Camp Noah Evaluation Report

Overview of Camp Implementation and Impact

April 2015

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Introduction

Camp Noah, a program offered by Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSSMN), is a locally hosted event for elementary-age children whose communities have been impacted by disaster. Most camps take place in communities impacted by natural disasters, such as floods or tornadoes. Camp Noah has been hosted in disaster-impacted communities across the country with the mission to bring hope and healing to communities that have been impacted by disaster. Camp Noah provides a structured and safe environment in which elementary-age children are encouraged to face their fears, grieve their losses, identify and share their unique gifts and talents, and plan for their future.

Camp Noah can be offered in a variety of formats (such as after school or on weekends), but is most often done as a week-long summer camp. The camp follows an established curriculum designed to help children process their disaster and/or trauma experience through creative activities and play. Camp Noah is a 30-hour program that includes a variety of activities, including small groups, large group time (including music, skits, and puppet shows), crafts, and recreation. Meals and snacks are provided. In addition, all campers receive a paintable ark, a Camp Noah t-shirt, a fully-equipped Camp Noah Preparedness Backpack, all the supplies necessary to complete the creative activities during camp, a handmade fleece blanket, and multiple craft items.

Camp Noah is implemented through the active participation of volunteers and communities. Each camp has a local Site Coordinator, who makes arrangements for local logistics such as finding a facility, arranging for food, and recruiting local volunteers. This team of local volunteers serves meals and snacks, provides transportation, and supports the camp in a variety of ways. The camp curriculum activities are led by a team of Certified Camp Staff. Headed by a Team Leader, each member of this team participates in training to administer the camp activities. The team of Certified Camp Staff could be from the local community where camp is being held, but most often come from other locations across the country. Many teams support camp across multiple years. In addition, each camp is supported by a Mental Health Professional, who provides additional social-emotional support for campers and linkages for ongoing support when needed.

In 2014, LSSMN contracted with Wilder Research to provide evaluation consultation and support. In this role, Wilder Research is working with LSSMN staff to collect information to help understand the full impact of camp on campers, families, staff and volunteers, and local communities. The evaluation is also exploring the way camp is implemented, and considering opportunities to strengthen the camp curriculum or approach. The evaluation will take place over a three-year period.
Evaluation overview

This report summarizes the evaluation of 25 camps conducted in summer 2014. These camps were held in a variety of locations, including:

- Carney, OK
- Crisfield, MD
- Crutcho, OK
- Duluth, MN
- El Reno, OK
- Fort Plain, NY
- Gifford, IL
- Little Axe, OK
- Little Rock, AR
- Lyons, CO
- Moore, OK (6 camps)
- Norman, OK (2 camps)
- Pink, OK
- Princess Anne, MD
- Shawnee, OK
- Tom’s River, NJ
- Vilonia, AR
- Washington, IL
- Yukon, OK

The evaluation draws information from a number of different sources. First, campers and parents provided information about their experience with camp, and their perceptions of the camp’s impact. Three data collection activities were used:

- **Camper surveys (N=936)** – Campers completed brief paper and pencil surveys at the conclusion of camp. These surveys asked campers to rate a variety of program activities and potential impacts. These surveys were developed collaboratively by LSSMN and Wilder Research staff, and collected by the staff and volunteers from each camp.

- **Parent survey (N=146)** – At the conclusion of camp, parents were asked to complete a brief online survey. The survey included questions about the impact of camp on campers, and their satisfaction with camp activities. These surveys were developed collaboratively by LSSMN and Wilder Research staff, and administered by LSSMN. It should be noted that only 15 of the 25 camps are reflected in the completed parent surveys.

- **Follow-up parent survey (N=88)** – Three months after camp, parents were asked to complete another brief online survey. The survey was designed collaboratively by LSSMN and Wilder Research staff, and administered by Wilder Research. It was designed to explore the longer-term impact of camp on campers.

Second, staff and volunteers were asked to complete online surveys immediately following camp. These surveys were all designed and administered by LSSMN staff, and provided staff and volunteers an opportunity to rate and describe their experience with Camp Noah and to provide recommendations for future camps. Three different surveys were used:
**Site Coordinator surveys (N=23)** – Site Coordinators from 23 camps completed online surveys at the conclusion of camp.

**Local volunteer survey (N=51)** – Online surveys were also conducted with local volunteers, who most often provided support with tasks such as food service, registration, or transportation. Twelve of the 25 camps are represented among the respondents.

**Staff-volunteer surveys (also referred to in this report as Certified Camp Staff surveys) (N=143)** – Finally, one additional online survey was conducted at the conclusion of each camp. This survey was sent to other staff and volunteers, including Team Leaders, Mental Health Professionals, and other members of the Certified Camp Staff team (such as Small Group Leaders and staff who ran or supported recreation and art activities). All but one camp was represented among the respondents to this survey.

Finally, a series of in-depth interviews were conducted with staff, volunteers, and other community partners. These surveys took place in fall 2014, generally two to five months after respondents had worked at a camp. Survey protocols were developed collaboratively by LSSMN and Wilder Research staff, and interviews were conducted by trained interviewers at Wilder Research. The interviews provided an opportunity to gather deeper feedback from people who had been involved in camp, and to explore a number of topics of particular interest to the Camp Noah staff. Interviews were developed for five separate stakeholder groups:

- **Site Coordinators (N=9 of 24 invited to interview, 38% response rate)**
- **Small Group Leaders (N=33 of 88 invited to interview, 38% response rate)**
- **Team Leaders (N=8 of 14 invited to interview, 57% response rate)**
- **Mental Health Professionals (N=7 of 21 invited to interview, 33% response rate)**
- **Other community stakeholders (i.e., local community members who were instrumental in bringing Camp Noah to their community or supporting camp activities) (N=13 of 25 invited to participate, 52% response rate)**
Overview of report

This report is broadly divided into three sections.

- **Camper and family experience** – While some of the information in this section comes from other perspectives (i.e., staff and volunteers), the first section of the report focuses on the experience of campers and their families. This section describes the background of the families that participated, the reasons why parents decided to send their children to Camp Noah, and the strategies that were used to recruit campers. This section also describes the immediate and longer-term benefits of Camp Noah for campers and parents’ satisfaction with their camp experiences.

- **Staff and volunteer experience** – The second section of this report focuses on the staff and volunteers who help to arrange and implement Camp Noah. This section covers a wide array of topics, such as effective strategies for recruiting volunteers, the reasons why people choose to volunteer, the training and preparation staff and volunteers receive before camp, and strategies used to coordinate the camp logistics. Staff and volunteer experiences implementing camp are also included here, including feedback related to the camp curriculum and the ways in which the team roles and relationships were managed (including some specific focus on the role of the Mental Health Professional). The benefits of camp for staff and volunteers, and their overall satisfaction with their experience, are also included in this section.

- **Community experience** – The third section presents the community perspective regarding Camp Noah. This section is relatively brief, highlighting some feedback regarding the participation of community stakeholders and the benefits of camp for the broader community.

The report concludes with some overall recommendations for Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota staff to further refine and enhance the Camp Noah approach.
Section 1: Camper and family experience

Family background

**What were the demographics of families who sent their children to Camp Noah?**

Most families had one or two children from their household attend camp.

About half of the families (55%) had one child attend Camp Noah, and another third (34%) sent two children to camp. About one in ten families (11%) had three or more children at camp (Figure 1).

1. **Parent survey: Number of children in household attending camp (N=146)**

   ![Bar chart showing the distribution of children in households attending camp.]

   Most families had between one and three children in their household.

   Forty-three percent of families had two children in their household, and another fifth (22%) had three children. A total of 15 percent of families had only one child, and 19 percent had four or more children (Figure 2).

2. **Parent survey: Number of children under 18 in the household (N=139)**

   ![Bar chart showing the distribution of children under 18 in households.]

   Most families had between one and three children in their household.
Most families identified as white or had two or more races represented in their household.

A total of 70 percent of families identified as white, and another 15 percent noted that they had two or more races in their household. Fewer families identified as African American (6%), Native American (5%), Hispanic/Latino (2%), or Asian/Pacific Islander (1%) (Figure 3).

3. Parent survey: Household race/ethnicity (N=137)

Household incomes were fairly evenly distributed, with the greatest percentage of families indicating total household income between $25,000 and $49,999.

About one-third of the families (35%) reported their income to be between $25,000 and $49,999. Another 20 percent indicated their incomes to be between $50,000 and $74,999. The remaining income brackets were evenly represented (Figure 4).

4. Parent survey: Total household income (N=133)
How were families of the children attending camp impacted by disasters?

Participating families were impacted by disasters in a variety of ways.

Almost all parents (97%) said that their family had been impacted by a disaster. Most parents (80%) said that their community had been impacted by a disaster. More than half (54%) said that a close friend or relative’s home had been impacted; 38 percent said that their own family home was impacted. Four in ten families (38%) said that there had been a loss of life in their community; one in ten (8%) had experienced loss of life within their family or of a close friend (Figure 5).

5. Parent survey: How families were impacted by the disaster (N=135-146)

- Our community was impacted: 80%
- A close friend or relative’s home was impacted: 54%
- Our family home was impacted: 38%
- Loss of life in our community: 38%
- Loss of life of a close friend or in our family: 8%
- We were not impacted by a disaster: 3%

Camp attendance

Did children attend the camp all or most of the days it was offered? If not, why not?

Almost all of the children attended camp all or most of the days it was offered.

Almost all parents (99%) said that their children attended Camp Noah all or most of the days. A few parents said that they did not attend every day due to schedule conflicts or illness. One parent said that his or her child missed one day due to feeling “overwhelmed” due to sensory and attachment disorders. Almost all parents agreed that their children wanted to go to camp each day (90% strongly agreed, 9% agreed) and felt comfortable participating in the activities (80% strongly agreed, 18% agreed).
Although most children attended camp all of the days, one Small Group Leader did suggest the challenges of integrating children who did not attend on the first day.

I would change where in the week they’re telling their [storm] stories. We had a lot of kids start on the second day and there’s no way they’re ready to tell their stories on the second day. They’re still becoming a group. Maybe another day later. The kids who missed the beginning really missed significant pieces… getting to know each other and that kind of thing. The team building.

Recommendations

- Consider the timing of activities, particularly the telling of the storm stories, with potential attendance issues in mind.

Reasons parents had their children attend camp

Why did parents choose to have their children attend Camp Noah?

Families were most likely to send their children to camp to help them deal with their disaster-related stresses and fears.

When parents were asked an open-ended question about why they chose to send their children to Camp Noah, parents were most likely to say that they wanted to help their children deal with disaster or storm-related stresses and fears (N=64). This comment was three times more prevalent than any other comments or themes.

The tornado caused a lot of anger and fear... I was hoping to ease their minds and help them understand their emotions.

Our kids had a strong emotional response to the tornado and constantly worry about when the tornado will ‘decide to get our house and suck up our toys.’

My daughter witnessed the tornado and has been suffering from anxiety since the incident. I heard that this camp would assist in learning coping mechanisms with an emphasis on God, which is amazing!

My daughter wanted to go as soon as she heard about it...she says she has ‘worry issues’ after the tornado and felt that Camp Noah would help.

My daughter needed help with the tornado. She is so kind-hearted she hurt for friends that lost everything.

I thought it would give her a new way to process the experience of living through a flood, particularly with folks skilled in this area.

I wanted [my son] to be able to interact with kids and specifically talk with them about their experiences with the tornado.
Other parents highlighted their interest in having a fun camp experience for their child.

Parents also had other reasons for sending their child to Camp Noah. Some parents said that camp sounded like fun, and provided an opportunity for their children to have an enjoyable summer activity (N=19). Others felt that it would be a good learning opportunity in general (N=16) or an opportunity for their children to spend time with friends (N=13). A few (N=11) specifically highlighted the fact that camp was free.

- The kids needed a good place to go and have fun and learn other than school.
- It [seemed like it would be a] good way for her to connect with other kids.
- It sounded like something they would enjoy and the postcard stated that 100% of parents were glad their child attended.
- I thought it would be a fun and enriching experience for them. The fact that it didn't cost us any money was extremely helpful.
- [Camp Noah] seemed to be a good program with positive relevant information my kids would benefit from.

Recommendations

- Consider ways to leverage parents’ reasons for sending their children to camp in marketing and recruitment materials.

Camper recruitment

How did families hear about Camp Noah?

Families heard about camp in a number of different ways, but school fliers reached the most people.

Six in ten parents (61%) learned about Camp Noah through fliers or postcards from school. It was also common for people to have heard about camp from their friends or family members (27%). Social media, local partners, and local media also reached some parents (Figure 6).
6. **Parent survey: How parents heard about Camp Noah (N=146)**

- **Flier/postcard from school**: 61%
- **Friend/family member**: 27%
- **Facebook**: 7%
- **Camp Noah website**: 4%
- **Site coordinator**: 4%
- **Media: newspaper, radio, TV**: 2%
- **Disaster case manager**: 1%
- **Other**: 5%

**Note:** Other responses included learning about Camp Noah through the community center/hosting organization (N=2), from LSSMN, from colleagues who worked at camp, and from the church (N=2). Two parents also wrote in that they had received a flier from school, which was also one of the choices above.

**What strategies for outreach and advertising did Site Coordinators use to recruit campers?**

Site Coordinators used a variety of strategies outside of what was provided by Camp Noah to recruit campers. These strategies generally reflected the ways that parents had heard about Camp Noah.

The most common recruitment approach was to work with local schools (N=6) or churches (N=4). About half of the respondents (N=4) also reported using Facebook. Other strategies included word of mouth, signs/fliers, newspapers, television, providing information at events in the community, or working with disaster relief centers (Figure 7).
7. **Site Coordinator interview: When recruiting campers, what strategies for outreach/advertising did you use outside of what was provided by Camp Noah? (N=9)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Count</th>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches</td>
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<td>Signs/fliers</td>
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<td>Newspapers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaster relief centers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Responses could fall into multiple categories.*

**Site Coordinators found it fairly easy to recruit children for the camp.**

Most Site Coordinators noted that the camps filled up quickly and there were not many other resources they would have liked or needed. One respondent did note that he or she might have wanted to try advertising with local television if the camp were held again.

**Site Coordinators and local volunteers also reflected on ways recruitment could be improved in the future.**

Respondents suggested more outreach to families directly affected by the disaster and a focus on greater gender and racial/ethnic diversity.

> [I] would have liked more kids actually affected by the tornado to come.

*In hindsight, I could have personally contacted some of the hardest hit families to be sure they were invited/got a first shot at the camp. Many kids there weren’t as heavily impacted as some kids who weren’t there.*

> I would recommend those planning the camps would continue to ensure diversity among the participants both in terms of gender and ethnicity.
During the recruitment process, what questions did parents have about Camp Noah?

Site Coordinators described a number of questions that parents had about camp during the recruitment process.

Site Coordinators help to recruit campers within their communities. In this role, they often field questions from parents of potential campers. During the interviews, Site Coordinators identified six primary topics that parents asked about: cost, logistics, the religious nature of camp, safety and security issues, the competence of the camp staff and volunteers, and the appropriateness of camp for children who were not directly impacted by disasters.

**Cost.** About half of the respondents (N=4) indicated that they had received questions about cost.

**Logistics.** Site Coordinators also received questions about logistics, such as the schedule, activities, and whether the camp could accommodate food allergies.

**Religious aspects of the program.** Several of the Site Coordinators also noted questions they received from parents about religious aspects of the program.

[Parents asked,] “Is it religious?”

Also this camp is non-denominational. It was supported by Lutheran Social Service [of Minnesota], but it is non-denominational. Those were the main questions I had from parents.

[Parents wanted to know,] “Is it going to be real churchy?”

As part of the in-depth interviews, some other staff and volunteers also shared concerns about the relationship between the program model and formal religion. A few respondents did suggest that it’s important for the program to be very clear with the public about whether the model has a religious foundation or not. They specifically suggested emphasizing the program’s focus on trauma and recovery, while making it clear that it does not need to be overtly religious.

For communities that are not in the Midwest or in a faith-based community, it's important for them to know and understand that the curriculum is geared towards coping skills and recovery from trauma, more so than religious in nature. I could see some communities not being so thrilled if there was that religious element to it. It's important that Camp Noah advertise to communities or potential campers that the focus is on recovery and healing and being prepared and all of that.

[It is important to let people know that Camp Noah] doesn't have to be religion based. Some people get turned off by the religiosity of certain things and think their kids are going to be smacked around by other peoples' thoughts on religion. If people don't go to church or they're Jewish or something else that's not a Christian-based religion, they're not sure if they feel comfortable with it.
We kept religion out of it so it was open to everybody. No one needed to feel like we were going to proselytize even though it's called Camp Noah. That was important for me.

Safety and security. Two Site Coordinators also commented that they received questions about safety and security.

[Parents wanted to know,] “Are the volunteers’ background[s] checked?”

Security and safety were definitely concerns of the parents. But how this camp is designed and how it works, it's not a problem. We even had shirts for our van drivers so they were recognized as being from Camp Noah.

Competence and responsiveness of camp staff and volunteers. In addition, some parents had concerns about whether the staff and volunteers were equipped to attend to the trauma that their children faced in an appropriate and sensitive manner.

The[y] were a group where their children were directly impacted, so there was that fear element. They asked a lot questions about what they would be hearing about and learning about.

Some just wanted to make sure that we knew what some of their kids had gone through and wanted to make sure that we handled it in the right manner.

Appropriateness for children not directly affected by a disaster. Finally, one respondent described receiving questions from parents of children who were not directly affected by the disaster about whether the camp would still be suitable for his or her child.

Probably the number one question was, our family wasn't affected by the disaster. The families here that were affected, a year later they already moved somewhere else. The number one question was that many families felt they weren't affected by disaster.

Recommendations

- Provide resources to Site Coordinators to support camper recruitment, including templates for school fliers.
- Review recruitment materials to address parents’ questions or concerns.
- Consider ways to support Site Coordinators in reaching out to families most directly impacted by the disaster during recruitment.
- Compare the diversity of camp attendees to the broader communities in which camps are being held, and if needed, explore ways to ensure that the racial/ethnic and gender composition of those who attend camp reflects the broader community.
Parent satisfaction

Were parents satisfied with their children’s experience at Camp Noah?

Almost all parents (99%) would recommend Camp Noah to other parents.

Only one percent of parents said that they would not recommend Camp Noah. These parents did not provide comments to explain their answers. All parents felt safe sending their children to camp (92% “strongly agree,” 8% “agree”) (Figure 13). Parents were enthusiastic about Camp Noah in many of their open-ended responses.

[I] just wanted to express how great Camp Noah really was for our community and how big of an impact that all of the staff left on my children. Please continue to offer this extraordinary opportunity for children affected by natural disaster.
The staff and helpers were warm and friendly and genuinely seemed to care about the kids.
I think that this is an excellent camp for kids!!! Thanks to all the volunteers that helped put it on! I felt very safe dropping my kids off. I can't say enough positive things about Camp Noah!!

Alternate camp approaches

What school year options for camps did parents prefer?

If camp wasn’t offered in summer, families were most likely to suggest holding camp during school breaks.

Camp Noah is most often offered as a five day option in the summer. Parents were asked what other kinds of arrangements might have worked for their family. Families were most likely to say that they could have participated if camp were offered over a five-day school break (57%). One-third of the families (34%) also thought it would have worked to hold camp on the weekends, over five consecutive Saturdays or Sundays. Very few families (6%) would have been interested in camp if it were held after school, for ten 3-hour sessions (Figure 8).

8. Parent survey: School year options families could have participated in (N=146)
What additional programming would parents be interested in?

Parents were interested in a variety of other programming options, especially camps for older and younger children.

Parents were asked what additional programming would have been of interest to them. They were most likely to say that they would have liked a preschool/early childhood version of camp (49%) or a middle/high school version of camp (35%). Approximately one in five parents would have been interested in parent-focused programming, including Noah’s Journey (resiliency and preparedness for adults) (22%), a pre-camp parent information event (21%), and a post-camp parent training/support session (19%) (Figure 9).

9. Parent survey: Additional programming of interest to parents/households (N=146)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programming</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-school/early childhood Camp Noah</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle school/high school Camp Noah</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah’s Journey - resiliency and preparedness for adults</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-camp parent information event</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-camp parent training/support session</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommendations

- Explore school-year options for camps, such as over school breaks or on weekends.
- Consider developing programs for other ages, particularly pre-school/early childhood and middle/high school.
- For those parents who were interested in parent programs, consider creating resource materials for parents that could complement the Camp Noah curriculum.
Benefits to campers

Did campers have a positive experience at Camp Noah? If so, what parts of camp did campers like the best?

Campers had fun at Camp Noah.

Almost all campers (99%) said that they had fun overall. At least 87 percent of the campers rated each specific camp component as fun (Figure 10). When asked in an open-ended item to describe the most fun part of camp, the most frequent response (N=107) was simply that “everything” was fun.

I can’t tell the most fun thing….so I’ll say everything.
This was the best camp ever.
[Camp Noah is a] happy place.
[Camp Noah is] fun, creative, and very active.
[Camp Noah is] AWESOME on so many levels!

10. Camper survey: Percentage of campers saying that each camp component is "fun" (N=882-926)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blankets</td>
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<td>Backpacks</td>
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<td>Teachers</td>
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<td>Crafts</td>
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<td>Food</td>
<td>95%</td>
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<td>Recreation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noah</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stories</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Take aways” like blankets and backpacks were very popular.

Almost all campers (98-99%) rated backpacks and blankets as “fun” (Figure 10). When asked in an open-ended question to identify the most fun part of Camp, one of the most common responses was blankets (N=62); fewer campers (N=15) mentioned the backpacks.

The most fun part was getting the blankets.
I really liked the backpack too!

Campers enjoyed the activities, though stories and songs were less popular.

Campers rated several camp activities as “fun,” including crafts (97%), food (95%), recreation (95%), and Noah (94%) (Figure 10). There was some variability in ratings across camps. For example, the percentage of campers rating food as “fun” ranged from 77-100 percent across camps. There was also some variability related to recreation (86-100% rating it as “fun”) and Noah (85-100% rating it as “fun”). Campers were especially likely to mention recreation (N=94) and arts and crafts (N=92) when asked in an open-ended question to identify the most fun aspect of camp. Several campers specifically mentioned painting the ark as a favorite craft activity.

The most fun part of Camp Noah was the crafts!!
Art was my favorite one of all, but I liked all of [the activities].
I liked the crafts and recreation the best.
My most fun part of Camp Noah is the food, crafts, and recreation.

They were slightly less positive about songs and stories, with 87 percent rating these activities as “fun” (Figure 10). However, several Site Coordinators and Small Group Leaders did mention that the songs and stories were popular among the campers.

Watching the group get crazy silly doing the banana song and others was fabulous.
All the kids LOVED the songs and would go around just singing them all through camp.
A couple of the parents that dropped their children off were talking about how they came home and sang the songs to the parents and just loved it. Put a smile on our face.
The kids liked [the stories]…I had 4th through 6th graders and older kids like to read and play around and it was nice to be able get them to read and talk about it and have a conversation.

Parents also indicated that their children had had a good time.

All parents either “strongly agreed” (91%) or “agreed” (9%) that their child had had fun at camp (Figure 13). Many parents also talked about the fun that their children had had when they were asked to describe the camp’s impact.
My daughter had the BEST time. I have never seen her so excited about going to a camp.
The camp was amazing. My kids had a blast and truly felt that this was the best camp they had been to.
My daughter came home excited to tell me what had happened each day.
She had an amazing time! She was so excited to talk about the daily events and the tools she learned.
He had a wonderful time! He enjoyed making friends with kids of all ages.

Staff, volunteers, and community stakeholders all felt that Camp Noah had a positive impact on campers.

Most local volunteers (98%) and Certified Camp Staff (94%) agreed that Camp Noah had a positive impact on campers, with 78 percent of local volunteers and 76 percent of Certified Camp Staff “strongly agreeing” (Figure 11). Some commented that the campers had fun, and enjoyed the various camp activities. Others noted that they heard positive feedback from parents.

The campers were so excited that they wanted the camp to go for another week.
I could honestly tell the kids learned a lot and loved it.
The campers all seemed to have fun and appreciated the special and individualized treatment and recognition that they were able to get at camp. Feedback from the kids and parents was very positive.
I had the pleasure of speaking to a number of parents who only confirmed how much their children loved the camp. It was clear on a daily basis that the children loved being there.

11. Local volunteer and Certified Camp Staff surveys: Camp Noah had a positive impact on campers on the community where I served

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Local Volunteers (N=50)</th>
<th>Certified Camp Staff (N=142)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately agree</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately disagree</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Local Volunteers (N=50)  Certified Camp Staff (N=142)
Site Coordinators and community stakeholders also shared stories of campers who had a positive experience at camp.

I received the following text from a parent on the last day of camp: ‘Good morning. I just wanted to tell you thank you for thinking enough of my boys to have them attend Camp Noah. They have really enjoyed themselves. They are sad to see this week end. Every day this week they have come home so excited about their day. So once again thank you.’

One 7-year-old boy asked his mother to come later for pick-up since he wanted to stay for as many minutes as possible. One 11-year-old girl said this was the best camp she’d ever attended, and she may even come by a church service to see what that’s like. A 6-year-old son of a single, working mother said this was the best week of his life.

Many parents called or texted me throughout the week, thanking us over and over for this opportunity. One mom asked if they have a Camp Noah for adults! And she was serious!

None of the kids wanted to see the camp end. All of them wanted to know when it was going to happen again. And there was a repeated phrase from the younger kids, they had this song going about ‘Camp Noah is forever.’

How else did campers benefit from Camp Noah?

Almost all campers learned that they are someone special and have hopes and dreams for the future.

The vast majority of campers said that they learned they are somebody special (97%) and have hopes and dreams for the future (96%) (Figure 12). Similarly, 94 percent said that they learned what their gifts and talents are.

12. Camper survey: Percentage of campers saying "yes" to each item (N=849-857)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I learned that I am somebody special</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have hopes and dreams for the future</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned how to stay safe during stormy weather</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know my safe place, and I can go there when I feel worried or afraid</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned what my gifts and talents are</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When asked in an open-ended item what they learned at Camp Noah, the most common response from campers was that they learned that they are special or unique (N=178).

[I learned that] everybody is special in their own way.
[I learned] how I’m special and everyone has a useful talent.
I learned that I am somebody special and nothing can change that.
[I learned that] I am somebody special and there’s nobody else like me.

Most parents felt that their children had hopes and dreams for the future (79% “strongly agreed,” 18% “agreed”) and had learned what their gifts/talents are (67% “strongly agreed,” 24% “agreed”). Parents also indicated that their children had learned that they were someone special (80% “strongly agreed,” 19% “agreed”), something that was highlighted in the comments provided by some of the parents following camp (Figure 13).

He knows how special he is, being told by others rather than just household members.
It made her feel special!
My son appears to have more self-confidence and better self-esteem.

Local volunteers and Certified Camp Staff also shared that Camp Noah provided an opportunity for campers to feel cared for, which may have contributed to campers’ feelings that they were special.

We had a kid who came in the middle of the week so he missed the beginning. He didn’t really enjoy it at first, then he saw how excited staff were that he was there, and how we tried to get him involved. By the time he left, he painted his ark and gave it to our team leader and said he wanted to go to college and he knew his future was going to be bright. He was like a totally different kid.

One little boy didn’t want camp to end, and he was so dang proud of that certificate he got at the end of the week. I just think it was some special love that he got there that maybe he doesn’t get all the time.

We had a student at the end get up and thank us and told us a little about his story and how we made him feel and Camp Noah helped build his confidence and made him realize he’s important and not just another kid. I think a lot of kids felt that way. They felt loved and that’s what they needed.

Several Mental Health Professionals and Small Group Leaders also emphasized that Camp Noah helped the campers feel that they were not forgotten.

Being where they are, I think that people had forgotten about them. I think it was exciting and emotional for them that people are willing to come and spend all this time with them and just hang out with them and teach them things.
It helped the campers feel cared about, loved, not forgotten, and to walk through the next step of the healing process.

Local volunteers and Certified Camp Staff also noted a new sense of hope among campers.

It shows them that they are strong and they can move forward. It takes that fear away from them.

The third day starts out with what is better now in our town than before, and one of the boys said we wouldn't have Camp Noah if we didn't have the tornado.

There was one little boy who at the beginning of the camp, his eyes just looked dead and he didn't have energy, and he was really lethargic. By the end of camp he was smiling again, his eyes looked really happy, and it was amazing just the five days we were there, how much of a difference you can see in the kids' behaviors.

Many staff, volunteers, and community stakeholders also emphasized the ways in which the team tried to attend to campers’ individual needs and meet them where they were at, which may also have helped campers feel that they were special and cared for.

Camp really made sure each and every child had all of their needs met, whether it was developmental needs, emotional needs, or physical needs. That is priceless because some of the kids that attended may or may not get that at home.

[A camper had] severe, limited verbal autism and was terrified on Monday morning when he got to camp. The environment, although warm and friendly, was new to him. After about an hour or so, he adjusted and seemed to enjoy the remainder of the day. On Monday evening, I received this text from his mother: 'Thank you so much for loving [camper] and making him feel special in a good way, instead of special because of his disabilities.'

The girls were more into the plays and skits and the boys just wanted to be in the classroom where they could move a little more and not have to sit there and listen to the play.

[Campers benefitted from] the open environment to communicate their feeling, to really allow them to discuss how they felt, what was going on with them. And for them to express it whichever way suits them best. Some activities were drawing, discussing things out loud; they had a good mix of activities for people who express themselves in different ways.

You need to put yourself into the kids’ place. And look at each individual child and see how they are different and special and how they need to be treated in each way and to see them when they realize that someone thinks that they are special. And to give the children these tools, it’s a growing experience.

Campers also learned about how to be prepared and stay safe during stormy weather, as well as how to relax.

Almost all campers said that they learned how to stay safe during stormy weather (95%) and that they knew their safe place and could go there when they felt afraid (95%). Most also learned ways to relax (94%) and to feel prepared for stormy weather (93%) (Figure 12). When asked in an open-ended item what they learned at Camp Noah, many campers
said that they learned how to feel safe or prepared (N=74). Some also talked about learning to relax (N=42) and how to find their safe place (N=27).

- I learned to be safe and prepared.
- I learned how your safe place is a good place to be when you’re scared.
- I learned that everything will be OK.
- I learned ways to relax.
- I learned that it’s okay to be sad, but tomorrow is a better day.
- Camp Noah made me feel safe.

Following camp, parents also felt that their children were better prepared for stormy weather. Almost all parents “strongly agreed” (79%) or “agreed” (18%) that their children were more prepared for stormy weather. This was also the most common response when parents were asked to describe how camp had impacted their children. Almost all parents also “strongly agreed” (82%) or “agreed” (15%) that their children knew their safe place and many also noted that their children had learned ways to relax (71% “strongly agreed,” 22% “agreed”) (Figure 13).

- It helped them to know that they were not the only ones that were scared and it helped them in knowing ways to prepare for the weather.
- Having his backpack of supplies helps him feel a little better because he feels prepared.
- She is always saying that she is ‘prepared, not scared’ now, which is so great.
- [There were] lots of fun and learning activities that will benefit her through her childhood when she is confronted by bad weather. She also really learned how to relax and comfort herself when no one else can do it for her.
### 13. Parent survey: Parent ratings of Camp Noah's impact (N=141-143)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) had fun at Camp Noah</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt safe sending my child(ren) to Camp Noah</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) learned that he/she is somebody special</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) wanted to go to camp each day</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) felt comfortable participating in the activities</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) feels more prepared for stormy weather</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) knows his/her safe place, and can go there when he/she feels worried or afraid</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) has hopes and dreams for the future</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) made friends at Camp Noah</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) learned how to feel safe during stormy weather</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) learned ways to relax</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) learned what his/her gifts and talents are</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child(ren) had a chance to tell his/her story to others</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Staff and volunteers also shared observations that the campers learned skills to be prepared, feel safer, and relax in stressful situations.

I still hear and read stories of children who went to camp and learned to be prepared for the next situation that they might feel scared or worried about.

The one that sticks out most in my head was a girl who actually in the beginning was one of our more difficult ones… Her mom and grandmother were some of the food makers. She kept wanting to leave and go be with them. She had a really hard time with sticking in there and wanted a lot of attention… But that last day it was raining. We had told them to leave their backpacks at home. She had her backpack on and I made a comment and she said but it was storming outside! She was going to be prepared, she got it, she knew where her backpack was and when it started to storm she had her backpack with her.
Kids that were having nightmares and were afraid to go to sleep without a light were actually going to sleep. So it went real well. The kids definitely learned to get over some of the fears and be prepared, and that we don't have to live under fear.

Yesterday, we had severe storm warnings. Everyone was anxious. One of our girls shared that she was extremely scared and I told her to ‘remember Noah’s wise words.’ She responded, ‘Oh yeah, that totally helps!’

The Friday after camp, we had a storm come through. The mother of a child that had lost two of his playmates told me he had used his Camp Noah learnings to brave through the storm.

Campers built strong relationships with the adults and other children at camp.

Almost all campers (97-98%) rated their camp teachers and friends as “fun” (Figure 10). Campers were relatively likely to talk about the teachers, volunteers, and staff (N=65) and friends (N=49) when asked to identify the most fun part of Camp Noah.

- Having a great time with friends [was the most fun part of camp].
- There is one teacher that was by my side since day one...she was very nice to me. I’m going to miss her.
- I met many friends that are nice and silly.
- Camp Noah was a really good camp for all of us and all the teachers were GREAT!!!
- I love you teachers. Thank you for everything you guys do for me.
- I am thankful for Camp Noah because it gave a chance to make friends with people.

In addition, almost all of the parents agreed that their children made friends at Camp Noah (77% “strongly agreed,” 20% “agreed”) (Figure16). Local volunteers, Certified Camp Staff, and community stakeholders also mentioned the new friendships that children made and the relationships they had built with staff and volunteers.

- We had kids that did not know each other coming into camp become great friends and support each other during camp and remain so even after camp.
- A lot of the kids did know each other but several came from outside of the church. I think it made them feel more like a community and they were able to overcome this [trauma] as a group rather than individually. It was like another family to belong to. They became a little Camp Noah group, and I think if they see each other they’ll be nice to each other. So it bonded them together.
- It was great because we had kids from all over the community and all over the school district, but it was good to see those friendships growing... and some of the campers had actually worked with some of the staff before so I think that was helpful, being able to have that continuity.
The amazing thing is when the kids walk in the beginning of the week and they're sitting by themselves and by the end of the week, they have a new best friend. The most amazing thing about Camp Noah is these kids are coming in with nothing and they're leaving with the most important thing which is a smile on their face and someone to talk to.

On day five, a little girl wanted to move to Minnesota to be with her teacher.

I think it was a good opportunity for them to be able to process their emotions and be with other kids that had experienced the same thing.

These relationships were not only valued by the campers, but Certified Camp Staff also discussed the strong bonds they built with the campers and other staff and volunteers and the difficulty of leaving at the end of the week. These remarks also suggest that some preparation for this transition might be warranted, potentially in the pre-camp trainings.

The campers come in at the beginning and they think it's like a school or something. At the end of the week, they have grown and changed and it happens with us too. You start off and you don't know these kids or people you're working with. By end of the week you're like family and everyone is having so much fun and we play games and sing and dance and everyone has a good time.

I think [volunteers] need to understand that they're going into a situation where kids have been really affected by something that was life-changing and they need to understand that and take it in the right way and not be shocked when it comes to the end of the week and they need to lose all contact with them. The first year that I had done it the people that I was with we were kind of taken aback like, why can't we talk to the kids anymore? And I think a lot of people struggle with that, is they really miss the kids.

Most staff and volunteers felt that campers were able to open up and share their feelings, but slightly fewer campers said that they had a chance to tell their story to others.

Fewer campers said that they had a chance to tell their story to others, though the majority of the campers (85%) still agreed that they had had the opportunity to do so.

[I learned] that it is important to talk about my feelings.

Parents were also least likely to say that their children were able to tell their stories to others, although 91 percent still reported that their children were able to do so (with 72% “strongly agreeing” and 19% “agreeing”) (Figure 13). However, most of the staff and volunteers felt that telling their stories was a powerful experience for the campers, and greater willingness to open up and share was by far the most frequent response of Small Group Leaders to how the camp had impacted the campers.

You notice a definite change in how they view the disaster. In the beginning of the week, the children are very afraid and they don't want to talk about it. By the end of the week, they feel like they are in a safe place to talk about their experience and to kind of learn and grow from it. It prepares them for other times in life when tragedy hits.
One little boy didn't want to tell his story, and I just said if you want to tell me sometime later....He sat down outside with me [and] shared his story, and that was good for him to be able to have the time. It's important to have them do it on their own time.

Being able to sit in classroom with kids their age talking about the same storm and realizing that it didn't just happen to me, it happened to other people...it lets them open up a little more. I think that's a huge part of being able to talk about it with other people. It helps them break it down and ask questions, and maybe if they need it, get further help on it.

There's a tremendous freedom to be able to name my story, to name my truth, in an atmosphere where it will be taken seriously. Where... my story is my story and I can freely share it, I can freely name it, it doesn't have to be like anyone else's story, it is mine... [Telling their stories] creates a tremendous amount of freedom where things they might have thought, I can't share, or I haven't been able to share, where I am taken seriously, I am not a kid, I am a person. And my concerns are as important as anybody else’s. That there's good things in me and in my story. So I sometimes see kids just be very relieved to unburden themselves.

Community can be built as people listen to their stories and respect one another. I insist that we really listen. Sometimes it's going to be different from yours and in some places it's going to be similar. But let them tell their story and then we can have some questions. It creates an atmosphere of safety and support, and that is a welcome container where those emotions and those experiences can live naturally and freely. I just see that releasing a lot of positive energy in kids.

One Small Group Leader also related how he or she was able to encourage the campers to tell their stories by first sharing his or her own story and modelling being open and vulnerable.

The kids were not being very forthcoming with discussing their tornado, so I said 'let me tell you about my tornado.' I told them my story and they really listened... And that led them to talk. One of the kids said they had been told at school not to talk about it, that they'll get over it. And I said, my tornado was three years ago and I'm not over it yet, your tornado was last year... and I'm sure you're not over it. And if the teachers don't want you to talk about it [in] class then talk about it to each other [or] with your parents or your grandparents, anybody, everybody. Just talk about it, that helps a lot to talk about it. Every time I tell my story it helps me because it just gets to where it kind of pushes it more to the back burner. Anytime you want to talk about anything, whatever you want to do, you find me, and we can talk about it. I just try to be the grandmother role with them, it's always nice to have a grandma to go and visit with.

Staff and volunteers also emphasized that the camp helped children open up and engage more broadly in the activities and interact with campers, staff, and volunteers.

We had one boy who had been in the tornado and lost his home. He came out of his shell. He loved everybody. He did everything. His folks, I run into them every now [and] again in town and they can't believe the transformation that he has gone through.
I kind of saw myself in one of the girls in my classroom. The more I got to talk to her the more things I found out. She had been removed from her home because her mother was abusive and she lived with her grandma. She would just stand off to the side at the beginning, but by the end of the week she would engage in activities and play board games and talk to the other kids and she wasn't as shy, she would laugh more. So she kind of came out of her shell and started to be a kid.

You could see the light in their faces, and the parents affirming you and what you did. ‘My child has been through this and she hasn't talked in months and now you guys come and she talks about how she's prepared now and not scared.’

I am always amazed by how these children who are so nervous and scared coming on Monday morning, and by Thursday you see the hugest change. They’re not shy anymore, they’re more relaxed, they're able to go with the things we’re asking them to do so much better. I think that is part of the therapeutic charm of Camp Noah. There is this magical miracle thing that happens in the week, and it doesn't happen in Bible school or other groups. But it's something that does happen with Camp Noah.

Camp Noah also provided campers with the opportunity to have fun and “be kids.”

Although many staff and volunteers expressed the impacts on campers of telling their storm stories, some also noted the importance of allowing children a chance to have fun and “be kids.”

I saw a lot of the children at the beginning not know how to handle it. To be honest they acted like little mini-adults. To me that was like, maybe at home they had to, they didn't have time to be children, they had to be grown up and take care of their siblings. By the end of the week they were just all playing and having a good time and had made lots of friends and were happy… It was just a chance for them to be kids.

If the issues we were talking about weren't necessarily about the flood, that that was okay too. Some of [the campers] had moved on and had other things they wanted to talk about. I think just being around accepting and encouraging people was positive for them.

The thing I noticed the most with the younger group, they had already started forgetting about what happened. They were like, oh that was a long time ago.

For some, camp allowed the campers to have a new experience that they would not have had otherwise in their day-to-day lives after a disaster.

They got to do the things that they don't get the opportunity to do. They walk around with the world on their shoulders. It was a freedom for them, not to always be on their guard. I think it was an extraordinary impact for them.

First of all, the kids had never been through an experience like [Camp Noah]. It was brand new for them to be part of something like that. They loved the team. They enjoyed getting to know… people from far away, just being loved on. Learning new things and doing all the crafts, it is incredible.

This community is very financially strapped. A lot of kids can't even attend camp due to the costs. This being a free camp, free food, free transportation was for some of them a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.
Camp Noah helped children and families become connected to additional resources and services.

Some staff and volunteers shared stories of children and families who were set up with additional resources and services as a result of Camp Noah.

One of the kids got set up with a program. One child was better prepared in his school. He has a better team around him now.

Some of these kids had gone through physical abuse from their parents and were just in ridiculous situations. So they've been in this house with physical abuse, and now they're bringing it up for the first time. That's where the Mental Health Professional is great. She pulled that kid out then and involved the agencies that needed to be involved.

We saw kids who didn't have school supplies at home that were just delighted by the fact that they got school supplies they got to keep.

The family will also receive clean-up help at their property from three churches.

We as a church are now able to help one of the families who sent their child to camp.

Camp Noah helped campers struggling with behavior issues.

Staff and volunteers noted that some children showed behavior issues from the beginning of camp. Others began to struggle with behavior issues after the harder days when children shared their stories. Nonetheless, several Small Group Leaders expressed that behavior problems seemed to improve as the week went on. Small Group Leaders also described how they used some of the skills taught during camp to help children regulate their feelings and behaviors.

Some of the classrooms were having a very hard time with behavior, and they started doing 'go to the safe place' with the children…. After they taught them that, the behavior of the children calmed down. So we are teaching the children some techniques of ways to help themselves focus themselves a little better.

Tuesday through Thursday were really tough material days and so that's when we would see maybe a spike in some interruptive behaviors, just kids having difficulties. But then we would see those resolving towards the end of the week, and things just calming down again.

[One child] obviously had some major behavior problems and spent a lot of time with the Mental Health Professional if he needed his time-out. But he would do that 6 to 8 times a day and not spend a whole lot of time in class. If you'd ask him to do something he didn't want to do it. At the end of the week, he said 'I’m going to miss you!' Gave me a great big hug. This little boy that had been so ‘I don't want to be here' kind of thing. So I definitely see changes and help for kids.

Some campers may benefit from Camp Noah more than others.

Several Certified Camp Staff pointed out that some of the campers may have benefitted from camp more than others. Respondents suggested that these impacts may relate in part to campers’ varying experiences with the disaster.
[The impact] really depends on the camper. For some it is transformative and for others it was a fun memory. Some more than others, but some needed it more than others.

It’s helping the kids that need it the most. A lot of the times we felt like there were some kids there just because it was free daycare. I feel like the kids that really needed it, it helped them a lot.

It’s not just a fun camp. It’s a camp that teaches them something. And again, it's also really fun and if that's all they get out of it that's fine as well.

Regardless, staff and volunteers shared that Camp Noah has powerful and transformative healing impacts on the children that attend.

Small Group Leaders and Site Coordinators in particular observed the healing impacts of Camp Noah on the children that attend. Several emphasized that the camp has great impacts within a week even though it may look like the children are just having fun. Small Group Leaders also emphasized the powerful impacts it can have on staff, volunteers, and the communities that are still healing.

It looks like all they do is do arts and crafts and sing songs and everything. However, people need to know that the kids are strengthened by talking about the whole thing, by the stories we tell, by skits, by books we read to them. It brings them into a fellowship together. We've all been through something together and by that we're bonded. People need to understand that it's more than just fun and games like church camp or vacation bible school. This gets down to where the kids have a basic need that something that has terrified them, and maybe they've lost family members or friends and that's different than anything they'll learn in church camp. They get tools that they can learn to close their eyes and relax and go to their happy place and they can learn so many good things from that.

We did a camp out in California and [the Mental Health Professional] was so negative. She said ‘There is no way in five days you can have any effect on these kids. It just doesn't work that fast. I think this is a waste of time.’ By Tuesday afternoon she was apologizing. She said, ‘I was wrong, I can see behavior changes in a number of kids already.’ They just needed to know somebody cared, somebody was listening, and giving them tools to handle things they've been through. I think [others] should know [that camp] serves a very acute need that children have. The wind blows, buildings fall down, people get hurt, communities get devastated, but the wounds that last the longest are the ones they can't see. They're the ones they can't see until kids start acting out and doing destructive things or getting depressed and what not. The deepest most profound wounds are not on the landscape, but are in the hearts and souls of adults and children. Adults do a very good job for a while of denying it. And it takes time to let them be expressed. Camp Noah allows and enables that to happen in a very safe, loving way so that children can name those wounds, begin to see what's healing them. Begin to see what growth and resiliency is and can be...

Recommendations

- Consider providing training or resources to prepare staff and volunteers for the end of camp.
Lasting benefits to campers

Did Camp Noah have lasting impacts on campers after camp was over?

Three months after participating in Camp Noah, parents reported that their children felt more prepared for stormy weather.

Almost all parents “strongly agreed” (64%) or “agreed” (32%) that their children felt more prepared for stormy weather after participating in Camp Noah (Figure 14). Feeling better prepared was also the most frequently cited impact by parents in open-ended responses. Parents noted that many of the children used their backpacks to feel prepared.

She has learned that she doesn't need to worry when bad weather is approaching because she is prepared and has a safety plan.

Since participating in Camp Noah, we have had a few days weathermen have called for possible tornadoes. Each time, the first thing my kids did was to grab their preparedness book bag (they keep under their bed). After Camp Noah… while the kids still might be scared/worried, they now feel more powerful because they are better prepared. So even in times they do not have control, they can feel more prepared and handle it better.

When the fire alarm went off in our apartment building, there were no tears or panic. My kids grabbed their backpacks and went to our meeting spot. I was a proud mama.

[My son] keeps his book bag full of storm supplies on hand and is proud that he's prepared.

A community stakeholder also related, “I heard a great story after camp was over. We had a storm, and this little girl, one of the campers, got up out of bed to get her backpack, the one the campers get, and put it beside her bed.”

Children continued to make use of their safe places after Camp Noah.

Three months after Camp Noah, most parents reported that their children continued to use their safe places. Almost all parents “strongly agreed” (53%) or “agreed” (40%) that their children knew their safe place and went there when they felt worried or afraid (Figure 14). Some parents also observed that their children used their safe place to manage other emotions as well.

She uses her safe place any time she feels nervous. She also uses it to fall asleep sometimes!

[She] uses her safe place when weather gets bad.

He imagines his safe place and that helps him feel less afraid during stormy weather.

The safe place has served him from cooling down his temper to tying his shoe without pressure.

We go over our safe spots on a monthly basis. We discuss what to do during a storm and she always checks her go bag.
Parents also indicated that their children are better able to manage and express their fears in stormy weather three months after Camp Noah.

The majority of parents “strongly agreed” (46%) or “agreed” (42%) that their children feel safer in stormy weather after participating in Camp Noah. In addition, most parents reported that their children use the strategies they learned at Camp Noah to relax (35% “strongly agreed,” 54% “agreed”) (Figure 14). Parents shared the following observations:

She is able to talk about her fears during storms.

I was recently hit with some challenging health news and my son was able to listen to it in stride without breaking down. Before attending camp, things like this would have upset him a great deal. I believe that the coping skills he picked up [have] helped him become better suited to handle any form of negativity.

We have struggled with anxiety and panic attacks since my horrific experience with [a hurricane]. I have had my boys in therapy and after Camp Noah the sense of relief that came over them was priceless!!! The precious little stone that they made, my one son keeps on his dresser and puts in his pocket when he needs to feel safe.

He talks about his feelings more overall. He has not had any other anxiety attacks since Camp Noah. Camp Noah also helped him process losing his brother and sister and grandmother to death. He made a picture and left it on the wall at Camp Noah and he was able to leave a lot of the pain there on that wall. I am so thankful for all that Camp Noah was for my son.

Three months after camp, parents reported that Camp Noah helped their children feel more confident.

Almost all (93%) of parents agreed that their children felt more confident after participating in Camp Noah (51% “strongly agreed,” 42% “agreed”) (Figure 14). In open-ended responses, parents reported improvements in their children’s self-esteem and confidence in handling storms.

Just being more sure of themselves.

He is more educated on the weather radio and tests for the storms so he feels more empowered. He… seems more confident.

Our five-year-old has found her voice and is becoming more assured and confident.

He is proud of himself.

I think in general it has helped with self-esteem and confidence. She lacks in these areas and continues to work on them.
Likewise, some parents observed that their children had a stronger sense of self after participating in Camp Noah.

A total of 96 percent of parents felt that Camp Noah helped their children understand that they are special (60% “strongly agreed,” 36% “agreed”). Almost all of the parents (99%) agreed that their children had hopes and dreams for the future (67% “strongly agreed,” 32% “agreed”) and 91 percent indicated that Camp Noah helped their children understand what their gifts and talents were (46% “strongly agreed,” 45% “agreed”) (Figure 14).

She loves her little book about me and is writing more about herself in her diary.
More self worth.
She learned that she must be herself at all times and that she is very special in her own way.
Both girls had wonderful opportunities to explore their gifts. Our five-year-old has found her voice.
She also learned to value herself more and doesn't let other kids bring her down.

Many parents also observed improvements in their child(ren)’s social skills three months after Camp Noah.

Most parents “strongly agreed” (42%) or “agreed” (41%) that their children engage more with friends after participating in Camp Noah (Figure 14). Parents also described the ways that their children have grown in their social skills and developed new friendships as a result of Camp Noah.

He talks about how much fun he had and is thrilled when he sees the new friends he met at camp when he’s in school.
Speaking to people and making new friends helped him the most.
She seems more at ease with her friends and peers.
Their social skills have greatly improved as they show confidence in making friendships.
He is VERY shy and Camp Noah has helped bring him out of his shell.

In particular, many parents noted that their child(ren) seems to show more compassion and awareness of others’ feelings after participating in Camp Noah.

They are more likely to care for each other when one of them has a cut or scrape. They are both quick to go and get the first aid kit.
They see and want to help others a lot more.
They seem more willing to offer help to others and are aware of others needs since attending Camp Noah.
He also seems more compassionate to others feelings too.
He also has a teacher this year who… is a Hurricane Sandy Survivor and she still does not sleep in her bed since the storm. My son Tyler, painted her a precious stone and wrote the words "brave & loved" on the stone.

Did Camp Noah have an impact on signs of stress and trauma in campers?

Most parents reported improvements in behaviors indicating signs of stress or trauma.

Children often communicate signs of stress and trauma through behaviors such as clingingness or whining, feeling fearful or anxious, somatic concerns such as complaining of aches and pains, sleep or toileting problems, or behavior problems. Parents were asked in an open-ended question if they had observed any changes in their children related to these behaviors in the months after Camp Noah.

Worrying and difficulty calming. Over a third of parents (37%) reported that their children were easier to calm or show less worry after Camp Noah. Reduced fears and worries was the most frequently indicated response.

She... is easier to calm down.
They have been more relaxed and calm. My oldest child has not had to return to therapy as often.
She doesn’t speak [about] or is as fearful of dying herself or others dying.
They have done better with anxiety.
Whining and clinginess. Parents also remarked that their children whined less and were less clingy. In some instances, this change was associated with greater independence.

- Less clingy and able to go to bed alone.
- His whining has decreased as his independence has increased.
- They are more self-reliant.
- He is rarely clingy anymore...only when we are actually encountering a bad storm where we are in the basement again.

Sleep disturbances. Parents also noted improvements in their children’s sleep. Parents observed that their children had fewer nightmares, and were more likely to sleep through the night or sleep independently.

- He’s had nightmares before and now he understands that everything will be okay. [He] likes to draw when he wants to feel safe.
- He doesn’t cry as much as he used to or wake up at night from nightmares that often now, so that is much better.
- He doesn’t seem to be getting up through the night as much.
- She can stay alone in her room when weather is bad at night.
- My son doesn’t sleep in my room anymore; this has been a welcomed change.

Toileting concerns. Relatedly, some parents reported bed-wetting and toileting problems were less of a concern now.

- He has had less bedwetting.
- She had trouble with toileting. However, she now has more confidence and is toileting much better.

Complaints about aches and pains. Several parents also noted fewer complaints about aches and pains, particularly stomach-aches.

- Actually have seen a decrease in aches and pains in our middle child.
- Less stomachaches.
- My little guy used to pace, complain about his stomach, just very nervous with bad weather. It has improved!

Behavior issues. Some parents also pointed to improvements in behavior in the months after their children participated in Camp Noah. Parents reported that their children were better able to regulate their impulses, emotions, and behaviors.

- He still has some behavior problems when he’s angry but has had some improvement.
- More mature decisions.
- More calm and disciplined.
Section 2: Staff and volunteer experience

This section of this report focuses on the staff and volunteers who help to arrange and implement Camp Noah. Camp Noah requires the active participation of volunteers and staff, including Site Coordinators, local volunteers, Certified Camp Staff, Team Leaders, and Mental Health Professionals. Most of the information in this section came from the staff and volunteer surveys conducted immediately after camp and the in-depth interviews conducted in fall 2014.

Volunteer recruitment

Did Team Leaders and Site Coordinators have any challenges recruiting volunteers?

Some Site Coordinators said that it was difficult to recruit local volunteers, though this did not emerge as a theme during in-depth interviews.

In the in-depth interviews, both Site Coordinators and Team Leaders were asked about their efforts to recruit volunteers. Site Coordinators were responsible for recruiting the local volunteers to assist with activities such as food service and registration, while Team Leaders assembled the team of Certified Camp Staff that would provide the camp activities. During the interviews, both the Site Coordinators and the Team Leaders said that they generally did not have any challenges. However, Site Coordinators did identify this as one of their greatest challenges in the survey that they completed immediately following camp. It may be that the Site Coordinators who were interviewed had more positive experiences, or that the challenges did not seem as great when considered a few months after camp was over. It may also be the case that Site Coordinators found this component somewhat difficult, but were still able to successfully recruit enough people to help. One Team Leader described recruitment challenges related to timing, noting that it was more difficult to recruit too close to camp, as many potential volunteers were no longer available.

The greatest challenge was recruiting volunteers.
Finding local volunteers was difficult for me.
The biggest challenge is that we don’t know the dates and locations until very late in the year. People think about their summers in January. The earlier you start recruiting the better.
Site Coordinators did have some challenge recruiting Mental Health Professionals.

One-third of the Site Coordinators who were interviewed said that they had difficulty recruiting a Mental Health Professional. Some described doing outreach to potential staff, but not receiving any return calls. Others said that the timing of camp posed a challenge in recruiting school counselors. When Site Coordinators did encounter problems, most of them were able to turn to Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota staff for assistance.

I put in three calls to the mental health people. I got no calls returned.
Our camp was late July. At that time of year, all of our counselors already had to report back to school, so I didn't have that option [for Mental Health Professionals].
We had a little trouble [finding a Mental Health Professional], but our Camp Noah contact took care of it.
When I told [LSSMN] I was having trouble, they recruited someone that was already doing a couple of other camps.

What strategies were most effective in recruiting volunteers?

Team Leaders and Site Coordinators identified a number of strategies that they felt were successful in their efforts to recruit volunteers.

During the interviews, Site Coordinators and Team Leaders described a number of strategies that had been helpful in their efforts to recruit volunteers. Most of these recommendations focused on how to reach and engage potential volunteers.

Rely on personal and professional networks. Several Site Coordinators and Team Leaders used their own professional and personal networks in their efforts to recruit volunteers. Often, but not always, these networks included their church community. Some Team Leaders also talked about doing outreach through avenues such as Facebook.

A lot of people chose to be very helpful and help us. We got a lot of volunteers [through] churches.
We partnered with the local Mormon churches. They are superheroes when it comes to volunteers.
Obviously I hit up the people I knew. I worked through the avenues with the people I knew for specific roles. I just kind of networked.

Use personal outreach. When making contact with personal and professional networks, a few people highlighted the importance of making direct and in-person requests. This was seen as more effective than just posting a request for volunteers online or in newsletters.

I did not have any challenges because I did all personal asks. I sent something in the newsletter and didn't get one response. I asked 20 people to do it and 18 said yes.
Emphasize the value of camp. Several Site Coordinators and Team Leaders felt that the most effective strategy for recruiting volunteers was to describe the camp’s model and the potential benefits for campers. A few of the Team Leaders also found it helpful to share information about the community that had been impacted.

[I told] them that it was going to affect the life of a bunch of kids. I didn't have to recruit a lot. I think just talking about the program. What it is like and what it is going to do for the kids. I think that was enough to engage the volunteers. I try to connect my volunteers with that community so that they could understand the disaster and know what these kids were experiencing, which makes them a lot more engaged.

Share previous experiences with camp. Some of the Certified Camp Staff teams participate in camp over multiple years. Some Team Leaders were intentional in sharing their stories from camp, to increase awareness of camp and to begin recruiting for future volunteers.

When we return [from camp], we share stories and pictures with our congregation. Having my team members talk to their friends was a great recruiting tool for us this year. They can share their story.

Target people who have experience and skills working with youth. Several of the staff and volunteers, especially Team Leaders, were intentional in recruiting people who already worked with youth. Site Coordinators also described doing targeted outreach for the Mental Health Professional. Some tried to recruit school counselors or staff from local mental health agencies who work with youth. Site Coordinators also offered some recommendations for finding Mental Health Professionals, recommending that Site Coordinators reach out to churches, school counselors, teachers, parent groups, local universities, and state departments of human services.

Most of the people I recruit are the people that work in the school and have the skills to make it a positive experience for everyone.

Be enthusiastic. One Site Coordinator emphasized the importance of enthusiasm when recruiting volunteers.

The enthusiasm of your Coordinator helps.

Secure funding. Volunteers generally face some financial burden, with a per-person fee plus costs of travel and food (and sometimes lodging). One Team Leader secured funding for their full team, to reduce the financial burden for potential volunteers.
I decided to find funding for my entire team. I got a few grants. Two other churches donated to us as well. No one had to pay anything. If there was some way for Team Leaders to come up with more funding, I think they would have less trouble coming up with team members.

A few Team Leaders and Site Coordinators also talked about the importance of keeping their volunteers engaged once they signed up.

Several Site Coordinators and Team Leaders also discussed strategies they used to keep volunteers engaged once they signed on, including opportunities for volunteers to take ownership of different activities, and small added incentives during the week.

I let them take ownership of what they led. If they had an idea, I let them flow with it. It doesn't have to be, [this is] how you cook this meal or even the menu. Let them be creative. Let them take ownership of some of the games. Give them the games but then let them decide which ones they like.

I provided pizza for the staff. In the morning we did doughnuts and snacks and stuff.

We had a number of meetings and we made them fun meetings, they weren't all business.

**Recommendations**

- Provide Site Coordinators and Team Leaders with a list of recommended strategies for recruiting volunteers.
- Provide Team Leaders with information about the local community that they can share with potential volunteers.

**Reasons why people volunteer**

*What are the most common reasons why people choose to volunteer or work for Camp Noah?*

Many staff and volunteers said that they participated in Camp Noah simply because they’d been asked.

In the in-depth interviews, Mental Health Professionals, Site Coordinators, Team Leaders, and Small Group Leaders were all asked why they chose to get involved with, or volunteer for, Camp Noah. Individuals from all four of these groups often said that someone asked them to do it, illustrating the importance of the personal outreach to potential staff or volunteers. Some were asked through personal connections, such as
family or friends. Others were asked by Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, by someone else from within their agency, or through other professional networks.

I usually don’t do things like this, but my friend asked me to do it.
My mom was going to be a Site Coordinator and she asked me to volunteer.
Someone I respect asked me to and it sounded like a good program.
The pastor’s wife at our church was really excited about putting a group together and she called us right away.
The biggest factor was friendship with one of the Camp Noah employees. I heard stories from her about her experience and got an invitation from her to volunteer.

Previous camp experiences inspired people to volunteer again for additional camps.

Many people also said that they had worked at previous camps through Camp Noah, and that having a positive experience at camp made them want to participate again in the future. This issue came up frequently among the Certified Camp Staff, including Team Leaders and Small Group Leaders.

What made me do it this summer is that I have done so many camps in the past. We believe in it and have seen the results of it.
After my experience the first time, I absolutely had to do it again.
I fell in love with it and I've been doing it every year since then.
I think it's been seven Camp Noahs I've done. It really just hit a spot in my heart so I keep coming back for more.

In some cases, it was the positive experiences of others who had volunteered or worked for Camp Noah that encouraged volunteers to commit. This response emerged relatively frequently for the Small Group Leaders.

Someone from my church had done it - they took a whole church service and told us about it. That's how I heard about it and started to want to do it.
We had a Camp Noah at our church and I could see what a good thing it was for children.
There was an energy in the group that had served. They talked about their experience with such enthusiasm and such joy in terms of what this ministry meant to them and how it lifted the kids that they had served. I immediately was drawn in by that enthusiasm for the ministry itself.
I had a couple of friends who had done it before in the past and they mentioned they really enjoyed doing it. I figured I would try it out.
Staff and volunteers also had a variety of other motives for getting involved with camp.

Finally, a number of other motives emerged when staff and volunteers had asked why they had gotten involved with camp. Some people were inspired to get involved with Camp Noah due to their interest in helping others, their personal or professional experiences with disasters, their desire to work with children, their general interest in the program, the alignment of camp with their own faith and values, and an interest in volunteering with others.

Interest in helping others. A few Mental Health Professionals were already working with children in their community and saw this as a way to do more. Some Team Leaders and Small Group Leaders also said that they wanted to do something to help others.

I thought it was a way to give back to the community. I just felt compelled to be a part of it.
We’d been trying to find ways to reach out to children and young families in our community.

Personal experience with disasters or other traumas. In some cases, staff and volunteers had their own personal experiences with natural disasters or trauma, or professional experience with disaster relief or camps. This personal or professional experience inspired a number of people to get involved. This was especially true of Site Coordinators, who may have been personally impacted by the disaster that struck their community. It was also cited by others, however, including Small Group Leaders.

I had been involved in a tornado and it was a mile from my house. My friend’s house was lost. I thought [Camp Noah] was a great thing for the kids.
The storms in Oklahoma affected the school where I teach. I did disaster relief there.
When I heard about Camp Noah, I thought it would be great.
I’ve dealt with some trauma personally, so I know how important it is to be able to process that.
I had experienced some trauma as a child and I thought this is something that would have helped me. I wanted to participate, because I wish I had something like that when I was young.

God gave me the experience of going through this tornado, not to just sit back and say, ‘Well, I lived through a tornado.’ I thought I could talk to the children and at least help them.

Interest and experience in working with children. Some staff and volunteers were already working with children in other ways, so felt comfortable and interested in getting involved with Camp Noah. Some volunteers, especially Small Group Leaders, also said that they really enjoyed children.

It was an overall draw for me, hanging out with little kids and stuff, because that’s what I’m going to school for. So it was right up my alley.
I've always liked working with kids. I was a camp counselor for three years. I love it, being able to help while having fun with them was a draw as well.
I was in education, so it's still a way for me to be involved with kids and teaching.
I love working with youth and I just felt called to do that.
I just really like kids.

Interest in the program. Some Certified Camp Staff, especially Team Leaders, and Small Group Leaders, said that Camp Noah just seemed like a good program, and that when they heard about it, they wanted to get involved.

It seemed like a great program, so I decided to participate.
We believe in the program, it's great.

Alignment with faith and values. Some volunteers, especially Small Group Leaders, saw Camp Noah as an opportunity to get involved with something that aligned with their faith and values.

I'm motivated as a Christian mostly. My viewpoint is that we ought to help folks that need help the most, not the top 10% of people who have resources, but people who through no fault of their own need some help.
The program I'm involved in for my graduate degree is closely related with family crisis. I thought it would be a great way to marry my professional goals with my faith.

Opportunity to volunteer with others. Some Team Leaders saw Camp Noah as an opportunity to bring people together for a volunteer experience. In some cases, Team Leaders or others were looking for an opportunity for something to bring their congregation together for a volunteer activity. Some Team Leaders and Small Group Leaders expressed a desire to volunteer with friends or family.

Our church needed an intergenerational volunteer activity.
It has been an opportunity for our adult congregation.
I wanted to put together a team from my congregation to go.
Ultimately my whole family did it together.
**Training and preparation**

*How prepared did Certified Camp Staff and local volunteers feel before beginning their work at Camp?*

**Most staff and volunteers did feel prepared for their role at camp.**

In the surveys completed at the end of camp, and during the in-depth interviews conducted in fall 2014, most Certified Camp Staff and local volunteers said that they felt prepared for their camp role. All 23 Site Coordinators who completed surveys following camp said that they felt properly equipped to fulfill their role. Most of the Team Leaders, and Small Group Leaders also said that they felt prepared.

A few of the Mental Health Professionals and Small Group Leaders did say that they felt unprepared for camp. In some cases, these individuals noted that they came into their roles relatively late and that they did not have time to train or prepare. In other cases, individuals did have time for training, but wanted additional information or consultation to help them get ready.

*What feedback did Certified Camp Staff and Site Coordinators have about the online training?*

**Many people felt that the online training was helpful.**

Many of the Certified Camp Staff and Site Coordinators felt that the online training was helpful. During the surveys completed immediately following camp, 94 percent of the Certified Camp Staff at least “agreed” that the training prepared them to serve effectively in their position; 39 percent “strongly agreed” (Figure 15).

**15. Certified Camp Staff survey: The training prepared me to serve effectively in my position (N=140)**

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Site Coordinators, Team Leaders, Mental Health Professionals, and Small Group Leaders were also asked to provide some more detailed feedback about their preparation for camp...
during the in-depth interviews. Often, these individuals talked about the training that they had received. Some respondents indicated that they had participated in an in-person training. Most, however, referenced the online training. A few people said that they had participated for multiple years and had received both in-person and online training. These individuals expressed a preference for the in-person training, saying that it aligned better with their learning style.

**Some staff and volunteers commented that the training was informative and prepared them for camp.**

Some staff and volunteers had very positive feedback about the online training. A number of people described the training as thorough and informative, and felt that it had adequately prepared them for camp. A few people specifically liked the online aspect, and appreciated that they could complete training at their own speed.

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Training was very helpful to define Camp Noah's goals [and] expectations as well as their philosophies.
[Training] was informal and made sense. It wasn’t a bunch of professional jargon.
I feel like the trainings laid it out and explained what was expected.
I have wonderful things to say about the online training.
Normally, I’m not a fan of online training but I really felt like yours was thorough and went over a lot of information that was helpful. I did feel like I walked in prepared.
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**Some people had difficulty accessing the online training or received it too late to be useful.**

Some staff and volunteers were unable to participate in the training. Some people said that they came into their role relatively late and did not have time for training. A few said that they did not receive training materials in time, though it was not clear if that was due to them entering their role too late. Others had trouble accessing the online training, so they did not participate. One Team Leader felt that older individuals may have more difficulty accessing material, noting that “Camp Noah has a lot of 50-something-year-olds in who are not savvy with technology.” A few people said that they were not given access to training materials or manuals.

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I didn’t get the training materials as soon as I would have liked to have received them.
I received them the evening before the first day of camp.
I wasn't given the materials or activities. When I asked for the material, I was told we weren’t allowed to have it.
I had trouble getting into some of the [online] training sessions.
The online training thing didn't work, when we tried to log into that, but otherwise it was good.
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I knew nothing about it. I just walked in and they handed me a book. I needed that book ahead of time to see what I’m getting into.

Some people felt that the online training was too long, especially for experienced volunteers.

A relatively consistent theme that emerged was that the training was too long. Some people felt that it was too long in general, while others specifically noted that it was a lot for repeat volunteers to cover. Some felt that there should be a shorter, refresher training for experienced volunteers. A few people felt that the training should be more narrowly focused for each role.

Some of the training was redundant, especially for volunteers that had already participated in Camp Noah. I think an abbreviated version or just having repeat volunteers take the quizzes would be a better approach.

Most of the modules were very repetitive and got really long/dragged on. I would suggest making them short and sweet and to the point!

I recommend ‘refresher training’ for returning Site Coordinators.

The videos were really lengthy and they got tiring.

My repeat volunteers were frustrated that they had to do the 8-hour training. If they could have a quiz or a shorter refresher they could go through, that would be good.

Some staff and volunteers requested that additional information be included in the online training.

Staff and volunteers had a number of suggestions for information that they would have liked to have emphasized in the training. The most common requests were for more information about managing classes/groups, addressing behavioral and mental health issues, and about camp activities and structure (i.e., a typical day of camp).

The training needed] a greater focus on behavioral/emotional issues of campers and how to respond, also how to manage classroom management issues.

A clear, concise and detailed ‘syllabus’ of daily activities would have been helpful. We were given only vague ‘now is small group, now is craft time,’ etc. itineraries.

The online stuff was very good, but I really thought we were going to walk through more of what we were doing day to day.

I think the online training could have been better. It could have showed us less about theory and interaction and being nice to kids and more about what does a typical day looks like, from minute to minute.

I think the camp should have provided some information for a volunteer just in case they were working with children that had behavioral problems.
**What was most useful in preparing staff and volunteers for camp?**

Site Coordinators, Team Leaders, Mental Health Professionals, and Small Group Leaders were asked what was most useful in helping them prepare for camp. Many people identified the online training as helpful. However, several other activities also emerged regularly as helpful. Consultation with Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota staff, planning meetings with the team, review of the curriculum/materials, and previous training or experience were most often cited as having been helpful.

**Consultation with Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSSMN) staff.** Individualized consultation and support from the LSSMN staff was mentioned relatively frequently as having been helpful in preparing staff and volunteers for camp. For example, seven of the nine Site Coordinators interviewed described their consultation with LSSMN staff when they were asked to describe what had helped them prepare. Team Leaders and community stakeholders also emphasized the value of their consultation with LSSMN staff.

> We had phone sessions that went over everything. That was really good too.
> The constant support from [a Camp Noah staff member was most helpful]. She was checking in weekly, but if I had something more urgent, I could text her or email her and she would get right back to me.
> The personal coaching phone calls from the people at Camp Noah [was most helpful].
> The first year I did it they actually came to our camp and helped us. The actual one-on-one was more helpful than the manuals.
> [Camp Noah staff] were just really great resources and always willing to take questions. They were really enthusiastic and genuine about what they were doing.

**Planning meetings with the project team.** A number of the Certified Camp Staff said that they had planning meetings before camp, and that these meetings were helpful in preparing them. In some cases, these planning meetings included phone calls between the Certified Camp Staff and local teams. In other cases, the Team Leader met just with the other Certified Camp Staff.

> The other thing that helped prepare me is that I prepared my team. We met three times in addition to the online training. That is part of why I felt prepared because I knew my team was prepared.
> Good communication with my Site Coordinators [was the most helpful].

**Review of camp curriculum/manuals.** Some staff and volunteers said that the manuals were comprehensive and organized. They appreciated that they could use the manuals to guide their activities, including having scripts for what to say. This made them feel more prepared to actually lead the activities.
The books are really step by step. You can read right out of the book if you want to. That's been helpful.
The manual was pretty helpful - having a set plan and knowing how much time.
The way the curriculum is laid out now is very user-friendly.
They had materials prepared for assisting the children and the planned-out day, everything was planned.

Previous training/experience. Finally, some staff and volunteers said that their previous training or experience had helped prepare them for camp. In some cases, they specifically referenced the fact that they had worked at previous camps through Camp Noah, and that doing it one time helped prepare them to do it again. In other cases, the respondents described other professional or personal experiences that helped prepare them for their role at camp.

I have worked in the school system for 13 years and have a social work license and trauma training.
I've had training in crisis work with kids, and having that training was helpful.
[The most helpful thing] was my past experience. This was not my first time being a Team Leader.
This year, I had previous camp experience and about 75 percent of my team were repeat volunteers as well. That has helped more than anything.
My experience doing small groups throughout the school year for another project helped me feel ready.

What should be done to better prepare future staff and volunteers?

When asked how Camp Noah could better support staff and volunteers before and during the camp, about half of those interviewed said that the current training and support were adequate and appropriate as is.

I felt well supported actually. I don't know if I would change a lot.
I think they've done just about everything they could to help us out as far as I can tell.
I think they did a great job - I felt very well prepared.
I got everything I needed when I needed it.
The staff were always available when I called. I felt like I was never alone.

Other people did offer suggestions for how Camp Noah could better prepare staff and volunteers.

Facilitate coordination between the local volunteers and the Certified Camp Staff. Several respondents noted the need for better coordination between the Site Coordinator and the
Team Leader. In particular, they requested earlier communication between the Site Coordinator and Team Leader before the camp began to establish trust and clarify roles.

It would have been good to just meet them ahead of time so we can both get a feel for who we are. There was never a real introduction. I think those things are just beneficial when you are setting things up.

Site Coordinator, Team Leader, and Mental Health Professional need to have a strong relationship before camp starts. That would be helpful.

I never knew how to contact my Team Leader.

Provide more information about Camp Noah. A few of the staff and volunteers felt it would have been helpful to have more grounding in what Camp Noah is, including their philosophy and goals.

I wasn't really briefed about what exactly Camp Noah was, so I was unequipped to help my kids better. If I knew what Camp Noah was and got an overview on its goals and what it intends to do, that would've been a lot better.

Provide more information about trauma and strategies for working with children who have experienced disasters. A few of the staff and volunteers felt it would have been helpful to know more about the impact of trauma in general, and the impact of disasters in particular.

There could have been more conversation about generally, what do kids who are coming to these camps need, what sort of mind frame are they in. I hadn't worked before with that specific camp context.

Provide more information about the local community and the campers. In addition to general information about Camp Noah, some Certified Camp Staff would have liked more site-specific information. Some requested earlier information about where the teams would be assigned. Others requested more information about the local community, and what they had experienced. Finally, a few of the Certified Camp Staff felt it would have been helpful for them to have more information about the specific needs and issues facing the campers.

The only thing that would be more helpful would be to know where we are going, who our host or coordinator is as soon as possible.

Our struggle was that they didn't provide us [information about] the special needs of children ahead of time. I don't know if it's HIPAA laws or what, but it makes it really difficult when you're in a situation and they're withholding information from you to best deal with a situation. It would have been helpful going into it, to have more communication and information shared about the children and the families.
It's always helpful to have background knowledge about the children that step into your small group. If you have a child that is on the autism spectrum, if you have a child who has had particular traumas that may have been treated by a Mental Health Professional, if you have a child with ADD. That kind of information allows you to anticipate and strategize a bit so that you just simply keep an eye out and are not caught flat footed.

I didn't know a lot about the site before I got there.

Simplify the manuals. A few staff and volunteers felt overwhelmed by the manuals, and felt it was a lot to refer back to during camp. This was especially true for Team Leaders who felt the need to be on top of everything that was going on. This issue emerged in the interviews, as well as in the surveys completed immediately following camp.

There are so many manuals. Some are necessary, but when you need to know it all, it's a little daunting. It was really hard to find certain things at certain times.

I felt lost every day. The handbooks did not lay out the daily schedules clearly and the information was not all found in one place.

The booklets contain far too much information and minutiae in terms of instruction; a clear, concisely worded curriculum would be more clear and easy to use on-the-spot.

Make some of the materials available online. Several people requested having more materials available online for download. They felt that this would have made the materials more accessible. It also would have made it easier for them to revise materials when needed.

It would have been good to put some of the skits and stuff online so we can print them up or download them.

Recommendations

- Offer technical support to staff and volunteers who have difficulty accessing online training, and/or provide training in alternative formats
- Create a “refresher” training for returning staff or volunteers
- Increase the emphasis on addressing behavioral and emotional issues in training
- Ensure that Certified Camp Staff have adequate knowledge about sites and facilitate connections between the Team Leaders and Site Coordinators
- Consider opportunities to “repackage” and disseminate training and curriculum materials, such as summary versions and downloadable resources.
Logistics

What challenges did Site Coordinators face in arranging for camp logistics?

Site Coordinators identified a number of challenges related to camp logistics.

In addition to recruiting the team of local volunteers, Site Coordinators are responsible for arranging a number of logistics for Camp Noah, including planning for camper transportation, finding a facility, and arranging for food. During the surveys completed at the end of camp, Site Coordinators were asked to identify their greatest challenge as a Site Coordinator. Most of the challenges that they identified related to logistics, including:

- Arranging transportation
- Arranging and managing camper meals
- Working with the online registration system

In the in-depth interviews conducted in fall 2014, Site Coordinators were asked to describe the greatest challenges that they had related to logistics. During the interviews, transportation and volunteer housing emerged most frequently.

[My biggest challenge was] finding a suitable location.

My biggest challenges were finding local volunteers to help with the food and also the preparation of the food. The kitchen didn't have adequate resources (i.e. enough oven space, counter space, stovetop, etc.) to fulfill the large amount of food that needed to be served every day. In the future, I would recommend looking for food donations that arrive prepared so that there is no cooking being done by the volunteers.

I picked up on the Thriva program relatively quickly, but could not seem to find one report that gave all the information that I needed about campers such as grade, address, phone number, allergies etc.

Transportation [was the biggest challenge].

I wish I could have found a place [for the visiting team] that had showers. We have one church that offers that, but they were already booked. I would have liked to have my team on-site, but it was just not possible.

Logistical issues also came up occasionally from other staff and volunteers.

Some other staff and volunteers, including Team Leaders and Small Group Leaders, occasionally referenced logistics issues in their surveys and interviews. These comments generally focused on concerns about the suitability of the facility for camp, perceptions that the food offered to campers was not healthy enough or appropriately portioned, and complaints about their sleeping arrangements.
Site Coordinators typically relied on their existing networks and community resources to address logistical challenges.

The Site Coordinators also called on a number of strategies to make logistical arrangements for the camp ahead of time. Many of the Site Coordinators described ways in which they were able to leverage their existing networks and call on a number of resources in the community.

The strategy that worked the best was to go to the resources that you have and you talk to them. You talk to everybody that you can and see the help fall out of the woodwork.

We used an interface approach. We worked with other congregations. For volunteer housing, we used our own homes. We would not have been able to do food without the other communities.

I went first to our local churches. I got them to supply volunteers to do different meals. I think going out to community to ask, that was huge. They just showed up and helped. I think we call that strategy, spreading the responsibilities.

Recommendations

- Consider whether there are opportunities to provide additional guidance regarding logistics to Site Coordinators, especially related to food.

Camp schedule and activities

Were staff and volunteers satisfied with the camp curriculum?

As part of the survey completed at the end of camp, most Certified Camp Staff (90%) at least “agreed” that the curriculum materials were clear and easy to use and follow; 51 percent “strongly agreed” (Figure 16). While most ratings were positive, comments provided by staff/volunteers tended to focus on concerns or suggestions for improvement.

Certified Camp Staff surveys: The curriculum materials were clear and easy to use and follow (N=142)

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What concerns did staff and volunteers have about the camp activities?

The most prevalent concern staff and volunteers had about camp was the pace, indicating that there were too many activities to complete each day.

Staff and volunteers had a number of opportunities to share concerns about the camp curriculum and to offer suggestions for improvement. In both the surveys completed after camp and the in-depth interviews conducted in the fall, staff and volunteers most often said that the pace of Camp Noah was too ambitious. This issue emerged most often from the Certified Camp Staff. Some Certified Camp Staff said that they needed to move too quickly, and that there was not enough time to complete everything they had planned. Several of the craft activities in particular seemed problematic, with Certified Camp Staff feeling as though they needed to rush through activities. When asked for suggestions for improving the camp model, Certified Camp Staff often suggested revising the schedule to be more flexible, reducing the number of activities, increasing time for crafts, or reducing the number or complexity of craft projects.

There are, honestly, too many different activities. I felt horribly rushed, and I observed that the hurry up affected the campers in negative ways, mostly by hyping them up to the speed of the curriculum. We were so pressed to move on that sessions going really well got abandoned in favor of getting everything "done." I think less would be much, much more.

The schedule and pace of the day was the biggest challenge, mostly on the first couple days.

I was unaware of how cramped the schedule would be and how quickly we needed to move through things.

We were feeling very stressed and anxious, like ‘Oh my God, we have to do all this and there’s no way we can do it all in this period of time.’ There was just way too much to fit into the day, and into the amount of time we had with the kids. We needed longer periods...lots of stuff never got finished.

Some Certified Camp Staff felt unprepared to effectively prioritize activities when they were running behind schedule. Team Leaders and Small Group Leaders who were new to camp often did not feel as though they had enough guidance to know which activities were most crucial, or which ones they should spend more time on.

You know that you’re supposed to kind of pick and choose what’s the best to use, but since we’ve never done it before it took so long. We probably could have spent more time on less things and it would have been just as effective. But there was so much and you never saw how it connected all the way through. You didn’t know how to pick and choose which were the best. Having someone from Camp Noah to help guide us a little bit would have been really helpful.

We needed more training beforehand and we needed someone from Camp Noah to come and help us go through that training. Like, if you have 5 things you need to do today, and you’re running out of time, these 3 or 4 work the best and these others add to it. But you don’t know that because you haven’t done them before.
Some staff and volunteers felt that camp materials were not age-appropriate.

A second theme that emerged was that camp materials were not age appropriate. Some staff and volunteers felt that materials were not appropriate for younger campers. An approximately equal number felt that materials were less appropriate for the older campers. These comments most often were made by the Small Group Leaders. They did not always explain the reasons why they felt materials were not age-appropriate. A few said that the younger campers struggled with some of the material, or that the older campers did not always enjoy the activities.

They were good for most kids, but it was a little too much for the kindergarteners in my group. I think my kids were maybe a little too young...I mean, some of the stuff they would come up with was pretty earth shattering but on most days they just wanted to talk about ponies and stuff.

The really young kids liked everything that we gave them. The older kids eventually liked it but they thought some of the other stuff might have been a little childish.

Some of the activities didn’t seem to fit the oldest age group.

Some of the material for the older kids involves too much drawing, when kids at the older ages sometimes prefer to write instead.

Staff and volunteers made a variety of other suggestions for improving the camp curriculum or format, though no other strong themes emerged.

In the online surveys and in the in-depth interviews, staff and volunteers (especially Small Group Leaders) made a number of suggestions for improving camp activities. No other strong themes emerged, though the following suggestions were each made by several respondents:

- Extend the length of camp, possibly making it a two-week experience
- Eliminate the Survivor’s Circle activity
- Replace the Ruby Bridges book with another option
- Rewrite the skits to be clearer or easier to perform
- Provide more options for indoor games or games for small groups
- Allow more flexibility in music selection
**Recommendations**

- Consider simplifying the camp schedule or activities, to allow Certified Camp Staff to spend more time on each activity, and to avoid feeling rushed.
- Provide additional guidance to Certified Camp Staff about how best to prioritize available activities.
- Consider modifying some of the camp activities to better suit the youngest and oldest campers.

**Staff/volunteer roles and expectations**

**Did staff and volunteers feel that their roles at camp were reasonable?**

In the surveys completed after camp, most Site Coordinators, local volunteers, and Certified Camp Staff felt that the expectations for their camp role were reasonable.

In the surveys completed after camp, staff and volunteers were asked in various ways whether their camp roles were reasonable. All 23 of the Site Coordinators who completed surveys said that Camp Noah had reasonable expectations for them. Ninety percent of the local volunteers, and 91 percent of the Certified Camp Staff agreed that the expectations and duties of their camp roles were reasonable (Figure 17).

**Local volunteer and Certified Camp Staff surveys: The expectations and duties for my camp role were reasonable**

*My duties as a volunteer were reasonable and I enjoyed helping out in any way that I could.*
What challenges did staff and volunteers describe related to team roles and responsibilities?

While most staff and volunteers felt that their own role was reasonable, some also described challenges within the team related to team size and roles.

Some staff and volunteers did describe challenges related to team roles and responsibilities. Some staff or volunteers felt that they (or others on the team) were confused about their roles due to arriving at camp unprepared. Some talked about the challenges of staff or volunteers who signed on to participate late, without time to complete the training. These challenges echo those reported in the section of this report related to staff/volunteer training and preparation. Several other challenges also emerged.

Team size and amount of work. A few volunteers felt as though they were asked to do too much work. In some cases, this was due to teams being smaller than expected. This emerged both within the local volunteer teams and the Certified Camp Staff.

I had far more time committed than expected.
[I] felt another adult was needed for the age and size of class.
[We were] way too short-handed.
We definitely needed more people. It was kind of stressful with the amount of work one that one person had to do because of the lack of grownups there. Everybody was pulling a lot of weight.
I think that camp was not staffed as fully as it might have been. Just increasing numbers of staff would be helpful.

Role confusion and flexibility. A few of the Certified Camp Staff who completed the Staff-Volunteer Survey following camp said that they needed to take on multiple roles, or roles other than what they expected. Some staff and volunteers attributed this to insufficient numbers of volunteers, or to people arriving at camp unprepared. However, in other cases, this was due to a perception that one of the other staff or volunteers were not clear about their roles or failed to perform their assigned role.

Sometimes it was challenging to juggle multiple responsibilities.
I really didn’t know what was going on and what I was getting into.
I ended up taking on some of the [Site Coordinator’s] roles to make sure that kids were kept safe and things were organized. I don’t think she really understood what her role was and what mine was.
It wasn’t clear whose roles were what.
Our site leader came on pretty late in the game and was not very organized. I found myself playing both roles as site leader and Team Leader. The Site Coordinator didn’t know what my role was and what her role was.
Recommendations

- Consider whether the current size of the teams, both for Certified Camp Staff and local volunteers, is adequate for the requirements of camp.
- Consider offering an abbreviated training for staff and volunteers who sign up too late, to ensure that everyone has at least some familiarity with their roles prior to camp.

Team dynamics and relationships

How well did staff and volunteers get along? What kinds of interpersonal issues or dynamics emerged within the group?

Most often, the staff and volunteers got along well and functioned cohesively as a team.

Camp Noah is an intensive experience for staff and volunteers, requiring many people to work closely and flexibly together over a period of days. While some interpersonal conflicts and issues did emerge, many of the staff and volunteers did not describe any challenges within the team. In contrast, many people described the team as hard working, positive, and cohesive.

- The team was amazing!
- The volunteers worked well together and the children had a blast.
- The team worked great together.
- The team did a great job engaging the kids. They had lots of energy and showed genuine care for the campers.
- The team at my camp was absolutely wonderful - the best yet. Everyone worked hard as a team and I never once had a concern. Perfect!

However, there were some conflicts between the Certified Camp Staff and local teams.

In many cases, the local volunteers and the Certified Camp Staff were very complimentary of each other. However, some of the interviewed staff and volunteers described tensions between the two teams. In at least some cases, this tension stemmed from a lack of clarity regarding the respective roles of the various staff and volunteers. Several people noted that these tensions could have been prevented if they had had more opportunities up front for the staff and volunteers to get to know each other and clarify roles in advance.
More communication with the staff and team prior to camp would have been helpful. Having a team that knows one another prior to running the camp would be awesome. I know that's not maybe feasible at all times, but I think it would run more smoothly and there would be even a greater level of cooperation among the staff and volunteers.

I think that they were more like an "us" and "them" kind of atmosphere. It didn't feel like a cohesive team. It felt like they brought in a team and we had a team.

The main difference I would...make is to have an earlier meeting with the [Team Leader] to make sure that we were all on the same page. I would have liked to meet with that person months before camp started.

Some teams described challenges related to information sharing.

One challenge that emerged within the local teams and the Certified Camp Staff was a lack of clarity regarding information sharing. Visiting members of the Certified Camp Staff sometimes noted that the local volunteers sometimes knew important information about the campers. In some cases, this was due to the fact that they already knew the campers and their families. In other cases, this was because the Site Coordinators had access to information reported by parents as part of the registration process. There was some confusion as to how much information sharing was appropriate. Members of the local team seemed to emphasize protecting campers’ privacy, while some members of the Certified Camp Staff felt that they could have better met the needs of the campers if they knew more about their situations or special needs. Several Mental Health Professionals also said that they were not given access to information, such as parents’ contact information, that would have helped them reach out to families and offer follow-up support.

I wanted to connect a family to long term services, but the Site Coordinator wouldn’t give me any information to contact the family. I understood that she felt it was her responsibility to protect information, but it's still one of the kids I wonder about - did they ever receive any services, how are they doing?

There was a gray area as to how much information the Site Coordinator should or is allowed to share with Team Leader or Mental Health Professional about how each family filled out their application. The Site Coordinator would want to tell us stuff, but felt like she couldn’t. I feel like there isn't a clear amount of information [about what the] Site Coordinator can share or cannot share with the other volunteers and staff.

Some staff and volunteers felt that their Team Leaders needed stronger leadership skills.

It was important for the Team Leaders to develop strong leadership skills. A few Mental Health Professionals, Site Coordinators, and Small Group Leaders described situations when there were leadership challenges for the team.
The Team Leader could have been a little more organized and had more of an authoritative role in explaining expectations and guidelines.

[Team stress and exhaustion] could have been alleviated some by having a strong Team Leader.

There didn't seem to be strong leadership.

The morale was low, people were very micromanaged.

We were blessed with many strong personalities. The leader had difficulty maintaining control and went about it in the wrong way!

Some teams struggled with other interpersonal issues.

Finally, some staff and volunteers described various other interpersonal issues within the team. These issues did not emerge frequently, however.

This year's mission team had many issues - they did not function as a cohesive team and several individuals on the team seemed to be dealing with personal issues.

The majority of the missionaries were wonderful; they were sweet and great at what they were doing. There were a few though that just caused issues, including the leader.

Of course, there are always bumps and we got through them. There were a few issues with other staff members, going and trying to tell other people what to do and there were communication issues with that.

Recommendations

- Facilitate early communication between Site Coordinators and Team Leaders, and provide guidance regarding issues that they should discuss/resolve in advance of camp.

- Develop clear policy regarding sharing information about campers/families across staff and volunteers and ensure that this policy is clear to all camp staff, volunteers, and parents.
Role of the Mental Health Professionals

What was the role of the Mental Health Professionals? How was their role understood by the Site Coordinators and Certified Camp Staff?

In some cases, the role of the Mental Health Professional was not clear to the rest of the team.

A few Mental Health Professionals felt that their role was not understood by the rest of the team. Others felt as though that understanding was developed over the course of the week. Some Site Coordinators also noted that there was some confusion about the intended role of the Mental Health Professional.

_I don't think it was clearly identified what [the Mental Health Professionals] should be doing while camp was going on. Should they be participating in camp? Should they sit in a room and wait for kids? The expectations were never set up. That was where it was unclear to me._

_The executive director and the Mental Health Professional had a little disagreement on how to handle something. I was unsure of who was in charge: the director, the Mental Health Professional, or myself, the Site Coordinator._

However, there was general agreement about the important role that Mental Health Professionals play in supporting campers.

Team Leaders, Site Coordinators, and Small Group Leaders all talked about the important role that Mental Health Professionals can play. They were seen as offering critical support to campers who may be struggling, or who need extra support. In particular, there was some consensus that the Mental Health Professionals offered important support to campers who were experiencing disaster-related stress or trauma. Some also noted the supportive role that the Mental Health Professionals played with campers who were struggling with other significant issues not related to the disaster, such as abuse or family difficulties.

_Her biggest role was comfort, just being there to comfort kids and help them talk through some of their difficulties or dreams they're still having. She gave them an outlet to redirect that thought process and how to deal with it and what she could do to help with the struggle._

_They were able to provide more intensive support for some campers, especially when we were talking about difficult things. It was nice to have that kind of warm transition from, 'okay, you're having a really tough time with this' to 'why don't we go to a safe place so that you can talk to somebody about what's going on.'_

_[Our Mental Health Professional] was a constant presence in case any campers needed extra time to have specific conversations with a well-qualified person, or to have a safe quiet place where they could go._
[The Mental Health Professional] is your go-to person if you have a child that is overwhelmed, needs some quiet time, needs separation, or needs one-on-one attention that can't happen as well in a small group setting. The Mental Health Professional can take them aside, sit with them, do relaxation exercises, and find out if there's other things happening in the child's life.

If a camper was really struggling, having a hard time, and didn't feel like they could talk to us about their problems or thought their problem was too large to handle, we usually sent them to the Mental Health Professional. And they were very helpful.

There was some confusion and mixed feelings about the extent to which the Mental Health Professional should be addressing campers’ behavioral challenges.

In many cases, the Mental Health Professionals offered support when staff or volunteers needed assistance managing campers’ behavioral issues. Often, the staff and volunteers expressed difficulty working with campers who exhibited behavioral challenges such as attention-deficit disorder, autism-spectrum issues, or other concerns. In some cases, the staff or volunteers talked about how useful the Mental Health Professionals were in helping them manage these situations.

They took the children that were acting out. When the disruptive children are able to go [to the healing room], we were able to do our jobs better.

All of us had difficult kids and some of us were very ill equipped to deal with some of the kids that had more issues. I was ill equipped when I got an ADHD kid. So in that case it was better to give them to the Mental Health Professional.

In other cases, the Mental Health Professionals and other staff and volunteers felt that this was not an appropriate role for the Mental Health Professional to play. One Team Leader spoke at some length about the role of the Mental Health Professional in working with campers who may be having behavioral challenges during camp. While the Team Leader found this support helpful, she also noted that “Unfortunately, the Mental Health Professional plays that babysitter role. They deal with the kids with behavior problems. In the last experience I had, the Professional was frustrated with the high level of needs, because she wanted to be working with the camp at large.” Similarly, one Mental Health Professional noted that at the beginning of the week they were seen as more of a “babysitter” for campers who were having behavioral challenges. By the end of the week, however, this Mental Health Professional felt that the team understood that they were available to address more substantive mental health issues.
Most staff/volunteers valued and respected the role of the Mental Health Professional. While staff and volunteers occasionally described challenges working with their Mental Health Professional, most described this role very positively. Staff and volunteers often described the Mental Health Professionals as “caring” and “available.” One described them as “invaluable.”

How did the Mental Health Professionals spend their time at camp?

All of the Mental Health Professionals who were interviewed attended other activities and made an effort to be visible and engaged.

All of the Mental Health Professionals said that they did not generally stay in the healing room. Most attended other camp activities and made an effort to be visible and engaged with the campers, volunteers, and staff. Some helped with other activities, such as crafts, while others tried to just be a quiet presence in the background. Some mentioned that they ate breakfast and lunch with the campers each day. A few of the Mental Health Professionals felt that it was important that they attend activities, so that they could observe the dynamics, offer assistance when needed, and become a familiar face to the campers.

I went from room to room. I just walked around. I wanted them all to be familiar with me in each age group. So I would visit classrooms, do activities with them, even if I was just sitting on the floor.

I participated in everything. I’d go from room to room and check on the kids. I didn’t think I could be proactive by staying in the healing room.

I was always present unless I had a kid in the healing room with me. I ate meals with the kids, and tried to help them get to know me so they would feel more comfortable if they did need to go to the healing room.

I was with the kids probably 85% of the time. I really wanted to be visible, available to the kids and staff, and interacting with them as much as possible, but still able to tend to children if they needed that one-on-one attention.

I wandered around. Ninety percent of my time was in classrooms or just talking to people, seeing if they had any concerns I needed to know about.

Mental Health Professionals generally felt as though their presence in activities was welcomed by the other staff and volunteers.

Most Mental Health Professionals did feel as though they were welcomed by the other staff and volunteers when they attended camp activities. One Mental Health Professional did feel that some groups were more welcoming than others, especially when it came to small group time. Another noted that some of the younger staff seemed “intimidated” by
her presence, but that “once they understood what I was doing, they loosened up a bit and were more welcoming and positive.”

I was extremely welcomed. They would even request for me to come in to some activities.
I think that they were glad to have staff from the church to be there helping them.
Pretty much all of the groups had no problem with letting me be a part of it or letting me being involved in some fashion.
[Some] took the small group as a very tight-knit thing, you don't let people in. I would just sit on the periphery just to have people know I was there to help if they needed it.

How were the healing rooms used?

The healing rooms varied quite a bit in terms of location and set up.

Each Camp Noah site had a designated healing room, though they varied considerably depending on the facility, resources, and efforts of the Mental Health Professional. Some, but not all, healing rooms were located in offices. For most sites, the Mental Health Professionals were instrumental in setting up the space. Some primarily brought in their own materials, while others used materials supplied by Camp Noah or the camp facility. During their interviews, most Mental Health Professionals talked about efforts to create a calm and soothing space for the campers. The Mental Health Professionals described their healing rooms as follows:

The healing room was the room the nursing moms use and it has a window so they can see through to the sanctuary. We shut the lights off, so it was pretty much just a small quiet room. They had a few church things and I took some of my own things in there. I brought what I call a tornado, it's a ball you shake when you're talking about anger and anxiety. You can see how everything's all crazy in there and when you calm down it all calms down. [We also had] a big teddy bear to hug and love on and a couple of books.

I think the Site Coordinator set up the healing room originally because it had already been used for two weeks of camp prior to the week that I worked. We were in an office that was designated as the healing room. It was a typical office, with a desk and chairs. There was paper and crayons and some puppets available. We had a Hoberman sphere. The kids really liked that. There were also some additional blankets.

My healing room was actually like a meeting/prayer room in the church. It had stained glass windows and was on the darker side. I brought in my iPod to play soothing music. I brought in puppets, play-doh, paper, and markers. We had Camp Noah blankets and I brought one with me. I had some stress balls and some other tactile things kids could use while they were talking to make them feel more comfortable. I brought my own supplies. The one thing I did use that the camp supplied was the Hoberman sphere.
In our camp, [the healing room] was the pastor’s office. We covered the couches and chairs with some funky sheets and had a bean bag in there, and it was just a quiet, comfortable spot for the kids to come. I’m familiar with therapy rooms so it was based on that, but for kids. We used a lot of soft blankets. We put a lot of activity toys in there. We had a bunch of cool things in there, but none of the kids used that stuff. They just wanted to sit on the couches and cover up. Probably 75% of the kids who came in there fell asleep.

The healing room was set up in the sanctuary at the church and we had an outdoor theme. I had an electric fireplace, a tent, pillows, and storybooks. I had bird sounds taped. Then I had various stations, there was a reading station, a coloring station, and a painting station. There were bowls of rocks and water, that kind of tactile stuff. The most popular one was the foot washing station that I had. I bathed each of the children’s feet and invited them to talk about where their feet had been - happy places, scary places - and then I blessed their feet. That was their favorite part, and mine too. I brought all my own materials. I find that the outdoors and a calming theme is refreshing to me, so that’s what I decided to bring to the kids. It was a quiet, calm space where a child could come and talk quietly if they wanted to or just rest or just be bathed in water and hear the fire crackling or hear the birds sing. All those things of nature heal me, so I wanted to bring those elements into the church and I wanted to use the function of water as a kind of cleansing and a blessing ritual too.

[The healing room was] actually the back of the stage. I think they used it for an office or something. There was a curtain dividing it from the rest of the space. There was a desk in there. I think there was even a fireplace. I just brought some things that kids could use to calm down [based on] suggestions that were made during the training.

The healing room was a very quiet, relaxing area where I had therapeutic toys and music and some couches. I had a Buddha board, where they could do things while they talk about their behavior or feelings. A Buddha board is a slate board that comes with a paint brush. You take water, and they can just draw on this board with water and it evaporates quickly. We can use it to get something out...they can put something angry on it and have it just lift off of them, it goes away quickly. Through speaking about it and talking through it they can release that from themselves and have it disappear off the board. And it’s confidential, they can’t take it anywhere, it just evaporates. It’s a therapeutic tool that folks like to use. I had a Hoberman sphere, which they also used in the meditation space, to teach the children how to breathe. The sphere contracts and expands and that’s how you focus on your breathing. And I have stress balls and all sorts of other stuff just to manipulate while they’re talking. I just used what I would normally use with kids that I work with.

Did the Mental Health Professionals offer support to the other staff/volunteers, or just to the campers?

Staff and volunteers sometimes struggled with campers’ behavioral and emotional issues, or their own responses to hearing the campers’ stories.

When asked to identify their most difficult challenge with camp, the most common response from staff/volunteers was that it was difficult to deal with campers’ behavioral challenges and/or mental health needs. Some staff/volunteers also described the emotional and physical impact of camp on themselves.
We had some behavioral difficulties in our small group that distracted from the content at times. It was a very "heavy" experience for a lot of our team members and some were unable to handle it as well as others. One of the challenges was trying to calm down the kids and or quiet them down so they can listen to the story and others in the group.

Some of the volunteers, especially Small Group Leaders, felt that the Mental Health Professionals offered support to them as they struggled to address campers’ behavioral challenges.

One Site Coordinator did not feel that the Mental Health Professional was there to support the staff, saying, “They definitely were not there to support the mental health of staff. They were there for the kids.” That sentiment was not common, however, and most staff/volunteers felt that they had received support from the Mental Health Professional.

When asked whether the Mental Health Professional offered support to them, many of the staff/volunteers (especially Small Group Leaders) highlighted the support that they received in working with campers who had behavioral concerns.

Others identified emotional support to staff and volunteers as an important part of the Mental Health Professional’s role.

Some staff and volunteers (including Team Leaders and Small Group Leaders) noted that the Mental Health Professional did provide deeper support to them. Some talked about the challenges in managing their emotions when working with campers who have experienced disasters and other trauma. Others said that the Mental Health Professional had offered support and compassion for them as they struggled with personal issues unrelated to camp.

She plays an important part in getting our team emotionally ready and prepared for what we are going to experience. Sometimes, it’s hard to hear kids’ stories and hear how they are struggling.

The Mental Health Professional can also be there to assist the team. You can’t just listen to kid’s stories who have been traumatized or a kid whose best friend got killed in school. The team themselves needs time to say, ‘here’s what this is doing for me in terms of my own emotions, here’s what’s roiling in me.’ The Mental Health Professional becomes a process person for the team and their feelings about the stories they’re hearing.

I saw her supporting staff members. She took time to talk at the end of the day to talk to me about something personal, about my children at home, and she stayed after and expressed some things that I could share with my child. And I really appreciated that, connecting and bonding in that way.
She was there for our team. It's a pretty intense day from start to finish and you're usually emotionally and physically exhausted by the end. Being in such close quarters and being in that intense environment with the children can wear on you as a team, so it's been helpful for us to have her with us. If we're going through our own personal trials or problems that she can talk us through that, and also to help us be better servants to the children.

They were there for everybody to talk to about anything, even things outside of camp. Like I had some stressful things going on this past summer and I came in to work one day and was upset and she noticed and we talked about it and she made me feel a lot better about the situation.

How well did it work when there were multiple Mental Health Professionals? What were the advantages of having local versus visiting Mental Health Professionals?

There were both challenges and advantages of having more than one Mental Health Professional.

Some staff and volunteers (including Mental Health Professionals, Team Leaders, Site Coordinators, and Small Group Leaders) described camps that had more than one Mental Health Professional on the team. In some cases, this offered the team added strength and advantages. For example, some Mental Health Professionals were able to have one person walking around visiting campers and attending activities, while the other remained in the healing room to support campers as needed. In other cases, having multiple Mental Health Professionals contributed to some role confusion. It was not always clear to the team, including to the Mental Health Professionals, why more than one person had been asked to serve in that role. Some also struggled to figure out how best to coordinate their services or supports, or to handle conflicts if they did not agree on a strategy to support campers or staff.

Combining local and visiting Mental Health Professionals offered some strength to the team, but also contributed to coordination challenges.

In some cases, there was one Mental Health Professional from the local community, and one that came from the visiting team. Some Mental Health Professionals and other staff and volunteers said that this compounded some of the coordination issues, as the two staff figured out how best to fulfill their camp responsibilities. Both local and visiting Mental Health Professionals were seen as having some unique advantages, however. Local Mental Health Professionals were seen as advantageous due to their connections to the local community. In some cases, they knew the campers or their families and were able to provide useful insight into their situations for the rest of the team. They were also able to link campers and families to other resources in the community.
Often, they know the most about what the kids have gone through, and they can add some real insight into behaviors. So having somebody local is wonderful. I’ve been at camps where we had a Mental Health Professional from outside the area and they were not as helpful because they didn't know the kids.

She helped provide us with information and follow-up because she lived in the community. It was nice to have a local person for that aspect.

This is the first time they’ve had a Mental Health Professional from the community. That definitely helped, because they knew the community, and if kids needed further help they could point them in the right direction for that town.

She gave the families some information so she could follow up. She was getting to know the kids and if they needed more, she’d be there afterwards.

Every single year, we need to make referrals for issues a child is having, such as abuse or neglect or maybe an undiagnosed condition that might need to be taken more seriously. The Mental Health Professional is the liaison to that network of mental health resources in the community. That’s one whole area that makes that person essential to that team.

On the other hand, some of the staff and volunteers noted that it was difficult when the Mental Health Professional came from the community and had also been impacted by the disaster. In these situations, they felt that the Professionals’ own trauma or grief made it more difficult for them to support others during camp. They also felt that the local Mental Health Professionals were more likely to leave after camp ended each day, making them less available to support the team. When this happened, it sometimes worked well for the team to bring its own Mental Health Professionals. For some teams, a Mental Health Professional has been part of the same team for multiple camps, which has helped build relationships and clarify roles.

If the Mental Health Professional has been personally affected [by the disaster], and is still in the midst of that, it’s hard for them to be available to the whole camp.

In the middle of the day, there’s really not time to see them yourself. But a lot of them just left right after camp was done. I know that’s challenging because they’re local volunteers and they have their own lives within the community.

At least with our team, I would almost like to see their Mental Health Professional take a back seat to us and just be there to support us instead of trying to take over. We know how our team functions, and we know what our needs are.

[Our Mental Health Professional] had been through the tornado, and just wasn't effective because she was emotional herself half the time. Literally in tears, leaning on us to help her. So we thought 'oh gosh, she really isn't helping us much.'

Camp Noah recently began providing us with a local Mental Health Professional. It was hard for our team to relate to them personally because we don't know them and they don't know us.
Did Mental Health Professionals think it would be helpful to document their work?

Mental Health Professionals had varied opinions about the usefulness of having a process to document their work.

Mental Health Professionals were asked during their interviews if it would have been helpful to document their work, such as how many campers used the healing room, or what kinds of support were provided. A few Mental Health Professionals did feel that some documentation would have been helpful. One Mental Health Professional felt that it could be useful to document crisis situations or stress responses exhibited by the campers. Others felt that it would be sufficient to keep a brief log of how the healing room was used (e.g., who used the room, how often they used it, what they did while they were there, what their behavior was like, anything pertinent that they said while they were there). One person noted the potential value of this documentation in helping them communicate and share information with the other staff or volunteers, saying “it may be beneficial to document the name of the child, their Group Leader, what topics were being addressed before they became emotional or needed assistance, what was done to help calm or soothe them, and the plan to reintegrate into their group.”

On the other hand, some did not feel that it would be helpful to keep documentation. One noted that there were already incident report forms available that could be used as needed. One Mental Health Professional also noted some of the concerns or challenges that could emerge if too much documentation was kept.

I think that could complicate things as far as who keeps the documents. How are we securing them? I think that it’s better to have the documentation that they already have in place. If you have more than that, then this person is a client in a sense. When that happens, there are different rules and regulations that need to be upheld and that could get complicated for the staff and Camp Noah.

Other Mental Health Professionals felt that it might have some value for Camp Noah, but not for them professionally. One noted that it could be “helpful for research purposes, or if someone wanted to use some of those ideas, but I didn’t feel any need to have to record that.” Another acknowledged that “would have been nice for Camp Noah to have, but not for me. I didn’t need to keep track of all that.”

Recommendations

- Clarify the intended/desired role of the Mental Health Professional in dealing with camper behavior and classroom management and provide clear information about this role to staff and volunteers.
- Provide additional training/resources to the Certified Camp Staff regarding behavior management, to increase their comfort and reduce the demands for this support from the Mental Health Professional.

- Include support to staff/volunteers in the description of the Mental Health Professional role, and encourage staff and volunteers to seek emotional support as needed.

- Develop guidelines regarding the number of Mental Health Professionals recommended per site and tips for clarifying roles and responsibilities when multiple people are filling this role.

- Consider creating a simple – and optional – reporting form to document the work of Mental Health Professionals, and weigh the relative pros and cons of more rigorous reporting.

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**Daily debriefings**

*Were there daily debriefings? Who participated?*

Almost all staff and volunteers said that there were debriefings, and that they participated.

Almost all of the staff and volunteers said that there were daily debriefings. All members of the Certified Camp Staff participated, along with (most of the time) the Site Coordinators and Mental Health Professionals. A number of people said that debriefings were held immediately following camp each day, though sometimes the Certified Camp Staff debriefed again in the evening as they were preparing for the following day.

*What was covered during the debriefings?*

Most staff and volunteers said that debriefings were used to review the highlights from the day, address issues that emerged with specific campers, and plan for the following day.

The staff and volunteers who were interviewed gave similar accounts of the daily debriefings. Most talked about three topics that were frequently addressed.

Highlights from the day. First, the debriefing usually involved each person identifying their “highs and lows” from the day. They typically identified things that had gone well,
things that had not gone well, and ways that they could modify their approach to do better the next day.

We did highs and lows every day, talked about moments we each had with kids that made us feel like it was all worth it, and we talked about things that we could improve.

Everybody went around and identified a good thing that happened that day and a bad thing that happened that day. And normally we started off with the bad thing and ended with the good thing. We talked about what we could [do] to fix it.

We talked about things that went particularly well during the day and then also talked honestly about challenging pieces or questions and concerns. I found it really helpful, to celebrate great things happening and think about other areas we could support each other when things were particularly challenging.

We tried to make it a point of two highs and a low. So, two good things that happened or things you were happy with, and if you had something, a low. What was something that either didn't go right or wasn't what you expected...the topics ranged from everything from facilities to volunteers to meals.

As a team, we usually did highs and lows. We would identify the problem areas and what we needed to address to make the next day better. It always spun off into how we could improve tomorrow, always trying to look ahead to be as beneficial as we could while we were there.

Camper issues and situations. Second, the debriefing often included discussions of specific campers who were struggling with behavioral or emotional issues. The team would discuss what they had seen in different activities, identify different strategies to try with those campers the next day, and (in some cases) get advice from the Mental Health Professionals.

[We discussed] stress responses by kids who seemed to be having a difficult time, who might be presenting some behavior challenges, and how to cope with behavior challenges.

[We talked about] a couple of children who were having problems. Most of them were discipline problems but some were mental health issues that were taken care of.

Sometimes a tough day was a child who was having a hard time managing their behavior and getting aggressive. So [we’d talk] about what happened, what was going on before that, how it was handled, brainstorming ideas for how it might be handled differently.

Planning for the following day. Third, the debriefings typically included some planning for the following day. The team would often review the schedule and activities for the following day, and make any needed adjustments. They sometimes prepared activities for the following day, or confirmed how staff and volunteers would be assigned to various groups or activities.

We got the team ready for the next day. We made sure they had all their materials so when the kids got there they didn't have to worry ‘am I going to need supplies for this or that?’

If there was anything we needed to prepare for the next day, we would go ahead and do that.
We would talk about the day and the logistics and looking to next day, what needed to happen when and who was responsible for which pieces. We also had time to prepare in smaller groups.

[We talked about] what we needed to change the next day. Sometimes we had to change up the schedule from what Camp Noah had done because the schedule was just too packed.

We were very stretched for volunteers. So we talked about how to utilize the people we do have to take stress off everybody else. And routine stuff - should we have snacks in the classroom or outside, what worked well for us to make life easier for the kids and also less confusion for us.

Some debriefings were used to provide emotional support to the team or for spiritual activities.

A few other topics or activities also were embedded into some debriefings, though with less consistency. A few of the volunteers said that they used debriefings to provide emotional support to each other, especially when camper stories or experiences were especially difficult to hear. A few Site Coordinators and Small Group Leaders also said that the debriefings included prayer or other spiritual activities.

If you had a real low, they talked about it [and] made sure you were okay. Sometimes the things you heard or saw could be hard on you. They just want to make sure that not only campers are okay, but leaders and volunteers were okay as well. [It was] very much a supportive team atmosphere.

To some, it was a time to let go of some of the things that we pick up from the children.

You just have to consume all of their stories and then the debriefing gave us a chance to let some of that out. When they tell you their stories and you're consuming it, you can't really respond to it in front of the children. I had quite a few that lost everything. A couple of them had lost family members with the storm. The debriefing allowed me to get some of that out without carrying it home with me.

We had a devotion time. We prayed for the kids, we prayed for the staff members. It was a very nice way to end, especially if you were having an emotional day.

They prayed over the kids that were struggling and that was awesome.

**Did the staff and volunteers find the debriefings helpful?**

Most staff and volunteers did find the debriefings helpful in addressing camper concerns and building team cohesion.

Staff and volunteers did generally agree that the debriefings had been helpful. They identified a range of potential benefits. Some said that the debriefings were helpful to them in learning more about the campers and strategies to work with them effectively. Others said that it helped them learn more about each other, and to come together more as
a team. A few said that the debriefings helped them to better understand the Camp Noah model and activities.

It was helpful in the sense that some of the children did have behavioral issues that were more deep seated than just trauma. So having the Mental Health Professional there as well as a few people that have worked with kids so bouncing ideas off of them. That worked really well.

I really enjoyed those. Those wrapped up the day nicely and helped the group become more cohesive.

When we had the debriefings, I was learning what the goals were for camp and how we were supposed to behave and act towards the children. I could see how all the rules in the book worked in actuality and not just reading about it.

It was cool to see different perspectives. At one point, I had a concern about one of my children. It was good to see how they interacted with the recreation person and with the Mental Health Professional.

I’m not sure staff always appreciate them, but I think in the grand scheme of things they’re very important for the staff. It’s a way to share concerns and problems that we have with the children and also a way to work through what you’ve heard that day.

**Did staff or volunteers recommend any changes to the debriefing process?**

Some staff and volunteers expressed concerns about the debriefing process, including the facilitation skills of the leader, the timing and location of the discussions, and the length of the meetings.

Staff and volunteers generally did not recommend changes in the content covered during the debriefings. Some suggested changes in how the debriefings were facilitated, however.

**Leadership and facilitation skills.** First, a few people expressed concern about the Team Leader’s ability to effectively lead or facilitate the debriefings. A few felt that training in group facilitation might have been helpful for the Team Leader, and several Mental Health Professionals thought that their own training would have helped them facilitate the discussion more effectively.

I would say that the Coordinator could have been better prepared. She really didn’t facilitate the conversation all that well. She could have had better training in facilitating the conversation. A couple of Small Group Leaders tended to dominate the conversation.

There were times when we just got off on a tangent or talked about things that weren’t really pertinent to all the staff. I felt like time management could have been improved.

With the training [Mental Health Professionals] have, we know how to direct conversations in an appropriate way.

I think it would have been beneficial to have the Mental Health Professional lead it. They are a little more detached from the kids because they’re not the direct care provider during the day. They are able to have a broader perspective on how the day went.
I think [if] someone was leading the debriefing a little more, we could have gotten more accomplished if we were more efficient. Sometimes we were leaving with no resolution.

Timing and location. Debriefings most often took place immediately after camp. A few Small Group Leaders wished that they could have had more of a break before jumping into the debriefing. The timing also posed challenges for some Mental Health Professionals. One Mental Health Professional said that their team decided to debrief offsite over dinner. This posed a challenge, forcing them to choose whether to be part of the team or to return home at the end of the day.

I wasn't really expecting to have to go somewhere else. Was I expected to go where they were having dinner?

I think the debriefing needs to take place on-site right after camp is over. So that people aren't required to go - I had other obligations, you know?

Sometimes I wish they were not right after the day, because some people need decompression right after the day. But then some people don't want to deal with it right then. Personally I think the meetings [would be] better if we could find a happy medium, like maybe take a break and get set up and then we come back and meet.

We were finding that after we had the time with the whole group and [the Mental Health Professional] would leave, we would still as our own team, at night, would regroup and debrief ourselves too. Sometimes it depends on the situation.

Length. Some staff and volunteers felt that the debriefings were too long. A few suggested efficiencies that could be used to shorten the meetings.

Everybody's really tired, and so [the debriefings] need to be short.

We would talk about a high and a low and discuss anything we wanted to work on the next day. That would end up taking a while because there were quite a few of us. On the last day I suggested maybe chatting with your assistant before you came to the debriefing so we didn't have 25 different accounts.

It could've been done in about 20 minutes instead of in about an hour. It took too long. I thought it was a little bit rude frankly. It ended up being a lot of chit chat and banter. An agenda should have been set. The leader should have said, everybody gets 3 minutes, and leave it at that.

They were a little bit lengthy.

You have too many meetings at night and not a lot of time to prepare, and then you're tired and cranky. If we could eliminate some of large group talk time that would probably be better in the future. Maybe just have the two Mental Health Professionals talk about needs and the situation without involving the whole group. When you have a team of 22 people plus anyone from Camp Noah - sometimes these meetings went on and on. If we could eliminate some of the debriefing with everyone all the time - maybe do a welcome and a closing, like Monday and the last day. To do that every night got a little taxing with all those people. It got old. And tiring.
**Recommendations**

- Develop tips for leaders to use when leading the debriefing session, including recommendations for efficient and effective facilitation

**Characteristics of ideal teams**

*What are the characteristics of ideal Team Leaders and Site Coordinators?*

Ideal Team leaders and Site Coordinators were often described as having strong leadership skills, and being organized, flexible, and supportive.

During the in-depth interviews, staff and volunteers were asked to describe the characteristics of an ideal Team Leader or Site Coordinator. Four characteristics emerged relatively consistently in their responses.

**Organization skills.** Team Leaders and Site Coordinators both frequently said that organization skills were important for their role. Some noted that it was important that the people in these roles needed to manage a lot of details, and to know what was going on across all of the camp activities.

- Very organized. They have to pay a lot of attention to details.
- I would say organized is the most important, and the ability to think on your feet.
- Someone who can multi-task and be organized.

**Flexibility.** Flexibility was another characteristic that was mentioned frequently. A number of people paired this with organization, saying that Site Coordinators and Team Leaders needed to be organized, while still maintaining flexibility. Effective teams were also described as flexible, with an ability to change course when needed.

- [The ideal Team Leader] is organized, but not controlling. Somebody who can be flexible and change, roll with the punches. Definitely not somebody that is a micromanager.
- If something happens, you need to be able to adapt without falling apart. I would say somebody who is flexible.
- I think it's important to know that you have to be flexible. Not everything's going to go as planned.
- Sometimes you have curriculum in front of you, and it's just going to not work. You just have to improvise and go with what's going to suit the kids the best.
- I would tell [Team Leaders] to follow the book activities but not to stress about it too much. Things don't always go according to plan, they're just kids.
Leadership skills. Third, people felt that effective teams required strong leadership. Leadership skills were highlighted for both Team Leaders and Site Coordinators. Several people specified that leadership includes asking for help and delegating when needed, rather than having a few people lead by trying to do all of the work.  

[Team Leaders] should be somebody who knows how to be a leader and a follower.  

Well, obviously leadership [is important]...you have to have somebody that can lead a team when all the little things start to come into play, such as not having what we need.  

I think the Team Leader needs to have some skills leading a group.  

I have heard of other camps doing bad because their leader wasn’t strong. I would tell others who want to lead it, you need to have the leadership skills. If you are planning on joining a team, I would say you want to join a team that has strong leadership.  

Supportive. Fourth, several people noted that it was important for Team Leaders to be supportive of their full teams of volunteers. This was sometimes described as taking the time to get to know the team, making sure that everyone had an appropriate role, and providing the team with the tools and resources that they need to do their jobs well. It was also described as a focus on using team members’ individual skills and talents effectively.  

An ideal Team Leader would take enough time to match up the team’s talents and passions and match up with work. An ideal Team Leader lets everybody do what works best for the team. They are also a cheerleader.  

An ideal team leader doesn’t favor anyone. They treat everyone on the team equally. This can be hard when you recruit your friends.  

You have to give the team the tools to do their jobs and carry out their roles. You must be supportive of your team.  

Other characteristics were mentioned less frequently. Some of the other characteristics that were used to describe effective Team Leaders or Site Coordinators included patient, resourceful, and responsible. A few people felt it was important for these leaders to have a strong support system of their own or a strong religious faith. A few people felt that it was important for Site Coordinators to have strong knowledge about Camp Noah, and about the community that is being served.  

What are the characteristics of ideal teams?  

Staff and volunteers felt that effective teams demonstrate teamwork, are positive and outgoing, include a diverse array of members, and have positive relationships.  

Staff and volunteers were also asked to describe characteristics of an ideal team. Four characteristics of ideal teams were emphasized in their responses.
Teamwork and collaboration. Effective teams were described as able to work together well. They should be able to be flexible in their roles, support each other, and work together to solve any problems that emerge.

A really strong team is flexible and supports each other. No one needs to be in the front all the time and be a leader. They support each other’s skills.

A strong team meets together at the beginning of the day to pray about the day and talk about what is going to happen. At the end of the day, work together to solve any problems they had that day.

A strong team is a team that can be weak together and work things out. They are open and can talk things out.

[The most important characteristic is] working together as a team, because camp could not be pulled off without everybody putting in effort.

Positive, outgoing, and energetic. Different words were used by different respondents, but a theme emerged around teams needing to be positive, outgoing, and energetic. These respondents talked about the importance of having fun, maintaining a high level of energy, and being friendly. These characteristics were identified for Site Coordinators and Team Leaders, as well as for teams as a whole.

You need people who are willing to be silly once in a while. It doesn’t have to be all serious.

[Effective teams are] creative and ready to have fun.

They need a ton of energy. One of the difficult parts is keeping up that energy through the week.

[Site Coordinators] need to have energy. Outgoing. You’re going to be out there in front of parents and the kids. You need to be welcoming.

[Effective teams are made up of] positive people who can come every day with a smile on their face.

Diverse. Some people thought that it was important for teams to have diversity among the members. Some people described this in terms of age or gender distribution, while others said it worked well when the team included people with different kinds of personalities.

I think it’s important to have people who play many different roles, and who come from all walks of life. A strong team would be very diverse.

Strong relationships. A few people, especial Team Leaders, noted that it was important for the staff and volunteers to know each other and to care about each other. A few felt that it was important that these relationships existed before camp started.

It helps to have a team that is personally connected to one another.

It helps if the team has spent time with one another prior to camp.
[It is important for the team to have] common goals, deep respect for each other’s individuality, and a desire to be in relationships with each other.

A number of other attributes were mentioned infrequently. A few people said that ideal team members were self-aware, strong in their faith, mature, competent, engaged, caring, hard-working, strong communicators, and dependable.

### Amount of time spent fulfilling camp role

**How much time did staff and volunteers spend on Camp Noah?**

**Mental Health Professionals**

**Before camp.** Time spent before camp varied widely. A few Mental Health Professionals said that they did the training, which took them 8-10 hours. Others spent some time preparing the healing room, such as gathering supplies and setting up the space. Not everyone gave a time estimate, but a few Mental Health Professionals said that they spent 10-20 hours on preparation. Two of the Mental Health Professionals played a more extensive role in preparing for camp. One person was involved with bringing Camp Noah to their community: “There was considerable time preparing the church to get them on board with hosting the camp. There was a lot of behind-the-scenes, administrative, public relations work that needed to be done internally in the church.” This same person also spent time “soliciting meals and food support,” spending at least 40 hours on additional preparation. Another Mental Health Professional spent about 55 hours working on marketing and outreach. “We made fliers, did a site visit to the church, and met several times to go over roles and responsibilities. I was using social media to get the kids involved, let them know about it.”

**During camp.** During camp, the Mental Health Professionals felt like they were there for “a full work week.” Most felt that it was about 40 hours of work during camp, with one noting that they were there “before breakfast until the debriefing every day.” Two people felt that they worked closer to 50 hours during camp, while another worked much longer days: “During camp itself, I was pretty much on deck from 7am until 6pm. Sometimes we entertained the staff at night and were out until about 8.”

**After camp.** Only one Mental Health Professional referenced spending time on camp after it was over, other than cleaning up the healing room and putting away materials. This Mental Health Professional referenced doing “some follow up with families, maybe five or so hours.”
Team Leaders

Before camp. The amount of time Team Leaders invested in the Team Leader role varied considerably. Two respondents estimated that they spent 25-30 hours preparing, three said that they spent 80-100 hours of time preparing, and one person said that they spent “hundreds of hours, but I kind of overdo [it].”

During camp. All of the Team Leaders said that they spent at least 40 hours of time during camp, with most estimating that they spent 50-60 hours on camp activities.

After camp. Ranges also varied after camp. Two Team Leaders estimated 4-6 hours of time on follow up, one estimated 8-10 hours, and two estimated 10-15 hours.

Small Group Leaders

Before camp. A few Small Group Leaders said that they agreed to participate pretty late, and did not have a lot of time available to prepare. Most, however, said that they completed the online training. Quite a few Small Group Leaders also spent time reviewing the curriculum and activities ahead of time. Some teams had a series of team meetings, where they reviewed material together and negotiated roles. “We figured out different activities for the kids, especially transitions, how we would set up our classroom, and how we could make sure we were there for the kids.” Some also practiced making crafts, or got started preparing materials.

Some were unsure how much time they spent on preparation. For others, estimates varied, though they usually ranged from 5-25 hours. Approximately one-quarter of the Small Group Leaders estimated that they spent 5-6 hours on preparation, another one-quarter gave estimates of 15-16 hours. One Small Group Leader estimated spending a full three weeks on preparation, but also noted that they helped set up all of the logistics for the team (vans, hotel rooms, etc.).

During camp. During camp, almost all of the Small Group Leaders said that they spent the full week working on camp. In addition to the time that they spent with campers, many described time spent in the mornings getting things ready and in the afternoons and evenings debriefing and preparing for the following day. Often, the Small Group Leaders reported spending 8-10 hours a day through the camp week. “In the morning we would need to get set up and then do the camp. At the end of the day, we’d pick things up and do debriefing.” After debriefing, Small Group Leaders often “took time to prepare the next day.” A few people noted that since they were away from home, they really devoted a full seven days to Camp Noah.
After camp. Most Small Group Leaders did not spend additional time following camp. A few said that there was additional time debriefing with others or reflecting on their own (“looking back on the experience itself, reflection time, and getting back into gear to go back to work and do real life”). In some cases, the Small Group Leader or the Team Leader maintained contact with the other group members. A few said that the team got together again once they had returned home.

Site Coordinators

Before camp. Site Coordinators often referenced doing the training ahead of time. Others talked about the other logistical preparation, such as visiting facilities, arranging for food, and advertising the camp. All Site Coordinators said that they spent at least 20 hours on preparation. Three Site Coordinators gave estimates of 20-35 hours of preparation, two estimated that they spent 50 hours preparing, and four estimated that they spent 80-100 hours of time.

During camp. All of the Site Coordinators said that they spent about 50-60 hours at camp. Most said that they were onsite all day.

After camp. Of all of the staff and volunteers interviewed, Site Coordinators were most likely to have spent time supporting Camp Noah after camp ended. Some referenced activities such as completing paperwork, delivering supplies to the next site, and sending thank you notes. Time estimates ranged from 5-20 hours.

Satisfaction of staff and volunteers

How satisfied were staff and volunteers with their camp experience?

Most staff and volunteers rated their overall Camp Noah experience as excellent or absolutely amazing.

When asked to rate their overall Camp Noah experience, 42 percent of the local volunteers rated it as “absolutely amazing” and 44 percent rated it as “excellent.” Similarly, 35 percent of the other staff and volunteers rate their experience as “absolutely amazing” and 46 percent rated it as “excellent.” The remaining volunteers rated their experience as “good” or “fair” (Figure 18).
18. **Local volunteer and Certified Camp Staff surveys: How would you rate your overall Camp Noah experience?**

Local volunteers who rated their experience as “excellent” or “absolutely amazing” tended to explain their ratings based on the quality of the staff/volunteers, the amount of fun that the campers had, and the high level of organization around camp activities.

*Even though I was in the kitchen most of the time, I was glad to see the smiling faces on the kids when they were participating in activities.*

*It was well organized and staffed with awesome people.*

*I saw the smiles and excitement on all the children’s faces.*

*I was impressed with how organized the people in charge were. Painting Noah’s arks with over 50 children is no easy task.*

*Great team and an amazing job done for the youth!*

Certified Camp Staff who rated their experience as either “absolutely amazing” or “excellent” tended to comment that they had a strong team and that it was rewarding to work with the children. Others commented that they had a solid curriculum and strong site support.

*The experience of loving on the kids all week was great! Knowing that we were going to give them tools to help them the next time a tornado comes through was empowering.*

*The curriculum was well thought out and thorough. The kids grew and learned so much over the week, it was amazing to see that happen. I grew a lot too.*

*We had a great group of people that were committed and worked well together. We had a lot of support from the people in the town.*

*Overall, it was a great experience. I was impressed with the content and the children enjoyed the camp very much. I felt the kids got a lot from the camp.*

*Leadership was excellent. Staff worked hard and stayed positive. All volunteers seemed committed to the children.*
Only a few local volunteers explained ratings of “good” or “fair.” Those few who did comment said that they did not know much about Camp Noah, or that they had too many responsibilities.

I enjoyed being a volunteer and helping with things that needed done. I didn't really interact with the kids, so I don't know much more about it.

I was not part of the mission team and really did not know what was going on and it seemed like they did not either. The mission leader did not clearly explain what our day would consist of.

[I had a] LOT of kitchen responsibilities.

No strong themes emerged in the comments provided by the Certified Camp Staff who gave ratings of “good” or “fair.” A few people expressed concern about their team organization, site support, the appropriateness of the curriculum, or the functioning of the team.

Most staff and volunteers would volunteer again and would recommend Camp Noah to others.

Almost all local volunteers and other staff and volunteers (96%) said that they would recommend Camp Noah to others as a volunteer experience (Figure 19). Fewer, but still most of the local volunteers (83%) and staff and volunteers (82%) said that they would volunteer for Camp Noah again in the future. Most others (16%) said they would not volunteer again (Figure 20).

19. Local volunteer and Certified Camp Staff surveys: I would recommend Camp Noah to others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local volunteers (N=51)</th>
<th>Certified Camp Staff surveys (N=141)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes 96%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe 2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No 2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What did staff and volunteers find most meaningful about their Camp Noah experience?

Staff and volunteers typically said that seeing the benefits for campers and having the opportunity to collaborate with others were the most meaningful aspects of their camp experience.

Local volunteers provided a range of responses when asked to describe the most meaningful aspect of their service with Camp Noah. Many highlighted the benefits for campers.

Seeing the children have a fun, safe and relaxing time.
To serve the kids and see their happy faces.
Serving the children and seeing the smiles, but also watching the Friday closing program and seeing the excitement with the songs.
Seeing the joy on the children's faces in the morning and throughout the day.
To see the joy and smiles of all the kids, who didn't seem to have much in their personal lives.

The other camp staff and volunteers made similar comments when asked to identify the most meaningful aspects of their camp experience. Common themes were that the staff/volunteers enjoyed seeing the children have fun, spending time with the children, and watching the children learn and grow.

Connecting with the children was the most meaningful part for me.
When I saw the positive impact with the children and how they blossomed open to talk with the staff and counselor, it made my heart full of joy.
The most meaningful aspect of camp was seeing some of the children with apprehension and/or fear of the unknown come out of their shells, and blossom as the week went on.
Getting to know the kids and teaching them about a safe place is the most meaningful because I know they will be able to use that in the future.

The most meaningful thing was making a positive impact on the kids and seeing their smiles and change in demeanor from the beginning of the week till the end!

Other local volunteers highlighted their interactions with the other volunteers and the opportunity to serve as most meaningful.

The most meaningful [part] was the daily enthusiasm of all persons working directly with the youths and the awesome teamwork.

I think my favorite part is that you're all staying together, so it was cool to get to know each other more outside of camp and talk about camp. I really enjoyed that aspect of it. You build connections because you're going through similar experiences.

Working together with our team to make the week a unique, positive experience for the campers. To see them all singing joyfully in the closing program was something I'll always remember.

[The most meaningful aspect was] watching the leaders work with and make connections with the youth. It was really a great group of leaders all the way through.

It was extremely meaningful to collaborate in the camp experiences and in meeting the needs of the campers.

Our team members were amazing. It was so great to see them take on these leadership roles and also be so caring to the children.

Benefits of experience for staff and volunteers

How does working at Camp Noah impact the staff and volunteers?

In the in-depth interviews, Mental Health Professionals, Site Coordinators, Team Leaders, and Small Group Leaders were all asked how their participation in Camp Noah had impacted them personally or professionally. A number of different themes emerged.

Camp Noah had had a powerful impact on staff and volunteers overall, though they did not provide additional details.

As seen in the following sections, some of the Camp Noah staff and volunteers described specific ways that their participation had impacted them professionally or personally. Others, however, simply said that it was a rewarding experience that had changed them.

It’s very rewarding and positive for the children as well as for the staff and volunteers that are there.

It’s a lot of work and a lot of stress but you also grow immensely. Your personal development is huge in the process. That's part of what is amazing about Camp Noah - it's helping the kids and it's also helping you.
I would tell [potential future volunteers] not to hesitate. Sign up and do it, because it's one of the most life-changing things they could probably ever do.

It’s a great experience to have. It doesn't just help the kids but it helps you too. You learn different things as well and I would recommend it.

Many staff and volunteers generally felt positive about their experiences and were glad that they had the opportunity to do something to help campers.

First, many of the staff and volunteers made general comments that they were glad that they’d had the opportunity to do something for others. Some staff and volunteers who were interviewed said that it was a positive or powerful experience for them to see how camp had benefitted the campers.

It was an avenue for me to help the children of my community...whether it was my friends' children, schools, or churches. It was my way to give back.

It was rewarding being able to see that these kids were getting their needs met [and] getting the love and support that they need and deserve.

I really like helping people, so it was cool to find a place where I could fill the need for someone.

I am giving people the opportunity to let their hearts be broken and see the transformation process. I feel like that’s one of the most important things to me, allowing adults to serve and make a change through their service.

I think that it’s just as much or more of a powerful experience for the volunteers as it is for the kids. I think it’s just a good time to not only give back to a community but to also give yourself a sense that you did good, and you helped a kid out. It's very satisfying.

Some staff and volunteers described benefits in their ability to work with children.

Second, some staff and volunteers said that Camp Noah helped them increase their interest or skills working with children. Several people, especially Small Group Leaders, said that they were more comfortable working with youth, and a few said that they had changed their career path to one that involves working with children.

I just got a job working with kind of troubled kids which is sort of similar to Camp Noah. It gave me background experience for that.

It definitely helped me understand how to deal with kids.

I realized I like working with kids more than I thought and I think I might do it more often.

When I first did it, I had no experience with kids, I never even thought about working with kids. I graduated this spring and now I’m working full time with kids. So it has completely changed my career path. I love helping the kids and I want to keep doing it for as long as I can.
Some staff and volunteers said that they applied Camp Noah materials or approaches in their personal or professional interactions with other children.

Third, other staff and professionals said that they applied some of the teachings, or used some of the camp activities, with their own children or children they were working with in other contexts. This seemed to be especially true for Mental Health Professionals and Site Coordinators, who were more likely to have ongoing connections with youth who had experienced trauma.

Some staff and volunteers used the camp experiences to support their own resilience and coping.

Fourth, some staff and volunteers described personal benefits of camp, saying that it helped them cope with their own stresses and issues. Some, especially Mental Health Professionals, said that camp helped support their own recovery in the face of the disaster that had also impacted the campers. Others, especially Small Group Leaders, described applying the lessons to help them deal with other stresses and traumas.
Camp Noah allowed some staff and volunteers to develop new friendships and personal connections.

Fifth, some staff and volunteers highlighted the new relationships that they formed with others at camp. This benefit was noted relatively frequently for Small Group Leaders, and was also reported by some Team Leaders and Site Coordinators.

I've got some new friends now that I've never had before and that we just saw a couple weeks ago. It has built some relationships.

It was an awesome adventure that created some lifelong friends with the team that came in.

It made our team very close. It really bonded a lot of us together.

It was pretty special to be able to do this with members of my church. We feel like we successfully completed a task together and we grew as a congregation at the same time.

I ended up feeling a whole lot closer to people I go to church with. Spending that week and in that kind of setting, some of us really got to know each other a whole lot better. And in a different way.

Camp Noah improved the ability of some staff and volunteers to work with people who have experienced disasters and traumas.

Sixth, some staff and volunteers felt that they had gained greater awareness of the continuing impact of disasters on children or communities. They described greater sensitivity and understanding, as well as improved comfort and skills providing support.

I hadn't realized how much impact this tornado had on people, until I heard all these kids' stories. It really had a major impact on me.

I realized that a lot of these kids have backstories that may have been pretty stressful before the flood or tornado. I have a whole new level of respect for peoples’ circumstances and their feelings.

When you've seen such disaster and such pain and such hurt, you look at life differently because you know that other side. I think it has opened up our hearts even more to care and to give and to serve.

It’s made me a lot more sensitive and more empathetic towards all people, not just children. It’s definitely changed who I am.

Never having had to live through [a disaster] like that myself, I learned a lot from the programming and also from the campers and their stories - what it means to build resilience and to be prepared. And to find ways to own that story, that's really challenging, but then to ultimately turn that into something hopeful. That was really powerful.
Staff and volunteers often felt that they had gained a number of personal skills such as confidence, flexibility, and patience.

Finally, many of the Site Coordinators, Team Leaders, and Small Group Leaders described impacts of Camp Noah on their personal characteristics. The most common characteristics that they felt had grown included confidence, flexibility, and patience. A few people talked about other traits, such as self-awareness and leadership skills.

Camp Noah really opened my eyes to what I can do. It gave me the confidence to do what I have dreamed to do all along.

Many times I have a plan, but often it doesn't go as planned. I've learned to be more flexible for sure.

I developed the general skills that come with working with kids in camp settings—flexibility and patience, good sense humor, all those things.

I definitely developed my teamwork skills and communication skills… It definitely helped me out in my personal life, being able to lead groups, being able to work with peers as well as younger kids and giving them direction and being the person who guides someone a certain way.

[Camp Noah] taught me patience. After dealing with the kids, I think I can deal with any customers I have in my work profession. And learning how to manage exhaustion because dealing with those kids made me nearly pass out at the end of the day.

Other thoughts from staff and volunteers

What do staff and volunteers feel that others should know about Camp Noah?

When asked what others should know about Camp Noah, many staff and volunteers repeated their positive perceptions of the program model and its impact.

When asked what other people should know about Camp Noah, staff and volunteers often re-iterated themes that have been highlighted elsewhere in the report. Most notably, many people said that Camp Noah had powerful and important benefits for children, families, and communities. Many also highlighted the value for staff and volunteers. Often, staff and volunteers simply said that they would tell others that they should volunteer for Camp Noah, or that other communities should offer camp.

The most important thing [about Camp Noah] is that it helps build resiliency skills for children. It prepares them for any storm in life. It teaches them relaxation techniques. It also gives them hope for the future when those storms come up again. It gives them a feeling of security of being prepared if these things happen again. It builds confidence in themselves. They can have faith and hope for things to get better.
I would tell [communities considering Camp Noah that] it’s a gift to themselves. It is all about being able to receive this gift that other people are wanting to give your community in a real, hands-on way. They will feel loved on and supported and walked with. That’s how the people felt here. They loved it.

Camp Noah was awesome! I really hope that you all have the opportunity to come back in the future to continue the work that needs to be done here! Thank you!

[Camp Noah] is such an awesome idea! I am in awe of the creators and those who continue to carry it out. I loved it all!

I can’t say anything negative about this program. What a blessing and awesome experience for children. THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU for the awesome ministry! God is good!

Staff and volunteers recommended more clarity regarding the program’s emphasis on disaster recovery.

Some staff and volunteers suggested that the program might want to expand its focus to be broader than just disasters. These volunteers said that they had seen positive impacts for campers affected by a wide array of situations, and that a broader group of children could benefit from a Camp Noah experience. Some felt that all children could benefit from Camp Noah to deal with whatever challenges they are facing. A few people noted that they felt the curriculum worked well for all children, while a few others wished that it could be modified to apply better to children who have experienced different challenges.

I hope that Camp Noah will eventually expand into poverty stricken areas and not just disaster affected areas. I saw amazing changes in children this week that touched my heart and life and changed me forever. There are children all over the United States that need the resiliency skills we teach at Camp Noah, not just after a disaster, but because of their environment and circumstances.

It is important for people to know that building resiliency skills in young people is absolutely key to their survival in a stressful world. In all kinds of stressors, not simply natural disasters. It was really key for parents to understand that this camp was all about providing a healing time and place for their children.

[Other people should know] what kind of impact Camp Noah can have on kids. It doesn’t have to be a child that has gone through a horrendous trauma. We all have traumas, life is full of traumas. I know this is specifically for certain groups of kids, but these are life skills we all need to get through life.

Camp Noah gives the kids some tools to teach resiliency and it gives them coping tools. It’s not always a natural disaster that has directly affected them, and sometimes they don’t even know why they’re feeling the way they are.
What advice should be shared with future staff and volunteers?

Team Leaders, Site Coordinators, Mental Health Professionals, and Small Group Leaders all offered a number of recommendations for future volunteers.

Team Leaders, Site Coordinators, Mental Health Professionals and Small Group Leaders were all asked what advice they would share with potential future staff and volunteers. Some of their advice aligned with topics presented elsewhere in this report, such as the importance of clarifying staff roles or considering ways to simplify or reduce some of the camp activities. A number of other recommendations emerged, however. Some of the strongest recommendations included:

Stay calm and do not get overwhelmed. Across all staff and volunteer roles (Team Leaders, Small Group Leaders, Site Coordinators, and Mental Health Professionals), people offered the advice that it is important to stay calm and manage their stress effectively.

I think a lot of people get a little overwhelmed with all the tasks and the time commitment. I think that it very well worth the time so do not get overwhelmed by all of the details.

When you get frustrated, you need to take a step back and breathe and remember what the whole thing is about. Don’t let stress get to you and remember that you’re here for the kids and that it’s to help and there’s going to be stressful times but those eventually end.

Don’t stress! It will all work out!

Ask for help. Similarly, staff and volunteers felt that it was important for staff to ask for help when they need it. Several people said that it was important to seek help from the others on the team. Several of the Site Coordinators, in particular, recommended that future Site Coordinators seek ideas and support from other volunteers, current or former, in this role.

Talk to the people around you to develop a support group to draw from.

Delegate, delegate, delegate!

Don’t be afraid to say you don’t know how to handle something. It’s ok. Everybody feels that and you support each other as you go. You don’t have to have all the answers, you just work it out as you go.

Communicate and coordinate with other Site Coordinators. They are a very helpful resource!

Work with other Site Coordinators to get ideas from them.

Expect to work hard and focus completely on camp. Quite a few of the staff and volunteers who were interviewed said that Camp Noah is a lot of work, and that people should expect to work very hard throughout camp. Several also said that staff and
volunteers need to be prepared to focus completely on camp, and to not be distracted by other things that may be happening in their lives.

Though it is a lot of fun, it is a lot of work. You have to be on 24/7 and be available and be flexible and carry a fun and positive attitude throughout the week. You have to have good endurance. It's hard work, but it's good work.

For volunteers, it's an awesome experience but it's tough. It's a hard week but really worth it.

Be sure that you want to do it because it is a commitment. That's what you're paying attention to all week. It's not like you can be thinking about other things while you're in the midst of that. So make sure you're committed to that for the time you're there.

I would tell them it's a very intense week. It's physically and emotionally exhausting, but extremely rewarding. You kind of have to put your life on hold for that week and just leave everything behind. You really need to be in the moment when you're there, and can't be encumbered too much by your own life or what you have going on at home.

Be prepared. Another common theme that emerged was that it is important for volunteers to be prepared for camp. This preparation should include completing the training, but also thinking through the curriculum and activities thoroughly in advance. Some interviewees also suggested that future staff and volunteers think about the array of situations that may emerge, and to have strategies in mind for addressing these situations.

Spend enough time with the curriculum ahead of time and brainstorm ideas with other people.

Prepare. Don't go in to the day not knowing what you need to do. Always prepare the night before and even before camp.

Start getting your camp prepared as soon as you can!

Get organized and envision how the day will go and how you will handle various situations.

Develop and engage community partners. Site Coordinators, in particular, were encouraged to begin reaching out to potential community partners as early as possible. This outreach and engagement was seen as critical for helping the Site Coordinators find a facility, recruit volunteers, and address other logistical issues.

Work early on getting the congregation or whoever the host site is, the community, to be involved in some way, whether it's providing meals or registration assistance, or helping to design rooms, assemble some of the materials, that kind of thing.

Be sure to involve as many community businesses and churches as possible. This gives everyone the feeling of being part of something of value to their community.

I think the biggest help we received aside from our facility involvement was the local school system. So my suggestion would be partner with them however you can. They facilitated recruitment AND transportation for us and were very willing to help.
Have fun. A number of the volunteers and staff, especially Team Leaders and Small Group Leaders, talked about the importance of having fun during camp.

*Have fun. Sometimes when people are doing groups they forget that. Children tend to seek out some form of fun. So if a group leader is stern, they're not going to do very well.*

*Go into the process with an open mind, a willingness to learn and to be challenged, a good dose of patience and good humor, and a willingness to be goofy and to have fun.*

Recruit a strong team of local volunteers, especially kitchen help. Finally, a consistent recommendation emerged among the Site Coordinators who participated in interviews in fall 2014. Quite a few urged future Site Coordinators to recruit a large team of local volunteers. Several specifically noted the importance of having strong volunteers supporting the kitchen and food preparation.

*Recruit more people than you think you will need.*

*Make sure you have excellent kitchen volunteers!*  

*Make sure you have excellent kitchen help! There are many things that arise throughout the day that prevent the Site Coordinator from directing things in the kitchen. You need to have one person in charge so they can oversee all of the kitchen tasks being accomplished.*

*Make sure you have reliable competent adults to handle lunch preparations.*
Section 3: Community experience

Community stakeholder involvement

Community members who helped bring Camp Noah to the community and support camp activities were also interviewed. Some community stakeholders participated in camp in more formal roles, but most were involved in preparation for camp or came to camp to observe and help out in smaller ways. Community stakeholders were asked to comment on their involvement during the week and broader impacts that they observed in their communities.

To what extent were community stakeholders involved in camp during the week?

Most of the community stakeholders visited or spent time at Camp Noah while it was happening in their community.

Community stakeholders were asked if they visited or spent time at camp when it was happening in their communities. Of the 13 community stakeholders interviewed, eight attended Camp Noah every day or almost every day. Two of those mentioned that they did so in an official capacity as a team member. Four respondents visited the camp at least once, but not every day, and one respondent helped out during the planning phase, but did not attend the camp while it was happening. One community stakeholder noted attending, but did not specify the frequency, and another respondent helped host two camps, one in which the respondent attended every day, and the other in which he or she just checked in (Figure 21).

21. Community stakeholder interview: Community stakeholder camp attendance (N=13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attended every day</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended at least once, but not every day</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helped during planning, but did not attend camp</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended at unspecified frequency</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: One community stakeholder was involved in two camps, one in which he or she attended every day, and the other in which he or she just checked in. Both responses are reflected in this figure.
Benefits to the community

Does Camp Noah impact the broader community? If so, how?

There was general agreement that Camp Noah impacted the broader community.

When asked about how they felt that Camp Noah went in their communities, about three quarters of Site Coordinators (78%) said that it was “absolutely amazing” and another 17 percent reported that it was “excellent” (Figure 22).

22. Site Coordinator survey: On a scale of 1-5, how do you feel Camp Noah went in your community? (N=23)

Respondents reported a variety of ways that the camp had impacted their community’s recovery process.

Camp Noah filled a unique need in focusing on recovery and resilience among children in the community.

Site Coordinators, Mental Health Professionals, and community stakeholders all remarked that the camp helped increase awareness of the needs of children after a natural disaster.

[Camp Noah] opened adults’ eyes to how impacted children really are. A lot of people just thought kids are okay, because everyone was so focused on rebuilding. They were not realizing that behavioral issues might have been related to [the] trauma of flooding, seeing friends lose their homes.

It's nice to have a group just focused on the kids and it gave the parents an opportunity to have a break. They have outside people who can give kids the tools they need to work towards that resilience. Something parents might not be equipped to do.

The children were impacted most. We had a support group for adults, but they kind of drifted away. But it was great knowing that children… walked out of here prepared.
Camp Noah provided communities an opportunity to work together on a shared project.

Many respondents, particularly the community stakeholders, indicated the benefits of involving residents, churches, and organizations in contributing to a common cause that benefitted the community. Some respondents detailed the strengthened connections that resulted from groups working together to support the camp.

I enlisted the aid from the broader community in raising funds for the blankets and making them… The more people you get involved in something, the more vested interest people are going to have. They were touched by the stories. It touched them in a way that it made it exciting for them to be a part of it even though they weren't at camp. It was a positive way to be a part of Camp Noah for them.

It was something people could identify with, like, ‘well, yes of course we want to help kids, to pay attention to them in the midst of their losses and not just the adults.’ So we had lots of partners who helped with funding, bringing meals, bringing kids in. It was a good uniting factor for the community.

The fact that [Camp Noah] brought a whole lot of partners together to work on something also creates increased resiliency. It says to the community, you can partner and work together even if you don't all have the same beliefs and you don't all agree all the time. In this type of situation, you can come together and work together and make something great happen.

Camp Noah was a great opportunity for that community to all come together and work on a project. And clearly they did that. They had a great long-term committee there already that had engaged over 50 organizations in that community… They were able to build on that and increase involvement, especially from faith community partners. It also linked congregations in our synod from five hours to the west. Our synod has some big geography, from one site to another is over seven hours. Churches from far to the west were able to help, and be a part of it even from afar. That speaks to the bigger faith community but it also says we’re all part of a family and when a portion of the family needs help, we can all help. So I think it’s in a better place.

Communities also benefited from having an outside team come in to help out.

Although respondents noted the benefits of rallying local volunteers and stakeholders, several Site Coordinators also shared that having a team come in from the outside reinforced that their community was cared about and had not been forgotten. Site Coordinators suggested that bringing in a resource such as Camp Noah was a new experience for their communities, but it led to increased pride and gratitude among community members.

It was encouraging that people would come in and help. We were thankful that Camp Noah would come into our little community. We usually get left out of things like that… Everyone was excited, proud, encouraged, and thankful.
Camp Noah offered new hope while also bringing greater awareness to the continuing needs of the community.

Several respondents emphasized that the camp helped bring new energy and awareness to the recovery process for the community. For one respondent, it was also a reminder that recovery takes time and the community was still working through that process.

I think this brought a fresh hope to people and it really helped solidify the foundation for the rebuilding of their lives.

Camp Noah has brought healing and future hope to so many families and children in Central Oklahoma this summer.

It was a great awareness builder for Lutheran Disaster Response and preparedness in general. We are always looking for ways to help our congregations realize that disasters will happen. It's not something that you think will ever happen. It will happen, and if you're prepared you'll be better able to respond and recover.

It helped remind the community that we are not recovered yet. The emotional parts can take a lot longer than the physical parts.

Camp Noah also helped to make new connections between families in need and resources in the community.

Site Coordinators and community stakeholders both observed instances of families becoming connected to resources in the community through Camp Noah and of churches being able to reach new constituents who were still in need.

[Families] made connections to resources that they might not have made otherwise.

Our church was able to reach a family that we didn't know had a need of a washer and dryer. If it wasn't for Camp Noah we wouldn't have been able to.

It gave families a chance to talk about it, to help families with physical needs. It also gave the church a better contact to meet those needs… we were able to help families work through recovery when they weren't getting anywhere with agencies.

Two respondents suggested that the camp did not have a great impact on the broader community.

One Site Coordinator and one Mental Health Professional shared that they did not believe the camp had a broader impact outside of those directly involved in the camp.
I don't think there was much impact at all [on the community]. It was a place to take kids for the week and not have to worry about them. The parents commented that it was nice, but I don't think the broader community had a clue.

I know it affected our church community, but as [for] the community as a whole, I don't think it had as much of an impact for us.

Would Site Coordinators recommend Camp Noah to other communities who have experienced natural disasters?

All of the Site Coordinators would recommend Camp Noah to other communities.

On the survey completed at the end of camp, all of the Site Coordinators (N=23) said that they would recommend Camp Noah to other communities as a post-disaster resource.
Recommendations

The results of this evaluation were very positive. Campers and parents were very satisfied with their camp experiences. Campers not only felt that camp was fun, but many also demonstrated sustained benefits of participation, such as feeling more prepared for storms. Some local volunteers and partners also described broader benefits for communities that had experienced disasters.

Similarly, the many staff and volunteers who supported Camp Noah through the previous summer also described positive experiences. Most felt adequately prepared before, and supported throughout, their camp experience. While it was sometimes challenging to arrange and manage all of the necessary logistics, in general, camp went smoothly across a diverse array of communities. The Certified Camp Staff who worked directly with the campers felt that the curriculum usually worked well, and they enjoyed their experience with camp. Many staff and volunteers also described benefits that they had experienced through their involvement with Camp Noah.

Camper recruitment

In general, Site Coordinators felt that it was not too difficult to effectively recruit campers. However, there may be opportunities for Camp Noah staff to further support these efforts, by sharing information about effective recruitment strategies, making sure that recruitment is reaching the intended group of families, and addressing parents’ questions and motivations in recruitment material. Specific recommendations for camp staff include:

1. Provide resources to Site Coordinators to support camper recruitment, including templates for school fliers, as these ended up reaching the most parents.

2. Consider ways to leverage parents’ reasons for sending their children to camp in marketing and recruitment materials, balancing their interests in a fun summer camp experience with their interest in helping their child address storm-related stresses and fears.

3. Consider ways to support Site Coordinators in reaching out to families most directly impacted by the disaster during recruitment.

4. Compare the diversity of camp attendees to the broader communities in which camps are being held, and if needed, explore ways to ensure that the racial/ethnic composition of those who attend camp reflects the broader community.
5. Review recruitment material templates or samples to see whether there are ways to more strongly address the issues that parents tended to ask about, such as the program cost, the religious underpinnings of camp, or the camp’s readiness and ability to support their children.

Volunteer recruitment

Similarly, many Site Coordinators and Team Leaders said that they did not have much difficulty recruiting their teams of volunteers for camp. They did, however, feel that some outreach strategies had been more effective than others. Specific recommendations for camp staff include:

1. Provide Site Coordinators and Team Leaders with a list of recommended strategies for recruiting volunteers.

2. As early as possible, provide Team Leaders with information about the local community that they can share with potential volunteers, as the “story” of those impacted by disasters often motivated volunteers to participate.

Training and support

Camp Noah already provides significant training to camp staff and volunteers. Most of the staff and volunteers who were interviewed gave positive feedback about the training, and most felt adequately prepared to carry out their camp roles. At the same time, however, they did provide some suggestions for improving or enhancing the training and support that Camp Noah offers. Specific recommendations include:

1. Offer technical support to staff and volunteers who have difficulty accessing online training, and/or provide training in alternative formats.

2. Create a brief “refresher” training for returning staff or volunteers, or an opportunity for them to demonstrate competence through a quiz, rather than requiring them to complete the full training again.

3. Increase the emphasis on addressing trauma and emotional issues in training, to better prepare Certified Camp Staff to address camper issues.

4. Provide additional training/resources to the Certified Camp Staff regarding behavior management, to increase their comfort and reduce the demands for this support from the Mental Health Professional.
5. Ensure that Certified Camp Staff have adequate knowledge about sites and facilitate connections between the Team Leaders and Site Coordinators prior to camp.

6. Consider opportunities to “repackage” and disseminate training and curriculum materials, such as summary versions and downloadable resources.

7. Consider whether there are opportunities to provide additional guidance regarding logistics to Site Coordinators, especially related to food.

8. Consider offering an abbreviated training for staff and volunteers who sign up too late, to ensure that everyone has at least some familiarity with their roles prior to camp.

9. Consider providing training or resources to prepare staff and volunteers for the end of camp.

Camp curriculum/activities

Overall, the camp curriculum went well. Most staff and volunteers found the curriculum material to be well-organized and easy to follow, and campers described almost everything about the camp activities as “fun.” A few concerns also emerged, however, primarily related to the overall pace of the camp schedule, the timing of specific activities, and the appropriateness of activities for the full range of campers. Specific recommendations include:

1. Consider simplifying the camp schedule or activities, to allow Certified Camp Staff to spend more time on each activity, and to avoid feeling rushed.

2. Provide additional guidance to Certified Camp Staff about how best to prioritize available activities, so that they can determine how to use their available time with campers most effectively.

3. Consider the timing of activities, particularly the telling of the storm stories, to ensure that campers are comfortable and prepared.

4. Consider modifying some of the camp activities to better suit the youngest and oldest campers.

Staff/volunteer roles

Again, the feedback gathered through this evaluation was overwhelmingly positive. Staff and volunteers were usually very satisfied with their experience, and felt that their teams worked together well. Some issues did emerge, including an occasional lack of clarity regarding the roles of team members. The interviews focused heavily on the role of the
Mental Health Professional, who were seen by most other informants as playing a critical role in supporting campers who are struggling with emotional or behavioral issues. Staff and volunteers did suggest some ways to clarify and support the Mental Health Professional, and to improve the coordination between the local volunteers and the Certified Camp Staff. Specific recommendations include:

1. Consider whether the current size of the teams, both for Certified Camp Staff and local volunteers, is adequate for the requirements of camp.

2. Facilitate early communication between Site Coordinators and Team Leaders, and provide guidance regarding issues that they should discuss/resolve in advance of camp.

3. Clarify the intended/desired role of the Mental Health Professional in dealing with camper behavior and classroom management and provide clear information about this role to staff and volunteers.

4. Include support to staff/volunteers in the description of the Mental Health Professional role, and encourage staff and volunteers to seek emotional support as needed.

5. Develop guidelines regarding the number of Mental Health Professionals recommended per site and tips for clarifying roles and responsibilities when multiple people are filling this role.

6. Develop tips for leaders to use when leading the debriefing session, including recommendations for efficient and effective facilitation.

7. Consider creating a simple – and optional – reporting form to document the work of Mental Health Professionals, and weigh the relative pros and cons of more rigorous reporting.

**Information sharing**

Some issues did emerge in the interviews related to information sharing across the staff and volunteers. Specifically, there were concerns that local staff – often the Site Coordinator – had information about the campers and their families that was not shared with others, including the Mental Health Professional and the Certified Camp Staff. This information may have come through previous relationships with the campers’ families, or through their access to information provided during the registration process. The team felt the conflict between protecting the campers’ privacy and confidentiality and having the information they felt they needed to best support the campers. Related to this challenge, the following recommendation emerged:
1. Develop clear policy regarding sharing information about campers/families across staff and volunteers and ensure that this policy is clear to all camp staff, volunteers, and parents.

**Supplemental activities**

Finally, some parents felt that other strategies for providing camp (such as over school breaks or weekends) may be appropriate for some families. Some also expressed interest in having supplemental Camp Noah approaches (such as for younger or older children) or additional resources for themselves. The following recommendations emerged from the evaluation:

1. Explore school-year options for camps, such as over school breaks or on weekends.

2. Consider developing programs for other ages, particularly pre-school/early childhood and middle/high school.

3. For those parents who were interested in parent programs, consider creating resource materials for parents that could complement the Camp Noah curriculum.