

About Camp Northland- B'nai Brith – Executive Summary

[last edit March 11, 2024]

Camp Northland- B'nai Brith (NBB) is operated by the Jewish Camp Council of Toronto, a not-for profit organization. Camp NBB is the largest independent Jewish community overnight camp in Ontario with its origins dating back to 1909. We have serviced the Jewish community for over a century by providing campers with a warm and enriching experience. Our vast history and traditions are why so many people hold NBB in their hearts as their “home away from home”.

Our mission began at the turn of the 20th century, when the small Toronto Jewish community was composed primarily of new immigrants who welcomed and provided social services to more recent arrivals. Camp services began with the intent of providing underprivileged members of the Jewish community with an opportunity for a brief escape from the confines of the city. For over 115 years, we have held fast to our mission, currently articulated as follows:

To achieve and sustain the highest standards of excellence in camper care, innovative programming and Jewish identity building in order to ensure that all campers and staff grow, thrive and have fun at Camp Northland by making lifelong friends, building life-skills, appreciating nature and respecting one another.

At the turn of the 20th century, the Jewish community of Toronto was composed primarily of new immigrants. The small group of Jewish Torontonians welcomed and provided social services to more recent arrivals. Camp services began in 1909 with the support of a number of different Jewish community organizations and were largely intended to serve the underprivileged members of the Jewish community and to give them an opportunity for a brief escape from the confines of the city.

As early as 1915, the Jewish Camp Council began providing country holidays for girls and in 1930 opened Camp Camperdown in Orillia. In 1920, The Jewish Boys 'Club and B'nai Brith joined to offer camp services to boys near Palermo, Ont. moved to Lake Couchiching near Orillia in 1929.

The Young Men's Hebrew Athletic Organization (the “Y”) started its first boys 'camp, Camp Freilich, in Torrance, Ontario in 1938. This camp was moved to Haliburton and renamed Camp Northland (the historical name of a former camp on the property) in 1944. It has remained on the Haliburton site ever since.

In 1954, the Jewish Camp council determined that the Haliburton site could accommodate both the boys and the girls and thus a camp for girls was built with some sharing of facilities. Programs were kept separate initially and gradually integrated over time.

In 1965 the camp was split into Junior Camp and Senior Camp, which operated in separate locations both on the Haliburton property. During this period, the camp reached its peak, offering educational and identity-informing programming to over 1,200 campers and 400 staff each summer.

On January 18, 1971, The Jewish Camp Council of Toronto was incorporated in Ontario, Canada. We operate as a registered charity (10753 4695 RT0001).

In 1979 all age groups were joined together as one camp on the main site to look much like the camp still is today.

Today, Camp NBB's mandate is to provide children's summer camping services to the Jewish community regardless of a family's financial circumstance by providing scholarships to those in need. Camp NBB has partnered and/or collaborated with other Toronto community organizations such as Jewish Child and Family Services, Jewish Immigrant Aid Services, UJA Federation, Harold Grinspoon Foundation, Foundation for Jewish Camping, Amici Camping Charity, Kids in Camp, Chai Lifeline, Beit Halochem/ Kids of Courage, Reena and other over many years to assist their clients to spend summers at Camp NBB, where they have been able to learn, grow and thrive as part of our camp community. These relationships are diverse and varied in structure, but all with the common goal of keeping summer camp accessible to children.

The Jewish Camp Council continues to develop its role and define its place in the landscape of Jewish camping having gone from managing 6 camps at one point in its history to only one camp at the present time. Decisions must be made as to whether the JCC is a dedicated Board for Camp Northland or a Board for Toronto Jewish community camping, with Northland as one of its operational projects. In the meantime, the JCC and Northland both function and are perceived as one and the same at the present date. Accordingly, strategic planning by the JCC tends to focus on the strategic plan for Northland vs. the plan for the JCC as a distinct entity with goals beyond Northland. I suspect this may be somewhat of a consequence of the Board's membership being almost exclusively Northland alumni often recruited because of their passion to the camp itself as opposed to a larger vision of community camping opportunities beyond the camp on Moose Lake. I am eager to explore these important conversations further as our organization continues to evolve.

The Jewish Camp Industry and the role of NBB

In an environment where day schools have been contracting, camps have the potential to shape the Jewish identity of our youth and ensure the vitality of our people. We are at a critical junction point where we must seek to find the community champions that can support this transformative change strategy surrounding the focus and purpose of camping.

I believe that Camp Northland can and should sit at the center of this strategy for the Jewish community. The camp has the potential to become the largest Jewish educational institution serving Toronto/GTA – servicing hundreds of youths each summer but with endless potential for year-round connectivity as well. Our plan for Camp Northland must go beyond rebuilding its aging facilities. We will pioneer the strategy of developing pipelines from Jewish day to overnight camps; we will reach under-engaged communities, including Russian and Israeli Jews; we will seek to create Toronto's first camp with a year-round platform working with the JCCs or other appropriate collaborative partners to extend its educative work throughout the year; and we will lay the groundwork for continued fundraising that will engage alumni and other donors to ensure the continual growth of the camp and its impact. I am confident that the transformation of Camp Northland will not only change the lives of the increasing number of campers who spend their summer there, but will have a ripple effect, catalyzing change across the field of Jewish camping.

Research from the Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC), a not-for-profit organization that promotes Jewish camping throughout North America, has shown that Jewish camping has a large influence on building Jewish identity. This research has proven that children with positive Jewish experiences become adults who value their Jewish heritage, support Jewish causes, and take on leadership roles in their communities. The impact of Jewish summer camp is clear, and the opportunity to increase that impact dramatically is significant, and in particular through the reach of Camp NBB.

For many of our campers, Jewish camping is the only involvement that they may have in an immersive Jewish environment. Many young families today are more interested in opportunities for their children to have informal Jewish education through Jewish camping, rather than through some of the more traditional routes such as day school education or synagogue affiliation. However, a large number of families committed to providing their children with these Jewish experiences cannot afford camp. Jewish overnight camps are reporting a dramatic increase in requests for financial aid from families.

“The pressure on the scholarship line [for Jewish summer camps] to support families has been at the highest point that they have seen in many, many years,” said Jerry Silverman, former President of the Foundation for Jewish Camp. Silverman has said that to make up for the scholarship crunch, many camps have also been forced to cut other budget items, such as programming, food and maintenance, as well as capital improvements.

In a typical year, Camp NBB allocates over \$450,000 to support approximately 25% of our campers who request financial assistance. Our goal is to reach more deserving children. We believe that we have a responsibility to help all children regardless of their socio-economic situation. Some of our campers need this experience more than others, as camp allows them to escape a troubled home life and seek comfort in a safe space. Our staff is trained by a combination of our own leaders and community experts (e.g. social workers, teachers, counsellors, etc) in how to create a safe space for children at camp through such avenues as abuse education, bullying prevention, social skills development and concepts of inclusivity including LGBTQ+ campers and staff, and treating campers equally regardless of their backgrounds. The overall goal of our staff is to help our campers have a safe, fun, and unforgettable summer. We receive many calls after the summer from parents, social workers and guardians about the difference our camp has made for their children. Simply put, their children are more self-confident and have a more positive outlook on life.

Parallel to our mission to support those in need runs an equally important objective of continuing to grow or at least stabilize the camp’s enrollment generally (i.e. find the sweet spot) and offer a camp experience to those who are not in need but want their child in the best possible environment for their summer camp experience. Camp Northland is trending and emerging as the ‘camp to go to’ going forward. We are strong. We are not affiliated with any movements or agendas of a particular organization. We are the Jewish community camp building pride, a sense of identity, and true sense of what it means to be a part of the Jewish community. We are shaping the leaders of tomorrow.

The FJC-commissioned research, “Camp Works”, reinforces that the long-term influence of Jewish overnight camp builds Jewish identity, community, and leadership. Jewish residential summer camp offers singular opportunities to construct an intense Jewish experience – around the clock, all week long, in every space and place. Jewish summer camp provides opportunities for campers to experience Judaism as a joyful cultural, ethical, and spiritual lens through which all aspects of life can be viewed.

“Camp Works” proved that as adults, campers are:

- 30% more likely to donate to a Jewish Federation
- 37% more likely to light Shabbat candles regularly
- 45% more likely to attend synagogue at least once a month
- 55% more likely to feel very emotionally attached to Israel
- 30% more likely to donate to a Jewish Federation;
- in addition to being significantly more likely to donate to charity, be members of a synagogue, feel that being Jewish is important and being more likely to marry a Jewish partner.

At Camp NBB we know from our experience what many studies have also shown, namely, that camp has an enormous positive impact on children. Well-designed summer camps are educational experiences that offer artistic, musical and athletic experiences, adventurous outdoor environments and excellent adult role models. Campers who participated in a study on the impact of summer camp, for example, “showed significantly greater improvement in a variety of social skills, including time management, initiating action in new situations, self-confidence, task leadership, and interpersonal skills... [which] can lead to academic benefits and can build a resiliency against negative behaviors that may surface later in kids' lives.”[1] Other research [2] identified solid gains made by campers in the four critical developmental areas of:

- Positive Identity
- Social Skills
- Physical and Thinking Skills
- Positive Values & Spirituality

Five Reasons (there are many more) explaining why I believe in Camp Northland-B'nai Brith

1. Camp Northland-B'nai Brith is a Jewish community camp able to service the broad spectrum of families from all parts of the Jewish community.

- We have day school and public-school families, families with a single parent, underprivileged children, families affiliated with the Jewish community and families where our camp is their only Jewish experience. LGTBQ+ campers, staff and families find an inclusive and welcoming community. Regardless of political views or affiliations, religious views or affiliations, lifestyle, socio-economic status, address or opportunity, everyone is welcome and becomes one family at Camp Northland. In short, Camp Northland is a connector to all while many other institutions by design drive a wedge of separation and inherent divisiveness through the Jewish community at a time where we need to be unified more than ever. I believe that the sustainability of a strong Jewish future for our children and beyond depends on us finding common ground and strengthening our connectivity and understanding. No place does this better than Camp Northland.

2. We have over 115 years of camping success and a beautiful facility that accommodates many children.

- The legacy of the camp is incredible with many third and fourth generational campers, and many camps under our operational leadership historically.
- Our capacity is 600 campers at a time, and we operate on a 750-acre picturesque, lakefront property with the greatest capacity potential and room for expansion than any Jewish camp in the country.
- The fact that we had an entire second camp (west beach o.k.a. 'senior camp' or 'intercamp') makes the opportunity for future expansion palpable and exciting. It was closed as enrollment waned in 1991. But we are back on the upswing and there are opportunities for Northland itself but perhaps also more creative entities to be managed by the JCC such as family campgrounds, seniors' events, alumni housing and programs, wilderness programs, etc.

3. We maintain a high level of accountability.

- We have a fiscally responsible Board of Directors and have an independent, annual audit performed • We are members of the Ontario Council for Jewish Camps
- We are an accredited member of the Ontario Camps Association
- We are an affiliate organization of the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto (or have historically been considered as such)
- We are trusted by international funding organizations such as Harold Grinspoon Foundation, The Fineberg Foundation, Foundation for Jewish Camping, Provincial and Federal Government Grant programs, along with generous local philanthropists including Anton Rabie and Ronnen Harary.
- Our Board has been recognized with a recent award for its excellence
- Our Executive Director (that's me) is considered a leader in the international camping industry, often called upon as a panel expert, as well as locally, where I sit on the OCA Standards Review Panel, the OCA camp accreditation committee, member of the 2020/2021 provincial Covid-19 Task Force for overnight camping, and more.

4. Our staff receives education, awareness, and Judaics training.

- Our Leadership team is comprised of educators, a social worker, guidance counsellor, and seasoned camp professionals
- Our staff is trained by internal and external professionals in how to properly care for children and detect and deal with issues generated both in and outside of camp.
- We don't consider our camp staff to be 'counsellors', we consider them to be youth professionals that function as counsellors, but also coaches, mentors, leaders, guides, facilitators and role models. We train to this objective and keep the standards and expectations of our staff high before, during, and after the summer.
- Our camp is a selected participant in The FJC Cornerstone Fellowship, which promotes Jewish culture change at camp by offering Jewish educational training to exemplary returning bunk staff and professional development to camp leaders.
- We create an enriching Jewish camp community where staff and campers experience Jewish living and celebrate the spirit of our culture and traditions. Our goal is to facilitate authentic and positive building and strengthening of each camper's Jewish pride and identity.

5. Camp Northland B'nai-Brith has the magical balance between activities, creative programs, capacity to build our community, inclusiveness and Judaics.

- Our camp has the base amenities and infrastructure of a world-class camp in place and ready for refurbishing and re-investment.
- Our camp has creative cabin-based, age-based, and camp-wide programs being freshly developed and implemented regularly
- Our camp facilitates an environment that is true to the broad spectrum of the Jewish community from those in need to those supporting those in need. We create a community rather than splinter the Jewish community into segments and status.
- Our environment is warm, inviting and inclusive to all those interested in becoming a part of the magic we call Camp Northland.
- I believe that we are the only camp operating in Ontario that sits at the intersection of intentional Jewish programming with Israel connectivity and values based informal education ALONGSIDE diverse programs with incredible and ever-expanding facilities.

Donor Considerations

A donation to Camp NBB will directly support the Jewish community of Greater Toronto i.e. not just a summer camp. Camp NBB is a community camp that is steeped in the tradition of providing opportunities for children to experience the benefits of Jewish summer camp regardless of their ability to pay. Each gift will open the door for these children to an outstanding summer at camp, thereby, building their self-esteem, resiliency, and Jewish identity. Every gift will make a difference for Toronto's children through a gift that will last throughout their lives. In doing so, donors will be directly contributing to the sustainability of a healthy, proud and vibrant Jewish community in Canada's future. Our investment in camp's children today is planting the seeds for the trees of our community tomorrow.

Jewish overnight camp is one of the most effective vehicles for engaging Jewish youth, with one of the highest measurable returns on investment relative to its cost. The Jewish overnight camp experience plays an integral role in establishing, nurturing and maintaining confidence, self-esteem and Jewish identity. Children and teens who spend summers at Jewish camp are more likely to be involved in communal leadership, more engaged in Jewish causes, and more emotionally attached to Israel than those who did not.

Summers at Jewish overnight camp turn Jewish youth into engaged Jewish adults, laying the groundwork for strong Jewish communities. Additionally, overnight camps attract children and families who otherwise shy away from traditional forms of Jewish education. Children with positive Jewish experiences become adults who value their Jewish heritage, support Jewish causes, and take on leadership roles in their communities. The impact of Jewish summer camp is clear, and the opportunity to increase that impact dramatically, is significant.

As Camp Northland continues to grow, so does the opportunity to undertake a monumental project the likes of which are unparalleled in any other Jewish communities in North America. Under new leadership, the program and reputation of the Camp have been reinvigorated and as a result, there is new life being injected into the Camp. Camp Northland has both the physical beauty and physical capacity to affect the largest number of Jewish children of any institution in our community.

Moreover, the impact of a revitalized Camp Northland will extend well beyond the summer. The camp could be host to shoulder programs targeted at the Russian and Israeli communities and specialty programs targeting Jewish athletes – communities traditionally under- engaged in Jewish Life. The camp could be a year-round connector, and may start to offer increased course credits, adult learning, and youth development initiatives.

Today, Camp Northland is faced with four challenges: a deteriorating physical plant which has not been updated since the 1960's, underutilization of the existing grounds, the absence of a master plan and strategic capacity and/or programmatic expansion, and the absence of a formal pipeline between a nonprofit Jewish day camp and overnight camp.

A significant capital investment in Camp Northland (both strategically and financially) will help to transform the camp into Canada's premier Jewish camp: It will rebuild camper facilities offering a physical plant unrivaled by other camps; It will help to facilitate a pioneering relationship between a community day camp and Camp Northland, enabling efficiencies in back office operations, and creating a year-round platform for the camp's engagement and educational activities; and it will set a new standard for camp governance, allowing for strong vision, management and financial sustainability moving forward. The JCC will need to provide strategic direction as to whether the focus of investment and HR efforts should be on the growth within Camp Northland or the surrounding ways to supplement Camp Northland. Both directions provide additional camping opportunities for Jewish children, and supplemental programs could also benefit from redevelopment of the camp's facilities. Consider the following supplemental programs:

i. J-Academy

In 2009, UJA Federation's Silber Family Centre for Jewish Camping funded a new camp program targeted at the Russian-speaking Jewish community called J-Academy. In recent years, J-Academy served over 230 campers during a 12- day session hosted on the Camp Northland site at the end of August. Initially launched with only 70 campers, J-Academy has tripled its enrolment and boasts a significant waiting list for its summer program – all to a segment of the population usually unengaged in formal Jewish education. J-Academy would like us to operate the camp, as opposed to the current facilitation through a local Jewish Community Center. It is in our hands to decide if operating J-Academy under the umbrella of the Jewish Camp Council makes sense as this initiative attempts to recover after closing the camp in the wake of Covid.

ii. Hebrew immersion camp

Building on J-Academy's successful engagement of the Russian speaking Jewish community, in 2014 UJA Federation launched a Hebrew immersion program at the JCCs Jack and Pat Kay Centre Camp. With the revitalization of Camp Northland, and additional investment, plans could continue from early discussion years back to create a Hebrew immersion track at the Camp targeted at the Israeli community which could parallel J-Academy. We have already introduced the camp to the Toronto Israeli community through our innovative and popular Gibushon family weekend experience up at camp in Haliburton.

iii. Other specialty programs

Several grants and funding opportunities are periodically available to incubate new niche specialty programs at existing camps. Together with UJA Federation, and in the context of a revitalization of the camp, discussion has begun on developing a specialized tripping program - to be housed in the undeveloped land on the Haliburton property – and an intensive hockey program at the camp. Other possibilities could include tennis specialty programming, other land sport options, glamping, mental health and wellness retreats, family camps, wilderness adventures, leadership learning, etc.

iv. Chai Sports and Maccabi Canada

The SRC runs a successful Chai Sports league program which engages hundreds of youths in a wide range of intramural sports programs. As well, Maccabi Canada runs select teams for the Maccabi Games held annually in North America and every four years in Israel. Leveraging the existing teams and infrastructure of these programs, a revitalized Camp Northland could house team training experiences, marrying intensive sports practice with the immersive Jewish experience of Camp Northland.

v. Camp Northland Credits (High School)

Camp Northland could receive accreditation and look to expand its course offering creating a blend between the informal role of camp and the opportunity camp creates to use the time towards formal credits while leveraging experiential education.

vi. Camp Northland as the location for all Jewish school connections and programs.

Programs like all grade 9 students at CHAT orientation a year after a grade 8 integrated program for all students (team building, leadership training, etc.) would be a much more significant and positive experience. Students coming to the annual Northland retreat each year at key milestones could bring our whole community together. i.e. grade 1, grade 6, grade 8, grade 9, graduation. Imagine how much more connected our Jewish adults would be if this was in place for our collective children.

Consider Some Specific Projects at Camp:

Camper cabins & related infrastructure: Some cabins onsite have been uninhabitable for many years [some recently intentionally burned and the 'museum' not being used at this time], while many others are past their useful life. The capital assessment conducted a few years back assumes that all camper cabins be replaced within 5-10 years in step with enrolment growth (I would suggest revenue growth as an alternative marker) with a priority ranking of all existing cabins. The budget we develop for a project of this nature must, in my opinion, account for a newly designed cabin concept that is competitive with offerings at other top-tiered camps in North America. We have discussed the 'cabin of the future' concept, a winterized social and group space, and other innovations.

Staff quarters: Upgrades are required to several of the 'head staff' cabins to make them habitable for the number of staff required for current/growing operations. We need more comfortable doctor and nursing accommodation, and room for more adults and families as we meet expectations for an increased adult presence on site.

Unit/Section recreation halls: These halls serve as critical indoor/covered programmatic spaces for units/sections when the weather does not permit outdoor activities. Currently the Camp relies on various other facilities that are not equipped with the capacity for programming. Currently, these buildings require upgrades and enhancements.

Washhouses: Minor upgrades are required to maintain these facilities in acceptable condition although complete redesigns could also be warranted and considered in the context of redesigned cabins with 'deck washrooms' possibly mitigating against the need for as many global washhouses.

Amphitheatre: Having a community space for outdoor programming, community events (Havdalah, mifkad (flagpole), plays, etc. will greatly enhance the camp experience.

Indoor gym and fitness center: With summer weather becoming increasingly unpredictable, I believe a proper gym and fitness facility would be an excellent strategic investment for the camp. We may want to consider a pool as well for instructional swim purposes and other fun waterfront activities that are limited by the lake and weather impact.

Theatre/Studio: Perhaps as part of the amphitheater discussions, but also maybe an independent consideration as increasing the role and impact of the arts in camp is a priority. Being able to use a facility like this for dance, music and theatre/drama would greatly impact on the camp experience.

West Beach Reinvented: We should be using this space for short term day programs – establish docks, use for tubing adventures, free swims, and other fun activities. In the medium term, consider building out a Yurt village to support special and unique programming opportunities (e.g. CIT leadership village and/or wilderness and survival camp programs). In the longer run, consider adding full infrastructure to this area of the site and develop a family camp (possibly fully winterized with its own site management) that can offer amazing year-round programs for different groups throughout the year.

Winterization: We should be winterizing key spaces immediately to allow for more effective year-round planning, site presence and supervision, as well as programming. The Board has approved moving this initiative forward and we expect to begin with the Director's cabin and Health Centre which both share a septic at the east end of the waterfront area.

Upgrades or enhancements to maintain competitive edge:

- Ropes course - needs horizontal elements and continued advancements on the 5-year plan.
 - Tennis courts - need lighting
 - Hockey court – pavilion roofing
 - Full revitalization of platform tents and campgrounds at 2 (existing) or even 3-4 overnight locations.
 - Expanded dining hall to accommodate single-shift meals, at least until capacity then warrants reconsideration of a two-shift model again]. Currently meals are split into two shifts to accommodate the number of campers and the capacity of the dining hall.
 - Many program areas need an equipment overhaul – e.g. new sails and sailboats, lifejackets, paddles, tents, boats and motors, archery, etc.
 - Security infrastructure, training, and guards are all becoming more relevant with each passing year, especially in the months following October 7, 2023.
-

¹ “Beyond Archery and Arts and Crafts: New Research from UNH finds Summer Camps can Foster Social Development in Youth,” University of New Hampshire, January 30, 2006: http://www.unh.edu/news/news_releases/2006/january/bp_060130camp.html

² Philber Research Associates, “Youth Development Outcomes of the Camp Experience”, 2005: <http://www.acacamps.org/research/ydo.php>.