

Something for Everyone

By Stephen J. Savitsky



As we approach the summer season, we begin thinking about our vacation plans. While for most people summer is an opportunity to relax, smell the roses and wind down, at the Orthodox Union (OU), we never sleep. Every season is our busy season, every week is a busy week, and it seems like we never slow down.

The OU never ceases to amaze me with the depth and breadth of its services. I recall visiting my grandchildren in summer camp this past summer and meeting the camp director. He told me about the 400 children in his charge and about the responsibility he feels each and every day. In response, I told him that even though summer programs may seem to be a minor part of the OU agenda, we have more than

1,000 teenagers attending camps under our auspices during the months of June, July and August.

Why do we run summer programs? How do they fit into our mission statement? Simply put, it's because summer programs provide an intensive period in which so many of our year-round activities can be reinforced.

Six weeks of a camping experience can turn a Jewish public school student into a yeshivah product. Six weeks of NCSY Kollel can transform a nice day school student into a budding *ben Torah*, growing in spirituality.

Often I have witnessed how an effective summer camping program can solidify the NCSY experience. I have personally seen miracles of transformation take place in mere weeks and have watched in awe as new generations of committed Jews crystallize before my eyes.

Each one of our summer programs is carefully thought out and designed to meet the specific needs of either observant or soon-to-be-observant Jewish kids. Our programs have changed the lives of countless young men and women who will probably tell

you that the few weeks they spent on an NCSY program were both the turning point and the highlight of their lives.

The OU mission—to strengthen the quality, spirituality and lifestyle of Orthodox Jews and to reach out to the non-affiliated—is best encapsulated in our summer programs.

Almost all of our summer programs are under the banner of NCSY. We are fortunate to have a truly outstanding director in David Cutler, who has the professionalism and creativity to make things happen. Vivian Luchins, the lay chair of NCSY summer programs, devotes considerable time and effort towards making our summer activities exactly what our young people need during this critical point in their lives.

Each program is distinct. Camp Nageela Midwest, for example, caters to fourth through eighth graders from both public school and yeshivah. Located in Indiana, the three-week camp, which runs separate programs for boys and girls, allows campers to experience the vibrancy of Judaism and to embrace their Jewish heritage.

Camp Sports, located in

Baltimore, Maryland, provides high school boys with a combination of sports, barbecues and Torah study. The camp is a blend of yeshivah and public school kids, enabling them to intermingle and to get to know one another.

A tourist's delight, this year's coed Euro Trip will take high school kids on a tour of various cities in Spain, Italy and, finally, Israel. Our GIVE program for yeshivah high school girls emphasizes *chesed* and giving back to the Jewish community. Teenagers are trained to be hospital clowns. They help out at a food bank, collect clothing for the poor and assist in a camp for victims of terror.

A coed program primarily for yeshivah high school teens, ICE (Israel Create Your Own Experience) is an adventure in hiking and in exploring the beauty of Israel.

Then there's JOLT (Jewish Overseas Leadership Training). Who could possibly explain what JOLT has accomplished in both its Ukraine version and its new Central Europe version? The program provides yeshivah students in tenth through twelfth grades with the experience of working with young Jewish boys and girls in a foreign country. The experiences they gain and the friendships they foster become life-changing events. Both programs culminate in Israel, enabling our young men and women to witness the vibrancy of Israeli life. In reality, JOLT is a training program for potential leaders, helping teenagers develop into *madrachim*, counselors.

A unique Israel-based program, Machane Dror, operated by our Seymour J. Abrams Jerusalem World Center, was originally created for OU families who have made *aliyah* and want to send their children to an American-style camp. Currently, the program attracts both children of *olim* as well as the children of those visiting Israel for the summer who want a camp that brims with *ruach* and a love for Eretz Yisrael. The program is for kids in fifth through eighth grades, and has separate facilities for boys and girls.

NCSY Kollel and Michlelet are

serious learning programs in Israel for yeshivah high school boys and girls, respectively. Each program has its own campus where students learn with their peers from public school who have demonstrated an intense love of *limud haTorah*. Both of these programs consistently attract the very best teachers and *rabbeim*, from both Israel and the United States, who provide students with a summer of serious learning.

SEG (Summer Experience for Girls) is an activity-packed sleep-away program for high school girls based in New York's Catskill Mountains, staffed by our best NCSY advisors.

Summer@YU is a specialized program at Yeshiva University for eleventh and twelfth graders who are seriously thinking of entering the medical profession.

And finally, one of the most incredible programs we offer is TJJ, The Jerusalem Journey, in which more than 250 public school kids tour Israel under the guidance of our finest NCSY advi-

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sors. TJJ, for which we were fortunate to have received a generous donation from Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Stechler from Teaneck, New Jersey, is now more affordable, giving these young adults a chance to build on their NCSY backgrounds. The program features intensive touring and imbues campers with a strong love of Torah and Eretz Yisrael. TJJ's success has been overwhelming, with many of our public school participants either switching to yeshivah high school upon their return or spending a year of study in Israel after graduating.

But let us not forget Yachad/National Jewish Council for Disabilities and its summer programs, all of which are a source of great pride. Yachad provides a variety of unique and inclusive sleep-away camp programs for its members with developmental disabilities. Yachad members enjoy a complete

camping experience in mainstream Jewish camps replete with swimming, boating, sports, drama and other camp activities while developing social skills and independence.

The Yachad B'Nesher program integrates Yachad campers ages nine to fifteen with their peers at Camp Nesher. The "MY" program integrates Yachad members ages twelve to twenty-one with their peers at Camp Morasha. Camp Moshava provides a different, fully inclusive program for campers with milder challenges such as learning disabilities, Asperger's syndrome or neurological impairments. For older members, Yachad offers full-time work positions in a sleep-away camp setting. Supervised by a job coach, Yachad employees enjoy a camp atmosphere while learning life and vocational skills.

Yad B'Yad, an inclusive summer travel program, offers two concurrent trips—one in Israel and one in the United States. This year's US trip will take participants to the West Coast for two weeks as well as to Hawaii. All participants travel, learn and engage in fun and exciting activities together. In light of the needs of Yad B'Yad participants, there is a high counselor-to-camper ratio. Mainstream teens are eager to join this program, making Yad B'Yad one of the hottest tickets in town.

All OU summer programs reinforce Jewish identity, bringing countless Jewish teenagers who would otherwise be lost to the Jewish world back to the fold. Indeed, when it comes to OU summer programs, there is something for everyone. For an organization that is involved in strengthening Jewish life, summer programs are among the best examples of our work. With our responsibility to the Jewish world to ensure the survival and growth of the Jewish people, our summer programs are leading the way in providing a most valuable service to Klal Yisrael. 