

How to Care for the Caregiver

By Brenda Shorkend, MA

We are all told that being a caregiver is detrimental to our health – one widely quoted study claims that elderly caregivers have a 63 percent higher risk of dying than non-caregivers. Other studies actually show increased longevity for people who are caring for their loved ones. The widely used example of taking an oxygen mask for yourself before you help a child or an older person is an important one. If we take care of ourselves, and find fulfillment in the caregiving role and in other aspects of our lives, we have a better chance of staying healthy and able to continue looking after our loved one. There are unexpected joys in caring for a family member, and many sources of stress and burden.

A huge number of Californians are taking care of an adult aged 50 or older: close to two million (or 16 percent) households, and close to four million family members. These caregivers are predominantly women over 60, but there are many younger people and men who are caring for a loved one. The care recipients are mostly parents, so the caregivers are often part of the sandwich generation – caring for two and sometimes three generations of parents, grandparents and children.

Some are caring for their parents and their grandchildren. Many have had to reduce or stop employment, so there are financial as well as physical, emotional and mental concerns. Caring for someone who has a cognitive impairment due to stroke, Alzheimer's disease or another dementia is particularly hard. So caregivers are not in a unique situation, and yet they tend to feel isolated and alone.

So what can you do?

There are many excellent resources out there – the Jewish Federation's Jewish Family Resource Services (JFRS) can point you in the right direction. Many of these resources, such as case management, support groups, meals on wheels and day care are free or provided on a sliding scale.

Christopher Reeve – Superman himself – who became quadriplegic after an accident, stressed the importance of keeping family relationships intact. Ask for help or hire help, or if necessary, seek out of home placement, so that you can still be the loving wife or caring son, and have the time and the energy to communicate your love to your family member.

It makes sense to build a circle of care: family, friends and professionals who can assist you in caring for your

family member. Ask friends for help and consult with experts: physicians, an attorney, financial planner, geriatric care manager, psychotherapist, to name a few. If your family dynamics are complicated (and whose aren't?) you may need some outside assistance in coming to decisions. In certain situations, you may not be the right person to take on the caregiving role, and it is important to recognize this and research the alternatives. Caregivers are a stubborn lot! Here's why:

We tend to focus on our loved ones and not on ourselves – but we need to care for ourselves in order to continue caring for them.

We are hesitant to share our duties with others – usually, all we need to do is ask!

We are uncomfortable seeking outside services – surprise! There are wonderful resources out there and many are free.

We tend to deny the effect of caregiving on our own quality of life, but paradoxically, we become better caregivers if we take care of ourselves.

So, start with something small: ask a friend to watch your mother when you go to get your hair styled, or ask the neighbor to visit while you go and have a coffee with a friend. You could simply visit the senior center with your husband. Once you have taken the first step, you will find that there is support and assistance out there for you.



Brenda Shorkend, M.A., has recently affiliated with Jewish Federation's Jewish Family Resource Services program. She is an independent

Geriatric Care Manager, serving Pasadena and the San Gabriel Valley. She is a member of the National Association of Geriatric Care Managers, with a background in Rehabilitation Psychology and Neuropsychology. Brenda has over 25 years of experience working with older people and their families in a wide variety of settings, in Israel and locally at Huntington Hospital. Her goal is to identify her clients' individual needs and tailor a personalized plan that will maximize their independence and autonomy while ensuring their safety and wellbeing. If you, a relative, or a friend is in need of a consultation about a problem, please contact JFRS at (626) 445-0810, Ext. 27, and we will assist you.

The Foundation for Jewish Camp Unveils New Research: Camp Has Long-term Effect on Engagement

The Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC) unveils the findings of CAMP WORKS, a landmark study revealing the long term effect of Jewish camp on its alumni. Jewish summer camp has long been associated with the North American Jewish community, but the lasting effect of these priceless and memorable summers have been purely anecdotal...until now. CAMP WORKS reveals that the influence of nonprofit Jewish camp can be seen in the ways adults choose to engage with the community and to the degree to which they associate with other Jews, long after the last sunset of the summer.

Throughout the past decade, FJC has worked tirelessly to promote the value and importance of the nonprofit Jewish overnight camp experience to North American Jews. As a result, Jewish camp has steadily become accepted as an essential part of building strong Jewish identity in children and creating a robust and enduring Jewish community. CAMP WORKS takes the next step and proves the long-term impact of overnight Jewish camp on Jewish attitudes and engagement.

Professor Steven M. Cohen led an esteemed research team responsible for these new findings utilizing data collected by some of the premier Jewish social scientists of our time. The study compares the Jewish behaviors of adults who had attended Jewish camp as children with those of adults who did not, and controls for factors involving Jewish education and upbringing. Ultimately, the report reveals that the childhood camp experience significantly impacts adult Jewish practices and commitments, and instills a sense of belonging to a larger Jewish community.

As adults, Jewish camp alumni are:

- 45% more likely to attend synagogue monthly or more, raising their voice in song and prayer as a community;
- 30% more likely to contribute to their local Jewish federation, demonstrating their care and solidarity for their fellow Jew as well as their feeling of being a part of a larger Jewish community;
- 55% more likely to feel very emotionally attached to Israel, continuing a centuries-old relationship to the Jewish Homeland and a contemporary kinship with Jews world-wide;
- 37% more likely to light Shabbat candles, bringing Jewish tradition and ritual in their home and sharing it with friends and family.

(as compared to adults who did not attend camp)

"CAMP WORKS clearly proves that Jewish overnight camp inspires a life-long commitment to Jewish living," explains Jeremy Fingerma, CEO, FJC, "As the North American Jewish community strives to find ways to evoke Jewish practice and passion in children and their families, CAMP WORKS proves that camp should be high on the docket. The Foundation takes this study as our calling card to continue to drive more kids to camp, enhance programming and emphasize professional development among camp leaders."

FJC has made research such as CAMP WORKS a priority in fulfilling the Foundation's mission: to unify and galvanize the field of Jewish overnight camp and to significantly increase the number of children participating in transformative summers at Jewish camp, resulting in a strong Jewish community. This report offers the fullest picture to date of the impact of Jewish summer camp.

"Having hard data that proves what we have always known - that camp 'works' to build a more vibrant Jewish future - is integral in helping us fulfill our mission of enabling more children the opportunity to experience Jewish camp," says Skip Vichness, Chair, Board of Directors, FJC. "As great as anecdotal evidence is, this new research pushes Jewish camp to new heights."

"The Foundation for Jewish Camp has worked successfully over the past 13 years to catapult Jewish camping onto the communal agenda. But FJC has never been comfortable assuming that camp 'works' based on studies that merely show a correlation between increased Jewish behavior and camp attendance. The Jewish community—as well as funders and parents with camp-age children—need proof that camp significantly impacts Jewish behavior and engagement well into campers' adult years, and Professor Steven Cohen's regression analysis demonstrates exactly that. There is no reason for any skepticism anymore: Camp works, and Jewish camping should be strongly supported and funded." - Elisa Spungen Bildner, Co-chair, FJC Board of Trustees

The Foundation for Jewish Camp (FJC) is the only public organization dedicated solely to nonprofit Jewish overnight camps. FJC employs a variety of strategies toward a single goal: to increase the number of children in Jewish summer camps. To this end, the Foundation creates inspiring camp leaders, expands access to and intensifies demand for camp, and develops programs to strengthen camps across the Jewish spectrum in North America. Through strategic partnerships on local and national levels, FJC raises the profile of Jewish camp and serves as a central resource for parents and organizations alike. FJC works with more than 150 camps, 70,000 campers, and 10,000 counselors across North America each summer to further its mission. www.jewishcamp.org.

Mordecai Ate Here

Editor's Note: This new food critic column by Robert Weissman will not appear in this edition of Jewish Community News -- it looks like he celebrated Purim a bit too much! Look for it again right here on page 7 in the May-June edition. Thank you!