



# SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY, SUSTAINABLE WORLD: Fostering Healthy Living at Summer Camp

What makes a camp unique? Is it excellent programs and staff? A strong board and fundraising? Successful marketing and enrollment? Effective technology and strategic planning? Of course, it's all of the above, but at the end of the day, what makes a camp truly exceptional is its culture. Here at the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, we are so proud to call Eden Village Camp in New York a JCamp 180 affiliate and PJ Library grant recipient. Eden Village's culture has been at the foundation of its success from the beginning, organically embedded into the camp's every decision, communication, and relationship. But don't take my word for it – read more from one of the camp's founders.

**Each summer at Eden Village Camp, our 460 campers run our organic farm from seed to harvest.**

They then put on their chef's hats and turn the bounty of the land into delicious feasts. They make salves, syrups, and teas in the herbal apothecary. They care for our animals and build skill in guitar, pottery, sewing, fire-tending, and animal-tracking. They co-create the "culture of kindness" that is the bedrock of our community and look forward to Shabbat as an awesome, multifaceted party. In short, our campers experience

a Jewishly-rooted way of living that is simple, creative, and exciting – a microcosm of the world we wish to see.

Because Eden Village campers focus on the environment and social responsibility, many families are attracted to Eden Village who would not otherwise be interested in Jewish life. In other words, our goal of a sustainable Earth supports our goal of a sustainable Jewish community. Fully 44% of our families report that they would not have chosen a Jewish camp for their child were it not for Eden Village!

Our camp's focus has also helped us create a truly pluralistic Jewish population. For the past nine years, our camp families consistently identify as follows: about a third Conservative, about a third Reform, 10% Orthodox, and the remaining 20% Renewal, unaffiliated, secular, or "other." Families from all these categories re-enroll year after year, so we know our pluralism is working for a broad spectrum of families.

Our success is due to cornerstones that guide our sustainability efforts, which broadly include our relationships with the

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land and with each other. Here are a few of the main ones:

**Diverse community.** As part of our commitment to a diverse camper body, we give more than \$250,000 yearly in scholarships and have launched a small inclusivity program for campers with special needs. Many LGBTQ-identified staff and campers return each year. The 10-day pre-camp staff training and ongoing training during camp include sessions that raise awareness of privilege, explore how various forms of oppression function, model how to be a strong ally, and ensure each community member feels seen.

**Gratitude practice.** We bring gratitude and intention to each day via daily “morning practice” options and blessings before and after meals, and we mark Shabbat as a day for celebrating the world and each other just as things are. Kid-friendly prayer services emphasize core values about the unity and sacredness of all beings.

**Environmentalism is social justice work.** In light of climate change, to take seriously the mandate to “love your neighbor as yourself” means working to protect the environment. Eden Village campers see this connection, such that when they tend the bees, they know they are not only supporting the ailing bee population but protecting key pollinators we all need for a robust food supply.

**Kindness in the air we breathe.** The magic lives in the countless details. Camp songs have positive messages, and cabins are named after Jewish activists. Instead of a color war, there’s a Mitzvah Day where campers dedicate their athletic, artistic, and other efforts toward supporting their nonprofit of choice. Campers publicly make a “covenant with the earth” (*brit adamah*) that is a “SMART” commitment (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-limited) which they will take action upon when they return home.

Toward the end of their fifth summer at Eden Village, each camper gives a speech to the whole camp community. One camper named Carlin, in his speech this past summer, voiced a powerful sentiment: “Look around. We here in this room are the ones who are going to change the world. The fact that a place like Eden Village even exists is a dream come true. So just think, how many other dreams can we make come true?”

For Eden Village, and many other Jewish organizations looking toward the future, this is a sacred question.

**Over the summer,** Eden Village also offered ongoing Friday morning Shabbat programs for local PJ Library families. These programs beautifully complemented the core work of both Eden Village and PJ Library. For Eden Village, they strengthened our connection with our local community and allowed us to serve more parents and young kids. For PJ Library, the programs brought families face-to-face in a concrete experience of Earth-based Judaism.

As a PJ Library mom myself, it was doubly special to share Eden Village pre-Shabbat activities with young families and my own two preschool-aged children. We dipped beeswax candles; harvested flowers for Shabbat table bouquets; threshed, winnowed and ground wheat into challah; and of course sang and danced together. This partnership highlighted PJ Library’s and Eden Village’s common value of sustainable community as we aim to nurture the next generation of Jewishly-inspired young leaders.