



Camp Noah

Impacts on campers and communities

These campers will one day run the community. They will be more resilient and prepared adults because of Camp Noah. They will be ready to handle the ‘storms’ of life, both literally and figuratively.—Camp Noah staff/volunteer

Camp Noah is a locally hosted program offered by Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota (LSSMN) for elementary-age children whose communities have been impacted by disasters, such as floods, tornadoes, or other community-wide traumas. Most often offered as a weeklong day camp, the program provides a structured and safe environment in which children are encouraged to face their fears, grieve their losses, identify and share their unique gifts and talents, and plan for their future.

The camp follows an established curriculum designed to help children process their disaster and/or trauma experience through a variety of activities, including small groups, large group time (including music, skits, and puppet shows), crafts, and recreation. In addition, all campers receive a Camp Noah t-shirt, a fully-equipped Camp Noah Preparedness Backpack, a paintable ark and other crafts, and a handmade fleece blanket.

The camp is implemented through the active participation of volunteers and communities, including: a local Site Coordinator and volunteers; community stakeholders who are instrumental in bringing Camp Noah to the community and supporting activities; a team of Certified Camp Staff, who often come from locations across the country and facilitate the daily curriculum; and a local Mental Health Professional, who provides campers with additional social-emotional support and, when needed, links to ongoing support.

In 2014, LSSMN contracted with Wilder Research to provide evaluation consultation and support to help understand the full impact of camp on campers, families, staff and volunteers, and local communities. This document summarizes key findings about the camp's impacts on campers and communities, using information from surveys conducted with campers, parents, staff, volunteers, and community stakeholders from 22 camps that were held during between October 2014 and August 2015. Wilder Research developed a full report of findings from these efforts, *April 2016 Camp Noah Evaluation Report: Overview of Camp Implementation and Impact*, which is available from Camp Noah at LSSMN.

Benefits for campers

Camp Noah provides a fun camp experience to children who have experienced disasters.

It is a very fun place to learn, have fun, and just meet new friends. —Camper

Funnest place I've ever seen. —Camper

It's been a wonderful experience for my son. He has learned so much! He had fun, made friends and showed so much happiness! —Parent

They loved it! They wanted to go every day and are still singing the songs they learned. —Parent

The younger campers definitely had great experiences and were appreciative of everything they received. Through their smiles, their full tummies, and giggling you could tell they really needed the time at Camp Noah to take a break from their daily struggle. —Staff/volunteer

The impact was nothing but positive. You could see the progress the campers made throughout the week. It was great to see some of the kids break out of their shell and learn the many talents they didn't know they had. Serving at Camp Noah was the best week of my life. —Staff/volunteer



Knowing that it can take time for communities to recover following a disaster, one of Camp Noah's goals is simply to provide a fun day camp for children. On surveys completed at the end of camp, almost all campers (98%) said that they had fun overall. When asked to describe the most fun part of camp, their most frequent response was simply that "everything" was fun. Parent ratings were similarly positive, with all parents strongly agreeing (81%) or agreeing (18%) that their child had fun at camp. Many of the camp staff and volunteers also highlighted the fact that they saw the campers having a good time, with some noting the importance of allowing children a chance to have fun and "be kids."

Camp Noah also helps campers learn that they are special, have hope for the future, and feel prepared for stormy weather.

That I am special and I can be me more! —Camper

I learned I can go to my safe place when I am scared. —Camper

My son had fun and even after the first day was telling me how he and everyone is special and that being different is special too. I was really happy with the lessons on coping skills and being prepared. —Parent

Anytime there is a storm now they tell me "I'm not scared, I'm prepared." —Parent

It shows the campers that they are not alone, that people care and will be there for them. —Staff/volunteer

Accepting the campers just as they are and encouraging them to explore their feelings with the Camp Noah activities seemed to allow them to relax, have some fun and think about the future with a more hopeful spirit. —Staff/volunteer

Great camp! Reassures campers that there is hope and ways to be prepared for emergencies and disasters that may come in the future and strategies to help heal from the past. —Staff/volunteer

Campers and parents described a number of benefits of Camp Noah for the campers, including:

- **Learning that they are someone special, with unique gifts and talents:** Almost all campers (97%) said that they learned that they are someone special at camp, and 92 percent learned what their gifts and talents are. Parent ratings were also positive, with most reporting that their children had learned that they were someone special (72% strongly agreed, 27% agreed) and what their gifts and talents are (53% strongly agreed, 31% agreed). Some local volunteers and Certified Camp Staff shared that Camp Noah provided an opportunity for campers to feel cared for, which may have contributed to campers' feelings that they were special.
- **Identifying hopes and dreams for the future:** Almost all campers (96%) said that they had hopes and dreams for the future. Parents also agreed that their children had hopes and dreams (67% strongly agreed, 24% agreed). Local volunteers and Certified Camp Staff also noted a new sense of hope among campers.

- **Feeling prepared and safe in stormy weather:** Almost all of the campers also knew their safe place and could go there when they felt afraid (93%) and learned ways to relax (93%). Most campers said that they learned how to stay safe during stormy weather (90%) and felt more prepared for stormy weather (90%). Following camp, almost all parents strongly agreed (61%) or agreed (32%) that their children were more prepared for stormy weather. Parents also strongly agreed (63%) or agreed (29%) that their children knew their safe place, and many also noted that their children had learned how to feel safe in stormy weather (55% strongly agreed, 35% agreed) and ways to relax (47% strongly agreed, 38% agreed). Staff and volunteers also shared observations that the campers learned skills to be prepared, feel safer, and relax in stressful situations.
- **Building relationships with others:** Almost all parents agreed that their children made friends at Camp Noah (66% strongly agreed, 28% agreed) and almost all campers (97%) rated their camp teachers and friends as “fun.” Campers were likely to talk about the teachers, volunteers, staff, and friends when asked to identify the most fun part of Camp Noah. Local volunteers, Certified Camp Staff, and community stakeholders also mentioned the new friendships that children made and the relationships the children had built with staff and volunteers.

Three months after camp, parents felt that many of these benefits had persisted.

I have heard them use the saying they learned. They both grab their blankets and backpacks when bad weather comes and have told me they know what to do and are not afraid. —Parent

He feels more in control of what he needs to do during bad weather. —Parent

*She has been a sweet child, now she has come out of her shell.
I would like to thank you for taking the time to help my little turtle. —Parent*

My children are homeschooled and [my child] has never gone to a class or place without me before. Now he has the confidence to go places without me and has attended classes outside the home. —Parent

He knows that he can be anything he wants to be. Now he wants to be a youtuber. He already created a channel about making some animation, and maybe some video games. And he is only 8. —Parent

My son has more adult friends in the community. —Parent

They seem to be making friends easier now than they did before. —Parent



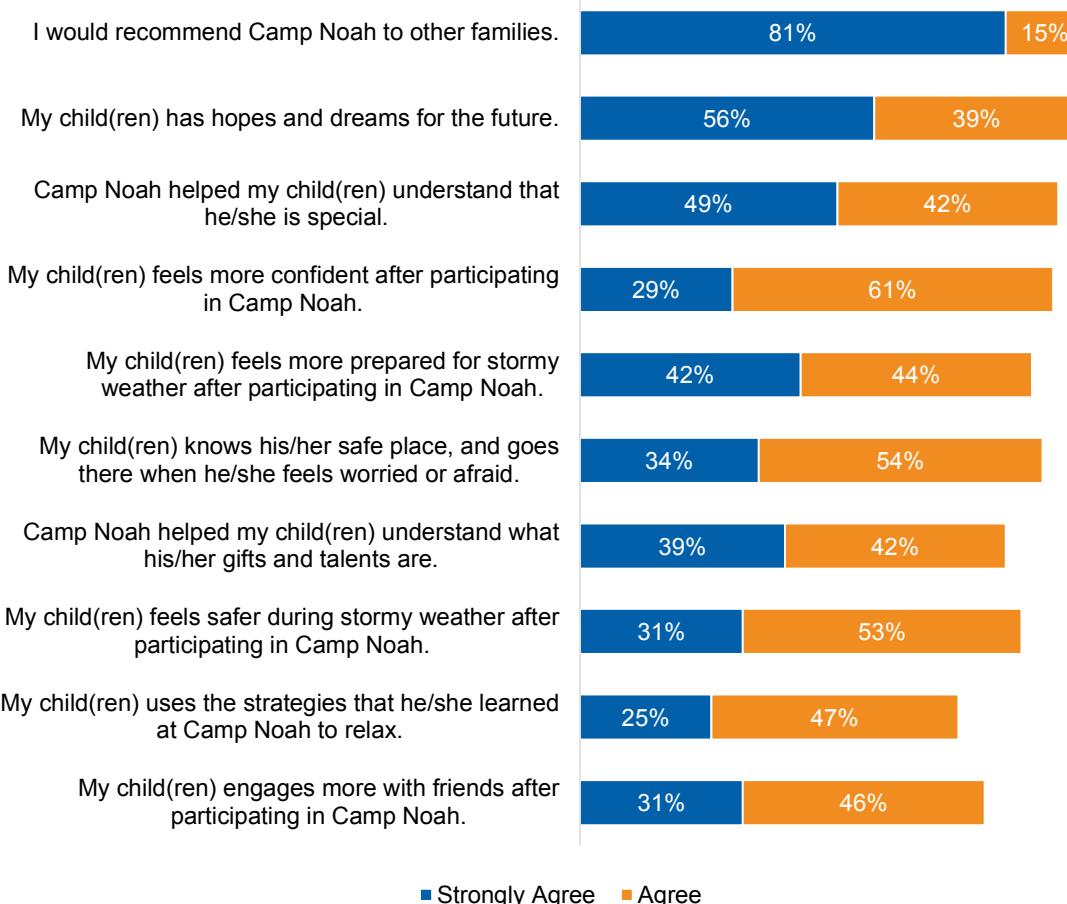
In addition to completing surveys immediately after camp, parents were also asked to complete a survey three months after Camp Noah ended about enduring impacts the camp had had on their children. As shown in Figure 1, parents felt that many of these initial benefits had endured, including:

- **Feeling prepared for stormy weather:** Most parents strongly agreed (42%) or agreed (44%) that their children felt more prepared for stormy weather, with some parents noting that their children used their backpacks to feel prepared. Many also felt that their children feel safer in stormy weather (31% strongly agreed, 53% agreed).
- **Using their safe spaces:** Most parents strongly agreed (34%) or agreed (54%) that their children knew their safe place and went there when they felt worried or afraid.
- **Feeling special and confident:** Three months after Camp, almost all parents felt that Camp Noah helped their children understand that they are special (49% strongly agreed, 42% agreed) and have hopes and dreams for the future (56% strongly agreed, 39% agreed). Most also felt that Camp Noah helped their children understand what their gifts and talents were (39% strongly agreed, 42% agreed) and feel more confident (29% strongly agreed, 61% agreed).
- **Improving social skills and relationships:** Most parents strongly agreed (31%) or agreed (46%) that their children engage more with friends after participating in Camp Noah. Parents also described the ways that their children have grown in their social skills and developed new friendships as a result of Camp Noah. In particular, many parents noted that their children seem to show more compassion and awareness of others' feelings after participating in Camp Noah.

In addition to these ongoing benefits, parents described a number of improvements in behaviors that can indicate stress or trauma. Children often communicate signs of stress and trauma through behaviors such as clinginess 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. Parents described a number of emotional and behavioral changes in their children. Reduced fear and worry was the most frequent response, and others described reduced whining or clinginess, improved sleep, and improved behavioral regulation.

Parent three-month follow-up survey: Parent ratings of Camp Noah (N=59)



■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree

Benefits to the community

Camp Noah also impacted the broader community.

I think our community has found a great resource for kids and even families. I have heard from so many parents, grandparents, etc. how happy they are to have been a part of Camp Noah. Our community I think has done well in facing the disaster of the flood but Camp Noah...was a way to help face trauma and personal disasters which is some things our community needs to tend to and Camp Noah was a great start to facing it. —Staff/volunteer

Camp Noah brought members of the community together for a common goal. We made new contacts and friends as a result. —Staff/volunteer

We also were able to engage many businesses and organizations to play a role for Camp Noah, for example, donating food for the meals. —Staff/volunteer

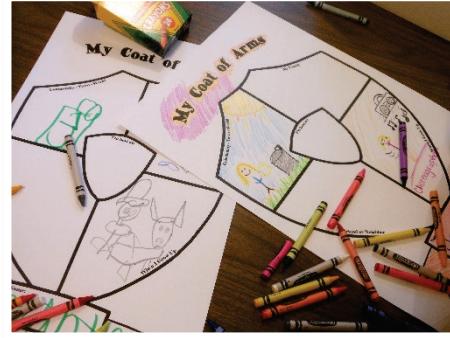
Seeing other children they usually didn't see every day at school or in [their] neighborhood allowed them to help realize what community is and that it's beyond our immediate surrounding. —Staff/volunteer

Shows that there is help from all over, even from people you don't know. —Staff/volunteer

The excitement that everyone felt with Camp Noah being there and we had more children than we could accommodate. More children came to sign up and participate when the camp started. We had to turn people away because the ones that participated were telling everyone what a great experience they were having and how they have learned about safety when it storms. They also asked if there was a way they could sign up for next year. —Staff/volunteer

Staff and volunteers were also asked about broader impacts to the communities affected. They identified a number of benefits of Camp Noah for their communities, including:

- **Increasing the focus on recovery and resilience among children in the community.** Staff and volunteers remarked that the camp helped increase awareness of the needs of children after a natural disaster.
- **Providing an opportunity to work together on a shared project.** Many respondents described the benefits of involving residents, churches, and organizations in contributing to a common cause that benefited the community. Some respondents detailed the strengthened connections that resulted from groups working together to support the camp.
- **Feeling cared about.** Although respondents noted the benefits of rallying local volunteers and stakeholders, several staff and volunteers also shared that having a team come in from the outside reinforced that their community was cared about and had not been forgotten. They felt that bringing in a resource such as Camp Noah was a new experience for these communities, but it led to increased pride and gratitude among community members.



Concluding thoughts

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 learned skills including being prepared, using a safe place, and calling on new ways to relax. In addition, many campers demonstrated sustained benefits of participation, such as feeling more prepared for storms, feeling special and more confident, stronger social skills and relationships, and reduced signs of stress and trauma.

Some local volunteers and partners also described broader benefits for communities that had experienced disasters. Camp Noah filled a unique need in focusing on the healing process for children in the community. In addition, the camp provided a shared project for the community and the knowledge that they were not forgotten by those outside of the community. These findings suggest that Camp Noah can play an instrumental role in helping children, families, and communities heal in the aftermath of a disaster and feel renewed hope in the recovery process.

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For more information

This summary presents highlights of the *Camp Noah Evaluation Report: Overview of Camp Implementation and Impact*. For more information about this report, contact Cheryl Holm-Hansen at Wilder Research, 651-280-2708.

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