

## Foundation for Jewish Camp

A national advocacy group invests in a high-caliber leadership program as it promotes summer camps as an extended community for Jewish youth.

Summer overnight camps are often seen as a fun way for kids to get away, make friends, and learn new things. Jewish summer camps have an added value according to Amy Kruglak of the Foundation for Jewish Camp: creating the sense of connection and community among Jewish youth. “Jewish summer camps are important because of the rich experiences they offer, but we also know that camp attendance builds a basis for participation in Jewish community life as adults,” she says.

As the Foundation sought ways to get the word out and promote the value of Jewish summer camp, it honed in on the pivotal role that camp directors play in meeting the mission. The organization decided to create a high-caliber professional development opportunity that would give directors the skills they need to lead camps in the 21st century. The vision was to combine best practices in leadership, management and business – all infused with Jewish values and ethics.

The Foundation’s Executive Leadership Institute (ELI) was launched in October 2006 and involves seven sessions over 14 months. ELI is rooted in CCL’s philosophy of self-awareness and personal growth as cornerstones of effective leadership. The camp directors, or fellows, also study finance, fundraising and best practices across the overnight camp industry. “It’s like an MBA for Jewish camping professionals,” says Kruglak.

The second session of ELI is an intense, three-day program designed and facilitated by CCL faculty. “CCL gives the fellows an unprecedented look at themselves as leaders and a chance to be introspective. It also raises questions about how to grow in leadership. What are they looking to change and how can they go about it?” Kruglak says. “The rest of the ELI program extends from this CCL session.”

Nine months into the program, the first group of 19 fellows still has several months to go in their program, with much of the work yet ahead. Each is working on a leadership goal during the summer camp sessions and will begin a long-term strategic project in the fall.

### OBJECTIVES:

Create a high-caliber program for directors of Jewish summer camps in order to:

- Professionalize the field by creating development opportunities and career paths
- Create a support system and networking structure for camp directors
- Teach best practices in leadership and management, weaving in Jewish values and ethics

### OUTCOMES:

The Executive Leadership Institute was launched in October 2006. A formal evaluation is underway; meanwhile the Foundation reports the following benefits:

- Camp directors have gained new stature as professionals, both in their own eyes and in the view of their Boards
- Camp directors have built trust, worked together on difficult issues, and shared best practices
- Camp directors have a new awareness of their own leadership style and goals for growth as leaders

Evaluation of the program and the fellows is ongoing, but so far the participants are enthusiastic, says Kruglak. “We’ve already raised the bar in terms of what is possible for developing our community of leaders. The fellows are seeing themselves in a new light, and so are their boards of directors.”

The fellows – who thought of themselves as competitors prior to the program – have established trust and now see themselves as peers.

Through ELI, the camp directors have been re-energized and re-connected to the value of their work. They appreciate the respect and recognition that comes with the Foundation’s investment in their role as leaders.

*The Foundation for Jewish Camp, a public foundation, is the only national organization dedicated to nonprofit Jewish resident camps, advancing program and leadership excellence to camps and access to vibrant Jewish experiences for campers. The Foundation helps raise awareness and support for Jewish summer camps, highlighting their successful track record for building powerful Jewish commitment in young Jews, ensuring future Jewish continuity. FJC works with more than 130 camps, 62,000 campers, and 12,000 counselors across North America to further its mission. [www.jewishcamping.org](http://www.jewishcamping.org)*