -.10 | .35* |     |
| 10. Burnout                    | -.08        | -.15*        | -.18*        | -.06        | -.09         | -.1   | .16* | .07  | .02 |

\*indicates  $p < 0.01$ .

\*\*indicates  $p < 0.001$ . Correlations greater than 0.4 are bolded.

## Qualitative Results

Two independent raters coded 936 responses across four open-ended questions; they had 89.8% agreement and a Kappa of 0.84, indicating strong agreement.

In response to the question, "What motivated you to work at camp?", more CITs (88%) mentioned a previous connection to their camp than non-CITs (50%). When asked what skills they gained, the overwhelming majority (92.31%) of participants mentioned interpersonal skills (e.g., patience and leadership). Counselors' greatest challenges included lack of sleep, difficulties with campers, burnout, and negative interactions with coworkers or administrators. CITs and non-CITs had similar responses to both questions. Finally, the majority (59.05%) reported a mostly positive camp environment, 26.72% reported a mix of positives and negatives, and 14.4% reported mostly negatives. A greater proportion of CITs (18.09%) reported mostly negative environments compared to their non-CIT counterparts (11.59%).

## Discussion and Implications

Though CIT programs' efficacy may not be consistent across camps, overall camp climate could be an important factor for future studies to address. Discrimination correlated with environmental factors such as organizational cohesion, training, and connection to camp. This is consistent with Perry's (2018) finding that racial discrimination can damage a camp's climate, isolating minority campers and counselors alike. Future research could examine the prevalence of discrimination across camps, and whether camp diversity plays a role.

Our results have implications for camp administrators and staff alike. Firstly, they indicate that both internal factors (e.g., self-efficacy) and external factors (e.g., organizational cohesion) may influence counselors' job performance and satisfaction. They also raise questions about the true efficacy of CIT programs, as no significant statistical differences were found between previous CITs and non-CITs. Although this was a retrospective study, more exploratory and experimental research needs to be conducted to further understand camp counselors' experiences, particularly discrimination and satisfaction with training.

This study had several limitations. Because the data was retrospective and non-experimental, it is impossible to draw a causal relationship between any two variables; additionally, respondents who had not counseled for several years may not have been able to accurately recall their thoughts and feelings during their first year of employment.

Results could also have also been affected by between-camp differences, especially in regards to how CIT programs are defined; some camps follow comprehensive leadership training models (e.g., Annessi et al., 2020), but others may not be empirically based or training-focused. Thus, future studies should use cross-camp experimental designs that assess the efficacy of different counselor training programs.

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# Camp Counselor Experiences: The Influence of Training, Self-Efficacy, and Organizational Cohesion

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## PURPOSE

To examine whether the completion of Counselor-in-Training (CIT) programs relates to self-efficacy and organizational cohesion in first-year camp counselors.

## BACKGROUND

- There are over 20,000 summer camps in the US today employing teens and young adults from around the world, 66% of which are overnight camps (ACA, 2024; Browne & Wycoff, 2021). Although past studies have examined camper experiences, fewer consider camp counselors.
- Camp counselors often report gaining soft skills such as leadership and teamwork from their employment. New, younger counselors tend to experience more growth (Duerden et al., 2014; Marshall, 2016).
- Counselor-in-Training programs are typically designed to support adolescents through their transition from camper to counselor (Ricketts & Ruddy, 2002). Although studies have supported the efficacy of individual CIT programs (e.g., Goldberger, 2022), none have examined the effectiveness of these programs across camps.
- Preliminary qualitative research indicates that environmental factors such as discrimination, camp culture and support from administrators affect counselors' sense of belonging. (Bailey et al., 2012).

## HYPOTHESES

- Counselors who completed CIT training will report higher self-efficacy, organizational cohesion, connection to their camp, job fit, and satisfaction with pre-camp training.
- Counselors who report lower self-efficacy will also report higher levels of burnout, lower levels of growth, and a lower likelihood of returning to camp.
- Younger counselors will perceive themselves as more immature than older counselors, but will experience more growth from camp employment.

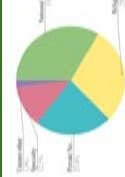


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## METHOD

### Participants

314 former camp counselors (130 former CITs, 185 non-CITs); Mean age 29.1 years ( $SD = 11.0$ ); majority White (83%), cisgender female (69%) US residents (75%). Roughly equal representation across major camp types (see Figure 1).



### Measures

Organizational Cohesion Scale (Ruga, 2014); New General Self-Efficacy (NGSE) Scale (Chen et al., 2001); 10 original Likert scale items and 4 open-ended questions pertaining to camp experiences.

### Procedure

Participants completed Qualtrics surveys sent out via camp counselor forums on social media (Reddit, Facebook). Of 394 total respondents, 70 were excluded because they either did not complete the majority of the survey, or they did not meet criteria for participation. After debriefing, all participants had the opportunity to enter into a raffle for a \$50 gift card.

## RESULTS

### Impact of CIT program completion and age

- No significant differences emerged between CITs and non-CITs across survey items (see Figure 2). In both groups, means for all items were relatively high (see Table 1).
- There was a negative correlation between age and immaturity such that younger counselors perceived themselves as less mature  $r = -0.37, p < .001$  but there was no significant correlation between age and growth  $r = -.001, p = .99$ .

### Counselor Self-Efficacy and Organizational Cohesion

- Self-efficacy and organizational cohesion had a significant positive correlation with one another  $r = .71, p < .001$  and with job fit, training, connection to camp, comfort with administration, growth, desire to return, and perceived immaturity.
- Only organizational cohesion had negative correlations with discrimination  $r = -.29, p < .001$  and burnout  $r = -.35, p < .001$ .

### Other Correlations

- Positive correlations also emerged between experience variables such as comfort with administration x satisfaction with training  $r = .43, p < .001$  and job fit x growth  $r = .56, p < .001$ .

### Content Analysis

- Of 314 participants, 233 (93 CITs and 140 non-CITs) answered the four open-ended questions. Responses were coded by two independent raters.
  - Motivations for working at camp:** The majority (65.67%) had a prior connection to their camp; 28.32% wanted to work with children; 15.02% wanted to have fun or gain new experiences. CITs were more likely to state a previous connection to the camp (88.17%) than non-CITs (50.17%).
  - Skills gained:** Many participants listed multiple skills. The overwhelming majority (92.31%) listed interpersonal skills, 29.1% mentioned concrete skills, and 10.7% mentioned internal growth. CITs were slightly more likely to cite interpersonal skills (94.88%) than non-CITs (90.71%).
  - Challenges:** Counselors reported facing issues such as lack of sleep (38.89%) burnout or other internal problem (31.19%) difficulties with campers (30.30%) negative camp environment or staff culture (23.93%); and isolation from support systems (8.50%). Non-CITs were more likely to cite isolation (40.71%) than CITs (5.32%).
  - Camp culture:** 59.05% of participants reported mostly positive camp environments, 26.72% reported equally positive and negative aspects of their camp, and 14.40% reported mostly negative camp environments (see Figure 3). A greater proportion of CITs (18.09%) reported negative environments than non-CITs (11.59%).

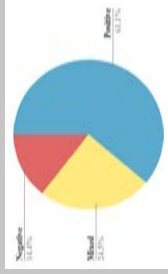


Figure 3. Counselors' perception of their camp culture, coded via content analysis.

"We were a wild, zany, creative, hyperactive bunch. We would have late-night "staff parties" where we smeared ice cream on our faces and then jumped in the pool. We had crazy planning sessions where we'd come up with off-the-wall clues for a scavenger hunt or ideas for a skit night. I was completely in my element... I got to really know other people, and be known by them. And loved by them."

- Participant response to "Describe the staff culture at your camp."

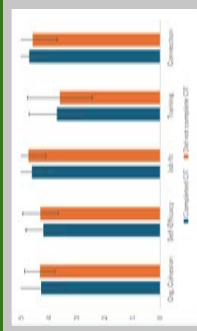


Figure 2. Organizational cohesion, self-efficacy, job fit, training, and connection to camp for CITs and non-CITs. Error bars represent standard error. Note: Error bars represent standard error. Organizational cohesion scores are scaled from 7-point to 5-point.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Self-Efficacy, Organizational Cohesion, and Camp Experience Variables

| Experience Variables        | Full Sample |
|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Self-Efficacy               | M (SD)      |
| Organizational Cohesion*    | 4.26 (0.58) |
|                             | 6.91 (1.22) |
| *Experience Items           |             |
| Growth                      | 4.83 (0.54) |
| Job fit                     | 4.69 (0.69) |
| Connection to camp          | 4.63 (0.79) |
| Desire to return            | 4.55 (1.00) |
| Comfort with administrators | 3.94 (1.16) |
| Satisfaction with training  | 3.65 (1.10) |
| Burnout                     | 3.28 (1.33) |
| General discrimination      | 2.57 (1.35) |
| Perceived immaturity        | 2.37 (1.16) |

Note: Data for organizational cohesion was rated on an 8-point scale; all other measures in this table were on 5-point scales.



We would like to acknowledge the help of Angela Draheim for support throughout the research process and Dr. Laurie Browne of the American Camp Association (ACA) for helping distribute our survey.

## DISCUSSION

- No quantitative differences between CITs and non-CITs emerged; however, self-efficacy, organizational cohesion, and means on all "experience" items were high with low variability (especially growth and job fit), signifying that the majority of counselors in our sample had a good experience.
- In the open-ended questions, many counselors reported gaining a mixture of "life skills" and personal growth.
- Qualitative results also suggest that counselors who completed CIT may experience different motivations, challenges, and perceived camp environments than their non-CIT counterparts.
- Non-CITs sometimes mentioned difficulties adjusting to their camp's environment: "I think during my first summer I struggled to feel confident as a new staff who wasn't a CIT beforehand. It was hard to feel over that hump and learn the camp's culture and ways."
- More research is needed to examine and address the challenges camp counselors face, especially regarding discrimination and negative camp environments.
- "The hours and the emotional weight of intense situations [were difficult] – especially at camps where leadership was not super competent/supportive."

## LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

- Although we had a large sample of previous CITs and non-CITs, it is important to note the retrospective nature of this study. The mean number of years since participants had been camp counselors was 10.4, meaning that many were reflecting on experiences from more than a decade ago. Thus, future studies should concentrate on those who counseled more recently.
- Counselors who observed discrimination at their camp also reported lower organizational cohesion. Future studies should further address camps' negative environmental factors and explore solutions.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR CAMPS

- Many counselors gain personal fulfillment and growth from their camp employment. However, it is important that **sleeppaw camps regularly evaluate their staff culture and training programs** in order to ensure that all counselors are getting the support they need.
- Satisfaction with training had significant correlations with counselors' self-efficacy, organizational cohesion, and comfort with administrators, indicating that **adequate training may be an important factor in counselors' performance**. Previous researchers suggest that camps **integrate continuous learning and mentoring throughout the summer, providing counselors with continuous feedback** (Goldberger et al., 2022).
- In their open-ended responses, many counselors cited a "divide" between older and younger staff and/or CITs and non-CITs. Additionally, non-CITs were more likely to list "isolation from support systems" as a challenge they faced while counseling. To boost staff culture and ensure an inclusive environment, **camps should provide adequate team-building between new and old counselors** and monitor discrimination and clique formation.



## HOW DOES JEWISH CAMP HELP YOUTH GROW? EXAMINING YOUTH PERCEPTIONS IN FIVE JEWISH OVERNIGHT CAMPS.

Authors: Nila Rosen, Foundation for Jewish Camp; Andrea Ettekal, Texas A&M University; Sarah Sprayberry, University of Kentucky; Emily Howell & Isaac Appiah, Texas A&M University

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Numerous studies suggest that attending summer camp is associated with positive youth development (PYD; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007), yet only a few studies involve faith-based camps, such as Jewish camp. There are ~1.6 million U.S. children who identify as Jewish (Saxe, et al. 2021); for many, overnight Jewish summer camp is the primary place where youth experience an immersive faith-based culture and receive informal Jewish education (Prell, 2007). Developmental theories emphasize specificity in human development (Lerner & Bornstein, 2021): youth are best served by specific contexts, designed for their specific needs, at that specific point in time and development. Thus, Jewish summer camp should be high quality, in terms of universal features that promote PYD (Simpkins, Riggs, Ngo, Vest Ettekal, & Okamoto, 2017), and specifically designed for Jewish youth. High quality Jewish summer camp fosters belonging and connects youth with religious and cultural practices and beliefs of Judaism. Empirical research suggests that attending Jewish summer camp fosters ethnic pride, Jewish identity, and engagement with Judaism and Jewish culture (Prell, 2007). In this study, we examine (a) youth perceptions of the extent to which Jewish summer camp fostered various PYD competencies, and (b) factors that explain variation in perceptions of growth (friendships, dosage, camper history, developmental period).

### Methods

Five Jewish summer camps practicing conservative or reform forms of Judaism and representing various U.S. geographic regions were purposively selected. All middle and high school campers were invited to participate and 1,225 (98–317 youth/camp; 54%–89% response rate) filled out the survey. Questionnaires contained quantitative Likert-type self-report items on perceived impacts of camp. We report findings on overall growth (1 item) and specific competencies gained (7 items). Associations with friendships (close, bunkmates, new) and dosage (weeks/summers at camp) were examined with Pearson's correlation coefficients. Group differences (returning vs. new, middle vs. high school) were examined with *t*-tests. Intraclass Correlation Coefficients (ICCs) ranged from .001 to .023, suggesting camp-level differences were negligible.

### Results

On average, youth thought camp fostered their development “*some*” to “*very much*” (Table 1). Increased friendships were associated with increased perceptions of overall growth ( $rs = .13-.20$ ,  $ps < .01$ ) and all 7 competencies (close:  $rs = .09-.23$ ,  $ps < .001$ ; bunk:  $rs = .09-.17$ ,  $ps < .05$ ; new:  $rs = .06-.17$ ,  $ps < .05$  with one exception, such that “increase resilience” *ns*). Increased dosage was associated with increased perceptions of overall growth ( $rs = .10-.11$ ,  $ps < .01$ ) and “take on responsibilities” ( $rs = .08-.12$ ,  $ps < .01$ ). Returning campers perceived more growth on “take on responsibilities,” “increase independence,” and “deepen ability to be kind” than new campers; high school campers perceived more growth on “increase confidence,” “increase motivation to achieve goals,” and “grow as a person” than middle school campers.

Table 1  
*Youth Perceptions of Developmental Growth at Camp*

|                                      | Overall      | Camper history |               | Developmental period |               |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------|
|                                      |              | Returning      | New           | Middle school        | High school   |
| <i>Camp Helped...</i>                | <i>M(SD)</i> | <i>M(SD)</i>   | <i>M(SD)</i>  | <i>M(SD)</i>         | <i>M(SD)</i>  |
| Grow as a person                     | 3.30 (.84)   | 3.33 (.83)     | 3.15 (.89)*   | 3.23 (.88)           | 3.40 (.76)*** |
| Increase your confidence             | 2.92 (.87)   | 2.93 (.87)     | 2.85 (.85)    | 2.83 (.88)           | 3.04 (.84)*** |
| Increase motivation to achieve goals | 2.95 (.91)   | 2.95 (.91)     | 2.90 (.93)    | 2.89 (.93)           | 3.03 (.88)**  |
| Take on responsibilities             | 3.27 (.84)   | 3.31 (.83)     | 3.01 (.94)*** | 3.26 (.84)           | 3.29 (.85)    |
| Increase your independence           | 3.21 (.94)   | 3.23 (.92)     | 3.02 (1.04)** | 3.19 (.92)           | 3.23 (.96)    |
| Increase your resilience             | 3.04 (.84)   | 3.05 (.83)     | 2.89 (.85)*   | 2.98 (.84)           | 3.10 (.83)*   |
| Deepen ability to be kind to others  | 3.17 (.88)   | 3.21 (.85)     | 2.83 (.99)*** | 3.14 (.91)           | 3.20 (.84)    |
| Practice using good judgment         | 3.10 (.88)   | 3.12 (.88)     | 2.97 (.93)    | 3.06 (.89)           | 3.15 (.87)    |

Note: 1=*not at all*, 2=*a little bit*, 3=*some*, 4=*very much*

### Discussion and Implications

Attending overnight summer camp is an important tradition for many Jewish American families. Our findings suggest that Jewish youth believed summer camp helped them considerably. Youth perceived that camp helped most to grow as a person, which may be because it is easier for some youth to perceive overall growth than specific developmental competencies. High schoolers perceived more growth than middle schoolers on some intrapersonal skills, which may be a developmental effect of camp, or could reflect that high schoolers have an increased sense of awareness. It is also possible that youth seek out opportunities for growth depending on their development, meaning the differences found here may reflect youth selecting salient developmental experiences. A key factor related to camp impact may be dosage. We examined two indicators of dosage, years of attendance (duration) and weeks at camp (intensity), which each had similar associations with self-perceived growth. Interestingly, returning campers perceived more growth than new campers, on multiple competencies including independence and resilience. This finding suggests that more competencies are gained when returning to camp for multiple years. Longitudinal research is needed to parse out camp dosage and impact.

Overnight summer camp is inherently relational given its social structure (e.g., group activities), communal living (e.g., sleeping and eating together), and immersion (e.g., limited access to relationships outside camp). Previous research suggests that the social nature of programs can be a reason they are effective, if those relationships are friendships (Donlan, Lynch, & Lerner, 2015). Whereas conversely, negative peer relations can cause detrimental program effects (Ward, Parker, 2013). Our findings were clear, such that having friendships at camp fostered perceived growth across all competencies. For practitioners, the implication is to

centralize and ensure positive friendships at camp so campers can gain competencies while at camp. Future research is needed to understand what it is about friendships that is so important for camp (e.g., safety, co-participation, opportunity, etc.), which features of camp support which competencies, and what additional competencies and identity developments are acquired through Jewish camps.

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# HOW DOES JEWISH CAMP HELP YOUTH GROW? EXAMINING YOUTH PERCEPTIONS IN FIVE JEWISH OVERNIGHT CAMPS

**Authors:** Nila Rosen, Foundation for Jewish Camp; Andrea Ettekal, Texas A&M University; Sarah Sprayberry, University of Kentucky; Emily Howell & Isaac Appiah, Texas A&M University.

**STUDY AIMS** We examine 1) teen and tween perceptions of the extent to which summer camp fostered positive youth development competencies and 2) which factors (friendship, number of weeks, years at camp, age) explain variation in perceptions of growth.

**METHODS**  $N=1225$  (54%–89% response rate) filled out a post-camp survey. Likert-type self-report items on perceived impacts of camp measured overall growth (1 item) and competencies (7 items). Associations were examined with Pearson's correlation coefficients. Group differences (returning vs. new, middle vs. high school) were examined with  $t$ -tests. Intraclass Correlation Coefficients ranged from .001 to .023.



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## FINDINGS

- Friendships were associated with increased perceptions of overall growth ( $r_s = .13-.20, ps < .01$ ) and all 7 competencies.
- Increased dosage was associated with increased perceptions of overall growth ( $r_s = .10-.11, ps < .01$ ).
- Returning campers perceived more growth than new campers.
- High school campers perceived more growth than middle school campers.

Table 1 Youth Perceptions of Developmental Growth at Camp

|                                      | Camper history |              |                           | Developmental period |                          |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|--------------|---------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
|                                      | Overall        | Returning    | New                       | Middle school        | High school              |
| Camp Helped...                       | <i>M(SD)</i>   | <i>M(SD)</i> | <i>M(SD)</i>              | <i>M(SD)</i>         | <i>M(SD)</i>             |
| Grow as a person                     | 3.30(.84)      | 3.33(.83)    | 3.15(.89) <sup>†</sup>    | 3.23(.88)            | 3.40(.76) <sup>***</sup> |
| Increase your confidence             | 2.92(.87)      | 2.93(.87)    | 2.85(.85)                 | 2.83(.88)            | 3.04(.84) <sup>***</sup> |
| Increase motivation to achieve goals | 2.95(.91)      | 2.95(.91)    | 2.90(.93)                 | 2.89(.93)            | 3.03(.88) <sup>**</sup>  |
| Take on responsibilities             | 3.27(.84)      | 3.31(.83)    | 3.01(.94) <sup>***</sup>  | 3.26(.84)            | 3.29(.85)                |
| Increase your independence           | 3.21(.94)      | 3.23(.92)    | 3.02(1.04) <sup>***</sup> | 3.19(.92)            | 3.23(.96)                |
| Increase your resilience             | 3.04(.84)      | 3.05(.83)    | 2.89(.85) <sup>†</sup>    | 2.98(.84)            | 3.10(.83) <sup>†</sup>   |
| Deepen ability to be kind to others  | 3.17(.88)      | 3.21(.85)    | 2.83(.99) <sup>***</sup>  | 3.14(.91)            | 3.20(.84)                |
| Practice using good judgment         | 3.10(.88)      | 3.12(.88)    | 2.97(.93)                 | 3.06(.89)            | 3.15(.87)                |

For practitioners, this study suggests that returning to Jewish camp and staying at camp during high school years increases skills, and to focus on the development of positive friendships at camp given their high associations with gained competencies.

## **CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AT CAMP: HOW YOUTH PERCEIVE THEIR CHARACTER GROWTH AND EXPERIENCES IN OVERNIGHT CAMP**

Authors: Nila Rosen, Foundation for Jewish Camp; Andrea Ettekal, Texas A&M University; Sarah Sprayberry, University of Kentucky; Emily Howell & Isaac Appiah, Texas A&M University

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Character is the capacity for moral agency applied selflessly for greater good. Character develops holistically throughout life and through exchanges between individuals and the contexts in which they are nested (Matthews & Lerner, 2024). Whether character develops and which strengths are grown depends on context (Ettekal, Agans, Bolick, & Shirzad, 2024). A primary goal of youth development research, known as the “black box” problem, is to disentangle which contextual features are associated with the development of which attributes (Lerner, & Bornstein, 2021). Summer camp is a context known to support character development (Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007). However, specific camp experiences may determine which strengths are developed. An assessment in character research is the VIA Inventory of Strengths, which includes 24 strengths (McGrath & Walker, 2016). The breadth of individual strengths in the VIA makes it a useful tool for examining character strengths grown at camp. In this study, we examined strengths youth perceived growing at camp and how those strengths were associated with camp experiences. Our study was guided by these key questions: What character strengths do young people believe they develop most during camp? How do campers' experiences within the camp's social environment relate to their character development?

### **Methods**

Five Jewish overnight summer camps representing various U.S. geographic regions (Midwest, West, Southeast, Northeast) were purposively selected for this study. All middle and high school campers were invited to participate. Altogether, ( $N = 972$ ) completed the survey (overall a 73% response rate). Data were collected through self-report paper questionnaires administered by staff near the last day of camp. Questions addressed camp experiences with the camp social environment, relationships, and character strengths. Youth reported the top three strengths they grew at camp that summer, based on a list of 20 strengths derived from the VIA (McGrath & Walker, 2016). Campers reported their agreement (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) on 16 items representing positive and negative experiences with social belonging at camp. Chi-square tests, interpreted with Adjusted Standardized Residuals (ASR), were used to examine group differences (middle vs. high school) on the strengths selected. Associations between experiences and strengths were examined with  $t$ -tests. Table 1 presents a subset of social experience items and strengths (for brevity, strengths and/or experiences with no significant associations are not presented). Intraclass correlations ranged from .02 – .07, suggesting minimal camp-level variation (Heck, Thomas, & Tabata, 2014).

### **Results**

The top character strengths campers perceived growing were leadership, kindness, responsibility, and teamwork. High school campers were more likely than chance to select leadership ( $ASR = 4.9$ ) and zest/enthusiasm ( $ASR = 4.0$ ), and less likely than chance to select creativity ( $ASR = -4.0$ ) and fairness ( $ASR = -3.7$ ) ( $\chi^2s > 13.54$ ,  $ps < .001$ ). On average, campers “agreed” with many of the positive experiences (e.g., belonging, caring adults) and “disagreed” with many of the negative experiences (e.g., exclusion by bunkmates, feeling the need to change oneself to fit in). There were several significant associations between experiences with the social

environment and developed strengths. The camp experiences that were positively correlated with character growth were acceptance, having friends, and being nice to people who were not friends (i.e., each of these experiences had significant associations with at least a third of the strengths). The character strengths that were most often associated with experiences were teamwork, judgment, leadership and curiosity (i.e., these strengths were associated with at least a third of the experience items); some strengths (e.g., gratitude, respect) were not associated with any camp experiences.

Examining the patterns of association between experiences and character strengths grown at camp revealed differences. Youth who developed teamwork skills had more positive and fewer negative camp experiences compared to those who did not. There was a similar trend for leadership, love, and kindness, although fewer of these associations were statistically significant. Youth who showed growth in judgment tended to have less positive experiences, and this trend also appeared for curiosity and fairness, but with fewer significant associations.

Table 1

*Associations between Character Strengths Grown at Camp and Experiences*

| <b>Top 3 strengths grown (%)</b>               |                                    |                   |                   |               |                     |                   |              |                 |                    |              |                  |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|------------------|
|  | Leadership<br>25.5%                | Kindness<br>23.1% | Teamwork<br>22.5% | Zest<br>18.0% | Creativity<br>15.7% | Judgment<br>14.6% | Love<br>2.9% | Honesty<br>0.2% | Curiosity<br>19.0% | Hope<br>7.7% | Fairness<br>5.1% |
| <b>M(SD)</b>                                   | <b><u>Positive Experiences</u></b> |                   |                   |               |                     |                   |              |                 |                    |              |                  |
| Accepted for who I am. 3.96(.88)               | >                                  |                   | >                 |               | <                   | <                 |              | <               | <                  | <            | <                |
| Feel like I belong. 4.15(.85)                  | >                                  |                   |                   |               |                     | <                 | >            |                 |                    |              |                  |
| I have a lot of friends at camp. 4.21(.90)     | >                                  |                   | >                 |               |                     | <                 |              |                 |                    | <            | <                |
| Nice to those who aren't my friends. 4.04(.79) |                                    | >                 |                   |               | <                   |                   |              |                 | <                  |              |                  |
| Try to be inclusive. 4.08(.84)                 |                                    |                   | >                 |               |                     | <                 |              |                 |                    |              |                  |
| People kinder at camp than school. 3.44(1.14)  | >                                  |                   |                   | >             |                     | <                 |              |                 | <                  |              | <                |
| <b><u>Negative Experience</u></b>              |                                    |                   |                   |               |                     |                   |              |                 |                    |              |                  |
| There is social exclusion at camp. 3.13(1.13)  |                                    | <                 | <                 |               |                     |                   |              |                 |                    |              |                  |
| I was mean to a bunkmate. 2.77(1.18)           |                                    |                   | <                 | >             |                     | >                 |              |                 |                    |              |                  |
| I need to change myself to fit in. 2.32(1.11)  | <                                  |                   | <                 |               |                     |                   |              |                 |                    | >            |                  |

|                              |   |   |   |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
| I was excluded by bunkmates. | < | > | > |
| 2.84(1.28)                   |   |   |   |

**Notes.** Cells show that youth who selected the strength were or statistically significantly more likely (>) or less likely (<) to have the experience than those who did not select the given strength as a top 3 strength grown at camp; blank cells were not statistically significant at  $p < .001$ .

### Discussion and Implications

The question of whether summer camp builds character and which strengths are fostered is crucial in youth development scholarship. Our results suggest that youth believed they grew in character during camp, with no differences based on time spent at camp. Camp experiences were associated with growth in specific character strengths. Youth who improved in relational strengths had better social experiences, while those who grew in intellectual strengths had less positive social experiences. This supports Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) idea that growth happens in contexts aligned with the specific attribute, meaning social experiences foster social growth, but not necessarily intellectual growth. These findings question the belief that positive environments promote growth in all attributes. Though we cannot confirm that camp caused these changes, this study is a valuable step in understanding how camp experiences and the social environment of camp shapes character and how youth perceive their growth at camp. The research has several key implications for camp leaders including the importance of focusing on belonging and acceptance at camp, friendship development, promoting positive social structures and interactions in the camp community, and tailoring outcomes and character development by age and attribute.

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# CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AT CAMP: HOW YOUTH PERCEIVE THEIR CHARACTER GROWTH & EXPERIENCES IN OVERNIGHT CAMP

Authors: Nila Rosen, Foundation for Jewish Camp; Andrea Etkel, Texas A&M University; Sarah Sprayberry, University of Kentucky; Emily Howell & Isaac Appiah, Texas A&M University.

## Study Purpose/Questions:

1. Which character strengths do middle and high school campers believe they develop most during camp?
2. How do campers' experiences with the camp's social environment relate to their character development?

**Methods:** 972 campers from 5 Jewish overnight summer camps across U.S. geographic regions completed the survey (73% response rate). Youth reported the top 3 strengths they grew at camp that summer, based on 20 strengths derived from the VIA (McGrath & Walker, 2016). Campers reported their agreement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) on 16 items representing positive and negative experiences with social belonging at camp. Chi-square tests, interpreted with Adjusted Standardized Residuals (ASR), were used to examine group differences on the strengths selected. Associations between experiences and strengths were examined with *t*-tests. Intraclass correlations ranged from .02 – .07, suggesting minimal camp-level variation.

## Finding #1

The most common strengths developed by campers at camp:

- Leadership** (25.5%)\*
- Kindness** (23.1%)\*
- Teamwork** (22.5%)\*
- Responsibility** (22.5%)\*
- Courage** (18.9%)\*
- Perseverance** (18.3%)\*

\*% of campers who selected this as one of their top three strengths grown at camp.

## Finding #2

**The development of specific character strengths were associated with a positive social environment and experiences at camp** (leadership, kindness, teamwork) while the development of other character strengths (fairness, judgement and curiosity) were associated with negative social experiences and other strengths (responsibility, courage, perseverance, respect, gratitude) were not associated with the social environment at camp.

## Finding #3

**There were no differences in which character strengths youth selected based on camp exposure** (weeks or years attended) but high school campers were more likely than chance to select leadership (*ASR* = 4.9) and zest/enthusiasm (*ASR* = 4.0), and less likely than chance to select creativity (*ASR* = -4.0) and fairness (*ASR* = -3.7) ( $\chi^2s > 13.54$ , *ps* < .001).

**Implications for Practitioners:** Results suggest that the development of some character strengths may be dependent on the camp environment. Camp leaders can help youth to develop the character strengths of **leadership** and **teamwork** by intentionally creating environments and experiences that foster belonging, acceptance, and friendship. Results suggest that camps that want to develop **kindness** as a strength can create opportunities, structures and activities that help campers to be nice to those who they don't consider to be their friends at camp and can focus on the value of social inclusion.



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## **FROM CAMP TO THE CLASSROOM: RESIDENTIAL SUMMER CAMP COUNSELING AND TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY**

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High levels of teacher self-efficacy are positively correlated with more job satisfaction, less burnout, and a greater commitment to the profession (Zee & Koomen, 2016). While Bandura (1978) identified four sources of efficacy expectations, individuals are most profoundly shaped by mastery experiences. In real, authentic settings, teachers are able to test and evaluate their capabilities, and build their confidence, or self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009).

Despite the parallels between schools and camps, and the transferable skills gained from working at camps, there is no research on camp counseling as a source of teacher self-efficacy. Working at camp equips counselors with competencies that they may not have the opportunity to develop in other environments, including social-emotional and leadership skills (Duerden et al., 2014; Povilaitis et al., 2021). Camp is a distinct landscape for learning experiences, specifically relationship skills (Wilson et al., 2019). Huang, et al., (2020) found teacher self-efficacy in teacher-student relationships was a much stronger predictor of teachers' outcomes than teacher self-efficacy in classroom teaching. Taking on a multidimensional view of teacher self-efficacy, the purpose of this 2-phased, mixed-methods study was to examine the relationships between overnight camp counseling experiences and teacher self-efficacy/relational efficacy in teacher-student relationships.

### **Methods**

During Phase 1, a 32-item survey was distributed via social media and convenience sampling. All participants ( $N = 60$ ) were current K-12 teachers who had worked at an ACA accredited overnight camp for four or more weeks. The survey included both the Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) and the Teachers' Relational Efficacy Scale (Robinson, 2020). Participants were asked about their camp counseling experience (weeks worked, living environment, and skills taught), and basic demographic information including grade level currently teaching, age, gender, race/ethnicity, and years of teaching experience. Survey data were used to determine if there was a significant difference between accredited overnight camp counseling experiences and teacher self-efficacy/relational efficacy in teacher-student relationships.

Using a sequential explanatory design model (Creswell et al., 2003), quantitative data were used to inform semi-structured interview questions and Phase 2 participant selection ( $N=9$ ).

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, and sought to answer the final research question: In what ways do teachers' perceive a relationship between their accredited residential summer camp counseling, teacher self-efficacy, and/or relational efficacy in teacher-student relationships?

### **Results**

The Phase 1 survey revealed differences in overall teachers' self-efficacy, efficacy in classroom management, efficacy in instructional strategies, overall teachers' relational efficacy, efficacy in designing relationship building activities, and efficacy in building relationships with struggling students based on the duration of participants' camp counseling experiences. While not significant, efficacy levels were higher for those who lived with campers in a shared space.

During Phase 2, participants attributed their relational skills and self-efficacy working with/supervising children to their residential camp counseling experiences. Themes that emerged

from the interviews included relationship building as a tool for classroom management, the ability to maintain consistency with rules and boundaries in the classroom, the ability to adapt and improvise, the ability to differentiate instruction and offer choice, increased confidence in understanding the needs of children, and the implementation of team building activities in the classroom.

### Discussion

This study supported current literature identifying camp as a place for developing social-emotional and interpersonal skills (Wilson et al., 2019). Across different efficacy measures, participants attributed their efficacy to skills they learned as counselors.

Camp counseling may provide pre-service teachers with a unique opportunity to gain practical skills and cultivate teacher self-efficacy and relational efficacy in teacher-student relationships. Building relational efficacy in teacher-student relationships demands hands-on experiences, and teacher preparation programs do not adequately offer those opportunities to students (Clark & Newberry, 2019).

While camps and schools are the two largest social institutions serving children in the U.S., informal learning environments, such as camps, are often overlooked when it comes to educational reform (Russel et al., 2013). In the future, expanding camp-school partnerships to support pre-service teachers may extend the benefits of current partnerships.

Because camp is a value-clarifying experience (Warner et al., 2023), there may be some bias when evaluating group differences. Participants who chose to work at an overnight camp for a longer duration may have done so because the experience affirmed their desire to work with children. The demographics of participants reflected current teaching and camp counseling demographics; consequently, participants may not be representative of all in-service teachers.

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# From Camp to the Classroom: Residential Summer Camp Counseling and Teacher Self-Efficacy



The purpose of this two-phased, mixed methods study was to identify if there is a significant difference between residential summer camp counseling experience and teacher self-efficacy/ relational efficacy, and to explore the specific sources of teacher self-efficacy/relational efficacy within the camp counseling experience.

## Phase 1

### Methods

Quantitative Data  
32-item online survey  
60 teachers with 4+ weeks of overnight camp counseling experience  
Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001)  
Teachers' Relational Efficacy Scale (Robinson, 2020)

### Results

Significant difference in teacher self-efficacy based on weeks worked ( $p = .028$ )  
4-7 weeks as a counselor ( $M = 3.67$ )  
8-11 weeks as a counselor ( $M = 4.67$ )  
12-23 weeks as a counselor ( $M = 4.73$ )  
24+ weeks as a counselor ( $M = 4.67$ )  
Significant difference in teacher self-efficacy based on living environment ( $p = .010$ )  
Shared space with campers ( $M = 4.96$ )  
Did not live with campers ( $M = 4.0$ )  
Significant difference in relational efficacy based on weeks worked for two relational efficacy items:  
Designing relationship building activities  
Building relationships with struggling students

## Phase 2

### Methods

Qualitative Data  
Semi-structured interviews  
9 teachers  
Thematic analysis of data

### Implications

Encourage camp/credential program partnerships when hiring seasonal staff  
Encourage undergraduate students considering a career in education to work at a camp.  
Build relational efficacy in teacher preparation program.

## Purpose

## Phase 2 Themes

### Relationship Building in the Classroom

"I knew that I wanted to connect with my students, build relationships, and start to create a family atmosphere in my class like I did at camp."

"...at camp we always do highs and lows. We do that every week in my classroom."

"I taught everyone [in my class] how to make friendship bracelets and we did a whole friendship bracelet exchange."

"In my classroom, we do a 'camp week.' It's a whole week at the beginning of the school year of teamwork activities."

### Differentiating Instruction & Offering Choice

"I didn't know it at the time, but when I was being trained on running activities, I was being trained on how to teach a lesson and how to differentiate for all my students."

### Understanding the Needs of Children

"One of the ways that I feel like I stood out during my credential program is that there was no learning curve for me for [relational aspect of teaching]...I didn't really have any hesitation when it came to knowing kids, knowing their needs, and establishing trust."

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## **USING PHOTOVOICE TO EXPLORE SENSE OF BELONGING AT A MEDICAL SPECIALTY CAMP**

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Children and youth with serious health concerns often face challenges due to their illnesses, including greater prevalence of anxiety and depression (Adams et al., 2019) as well as reduced social connections and limited independence. The serious impact of childhood illness highlights the need for therapeutic interventions. Overnight medical specialty camps can support positive development for children living with serious illnesses. Positive outcomes of these camps include improved self-perceptions (Odar et al., 2013) and social functioning (Wu et al., 2016).

Several studies have used photovoice to explore the outcomes of camp for children with serious illnesses. Photovoice is an interactive research method that allows participants to share personal narratives through photography (Wang and Burris, 1997). Photovoice has been used to demonstrate how camp can be a beneficial social outlet for children with sickle cell disease (Stegenga et al., 2013) and foster increased self-confidence (Bultas et al., 2015). However, while these studies highlight the psychosocial benefit of overnight camp for children with chronic illnesses, they do not assess the participants' sense of belonging to these communities.

The study objectives were: 1) explore adolescent campers' experience of a sense of belonging at a medical specialty camp; 2) identify promising practices for creating a sense of belonging for adolescents with chronic illnesses.

The study's theoretical foundation was Developmental Relationships (Search Institute, n.d.). The theory outlines five tenets of impactful relationships leading to thriving and resilience for adolescence: express care, challenge growth, provide support, share power, and expand possibilities. We explored the impact of these developmental relationship tenets on adolescents' experiences of a sense of belonging at The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp (THITWGC).

### **Methods**

Quinnipiac University's IRB and THITWGC granted study permission. Following parental consent, an in-person information session was held at the beginning of each of two camp sessions with the researchers, camp staff, and potential study participants (19 enrollees in the Junior Staff program). During the information session, the researchers provided detailed instructions to capture images to reflect sense of belonging at camp. Participants learned ethics of photo-taking i.e. not taking identifying photos of themselves or other campers. Participants borrowed instant film cameras. Five prompts guided participants: 1) What makes you feel like you belong? 2) When/where do you feel included? 3) What does friendship mean to you? 4) Where do you feel like you can be yourself? 5) What makes a community?

At the end of each session, we held and recorded a 90-minute focus group. Going through each prompt, we laid out the corresponding photos. We aimed to create a comfortable environment, giving participants 5-10 minutes to journal reactions to the first prompt and their individual photo. Participants were then invited to share their reactions aloud with the group. Focus group audio files were transcribed and data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Initial codes were generated using data from the journals. Codes were grouped into themes, which were used to analyze the focus group audio files.

Although none of the researchers had childhood chronic illness, all have been involved as volunteers and/or staff of THITWGC and have a personal and professional interest in this topic

and population. The research team also brings social identity diversity through their lived experiences, which helped them observe patterns and nuances in the data.

## **Results**

Four themes emerged from the participants' journals and focus group discussions that reflected a sense of belonging at camp.

*Bonding through vulnerability and acceptance:* Participants reported experiencing comfort and support at camp, fostering empathy and relationship development through similar health backgrounds. Many participants emphasized that this experience was unique to camp, contrasting with feelings of loneliness and exclusion in their daily lives. A deaf participant wrote, "This is a place I feel I can just be free to let my true colors shine and not muffle my laugh. I know no one is judging me for laughing loudly." Camp provided a rare environment where participants could openly discuss their illnesses without constant questioning.

*Building a diverse and inclusive community:* Participants described how campers and staff capitalized on their differences and diverse backgrounds to work towards a common goal of fostering "camp magic." One participant shared a picture of colorful hearts hanging in the dining hall and said, "It represents how everyone has different paths and different struggles they've gone through. But we all unite with love for camp, like [when] the staff and the campers combine, the power of camp just takes over." Participants emphasized that while most of their stories have common themes, each of them brings a unique perspective to contribute to the community.

*Growth through experiences at camp:* Study participants discussed stepping outside of their comfort zones and growing through experience with support and without pressure. Referring to dancing in the dining hall, one study participant shared that "Even if [the campers are] like scared at first, I feel like once everyone pulls in and starts dancing, that's when you kind of forget all your feelings and feel like you belong." Participants discussed how taking healthy risks nourished personal growth and self-expression.

*Leadership:* More than 50% of the summer staff at THITWGC were former campers (personal communication, THITWGC staff). One participant journaled, "I also now get to make the difference on campers' lives that other counselors made on mine by helping them all feel included. It's like a full circle moment." By participating in a leadership program at camp, study participants had the opportunity to give back, reinforcing a continued sense of belonging.

## **Discussion and Implications**

The THITWGC community fostered belonging through shared experiences, acceptance, and developmental relationships. Four themes emerged: bonding through vulnerability, building an inclusive community, growth through camp experiences, and leadership development. Shared experiences form the foundation of strong communities (Jolly et al., 2019). By emphasizing Developmental Relationships, THITWGC cultivated a sense of belonging that can benefit adolescent development.

Photovoice was effective in eliciting adolescents' feelings of belonging, allowing them to express vulnerability and connect over shared experiences. This method can also aid camp professionals in understanding and strengthening their communities.

Implications for practitioners include using photovoice to encourage reflection in adolescent campers. This adaptive approach allows for authentic expression through verbal and non-verbal media, revealing the potential impact of camp experiences. Future studies can further explore strategies for building developmental relationships.



Our study demonstrated the efficacy of photovoice in exploring adolescents' sense of belonging at a medical specialty camp, highlighting the importance of meaningful camp experiences for adolescents with chronic illnesses.

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| <p><b>INTRODUCTION</b></p> <p>Study objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Explore adolescent campers' experience of a sense of belonging at a medical specialty camp</li><li>2. Identify promising practices for creating a sense of belonging for adolescents with chronic illnesses</li></ol> | <p><b>PHOTOVOICE PROMPTS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What makes you feel like you belong?</li><li>• When/where do you feel included?</li><li>• What does friendship mean to you?</li><li>• Where do you feel like you can be yourself/included?</li><li>• What makes a community?</li></ul> | <p><b>Building a diverse and inclusive community</b></p> <p>"It represents how everyone has different paths and different struggles they've gone through. But we all unite with love for camp, like [when] the staff and the campers combine, the power of camp just takes over."</p>  <p>Two campers stand in a warm embrace.</p> <p><b>Growth through experiences at camp</b></p> <p>Referring to dancing in the dining hall, "even if [the campers are] like scared at first, I feel like once everyone pulls in and starts dancing, that's when you kind of forget all your feelings and feel like you belong."</p>  <p>Staff and campers congregate outside the dining hall before a communal meal.</p> <p><b>Leadership</b></p> <p>"I also now get to make the difference on campers' lives that other counselors made on mine by helping them all feel included. It's like a full circle moment."</p>  <p>Junior staff members standing together.</p> | <p><b>DISCUSSION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• By emphasizing Developmental Relationships, THITWGC cultivated a sense of belonging that can benefit adolescent development.</li><li>• Photovoice was an effective tool to explore adolescents' sense of belonging at a medical specialty camp.</li><li>• The photovoice modality helped adolescents express vulnerability and connect over shared experiences.</li><li>• This study highlighted the importance of meaningful camp experiences for adolescents with chronic illnesses.</li></ul> | <p><b>Implications for practitioners:</b></p> <p>Using photovoice to encourage reflection in adolescent campers.</p> <p>This adaptive approach allows for authentic expression through verbal and non-verbal media, revealing the impact of camp experiences.</p> <p>Future studies can further explore strategies for building developmental relationships.</p> | <p><b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b></p> <p>QUINNIPAC UNIVERSITY IRB PHOTO CODE #11223<br/>THE HOLE IN THE WALL GANG CAMP, SERIOUSFUN CHILDREN'S NETWORK</p> | <p><b>CONTACT INFORMATION</b></p> <p>NOEL SHAPIRO-FRANKLIN@QUINNIPAC.EDU<br/>MEGAN.CORTES@QUINNIPAC.EDU</p> |
|  |  | <p><b>REFERENCES</b></p>   |   |  |   |   |
|  |  | <p><b>RESULTS</b></p> <p><b>Bonding through vulnerability and acceptance</b></p> <p>"Making friends here is very different than at home... we all walk in here and we're like, 'okay, we're about to be best friends.'"</p>  <p>Junior staff members form a circle around a Paul Newman pillow. Hands depict "I love you" in ASL.</p>  <p>Junior staff members holding hands.</p> <p>"This is a place I feel I can just be free to let my true colors shine and not muffle my laugh. I know no one is judging me for laughing loudly."</p>  |   |  |  |   |
| <p><b>METHODS</b></p> <p><b>IRB Approval</b></p> <p>IRB approval was granted by the Quinnipiac University IRB.</p> <p><b>Photovoice</b></p> <p>Using instant film cameras, participants were instructed to take a single photo in response to five prompts.</p>  |  | <p><b>Focus Groups</b></p> <p>On the fourth day of each session, we conducted a two-hour focus group with all of the participants. Participants were asked to journal and verbally share their reactions to each of the five prompts.</p> <p><b>Data Analysis</b></p> <p>We used the participants' journals along with the focus group transcripts to create a codebook for further data analysis.</p>  |   |  |  |   |

# **ALIGNING VALUES AND EXTENDING IMPACTS INTO THE HOME AT CHRISTIAN CAMPS**

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A growing body of research has demonstrated that overnight summer camps have consistent and lasting impacts on participants (Thurber et al., 2007, Wilson et al., 2019). Camps with different program priorities share many outcomes, but they also specialize in specific areas, in which they show greater impact (Warner et al., 2021). Recent research has also suggested the importance of camp impacts as part of a larger developmental ecosystem, alongside settings like school and the home (Spielvogel et al., 2022). Faith-based camps offer settings that are both specialized and frequently connected to a supportive ecosystem that includes houses of worship and family faith transmission, resulting in outcomes common across all camp types as well as unique faith-based outcomes (Sorenson, 2018). This provides an ideal setting to explore the unique impacts of camp in the context of a developmental ecosystem. This study examined the impacts of Christian camps on family practices among camps that prioritize connection to their supporting faith networks.

This prioritization is important because strong connection with partnership organizations has the potential to reinforce learning. Christian camps differ in their degree of connection to Christian teachings and institutions (Sorenson, 2021), so this study selected camps with strong connections and faith teachings integrated into their programming to isolate the influence of parent intentions and faith support. It is well-established that parents are the most important influence on child/adolescent faith development (Smith 2005), with regular practices like conversations between parents and children about God/faith among the most influential in faith development and retention (Smith & Adamczyk, 2023).

The Rhythms of Faith Project is investigating overnight camp's role as a catalyst for family faith formation. The exploratory phase (2024) investigated promising strategies of Christian summer camp that influenced faith practices in the home. In order to get a diverse representation of Christianity and draw insights from different traditions, three distinct Christian traditions were included (Lutheran, United Methodist, and Evangelical). A survey of camp directors and follow-up interviews of 20 directors identified promising strategies in six thematic categories, which included partnership with local church leadership and directly equipping parents before, during, and after camp. Researchers identified 11 camps with a combination of the promising strategies for further investigation, including site visits, focus groups, and surveys of camper parents. This study examines the camper parent responses.

## **Methods**

The parent survey was a cross-sectional, retrospective analysis examining connections between camp goals and perceived impact on family faith practices. The study explored parent perceptions of camp as a component of their children's faith development and their understanding of camp's role in equipping them in family faith formation. The study explored several intervening factors, including number of children attending, repeat attendance, parental camp involvement, and participation in supplementary programs.

The selected camps distributed a survey link in spring 2024 to camper parents from the previous summer (2023), meaning at least nine months had passed since their child's camp experience. A total of 1,233 valid responses were collected. Many survey items used Likert-type questions, with agreement, importance, and frequency scales. Since many of the resulting

distributions were non-normal, researchers used nonparametric tests (Mann-Whitney) to assess differences based on family experience and parent perceptions of camp.

### Findings

Respondents were predominantly mothers (84%) with one child enrolled in summer 2023 (59%) and had attended a Christian camp as a child themselves (68%). Respondents reported high levels of church involvement and personal faith, with 80% reporting regular church attendance (more than monthly) and 84% agreeing or strongly agreeing, “Faith in God is central to my daily life.” Respondents identified consistent impacts of the camp experience, with 94% agreeing that it is clear camp had a positive impact on their child, 88% that their child grew in self-confidence, 89% that their child was strengthened in faith, and 68% that their child showed greater interest in attending church.

Most viewed camp as important for faith formation: 84% agreed or strongly agreed that “Christian summer camp is an important tool in faith formation” and 64% indicated that “Equipping families” should be a very or extremely important goal of camp. Though rated as quite important, the goal of equipping families was rated significantly less important, on average ( $M = 3.82$  on a 5-point scale), than having fun ( $M = 4.62$ ), growing in faith ( $M = 4.57$ ), strengthening character ( $M = 4.53$ ), making friends ( $M = 4.43$ ), and trying new things ( $M = 4.28$ ), all at the level  $p < .001$ .

There were significant differences in agreement with “Christian summer camp is an important tool in faith formation” based on several factors (comparing means using the Mann-Whitney test). Respondents with multiple children attending reported significantly higher agreement than those with one child ( $p < .05$ ), as did respondents whose children were returning after a previous experience compared with those there for the first time ( $p < .001$ ). Finally, respondents that had participated in a supplementary camp program (e.g., Family camp or retreat) had significantly higher agreement than those who only participated in summer camp ( $p < .001$ ). There were no significant differences seen in respondents’ rating of “Equipping families” as a goal of the camp experience based on these factors.

Among eight family practices assessed in the survey, parents most consistently identified impact of camp on “Conversations about God” (30% indicated “a good amount” or “a lot” of impact, with an additional 28% indicating “a moderate amount”). Considering all eight practices, 45% of respondents indicated camp had “a good amount” or “a lot” of impact on at least one. Parent perspectives on camp’s role corresponded with increased impact. Respondents who reported that equipping families was a very or extremely important goal of camp were 1.5 times more likely to report that the camp experience had impacted at least one practice, while respondents that strongly agreed that camp was an important tool in faith formation were 2.5 times more likely to report that the camp experience had impacted at least 1 practice. Increased dosage was also associated with more frequent reported impacts. Those with multiple children attending (compared with only one) and those who had at least one supplemental camp experience were 1.33 times more likely to report that camp impacted at least one practice.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) considered experiences at camp during the summer as a “very” or “extremely important” factor in their family’s engagement in faith practices. On average, this was a significantly less important factor than their personal faith, their child’s faith/initiative, and their local church’s support ( $p < .001$ ). However, this was reversed among families with the lowest levels of faith commitment (less than monthly frequency for church attendance, mealtime prayer, and conversations about God). Among these families,

summer camp experiences were considered the most important factor, on average, for family faith practices (significantly more important than the other three factors).

### Discussion

These findings present a complex picture of parental perceptions of the role of Christian summer camps alongside supporting networks (specifically among camps that prioritize these partnerships). Respondents viewed camp as highly impactful, but they generally regarded it as supplemental to other experiences and influences. The gap between parental value of camp and parental goals for camp suggests a need for increased parent education and training, both in faith formation and in the role, purpose, and potential of Christian summer camps. It is possible that higher parental expectations of camp as a tool for impact increased their desire to reinforce these impacts in the home, facilitating lasting outcomes. More research is needed to confirm this, since the data are cross-sectional, and it is possible that parents observing greater impacts were more likely to identify camp as an important tool for impacting campers in faith and equipping parents. Regardless, it is evident that parents desired to be equipped.

Additionally, those with the highest levels of faith commitment and frequency of family practices tended to regard camp's role as important but less so than other influences on faith practices. When camp was the most important factor, existing faith practices and commitment measurements were lower. This suggests that camp has different outcomes and is perceived differently, based on family background and church connections. It also suggests that camp functions most effectively as a supplemental factor in faith formation rather than the primary source.

Finally, increased dosage (multiple children, previous camp experiences, or supplemental programs) was associated with greater perceptions of camp's importance to formation and greater perceived impacts, a finding different from Spielvogel et al. (2022) but in support of Botting (2023). This complicates the discussion in camp research and warrants further investigation. This increased dosage did not significantly impact the perceptions of camp's role in equipping parents, adding further support to the above conclusions.

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# Aligning Values and Extending Impacts into the Home at Christian Camps

Jacob Sorenson (Sacred Playgrounds), Rachael Botting, Rob Ribbe (Wheaton College)



## INTRODUCTION

The Rhythms of Faith Project is a 5-year, nationwide, cross-denominational initiative seeking to empower parents and caregivers in family faith formation by leveraging the power of camp experiences. The first phase of the study identified promising strategies for influencing faith in the home through surveys, focus groups, and site visits.

## METHODS

**Selection:** United Methodist, Lutheran (LOM), and CCCA (Christian Camp and Conference Association) invited to participate. 75 director responses, with 20 follow-up interviews. 11 camps chosen for promising strategies.

**Parent Survey:** Camps distributed in May 2024 to parents from previous summer, yielding 1,233 responses. Averages compared using Mann-Whitney.

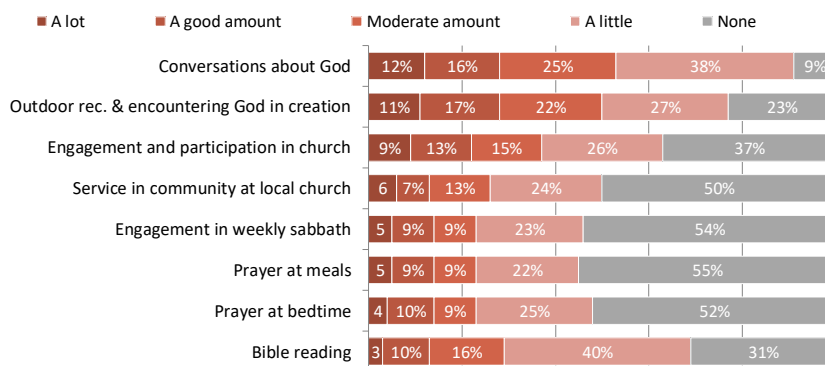
## LESSONS TO SHARE:

- ❖ Most respondents had high personal/family faith & agreed camp should have an important role in their children's faith development.
- ❖ Parents who saw camp as an important tool for family faith formation were more likely to report impacts.
- ❖ Increased camp dosage was associated with more reported impacts.
- ❖ Home and church were generally considered more important than camp experiences for influencing family faith practices, except among families with low faith commitment.
- ❖ Parents generally identified moderate impacts that camp had on specific faith practices, with conversations about God/fait h most common.

## Most Responding Families Had High Faith Commitment



## Perceived Impacts of Camp on Family Faith Practices



45% of parents reported "a good amount" or "a lot" of impact on at least 1 of the above

## Impact of Increased Dosage

% of parents reporting "a good amount" or "a lot" of impact on at least 1 practice

Avg. agreement (6-pt): "Christian summer camp is an important tool in faith formation"

| FACTOR   |          | Practices | Avg Agree |
|--|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Number of times children attended camp         | Once     | 37%       | 5.06      |
|  | Multiple | 48%       | 5.33***   |
| Number of children who attended in 2023        | One      | 42%       | 5.19      |
|  | Multiple | 49%       | 5.37***   |
| Attended a supplemental program (e.g. retreat) | No       | 43%       | 5.19      |
|  | Yes      | 50%       | 5.39***   |

## Comparing Average Importance of Faith Influencers

1—not important, 2—a little important, 3—moderately important, 4—very important, 5—extremely important

| High Family Faith Commitment<br>n=787 | Factors Impacting Family Faith                | Low Family Faith Commitment<br>n=90 |
|---------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| 4.67***                               | Parent's personal faith commitment/initiative | 3.01                                |
| 4.38***                               | Child(ren)'s faith commitment/initiative      | 3.13                                |
| 4.21***                               | Your local church's support and initiative    | 2.58                                |
| 3.83                                  | Experiences at camp during the summer         | 3.61                                |

Independent samples t-tests were significant at  $p < .05$  (\*),  $p < .01$  (\*\*), and  $p < .001$  (\*\*\*)

2025 ACA Camp Research Forum, Dallas, TX



## **CLIMATE CHANGE AT CAMP: A GEO-SPATIAL APPROACH**

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Climate change poses an escalating risk to people, infrastructure, and wildlife. Despite abundant scholarship, communication and action on climate change remains fragmented. Out-of-school (OST) programs, like summer camps in or adjacent to outdoor environments, are particularly vulnerable to these risks. While global warming is often the threat that most quickly comes to mind when discussing climate change, changing weather patterns like increased rainfall, drought, or wildfires can also limit opportunities for outdoor recreation, which affects youth program operations as well as youth participant's ability to recreate during their time away from camp. Climate change is a multifaceted issue and creates problems from both scarcity and abundance perspectives (e.g., too much and too little rain are related to climate change). Climate change, while debated in popular media and heavily politicized in the U.S., is well-evidenced in the fields of environmental science and psychology. Given the wide variety of large-scale (e.g., global and regional), granular (e.g., census-track level) datasets amassed and collected by non-governmental organizations, international research organizations, and non-profit organizations, I used these datasets to answer: What are the projected impacts of climate change on summer camps in specific regions of the U.S.?

### **Methods**

Before examining climate change projections across the U.S., it's important to understand the application of these models. The Relative Concentration Pathway (RCP) models, RCP 4.5 and RCP 8.5, focus on human-led climate actions. According to the IPCC, climate change refers to measurable, long-term changes in climate properties. While the IPCC distinguishes between human and environmental causes, RCP models emphasize human impacts. Although this study doesn't explore these causes in depth, they offer a broader context for understanding climate change. RCP 4.5 assumes a reduction in emissions, leading to moderate impacts. RCP 8.5 assumes high emissions continue, causing more extreme weather events.

I downloaded LOCA model data from the Climate Solutions Hub (ESRI, 2021) for projections on days exceeding the 99th percentile for temperature and precipitation, and consecutive wet days, focused on the Early-Century period (2016-2045). After adding U.S. state boundaries, I used the clip tool in ArcGIS Pro to isolate the relevant states for each region. The ACA provided a list of accredited and member programs in the U.S., including camp names and addresses which I transformed to feature points. This information is also publicly available on the ACA website through the Find a Camp search feature. To visualize the data, I applied a heat map technique, aggregating occurrences within grid cells to show the intensity and variation of climate projections, providing a detailed interpretation of regional climate change patterns.

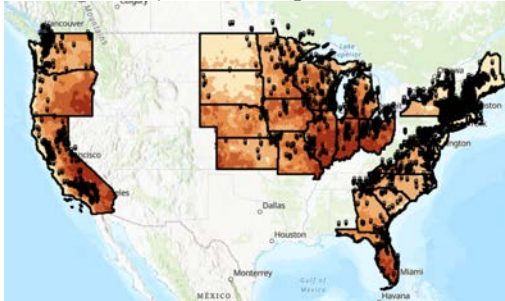
### **Results**

The West Coast includes ACA regions: Evergreen, Oregon Trail, Northern California, and Southern California/Hawaii. In regard to rising temperatures, this map investigated the annual number of days in which the maximum temperature projected to exceed the 99th percentile; a slightly more contextual data source than average annual temperature alone. These data highlight extreme weather (e.g., heat) events in context to the region, looking at previously recorded averages. California's projections in this context did not change from model RCP 8.5 to model RCP 4.5, reflecting an overall high trend of annual days with temperatures above the 99th

percentile. Both Oregon and Washington demonstrated slight trends between the two models, as Washington's projections increased slightly between RCP 8.5 and RCP 4.5, while Oregon's projections were opposite, with a slight decrease in number of annual days with exceedingly high temperatures. An increase in not only average temperature, but in overall days with exceedingly high temperatures could have devastating impacts on the region, not limited to heat-related illnesses and agricultural consequences.

Figure 1

*Map of Maximum Days with Temperatures above the 99th Percentile*



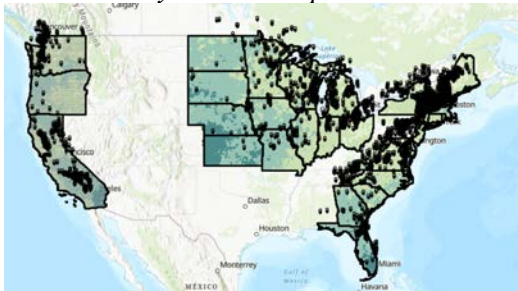
*Note.* The black markers indicate ACA-affiliated camps in the region(s), and the darker shades of red indicate greater amounts of days with temperatures above the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile.

The Midwest includes ACA regions: Northland, Great Rivers, Illinois, St Louis, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin. Regarding increasing annual temperatures, this map explored the annual number of days in which the maximum temperature projected to exceed the 99th percentile, based on historical data. The southern portion of the region exhibited a decrease in annual days of exceedingly high temperatures between RCP models 8.5 and 4.5, with the more ambitious RCP 4.5 model demonstrating the potential effects of more rigorous climate action. The East Coast includes ACA regions: Southeastern, Virginias, Chesapeake, New York & New Jersey, Upstate New York, and New England. This map explored increasing annual temperatures further contextualized by the annual number of days with temperatures exceeding the 99th percentile. This region indicated very little difference in annual days of exceeding temperatures, seen in the overall lack of color variation between RCP models 8.5 and 4.5. However, this finding is not a complete outlier, as coastal communities have historically been increasingly impacted by climate change. Full maps and supplemental materials available here:

<https://arccg.is/0Cnvr1>.

Figure 2

*Map of Maximum Days with Precipitation above the 99th Percentile*



*Note.* Darker shades of green indicate greater amounts of days with precipitation above the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile.

## Discussion & Implications

Camp directors and administrators working along the West Coast are unfortunately no strangers to climate change's devastating impacts, with the threat of wildfires limiting camp operations, and access to property insurance. These visualizations, while not intended to be alarming, do offer an excellent starting point for data-driven decision-making conversations regarding climate change at camp. The projections from these maps, with data projected until 2045, along with two climate models, demonstrate the complexity of climate change, and the need for a multi-faceted approach to climate action. Community-based solutions, in addition to collaborative efforts between local communities and government, offer the potential for climate resiliency, and support amongst changing weather patterns. Summer camps are uniquely poised as centers for environmental education, not only for youth and young staff, but for communities as well. In the off-season, camps should look into collaborations with local towns or cities. The connection between the climate crisis and other social issues is heavy, as the impacts of housing access are set to further exacerbate migratory strains from wildfires in the region (United States Global Change Research Program (USGCRP), 2023). Camp professionals are innovative community-builders, and climate action will require environmental adaptations along with social and economic changes, as an opportunity to care for campers, staff, and their families persists in the opportunity for climate action.

Camp directors and administrators working along the East Coast include myself and my home camp, and the inclusion of the consecutive wet days variable is directly tied to my personal experience at camp over the past few years, with increasingly wet summers in northeastern Pennsylvania impacting camp activities. A day of rain is manageable, but consecutive days of above-average rainfall limits our ability to operate our program at the level we (and our campers, and their parents), expect. While the maps do not offer much inspiration with regard to climate resiliency, as climate change's impacts on the East Coast remained largely unchanged between models and different variables, climate action is occurring in our region. The solution to climate change is not camp, but camp can be part of the larger solution for collaborative climate action, beginning with discussions amongst the industry on the impact of climate change our communities and programs are already facing, and looking to adjacent agencies for opportunities to combat these risks. As an industry predicated by time spent outdoors, climate change or the need for "green" behaviors can no longer be ignored, but highlight distinct threats to the survival of our business, programs, missions, and industry itself.

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# Climate Change at Camp: A Geospatial Approach

## WHAT ARE THE PROJECTED IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON SUMMER CAMPS IN SPECIFIC REGIONS OF THE U.S.?



### Aims

- Assess the projected impacts of climate change (e.g., extreme heat, precipitation) on summer camps in U.S. regions.
- Use geospatial data to inform camp decision-makers and climate resilience strategies.



### Data

- Climate Solutions Hub (ESRI, 2021) LOCA model data for RCP 4.5 (moderate emissions) and RCP 8.5 (high emissions).
- ACA-affiliated camp locations



### Methodology

- Analysis:
  - Focused on "maximum days exceeding the 99th percentile" for temperature and precipitation.
  - Visualized impacts using heat maps in ArcGIS Pro.
- Projections
  - Examined patterns for early-century (2016-2045) climate data across three U.S. regions.



### Results

#### Finding #1: West Coast

- Persistent high-risk areas, particularly in California, with little difference between RCP 4.5 and RCP 8.5 models.
- Implications: Increased days of extreme heat may impact camp operations, health, and insurance access.

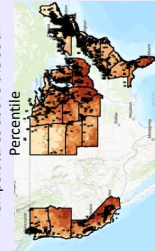
#### Finding #2: Midwest

- Southern areas show improvements under RCP 4.5, indicating benefits of emissions reduction.
- Implications: Encourages data-driven planning for climate adaptation.

#### Finding #3: East Coast

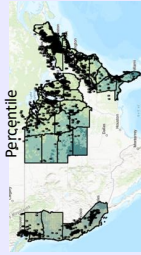
- Minimal variation in projections between RCP models for consecutive wet days.
- Implications: Extended rainfall disrupts camp activities, requiring contingency planning.

Map of Maximum Days with Temperatures above the 99th Percentile



Note: Darker shades of red indicate greater amounts of days with temperatures above the 99th percentile

Map of Maximum Days with Precipitation above the 99th Percentile



Note: Darker shades of green indicate greater amounts of days with precipitation above the 99th percentile

### Implications

As an industry predicated by time spent outdoors, climate change or the need for "green" behaviors can no longer be ignored, but highlight distinct threats to the survival of our business, programs, missions, and industry itself.



### Want more?

Check out this interactive StoryMap in ArcGIS!



### Authors

Katie Thurson, Matthew H.E.M. Browning, David White, Olivia E. McAnirlin, Clemson University & Kailan Sindelar, University of North Florida

# COMPARISON OF RETURNING VS NON-RETURNING CAMPER EXPERIENCES IN A FREE, MULTIYEAR PROGRAM

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Structured youth development programs (YDP) provide participants with opportunities to strengthen essential life skills (Nagaoka et al., 2015); however, an opportunity gap limits families with strained financial resources from accessing quality YDPs (Putnam, 2015). Researchers have used the Leisure Constraints Negotiation Model (LCNM) to understand barriers to accessing camp and found that beyond structural constraints (e.g., finances), intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints also reduce youth camp attendance (Wycoff et al., 2024).

Quality camp programs provide lasting benefits for youth and with greater time spent at camp, youth from low-income backgrounds experienced lasting impact and use of skills learned from camp (Povilaitis et al., 2023). It is therefore critical to increase and retain participation of youth from low-income backgrounds in multiyear camp programs.

Youth participatory action research (YPAR) involves working directly with youth to conduct research (Malorni et al., 2022). Elevating youth voice provides youth an opportunity to meaningfully contribute to programs that impact them. Few studies have used YPAR principles to examine youths' perspectives of camp. Therefore, understanding how youth from low-income backgrounds experience camp may inform staff behaviors/interactions that better support the needs of this population and encourage them to complete multiyear camp programs. We sought to understand: 1) How do youth from low-income backgrounds describe their experiences attending a free, multiyear summer camp program? 2) Why do youth from low-income backgrounds choose to return or not return to a free, multiyear summer camp program?

## Methods

Participants who formerly attended a free camp for youth from low-income backgrounds were recruited via email from one multisite camp organization. We recruited returning participants ( $n = 10$ ,  $M_{age} = 18$ , 20% Male, 40% White) from the organization's Youth Advisory Council, recently graduated campers who advise on organizational decisions. We recruited non-returning participants ( $n = 12$ ,  $M_{age} = 15$ , 50% male, 75% White) using administrative records of campers who completed at least one summer camp session but did not complete a camp application for summer 2023 or 2024. All participants are from low-income backgrounds.

Using YPAR principles (e.g., YAC contributing to the creation of study materials and providing feedback on protocol; Malorni et al., 2022), we collected data in two phases. First, participants created a journey map ( $n_{returners} = 10$ ,  $n_{non-returners} = 12$ ) to creatively depict components of their camp experience (e.g., registration). Second, the first author interviewed participants ( $n_{returners} = 5$ ,  $n_{non-returners} = 12$ ) using the journey map as a reference in semi-structured interviews.

We reviewed maps inductively to identify major themes and create an interview guide and initial codebook for phase two, which we used alongside thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and open coding to identify themes related to campers' experiences. The authors each separately coded five interview transcripts using the updated codebook and met to review coding discrepancies and decide on final codes. Additional themes arose through transcript review and negative themes were classified as constraints within the three major categories of the LCNM.

## Findings

We found a higher prevalence of positive themes (e.g., learning valuable life skills) among returning campers. Non-returning campers more frequently experienced negative themes (e.g., negative peer interactions). The only positive experience that non-returners reported more often was finding it hard to say goodbye to camp due to meaningful experiences and relationships. Non-returning campers may have enjoyed camp so much that they did not want the emotional burden of leaving in subsequent sessions. See Tables 1 and 2 for frequencies and example quotes.

Table 1  
*Positive Themes Discussed by Participants*

| Code   | Returner % | Non-Returner % | Example Quote  |
|--|------------|----------------|--|
| Learning Valuable Life Skills                    | 100%       | 75%            | "I am bilingual because of camp."*   |
| Building meaningful relationships                | 100%       | 92%            | "I grew closer to [cabin mates] each day."^  |
| Realizing Self-worth/Feeling Supported           | 100%       | 42%            | "I had counselors who believed in me...I gained a lot of confidence in myself."*                                 |
| Positive interactions with camp and staff        | 100%       | 100%           | "[Counselor] was nice, he would take me to play basketball and I'd tell him about my summer plans."^             |
| Hard to say goodbye                              | 40%        | 75%            | "I felt sad that I had to leave my friends and all those connections."^  |
| Gaining insights into future opportunities/paths | 80%        | 8%             | "When you keep going in level four, you're looking more at the counselors, because they're closer to your age."* |

**Note:** \* = Returner, ^ = Non-returner

Table 2  
*Negative Themes Discussed by Participants*

| Code Name                  | Returner % | Non-Returner % | Example Quote  |
|----------------------------|------------|----------------|--|
| Interpersonal Constraints  |            |                |  |
| Problems with Counselors   | 80%        | 83%            | "I feel like the counselors had their favorites."*       |
| Negative peer interactions | 40%        | 67%            | "[Campers] called me mean names and hit me with shoes."^ |
| Intrapersonal Constraints  |            |                |  |

| Code Name                | Returner % | Non-Returner % | Example Quote  |
|--------------------------|------------|----------------|--|
| Mentally overwhelmed     | 40%        | 42%            | “It was very tiring, being thrown into that environment again...I thought ‘I can't do it.’”^ |
| Structural Constraints   |            |                |  |
| Life Conflicts with Camp | 20%        | 67%            | “It was just not having time for both camp and work.”^                                       |

**Note:** \* = Returner, ^ = Non-returner

### Discussion

Results suggest that campers experienced positive and negative aspects of camp. The greater frequency of positive themes among returning campers aligns with research suggesting lasting benefits of multiyear camp programming (e.g., Povilaitis et al., 2023). Overall, findings highlight that youths’ choices to return to multiyear programs cannot be solely attributed to camp experiences and span all facets of the LCNM. Practitioners may consider strategies to support youth in overcoming common barriers to participation to reduce the opportunity gap.

Implications for camp professionals include considering integrating near-peer connections to allow youth to learn more about future opportunities. For example, having older campers provide tours to new campers on the first day of camp. Many non-returning campers cited “life conflicts with camp” as a barrier to continued participation suggesting that camp professionals need to support campers attending camp despite increasing school, relationship, and work-related conflicts. Such support may include writing letters to employers, financial incentives, and highlighting the professional value of completing a multiyear camp experience. This study serves as a launching point for camp YPAR and incorporates creative methods that allow youths’ perspectives to inform program improvement efforts. Future research may include replicating the study with a larger group and including parent insights to identify constraints to camp participation for this population.

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## Comparison of returning vs. non-returning camper experiences in a free, multiyear program

Carly Zylak, Western University; Victoria Povilaitis, Tim Hortons Foundation Camps; and Taylor Wycoff, University of California, Irvine

### Introduction

- Opportunity gap means youth from low-income homes have reduced access to positive developmental experiences
- Increasing and retaining participation in multiyear camp programs to reap established benefits is important
- Study purpose:
  - To understand and compare reasons why youth choose to return and not to return to cost-free multiyear camp

### Methods

- Youth participants represented two groups: 10 returning campers and 12 non-returning campers
- Two phase data collection: journey maps and semi-structured interviews
- Inductive thematic analysis; constraints were framed using Leisure Constraints Negotiation Model (LCNM)

### Findings

- All campers had mixed experiences at camp
- Constraints to returning were interpersonal, intrapersonal, structural
- Returners = more positive experiences
- Non-returners = more constraints

| Positive Themes                            | Returner | Non-returner |
|--|----------|--------------|
| Learning valuable life skills              | 100%     | 75%          |
| Gaining insights into future paths         | 80%      | 8%           |
| Constraints                                | Returner | Non-returner |
| Interpersonal – negative peer interactions | 40%      | 67%          |
| Intrapersonal – mentally overwhelmed       | 40%      | 42%          |
| Structural – life conflicts                | 20%      | 67%          |

### Discussion and Implications

- Youths' choices to return are not solely attributed to camp experiences, but span all facets of the LCNM
- Consider integrating more near-peer connections to allow youth to learn about future camp and life opportunities (e.g., leadership at camp, education, employment, leisure)
- Consider creative ways to support campers in returning to camp amid increasing school, relationship, and work-related conflicts (e.g., certificates of program completion, letters to employers, financial incentives)



**Eleanor P. Eells Award for Excellence in  
Research in Practice Posters**

# EVALUATION OF CORRELATION OF WOODCRAFT RANGERS PROGRAMS WITH SEL SKILL GROWTH

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## EVALUATION OF CORRELATION OF WOODCRAFT RANGERS PROGRAMS WITH SEL SKILL GROWTH

Helen Morales, Director of Camp Woodcraft | Katherine Eiler, MPH, Impact Manager

### Evaluation Aim/Purpose:

1. This study aimed to evaluate the relationship between program methods and SEL skill growth in children by analyzing data from pre- and post-tests administered to thousands of students in a school-year afterschool setting. By applying these findings, we sought to inform and enhance our approach within the shorter time frame and smaller population of a week-long sleepaway camp.
2. The study also aimed to identify what SEL skills the students most often struggled with and areas of strength to make effective program adjustments to better align with students' developmental needs and program goals.

### Methods:

1. 1,675 children ages 8-18 were surveyed with the Hello Insight SEL Youth Survey in the pre phase and 1,177 in the post phase, with 498 lost to follow-up. Participants were randomly selected from our 110-school site afterschool population across Los Angeles County, the same children were surveyed in February and May of the '23-'24 school year. Our sleepaway camp attendees are recruited almost exclusively from this population as well. Data collection was performed by Site Coordinators, after a one-hour training, and by the Impact Manager. Surveyed children were exposed to the same program ethos, structure, SEL focus, and often staff as sleepaway camp participants.
2. We measured proficiency in the following SEL skill domains: Self-Management, Academic Self-Efficacy, Social Skills, Mastery Orientation, as well as Contribution and Positive Identity for youth over age 11. We then measured differences in overall skill proficiency from pre-test to post-test.

### Findings:

#### Finding #1

Among youth ages 8-11, 86% had SEL skill growth in one or more skill domains. 52% had overall positive skill growth after exposure to our programming. Among youth age 11 and older, 94% had skill growth in one or more skill domain, and 62% had overall positive skill growth after exposure to our programming.

#### Finding #2

Our populations' strongest skills were consistently Social Skills and Academic Self-Efficacy. Youth struggled consistently with the Self-Management skill.



### Implications for Practitioners:

1. **Focus on Social Emotional Learning.** Integrate activities that support the five CASEL Framework domains. Examples include group work and team building exercises to build trust and collaboration, offering choice-making opportunities to foster autonomy, and activities like leading tasks or cleaning up after meals to enhance responsibility and self-regulation. These intentional practices promote holistic development and empower youth to thrive in all areas.
2. **Uplift Youth Voice.** Encourage active camper participation by empowering them to make choices about their camp experience. Regularly seek and incorporate their feedback to adjust activities and daily programming, ensuring accommodations are made in real-time and informing improvements for future sessions.
3. **Hire Diverse Staff.** To ensure equity and inclusion through culturally responsive practices, hire diverse staff who reflect the students you serve, providing representation across identities – race, gender, sexual orientation, body size, ability, etc., – and offering tailored support for neurodivergent youth and those with disabilities to create a thriving, relatable, and inclusive environment.

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# CAMPERS WITH VARIOUS MEDICAL ILLNESSES ARE FLOURISHING DESPITE THEIR MEDICAL CHALLENGES

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| Campers with Various Medical Illnesses are Flourishing Despite their Medical Challenges   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <div><div></div><div><p><b>Study Aim/Purpose</b></p><p>1. To understand the holistic well-being of adolescents with medical illnesses.</p></div></div>  |   |  |
| <div><div><p><b>Methods</b></p><p>1. Participants were adolescents aged 15-17 (N = 98). The following measures were used: (a) <i>Adolescent Flourishing Scale</i>, (b) EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-being, and (c) free response questions. Data was collected after camper attendance at a medical-therapeutic recreation camp in the Southeastern United States.</p><p>2. For Research Question 1, a comparison of means based on child diagnosis was conducted.</p></div></div>  |   |  |
| <div><div><p><b>Findings</b></p><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Campers with heart conditions demonstrated the highest overall Flourishing scores, specifically in Happiness and Life Satisfaction and Close Social Relationships.</li></ul></div></div>  | <div><div><p><b>Finding #2</b></p><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Campers with heart conditions scored highest on the EPOCH Well-being measure, specifically in engagement, optimism, connection, and happiness.</li></ul></div><div></div></div> | <div><div><p><b>Finding #3</b></p><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Oldest camper free responses revealed significant personal growth, enhanced social skills, and role-modeling behaviors.</li></ul></div><div></div></div> |
| <div><div><p><b>Implications for Practitioners</b></p><p>1. Though Adolescent Flourishing scores were relatively high, varying scores in Mental &amp; Physical Health suggest an opportunity to incorporate more wellness-focused activities and support systems, specifically for campers with cancer and gastrointestinal disorders.</p><p>2. Financial stability was also assessed, and camps might consider developing additional resources or partnerships to support families with economic challenges.</p></div></div> |   |  |
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