



Tikvah Connects/קשר תקוה

May 2017 / Iyar-Sivan 5777

I. Bruchim Ha'Baim

Greetings from Howard Blas, National Ramah Tikvah Network Director

Welcome to *Tikvah Connects*, a new publication of the National Ramah Commission, connecting you several times a year with news about members of the Tikvah community and exciting Tikvah events.

Nearly every Rosh Hashanah and Passover since 1984, I have received beautiful handwritten cards from Matthew, a former Tikvah camper. Several Friday afternoons and erev chags a year, I receive lovely phone calls from Jeremy, another former camper from Camp Ramah in New England. Matthew, Jeremy, and hundreds of other former Tikvah campers from across the United States and Canada have grown in so many ways since their camp years.

Members of the larger Tikvah community are quite diverse. They work part time, full time, and volunteer. They live in apartments, group residences, and houses. They participate in various social and recreational activities. Yet, they all have one thing in common: They cherish precious memories of summers in various Tikvah programs. They feel deeply connected to Tikvah and Ramah, and many are looking for ways to stay connected.

Tikvah is truly special! There has been so much growth in the world of inclusive camping since Herb and Barbara Greenberg started the first Tikvah program (with 8 campers!) in Glen Spey, NY, in 1970. The Tikvah program soon moved to Ramah New England. Now, all of our Ramah camps include campers with disabilities. Each time I travel to Israel, I am fortunate to visit with the Greenbergs in their home in Ra'anana. They are delighted when I share stories of Tikvah's ongoing development. So much has happened in 47 years!

Our Tikvah programs offer camping, vocational training, employment opportunities, family camps, Israel trips and more! [Check out our new brochure!]

Our National Ramah Tikvah Network, founded in 2011, connects Ramah staff, families, and alumni from across camps and from across the decades. Our alumni staff, campers, and families live in many parts of the US, Canada, Israel, and even other countries around the world. We have had successful local reunions in such places as Washington, DC, Chicago, Los Angeles, and at Camp Ramah in Ojai, California. Some of our camps hold weekly or regular video chats with such names as "Shabbos Is Calling" and "Shavua Tov."

We are particularly excited to share our inaugural issue of Tikvah Connects at this time. Just this week, Tikvah staff members for summer 2017 met for training at the National Ramah Spring Leadership Training Conference ("Winer") at Ramah New England. And earlier this month, 101 representatives of our Ramah camps participated in our 4th Ramah Israel Bike Ride and Hiking Trip and have thus far raised almost \$470,000 to support our Ramah Tikvah programs. Three of our Tikvah Directors (Ralph Schwartz, Wisconsin; Orlee Krass, Poconos; and Howard Blas, Northern California/NRC) were riders! There's still time to support this important cause.

Enjoy this inaugural issue of *Tikvah Connects*/קשר תקווה. In each issue, we will share news of staff, alumni, and programs. Feel free to send ideas, feedback, and updates to me at howard@campramah.org or 413-374-7210.

II. Alumni Spotlight

Benjamin Paley is a graduate student pursuing a master's degree in public administration. He lives in Hollywood, Florida, and reports, "I was a Tikvah camper at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin for four summers, and a participant in the Atzmayim ("independence") program for one summer." Ben writes:

Attending a Ramah summer camp (sorry about this, fellow non-Wisconsin Ramahniks, but this shoutout goes to Ramah Wisconsin) is, for many, an experience that lasts a lifetime—sometimes generations. For me, a shy 14-year-old with high-functioning autism, the prospect of attending summer camp so far away from my familiar surroundings—a three-hour flight plus a seven-hour bus ride through the Dairy State—was daunting. But if I had the opportunity to speak with my 14-year-old self, I would tell him (despite his screams) that he would gain more from Ramah than any other experience.

And success at camp would lead to other important opportunities. One of those was a spot, fully funded, through the Hillel of Broward and Palm Beach counties, to attend the 2017 AIPAC Policy Conference. I was taken aback by the 18,000 Israel advocates all sitting in one room. Although I had been told about the number before, to see it in person was something else. Over a three-day period, I would meet and learn more about a variety of topics related to US-Israel relations with some of the 18,000 advocates in attendance, including 4,000 college students. One highlight of AIPAC: learning about other countries' relations with Israel.

III. Staff Spotlight

Yasher koach to various members of our Tikvah and Ramah families for their recent articles in Journal of Jewish Education, Issue 1: Special Needs and Inclusion in Jewish Education.

- "[It's Off to Work We Go: Attitude Toward Disability at Vocational Training Programs at Jewish Summer Camps](#)"—Daniel Olson
- "[Inclusion Coordinators at Jewish Summer Camps: Roles and Challenges](#)"—Laura Shefter, Abigail L. Uhrman, Lisa Tobin, Jeffrey S. Kress

IV. Upcoming Tikvah Birthright Israel Trip

The Tikvah program has a long, distinguished history of bringing members of the Tikvah community to Israel. All past trips have been “private pay,” meaning families were responsible for all costs. This year, we are offering something truly amazing!

The National Ramah Tikvah Network and Amazing Israel are pleased to announce our first-ever Birthright Israel trip. This free 10-day Israel trip is open to current members of any of our Ramah Tikvah programs, as well as to alumni. Applicants must be ages 18-29. Tentative dates are December 18-29, 2017. Please visit <http://bit.ly/AmazingIsraelRamahTikvah> to begin the process of applying to participate in this exciting trip.

V. A Word From Tikvah Vatikim (Veterans)

Sandy Driver Gordon is an educational consultant/advocate who works with families of children and young adults with disabilities. She was kind enough to share reflections on how Tikvah at Camp Ramah in California got started, and on the early years.

My late husband, Milton G. Gordon, was a member of the board at the University of Judaism and served as chairman for several years. It was during that time that I learned there were no Jewish camps or Jewish schools on the West Coast with a program for children with special needs. In 1981, I approached the director of Camp Ramah in California about the possibility of starting the first special education program in a Jewish camp on the West Coast. I continued “nudging” until one weekend when we were on a retreat for adults at the camp, I took a long walk with the director, Dr. Alvin Mars, and began to establish the Tikvah program. I learned about the Tikvah program in New England (which was established in 1970) that night.

We first went to the Bureau of Jewish Education and established the first special education committee in the Los Angeles Jewish Community. I went to the Jewish Community Foundation of the Jewish Federation Council of Greater Los Angeles with a grant proposal for \$36,000. It was accepted and in June 1983, 32 children with special needs, ages 10 to 13, came to Ramah California. In the early years, I traveled with our first director, David Ackerman, to family interviews and to scout the first participants, and I partnered with the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs to raise funds annually in support.

Today, the Tikvah/Ezra program is one of Ramah's proudest achievements and is well known in the Jewish community. For 34 years, I have followed several of these young adults who have found success in their lives with jobs, marriage, and in the Jewish community. I have continued to be in touch with some of the Tikvah alumni through a residential program I started in 1986 called Independence Center in Los Angeles, CA. Some of the Tikvah alumni came into the residential program and we have kept in touch through telephone, events, and Facebook. I had an alumni party at my home last summer.

VI. Creative Ways to Support Tikvah

Annual Purim 5K at Fair Lawn Jewish Center in New Jersey: How To Run a Run in YOUR Community, by Ilene Laufer

Five years ago, Rabbi Ronald Roth came to the Sisterhood of the Fair Lawn Jewish Center/Congregation B'nai Israel with the idea of a 5K run and 1 mile walk to celebrate Purim and raise money for a great cause. Our Sisterhood had many members who were runners, walkers, and supporters of social causes, so we readily agreed to organize this event. Rabbi Roth told us about the Tikvah program of Camp Ramah, as his own family had many ties to Camp Ramah. When we learned about the amazing programming available through Ramah, our organizing committee was sold on donating the proceeds to the Tikvah program.

Our goal was to donate all the registration fees of the runners and walkers to the Tikvah program. We have had so many generous sponsors over the five years we have been holding this event that we have never had to use any funds collected from the participants for our costs. We have raised approximately \$14,000 thus far for Tikvah!

The event has grown, with the number of participants doubling in five years. Many runners and walkers return every year because they believe in the cause and find inspiration in the children they can help. These past two years have been so special for us due to the participation of Howard Blas, who has shared his beautiful words about the Tikvah program and its campers prior to the start of the race.

This Purim 5K Run/1 Mile Walk has been a labor of love for our Sisterhood. It involves so many of the guiding principles of our Sisterhood, and combines our synagogue's community with the local running community— all while supporting a program that offers children a chance to be outdoors and feel included and special. We hope to continue to hold this event for many years to come. I can be reached at RFlanzman@aol.com with any questions, and I'd be happy to help other communities to start a similar initiative!

VII. ISO/Network: Helping Make Connections

- Israeli-American family in search of two Jewish roommates to share a home in the NY Metropolitan area with a wonderful and fun Ramah New England Tikvah alum in her late 20's. Also seeking assistance finding creative and enthusiastic female staff. Please call sister, Leora, at: 917-400-0762.
- [Yozma](#) is the track of Nativ that is dedicated to furthering the development of life and leadership skills that are essential for young adults with cognitive and social challenges to lead independent, meaningful Jewish lives and successfully transition to a college program. Yozma is searching for a male madrich for August 2017-May 2018. If you are interested, please email David Abraham, long-time Tikvah staff member and assistant director of Nativ for Yozma, at dabraham@uscj.org.