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# CITs: Counselors in Training and the Challenges in Transition A Leadership Case

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## Introduction

Students at the Rhea Hirsch School of Education are often asked to look back towards their formative moments in their Jewish education as a way to connect back to their own teaching, whether theoretically in the classroom or practically in the field. During my three years as a student at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), my reflective practice seemed to always include the countless moments at a Jewish summer camp that shaped me. I consider summer camps to be a staple of American Jewish culture, and personally find them fascinating.

It is for this reason that I was excited to work on this case. I wanted a fresh look into summer camps—how they are planned and operated, how effective they are at fulfilling their mission, and to hear real stories from the people who care about these places. This work allowed me to gain this perspective and challenged me to consider all the aspects of my learning from my tenure at HUC-JIR.

In the case that follows, you will read about the stories I collected from two Reform Jewish summer camps with counselor in training programs (CIT), the patterns that emerged, how these camps might improve these programs, and conclude with my reflections on the entire learning process.

## Rationale

During the summer of 2010, after seven summers of being a camper at my regional summer camp run by the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), I had the pleasure of being a Counselor in Training. In the summers leading up to that moment, I eagerly looked forward to the chance to be a part of this storied tradition and to feel that sense of pride and purpose as I gave back to the camp that had figuratively raised me and helped to form my Jewish identity. It was during that long-awaited summer as a CIT that I had a shift in my career aspirations. No longer was my goal to be an actor—now, I wanted to be a Jewish professional, a Jewish educator just like the countless examples of role models who led me through these impactful programs. Ever since, CIT programs have held a special place in my heart.

There already exists research on the impact of how Jewish summer camps have been effective at socializing young Jews and instilling within them a sense of Jewish pride and identity as well as a sense of duty among their most loyal attendees. Amy Sales and Leonard Saxe refer to these people as “homegrown staff”. These are former campers who “are committed to creating the same kind of community they enjoyed as campers” (Sales & Saxe, 2004, pp. 130-1).

This case explores how a sample of homegrown staff and newer attendees at Jewish summer camps were affected by their CIT experience. The case sheds light on the development of these staff, homegrown or not, as it relates to their experience of training to be a counselor. CIT programs provide both staff training and in-the-field experience as the CITs make the jump from camper to counselor (Sales & Saxe, 2004). The information uncovered by this case can be a resource for camp professionals looking to understand the impact of their CIT programs, to make adjustments to their program models, and to ensure their participants are getting the most out of the experience.

The research about Jewish summer camps already acknowledges the power they hold to inspire their attendees to formulate strong Jewish identities (Cohen et al., 2011; Reimer, 2012). Staff members immersed in the camp environment are provided a de facto professional development in which they are able to gain and hone skills while working in the summer (Zigmond, 2018). Research has also explained that the cabin, or bunk, is a zone of excellent character development. Since its nature encourages the residents—camper and staff—to be present and social, the needs of each person must be balanced and talked through (Orlow, 2019). This case will explore how each subject experienced that development within themselves, and how their expectations of the program aligned with the goals and objectives of the camps.

There is a rich history of Jewish summer camps in North America, and they have served as masterful community builders. The Jewish value of building a *k'hillah k'doshah* – a holy community – is exemplified in summer camps. This case adds a level of understanding into how camps might make their holy communities more effective in achieving their mission goals. The concept of *l'dor vador* – instilling Jewish practice from generation to generation – is essential as well. We see this value in Jewish text. In the Talmud, Tractate *Ta'anit* 23a, we read of Honi who comes across a man planting a carob tree. When Honi asks him how long it will be before the tree bears fruit, the man replies, “It will take seventy years.” Honi scoffs at the man, but the man explains that his ancestors planted trees that they never lived long enough to see bear fruit. The story continues with Honi falling into a deep sleep only to awake seventy years later. Honi sees a man gathering carob from the same tree and finds out that this man is the grandson of the man Honi had met before he fell asleep. The story aims to teach that we are asked to invest in future generations, even if we will not necessarily see the benefits ourselves. CIT programs are also investments in the future of a summer camp and it's not always clear who exactly is benefitting. This case explores how camps invest in their future by investing in the CITs.

Appendix 1.1 shows the 15 URJ Camps' objectives for their CIT programs based on their program descriptions. In looking at how these camps across North America craft their CIT programs, there

are many differences in how the camps design their programs. Some programs include a culminating experience where CITs become counselors, some include training in other camp capacities, and some put an emphasis on creating programming for the campers. The one piece that every program shares is building up the leadership skills of CITs. This raises the question on how each camp defines leadership and what the steps towards developing those skills might look like. In what ways do the camps train their CITs to be the best leaders for their specific camp and how might they train them to be leaders inside and outside the camp sphere? If a camp wants to connect the dots between camper and staff for their participants, how might each camp construct their program to address that need in a way that benefits the CITs and the camp itself? Further, does the camp's CIT strategy fit the needs of those who enroll in those programs? This case explores these questions while examining how two of the camps designed their CIT program and the effect that it had on their participants.

Camp is always going to be important to me, as it is important to so many other Jews in North America, Jewish professional or not. This case is a piece of work that takes that passion and channels it into a learning opportunity.

## The Case

This case addresses some overarching questions about CIT programs. The first question is who truly benefits from CIT programs? The broad title of these programs imply that they are established to train incoming counselors, but how much are these programs also a leadership incubator or professional skill seminar? Further, to what extent are these programs implemented to provide the camps with a steady stream of staff to fill the quota of adult supervisors in subsequent summers? How much of a CIT program is meant for the CITs themselves in their development?

Secondly, and similarly in terms of the aims of CIT programs, where are the objectives of camp leadership and CIT participant both in and out of alignment? If camps can articulate exactly what they believe the goals are for CIT, where might it match with the goals for the participants? What are CITs expectations before they begin the program? If a former camper has been homegrown at their camp and seen CITs before them, how does it color their experience once they are in the program?

The third set of questions looks to how camps may make their CIT programs even more successful in the future. By understanding the patterns that occur within CIT programs, and how the

leadership and participants shape it, what could we do to improve these programs to be mutually beneficial for the camps and the participants?

When this case began, there was a fourth set of questions that did not end up being a focus. This concerned just how the COVID-19 pandemic might have influenced the CIT programs analyzed in this case. Summer camps cancelled the in-person experience for summer 2020 and consequentially left an entire generation of would-be CITs without this transitional program. The questions surrounding this variable were about the ways that a staff member without a CIT experience might feel in their preparedness compared to someone who did go through their camp's training program. Ultimately, this variable was eliminated from the case because the broader questions about CIT programs would be more helpful to summer camps. It focuses on what the camps do when they operate normally rather than what they do when they cannot.

This case highlights four profiles of recent CIT alumni to address these questions. To collect data, camp directors and four of these recent alumni were interviewed (See Appendix 1.2 for protocol).

## The Camps

This case covers two Reform camps as these camps share a common umbrella organization and tend to share similarities in their structure and mission. They are both religious camps and share a common fiscal agent, the URJ. Further, the camps were chosen to investigate if there was something of note when comparing how long these camps with a CIT program have operated. If a camper grew up and viewed their CIT summer as a goal or part of their camp's history, how might their experience compare to that of someone who did not, or could not, fit that homegrown archetype. With that consideration, a legacy institution a newer camp were ideal subjects.

The legacy camp would have many years of campers transitioning to staff while the newer camp would only have a few summers to establish their culture for CITs. After considering options, two camps<sup>1</sup> agreed to be the focus of this case.

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<sup>1</sup> In this case, the two camps have individual titles for their Counselor in Training programs. When referring to one camp specifically, that camp's title will be used. When speaking generally about these programs, the acronym "CIT" will be used.

## Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute

The first Reform summer camp in North America, the Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute (OSRUI<sup>2</sup>) is located in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin—between the cities of Milwaukee and Madison. The inaugural summer welcomed campers in 1952 and serves as a regional summer camp for Jews in the Midwest and Great Lakes region, a majority coming from the Chicago metro area. OSRUI operates in the summer months from mid-June through mid-August. Campers from grades 2 through 12 attend for as few as two weeks and as many as seven weeks, while participating in a variety of activities from summer camp staples like arts and crafts, time on the lake, and archery while also participating in Jewish ritual and learning. As of the writing of this case, the camp is led by Executive Director Solly Kane and Camp Director Beth Rodin, both of whom are homegrown themselves as they grew up at OSRUI.

OSRUI's program model for CIT—known as Machon (the Hebrew term for “institute”)—is designed for recent high school graduates and is somewhat unique compared to other programs in the URJ camps. They are first-year staff who are hired by OSRUI, and they go through a summer-long training while actively working as in-cabin counselors. Machon participants (known colloquially as *machonikim*), are therefore paid to be a part of this training, unlike the majority of URJ camps (see Appendix 1.1) which offer pay-to-participate CIT programs. Solly Kane estimates that “almost all” *machonikim* are homegrown with roughly 95% having attended as a camper for multiple summers. In this summer, *machonikim* spend the first week going over general staff basics (camper care, how to get what you need, etc.) and then rotate within the various camper units. The program itself is led by the Machon Director; a position typically filled summer-to-summer. Historically, the training curriculum has been developed by the Machon Director each summer. OSRUI typically brings in roughly 30-45 *machonikim* each summer.

According to OSRUI leadership, the goals for their *machonikim* include helping them transition from camper to staff, giving them a glimpse into how OSRUI operates, and that they will walk away with some useful, personal, and professional skills (Beth Rodin mentions “personal advocacy” and “conflict resolution” within these skills). Both directors also see Machon as crucial to their institutional goal of keeping staff engaged summer after summer. Solly Kane states that “everything we do has an eye on retention” and Beth Rodin believes a “huge goal” is to have *machonikim* prioritize OSRUI when they consider future summer plans.

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<sup>2</sup> Acronym pronounced *os-ROO-ee*



## 6 Points Creative Arts Academy

Part of the 6 Points brand of specialty camps which the URJ established in the 2010s, 6 Points Creative Arts Academy (CAA) is a specialty camp located in West Chester, Pennsylvania on the campus of Westtown School. They welcomed campers for their inaugural summer in 2018. CAA campers entering grades 3 through 10 attend from all parts of North America for as few as two weeks up to the entire roughly two-month summer. The summer is divided into three individual sessions lasting two weeks and families can choose how many of these sessions to enroll their camper. Each participant explores various forms of expression including visual and performing art, music, and creative writing. During their summer experience, they sign up for a major and dedicate much of their daily schedule to developing those capacities under the direction of highly skilled arts mentors. The camp experience culminates with a showcase at the end of each session where campers perform and present their work for fellow campers and visiting family. As of the writing of this case, CAA is led by founding Director Jo-Ellen Unger.

CAA's program for CITs is called Gesher ("bridge" in Hebrew) and is a pay-to-participate programs for teens entering 11<sup>th</sup> grade. It was first implemented in the summer of 2019, the second operating summer. This is a four-week program—participants enroll for either session 1 and 2, or 2 and 3. In Gesher's first summer (2019), there were four participants, and in the second summer (2021) there were seven. During the summer, Gesher participants attend a major alongside other teenage campers and present during the end-of-session showcase like the typical campers. Gesher participants attend training seminars, known as Gesher Time, to build their capacities as a counselor and camp staff member, and to build professional skills as well. This has included resumé writing workshops and listening to guest speakers on leadership in previous summers. They do not solely focus on camper care during Gesher Time and rotate their participants through the programming and logistics teams to develop their skills in multiple aspects of camp life. These experiences are supplemented with moments where Gesher participants can shadow a counselor or a member of the logistics team to have experience in the field. Their training is led by the Gesher Director who is hired for each summer. The Gesher Director plans and leads the training sessions.

According to Jo-Ellen Unger, the goals for the Gesher participants include program alumni leaving with some of the counselor basics and with some personal and professional development, which she describes as "transformational growth". She also believes it's important that they see how camp works, and they should understand how making experiences for campers involves planning and clear communication. Unlike OSRUI, Jo-Ellen does not see staff retention as of high a priority. The more experienced staff at CAA include the highly skilled arts mentors, and she does not see developing Gesher participants into these roles as a goal for the program. However, she does hold

that there is an institutional goal that the leadership and arts skills be transferable to settings both in and out of the Jewish camp world as a whole. Jo-Ellen believes that having a Gesher alum take their skills to another camp, or another field, would be in alignment with the institutional goals. She remarks “If [we] could train a whole cadre of kids who could be the [arts] specialists in the [other URJ camps], *dayeinu*”.<sup>3</sup>

## Case Subject Profiles

I asked each camp for a list of potential case subjects who were recent alumni of their CIT programs and who the camps believed would be articulate and reflective about their experience. In the case of OSRUI, I wanted subjects who were homegrown, having attended as a camper for four summers or more. CIT Directors were not asked to be interviewed primarily because these roles are typically filled on a summer-by-summer basis and they build the training for the participants. This means that their goals can vary each summer, while the goals set by the institution can be more consistent.

### Ari – Machon 2019

Ari grew up in the northwestern suburbs of Chicago and began as a camper in his 3<sup>rd</sup> grade summer. It was seemingly the right camp for him because his parents met while at OSRUI, and his brother attended the camp as well. He would return summer after summer, staying for longer sessions as he grew up, to the point where he would say “*that’s* what I did in the summers”—go to OSRUI. Ari built strong connections and friendships with his fellow campers, and to some extent his counselors, as well as built a connection to Judaism. In the years where he was attending summer after summer, Ari saw OSRUI as the “center” of his Judaism.

Looking back, Ari recalls that the *machonikim* often were the staff that seemed “cooler” and “closer to the campers” and thinks it’s perhaps because they were younger than the more experienced staff members. However, he could not always distinguish who was a full-fledged counselor and who was training to become one in Machon.<sup>4</sup>

Ari was accepted into the Machon program, following his graduation from high school, in the summer of 2019. He came into the program alongside many close friends he had made throughout his camper years, looking forward to the next logical step in his OSRUI experience.

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<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew term for “it would have been enough”.

<sup>4</sup> According to the OSRUI Directors, this is an intentional choice in the design of the program. They see *machonikim* as wholly part of the staff team.

## Ezra – Gesher 2019

Ezra<sup>5</sup> grew up in Kansas. They had family living in Wisconsin and, because a family member of theirs went, attended OSRUI for approximately six summers. They didn't truly feel like OSRUI was a good fit for them primarily because it felt too strict. Ezra recalls feeling that being a camper at OSRUI focused on telling them "This is what's right, this is what's wrong, [these are the] places you *can* go, [these are the] things you *can* do". Once Ezra's family moved to Delaware, and OSRUI was no longer the convenient choice for a Jewish summer camp, they attended CAA in its inaugural summer of 2018 when they were an incoming high school junior. Ezra majored in dance and instrumental music, made many lasting friendships, and thought highly of the counselors. Compared to OSRUI, they found CAA to be a place where they "had more freedom" and a place where they "could do more of what [they] want" and "felt a lot happier" at CAA.

In that inaugural summer, CAA did not yet have their Gesher program. Ezra recalls being approached by camp leadership asking if they would be part of a new program the following summer. Ezra thought it was "cool to be asked to do that and have that opportunity to be [among] the first year of campers and the first year of Gesher.". Ezra registered to become a part of the first class of Gesher participants at CAA in the summer of 2019.

## Leah – Machon 2021

Leah grew up attending OSRUI for several summers, approximately eight, before her summer in Machon. She was a camper for a number of programs within the OSRUI summer including an introductory session for new campers, summers in cabins, summers in tents, as well as the Hebrew intensive program, *Chalutzim*. Leah recalls that, in her mind as a camper, the *machonikim* "were a lot older" than they truly were. Since she attended for two weeks at a time each summer, until her *Chalutzim* year, and the *machonikim* rotated sessions in that time frame, it wasn't always clear who was an experienced counselor and who was training to become one.

Prior to summer 2020, Leah spent a semester abroad in Israel<sup>6</sup> where she felt a "[connection] to Hebrew and to Judaism in a way that [she] hadn't before" which was "pretty different from [her] camp experience.". Leah saw that upcoming summer, which would follow her graduation from high school, as an opportunity to build on that growth in OSRUI's *Avodah* program. This is a pay-to-participate program which serves as the introduction to working for OSRUI. When the onset of COVID-19 closed OSRUI for the summer, Leah felt like she missed out on the chance to have "a

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<sup>5</sup> Ezra uses all pronouns and will be referred to using the singular they/them pronouns in this case.

<sup>6</sup> Leah did not mention which program she attended prior to summer 2020, only that she strengthened her Hebrew speaking abilities.

big ‘hurrah’ at the end of the year” and a “perfect transition” into college. To make up for this missed opportunity, she applied and was accepted into the Machon program for summer 2021 amid OSRUI’s push to make their first COVID-era summer happen as safely as possible.

### Ilana – Gesher 2021

Ilana’s Jewish summer camp story began shortly after she was born. Being a rabbi’s child, she went to her regional camp (in her case, URJ Camp Harlam in Kunkletown, Pennsylvania) from the age of 0 through 7<sup>th</sup> grade. In that time, Ilana never felt that Harlam was the right fit for her. For the summer leading into her 8<sup>th</sup> grade year, she attended CAA for its inaugural summer in 2018. Feeling that it was a much better fit for her, Ilana returned the summer of 2019 with the intention returning for subsequent summers. During her second summer, and CAA’s first summer with the Gesher program, Ilana recalls not knowing them well and not having a sense of what the program entailed apart from “seeing them around” and how once “they got donuts”.

Summer 2020 would have been Ilana’s third camper summer before entering 10<sup>th</sup> grade and it was cancelled at the onset of COVID-19. In that time, two significant changes in her schooling developed. First, she skipped a grade during the 2020-2021 school year, and second, she attended URJ Heller High in Israel, a residential study abroad program for high schoolers, in the spring of 2021. With this intensive program in Israel and the advancement in her grade level, she felt ready to take another challenge. Ilana registered for the 2021 Gesher class at CAA, beginning just one week after returning home from Israel.

## Identifying the Patterns

Each of these case subjects bring a unique perspective about their camp from the years leading up to their CIT summer. The following section explores how their experiences participating in their CIT programs can answer the overarching questions of this case. It implements the leadership model of the Four Frames. The Four Frames comes from thought leaders in organizational leadership Bolman and Deal (2017). They look at management through a model which is intended to coax a paradigm shift in leaders to think about their organizations in new ways—what they call “reframing”. Reframing is a useful strategy for leaders because challenges within an organization are rarely simple. Those challenges ought to be looked at through multiple angles and reframing gives four useful lenses to unpack them. They are the Structural, Human Resources, Political, and Symbolic/Cultural<sup>7</sup> Frames.

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<sup>7</sup> While Bolman and Deal title this frame simply as the “Symbolic Frame”, students at the Rhea Hirsch School of Education often include “Cultural” in the title because it analyzes how a culture is formed within organizations as much as what various symbols mean within them.

## The Structural Frame

Looking at this case through the Structural Frame requires looking at the institutions through the systems that the summer camps in question have built to reach their specific goals for CITs. The Structural Frame views an organization as existing to accomplish certain objectives and is therefore built accordingly. It is meant to breed efficiency by solving problems through specializing forces within and problems can then be fixed with an alteration to the structure itself (Bolman & Deal, 2017). This frame asks us to look at the hierarchy within our camp subjects and how it affects the processes and strategies used.

Machon and Gesher have a similar leadership structure: they are led by a director who is responsible for the crafting of the training curriculum and supervising the CITs. In the case of OSRUI, since the *machonikim* are in-cabin counselors, they are also overseen by a unit head. This director is not part of the full-time camp leadership. The case subjects from CAA tended to see themselves as close to their director with both Ezra (Gesher 2019) and Ilana (Gesher 2021) viewing their director as a major player in their experience during their Gesher summer. At OSRUI, while Leah (Machon 2021) viewed her director as a major player in her experience, Ari (Machon 2019) felt a closer connection to the unit heads.

The CIT directors for OSRUI and CAA act in the role of educator while they formulate the counselor training curriculum for their participants. This training takes place every day at both OSRUI and CAA. Training time is reserved for covering counselor basics, leadership strategies, professional skills, and debriefing experiences they had while working with campers. While reflecting on his experience, Ari (Machon 2019) remembers feeling that he was learning a lot in these sessions but struggled to recall the lessons when interviewed. He received a book by Faber and Mazlish<sup>8</sup> to supplement his training but said that the book was rarely used during his Machon summer. He often felt stressed because he was “not doing enough for the campers”. Leah (Machon 2021) did not enjoy the training because she saw those lessons as addressing hypothetical scenarios that rarely came up with her campers. Instead of dealing with camper homesickness and adjusting to routines, Leah found herself dealing with “mental health issues” that OSRUI “wasn’t willing to deal with head-on” including some of her campers self-harming or threatening to do so. She felt like she was unprepared to handle those challenges with her training alone. In these two scenarios,

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<sup>8</sup> Faber, A., & Mazlish, E. (2012). *How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk (The How To Talk Series)* (1st ed.). Scribner Book Company.

the training provided did not fully address their needs as beginner counselors once they were in the field and working with campers.

Both Machon and Gesher have experiences built into their programs where they are given a chance to work on skills covered in the trainings. *Machonikim* live in-cabin with campers and senior staff (OSRUI refers to the second-year staff and above as senior staff) while Gesher participants go through rotations which include shadowing the more experienced counselors in the bunks. Ilana (Gesher 2021), when reflecting on her time shadowing a more experienced counselor, said that she learned a lot in a short amount of time. She recognized the work of being a counselor was difficult at times when she witnessed the middle-school aged campers going through some “existential crises” before bedtime. She remembers watching how the counselors she shadowed attempted to calm them down before they went back to their rooms. Ilana recognized the responsibility that counselors must take on when acting in this role. Even though she found the moment to be stressful, it was one of the most impactful moments in her learning. In Ilana’s case, she found her learning from her field work to be longer lasting than the daily training sessions. Ezra (Gesher 2019) also shadowed counselors during their Gesher summer. They remember being put “in charge of the kids” for these short bursts and turning to the experienced counselors when they found a situation to be difficult. They would turn to the counselors “whenever [they] had a question about how to handle a situation...and [the counselor] would teach [them what to do]”. Ezra had a mentor beside them and was getting feedback in real time. In these two cases, their work with other counselors made more of an impact when it comes to their camper care capacities.

The daily training sessions and the work alongside experienced counselors is built into the structure of both CIT programs, but it seems that the latter is far more of an impactful learning experience.

### The Human Resources Frame

Viewing this case through the Human Resources Frame requires looking at it through the people involved, and how they are related symbiotically to the organization itself. In essence, the success of both parties means each satisfying the needs of the other. The people are therefore seen as a crucial element to running an organization—the humans are the most important resource. The Human Resources Frame asks us to think about everyone’s needs because the organization will suffer if the people it employs or serves aren’t happy (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Across the four case subjects, three primary needs emerged: first, to feel like they are prepared enough to become counselors; second, that they are getting some personal development or fulfilment from the

experience; and third, that they are still getting the enjoyable social interactions that they expect from any summer at camp.

We've already covered some of the difficulties that Ari (Machon 2019) and Leah (Machon 2021) had with their training curriculum not addressing enough of the challenges they had with their campers in the previous section. Even though they had those difficulties, they left the program feeling confident in other capacities. Ari left the Machon program with an appreciation of the role that counselors play, even going so far to describe being a counselor as "real Jewish communal professional experience". Leah left Machon confident in her skills in designing camp programs. Upon reflection, she believes that she gained the skills of how to structure an educational program, how to infuse Jewish content, how to keep her campers engaged, and how to redirect their attention if they get sidetracked. Ilana (Gesher 2021) and Ezra (Gesher 2019) felt a similar preparedness to take on being a counselor. Ilana explained that she feels "very prepared to work with kids" and is looking forward to the opportunity to be a counselor. Ezra explained that, while they felt confident in their camper care skills and that being a counselor would be a fun experience, they would be more interested in returning as an arts mentor. Each subject left the experience with that sense of accomplishment and new skills. This is an instance where the needs of the institution and the CITs themselves are in alignment. OSRUI and CAA want their program alumni to leave with the skills they need to be good counselors and each left with that sense of confidence, even if the path to get there was challenging.

The CITs were looking for personal fulfillment as well. Ari appreciated the sense of maturity that developed as he spent the summer in Machon. He believes that being in the program "was helping [him] to become an adult". Ilana claims that out of all the things she learned while in Gesher, she learned the most about herself. She learned that she "thrives in smaller environments" and discovered that while in a more intimate program (Ilana was in the Gesher class of seven participants). Both OSRUI and CAA see this personal development as a goal of their CIT programs, and it seems that they are meeting those goals to a certain extent by the nature of instilling the responsibility in those CITs.

The third need expressed by the case subjects is one that is harder for the camps to address. Each case subject remarked that their friends were a crucial element to them wanting to be in the respective programs. Ezra (Gesher 2019) explained that social connection they felt between the others in the Gesher cohort has been their main connection to CAA even though they no longer plan to work on staff in future summers. Ezra explains that the original cohort is still very close, and they communicate often with a group text message. Even though Ezra is not a part of the staff

community at CAA, they are still connected in a way meaningful to them. With the case subjects at OSRUI, both of whom are homegrown, we can see just how impactful that social aspect is for CITs. Leah (Machon 2021) recalls that while she had a lot of fun while in Machon, “the things [she] enjoyed were the least important” from her perspective, and that she had the most fun when not with the campers. Being with her long-time friends at camp was more important than the counselor skill building. She prioritized her free time to be with friends to enjoy being at camp. Ari (Machon 2019) on the other hand described his Machon summer as incredibly difficult primarily because of challenges to his social life at camp. He explained that he had a close-knit group of friends from over several summers at OSRUI and was dating a camp friend within that social circle. When they broke up, his now former girlfriend started seeing someone else from that same friend group. Being with this group of friends became awkward for Ari, and he had trouble remaining connected with these long-time friends. To combat that, he looked towards building up friendships with those with whom he had not been close before. However, drinking alcohol and smoking cannabis was a common pastime of these newer friends and the consumption of these substances made him feel very uncomfortable: both in terms of his reluctance to partake and how they were underage, violating civil law and camp policy. Ari struggled with his urge to connect with others being in tension with the discomfort of engaging with people who no longer were close or with those who acted in ways he did not support.<sup>9</sup> Leah and Ari’s social experience during Machon was a key factor in how they viewed their overall experience and whether they wanted to return for another summer on staff. Neither Leah nor Ari left OSRUI with the intention to return of staff the next summer. If camps want to maintain the pipeline of campers turning into CITs and CITs turning into staff, they must be aware of how important the socialization is for their participants.

These three needs—confidence in skills as a counselor, personal growth, and a meaningful socializing experience—appear to be crucial for staff wanting to return. Ilana (Gesher 2021) is the only subject interviewed who knew that she wanted to return for the following summer. She will be at CAA summer 2022 as a counselor. She had all three of these needs addressed within the structured learning and the unstructured social interactions with her Gesher cohort.

## The Political Frame

This case viewed through the Political Frame investigates the various coalitions or interest groups involved. It asks questions concerning who holds and in what capacity do they hold power, and

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that, in order to address the needs of their staff, OSRUI (and all summer camps) has some control over alcohol and drug consumption by staff. It cannot control any romantic relationships that can form or deteriorate among their staff.



how that power translates to how scarce resources are allocated. It describes organizations as being part of an ongoing process of negotiation and can result in conflict (Bolman & Deal, 2017). When analyzing our camp subjects through the Political Frame, these tensions are addressed.

The CIT directors, as mentioned earlier, are the ones who hold the power over what is taught during the daily training sessions. Both OSRUI and CAA leadership have given these directors autonomy in how they want to train the CITs. There are few aspects of these CIT programs which the CITs themselves have any decision-making power. At CAA, while every Gesher participant completes a rotation of shadowing counselors and spending time with campers, they have the choice of what other parts of the camp world they want to shadow. Gesher participants have chosen to shadow the logistics team and the infirmary staff based on their personal interests. *Machonikim*, also rotate through age groups, but the assignments are decided by the leadership. As full counselors they receive time off and they must decide for themselves how they use that free time. Each camp has intentionally limited the amount of the choice the CITs can make, seemingly to create their ideal training experience.

The power dynamic between leadership and the CITs is seen in the case subjects' experience. Ezra (Gesher 2019) and Ilana (Gesher 2021) both found moments when they struggled with the limit of their power, particularly when it came to things they were not permitted to do. Both mentioned the policy that Gesher participants could not be alone with campers and were not allowed to take campers to the restroom without a counselor. While both understood that the policy addressed concerns about liability, they found it strange and limiting to be asked to deal with camper care issues while also not being permitted to do something as simple as walking a camper to the restroom. CAA very much sees Gesher participants as campers (they pay tuition and are minors) but also asks for them to take on responsibilities to a certain point. *Machonikim* at OSRUI, being full counselors, do not have those same limits placed on their responsibilities at camp. Leah (Machon 2021) expressed the most frustration at the lack of training she was given to address the mental health issues she perceived in her campers. She wanted her training to reflect what she was experiencing in her cabins but did not feel listened to by the leadership. Leah wanted training that included role playing scenarios, based on their interactions with campers, with a discussion afterward. Instead, she found the training to be "superficial" and not connected to what she was seeing in the field.

### The Symbolic/Cultural Frame

Viewing this case through the Symbolic-Cultural Frame means looking at the culture already established within our camp subjects and how the CIT programs align with them. We look to what

the camps' actions mean to the campers, the staff, and the CITs. According to this frame, the meaning is far more important than the outcomes. Looking at the camp subjects through the Symbolic-Cultural Frame requires identifying the feelings and intentions behind our choices and the weight they hold compared to other frames (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

In looking into what meaning our case subjects drew from their CIT experience, it helps to understand how they saw themselves within their broader camp world. Comparing the overall experience between Ilana (Gesher 2021) and Ari (Machon 2019) reveals that there is a power in CITs seeing themselves as connected to their camp. Ilana spent only a few summers at CAA before enrolling in the Gesher program. Although she would not necessarily be considered homegrown, she completed the program with a strong sense of belonging. In contemplating her upcoming summer on staff—coupled with her being slightly younger than most of her cohort—she is actively thinking about the ways she fits into the staff community. She's not concerned about feeling out of place because of her sense of preparedness after the Gesher program. She is looking forward to being with her close friends but also recognizes that she will need to navigate balancing that social time with the work and expectations of being a counselor. This is a major enduring dilemma for CITs. They must answer for themselves what they want out of the summer experience: a fun and social summer or a working summer focused on the job they were hired to do.

Ari, after his challenging summer in Machon, was not planning to return to be on staff at OSRUI. In the time following his completion of the program he continued his Jewish learning in college and was accepted into a Jewish leadership fellowship. Still seeing OSRUI as the “center” of his Judaism, and because he considered it a “shame” that his time at the “place [he] loved so much” would end on such a sour note, he applied to return to staff for the summer of 2022. Ari's case shows that the overall meaning of camp to someone homegrown is not fixed. Time and personal growth away from OSRUI allowed Ari to heal and bring back the desire to give back to his camp. As of the time of his interview, Ari's staff contract is unsigned, but he is strongly considering returning.

Both Ilana and Ari see themselves not done with their camp just yet. Meanwhile, Ezra (Gesher 2019) and Leah (Machon 2021) no longer see themselves working at their camps any further. Ezra moved to New York and is pursuing a career in cosmetology, and they don't think there would be a time where they could take time out of beauty school to be on staff at CAA. Ilana sees the lack of freedom she experienced at OSRUI, combined with her stressful experience working with her campers, as reasons to not return. She also claims that she sees spending a summer at OSRUI might be financially difficult because she can make more money elsewhere. Ezra and Leah, the

former who had a great experience and the latter who didn't, no longer see themselves fitting into their respective camps. This is important for camps to recognize with their CITs. CITs and staff make the choice to return based on how they see their camp fitting with their future trajectory. It is a large commitment of time and means they have fewer professional opportunities during the summer months. Camps should be recognizing this choice the CITs and staff make, including that a CIT summer might be the last summer they have with a participant.

The Symbolic/Cultural Frame also asks how organizations establish a culture within that encourage their employees to invest themselves into the work. An example of establishing a culture focused on the CITs' transition from camper to counselor is seen clearly at CAA. In the summer of 2021, the Gesher director planned a ceremony to meaningfully mark their transition. Jo-Ellen Unger described the ceremony beginning with the Gesher director leading the participants on a quarter-mile hike along a trail that led to a literal bridge (a *gesher*). The participants crossed the bridge, and the rest of the staff was waiting for them on the other side. Recalling this moment from summer 2021, Jo-Ellen described the entire group singing *shehecheiyanu*<sup>10</sup> while many people cried at the weight of this moment. Then each of the new graduates of the Gesher program were given a staff application for the following summer. This ceremony is important for establishing a culture of celebration for a group's commitment to the camp and making meaning for the CITs' transition.

This frame helps us understand the importance of ensuring the CITs see their work as meaningful; both in the sense that their work for the camp means a great deal to the camp, and that the camp means a great deal to the CITs. Without that sense of meaning, it would likely be difficult to reach the goals of the camp or the CITs.

## Recommendations

Based on the experiences of the case subjects, and with an understanding of how we might use the Four Frames to view this case, I would encourage camps to consider these recommendations.

- 1 **Implement a mentorship structure in which CITs can get one-on-one coaching from experienced counselors or CIT staff to address the challenges they experience in the field.** The structure of these CIT programs puts a good deal of the onus of teaching and training on the CIT directors. Camps should consider experienced counselors as another

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<sup>10</sup> A blessing in Hebrew meant to mark either the first occurrence of something, or to show gratitude for reaching a meaningful moment. The blessing thanks the Divine for giving us life and sustaining us to be able to reach this moment.

strategy in their organization to reach their counselor training goals. The relationships the CITs form with experienced counselors provided longer-lasting learning than the training sessions because the CITs were given immediate feedback on situations as they were happening. CITs could ask questions and get advice to further their learning.

- 2 **Using the strategies of emergent curricula, CIT leadership should investigate the experiences of their CITs as the summer progresses to address their needs or fill in gaps in their understanding.** Rather than a one-size-fits-all training model, camps should consider developing training to fit each group of CITs for each summer. This will decrease frustration as they discuss and learn from each other's experiences in the field and provide the campers with the care they need.
- 3 **Ensure there is adequate socializing time for CITs to connect with one another and enjoy the camp experience.** A CIT's overall experience, even if they learned a lot from their training, can be marred by a negative social experience. Camps should consider creating opportunities or reserving time for a CIT cohort to be together to reflect on their camp careers and their transition. Camp should be fun and enjoyable for everyone there and the CITs' responsibilities make it difficult to make the time to do so.
- 4 **Give CITs agency in how they use their time, both free time and training time, to build upon their goals for their professional and personal capacities.** Camps should consider giving some power of choice to CITs. They can be encouraged to choose to build up their counselor skills by spending more time with campers and counselors, learning from the various teams and departments of their camp, or to pursue any personal and professional goals they have outside of camp. This investing in the individual's choice would help to build a better rapport between camp leadership and CITs.
- 5 **Develop a culture within CIT programs where they can appreciate their growth and can regularly consider and articulate how they transition from camper to counselor.** CITs should be celebrated as they make this transition and ought to feel a meaningful sense of accomplishment throughout. If that culture exists, CITs can feel a sense of belonging to their camp even if they are unsure if they will return to be on staff.

## Conclusion

CIT programs at Jewish summer camps have the chance to provide their participants an incredibly meaningful experience. Those who spent multiple summers at their home camp can see this a culminating moment where they can give back to a place that built them up. Those who are newer to their summer camp receive care and attention as the camp invests in them. Either way, these Jewish summer camps understand that there is meaning in putting time and energy into training

people to be the best camp employee they can be. Even if from camp to camp the programs look and feel different, they see value in developing them and trying to make them as best as they can.

Camps should see CIT program development through a lens of an enduring dilemma wherein two highly held values are in tension. OSRUI and CAA, in their respective CIT programs, seem to value cohesion within their camp staff while simultaneously valuing the individuality of their participants. Both camps have built their CIT programs to ensure that program alumni know how to be the best counselor at their specific camp. They want the people on their staff to have that shared vocabulary and know what is expected of them. At the same time, they want to make sure that their CIT alumni walk away with personal skills that would be helpful even outside the camp world. The dilemma ought to make camps ask one of the critical questions originally posed in this case: who is this program for? OSRUI and CAA want the programs to benefit the institution and want the people within it to get the most value from it. Their CIT programs are a pipeline for campers to become staff, *and* a professional development seminar, *and* a moment of meaningful transition. It is not just one thing. At any given moment, camps should be considering multiple goals and perspectives. They should try to actively balance between them, reflect on their triumphs and mistakes, and experiment with new strategies.

Hopefully the information uncovered will be useful for any summer camp that runs a CIT program or is interested in applying these lessons to their staff training and retention strategies. This could also be used for professionals who run teen leadership programs, regardless of religious background or setting (YMCA, Big Brother/Big Sister, etc.).

I am still wondering how summer camps would respond to the recommendations, primarily the ones that are about including CIT input regularly during the program experience. It might be difficult to adjust existing programmatic structures to allow this collaboration, especially if they see themselves as experts teaching novices. It would be my hope that those camp leaders would turn to the wisdom of Ben Zoma, who writes in *Pirkei Avot* 4, “Who is wise? [The one] who learns from [everyone]”.

## Appendix

### 1.1 URJ Camps CIT Program Objectives (Environmental Scan)

	Program Name	Entering Grade	Pay-to-Participate	Leadership	Personal/Professional Development	Camper Care	Programming	Transition from Camper	Other Camp Capacities	In-Cabin Experience
Olin-Sang-Ruby Union Institute (OSRUI)	Machon	After 12	Paid	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
6 Points Creative Arts Academy (CAA)	Gesher	12	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
6 Points Sci-Tech	Machon	12	✓	✓		✓	✓			
6 Points Sports Academy	CIT	12	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
6 Points West	CIT	12	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
Camp Coleman	Machon	12	✓	✓		✓				✓
Camp George	CIT	10	✓	✓		✓	✓			
Camp Harlam	Gesher	12	✓	✓		✓				
Camp Kalsman	Machon	12	✓	✓						✓
Camp Newman	CIT	12	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Crane Lake Camp	Machon	12	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Eisner Camp	Machon	12	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Goldman Union Camp Institute (GUCI)	Machon <sup>11</sup>	After 12	Paid	✓		✓				
Greene Family Camp	Avodah	12	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Henry S. Jacobs Camp	Solelim	12	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	

<sup>11</sup> The Machon at Goldman Union Camp Institute (GUCI) program was modeled after the Machon program at OSRUI.

## 1.2 Interview Protocol

Questions for camp leadership:

- Define your role at camp.
- Describe your CIT training. Who runs this program?
- What do you see as the goals for this program? To what extent do you see staff retention as the goal for CIT?
- What experiences are designed to achieve your goals?
- What changes have you made to the program in recent years?

Questions for CIT alumni:

- Explain who you are and your connection to your camp.
- What about your years leading up to your CIT summer led you to want to be part of the program?
- Describe your experience in your CIT program.
- Describe the lessons from your training that you recall.
- In what ways, or in what spaces, did you feel like a full-fledged counselor?
- To what extent do you feel prepared to be a counselor in a future summer?

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