

GET READY FOR CAMP

MINDFUL CAMPING FOR KIDS

A Therapist Helps Make Camp a Mindful Experience and in the Process Helps Evolve a Movement



Tracey Ellenbogen (center) uses principles of mindfulness meditation to help kids connect with themselves and each other. Photo/Brainstorm Creative Resources

By Marc Kaye

You could hear the whole camp give a collective sigh. The sun is nearly set as the summer breeze touches the necks ever so lightly of 200 campers between 6 and 16 who are all welcoming in Shabbat in the outdoor chapel at Camp Bluestar. Nestled in the scenic Blue Ridge Mountains, these campers are...amazingly...still. Accompanied by a chorus of crickets and a few bullfrogs from the not-too-distant lake, the campers and staff are transitioning into Shabbat. Clearly, this is not your typical Friday night scene when the week of activities and color wars usually generates a frenetic amalgamation of youthful exuberance waiting to be expunged.

"It was like magic," recalls Penny White, Song Leader and Living Judaism Director at the camp, "you could see everyone get quiet within themselves. Friday night services, while beautiful and joyful, were not as successful in terms of a deeper experience for the campers. We tried different ways to do that, such as music and poetry, but it wasn't until we integrated mindfulness with Tracey that we all really had a chance to take a breath and look inside ourselves and reflect on the week. You could hear the whole camp give a collective sigh."

Tracey is Tracey Ellenbogen, MSW, a licensed clinical social worker with post-graduate training at the both the Psychoanalytic Center in Philadelphia and certification in Mind Body Intelligence (MBI) from the Sage Healing Institute, run by renowned instructor, Ellen Edelman.

"As I incorporated mindfulness into my own practice, I started wondering 'what if this happened at age 8 instead of age 40?'" Ellenbogen recalls. What started out as a serendipitous encounter to help continue a meditation class at her Synagogue, has now become an integral part of a clinical and personal practice.

Seth Herschthal, himself a camper since 1991 and now a Director at Camp Bluestar and co-owner with his wife, Lauren, is thinking a lot about the direction of his camp, Jewish camping and Judaism, in general. "In this age of technology, parents are craving ways to help their kids get back to nature," Seth explains and this summer was the first where any type of formal mindfulness instruction was included. He continues: "We were hesitant about it at first because it is kind of cliché right now. There is tons of press and, for us, we were actually careful of not being too preachy. We never want to impose or force our views on anyone."

After conferring with their core leadership team, they decided to introduce mindfulness to staff and campers as a way of helping to break free from technology, deal with stress and, in general, as something helpful to healthful living. "We started out in a small way with Tracey and some of it seeped into practice right away and became what we did for the rest of the summer."

There's a synchronicity that happens. Ellenbogen didn't start out thinking about kids or camp. "I met someone with similar training who was looking for someone to guide a class of women through a meditation spiritual journey so we created a class focused on what they needed, not what I thought," Ellenbogen explains. "I was able to integrate meditative teachings from different sources and incorporated my training as a therapist, as well. The clinical training allowed for an organic flow to the class. We would meditate, share, and guide our mediation based on sharing," Ellenbogen continues.

Alicia Felton, an early attendee to that class was there to witness the origins of what would move beyond just a woman's meditation group. "For me, there's a synchronicity that happens where everyone seems to need the same thing that week or something similar and it's beautiful. It's a chance to process in a way that is safe and people can give feedback and Tracey, in particular, is brilliant in how she gives that space but also keeps it focused."

It was that type of openness that allowed this concept to be modeled with kids. Ellenbogen reached out to Eytan Graubart at Harlam Day Camp, where her own two kids were attending. "He was all over it," she remembers, and they started in the summer of 2014. Started as a pilot program, it has now completed its successful 2nd season this past summer. "We want this to be more than just a summer experience but also a community builder year round and connector between people, organizations, communities and still be as engaged with your camp community as you were in July and August," Graubart explains. In other words, the idea of mindfulness is around intention. This is where teaching skills and experiences to help not just at camp but also in their lives—such as how to calm down and be mindful.

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Moore Presents MooreWomenArtists Film Festival

Moore College of Art & Design continues to honor its legacy as the first and only women's visual arts college in the United States for undergraduates by establishing itself as a thought-leader in its industry. First came www.MooreWomenArtists.org, an online destination for ALL women visual artists, launched during last year's Women's History Month, and now comes the MooreWomenArtists Film Festival, scheduled for Friday, April 1 through Sunday, April 3, 2016. The Festival will include six films about women artists, five directed by women, with introductory talks by women who are esteemed professionals in their fields. Films being screened are: "Conjure Women" by Demetria Royals, "Guerillas in Our Midst" by Amy Harrison, "The Heretics" by Joan Braderman, "Artist" by Tracey Moffatt, "Learning to Swallow" by Danielle Beverly and "Alice Neel" by Andrew Neel. All films are free and open to the public and will be held in the College's Stewart Auditorium, 20th Street and The Parkway. Admission is free. For details and tickets, visit www.moore.edu/MWAFilmFestival.

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Golden Slipper Center for Seniors Receives Grant

As part of its Worldwide Grant Program, the MDRT Foundation awarded a \$5,000 grant to the Golden Slipper Center for Seniors in Wynnefield Heights. The grant will support the Golden Slipper Center providing services to low-income seniors along with a nutritious meal services. Representing the MDRT Foundation, Leon L. Levy and his son David Levy, presented the grant check to Marcia Garrell, Executive Director, Golden Slipper Center for Seniors. From left are Leon L. Levy, Marcia Garrell, and David Levy.



A MINDFUL CAMP EXPERIENCE FOR KIDS

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Ellenbogen engaged in staff trainings, workshops and tailored mindfulness to the age and needs of the camp. "The ultimate goal was to use meditation and mindfulness in a way to take care of each other, connect and bring loving kindness to the way we treat each other," Ellenbogen explains. Parents received it extremely well, too. "Here we are raising our kids in a world of give me, get me, text me and we all want for our kids and ourselves to find meaning spiritually in this world." Graubart remembers seeing a difference in the camp almost immediately. "It just was more focused, kids could play nicely, counselors could breathe—it was a dramatic turnaround and word got out among the camp."

The same applied at Camp Bluestar, where they believe a more spiritual involvement means more engagement. "I saw our campers tuned in and excited about it. They had their arms around each other. Meditation and mindfulness were wonderful because you can't be spiritual if you're tuned out," suggests White.

Ellenbogen and others at the camps wherein this practice was introduced, think a lot about sustaining the positive benefits of mindfulness beyond camp. "This idea of how to approach feelings and learn how to recognize them and allow them to be there and not react is so important," Ellenbogen explains. "First you have to be aware and then mindfulness is about not having judgment at the moment. These are incredible tools to reduce anxiety and leave a little more connected with ourselves and not just others around us."

It takes a lot of discipline to keep up meditation practice. Ongoing practice and incorporating this into camp is a good start. "If kids leave with some tools of mindfulness to handle stress better during school, that's great. We need to find ways to have this live beyond the summer when stressors are more acute. If I had at 16 what I have now, I would have been a hugely different person," according to Ellenbogen.

At Camp Bluestar, the theme of "Shine On" and finding one's light and passion permeated throughout the camp. Herschal remembers thinking: "This concept of paying attention purposefully with kindness, open heart, whatever phrase works for you, was transcendent to me. We can shine the light on a lot of what we do." As they both see it, there is no longer an option to not be open to mindfulness and meditation, particularly when it comes to inclusiveness. Ellenbogen explains, "Mindfulness meditation is a way to channel what we are experiencing and allowing others to do the same. Within many different traditions, there are values that are based in mindfulness, non-judgment, and loving kindness to others and ourselves. A mindfulness meditation practice and its teachings just compound these beautiful aspects and can only strengthen us. It is right in our back pocket."

Ellenbogen, through training, practice and her own workshops, offers another way in to this. In summary, Ellenbogen reminds us that "we are hearing more and more about the impact that mindfulness, meditation and small changes – based on this practice – has in both personal and professional settings from being a student or parent through running Fortune 500 companies. It can only strengthen us."

To learn more about mindfulness, meditation and find out about incorporating into your life or business, you can contact Tracey Ellenbogen at traceybogen@gmail.com, 610-864-1294 and at her website www.traceymsw.com.

Montgomery County Judge Toby L. Dickman to be Honored

The Women's Center of Montgomery County and the law firm of Rubin, Glickman, Steinberg & Gifford, PC are celebrating the legacy and honoring the valuable lifetime contributions of The Honorable Toby Lynn Dickman at an appreciation brunch. The event will be held on **April 3** at the William Penn Inn in Gwynedd, PA. Individual or table tickets are available and proceeds will support crucial Center programs. Information can be found at www.wcmontco.org.

Free Hip and Knee Pain Seminar

The Haverford Township Free Library will host a Hip and Knee Pain Seminar on Tuesday, **April 5** at 2 p.m. Hip or Knee Pain? Take this Step! Attend a free one-hour seminar sponsored by Bryn Mawr Hospital Orthopedic Center to learn what you can do about joint pain. Sharon Register, RN, will provide valuable insights on the causes of joint pain and treatment options from medications and exercise to advance surgical techniques — all designed to help you return to an active lifestyle. This program is free and open to the public, but registration is required. To register, visit the Library's website at www.haverfordlibrary/events or call 484-589-1000. The library is located at 1601 Darby Road, Havertown, PA. For information, contact Mary Bear Shannon at 610-446-3082 ext. 216 or shannon@haverfordlibrary.org.

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Tracey Ellenbogen offers guided mindfulness meditation to enhance the camping experience for staff and campers alike.
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