**EMMA KAUFMANN CAMP**

**3-Year Strategic Plan**



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February 26, 2018

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Camp is embedded in the DNA of the Jewish community. In cities across the country when Jewish adults gather the conversation inevitably turns to overnight camp memories filled with nostalgia. When two Jewish adults meet for the first time, the game of “Jewish geography” ensues and “Which camp did you go to?” and “Did you know so-and-so who went to that camp?” are the unavoidable questions. Overnight camp is indeed an important ingredient to the heart and soul of our Jewish faith, and over its 110 years of operations, Emma Kaufmann Camp (EKC) has filled this role for countless children and young adults from Pittsburgh and beyond.

Founded in 1908 and situated in Morgantown, WV since 1972, EKC is accredited by the American Camp Association (ACA) and offers boys and girls ages 7-16 a fun, vibrant, and pluralistic Jewish experience through a traditional overnight camp program. EKC’s 175+ acres along Cheat Lake helps campers and staff escape from the increasing day-to-day pressures they face and provides a safe environment for them to learn, grow and build lifelong friendships. EKC typically has been at 92-94% of capacity each summer and, even in the face of a much lower volume of Jewish school-aged children in Pittsburgh than in other major metropolitan markets, consistently outpaces the national average (up to 80% in 2016) in this area. However, over the last several years, EKC has lagged behind the best Jewish overnight camps in growing and retaining audience. Recent survey data from the Foundation of Jewish Camp (*Camper Satisfaction Insights* and *Staff Satisfaction Insights*) help to frame these trends and suggest areas of focus to better serve our campers, their parents and our staff.

* Overall satisfaction of parents and campers as well as campers’ likelihood of returning to camp at EKC are currently 6% lower than the national average.
* The quality, clarity, content and timeliness of EKC’s communication with parents was rated 10% lower than the national average.
* According to parents and campers, EKC leadership and the way camp is run was rated 16% lower than the national average.
* While staff satisfaction is ahead of the national average (88% vs. 82%), EKC staff rated the visibility and engagement of EKC leadership in daily camp life 19% lower than the national average.
* Not atypical for camps with mixtures of reform and conservative families, EKC was 13% and 19% less likely to impact the Jewish identity of staff and campers, respectively, compared to the national average.

These factors have contributed to EKC missing annual budget targets by over $650,000 the past five years, despite over $7 million in capital reinvestment over the last decade.

EKC has thrived on traditions passed down from generation to generation, but now finds itself challenged by the complexities of 21st century living --- IT connectivity, more demanding parents, complicated health-related needs of campers and summer calendars that are compressed by campers’ various academic and athletic pursuits. A thorough analysis of EKC’s competitors and other best-in-class Jewish overnight camps suggests that there is notable opportunity for improvement. Despite the fact that EKC continues to keep up with or outperform the national average in a number of areas, such as building camper friendships, fostering camper independence, quality of programming offered, adequacy of facilities and social environment for staff, the status quo will no longer suffice for EKC to once again become the preeminent Jewish overnight camp in the Tri-State region. Instead, the Board of Directors, senior management and full-time camp staff agree that increasing camper enrollment, improving customer engagement, satisfaction and retention and maximizing Jewish impact will require EKC to build its organizational capacity for leadership and resource development, address the limitations in our operations and facilities and strengthen our staff, programs and approach to camper care.

**HISTORY OF EMMA KAUFMANN CAMP (EKC)**

In 1908, city kids didn’t have many opportunities to escape Pittsburgh’s stultifying summer heat and throat-choking pollution. Many of them were new arrivals to America living in crowded conditions, suffering from asthma and malnutrition.

That summer, the countryside became accessible when a group of social reformers in the Jewish community founded the Emma Farm Association, a health-and-wellness facility in Harmarville, PA. Children, and sometimes their parents, would travel by train into the great outdoors and spend a few weeks breathing clean air, bulking up on nutritious food, hiking, swimming, playing sports and enjoying nature.

Along the way, camp moved to Harmony, Butler County, and absorbed children from two other primarily Jewish camps — the Laurel Y in Somerset County, which closed in 1961, and Camp Lynnwood, located on Cheat Lake near Morgantown, WV that had been purchased by four Jewish families from Pittsburgh. In 1972, the Jewish Community Center of Greater Pittsburgh purchased Camp Lynnwood and it became the new home of Emma Kaufmann Camp (EKC).

**THE EKC BRAND – “WE ARE FAMILY” AND BEYOND**

Emma Kaufmann Camp is open and accessible to everyone, regardless of age, race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or special need by welcoming individuals of all backgrounds, embracing their uniqueness and diversity under our communal tent.

EKC aims to prepare our campers and staff for life’s journeys through providing and promoting:

* Connections 🡪 with campers, with staff, with oneself, with Judaism, with nature, with activities
* Values 🡪 a Jewish lens in the way we live, play and work
* Growth 🡪 greater independence, increased responsibility, enhanced understanding and appreciation
* Fun 🡪 enjoying every aspect of camp

Testimonials

*I don’t even know where to start about the positive impact EKC has had on my two sons. Not only do they have a ton of fun…but they have become more confident, independent and happier kids. They make friends from different states, try new adventures and they learn how to get out of their comfort zone by being away [from home]. These are all good life skills that will be with them for the rest of their lives? Hearing the stories they bring home…makes me want to go!*

*EKC is our girls’…home away from home for three weeks every summer. The entire staff naturally creates a welcome and inclusive environment and the counselors…seem genuinely invested in all the campers.*

*My two daughters started going to EKC when they were each just 7 years old, and it is literally their favorite thing in the world. They count down all year until the day they get on the bus to see their friends and counselors, and they talk about it so much during the year that every friend, relative, and teacher knows exactly what EKC is. I am constantly amazed by the impact of camp on their lives – each one of them comes home more mature, independent and confident. It’s also incredible to see how all the kids at camp take care of each other. Kids who barely say “Hi” to one another in Pittsburgh are like family at EKC.*

*This will be my 8th summer at EKC, and the friendships I have made with campers and counselors, from both Pittsburgh and out-of-town, will last a lifetime.*

**THE CURRENT CONDITION**

Jewish camping fosters Jewish identity in children and adolescents and offers the path to engagement through the college years, young adulthood, and ultimately parenthood. Excellent Jewish camps provide a platform to:

* Demonstrate lasting, long-term influences upon adult Jewish identity.
* Intentionally create positive identification with Israel.
* Cultivate adolescents and young adults who are engaged in Jewish life and more likely to enter careers in service to the Jewish community.
* Help children gain greater confidence and self-concept through enhanced social and problem-solving skills and increased adaptability. This is often the primary market driver for why Jewish parents choose a particular camp (Jewish or secular) for their child.

We also know that:

* Jewish impact grows the longer a camper goes to camp and how many years they attend.
* Jewish camp can attract and impact the highly engaged, marginally engaged, and under engaged.
* Jewish day camp is a feeder to Jewish overnight camp.
* The more campers we ultimately serve, the larger the impact will be.

Having just completed its 110th year of operation, EKC is financially healthy and our tradition is strong, with 67% of seasonal staff in 2017 (100 out of 148) having grown up as EKC campers compared to 45% of staff from all Jewish overnight camps in 2015 who were alumni of the camp they worked at. While EKC has consistently achieved a higher % camp capacity (defined as # of camper beds filled each summer divided by the total number of camper beds available) than the average Jewish overnight camp, EKC’s performance has fluctuated greatly over the last three years (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: How Full is Camp?

**NOTE:** In 2016, camps with a total of 400-999 beds available had an average % camp capacity of 86%; camps with gross revenue of $2.5 million and over had an average % camp capacity of 86%; JCCA camps had an average % camp capacity of 80%.

A number of factors have contributed to a more challenging business environment and have ultimately detracted from EKC’s ability to most effectively deliver on the promise of Jewish overnight camp. While EKC has struggled to adequately address issues such as an explosion of competing interests for the attention of campers and their families, affordability, a diminishing pipeline of qualified staff, over-reliance on smartphones and IT connectivity, “helicopter” parenting, compressed summer calendars, and a growing number of interfaith marriages, other Jewish overnight camps, including other JCCA overnight camps, have been able to attract and retain campers. While Figure 2 illustrates that EKC has lagged behind the national average in the change of year-over-year camper enrollment for the last several years, FJC reports that out of a total of 161 camps 53 camps have flat or decreased enrollment over the most recent ten-year period (2007-2017).

Figure 2: Annual Enrollment Patterns

**NOTE:** National data from Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC) Annual Census reports.

Specific to JCCA overnight camps, although the number of affiliated camps decreased from 29 to 27 (2015 vs. 2016), the overall percentage of campers at Jewish overnight camps attending a JCCA camp increased from 28% to 29% (20,879 campers vs. 23,380 campers).

An overnight camp’s enrollment is driven by a combination of its ability to attract new campers and to retain existing campers. Table 1 below illustrates just how challenging of a year 2017 was. Not only did overall enrollment decline, but the percentage of those who were new to camp also declined. While the retention of campers who were new to EKC in 2016 rebounded in 2017, it was not enough to salvage the overall retention rate, which dipped to its lowest level in six (6) years.

Table 1: Attracting & Retaining Campers

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **New Campers (% of Total Enrolled)** | | **Retention of New Campers** | | **Overall Camper Retention** | |
|  | National | EKC | National | EKC | National | EKC |
| 2012 | 18% | 24.3% | 56% | N/A | 79% | 79.2% |
| 2013 | 16% | 24.5% | 50% | 69.4% | 79% | 78.7% |
| 2014 | 35% | 25.3% | 70% | 65.3% | 73% | 79.8% |
| 2015 | 34% | 26.3% | 62% | 77.8% | 72% | 78.7% |
| 2016 | Not available | 26.8% | Not available | 64.7% | Not available | 78.5% |
| 2017 | Not available | 23.9% | Not available | 73.4% | Not available | 74.8% |

**NOTE:** 2014-15 national data related to new campers is heavily influenced by FJC’s incubator of four overnight specialty camps.

To help better understand some of the underlying causes for EKC’s enrollment difficulties over the last several years, we have analyzed a rich data set from a national survey, Camp Satisfaction Insights (CSI), administered by FJC and Summation Research Group. As illustrated by Table 2 below, overall satisfaction with EKC and the likelihood of our parents recommending EKC are both 6% lower than the national average. While EKC was at or above the national average in facilitating camper friendships, developing camper independence, building camper skills, quality of programming offered and adequacy of facilities, specific areas of concern highlighted by the survey include underperforming staff, inadequate attention to camper care, poor communication with parents throughout the year and a perception that camp is not as healthy, safe and secure as it can be.

Table 2: CSI Results (presented as % of total respondents)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Questions – Answers** | **EKC 2017** | **All Camps 2017**\* |
| Overall satisfaction with this summer’s experience – “Extremely” | 65% | 71% |
| Overall, the leadership and staff of the camp and the way it is run – “Excellent” | 55% | 71% |
| Camp’s communication with parents (in terms of its quality, clarity, content and timeliness) directly and/or online –“ Excellent” | 61% | 71% |
| Creates an “ambiance” and atmosphere where your child is proud to be Jewish – “Excellent” | 71% | 80% |
| Overall, the competitive cost compared with other options you might have considered in your area – “Excellent/Very Good" | 61% | 71% |

\***NOTE:** All Camps data from 10,642 parents at 66 North American Jewish overnight camps, representing 14,698 campers.

Figure 3 depicts the top ten most often cited strengths of EKC and compares each to the frequency it was identified as a strength across all of the overnight camps surveyed. Parents find EKC to excel in the areas of building community, instilling self-confidence and independence and building lifelong friendships. Programming/activities and physical plant/facilities appear to be particular highlights, with 39% and 12% of the respondents, respectively, listing them as one of their three EKC strengths (vs. 26% and 4% nationally).

Figure 3: CSI, Select up to Three Key Strengths of Your Camp

Figure 4, on the other hand, illustrates that food at EKC is the most often cited area for improvement, while communication during the summer and camp leadership were both mentioned significantly more often by EKC parents than by parents from other camps across the country.

Figure 4: CSI, Select up to Three Key Areas for Improvement at Your Camp

A camp’s enrollment by age is an important metric to follow, as it suggests a direction for programming but also clearly indicates the strength of a camp’s pipeline for both campers and staff. Figure 5 shows that Jewish overnight camps are largely a middle-grade phenomenon, with the greatest increase in enrollment occurring between 3rd and 4th grade and the greatest decline occurring between 10th and 11th grades.

Figure 5: Two-Year Retrospective of the Age Distribution in Jewish Overnight Camps

Figure 6 paints a similar picture for EKC but shows fewer 3rd grade campers as a percentage of the overall camper population and more variation among the population of 9th and 10th graders. These data could suggest the difficulty EKC parents and their younger children have in commiting to an overnight camp experience as well as the challenge in keeping teen campers engaged and interested in camp.

Figure 6: Three-Year Retrospective of the Age Distribution at EKC

Camper retention is positively correlated with a camp’s ability to retain strong staff. According to FJC, the percentage of bunk counselors who were returning staff in 2013, 2014 and 2015 was 56%, 48% and 48%, respectively. During this same period of time, EKC had an overall staff retention rate of 47.9%, 76.9%, and 50.0% and 61.3% and 56.3% in 2016 and 2017, respectfully. As staff retention has become somewhat variable and having experienced a 5% decline in retention in 2017, EKC has a greater need for international staff. In general, greater staff turnover presents challenges in maintaining important camper/staff relationships from year-to-year. While our staff are more likely to recommend working at EKC to a colleague and our staff are more satisfied with their overall experience than the average staff at other Jewish overnight camps, there are a number of areas of concern detailed in Table 3, which presents the results of a national survey, Staff Satisfaction Insights (SSI), administered by FJC and Summation Research Group.

Table 3: SSI Results (presented as % of total respondents)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Questions – Answers** | **EKC 2016** | **EKC 2017** | **All Camps 2016** | **All Camps 2017** |
| Degree to which you felt appreciated for your work – Excellent/Very good | 59% | 56% | 64% | 63% |
| Overall quality & professionalism of camp leadership – Excellent/Very good | 83% | 74% | 83% | 80% |
| Visibility & engagement of camp leadership in daily camp life – Excellent/Very good | --- | 58% | --- | 77% |
| Camp leadership’s regard for incorporating staff feedback – Excellent/Very good | --- | 56% | --- | 65% |
| Overall, having a positive impact on your Jewish/religious identity – Excellent/Very good | 91% | 66% | 82% | 79% |

**COMPETITION/BEST-IN-CLASS PROVIDERS**

A thorough review of EKC’s competitors and other best-in-class Jewish overnight camps is provided in Appendix 1. The purpose of this analysis is to determine (1) the strengths and weaknesses of the competition, (2) the strategies that will provide EKC with a distinct advantage and (3) the barriers that can be developed and weaknesses that can be exploited in order to prevent competition from further entering EKC’s market.

**SWOT ANALYSIS – A ROADMAP FOR WHAT TO FOCUS ON IN THE FUTURE**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Strengths | Weaknesses |
| * American Camp Association accreditation * Solid national reputation * Diversity of geographies represented at camp (national reach) * All-in pricing model (no hidden costs) * Facility improvements * Specialty offerings, i.e., waterfront, horseback riding and outdoor adventure * Kitchen that can accommodate sensitive food allergies * Progressive camper/staff inclusion policy * Facilities and maintenance managed by external company that adds expertise on the ground * Built in, “home grown” staff recruitment program, highlighted by CIT/SIT program * Full-time media specialist on staff at JCC * Israel inclusion program (both campers and staff) * Longstanding core of camp leadership – Camp Director, Assistant Director of Operations and Health & Wellness Directors | * Camper retention, which is 10% below industry best practice, combined with declining number of new campers * Lack of professional specialty staff * No suitable housing to accommodate more experienced/adult professionals * Diminished pipeline for SITs * Inconsistent enforcement of various camp rules and regulations * Insufficient “cocoon of care” for parents and campers * Non-visionary marketing and communications campaign, including “tired” website, that fails to meet parent’s expectations and sell the strengths of camp * Informal and infrequent review of what the competition is doing * Lack of communication around program differentiation between 1st and 2nd sessions and camper development from year-to-year * Poor data and performance measurement systems to identify successes and areas for improvement * Over-reliance on the specific bunk experience that can create uneven satisfaction measures by individual cabin |
| Opportunities | Threats |
| * Untapped market: Only 10% of U.S. Jewish children attend Jewish overnight camp * Participation in FJC’s *Hiddur* initiative as well as the Harold Grinspoon Foundation’s *JCamp 180* * JCC capital campaign, targeting specific facility needs at EKC * Proximity to WVU and Morgantown, WV * Leverage the waterfront as a key differentiator in both camper recruitment and program/staff development * Rental groups as a source of income (Beit Chosky is winterized for off-season housing) * Alumni/parent network in its early stages | * Limited audience: Only 10% of U.S. Jewish children attend Jewish overnight camp * Decrease in number campers at J&R since 2012 * Overall decrease in the number of Jewish children in the Greater Pittsburgh community * Competing interests for the attention of campers and staff * Increasingly more difficult for parents to let go of their kids for the summer PLUS their expectations around continuous information/communication * Compressed summer calendar that is inconsistent by state/region * Camp not perceived as valuable work experience during college (vs. internship) * Insufficient data on the benefits of overnight camp, specifically on the journey of camper to staff |
|  |  |

**REIMAGINING EKC**

Re-establishing EKC as the preeminent Jewish overnight camp in the Tri-State region will require somewhat of a full-court press across a number of key areas. Our path forward has been informed not only by the analyses above but also through conversations with directors from other Jewish overnight camps and industry experts from foundations, camp associations and JCCA. We believe adhering to the guiding principles listed below will put us on the path to improve camp and ultimately bring enrollment closer to capacity:

* **High-quality daily programming and specialties are a lynchpin of successful overnight camps.** Parents want their children to be busy during the day with minimal downtime and to come home from camp having learned a new skill and/or improved their proficiency at a skill they had prior to camp.
* **A formalized camper care program is an anecdote for parents who are hesitant to send their children to overnight camp.** Overnight camps must develop leading-edge systems that demonstrate the well-being of every camper is a year-round priority.
* **Jewish overnight camps must better communicate the value they bring in the overall development of campers and staff, including enhancing Jewish identity**. It is critical that the countless anecdotesabout how overnight camp has helped to positively shape lives reach prospective camp parents and campers, universities and industry.

Camper Recruitment

Simply put, EKC’s camper enrollment numbers are “soft” and there are several disturbing trends that suggest a renewed and energized emphasis on recruitment is needed.

* Unique number of campers has declined by 12.9% over the last 5 years.
* Total enrollment has declined by 9.2% over the last 5 years.
* Since 2013, the % of total EKC enrollment made up by Pittsburghers has declined by 7.8% and the number of Pittsburghers attending EKC each summer has declined by 21.3%.
* New campers as a % of total enrollment has decreased by 12.7% over the last 5 years and there were 40 fewer new campers in 2017 than in 2013.
* As of 2017, the number of unique families sending their children to camp either as a camper or SIT has declined by 13.5% since 2013, from 488 to 422.

Successful camper enrollment depends on creating a strong and loyal base of customers, which is most often accomplished through building positive relationships with campers and their parents throughout the entire year. This requires camp to anticipate and offer what campers and their parents need, and when possible, exceed their expectations. More than their counterparts across the country, EKC parents like to be "in the know" and they will likely feel more connected to camp with even a modest investment of time and money in feeding them information.

**Proposed Actions – 2018**

* 1. Revamp local recruitment strategy.
     + Hold four (4) parlor meetings (information sessions) between November 1 – April 1 with the goal of registering 10 new campers.
     + Attend five (5) local Pittsburgh Jewish camp fairs/communal events.
     + Formalize the EKC camper referral program. Create a marketing effort to raise awareness and offer stronger incentives.
     + Welcome new camp families with a Spring Shabbat dinner, with existing Parent Liaisons serving as “chairs” for the event.
     + Expand dual programming with J&R Day Camp.
  2. “Keep ‘em or Lose ‘em” (KEOLE) program targeting campers from the previous summer who have not yet registered for the upcoming summer.
  3. Implement a robust camper care program that emphasizes real-time and meaningful communication opportunities for parents (see Camper Care section below).
  4. Review enrollment-related information available on the *JCamp180* Knowledge Center and reach out to subject matter experts from within the *JCAMP180* cohort, Benji Bearman (COO, Ramah Day Camp Wisconsin) and Simon Wolle (Director, Camp Northland B’nai Brith).
  5. Open and promote registration for Summer 2019 before Session 1 ends in 2018.

**Proposed Actions - 2019**

* 1. Participate in *JCamp180* enrollment program.
  2. Identify new(er) markets for EKC to recruit from or build upon, i.e., Cherry Hill, NJ Buffalo, NY, Washington, DC, Reisterstown, MD.
  3. Research key takeaways from FJC’s Innovative Engagement Initiative as a means of meeting the needs of an ever-changing Jewish community (i.e., interfaith, LGBTQ)

1. Approach Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh, local grant makers, and individuals for scholarship and other incentive opportunities in addition to the One Happy Camper Grant to complement/expand the $238,000 in financial aid and other unreimbursed fees provided by the JCC (for both US and Israeli campers).
2. “We Missed You” program targeting every camper who attended camp in 2017 but did not return in 2018.
3. Develop online camper registration process as the JCC’s new CRM is implemented.
4. Work together with ACA to develop a data-driven communication piece around the value of overnight camp, i.e., greater independence, problem solving, teamwork, etc.

**Proposed Actions - 2020**

* 1. Create marketing piece that specifically targets children of EKC alumni.

1. Continue working with the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh, local grant makers, and individuals for scholarship and other incentive opportunities in addition to the One Happy Camper Grant to complement/expand the $238,000 in financial aid and other unreimbursed fees provided by the JCC (for both US and Israeli campers).

Staff and Staff Development

The role of staff at an overnight camp is critical to the overall customer experience – for both parents and campers. Frontline staff must feel inspired, encouraged and supported by camp leadership and in turn they are more likely to carry out their jobs with patience, compassion and creativity. A safe, positive and fun work environment retains staff in the long run, and a comprehensive training program equips staff to be the best they can be. A strong and present leadership team serves as role models for frontline staff and builds trust and confidence among parents. Finally, the overall staffing model at overnight camp must strike the perfect balance of meeting campers’ and parents’ needs while at the same time not putting too much strain on the overall budget.

While we know that staff retention at EKC has recently slipped and turnover is on the rise, the 2017 staff and camper satisfaction survey results can be helpful in identifying the underlying causes for these concerning trends.

* Need for better training of unit heads and other direct supervisors throughout camp: While 88% of staff respondents rated their overall satisfaction at EKC as excellent or very good (vs. the national average of 82%), only 74% rated their direct supervisor’s quality and professionalism as excellent or very good (vs. a national average of 81%).
* Need for better training of full-time leadership team: Although 84% of staff respondents rated the overall work environment at EKC as excellent or very good (vs. a national average of 78%), only 74% rated the quality and professionalism of EKC’s senior leadership as excellent or very good (vs. a national average of 80%). Senior leadership at EKC significantly underperformed the national average in areas of visibility & engagement on a daily basis, regard for incorporating staff feedback and serving as Jewish role model.
* Update staff training with the most relevant topics and maintain a work/life balance for staff: EKC staff felt just as well trained and equipped to do their jobs as their colleagues from other Jewish overnight camps and just under 80% of both groups rated the overall staff environment as excellent or very good.
* Need for additional/better training in building relationships, managing bunk dynamics, serving as a role model and valuing the individual: While 97% of the EKC staff respondents rated their relationships with their campers as excellent or very good (vs. the national average of 93%), only 86% of EKC parents rated the quality of their child’s counselors and their child’s relationship with the counselors as excellent or very good (vs. a national average of 93%). Furthermore, 81% of EKC families rated staff sensitivity to campers’ personal issues/needs as excellent or very good compared to the national average of 91%.
* Need for more of an adult presence and increasing the expertise of key program staff: 85% of EKC families rated the expertise and professionalism of supervisory and programming staff as excellent or very good compared to the national average of 94%.
* Camp director needs specific training on problem solving, communication and change management: 83% of EKC families rated the camp director as excellent or very good compared to the national average of 95%. Furthermore, “camp leadership” was only cited as 1 of the top 3 strengths of EKC by 5% of the family respondents (vs. 15% nationwide) and it was cited as 1 of the top 3 areas for improvement at EKC by 12% of the respondents (vs. 4% nationwide).

**Proposed Actions - 2018**

1. Review the entire staffing model of EKC, compare it to best practices in the field and make necessary adjustments to ensure that camp is equipped to meet customer needs and expectations both during the off-season and while camp is in session. This includes adhering to important staff-to-camper ratios, bringing on additional camper care-related staff and updating job descriptions for all positions.
2. Compare the wages paid to EKC seasonal staff using FJC’s Annual Census data and ACA's camp salary and compensation research reports in order to make sure EKC’s pay scale is competitive and in line with similarly sized overnight camps.
3. Benchmark EKC’s existing staff training curriculum and make at least one meaningful enhancement, i.e., enhanced security training, bringing in one (1) new, relevant guest lecturer.
4. More broad participation by full-time staff at FJC’s Leaders Assembly and the ACA NY/NJ Tri-State Camp Conference.
5. Camp director to participate in the JCC’s quality improvement training program (“Perfecting Community Care”) to provide him with the tools and resources needed to eliminate errors, decrease inefficiency and waste and deliver best-in-class service to EKC’s customers.
6. “We miss you” campaign targeting 2016 staff who did not return in 2017.
7. Staff retention.
   * + Provide staff time out of camp both at night and during the day.
     + Adjust weekly night time staff activities to be more current with the feedback received from staff and what their needs are, staff sports leagues, more frequent staff socials, etc.
     + Research and implement best practices in keeping staff engaged, happy and positive, i.e., Hanoch Greenberg (Director of Education, Content & Training with Jewish Agency for Israel and part-time Wizard of Fun at URJ Camp Coleman).
8. Intentional development of the staff pipeline.
   * + Create a “Teen Village Sikkum Guide” for staff which will include ideas for programming (i.e., leadership development and the responsibilities tied to becoming more independent), facilitation tools, what to say when the discussion gets tough, etc. Teen staff will be trained on this guide by Unit Heads, Program Director or Assistant Director during staff week.

**Proposed Actions - 2019**

1. Establish a state-of-the-art staff training curriculum.
2. Institute a “Refer a Friend” incentive program for key staff positions.
3. Staff retention.
   * + Offer formal fitness program, i.e., Spartan Strong or Spartan SGX.
     + Create formal internship program that is recognized by universities and allows staff to receive college credits for working at camp.
     + Provide staff with talking points for their professional interviews as to why camp was such a valuable work experience.
     + Create professional networking program connecting current camp staff to EKC alumni who can help them get internships and jobs throughout college and once they graduate.

**Proposed Actions - 2020**

1. Continue to implement modifications in staff training.
2. Create a formal mentoring program for 4th year staff to work with 1st year staff throughout the summer.
3. Intentional development of the staff pipeline.
   * + Leverage the final project for SITs to address important opportunities for improvement that were identified during the summer.
4. Implement formal childcare program for adult staff with children who are not yet of camp age.

Programming

EKC’s offers a unique and intimate bunk experience in which the members of each bunk participate together in the vast majority of daily activities throughout each session. Staff has long advocated for this approach in helping to build deep and long-lasting bonds between bunk mates, and while a core component of the new EKC brand is “connections,” when the chemistry within a bunk sours for whatever reason, not providing campers an outlet from the “negative” bunk dynamic has often resulted in a very unsettling experience for both campers and their parents.

To help relieve some of the inescapable friction within a bunk and to better respond to parents’ and campers’ desire for a more customized suite of activities (only 52 percent of national CSI respondents found the degree to which campers could choose to do the things they really wanted to do as “excellent”), many overnight camps are more aggressively adopting free-choice programming, where campers are able to explore their interests and create a larger portion of their schedule. The benefits of allowing campers to self-select even more of their daily activities are clear:

* Choices in the summer camp setting are very important to the development of **self-reliance and a sense of autonomy.** When we offer children choices, we are allowing them to practice the skills of independence and responsibility, while we guard their health and safety by controlling and monitoring the options. This strengthens their sense of responsibility to themselves and acts as proof that they do have impact and influence over their life.
* One simple fact of life is that being in control and making your own decisions feels good. The ability to go from decision, to action, to success does wonders for **self-esteem.** By encouraging children to explore the full variety of camp activities, they are provided the opportunity to step outside of their comfort zone from time to time. When a camper pushes themselves to overcome a fear, hesitation, or anxiety that they once had, the joy of success is truly contagious.
* Children become must more involved and motivated in activities when they have made the conscious choice to be there. Engagement in camp activities and collective enthusiasm promotes **cooperation** within groups of children. Once a child learns cooperation in a specific circumstance, such as a team sport, they better able to practice it in other aspects of their life.

SECULAR PROGRAMMING

The average camper’s day at EKC consists of six (6) activity periods and special evening programming. EKC currently has six (6) key program areas - waterfront, aquatics, horseback riding, outdoor adventure, culture & performing arts, and athletics. Campers access these foundational program areas primarily through the bunk/cabin experience, and they also have the opportunity to explore more specific offerings (i.e., waterskiing, pool games, horsemanship, outdoor survival skills, drama, dance, gymnastics, etc.) as well as other content areas (i.e., sports broadcasting and radio, babysitting certification, cooking, fitness, robotics, etc.) during chugim (specialty) and camper-choice periods. While the older campers at EKC get more choice in their day-to-day activities, the majority of every camper’s day is still spent with their bunk/cabin group.

EKC has not typically been as timely as other overnight camps in updating our specialty offerings based on the most current interests among the camper population. While EKC has very intentionally steered clear of crossing too aggressively into the specialty camp space, our suite of specialty areas lags behind our competitors, which offer activities such as multimedia, outdoor survival skills, travel and photography.

JEWISH PROGRAMMING

In 2016 EKC was selected as one of eight (8) camps nationally to participate in the multi-year *Hiddur* initiative, a pilot project of the Foundation for Jewish Camp aimed at helping overnight camps more effectively deliver Jewish educational experiences to campers and staff. EKC has organized a *Hiddur* team to implement systemic change and growth in our approach to Jewish programming and content with three primary goals: (1) increased intentionality in teaching Jewish values; (2) deliver experiential, interest-based programming for all units, with special emphasis on teens; and (3) provide more intensive Jewish experiential learning and training to staff so that they can more effectively teach Jewish values to their campers.

Rosov Consulting, a national strategic planning and analytics firm engaged with dozens of Federation and Jewish organizations worldwide, is the data collection and evaluation process partner for *Hiddur*. Their baseline year data for EKC along with the other seven (7) camps in the *Hiddur* cohort provided important data from EKC parents, campers and staff that inform our intuition and help shape our future direction.

* **Parents:** EKC parents are 10% less likely than the cohort camps to engage in Jewish ritual practice at home and about 8% less likely to answering around the “importance of feeling connected to Judaism and Israel.”
* **Campers:** EKC campers are 24% less likely to have half or more of their closest friends that are Jewish than other camps. EKC campers are more interested in Israel engagement than Jewish engagement, a factor that increases with the oldest 9th and 10th grade camp unit.
* **Staff:** EKC Staff are 15-25% less likely than other cohort camps to see EKC as a place where they can gain Jewish knowledge, see Jewish life as “exciting,” have inspiring Jewish role models and create innovative Jewish programs.

**Proposed Actions - 2018**

1. Revise the process by which campers select their specialties as well as the daily scheduling process to maximize camper choice, minimize downtime (other than Shabbat), improve the bunk experience and reduce administrative burden on EKC program staff.
2. Perform a comprehensive review of specialty areas offered at competing Jewish overnight camps and update our inventory of specialty offerings.
3. Implement new programming for all age levels
   * + Golf (Kineret, Halutzim and Teens)
     + Fitness/SPARTAN EDGE, STRONG SGX (Kineret, Halutzim and Teens)
     + Interactive Tikun Olam program in partnership with FJC and the Tivnu Building Justice program (Teens)
     + Yom Foam (Sabra)
4. Offer real-life skills development courses in lifeguarding, babysitting and Jewish outdoors.
5. Professionalize specialty areas through an aggressive recruiting strategy for experienced instructors and adults that includes University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) and West Virginia University (WVU) student athletes, the WVU Recreation Center, Hillel at both Pitt and WVU and local cooking, dance, gymnastics and sports programs in Morgantown, WV.
6. Create formal lesson plans for each program and specialty area, with special attention to creating aspirational arcs across campers’ time at camp each year and through the years.
7. Implement a 1-night/2-day trip for teens in Session 2.
8. Continue to refine the “Jewish at Camp” and our intentional connection to Israel as part of the *Hiddur* initiative.
   * + Hire a new Jewish educator and develop “a bench” for the position of song leader.
     + “Back to basics” with Shabbat services and create moving and emotional Havdallah services and inspired Jewish song sessions.
     + Create an alternative Shabbat experience for teens 1 time per session that is customized to each teen’s interest, i.e., yoga, meditation, arts, sports.
     + Enhance key elements of Jewish programming, i.e., *Modeh Ani* at flagpole, sikkumim (nightly bunk learning circles) and *chinuch* (formal Judaics education) and better align with weekly middot.
     + Further strengthen Jewish programming through the installation of various audio/visual equipment in the dining hall, amphitheater and playhouse.

**Proposed Actions - 2019**

1. Expand teen out-of-camp trip to both sessions (different locations to accommodate 7-week campers).
2. Enhance the specialty program to include a cooking chug where EKC partners with local restaurants and their chefs to donate their time in their own kitchens and at EKC.
3. Continue to professionalize specialty areas through an aggressive recruiting strategy for experienced instructors and adults that includes University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) and West Virginia University (WVU) student athletes, the WVU Recreation Center, Hillel at both Pitt and WVU and local cooking, dance, gymnastics and sports programs in Morgantown, WV.
4. Continue to create formal lesson plans for remaining program and specialty areas, with special attention to creating aspirational arcs across campers’ time at camp each year and through the years.
5. Continue to refine the “Jewish at Camp.”
   * + Hire an agency-wide Jewish educator whose suite of responsibilities will include “Jewish at Camp.”
     + Partner with a local Morgantown community-based organization to create large-scale mitzvah project for teens that entails a volunteer experience both in and out of camp.
     + Develop a resident Tikkun Olam program for Halutzim and teens in which local Morgantown social services agencies visit camp to address/exemplify the middah of the week.
     + Increase EKC’s connection to Israel through various programs involving SITs both in Israel and back at camp.

**Proposed Actions - 2020**

1. Implement a day trip experience for Halutzim.
2. Continue to professionalize specialty areas through an aggressive recruiting strategy for experienced instructors and adults that includes University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) and West Virginia University (WVU) student athletes, the WVU Recreation Center, Hillel at both Pitt and WVU and local cooking, dance, gymnastics and sports programs in Morgantown, WV.
3. Implement a seventh core program area, Outdoor Trips & Travel, where every unit will have an authentic overnight camping experience.
4. Leverage our new waterfront program space and develop a formal water safety instructor course for older campers and SITs.
5. Create a camp garden and gardening specialty program where campers will learn and participate in a farm-to-table cooking experience and home grown food will be able to be used by the EKC food service vendor.

Operations

Important components of the overall operations at camp include camper registration, bunk assignments, planning of camper activities, staff scheduling, establishing policies and procedures, collection of accounts receivable, processing of accounts payable, transportation, emergency preparedness and information technology. Generally when the operations of an organization are properly managed, the functions of all other departments are smooth, customers are provided with a positive experience and the organization’s financial performance often benefits. As a business line that exists within the larger JCC of Greater Pittsburgh, it is critical that EKC’s operations be the best they can be, as they not only reflect on camp but on the agency as a whole.

Recently at EKC, uncollected balances as of the first day of camp have increased, outstanding invoices are not being closely managed, staff files continue to lack required pieces of documentation, bunk assignments are a point of contention for a small, but vocal group of parents each year, scheduling camper activities has become a long and cumbersome process each week, the demands of staff for more time off have grown and certain camp policies are enforced in somewhat of an ad hoc manner.

While EKC must address each of these operational concerns in order to recognize its true potential, one issue in particular has begun to rip away at the fabric of what makes an overnight camp experience special -- the growing prevalence of mobile devices with internet capability at camp. EKC strives to offer our campers an experience that includes healthy social interactions and a chance to develop overall confidence and independence, and we find that electronic devices can interfere and even sabotage a child’s experience at camp. Simply put, the use of electronics allows campers to avoid getting to know their bunkmates, facilitates an over-reliance on parents and friends back home and distracts attention from the activities taking place at camp. According to Tom Rosenberg, Director of the American Camp Association, only 17 percent of ACA-accredited camps allow access to the internet on a scheduled basis, and only 10 percent allow access to cellphones. Interestingly enough, our conversations with camp directors from across the country suggest that the people who have the hardest time letting go of mobile devices are not necessarily the campers themselves, but rather the parents of campers, the young staff members, and sometimes even the counselors' parents as well.

**Proposed Actions - 2018**

1. Implement a performance measurement program which will focus on key drivers for camper enrollment.
2. Roll out a new mobile device policy that does not allow campers to bring cell phones/smartphones to camp and restricts the use of mobile devices by staff to designated times and places.
3. Implement the recommendations of the JCC’s Seasonal Employment Work Group to ensure compliance with agency and regulatory requirements in payroll and human resources.
4. Investigate and implement new alternatives for bus transportation throughout the summer.
5. Expand partnership with the JCC Finance Department to improve the management of outstanding receivables and the annual budget.
6. Expand Parent’s Breakfast to the South Hills.
7. Continue partnership with West Virginia University Student Cadet Program for overnight security personnel.

**Proposed Actions - 2019**

1. Develop online camper registration process, as the JCC’s new CRM is implemented.
2. Research functionality in JCC’s new client relationship management system that identifies outstanding balances one month prior to due date and implement outreach strategy to impacted families.
3. Review policy around notifying families of bunk assignments.
4. Expand Parent’s Breakfast to outside of Pittsburgh.

**Proposed Actions - 2020**

1. Continued expansion of the Parent’s Breakfast.
2. Revisit security-related needs and implement enhancements as required.

Facilities

Emma Kaufmann Camp is a 175+ acre facility with a capacity 396 campers at any one point. EKC has been run out of its current location in Morgantown, WV since 1972 and the camp facilities are among the finest in the country, designed to keep campers and staff safe and comfortable while they enjoy the magic and adventure of overnight camp. Parents and campers routinely rank EKC’s overall quality, adequacy and cleanliness of its facilities on par with the national average.

* The John & Leatrice Wolf Aquatics Center was built in 2009 and is made up of three individual pools. The Lap pool contains six swimming lanes, two slides, ranges from 3-6ft in depth and holds 112,000 gallons of water. The dive pool has 2 diving boards, ranges in depth from 4-12 feet and holds 104,000 gallons of water. The zero-entry pool, also known as the activity pool, contains the buckets of water feature, ranges in depth from 0-3 feet and holds 20,000 gallons of water.
* The Chadar Ochell (Dining Hall) was expanded upon in 1992 and again in 2007. It has the capacity to seat over 500 people. Its HVAC system currently has functional air-conditioning, while the heating capability is not yet operational. The entire facility is kosher (but not under Rabbinic supervision), and there is a separate gluten-free kitchen.
* EKC has a private cove on Cheat Lake with its own private beach and two docks, with the ability to dock up to 5 motor boats. In the cove, the campers can swim, play on the blob and rave (inflatable water toys), paddleboard, and peddle boat, canoe, kayak and fish.
* The EKC Outdoor Adventure Course contains both a High Ropes and Low Ropes Challenge Course. The High Ropes course consists of the following elements: two climbing walls, Flying Squirrel, Solomon’s Circuit, Jacob’s Ladder, Zip-line and Pamper Pole. The Low Ropes Course consists of the following elements: High Wall, Low Wall, Trust Fall, Triangular Traverse, Wild Woozy, Nitro Crossing, Teepee Shuffle, Slack Line, and All Aboard.
* The main courtyard area consists of the flagpole, Fieldhouse, gaga pit, badminton and four square courts and senior staff housing.
* EKC’s sports facilities, known as the “upper ball fields” consists of one basketball court, two tennis courts, one softball field, one soccer field, one volleyball court, one wiffle ball field, 5 archery targets, the Gillman Pavilion and the barn. The Gillman Pavilion is used for a variety a purposes, including hockey, basketball and all-camp programming. The barn, located near both the lower and upper horse pastures, is the hub for all horseback riding activity.
* Claire & Vern Reingold Park traditionally houses Halutzim campers, those entering 7th and 8th grade. There are 9 Park cabins, which were built in 2008. Eight of the cabins are equipped with bathrooms that are annexed to the back of the cabins and accessed through a breezeway. The bathrooms were built in 2015, each containing two showers and two toilets. Parks 1-8 sleep 14 individuals comfortably. Park 9 sleeps 10 individuals comfortably and has a bathroom inside the cabin. There is also a unit head cabin the sleeps two individuals and contains a single bathroom.
* Camp Street traditionally houses Kineret campers, those entering 5th and 6th Grade. The unit contains 12 cabins that sleep 12 individuals comfortably. Each cabin is equipped with an attached bathroom accessed through a breezeway. Each bathroom has two showers and two toilets. Cabins 1, 2, 10, 11 and 12 were built in 2014, and cabins 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 were built in 1992 Camp Street bathrooms were added in 2015. There is also a duplex cabin for the unit heads, which house four individuals and contains two bathrooms.
* Camp Circle houses our youngest campers - Sabra (entering 3rd and 4th grade) and First Experience (entering 2nd – 5th Grade) - and our special needs campers (*Gesher*). The unit consists of 9 cabins built in 1991. Cabins 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9 each sleep 12 individuals and have attached bathrooms (accessed through a breezeway) built in 2015. Each bathroom contains two showers and two toilets. Cabin 8 sleeps 8 individuals and also has a bathroom with one shower and one toilet inside the cabin. Cabin 7 is reserved for Unit Heads.
* Teen Village, located in the heart of the woods on the southeast side of camp, houses teen campers (entering 9th and 10th grade) and consists of 7 quads of platform tents. Each quad, except for Quad 5, consists of 4 tents surrounding a fire pit. Quad 5 consists of 5 platform tents. Each tent sleeps 6 individuals. Teen village is a five minute walk from the rest of camp and can only be accessed by a suspension bridge. This separation and unique living arrangement creates the ultimate aspirational arc for campers. Teen Village also contains a Recreation Center with game tables and a lounge area for teen campers. Teen campers use a bathhouse that was newly renovated in 2009.
* Our state-of-the-art Health Center is an air conditioned building that contains 6 private rooms and a separate wing with a separate entrance and exit for daily medication distribution. EKC has a full complement of nurses, 1 full-time EMT and 1 doctor on-site at all times.
* The field house, built in the 1950s, is the oldest building in camp. It is a weather-safe building and can comfortably fit the entire camp in the case of an emergency. The field house is used daily for our gymnastics program, but is also used for unit & all-camp programming, especially on rainy days.
* The Beit Chosky is EKC’s only completely winterized building. Built in 2009, it is a retreat-style lodge that can sleep 50 people. It has a common room with a fireplace and both a front and back porch. The Beit Chosky has allowed EKC to expand into the off-season retreat business during the months of April through October. It has also allowed EKC to better engage campers year round by allowing them to come to camp with their friends for retreat weekends.
* The Playhouse, built in 1997, is a covered outdoor theatre space that houses the EKC Performing Arts Program. It is 3,702 square feet and has a concrete floor, wooden stage and can comfortably fit the entire camp. This space is also used for Shabbat Services on rainy days.
* The Amphitheater was built in the 1950s and is completely surrounded by woods. This space is used for Shabbat services, our weekly camp talent show, Jewish education classes and other cabin programming. It can comfortably seat the entire camp, but is completely uncovered so it cannot be used whenever it rains.

Given the age and diversity of the overall physical plant and the complexity of land-related issues that arise on a routine basis, earlier this year EKC entered into a formal agreement with Oxford Development to manage the entire EKC campgrounds. This partnership has already helped institute a preventive maintenance plan and a professional process by which major renovations and improvements (facility and land) are planned and budgeted for.

**Proposed Actions - 2018**

1. Formalize a weekly system of communication between EKC Oxford Development representative, JCC Senior Director of Facilities and EKC Camp Director.
2. Focus on maintenance and general upkeep. Most recent list of work to be done, includes new roofs on the Arts & Crafts Center, CMU and the Doctor’s House, remediating the hillside behind the Park cabins, replacing a compressor in the dining hall HVAC system, purchasing a new ski boat, addressing stability of support beams in the dining hall and excavation and a new drainage system behind the dining hall.
3. Increase comfort and safety in Teen Village through piloting a “roof” over a tent.
4. Create up to 5 obstacles as part of new fitness/Spartan chug.
5. Crowdfunding campaign (“Tush Push”) for new benches in the amphitheater (pending further review by CEO and Senior Director of Development).
6. Launch fundraising effort with parents/alumni targeting core projects at camp. Goal will be to raise $1.5 million earmarked for a number of priority areas including, but not limited to, (1) senior staff housing, (2) waterfront lake development, (3) additional specialty area improvements, i.e., tennis, cooking, etc.
7. Begin planning for and development of senior staff housing.

**Proposed Actions - 2019**

1. Continue with maintenance and general upkeep, including “roofs” over tents in Teen Village if the 2018 pilot is deemed successful.
2. Continued parent/alumni solicitation efforts around program and capital development at EKC.
3. Open Phase I of senior staff housing.

**Proposed Actions - 2020**

1. Continue with maintenance and general upkeep.
2. Continue making capital improvements as secured funds allow.
3. Research requirements for and economic benefit of renting facility throughout the off-season.

Camper Care

The days are over where parents simply ship their children off to overnight camp waiting for the occasional letter home and believing that the magic of camp will result in greater independence and maturity. Today, parents want and need to know that their chosen overnight camp is equipped to meet the social and behavioral health needs of their children, as living at resident camp for prolonged periods of time and being away from home often lead to campers feeling vulnerable and lonely and may accentuate existing issues, fears and/or needs. As such, EKC must develop systems that are at the leading edge of what summer camps offer in terms of looking after every camper’s well-being and effectively communicating with parents.

According to the most recent CSI survey, EKC rated well below the national average when asked about:

* Sensitivity to the personal issues/needs of their child; and
* Camp’s willingness and success in dealing with campers’ specific medical needs.

Parents also reported discontent with other areas of camper care such as food, lost and found and mail delivery and timeliness.

Recognizing the changing landscape and the growing importance of camper care to existing and prospective customers, EKC instituted a new Parent Ambassador program in the summer of 2017. Ambassadors were assigned a number of first-time EKC families, with whom they developed relationships via phone, email, text, social media and/or personal visits. Ambassadors were charged with providing new families a parent perspective that the EKC staff could not offer. While certainly a good first step in improving our approach to camper care, EKC must amplify its efforts and focus **on both** parents and campers.

**Proposed Action - 2018**

1. Formal review of the EKC disciplinary process with changes made as appropriate, i.e., documenting and communicating (to EKC leadership and parents) issues identified, monitoring issues over time, etc.
2. Expand EKC’s personalized intake process for every First Experience camper, where not only the required forms are explained but there is a real “get-to-know you and your child” interaction.
3. Implement role of Unit Director made up of veteran Unit Leads who serve as role models to the bunk counselors, providing assistance and mentorship as needed.
4. Improved staff training (both during Staff Week and throughout the summer) to better equip frontline staff with the ability to manage difficult social dynamics among campers.
5. Redesign staff t-shirts to more explicitly communicate their role in camper care.
6. Embed EKC’s two (2) health & wellness professionals (retitled as “Camper Care Specialists”) within specific units and assign them as the primary point of contact for parents regarding all camper-related issues. These positions will be managed by the Director of Communications and Alumni Engagement.
7. Camper Care Specialists to call the families of all first-time campers within the first four (4) days of camp to provide parents with an update on the camper’s initial experiences at EKC.
8. Daily meetings between Camper Care Specialists and camp leadership to discuss the situation within each bunk and individual camper issues, making sure that campers are happy, making friends and enjoying their activities.
9. Build mailboxes in each unit where campers can easily drop off letters to be mailed and have Camper Care Specialists deliver all letters each day to the office to be mailed.
10. Increase healthy food options and diversify menu offerings.

**Proposed Action - 2019**

1. Expand the number of Camper Care Specialists to four (4).
2. Revisit a new communication policy between parents and camp, where Camper Care Specialists are the primary point of contact for parents to inquire about how their child is doing at camp (versus inquiries being vetted and assigned by camp office personnel).
3. Continue to expand on healthy meal offerings with an additional two (2) meal options, two (2) new side dishes and one (1) healthy alternative for Nosh.
4. Reduce the amount of lost and found articles through offering parents a discount on the purchase of clothing labels for their camper’s items and improving the collection and storage of lost and found items.

**Proposed Actions - 2020**

1. Hire new Health Center Director

Communication

Successful overnight camps manage the expectations of parents and campers alike through clear, open and consistent communication. On the most recent CSI survey, 44% of the respondents said they were more than satisfied with EKC’s communication in terms of its quality, clarity, content and timeliness, compared to a 62% national average. EKC also scored well below the national average when it came to other critical aspects of parent communication, including turnaround time for a question during the summer, setting clear expectations regarding when and how information about camp and campers would be shared and staying in touch during the off-season. While communication is clearly a challenge, EKC appears to have a very demanding base of parents, where 21% of parents want daily updates about their camper (three times the national average of 7%) and 51% of parents want daily updates regarding camp.

An important tool in helping to allay fears and concerns of a sensitive parent consumer market is accreditation through the American Camp Association. Although EKC has maintained its ACA accreditation for 17 consecutive years, we have not done an effective job in explaining what this means in terms of ensuring that the current practices at EKC reflect the most up-to-date, research-based standards in camp operations. ACA accreditation demonstrates EKC’s commitment to meeting government-recognized best practices and assures parents that we have had a regular, independent safety audit that goes beyond regulations in most states. Accreditation is different than licensing in that it is voluntary. To earn our ACA Accreditation status, we have to first comply with 26 mandatory prerequisite health and safety standards. Then, we have to demonstrate substantial compliance with up to forty additional standards in ten operational areas. Every three years, EKC is visited by ACA evaluators who confirm that we are continuing to meet all of their standards. Accreditation visitors ask over 300 questions regarding essential health, safety and program quality issues important to our camp’s overall operation.

While EKC currently utilizes a variety of communication tools and tactics (see Table 4 below), there is no cohesive strategy knitting these all together. Our website is in desperate need of updating and we have to develop a brand for EKC that is responsive to the changing times and needs/expectations of campers and parents.

Table 4: Current Inventory of Parent Communication

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Parent Communication During the Summer** | **Parent Communication During the Off-Season** |
| 1. Daily photos on CampMinder | 1. Monthly e-newsletters |
| 1. Semi-weekly (2x/week) Facebook posts of what’s going on at camp | 1. Topic-specific emails as needed, i.e., upcoming events, registration announcements, camper forms, etc. |
| 1. Information about bunk counselors sent on the third day of camp | 1. Weekly posts on social media |
| 1. Daily newsletter |  |
| 1. Topic-specific emails as needed, i.e., transportation reminders, luggage pick-up, etc. |  |

**Proposed Actions - 2018**

1. Implement a comprehensive parent communication strategy for both the off-season and during camp that adheres to four (4) basic tenets: timeliness, quality, clarity and content. This strategy will include creating “wow moments” to build excitement and anticipation just before the start of camp and expressing thanks and gratitude immediately following the end of each summer. It will also include information describing the camper’s journey, from the up’s and down’s of camp (problems in the bunk, selected as color war captain) to the value proposition of camp (building resilience, growing independence and developing friendships).
   * + Notify parents of changes in camp (new cell phone policy, schedule of communications from camp, etc.) by framing them in a positive light and backing them up with research from ACA, the Foundation for Jewish Camp and other industry data.
     + Hire part-time in-season Communications Specialist to oversee all picture and video taking, manage EKC blog and social media and conduct regular e-mail communication with parents giving them information about their child such as Chugim selection, swim level, and staff biographies.
     + Eliminate the daily newsletter and instead post enhanced set of pictures 2x/day through the WALDO communication system.
     + EKC Director’s weekly message (Wednesday) which will build on key messages from weekly staff meetings, i.e., leadership, self-discovery, perseverance etc.
     + Weekly Shavua Tov message from other full-time EKC staff where meaningful quotes are applied to previous week’s happenings at camp.
     + Aggressively deploy the services of the JCC media specialist for both summer and off-season video content.
     + Enhance parent and staff newsletters through improved content and a modern user interface.

**Propose**d **Actions - 2019**

1. Redevelop the EKC website into a state-of-the art recruitment and communication tool.
2. Expand role of Communications Specialist.

**Proposed Actions - 2020**

1. Prepare for 2021 ACA accreditation and launch related communications campaign, highlighting the most notable ACA standards for which EKC will have been assessed, including, but not limited to staff to camper ratios by age groups, developmentally-based goals for camp activities, availability of emergency transportation, and quality of first-aid facilities and training of health services staff.

Fundraising/Development

In 2005, the JCC retained Schmidt Copeland Parker Stevens, a Cleveland-based architectural firm noted for design expertise in overnight camps, to develop a Master Site Improvement Plan (MSIP) for EKC. The goal for this project was to provide the JCC with an informed roadmap for continued capital investment into the property which in turn would help ensure that campers and staff work, live, learn, and play within a modernized, yet rustic, environment and at the same time attract families in the highly volatile market for Jewish overnight campers.

The full implementation cost of the plan totaled nearly $15 million, including contingency costs and a related allocation for architect fees and permits. The Schmidt Copeland report was analyzed at length by lay and professional leadership who prioritized items on a project-by-project basis. The JCC Board of Directors approved a more cost-effective plan and a philosophy of leveraging private donations with JCC discretionary funds to address approximately $10 -$12 million of total project need over time.

The JCC prioritized phases of capital development at EKC and provided seed funding for Phase I of the capital plan that began in 2006. Private donations spearheaded Phase II several years later, and Phase III leveraged private donations with the JCC providing matching contributions. To date, the JCC Board has authorized and allocated over $7 million in capital improvements to EKC, about $3 million of which have come through charitable gifts. This includes:

* **Dining Hall:** Expanded seating capacity, added central air conditioning, new roof and porch, kitchen upgrades, gluten-free kitchen and ADA accessible rest rooms.
* **Teen Village:** Renovation of recreation hall and construction of new bath house.
* **Counselors-in-Training:** Construction of winterized Beit Chosky Lodge to house CIT’s during camp season.
* **Camper Housing:** Renovation of Camp Street, Circle and the Clair and Vern Reingold Park cabins, including the addition of bathroom and shower facilities to the cabins, a new activity pavilion and Unit Head housing.
* **Specialty Areas:** Resurfacing and expansion of basketball and tennis courts, fire circle and multi-purpose Gilman Pavilion on upper ball fields, renovation of horse stable area, additional elements added to Outdoor Adventure area, lakefront improvements, including a new path and stairway to more easily access to Cheat Lake.
* **John and Leatrice Wolf Aquatics Center:** Three new pools, diving boards, water slides and bathhouse and renovated counselor lounge to accommodate upgraded instructional and free swim programming.
* **General Infrastructure:** Electrical and water system upgrades, sewage system renovation, improved wireless internet access, maintenance center, dredging of lake in Cove area, sidewalk replacement, relocation of main camp access road, installation of monitored security gate at camp entrance and new camp office and welcome center.

The plan’s final phase will be implemented on a “funds committed” basis that leverages private donations with agency contributions. Projects identified for this final phase are estimated to cost $4.5 million.

* **Priority 1:** New housing to support the addition of adult staff members, expanded program space for specialties.
* **Priority 2:** Enhanced lakefront to support important safety and programmatic improvements that help EKC build a competitive advantage as a lakefront camp.
* **Priority 3:** New or expanded multi-purpose recreation center.
* **Priority 4:** Upgrading Teen Village, both activity areas and living quarters.

In addition to traditional fundraising efforts through capital campaigns and community donors, the most successful overnight camps routinely leverage the sincere connection their alumni have with camp. When utilized properly, alumni networks not only provide a pipeline of future campers but they are great resource for programming ideas, professional staff, camper/family referrals **and donations.** EKC is one of the only camps in the country that is over 100 years old and does not currently have an ongoing, sustainable alumni engagement initiative.

In 2016, EKC created the Parent & Alumni Network – an engaged group of current camp parents and alumni – that exists to build and maintain a premiere overnight camp experience and make camp better for future generations through various engagement, recruitment and fundraising efforts. This network consists of 2 committees – Parent Liaison Committee and the Alumni Steering Committee. Working with the Grinspoon Foundation as a member of *JCamp180,* EKC seeks to transition this loose network into a formal alumni engagement and fundraising initiative that will be staffed by JCC development professionals and housed within the JCC (as opposed to an independent 501(c)(3) alumni organization).

**Proposed Actions - 2018**

1. Crowdfunding campaign (“Tush Push”) for new benches in the amphitheater (pending further review by CEO and Senior Director of Development).
2. Identify approximately 75 major parent/alumni donors to solicit $1.5 million earmarked for a number of priority areas including, but not limited to, (1) senior staff housing, (2) waterfront lake development, (3) additional specialty area improvements, i.e., tennis, cooking, etc.
3. Active participation in the *JCamp180* Data2Donors and GIFT training programs.
4. “Welcome Back to EKC” package to every alumnus for whom we have contact information.
5. Develop Alumni Weekend concept, with each decade of alumni to have their own weekend at camp.

**Proposed Actions - 2019**

1. Create professional networking program connecting current camp staff to EKC alumni who can help them get internships and jobs throughout college and once they graduate.
2. Create a semi-annual alumni e-newsletter.
3. Send EKC-themed Baby Care Package to every alumnus with a new baby.
4. Alumni Day targeting older generations who may not want to stay overnight at camp.
5. Hold first Alumni Weekend at camp targeting a specific decade of campers. Create an annual Impact Report to mail to all EKC donors and alumni.
6. Create Annual Impact Report to mail to all EKC donors and alumni.
7. Develop a roadmap for the EKC Annual Fund.
8. Continued parent/alumni solicitation efforts around program and capital development at EKC.

**Proposed Actions - 2020**

1. Host 3 alumni engagement events (sports outings, tailgates, bar nights) in select cities with a high density of EKC alumni, i.e., Washington DC, New York City, and Chicago.
2. Launch EKC Annual Fund, contingent on engagement efforts of parents and alumni to date.

Marketing and Public Relations

Marketing is one of the most important aspects of running a successful overnight camp for several reasons:

* Communicating the why, how and what of camp
* Sustaining camp’s presence and engaging families throughout the year
* Selling camp
* Growing the reach of camp

EKC’s most recent marketing efforts have primarily been limited to a camper yearbook, an annual calendar and a recruitment brochure and have neglected to adequately position EKC as experts in the areas of youth development and creating community leaders. More so now than ever before, overnight camps must broadly communicate the fact that camp creates advantages for campers. An effective marketing strategy includes persuasively and persistently messaging to existing customers and the public about the lifetime benefits of camp attendance, which include building resilience, problem solving and fostering teamwork, communication, and leadership skills. Creative use of photos and videos that help convey the fun and excitement of camp as well as a compelling website are efficient methods of connecting with both parents and their children. Giving incentives for bringing referrals is an effective tool in building camp’s network, and small things like sending personalized birthday cards will help deepen a family’s connection to camp and make parents feel more comfortable sending their children to camp.

**Proposed Actions - 2018**

1. Re-branding campaign, promoting *Connections, Values, Growth, Fun* and how it applies to the various components of camp, i.e., programming, Jewish at camp, bunk assignments, etc.
2. Implement an aggressive video marketing strategy based on an agenda of releases throughout the entire year.

**Proposed Actions - 2019**

1. Create marketing piece that specifically targets children of EKC alumni.
2. Create Annual Impact Report for all current EKC families, EKC alumni and donors.
3. Redevelop the EKC website into a state-of-the art recruitment and marketing tool, including a schedule of blog posts from full-time and seasonal staff.
4. Release quarterly 1-2 minute videos on social media as a means to build excitement for the upcoming summer and showcase the “magic” of camp.

**Proposed Actions - 2020**

1. Film new full-length EKC video.

**METRICS**

Establishing time-based milestones over the 3-year time horizon of this strategic plan is critical to demonstrate our progress in re-establishing EKC as the preeminent Jewish overnight camp in the Tri-State region. As illustrated below, a number of key metrics have been identified as what will “drive,” or contribute to, the overall goal of being at 92% of capacity heading into the summer of 2021.

**% CAMP CAPACITY: 92%**

**% CAMP CAPACITY: 88%**

**% CAMP CAPACITY: 85%**

1Defined as the percentage of CSI respondents who rate the impact EKC has on their child’s Jewish identity as “excellent.”









