

## Joining Formal and Informal Jewish Education in Camping: A Unique Model of Cooperation Between Two Federation Agencies

Gerald A. Teller, Ed.D.

*Superintendent, United Hebrew Schools, Detroit*

*The camp experience for the formal educational agency opened new possibilities of informal Jewish educational programming such as high school retreats, family weekends, grade level camping experiences . . .*

There is a strong tendency in American Jewish education to promote the coordination of formal and informal Jewish education. This is not always possible for a variety of different reasons. One factor is the separate nature of the formal educational organizations and their institutional goals and directions. Moreover, the formal educational agencies tend to hire staff that are not capable of dealing with informal education. They look at Jewish education as the transmission of cognitive knowledge; Jewish knowledge is viewed largely as a set of skills which demand long hours in classroom situations. On the other hand, the communal camping movement, as opposed to the ideological camps such as Camps Ramah, Habonim Camps, Young Judea Camps, etc., are generally social-work-oriented camps. They do not always perceive themselves as the transmitters of Jewish culture nor as change agents in the complex process of Jewish identity. There is an unspoken tension between Federation supported camping agencies and communal educational agencies.

The Detroit Jewish community created a unique model in the 1981 camp season. A working relationship was developed between two Federation agencies, the United Hebrew Schools, a communally sponsored educational agency, and the Fresh Air Society's Camp Tamarack. The United Hebrew Schools is a formal educational agency which provides Jewish educational experiences from nursery school through

the Midrasha College of Jewish Studies. It serves a population of over 1,000 students. A major factor in the recent history of the school system is the declining number of students and the inability of the agency to reach out to the unschooled and unaffiliated Jewish student population. The Fresh Air Society's Camp Tamarack is a communally sponsored camp which serves a population of about 700 campers during the summer season. The camp, under the leadership of its current Executive Director,\* is dedicated to fostering a deeper awareness of Jewish life. The camp perceives itself as an agency which allows its campers and staff the opportunity to explore, in an open and free manner, their Jewish identity. The camp is dedicated to a Judaism in the philosophical framework of Franz Rosenzweig. It maintains a "not yet" Jewish position with regard to Jewish law. It is open to Jewish experiences without the binding effect of the Halachah. The camp has become increasingly Jewish in its programmatic content and in its desire to affect seriously the quality of Jewish life in the Detroit area. The camp also serves a 20 per cent population of students who are unschooled and whose parents are not members of synagogues in the Detroit area. The broadened goals of the camp and the unique population of the camp provided a unique opportunity for a new relationship between formal and informal Jewish educa-

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\* Mr. Michael Zacks

tion. The two agencies perceived that they could develop a relationship of mutual benefit.

The two agencies have cooperated for a number of years in a joint project called Kfar Ivri. Kfar Ivri is one of the villages at Camp Tamarack in Ortonville, Michigan. The village is a Hebrew speaking unit with a strong emphasis on Jewish educational and cultural content. The village provides a separate Jewish educational program and at the same time is also integrated into the full programming of the camp. The staff is committed to Hebrew and to Jewish cultural experiences. The camp, itself, has supported the Kfar Ivri and has continually pushed for a more intensive and creative Kfar Ivri experience. The United Hebrew Schools supervises the educational and Jewish cultural content of the Kfar Ivri, recruits the students and helps to provide the staff.

During the 1980-81 school year, the agency heads met to explore models of effective relationships. The camp needed an additional administrative staff person to work with the supervisory heads of individual camp units. The superintendent of the United Hebrew Schools, on the other hand, desired a setting to meet a potential student body and to become familiar with an increasing number of potential Hebrew School students. The two agency heads, for different reasons, did not want the superintendent of the United Hebrew Schools to be identified as the camp rabbi. This would eliminate his effectiveness in developing real relationships with the staff. It would also eliminate the burden of Jewish programming from the camp staff which was perceived by both agency heads as negative. The model developed, then, was that the superintendent of the United Hebrew Schools was to become a Maas Scholar-in-Residence with the specific responsibility of supervising village supervisors. In order to carry out his supervisory tasks, the superintendent of the United Hebrew Schools would have to participate fully in

village and camp life. In this way, he would be able to become aware of and known to large segments of the camp population. The supervisory model was also beneficial to the superintendent because it provided him the opportunity to help direct the Kfar Ivri program and to develop new goals for the future of the Kfar Ivri program.

The realities of the camp situation both modified and enlarged the model. The camp provided numerous opportunities for creative Jewish programming. First of all, the camp expects an Oneg Shabbat cultural experience Friday night, a Shabbat morning service and *chugim* (study groups) Shabbat afternoon. These occasions provide a time for creative Jewish cultural encounters and provided the campers with the opportunity of experiencing creative Jewish encounters. The superintendent of the United Hebrew Schools and his wife, Judy, became resources to the staff who felt uncomfortable with the Jewish content sessions. They were non-threatening facilitators of Jewish experiences. He was an exponent of Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel's philosophy of wonder, mystery and awe. The camp experiences were seen as opportunities of acknowledging the religious dimension in human experience. There were many counsellors and campers who saw Judaism in a new light for the first time. Thirdly, the camp provided opportunities for creative human encounters. There were problematic situations dealing with campers who needed an adult listening ear and an understanding person. The superintendent was around enough in village activities for campers to turn to him in moments of crisis. Moreover, there were many counsellors who were in search of a new way of life. The superintendent became a focal point for counsellors needing religious help, spiritual guidance and a learning situation. There was always a *kiddush* on Shabbat afternoon and a study session. These study sessions became a forum for the spiritual exploration of

human situations. The discussions on the Torah portion became an opportunity to discuss the religious dimension of life itself. Fourthly, the superintendent became a link to the Israeli staff. Camp Tamarack brings about twelve Israelis to the camp each summer. They are counsellors and supervisors of villages. They needed someone to interpret the American cultural experience to them in their native language. They needed help in dealing with problematic situations, understanding their supervisors, writing evaluations and participating in the multi-faceted aspects of a camp program. The superintendent created a bridge to the Israeli staff. Lastly, the role of the superintendent allowed people to view him as a real person. It is difficult for young Americans to conceive of a rabbi in jeans or in tennis shorts. This new image of the rabbi gave young people the courage to seek a new perspective on their lives and their problems. When the staff perceived the superintendent as a real person, who was concerned about their lives and their

problems, they were open to listen to him speak on the fullness of the Jewish tradition.

The unique cooperative model developed in the Detroit area provides a new model for both the development of a series of formal/informal educational experiences and indicates the tremendous possibilities present when two Federation agencies begin to cooperate with each other. The camp experience for the formal educational agency opened new possibilities of informal Jewish educational programming such as high school retreats, family weekends, grade level camping experiences, and so on. The relationship provided a meeting place for dealing with new adventures in the camping experience such as a Brandeis model camp in the Detroit area and other cooperative relationships which could raise the level of Jewish programming and Jewish identity among young people in the Detroit area. The relationship opened new possibilities to be explored in the future. The model itself was highly successful and should be replicated in other communities.