



CAMP RAMAH IN THE BERKSHIRES
STRATEGIC PLAN
תשע"ט • 5779 • 2019

LETTERS FROM CAMP



A strategic plan requires a peculiar sort of double vision. On the one hand, those engaged in the creation of such a plan need to be focused on where we are now, on what is happening this moment, on how our current strengths and weaknesses help to create our

successes and our challenges. On the other hand, a strategic plan must also attempt to peer into the future, to see the possibilities that have not yet arisen, to gaze upon a transformed institution that does not yet exist. When we asked a diverse group of our lay leaders to come together with our professionals to create a dynamic and ambitious strategic plan for Camp Ramah in the Berkshires, we were hoping that their work would reflect a more holistic view, combining both a vision for Camp today, and a vision for Camp's future.


We are thrilled with the results, which you now hold in your hand. After scores of interviews with a myriad of stakeholders (including, but not limited to, staff members, campers, parents, donors, and community leaders), after hours of painstaking research and debate and discussion and dreaming, this strategic plan represents a tremendous coming together of data and analysis made to soar with a remarkable sense of opportunity and hope for the future of this organization. We heard it over and over again in this process: Camp Ramah in the Berkshires is a vital force for Jewish learning, living, and community. This plan helps us get better at what we do now while keeping one eye firmly fixed on what we would like to become in the coming years. We are so very grateful to the members of our Strategic Planning Committee, led by Alisa Rubin Kurshan and Yoni Saposh, who worked diligently over many months to produce this beautiful vision for our future.

There is much work to be done. We hope you will be as excited by what lies within these pages as we are. We hope you will be moved to help us fulfill the dreams embedded in this exciting blueprint for our future. This is a critical moment for Ramah Berkshires and a critical moment for the Jewish community we seek to serve. This strategic plan helps us to meet that moment with optimism and confidence. With your partnership, we will **Elevate, Inspire, and Grow**. Please join us in the critical work to come.

Rabbi Ethan Linden
Director

Richie Friedman
President

Dr. Hugh Pollack
Chair



Elevate, Inspire, Grow. Camp Ramah in the Berkshires is ready for our future! We believe that we are at the right point in our development to aim high:

- to build upon excellence that we deliver;
- to inspire new cohorts of Jews to become role models and educators of the next generation of Ramahniks; and,
- to deepen and expand the imprint of Camp, reaching more Jewish families throughout the year.

It is always a good idea for organizations to step back periodically and to create the space to think big. This past year, we did just that. Starting from a position of strength, the leadership of Camp Ramah in the Berkshires asked ourselves a series of difficult questions:

How can Ramah Berkshires be the leading edge and catalyst for the renewal of American Judaism's vital center? Given that we fill Camp each summer with a very high percentage of returning campers, how do we grow to reach greater numbers of campers while maintaining our commitment to meeting high standards of excellence? Recognizing the changing face of Conservative Judaism, how do we adapt to create joyful, inclusive, and participatory Jewish experiences?

We are delighted to share with you Camp Ramah in the Berkshires' newly released strategic plan. This plan reflects the work of many individuals who contributed their insights and experiences. We spoke to leading Jewish and camping professionals, lay leaders, current and past staff members, rabbis, donors, parents, and more. We visited Camp, observed the facilities and the program, and spoke to many staff and campers.

We were blessed to do this work with a committed group of committee members (listed on page 19) who conducted interviews, facilitated focus groups, and worked closely with us and the professional team to widen our lens and allow us to learn from diverse constituencies.

This plan represents our learnings and recommendations for Ramah Berkshires. It is the first step in the next phase of our camp's growth. We believe that working together we will be able to achieve the goals that will secure our future.

Alisa Rubin Kurshan and Yoni Saposh
Ramah Berkshires Strategic Planning Committee Co-Chairs



Camp Ramah in the Berkshires was founded in 1964 on the principle that Jewish expression and experience, Israel and Modern Hebrew, should be woven into the fabric of everyday life at Camp. Programming of all types – from the sports fields to the arts studio, eating, singing, dancing, to even just hanging out – should all be suffused with Jewish values, traditions, and rituals.

Now, fifty-five years later, Ramah Berkshires serves more than 700 campers (ages 8-16) each summer, supported by approximately 250 summer staff members, at our 250-acre property in Wingdale, NY. Campers predominantly come from communities across the New York metropolitan area, including New York City, Westchester, Long Island, and Northern New Jersey.

VISION

Camp Ramah in the Berkshires will provide a compelling expression of 21st century traditional egalitarian Jewish life.

We will model vibrant, inspiring, and joyful Jewish life for the Conservative Movement and the vital center of American Judaism for Jews of all ages. To achieve this vision, we will create a culture of warmth, care, commitment, fun, and exploration for our campers and our staff. We will place a strong focus on the hiring and development of staff members who can serve as appropriate and spirited role models for campers, and for each other, in all aspects of their lives. We will experiment and be bold with our programming, striving to better integrate serious and sustained Jewish living and learning, while aiming for excellence in all of our endeavors.





Camp Ramah in the Berkshires, a part of the international Camp Ramah network, creates a vibrant Jewish summer camp community where children grow in a beautiful and safe setting and are nurtured by spirited Jewish role models.

Lifelong friendships are forged at Ramah Berkshires, and excellence in programming is coupled with innovative Jewish educational methods. We strive to create an environment of inclusivity, care, and joyful Jewish expression. Not content with providing only a great summer to our campers and staff, we expect the Ramah Berkshires experience to inspire our campers, staff, and community to embrace and live meaningful, active, and participatory Jewish lives. Through our work both at Camp and in other locations, Ramah Berkshires is a model of, and engine for, the strengthening and revitalization of traditional egalitarian Jewish life.

As we improve and optimize our existing summer camp experience for campers, staff, and community, we will seek out ways to be more engaged with the Jewish community beyond the summer. We seek to engage more people in Jewish learning and living that are the hallmarks of the Camp experience. Ramah Berkshires has a role to play in the ongoing development of American Jewish life, and we commit to working in partnership with synagogues, day schools, and Jewish communal organizations that share our commitment to an active and vibrant center of the American Jewish community.

To achieve our vision during the course of the next three-to-five years, Ramah Berkshires will plan for, execute on, and achieve three strategic priorities:

ELEVATE

Excellence in Program, Jewish Education, and Facilities



INSPIRE

Development of Leaders and Optimization of Talent



GROW

Expansion of the Impact and Imprint of the Ramah Berkshires Community

Through an ambitious multi-year plan, the successful implementation of these priorities will secure a vibrant future for Ramah Berkshires and will enable the organization to reach its potential. Ramah Berkshires is in a strong position and is well-poised to meet this bold challenge.

ELEVATE



EXCELLENCE IN PROGRAM, JEWISH EDUCATION, AND FACILITIES

Ramah Berkshires is a thriving Jewish summer camp with a wide range of programming. We will expand our capacity and strengthen our ability to provide a variety of 21st century camper-appealing programs and experiences that are fun and memorable, that challenge and inspire, that build confidence and life-skills, and that have Jewish values and community at their core. Our commitments to a safe and beautiful environment, to cutting-edge innovative programming, and to Jewish educational excellence are integral to our success. We also recognize that excellence in program is predicated on having well-maintained facilities and sustainable infrastructure.

In order to achieve excellence in program and Jewish education, we will recommit to being a well-rounded Jewish overnight camp. We will develop and implement goals, practices, and integrated curricula, in order to expose campers and staff to deep Jewish learning, thereby allowing them to feel knowledgeable and empowered to live meaningful and impactful Jewish lives within and beyond the Ramah Berkshires community. And we will invest in efforts to upgrade our current facility and grow for the future.



INSPIRE



DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERS AND OPTIMIZATION OF TALENT

The quality and strength of Ramah Berkshires programming and Jewish educational experiences are a direct outcome of the quality and strength of our staff. Our success is measured by our ability to meet the needs and positively influence not only our campers, but also our staff.

Therefore, in the coming years we will increase our investment in recruiting and engaging talented and Jewishly educated staff, and we will provide significantly more resources and attention to developing, training, and empowering them to become the Jewish leaders that we demand within the Ramah community. We will also strive to create Camp programming that leads to a natural path from camper to staff, with an eye towards increasing the longevity of staff engagement.



GROW



EXPANSION OF THE IMPACT AND IMPRINT OF THE RAMAH BERKSHIRES COMMUNITY

Recognizing that Ramah Berkshires is one of the greatest success stories of Jewish educational life in North America and within the Conservative Movement, we will aim to deepen and grow the impact of the Ramah Berkshires experience.

In order to achieve this strategic priority during the course of the implementation period, we will use the results of a master site planning process to maximize our current facility, with a focus on programs and initiatives that (1) expand the impact, and (2) expand the imprint, building a wider network of Jews who feel connected to Ramah Berkshires.



ELEVATE

EXCELLENCE IN PROGRAM, JEWISH EDUCATION, AND FACILITIES

Efforts to Deliver Excellence in Program and Jewish Education

- » Continue our multi-pronged effort to improve programming across Camp, by developing the proper staffing models, curricula, and programming to expand the range of experiences at Camp including investment in specialist staffing, facilities, and new program areas.
- » Improve the quality of Jewish experiences and programming across Camp. Focus on both the formal elements of ritual and learning as well as an innovative integration of Jewish content into all parts of Camp.
 - Develop the proper staffing models, curricula, and programming that properly address Camp's Jewish educational goals.
 - Develop and implement programming and curricula for teaching about the people, State, and land of Israel.
- » Assess the varying backgrounds of our campers and staff and develop appropriate learning opportunities for all.
 - Undertake a study of the nature and content of Jewish learning our campers currently receive from day schools and supplemental synagogue schools.



- Examine ways, including through curricula and programming, to ensure that different levels of learning and observance are dealt with appropriately and sensitively in both formal and informal settings at Camp.
- » Explore strategies to enhance and deepen the experience of our teenage campers, with special attention given to the final camper summer.

Investments to Improve Our Facility

- » Engage in a master site planning process in order to best use and optimize our current facility to match our evolving programming goals and needs.
- » Undertake a multi-million dollar capital campaign to achieve the goals set out through the master site planning process.




INSPIRE

DEVELOPMENT OF LEADERS AND OPTIMIZATION OF TALENT

Increase Our Investment in Recruiting and Engaging Talented Staff

- » Better align staff skills and competencies with expectations, responsibilities, and personal interests – particularly in the area of Jewish education and ritual leadership.
- » Expand and strengthen the pipeline of the best international staff in order to develop global Jewish citizenship within the Ramah Berkshires community.



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- » Develop a new model of recruitment and hiring in order to strengthen the Israeli *Shlichut* program to maximize participant engagement with, and connection to, Israel and Hebrew.
 - » In order to help recruit the highest caliber specialists and program-area experts, explore and evaluate the merits of alternative staffing models, including hiring staff of other faiths and implementing flexible schedules.
 - » Redouble our efforts to successfully integrate new staff into the Ramah Berkshires community.

Develop, Train, and Empower Staff to Become Jewish Leaders and Skilled Professionals

- » Create and implement strategies and systems to develop, train, and empower staff to be accessible role models and skilled counselors and specialists. Provide them with tools to succeed as Camp professionals that they can translate to their lives beyond Camp—both personally and professionally.
- » Promote female role models of Jewish leadership in all facets of Camp life, including ritual.
- » Expand our ability to support staff members in their efforts to build and lead vibrant Jewish communities on their university campuses and beyond.

Increase the Longevity of Staff Engagement

- » Study other camp structures and practices to understand successful models of 21st century camping that support a quality summer experience, meaningful year-round engagement, and year-to-year retention for staff.
- » Review and, if necessary, re-imagine the Counselor-in-Training (CIT) experience to better prepare our older campers for future Ramah Berkshires staff positions.
- » Continue to develop, fund, and promote programs that offer training, internships, and incentives to staff members to return to Camp for multiple summers.

GROW

EXPANSION OF THE IMPACT AND IMPRINT OF THE RAMAH BERKSHIRES COMMUNITY

Programs and Initiatives to Expand the Impact

- » Develop opportunities for year-round involvement, programming, relationships, and education to connect our Camp families to each other throughout the year.
- » Build a stronger network of Jews who feel connected to Ramah Berkshires by supporting and engaging those already associated with the Ramah Berkshires community (e.g., new and current parents, alumni, etc.), through efforts including:
 - Developing an onboarding experience for first-time Camp parents.
 - Expanding our support of alumni in their efforts to build vibrant Jewish communities.



Programs and Initiatives to Expand the Imprint

- » Build a wider network of Jews who feel connected to Ramah Berkshires.
 - Make Ramah Berkshires more accessible for those who cannot currently access Camp due to physical, emotional, and/or financial reasons.
 - Prioritize outreach and strengthen programming and policies to make Ramah Berkshires a more diverse and welcoming environment, including for LGBTQ campers and

families, Jews of color, and Jewish campers from interfaith families.

- Together with clergy and educators, design programming that will bring the energy, creativity, and ingenuity of Camp to synagogues and day schools, in order to enable more families and communities to experience Ramah Berkshires.



- » Invest in new property to expand our summer program. The maximum summer capacity at our current property has been met. As part of the potential purchase and build-out of a new property we will need to evaluate what type of programs will be appropriate at a second site.
- » Create a robust special needs (*Tikvah*) program. As a best-of-class Jewish educational institution, we need to meet the needs of our entire community. A special needs program will be additive to our current environment and will also meet the needs of an underserved and important part of our community.
- » Explore the feasibility of, and opportunities for, enabling Ramah Berkshires to provide experiences outside the summer months – either on our existing site or elsewhere.
- » Undertake market research to determine the feasibility of opening a day camp to act both as a feeder for our overnight program and to enable more families to experience the power of Ramah Berkshires.



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**Thank you to the many dedicated community
members who participated in this process, and
to the volunteer leaders who brought their time,
energy, and expertise to the creation of this plan.**

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