



## **Gesher Program**

### **Should I convince my child to attend?**

There are a few reasons to consider, and you will have to decide what reason to prioritize. Camp is a healthy, safe, supervised place for your child to build skills and thrive. At their current age, your children are vulnerable. That has always been true, but the current environment that kids are living in is making it much harder for them to thrive mentally, emotionally, spiritually and socially. Camp can change that trajectory and can be a place for your child to breathe, recalibrate, and leave the summer (to begin a stressful senior high school year) on better emotional footing than when they arrived. Read, reread, and decide if it might be worth the uncomfortable conversation with your child about why you are pushing them to attend, maybe even making the decision for them.

### **Is the Gesher program the full summer or can my child attend for part of the summer?**

The Gesher program is an 8-week program that consists of 6 weeks of curriculum-based training and hands on learning, combined with living communally in the Bayit with peers and learning valuable leadership and project management skills. It also consists of team building and providing the opportunity to deepen existing friendships and develop new connections as well. The final 2 weeks of the program, which are highly recommended, but not required, will place Gesher participants in a bunk to learn alongside our cabin counselors and continue to learn new skills (what to do and what not to do). This opportunity to experience bunk living will hopefully position CITs well to make a healthy decision about working at camp in the following summer.

### **Is there a different price if my child opts out of the 2 week immersive bunk living experience at the end of the summer?**

The price for the program is based on 6 weeks of intensive learning while living communally in the Bayit under close supervision. The final 2 weeks of the program yields continued supervision and programming and an additional stipend toward your first summer as a camp staff member (Gesher participants receive a \$100/\$200 bonus during their first year as a staff member depending on whether they participate for 6 weeks/ 8 weeks).

**Why did we change the Gesher program to include a 2-week option to live in the bunk?** Mostly, because what we have learned historically from first year staff members is that they felt that more experiential learning would have better prepared them to be the best staff member possible. And, due to Covid and our need to offer a shorter experience for our CITs last summer, we were able to test out completing our curriculum in a shorter amount of time, and it worked! We also were able to pilot a small number of CITs to live in bunks during our second session and received positive reviews about the experience. Essentially, we learned that shortening the curriculum based experience wasn't at the sacrifice of learning. We learned that the 6 weeks provided ample time to execute the full curriculum and the benefits of in bunk placement learning was invaluable.

**Will my child be able to work on college applications during the Geshher experience?** YES. There is a lot of free time built into the program, and seeing kids collectively support one another (while sitting in hammocks or lounging at the amphitheater) to write essays, decide on which schools to apply to, and getting advice or some essay editing from their mentors at camp (who they listen to more readily than to parents) is beautiful. AND, it's also okay for your child to use the opportunity at camp to recharge so that they arrive home with more energy and willingness to shift efforts back to academic and college preparation.

**My child doesn't seem to have any friends attending. Won't that make it hard for them to have a successful experience?** Traditionally, the Geshher summer is one where new friendships are formed. It is typically the year where first session and second session kids merge and live together for the first time. That makes for an uncomfortable first day. But while despair is bad, discomfort is often what propels growth. In fact it is good practice for your child before they head off to college! And it is short lived. Our experience has shown us that the curriculum and leadership provided by our Geshher staff helps kids to build connections quickly, as well as to develop skills to have a very positive impact on the younger campers who tend to "idolize" their CITs. Remind your child how much they looked up to their CITs and remind them of how wonderful it will feel to be a young person's somebody!

**Our pledge:**

We are committed to providing a safe environment for kids to learn new skills, while giving kids the practice to learn new things and make mistakes in a supportive environment. We see camp as a place where children can learn and grow into the best versions of themselves. In an environment like Harlam, where there is supervision, support, and scaffolding around children, the ability to grow is expedited. And with growth, can come an increase in self-esteem and confidence, even when there is trepidation. Our goal is to make sure everyone in our community leaves camp feeling better about themselves than when they arrived. Giving kids the opportunity to decompress, build skills, develop new relationships, and build connections is a great gift.

We know this is difficult, and we are here to help in any way we can if needed, whether it's to speak with you personally, or to join a group of parents for a zoom conversation to help you all to perhaps collectively make a decision to send a group of children. In addition, we care about you PARENTS! Parenting during these unprecedented times is challenging. Sometimes the gift we can give our children is to help their decisions along and taking time as parents to breathe and recharge during the summer.

If you feel the Geshher program might be right for your child, but have some questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to Cori Miller at [CMiller@URJ.org](mailto:CMiller@URJ.org) or any member of our Professional Staff. We are happy to answer questions and talk through any concerns. And, if your child decides to apply, please have them [use this link](#) and do so preferably by March 1st.