

NISAYON, Temple Judea

TARZANA, CA

WHO ARE THE LEARNERS? THE TEACHERS?

- Parents and their children, grades K-8
- Camp counselors - students in 11th or 12 grade or in college
- Teachers
- Nisayon Director

Nisayon began with 50 kids across K-6 grade and their parents. In year two they had 114 kids and in year three 203 kids, K-7. In the coming year, the model will include students in the 8th grade as well. Many of the original parents were people who like camps and were connected to others in the synagogue. Counselors provide the element of ruach in the camp. They are the fun, engaging person with whom the kids want to create a connection. The teachers bring formal, credentialed teaching experience in the classroom to Nisayon.

WHEN DOES THE MODEL TAKE PLACE?

- Two weeks of camp in the summer, one week of camp in the winter, Monday – Friday from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm
- Shabbat dinner and service one Friday night during the summer camp session according to grade level
- Six family programs on Sunday afternoons throughout the school year
- Two Yom Machane – Day of Camp sessions for kids only, from 1-5pm, one each semester
- One Parents' Night Out & Kid's Night In scheduled for January
- Families can choose between two sessions – Shemesh, at the beginning of the summer, and Yareach, towards the end of the summer – each with a corresponding week of winter camp and family sessions during the year
- Individual or pair Hebrew tutoring takes place weekly for 45 minutes at the families convenience

- Small group Hebrew tutoring takes place week for 90 minutes with several Sunday and mid-week options

Initially Nisayon offered only one session. As numbers increased, intimacy decreased as did space so a second session was offered. The congregation scheduled the summer sessions to avoid interference with regular summer camp dates. Sunday afternoons were chosen for family learning as they posed the least conflict with sports and other activities. Yom Machane- Day of Camp - was offered to address the reality that kids missed being at the synagogue without parents between the summer and winter sessions of camp. Parents' Night Out & Kids' Night In allows parents to spend social time with other Nisayon parents and the clergy without their kids. Next year the congregation plans to add a family retreat at a real camp for a weekend.

WHERE DOES THE MODEL TAKE PLACE?

- Primarily at the synagogue
- Nisayon utilizes all available spaces
- Some sessions early on in home of clergy (Sukkot) or at the beach (Tashlich)
- Hebrew tutoring for grades 4-6 is either at home or at the synagogue

Currently, Temple Judea is in the middle of a major construction project requiring the use of a temporary, but inadequate, space. Two sessions should alleviate space concerns until they can return to the permanent campus.

HOW IS THE LEARNING DESIGNED?

- Content organized around a particular theme each year, taking core areas of the religious school curriculum camp-wide. Examples include Israel, Torah and Mitzvot. The coming year will be Lifecycle.
- A typical day at camp includes time for learning, tefilah, various activities, lunch, an opening circle and closing community time.

- Family programs begin together followed by adults and kids engaging in parallel learning.
- Adults study with a member of the clergy.
- Kids learn with their teachers and counselors from camp.
- Families then come back together to engage in experiential learning around the theme.
- Next year, participating 8th grade students will be involved in a leadership development program.

The camp experience is modeled on a traditional summer day camp but with a mix of learning related to the year's content theme and activities like music, dance, drama, and krav maga. Community building represents another core element of the experience. Initially, family programs centered around holidays. Now only two family programs each year focus on holidays, and they rotate from year to year. Additional family programs will be developed thematically away from holidays.

WHY IS THE LEARNING DESIGNED THIS WAY?

- Research on camps helped make clear what works in camp:
 - Friendship, a sense of community
 - Intensity of the experience, without external distractions
 - Repetition, doing things every day make them a part of your life
- Core belief that if whole family involved in process of Jewish learning, it will be reflected in home and family life.
- Kids need an opportunity to create their own memories and their own connections to Judaism.
- Adults enjoy learning with other adults and being treated as adults.

When the congregation began the process of determining what new model could work for their population, culture and setting, they asked congregants to describe their most significant Jewish learning experiences. Out of 450 responses, 400 described Jewish summer camp, Israel experiences, and things they did

with their family. The congregation already had a teen Israel trip so it focused on the combination of camp and family experiential learning.

KEY FIRST STEPS TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION

- Parent meetings key to marketing for first year
- A core of four or five moms really “sold” the model to their friends
- Created a brochure with clear descriptions of the model and a calendar

The core group of parents wanted to be sure there were enough kids for the model to get off the ground. The educator felt they needed 50 kids in order to make it worth the time and money. The parents made it happen.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR NISAYON

- No formal governance structure.
- Based on feedback from participants, a parent committee formed to give input into changes in the program. Serves advisory vs. governance role.
- Parents' group coordinates welcoming play dates for all new kids entering Nisayon.

Parent feedback continues to guide the evolution of the model. As the numbers grew, parents expressed frustration that intimacy had been lost which led, in part, to the addition of a second session for the model. Parents also began bringing in food to add to the social component of their sessions together with other families. They also pushed for deeper, richer content level in the learning.

BUDGET/RESOURCES

- Hired a full-time Nisayon director with some additional non-Nisayon responsibilities
- Recently added a half-time person to provide administrative support
- Hired part-time specialists for art, music, krav maga and others
- A 40 x 20 ft above ground swimming pool

Initially Nisayon cost \$200 less than regular religious school. In year two it cost the same, year three \$200 more and year four will cost \$250 more.

INTEGRATION OF NISAYON FAMILIES AND LARGER CONGREGATIONAL COMMUNITY.

- Nisayon kids connect to other kids through youth group and the congregational retreat.
- Some come together around small group Hebrew study.

IMPACT ON LEARNERS, TEACHERS, CONGREGATION.

- A core group, committed to this model, find multiple ways to be involved in the congregation. They have a deepened Jewish commitment and a deepened connection to clergy.
- Nisayon parents make up a significant number of the current adult b'nei mitvah group.
- Some now sit on committees and on the Board of Trustees.
- Kids, who come from over 100 secular schools, know one another.

The congregation doesn't want Nisayon to become the only model for Jewish education. It firmly believes that one size does not fit all. In fact, it is in the midst of launching a new, family havurah model for families of 1st graders. The educator frequently refers to the meaning of the model's name, Nisayon or experiment. The model continues to evolve in order to meet the changing needs of the congregation.