



ISSUE 3

Beyond the Bunk

Camper Name: Sara Z.
Current Age: 18
Hometown: Knoxville, TN
Years as a Camper: 2017,
2018, 2019, 2020, 2021
Years as Staff: 2025 יyH

Stories of campers who took their camp experience and built Jewish futures.

A Spark That Became a Flame Igniting a Lifelong Passion for Yiddishkeit

Sara grew up in Knoxville, Tennessee, as a Conservative Jew in a home connected to Jewish tradition. She celebrated Shabbat and holidays with her family and attended the Conservative Hebrew school. Around second grade, her connection to Yiddishkeit began to shift when she transferred to the local Jewish day school run by the Chabad shluchim.



Sara (right) as a camper in 2017

Even with this change, Yiddishkeit remained a part of her life rather than the center of it—until the summer of 2017. Encouraged by the Chabad shluchim, she took a leap and attended Camp Gan Israel Poconos. That summer changed everything.

At CGI Poconos, Judaism wasn't just something she learned about; it was something she lived. The energy of camp was electric, from the heartfelt Shabbat singing to the daily mitzvah challenges. Her counselors radiated joy in their Yiddishkeit, showing her what it meant to live as a proud Jewish girl. She left camp that summer with a fire in her heart and a determination to grow.

Sara returned for the next five summers, each year deepening her commitment. The values she absorbed at CGI Poconos followed her home, shaping her identity. Slowly, she embraced more mitzvos—starting with tznius, dressing modestly out of pride. By the end of her fifth summer, Sara had become fully frum.

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With her new path clear, Sara knew the next step was crucial for her growth. Though it meant leaving home and moving across the country, she made the life-changing decision to enroll in a Jewish high school. It wasn't an easy transition, as she faced new challenges and adjustments, but the strength she gained at camp gave her the confidence to push forward and embrace this next chapter of her life.

Over the years, Sara's passion for Yiddishkeit has only grown stronger. She has spent her summers working in CGI day camps, sharing the joy of Judaism and the values she learned with younger girls. Now, she's an active leader in her high school community, organizing programs and events that bring her peers closer to their roots and help them connect with their Jewish identity.

This summer, she's returning to CGI Poconos—this time as a counselor. The same girl who once stepped into camp wide-eyed and searching is now stepping into a role of leadership, ready to inspire the next generation just as she was inspired. She looks forward to creating an environment that promotes joy, and a deep connection to Yiddishkeit for all her campers.

Sara's story is a testament to the power of Jewish overnight camp. When done right, it does more than inspire—it gives Jewish girls the conviction to stick with their Yiddishkeit, even when it means taking bold steps toward their future.

Sara's Journey at a Glance:

- 2015** – Transferred to local Jewish day school
- 2017** – Attended CGI Poconos for the first time
- 2019** – Sara continues to grow strongly in her Yiddishkeit
- 2021** – Last summer as a camper
- 2022** – Sara attends Jewish High School
- 2025** – Returning to CGI Poconos as a counselor



Sara during her last summer in 2021

CKids Gan Israel Poconos was founded in 2012 to provide Jewish girls—regardless of background or affiliation—with an immersive experience of Jewish joy, pride, and connection. Over the past 13 years, we've welcomed more than 800 campers from 26 states and 8 countries, igniting a lifelong passion for Yiddishkeit.



Camp Gan Israel Poconos

Premier Overnight Camp for Jewish Girls located in the heart of the Pocono Mountains

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