



# Project Campfire Longitudinal Evaluation

**Executive Summary // January 2026**

**Prepared by Third Plateau Social Impact Strategies**

**Authors: Ali Ryan-Mosley, Garrett Jenkins, Zafreen Jaffery, Nora Greenstein Jacober, Ashley Drake and Samara Leader**

# Introduction

---

In 2025, **Third Plateau** partnered with the **Farash Foundation** and **Camp Seneca Lake (CSL)** to evaluate the camp's immediate and long-term impact and explore how Project Campfire, a scholarship program funded by the Farash Foundation offering free camp to all Rochester area Jewish-identifying children in grades 3-10, contributes to and expands this impact.

Launched in Summer 2025, Project Campfire is an unprecedented investment in Jewish camping. As this initiative rolls out and its impacts are felt, the Farash Foundation and CSL see a critical opportunity to evaluate the long-term value of free Jewish camp – particularly how it shapes Jewish identity, connections, and engagement for its participants.

To paint a holistic picture of this, Third Plateau proposed two studies: a Cross-Sectional Evaluation and a Longitudinal Evaluation. The [Cross-Sectional Evaluation](#), conducted in the spring of 2025, focused on the perspective of camper alumni to explore the lasting value of Jewish camp experiences. The current study, the **Longitudinal Evaluation**, follows families who received the Project Campfire scholarship to explore the scholarship's impact and better understand whether the initiative attracts families to camp that otherwise would not have attended. It measures campers' expectations before camp and their experience after camp. Specifically, this longitudinal study serves the following purposes:

- Examine the extent to which attending CSL increases the likelihood that a Jewish child identifies and celebrates their Judaism;
- Understand the perspective of campers before and after camp;
- Explore the mechanisms through which camp produces these outcomes;
- Measure the impact of free admission to Jewish camp on the makeup of camp attendees; and
- Measure the impact of free admission to Jewish camp on campers' sense of Jewish identity, engagement, and connection to the Jewish community.

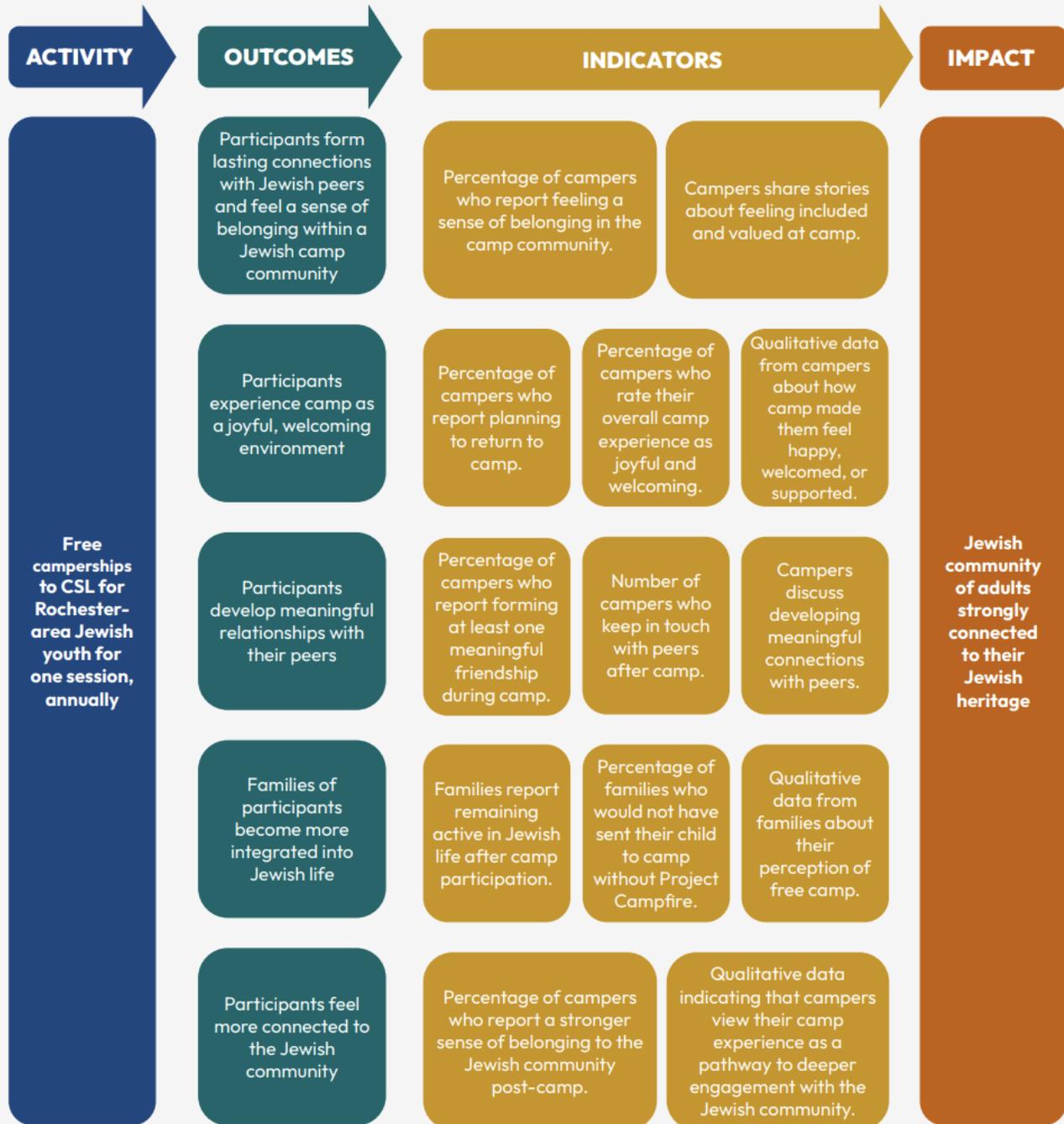
This executive summary presents key findings from the first year of the longitudinal study, provides early insights about Project Campfire's impact, and offers considerations for the future of the program and the study.

Project Campfire's Theory of Change is shown below. This represents the key short- and long-term outcomes that the Farash Foundation aims to achieve in concert with CSL through Project Campfire.



# Project Campfire Theory of Change

Project Campfire's Theory of Change represents the key outcomes and impact that the Farash Foundation aims to achieve in concert with Camp Seneca Lake through Project Campfire.



# Methodology

---

This report is based on data collected through 1) a pre-camp (baseline) survey developed by Third Plateau and administered to campers in June 2025, 2) a post-camp (endline) survey developed by Third Plateau and administered to campers in September 2025, 3) a survey developed by Third Plateau administered to parents of campers who received the Project Campfire scholarship in September 2025, 4) focus group discussions facilitated by Third Plateau with campers grades 9-12 in November 2025, and 5) focus group discussions facilitated by Third Plateau with parents of campers who received the Project Campfire scholarship in November 2025.

Project Campfire is open to any Jewish youth in rising grades 3-10 who reside in the Rochester area (Monroe, Ontario, Wayne, Livingston, Orleans, Genesee, or Yates Counties) for more than 50% of the year and attend school in one of those counties. Qualifying campers will receive a scholarship covering the full cost of one session at CSL. Campers from outside the Rochester area can still apply for subsidies through the Foundation for Jewish Camp's One Happy Camper program, as well as need-based financial aid directly from CSL.

Additionally, every year, CSL conducts a Camper Satisfaction Insights (CSI) Survey through the Foundation for Jewish Camp. While the objectives of the survey are different from those of the Longitudinal Study, some parallels exist in exploring the camper experience. Where appropriate, this report compares findings or uses CSI data to add nuance to certain Longitudinal findings. Please see [Appendix A](#) for a more detailed description of the methodology, [Appendix B](#) for the complete list of survey questions across the multiple surveys, and [Appendix C](#) for the focus group protocols for both campers and parents.

## Research Questions

This evaluation was guided by a set of core research questions designed to illuminate the effectiveness, impact, and areas for improvement within CSL and the Project Campfire initiative. For a detailed overview of how each research question aligns with the outcomes outlined in Project Campfire's Theory of Change, please refer to the Crosswalk Table in [Appendix D](#). These questions were developed in collaboration with the Farash Foundation and CSL to ensure that they reflect the priorities, context, and intended outcomes of the work.

1. To what extent does offering admission to a Jewish camp for free for children in Rochester attract campers to CSL who would not have otherwise attended a Jewish camp?
2. To what extent does attending CSL increase the likelihood that a Jewish child identifies and celebrates their Judaism as an adult?
3. To what extent do campers feel a sense of connection and belonging to the Jewish community beyond the camp experience?
  - a. How do camper outcomes (e.g., Jewish engagement, identity, and belonging) vary by subgroup (e.g., age, length of attendance, and financial assistance status)?
4. To what extent does participation in Project Campfire influence campers' Jewish engagement and sense of identity?

## Survey Design and Administration

The baseline and endline **camper surveys** and the **project campfire parent survey** employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative questions to better understand the experience of and impact from CSL and Project Campfire.

- Baseline: a total of 48 respondents between grades 3-12 completed the pre-camp survey, about a 69% response rate<sup>1</sup> (48 of ~ 70<sup>2</sup>)
- Endline: a total of 88 respondents between grades 3-12 completed the post-camp survey, a 37% response rate<sup>3</sup> (88 of ~ 240)
- Parent: a total of 74 respondents completed the parent survey, a 67% response rate<sup>4</sup> (74 of ~110)

All surveys were distributed electronically using Third Plateau's software system, Qualtrics, to maximize accessibility. Survey respondents received a gift (\$15 for baseline, \$20 for endline, and \$20 parent surveys, a measure to increase participation) as a token of appreciation for their time, in the form of a Visa gift card, a BookShop gift card, or a donation to CSL.

Quantitative data were analyzed within the R open-source programming software, version 4.5.1. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were applied, as appropriate. Qualitative responses were thematically coded using inductive (themes and codes that emerge from the data) and deductive (predetermined themes and codes we look for in the data) coding. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of participant experiences, engagement levels, and program impact.

## Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were also conducted as part of the evaluation to gather in-depth qualitative insights. At the conclusion of both the endline camper survey and the parent survey, respondents were provided with a link to a form where they could indicate their interest in participating in a focus group. To maintain participant confidentiality, Third Plateau followed up directly with those individuals to coordinate participation. Focus group participants received a \$50 gift as a token of appreciation for their time, in the form of a Visa gift card, BookShop gift card, or donation to CSL.

Third Plateau also designed the focus group protocols and facilitated the semi-structured conversations. The data collected from these discussions complemented the survey results and deepened the understanding of key themes within the evaluation.

- Camper focus groups: eight campers participated across two focus group discussions
- Parent focus groups: eleven parents participated across three focus group discussions

---

<sup>1</sup> The response rate should be interpreted as an approximation. Families often had multiple campers attending camp, so one email might have been distributed intending to reach multiple campers. This makes the ratio of outreach sample to response sample difficult to precisely track.

<sup>2</sup> The difference in the outreach pool from baseline to endline is explained by a change in outreach strategies. For the baseline outreach, CSL wanted the consent forms to be sent separately from other camp consent forms, to provide more detailed context to the study and its purpose. With this approach, families would consent to be sent the survey, and also had the opportunity to opt out of further communication. This consent form outreach was delayed due to technical difficulties and a camp weather emergency. Since this approach did not yield as high of a response as intended, the outreach plan was adjusted for the endline survey, and all families, except those who opted out, received the link to complete the survey.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

# Key Findings

This section provides an overview of the most significant findings, drawing on data from camper and parents survey respondents and focus group participants.

## PROJECT CAMPFIRE IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

**32%** of parents shared that Project Campfire funding made camp attendance possible for their child.

**91%** of campers agreed or strongly agreed that they felt a sense of belonging at Camp Seneca Lake.

*"For us, [Project Campfire] made it possible. We couldn't have afforded sleepaway camp otherwise."*

Since Project Campfire, there's been a **135%** increase in new campers from Rochester.

The more summers an individual attends Camp Seneca Lake, the more likely they are to feel that it strengthened their connection to the Jewish community.

*"...having this opportunity for so many more Jewish families to be able to participate [in Jewish camp], especially at this time where antisemitism is at its highest...it's just such a tremendous, special, important opportunity...It couldn't have come at a better time, and I'm just so thankful for it."*

*"Camp made me feel a lot more capable"*

**93%** of campers agreed or strongly agreed that they formed meaningful connections at Camp Seneca Lake.

*"I realized that services and prayers can be fun if you want them to be."*

**97%** of campers agree that their overall camp experience was joyful, and of those, 81% strongly agree. Camp made respondents feel happy through a variety of ways, namely through the time spent and friendships made in cabins, and through camp traditions like village nights and Color War.

- **Project Campfire opened the door to Jewish camp for families who otherwise had limited access.** Reducing financial barriers enabled more children to experience camp. There was a 135% increase in new campers from Rochester who attended CSL from 2024 to 2025, in large part due to the launch of Project Campfire. Through survey and focus group responses, parents shared that the scholarship eased the burden of paying for camp. With Project Campfire funding, some families were able to send their child to camp at an earlier age than planned, and others were able to send them to longer camp sessions.
- **The Project Campfire initiative sparked excitement and gratitude across the Rochester Jewish community.** Many parents described a “buzz” within the Rochester Jewish community following Project Campfire’s launch. For some parents, the scholarship also fostered a sense of pride in the community's responsiveness and care for one another. One parent noted that Project Campfire helps families feel included in Jewish communal spaces where they may not have felt welcome before.
- **Campers had high expectations of their camp experience, and their expectations were met and often exceeded.** Before camp, according to the baseline survey, campers broadly shared that they expected to feel a sense of belonging, experience camp as a joyful environment, build relationships, and grow a connection to the Jewish community. Data from the endline survey shows that campers experienced these outcomes, and in many cases, more strongly than they expected. Focus group conversations with campers and parents further illuminated this progress across outcomes.
- **CSL fosters a strong sense of belonging by creating opportunities for meaningful relationships with Jewish peers, strengthening both personal bonds and communal ties.** Campers and parents shared that CSL helped spark new friendships and strengthen existing bonds between campers. These experiences of friendship and connection to the Jewish community are central to the sense of belonging that CSL provided.
- **Campers feel pride in their Jewish identity thanks to the camp community.** Across data sources, many campers expressed a feeling of pride in their Jewish identity when they were surrounded by their camp peers. Some campers live in communities with small Jewish populations, so being surrounded by peers with a shared experience was profoundly impactful and normalizing. Some campers emphasized the importance of this feeling, especially amid rising antisemitism and other challenges facing the Jewish community today.
- **Campers and parents shared that CSL allowed campers to practice their faith and express pride in their Jewish identity in a joyful and relaxed manner.** Being at camp normalized the experience of being Jewish for campers. Engaging in the same rituals together, such as Shabbat, created a sense of community and, for many, helped integrate Jewish traditions into life outside of camp. Across both camper and parent focus groups, participants overwhelmingly praised CSL for cultivating confident, connected, joyful, and proud Jewish youth and deepening their engagement with Jewish identity.

- **Campers made new friends at camp, deepened existing relationships, and continued these relationships outside of camp.** Multiple data sources suggest that CSL fosters an environment in which campers form and grow meaningful relationships. Many of these friendships continue outside of camp, through phone calls, group chats, connecting at synagogues, and Shabbat dinners. Some participants named CSL's organized programming outside of camp as a great way to meaningfully interact with peers and to continue embracing their Jewish identity. Additionally, a few parents noted that camper friendships have allowed them to expand their networks of friends and community connections. Some parents and campers expressed a desire for more engagement outside of camp.
- **The more summers an individual attends CSL, the more likely they are to feel that it strengthened their connection to the Jewish community.** Quantitative data shows a statistically significant positive relationship between summers attended at CSL and the strength of connection to the Jewish community. This suggests that the more an individual attends CSL, the more likely they are to see the putative benefits. By reducing barriers for families who wish to send their child(ren) to CSL annually, Project Campfire effectively increases Jewish community engagement.
- **Campers and parents highlighted that camp supported holistic growth among youth.** Through camp, youth gained confidence, grew their leadership skills, and became more independent. Parents recognized and appreciated these newfound skills. These outcomes manifested differently across different ages of campers. Older campers felt more confident in their ability to solve problems, while parents of younger campers shared examples of independence, like brushing their hair or packing for a trip themselves.

## Conclusion

Project Campfire not only opened the door to Jewish camp for families who previously had limited access, but it also ignited a sense of excitement and gratitude within the Rochester Jewish community.

At CSL, campers entered with high expectations — and those expectations were consistently met and often exceeded. Through an intentionally inclusive environment and organically supportive cultural norms, CSL fostered belonging, meaningful friendships, and opportunities to practice and celebrate Jewish identity in joyful, relaxed ways. These experiences strengthened both personal bonds and communal ties, allowing campers to deepen their pride in being Jewish while growing socially and personally. This study shows that repeated summers at CSL amplify these benefits, reinforcing connections to the broader Jewish community. Parents and campers alike emphasized that camp is more than a seasonal experience—it is a catalyst for holistic growth, identity formation, and enduring relationships that extend far beyond the camp.