

american *CAMP* association®

NATIONAL CAMP IMPACT STUDY

2017-2022

Final Report

Report prepared by
Bryn Spielvogel, Robert Warner, & Jim Sibthorp

Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism
250 S. 1850 E.
HPER-N 239
Salt Lake City, UT 84112

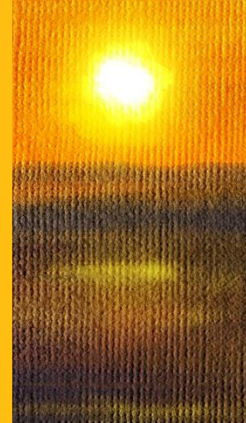


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The team from the University of Utah evolved over the life of the project. Dr. Jim Sibthorp served as the Principal Investigator for the duration of the project. Drs. Keven Rathunde and Doug Hacker were instrumental in the initial study design. Dr. Dan Richmond served as Post-doctoral Research Associate from 2018-2021 and was the primary person responsible for managing the project data collection, organization, and analysis during phase 3. This role was passed on to Dr. Bryn Spielvogel, who served as Post-doctoral Research Associate from 2021-2022. Dr. Camilla Hodge became more involved during phase 3, as the focus of the study gravitated toward understanding more about how families use summer and summer camps. Notwithstanding the contributions of faculty and staff, graduate students contributed most of the necessary labor and effort to make this project a success. Cait Wilson (Ph.D. 2018), Victoria Povilaitis (Ph.D. 2020), Rob Warner (Ph.D. 2022), Jessica Dickerson (MS, 2020), and Taylor Wycoff (MS, 2021) all played central leadership roles in phase 3. Many other graduate students, including Lisa Meerts-Brandsma (Ph.D. 2019), Meagan Ricks (Ph.D., 202?), Rachel McGovern (Ph.D. 202?), Mike Riley (Ph.D., 2021), Mike Froehly (Ph.D., TBD), Mary Godwin (MS, 2021), and Tara Hetz (MS, 2023) contributed efforts and ideas as part of our larger lab team.

INTRODUCTION

Project Overview

The five-year American Camp Association (ACA) National Impact Study began in January of 2017 with the primary purpose of understanding the long-term impacts of organized summer camp experiences for youth participants and young adult staff members. From its onset, this was a three-phase project. Each phase was essential for gathering data to inform the development of the next phase, which culminated in a 4-year national longitudinal study of camp attendees. While we initially framed this project in terms of the [National Research Council's \(2012\)](#) framework for academic and workplace readiness, finding partial support for aspects of this model in Phase 1 (e.g., [Wilson & Sibthorp, 2018](#)), we ultimately determined that social-emotional learning (SEL) frameworks better aligned with the Phase 1 and 2 results, thus we shifted our focus to SEL outcomes by Phase 3.

Phase 1, the **Exploratory Phase**, began with inductive interviews of prior campers in the spring of 2017. The goal was to identify distinct and transferable outcomes of summer camp experiences. In other words, what were the things that people learned at summer camp that helped them in other areas of their life, including in school and in their career?

Phase 2, the **Mapping Phase**, involved a retrospective, cross-sectional survey of prior campers. Building on findings from Phase 1, the objectives of this phase were threefold: 1) to identify which outcomes were uniquely attributable to the summer camp environment, as opposed to other settings such as school, home, and other out-of-school-time activities, 2) to understand how camp fit into the larger learning landscape, and 3) to identify aspects of the summer camp experience that may underlie developmental benefits.

Phase 3, the **Longitudinal Phase**, was comprised of two partner studies: the Youth Impact (YI) Study, and the Staff Impact (SI) Study. These interconnected studies were designed to assess longitudinal benefits of summer camp experiences for youth participants and seasonal staff. YI study participants were 9- and 10-year-old children who were enrolled in an ACA-accredited summer camp in 2018, while SI study participants were staff working at ACA-accredited camps in summer of 2018. Data were collected through surveys of child/parent dyads (YI) and camp staff (SI), as well as targeted interviews with a subset of participants from each study. Both projects involved bi-annual data collection, which began in summer of 2018 and occurred thereafter in spring and fall of each year, with the final wave of data collected in fall of 2021.

Study Focus & Evolution

At the inception of the Impact Study, the primary goal was to evaluate whether participation in summer camp shaped youth and young adults development over several years. By the start of Phase 3, however, the goals of the project had expanded slightly. The following research questions drove the development of Phase 3:

Youth Impact	Staff Impact
1. How is exposure to summer camp related to youth outcomes?	1. What do staff learn from summer camp employment?
2. What features of the camp experience are most important to youth development?	2. What features of the camp experience are most important for staff development?
3. How do families make decisions regarding summer camp participation?	3. How do staff make decisions about whether to return to camp employment?

Phases 1 and 2 helped the study team and Research Advisory Committee (ReAC) target outcomes deemed most distinct to summer camp. These outcomes, which were tracked over time for youth, included independence, affinity for nature, willingness to try new things, social awareness/friendships, grit/perseverance, and appreciation for diversity. Appreciation for diversity was dropped as a tracked outcome after the initial data collection, as child participants found the items confusing. The remaining five outcomes were tracked via both parent and child report at each data collection. The Staff Impact study included some of the same outcomes as the youth impact study but

focused more on career and leadership, omitting formal measures of independence, affinity for nature, and willingness to try new things.

Further, four setting-level variables were identified as central to the camp experience: engagement, sense of belonging, adult-youth relationships, and experiential learning. Participants were asked to consider the degree to which they experienced these elements in different settings (camp, school, and other summertime activities for youth; camp employment, non-camp employment, and college for staff).

Prospective and retrospective time diary data were similarly important to the YI study from the outset. These data were initially collected to allow the research team to calculate dosage information, including how many weeks per summer a child spent at summer camp. Over time we came to understand the value of asking follow-up questions to better understand how families were approaching summertime. These subsequent questions included information on summer highlights and meaningful activity choices.

In addition to gathering data pertaining to our primary research questions, it was important to understand the participants that were providing us data. Thus, for youth participants, we collected a range of family information, including their history with summer camp, information on other family members, income, and family functioning. Through the interviews, we became more familiar with some of the families on a personal level. For staff participants, we gathered information on year on college, grade point average, and employment status.

As the study evolved, it became clear that, in addition to addressing the study's initial mandate, interesting and meaningful data might be collected to address other research questions. Early in the process, we began work to understand how parents and children make summertime activity decisions. This research question was messier than tracking youth outcomes, and, thus, we added some more exploratory survey items and scales to inform this question. Some of these survey questions targeted the role of a child's spark in summertime decisions. Other survey questions sought to understand parent and child contributions to decision-making about summer camp participation, parental goals for summer camp, constraints to camp attendance, and potential constraint negotiation strategies. For staff, we had originally hoped to see development tied to duration of camp employment. Based on early findings, the focus shifted more to how camp can be a valuable and enriching employment option for young adults, where it helps them hone their work preferences and values while affording rich developmental opportunities.

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring of 2020 complicated the study. Although all data were collected via online surveys and phone interviews, making it feasible to continue with the study, we expected that the pandemic would have profound effects on our participants and their use of summertime. Limited use of summer camps during summer of 2020 and potentially beyond would impact our ability to assess connections between camp participation and outcomes over time. However, we elected to move forward with data collection. Questions about the impact of COVID-19 on participants and their summertime activities were added in the spring and fall 2020.

As data were collected and preliminary analyses undertaken, our focus shifted towards areas of inquiry that appeared to be most fruitful and informative. For instance, questions pertaining to camp exposure/dosage gave way to those related to features of the camp experience. These shifts are documented in prior ReAC reports and are reflected in the present report.

Report Content & Organization

This report details key conclusions from the National Impact Study. Many of these findings are not new, having been documented in prior reports or published academic articles (as referenced throughout). However, they are packaged to highlight the essential takeaways of the National Impact Study, based on a complete picture of the study from start to end. Results are organized around three overarching themes: 1) The Importance of High-Quality Camp Experiences, 2) Understanding Camp in Context, and 3) Decision-Making About Camp. Most of the findings outlined in these sections were drawn from Phase 3, which was designed with the express purpose of systematically assessing how exposure to and experiences at camp were connected to youth and staff development. However, findings from earlier phases are integrated where appropriate. For a discussion of how Phase 1 and 2 results should be understood in light of findings from Phase 3, see page 47.

Two additional sections are included to provide a complete picture of project findings and to offer ideas for future research. **Secondary Findings** provides an overview of research that has been (or will be) published based on data from the Impact Study, including from Phases 1 and 2. It excludes research that was discussed in detail in an earlier section of the report. The final section, **Supplemental Explorations**, summarizes investigations that began as part of the Impact Study, but were not fully realized. This includes analyses that pertained to primary research questions but that did not provide useful insights, as well as investigations that were not central to the goals of the Impact Study but may be informative for future research.

Several appendices are also included. This includes a results appendix (A), a full list of peer-reviewed publications resulting from the National Impact Study (B), and a full list of prior ReAC reports, along with linked PDF documents for easy access.

Summary of Key Findings

Conclusion 1: High-quality camp experiences are linked to youth and staff development.

Features of a High-Quality Camp Experience

- Youth who reported high levels of engagement at camp generally also reported high levels of belonging, supportive youth-staff relationships, and opportunities for action-based and – to a lesser extent – reflection-based experiential learning. Meanwhile, youth who reported lower levels of engagement tended to report worse experiences in other areas as well.
- Considering the camp experience holistically (across all features), youths’ experiences at camp generally fell into three categories: Good, Great, or Exceptional. In 2018, however, some youth had Just Okay experiences (i.e., experiences characterized by moderate rather than high levels of engagement, belonging, etc.).
- While youth often had consistent camp experiences across years – for instance, having a Great Experience in 2018, 2019, and 2021 – there was also a good deal of variation in the types of experiences youth had from year-to-year, with 30% experiencing improvements in quality of experiences from one year to the next, and 25% experiencing declines.

How Camp Experiences Are Related to Youth Outcomes

- Youth who had higher quality camp experiences across waves reported higher levels of affinity for nature, willingness to try new things, social awareness, independence, and grit than youth who had lower quality camp experiences across waves. Youth who had higher-quality camp experiences tended to also have higher levels of *parent-reported* affinity for nature and willingness to try new things, on average, but there were no differences in parent-reported independence or youth friendships.
- After a high-quality camp experience, youth reported higher affinity for nature, independence, and social awareness than they did after a lower quality camp experience; parents also reported that their child had better friendships following a higher versus a lower quality camp experience.
- While high-quality camp experiences were predictive of all youth-reported outcomes within and/or between individuals, they were far less predictive of parent-reported outcomes, likely due to lower levels of variance on these indicators.

Enduring Connections Between Camp Experiences and Youth Outcomes

- Having a high-quality camp experience at the start of the study was connected to improved outcomes in the short-term *and* several years after camp attendance, with the most enduring effects emerging for affinity for nature, willingness to try new things, grit, and child friendships.
- For most outcomes, these relationships were driven by significant short-term effects that carried forward over time. In other words, improvements in youth outcomes were evident the Fall after camp, rather than emerging gradually. This suggests that positive experiences at camp give youth a boost in skills, perhaps akin to an intervention.

Lasting Camp Memories and Appreciation for Being Present

- Positive peer relationships and new opportunities are part of what makes camp experiences memorable to youth. Memorable experiences like these may help explain the enduring effects of a high-quality camp experience.
- Youth who had higher quality camp experiences in terms of engagement, belonging, youth-adult relationships, and experiential learning also reported higher levels of appreciation for being present after camp. The interconnected nature of these different aspects of the camp experience makes it difficult to determine whether high-quality camp experiences promote appreciation for being present, or whether youth who already appreciate being present are more likely to have positive experiences at camp.

Camp Experiences Related to Identity Development Among Staff

- Participants' stories about their work at camp had more evidence of lasting meaning than their stories about non-camp early-life employment. Additionally, camp offered more opportunities to try new things, make a difference, and feel challenged than their other early-life employment.
- Camp employment was observed to support emerging adults' self-authorship development, such as making decisions on one's own, and making decisions that are value-driven, particularly when camp sparked change or confirmed staffs' values.

Practical Takeaways

The feature that differentiates great and exceptional experiences at camp is opportunities for reflection-based experiential learning. Camps may thus want to integrate opportunities for reflection into their programming.

High-quality camp experiences predict youth outcomes, with some connections enduring several years after the quality camp experience. Improving camp quality may thus have short- and long-term benefits for youth development.

Assets of the camp environment include peer relationships, new opportunities, and being in the moment. Camps are well-positioned to build these things into programming.

Employment at camp provides young adults an avenue for exploring and solidifying their identities, and for making decisions that align with their values and beliefs. This information may be used to recruit staff for camp employment.

Conclusion 2: Summer camp is one piece of a larger developmental ecosystem. Though it may offer unique benefits compared to some settings, camp is best understood as a setting that can complement youths' other life experiences.

Connections Between Camp and School

- Experiences in camp and school settings appear to be mutually reinforcing.
- In general, youth who had higher quality camp experiences than their peers also had better school experiences the following Spring. Additionally, youth who reported higher quality school experiences than their peers in Spring 2019 tended to have better camp experiences than those peers the following summer, even when comparing youth who had similar camp experiences in summer of 2018.
- Experiences at camp predicted all child-reported outcomes at the same wave (e.g., camp experiences reported in fall of 2018 predicted outcomes in fall of 2018), as were experiences at school. Youth who reported higher-quality experiences than peers in each of these settings generally reported higher outcome levels than those peers.
- There were significant *indirect effects* of camp experiences on later outcomes through school experiences, meaning that "effects" of quality camp experiences on social awareness, grit, willingness to try new things, and affinity for nature were partly transmitted through improvements in school experiences.

Camp as Part of an Enriching Summer

- Data on where youth spent time over summer were used to examine variation in how families construct youths' summertime. Findings revealed that many youth had balanced summers characterized by time in a variety of settings, including day camp, overnight camp, on vacation, at home, and – in some cases – in specialized activities (sports or arts/music focused). Other youth spent the majority of their time in one enrichment setting. There was also a large portion who spent most of their summer at home.
- Consideration of descriptive statistics suggests that factors such as income and family size may impact how families decide to use their summer. For instance, youth whose families had lower levels of income tended to spend more time at home than others, likely due to the expense of extracurricular activities. Meanwhile, youth in smaller households were more often in the Day Camper and Overnight Camper profiles, perhaps due to childcare needs.
- Many youth changed their approach to summertime at some point over the course of the study. In general, results show that many youth spent an increasing amount of time at home in later years, and youth who spent most of their summer at camp early in the study generally spent fewer weeks there by the end, balancing camp with time at home. These changes are likely explained by child maturation and interest development; pragmatic concerns related to childcare, expenses, and COVID-19; and parent views about how their kids should use summertime.
- Comparing the qualities of summer camp to those of other summertime settings, we found that camp offered similar levels of engagement, belonging, experiential learning, and youth-adult relationships compared to specialized activities like sports and arts/music. However, camp settings were most differentiated from being at home, which was the least engaging, and from family vacation, which involved less experiential learning.

Comparing Camp Employment to School and Other Work for Staff

- Summer camp often offered significantly higher levels of belonging, engagement, and experiential learning than school and other work settings.
- Across both quantitative and qualitative data, camp employment seems more related to the development of social awareness/relationships skills and leadership skills than school or non-camp employment.
- Participants who worked at a camp during the summer of 2019 reported that their work was more meaningful than did participants working in other settings. Meaningfulness was driven by relationships with coworkers, opportunities to make a difference, and opportunities to learn and develop skills.
- Connections between camp and meaningful work endured beyond staff's employment at camp. Participants who had better camp employment experiences than others in 2018 reported that their work in the fall of 2021 was more meaningful than did those peers, regardless of whether they were still working at camp. This suggests that high-quality camp experiences help staff identify what's important to them in work and seek that out in future employment.
- Additional analyses confirmed that working at summer camp is a seasonal employment setting that can support the discovery, reinforcement, and pruning of work values (i.e., what people want in work). This appears to be driven by unique features of camp employment, such as the novel social environment, the embedded nature of the work, the intense schedule, and the impact of the work, among other things.

Practical Takeaways

An exceptional camp experience may support improvements in youths' school experiences, with benefits for developmental outcomes. This underscores the importance of promoting high-quality camp experiences. However, it also suggests that youth having trouble at school may need extra support to benefit fully from the camp experience. It may be useful for camps to build partnerships with schools to promote positive experiences across the two settings.

Camp is one part of a larger summertime ecosystem. While evidence suggests that camp may offer developmental benefits to youth, other settings such as sports and arts/music activities may offer similar benefits given shared qualities. However, even youth who spent the majority of their time in these settings tended to participate in a few weeks of camp. It may thus be useful to view these as complementary settings that offer engagement, belonging,

experiential learning, and positive youth-adult relationships through different avenues.

How youth use their summertime appears to change as they get older. This is likely a natural developmental progression. While some youth de-prioritize time at summer camp in favor of other settings (particularly being at home), others continue to prioritize camp. However, even these youth generally spend less time at camp than they did in younger years. They may therefore be more selective in choosing which camp(s) to attend as they get older.

Camp employment seems to provide some unique opportunities compared to other settings, with potential benefits for youths' skill and career development. For instance, things like novelty and ability to make an impact allow young adults use camp employment to determine qualities that make work meaningful for them, and then seek those qualities in future employment. Summer camp employment can thus be viewed as a viable stepping-stone in young adult career development.

Conclusion 3: People consider a myriad of factors in making decisions about camp attendance and employment, from economic constraints to socioemotional needs.

Drivers of Camp Attendance

- Parents – often mothers – contributed most to camp-related decision-making, with youth contributing more to the initiation phase than other phases.
- While quantitative data showed minimal changes in youth contributions to decision-making about camp over time, interview findings suggest that caregivers provide their children more leeway in deciding what they want to do during summer as they get older.
- Parents had three types of camp-related goals for their children: interactive learning, intrapersonal development, and fun/belonging. At the same time, caregivers also considered “camp fit” factors in deciding where to send their child to camp. These were logistics/cost, program quality, child fit, institutional ties, and social connections.
- Parents with low levels of income generally wanted their children to get more out of camp than did parents with high levels of income, but they were more constrained in terms of costs and logistics. They also valued institutional ties more than higher income families.
- Select groups of youth, including Black and Asian youth, and youth from families with fewer socioeconomic resources attended camp over fewer years than their peers (camp attendance was less “enduring”).
- Youth from families with fewer socioeconomic resources, those with less family history with camp, and those in larger households attended camp for fewer weeks than their peers over the course of the study (camp attendance was less “intense”).

Decision-Making About Summer Camp Employment

- Motivations to work at summer camp included a desire to give back to the camp community, make a difference in campers' lives, and create meaningful community. For many, these ideas were guided by prior experiences as a camper. Other motivations included fun and skill development.
- Staff reported that retention at camp was driven by factors like making a difference and embeddedness with the camp community. Participants who chose not to return to camp reported that low pay, poor fit, other opportunities related to career or life, and “aging out” were driving factors.
- Staff experiences at camp were also connected to their likelihood of returning to camp employment. Specifically, we found that quality of staff experiences in terms of belonging, engagement, and experiential learning during their initial employment predicted returning to camp employment after the first year.

Practical Takeaways

Families balance competing needs and interests in making decisions about sending their children to camp. Unfortunately, some families must navigate more constraints than others, resulting in key inequities in camp

attendance even within a sample of families that send their children to camp.

Camps need to continue to find ways to reduce barriers to camp attendance for children from low-income homes through scholarship programs and relationship building with local institutions, such as churches and schools. More research is needed to understand racial/ethnic differences in camp attendance.

Recruiting staff from campership is a viable mechanism for finding camp employees. However, it may be worth emphasizing to potential staff – whether or not they were former campers – that camp offers opportunities to develop skills and values that are relevant to career advancement. Young adults who are focused on developing career skills may otherwise not view camp as an employment option, despite its unique assets.

While some staff are unlikely to return to summer camp employment (in the case of poor fit, for instance), others may be more likely to return if pay is improved or opportunities for career development are offered. Training seasonal staff to market skills developed through camp employment may also be useful. Additionally, evaluating seasonal staff's employment experiences may support camps in improving the camp environment in an ongoing manner, with potential benefits for retention.

SAMPLING & PARTICIPANTS

Sampling Strategy

In the spring of 2018, the American Camp Association invited a stratified sample of summer camps to recruit campers and their caregivers into the Youth Impact Study, and to recruit young adult camp staff into the Staff Impact Study. The intent was to enroll families and staff from 50 camps that represented the breadth of ACA accredited camps across the United States (e.g., both day and overnight camps; agency, for-profit, religiously affiliated, and specialty camps). Sixty camp directors were contacted and asked to forward study information to families enrolled in their programs and staff working at their camp in 2018. Potential participants were informed that they were invited to participate, that participation would be voluntary, and that they would be compensated with a \$20 gift card for completing the survey at each wave. Ultimately, 449 rising 5th graders were enrolled in the Youth Impact Study from 48 ACA accredited camps, and 254 emerging adult staff were enrolled in the Staff Impact Study from 50 ACA accredited camps. The samples are further described below.

Participants

Youth Impact

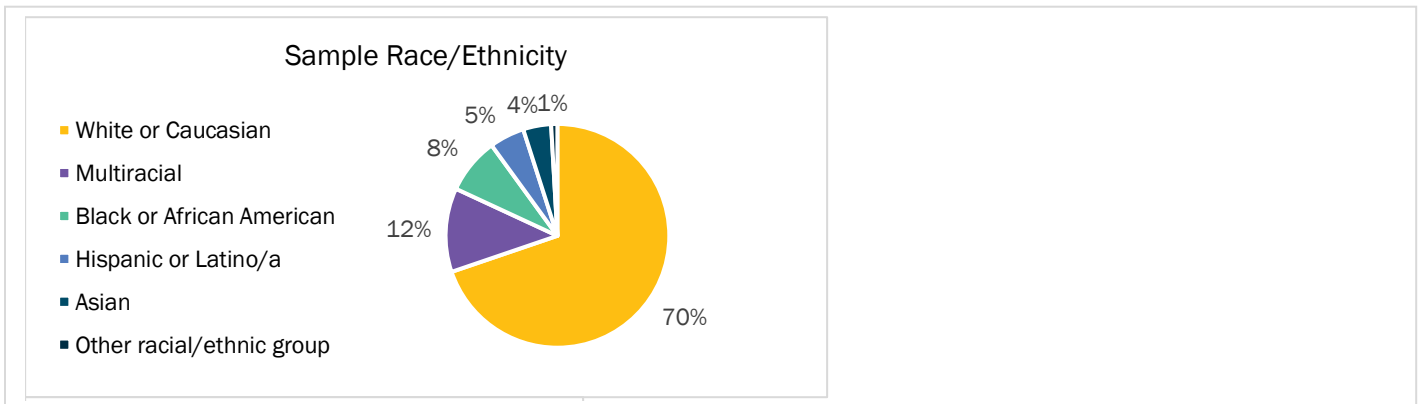
Four hundred and forty-nine parent-child dyads participated in the summer 2018 round of data collection. Participants were recruited from 48 ACA-accredited camps, meaning that all youth in the study had attended camp at least once. The sample of participants dropped across waves, with a maximum of 10% attrition from one wave to the next. Parent-child dyads participated in 6.6 waves on average (out of 8), with a minimum of 1 wave (n = 11) and a maximum of 8 waves (n = 248).

Table 1. Family Responses by Collection Period

	2018		2019		2020		2021	
	Summer	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall
Surveys collected	449	404	380	361	359	359	347	327
Interviews conducted	-	234	111	104	98	101	68	84
Attrition since last wave		10%	6%	5%	<1%	0%	1.4%	6%

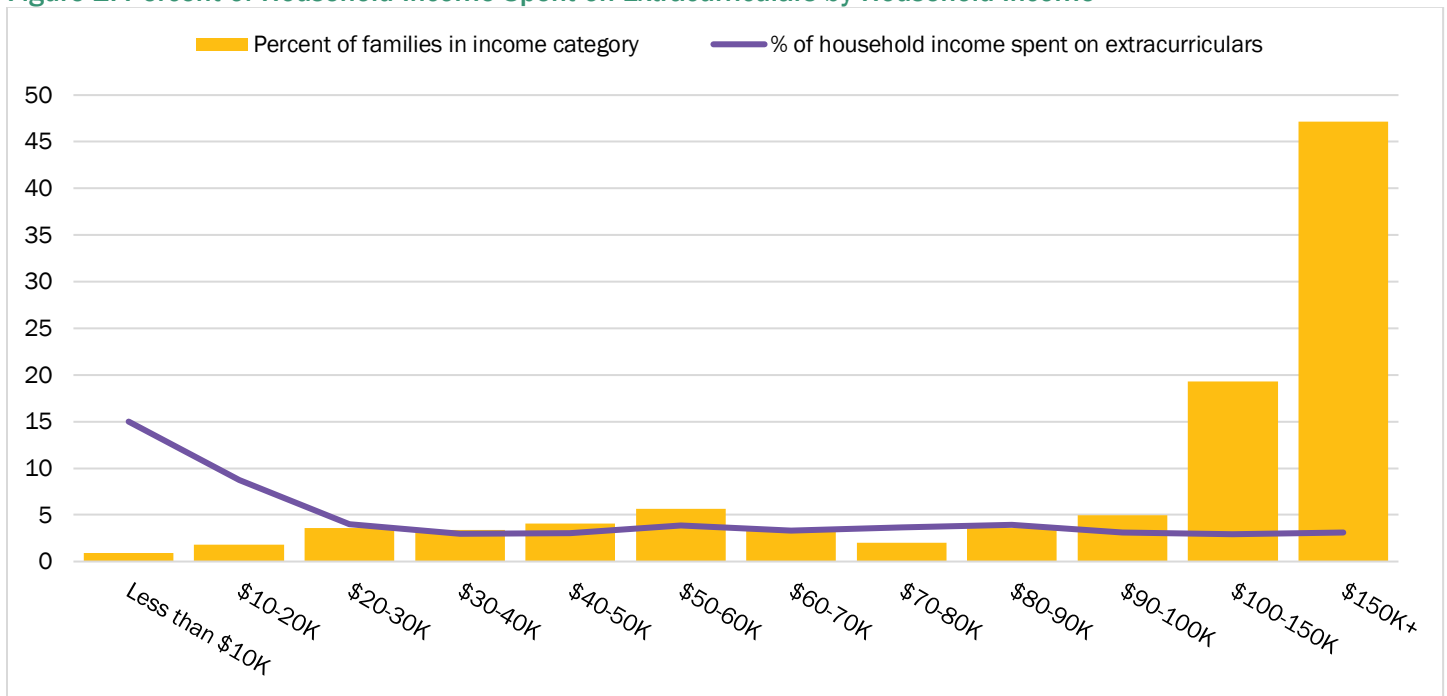
A slight majority of participating youth were female (52%) as reported by caregivers in 2018, with the remaining 48% of youth identified as male. By 2021, a few youth identified as non-binary or gender non-conforming. Nearly 70% of youth were White, 12% were multiracial, 8% were Black or African American, 5% were Hispanic or Latino/a, 4% were Asian, and less than 1% were American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or a different race/ethnicity as reported by their primary caregiver. As seen in the chart below, White and Multiracial youth are overrepresented in the sample considering the racial/ethnic makeup of the nation at large, while Black and Hispanic or Latino/a youth are underrepresented in the sample ([ChildTrends, 2018](#)).

Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity of Sample Versus Nation



Families who participated in the study were largely well-educated and affluent. Around 80% of parent respondents reported having at least a 4-year degree, having household earnings above the 2018 national median (\$63,179; [Guzman, 2019](#)), and living with a spouse or partner. Over 65% of households had earnings of \$100,000 or more, while less than 6% fell under the 2018 federal poverty threshold for a family of 4 ([Federal Poverty Guidelines, 2018](#)). On average, families spent about \$4300 on extracurricular and other enrichment activities for their child in 2018. Around 7% of caregivers reported spending below \$500, while 12% reported spending upwards of \$10,000. Households making more than \$20,000 a year spent between 3-4% of their annual income on extracurricular activities, on average, indicating that as family income increases, so too does the amount spent on these activities (see the below chart). Notably, families making less than \$20,000 spent a higher portion of their annual income on extracurriculars than those with higher levels of income.

Figure 2. Percent of Household Income Spent on Extracurriculars by Household Income



Staff Impact

Two hundred and fifty first-year staff from 50 ACA-accredited camps participated in the summer 2018 round of data collection. The sample of participants dropped across waves, with a maximum of 19% attrition from one wave to the next. Staff participated in 5.88 waves on average (out of 8), with a minimum of 1 wave (n = 25) and a maximum of 8 waves (n = 114).

Table 2. Staff Responses by Collection Period

	2018		2019		2020		2021	
	Summer	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall
Surveys collected	254	205	204	185	184	155	161	150
Interviews conducted	-	91	86	76	76	75	69	-
Attrition since last wave	-	19%	<1%	9%	<1%	16%	-	7%

In 2018, the average age of participants was 20 years old. Sixty nine percent identified as female, 29% as male, and 1% as gender non-conforming. In terms of race/ethnicity, the sample included more White and less Black and Asian participants than the Youth Impact Study, as 76% self-identified as White, 8% as multiracial, 6% as Black or African American, 5% as Hispanic or Latino/a, 3% as Asian, and less than 1% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, or a different race/ethnicity.

PRIMARY FINDINGS

The Importance of High-Quality Camp Experiences

High-quality camp experiences are linked to youth and staff development.

Among youth, high-quality camp experiences were generally characterized by high levels of engagement and belonging, supportive youth-staff relationships, opportunities for action-based experiential learning, and – to a slightly lesser degree – opportunities for reflection-based experiential learning. These different facets of the camp experience generally cooccurred, such that youth who reported high levels of engagement tended to also report high levels of belonging, youth-adult relationships, and experiential learning, while youth who reported more moderate levels of engagement tended to also report moderate levels of belonging, etc. It is important to note, however, that many youth varied in their camp experiences across time, perhaps as a consequence of differences in program quality across camps (among other things).

Analyses indicate that high-quality camp experiences are related to improved outcomes for campers. Youth who had better experiences at camp than their peers generally had better outcomes, both in the short-term and several years after attending camp. Additionally, among youth who attended camp across multiple summers, youth had better outcomes following a higher versus lower quality camp experience. These findings may be related to memorable experiences youth have at camp, which often occurred during unstructured time and involved positive peer relationships and new experiences. They may also be related to youth experiences of “being present” at camp, though more research is needed on this front.

For young adult staff, camp experiences were most beneficial when they offered developmental opportunities. Camp was generally a more meaningful employment setting than other workplaces, in part because camp employment provides more opportunities to try new things, make a difference, and be challenged. Moreover, camp experiences that were developmentally effective – in other words, ones that provided staff an opportunity to see the world in a different way – were supportive of self-authorship, i.e., independent and value-based decision-making. Overall, evidence suggest that camp employment can support the identity development of young adult staff.

Although the correlational nature of the Youth and Staff Impact Studies makes it impossible to draw causal conclusions, this body of evidence suggests that high-quality camp experiences **may** contribute to positive developmental outcomes in the short- and long-run. This points to the importance of high-quality camp programming, effective staff integration, and person-camp fit. Conducting assessments of camper and staff experiences may help camps improve programming and meet the needs of their camp community.

It is important to note that these conclusions are drawn from samples of youth and staff who were enrolled in or working at ACA-accredited camps in 2018. These samples were predominantly White and affluent. More research is needed to assess whether these patterns hold for individuals and groups who are not well represented in the present study.

Features of a High-Quality Camp Experience

Having a chronic illness at a young age often means you can't relate to other kids. It was an amazing feeling like I belonged for once. - Camper

My amazing counselors and fellow campers, being surrounded by empowered, confident, sometimes silly women inspired me. I wanted to be just like my leaders. – Camper

[You] get to learn about yourself somewhere you feel you belong. – Camper



This study focused on five facets of the camp experience: engagement, sense of belonging, youth-adult relationships, action-based experiential learning, and reflection-based experiential learning. These measures were selected for inclusion because of their importance and distinctness in the first (Wilson et al, 2019) and second (Sibthorp et al., 2020) phases of the ACA Impact Study. Details on these measures are included in Table 3. Items pertaining to engagement, sense of belonging, and youth-adult relationships were drawn from the Panorama Grades 3–5 Student Survey (Panorama Education, 2016), wherein youth were asked about different aspects of their school experience. For the Youth Impact Study, youth were asked to report on their experiences in school and at camp each year. Items related to experiential learning came from the Girl Scout Research Institute (GSRI, 2009). For each construct, survey items were averaged to create a composite (combined) measure. This resulted in five camp (and school) experience indicators.

Table 3. Details on Camp and School Experience Constructs

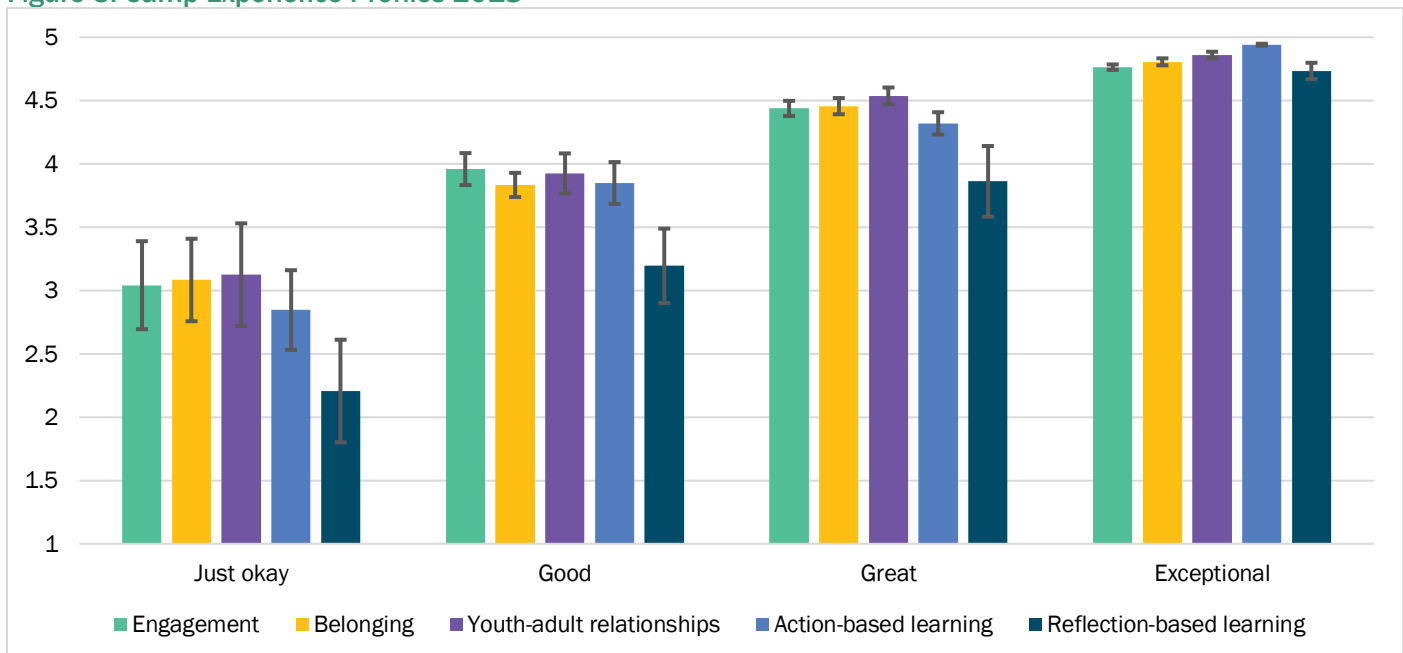
Construct	Definition	Survey Items	Source
Engagement	How attentive and invested youth are in camp/school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How excited were you about going to camp/school? • How focused were you on activities at camp/school? • At camp, how excited were you to participate in activities? • When you are not at camp/school, how often do you talk about ideas or experiences from camp/school? • How interested are you in what you do at camp/school? 	Panorama Student Survey
Sense of Belonging	How much campers/students feel that they are valued members of the camp/school community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well did people at your camp/school understand you as a person? • How much support did the adults at your camp/school give you? • How much respect did other kids at camp/school show you? • Overall how much do you feel like you belonged at camp/school? 	Panorama Student Survey
Youth-Adult Relationships	How strong the social connection is between adult leaders and youth within and beyond the camp/school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How respectful were camp counselors towards you at camp/school? • If you were upset at camp/school, how concerned would camp counselors/teachers be? • When camp counselors/teachers at your camp/school asked, "how are you?", how often do you feel that camp counselors/teachers really wanted to know your answer? • How excited would you be to have your camp counselors/teachers again at your camp/school? 	Panorama Student Survey
Experiential Learning	How much the experience involves hands-on learning that engages youth in an ongoing cycle of action and reflection.	<p><i>Action-based</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When we did activities or projects, we learned new things. • We got to try out our ideas and see how they worked. • We learned by doing, not by just listening. <p><i>Reflection-based</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We figured out how to do better in the future. • We talked about what worked and what didn't work (on projects, activities, etc) • We talked about what we liked and didn't like about learning experiences (projects, activities, etc.) 	Girl Scout Research Institute

We believe whole heartedly in the curriculum and opportunities for personal growth, confidence, skills you wouldn't otherwise learn. There's a whole host of mental/spiritual/physical/social growth that goes along with camps that you don't otherwise get anywhere else. – Parent of camper

Being sat down in the classroom and kind of being told this is how you work in a group, this is how those two interact with others when you're playing or doing project service...I feel like that would not have been as effective as my time at camp where I was actually doing it and experiencing it and learning it in the real time. – Former camper

An analytic strategy known as **Latent Profile Analysis (LPA)** was used to consider the different types of experiences youth had at camp based on the five aforementioned indicators. LPAs were conducted for 2018, 2019, and 2021 camp experiences; 2020 camp experiences were not analyzed given how few youth attended camp in 2020. The figure below provides an illustrative example of these profiles from 2018, including means and variances for each indicator included in the analysis.

Figure 3. Camp Experience Profiles 2018



Note: Black error bars show the amount of variance in the given indicator for each profile. Higher levels of variance indicate a wider diversity of experiences within that profile.

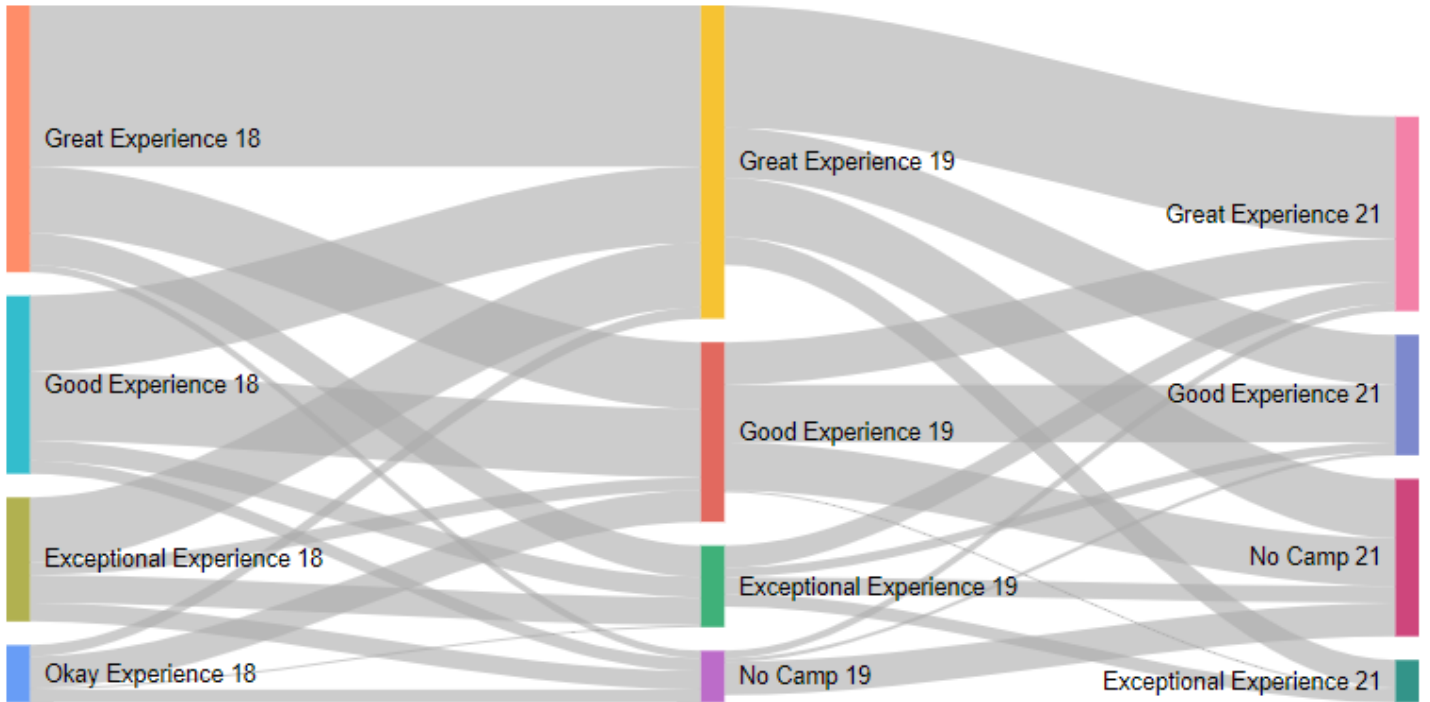
In 2018, youths' experiences at camp generally fell into four categories: Okay ($n = 40$), Good ($n = 116$), Great ($n = 170$), and Exceptional ($n = 76$). With the exception of Okay Experience, which was not present after 2018, these profiles were replicated in 2019 and 2021, indicating that these camp experience typologies were consistent over time. At each wave, having a Great Experience was most common, followed by having a Good Experience. Okay Experiences and Exceptional Experiences were least common.

He, as a younger child, he was really nervous about going to camp and being by himself and for us to leave, and this year there was no problem with that—he was super excited to go to [camp] this summer. – Parent of camper

As seen above, each profile is characterized by incremental improvements in overall camp experiences – that is, mean levels of engagement, belonging, adult-youth relationships, and experiential learning. In other words, it is clear from these profiles that different facets of the camp experience tend to cluster together, which lends itself to a global “camp quality” measure. However, it is worth noting that youth generally reported slightly less reflection-based experiential learning at camp than engagement, belonging, etc., and there is more variance on this indicator across profiles. This suggests that reflection-based learning is less consistently integrated into the camp experience than the other features. Given the lower scores, reflection-based experiential learning may represent an opportunity for improvement at summer camps.

While camp experience profiles were mostly consistent over time, it was important to assess whether individual campers changed profiles from year-to-year. The visual below shows how youth transitioned between camp experience profiles across years based on their most likely profile membership at each wave.

Figure 4. Latent Profile Transitions for Camp Experiences



Note: This Sankey Diagram shows the flow of youth between different camp experience profiles between 2018, 2019, and 2021. For youth who attended camp in the given year, profile membership at each wave was estimated based on youths’ reported level of engagement, belonging, adult-youth relationships, and experiential learning.

While youth often had consistent camp experiences across years – for instance, having a Great Experience in 2018, 2019, and 2020 – there was also a good deal of variation in profile membership. For instance, about 30% of kids moved to a “better” camp experience profile from 2018 to 2019, while 25% moved to a “worse” profile (though it is important to keep in mind that the worst profile was Good Experience). The fact that many youth changed profiles suggests that camp experiences are not driven solely by stable youth characteristics, such as personality. Rather, camp experiences are likely the result of contextual factors such as camp program quality, location, and weather, as well as youth factors such as interest in camp, mental health, and family stress.

How Camp Experiences Are Related to Youth Outcomes

She grew as a person at camp, hard first day but persevered and showed grit. – Parent of camper

The most valuable thing I learned at camp was how everyone deserves to be treated equal. A lot of times people treat us children with illnesses differently due to our conditions or just downgrade us. Camp has brought back the meaning of belonging somewhere in this world no matter how different or dysfunctional we seem to be. It's a place where we do belong and we can be whoever and whatever we want to be. – Camper

Having those seven weeks away from home every summer made me more independent and prepared me to go to a boarding school when I was fourteen which was never easy, but I definitely wouldn't have made it these four years at boarding school if I hadn't been at camp...I don't know if it would have been impossible, but it would have been harder if I hadn't had that practice at camp of making sure that I got to my activities on time, making sure that I was dressed in the morning, and brushing my teeth, and all that stuff, even though I had counselors to remind me to do all that stuff. But it's really different than having your parents around. So it prepared me for that. – Former camper

Youth outcomes were measured over time to allow for longitudinal analyses. Measures, described in the table below, were selected based on findings from Phases 1 and 2. See Study Focus & Evolution for more information on how these measures were selected.

Table 4. Details on Youth Outcome Measures

Construct	Definition	Survey Items	Source
Affinity for nature	How emotionally attracted youth are to nature.	<p>Child Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I like being in nature. I want to spend time outdoors. I enjoy the freedom of being outside. I am comfortable in the outdoors. I feel connected to the natural environment. <p>Parent Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My child enjoys the outdoors. My child likes the outdoors. My child prefers being outdoors. 	Youth Outcomes Battery 2.0
Willingness to try new things	How curious, inquisitive, and eager to learn new things youth are.	<p>Child Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I want to meet new people I enjoy getting to know new people. I would like to travel to places I've never been before. I want to visit places that are different from where I live. I look forward to learning to do new activities. I want to do new things. I want to learn more about new ideas. I look forward to thinking about new things. <p>Parent Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My child likes to meet new people. My child likes to try new activities. My child likes to visit new places. 	Youth Outcomes Battery 2.0
Independence	How well youth can solve problems and carry out day-to-day activities without assistance from adults.	<p>Child Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am comfortable being away from my family. I can make good decisions even when members of my family aren't present. I don't need adults to help me do things. I can do things on my own. 	Youth Outcomes Battery 2.0



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am independent. • I can solve problems without help from my friends. • I can make decisions by myself. • I can make decisions without adults helping me. <p>Parent Report*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My child can figure things out without adult assistance. • My child can take care of themselves. • My child is good at making decisions without adult support. <p>*Prior to answer questions about their own child, parents read 3 anchoring vignettes portraying children with high, moderate, and low independence, and rated these hypothetical children in terms of independence.</p>	
Social awareness	How well youth consider the perspectives of others and empathize with them.	<p>Child Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the past 30 days, how carefully did you listen to other people's point of view? • During the past 30 days, how much did you care about other people's feelings? • During the past 30 days, how often did you compliment other's accomplishments? • During the past 30 days, how well did you get along with students who are different from you? • During the past 30 days, how clearly were you able to describe your feelings? • During the past 30 days, when others disagreed with you, how respectful were you of their views? • During the past 30 days, to what extent were you able to stand up for yourself without putting others down? • During the past 30 days, to what extent were you able to disagree with others without starting an argument? 	Panorama Student Survey (Grade 3-5)
Friendships	The degree to which youths' relationships with peers are characterized by mutual experience of support and encouragement, affect, companionship, loyalty, and trust.	<p>Parent Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My child is supportive of his/her friends. • My child encourages his/her friends. • My child takes advantage of his or her friends.* • My child cares about his/her friends. • My child finds it hard to make friends.* • My child is there when a close friend needs her/him. • My child would stand up for her/his friends. • My child finds it hard to keep friends.* • My child tries hard to be good to her/his friends.* <p>*reverse coded</p>	Child Trends Positive Indicators Project
Grit	How well youth are able to persevere through setbacks to achieve important long-term goals.	<p>Child Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often do you stay focused on the same goal for more than 30 days at a time? • If you fail to reach an important goal, how likely are you to try again? • When you are working on a project that matters a lot to you, how focused can you stay when there are lots of distractions? • If you have a problem while working towards an important goal, how well can you keep working? 	Panorama Student Survey (Grade 3-5)

To consider the relationship between camp experiences and youth outcome, we employed **Mixed Effects (ME)** models. Instead of simply comparing youth who have one type of experience to youth who have a different type of experience, this analytic strategy allows us to simultaneously compare youth to themselves over time. This brings us closer to identifying causal connections between different factors, such as camp experiences and outcomes.

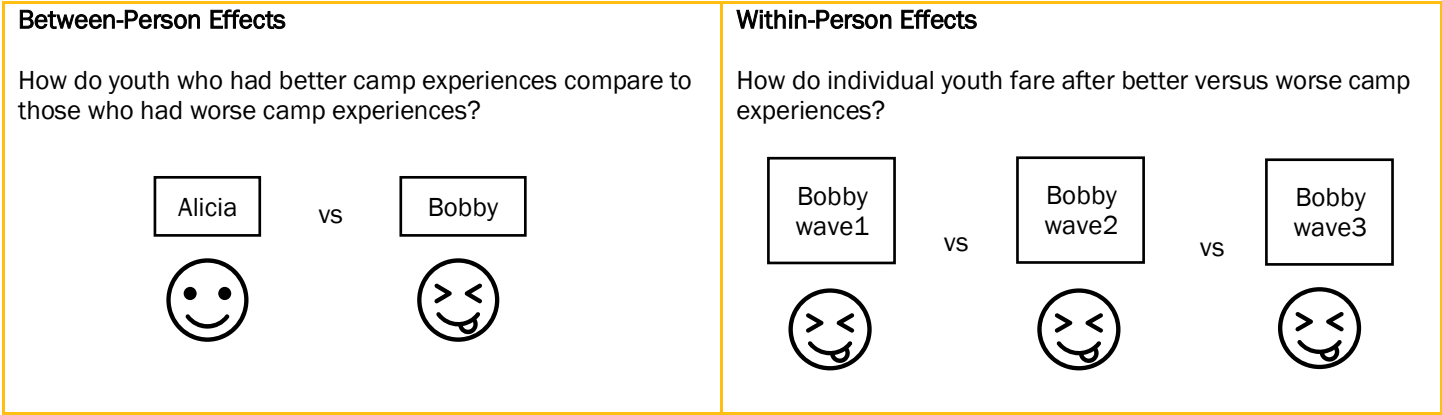


Table 5. Strength of Associations Between Camp Experiences and Youth Outcomes

	Child Reported Outcomes					Parent Reported Outcomes			
	Affinity for nature	Willingness to try new things	Independence	Social awareness	Grit	Affinity for nature	Willingness to try new things	Independence	Friendships
Between person link	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	-	-
Within person link	X	+	X	X	+	-	-	-	X

Note: X indicates a significant relationship between overall camp experiences and the outcome. + indicates a marginally significant relationship. - indicates no relationship. Darker green represents stronger evidence of a causal association.

Between-person findings

Youth who had better experiences at camp, on average, had higher youth-reported outcome levels, accounting for family income, race/ethnicity, gender, COVID impacts on parent employment, and school experiences. Specifically, youth who had higher quality camp experiences across waves reported higher levels of affinity for nature, willingness to try new things, social awareness, independence, and grit than youth who had lower quality camp experiences across waves. Additionally, parents whose kids had higher quality camp experiences across waves reported that their kids had higher affinity for nature and willingness to try new things, on average. It is possible that great camp experiences promote these outcomes in youth. However, it is also possible that youth who have better socioemotional skills and are more connected to nature to begin with tend to have a better time at camp than their peers who have less advanced skills or are less interested in nature. Because of this, between person effects are not *necessarily* indicative of a causal relationship and must be interpreted with some caution.

Within-person findings

Youth had better outcomes after a better versus a worse camp experience, accounting for major life transitions, effects of developmental maturation, COVID impacts, and school experiences. Specifically, after a high-quality camp experience, youth reported higher affinity for nature, independence, and social awareness than they did after a lower quality camp experience; parents also reported that their child had better friendships following a higher versus a lower quality camp experience. Within-person effects provide compelling evidence of short-term effects of camp experiences on child outcomes.

While high-quality camp experiences were predictive of all youth-reported outcomes within and/or between individuals, they were far less predictive of parent-reported outcomes. This discrepancy was more evident when considering within-person effects. This may be due to the fact that parents reported limited change in their children’s outcomes over time. Substantively, this discrepancy suggests that parents may not notice shifts in their children’s behaviors following higher quality camp experiences, despite the fact that youth perceive changes in their own interests and capacities.

It is important to note that by adjusting for school experiences, we are able to rule out the possibility that links between

camp experiences and outcomes are actually driven by effects of *school* experiences. This allowed us to more effectively isolate the effects of high-quality camp experiences. However, it is possible that this led to a slight underestimation of camp effects. When we consider links between camp experiences and outcomes *without* adjusting for school experiences, we see significant effects of quality camp experiences on **all** child-reported outcomes both within *and* between individuals.

Overall, results suggests that high-quality camp experiences may promote youth outcomes, with the most compelling evidence emerging in relation to affinity for nature, independence, and social awareness. Though it is difficult to separate the contributions of different components of the camp experience, these results appear to be primarily driven by engagement, belonging, and action-based experiential learning at camp.

Enduring Connections Between Camp Experiences and Youth Outcomes

“Camp took me from an incredibly shy girl to who I am today. I am confident that I’m actually pretty cool, and a good person. I can be myself with anyone because I am no longer afraid of rejection. I am confident in myself, and I owe a great deal of that to the fact that I can do archery, cook some pretty great meals on a fire, build said fire in the rain, make any kid feel better when they are homesick, kayak, canoe, ride a horse, etc.” – Former camper

I’d likely have not moved across the country with people I’d never met to attend college if I hadn’t spent so much time at camp. – Former camper

I have been learning things that are kind of essential to who I am now and that’s all thanks to summer camp. I have a view on so many things that I’m just grateful for. Everyone takes away something different. – Former camper

To consider enduring connections between camp experiences and youth outcomes, we used **Lagged Structural Equation Models (SEM)**. Lagged models allow us to assess when “camp effects” emerge and how long they last while accounting for baseline (pre-camp) outcome levels. Lagged models are between-person models, as they compare youth to one another rather than comparing youth to themselves over time. The conceptual model for these analyses is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Conceptual Model Considering Short-Term, Lagged, and Carryover Effects of 2018 Camp Experiences

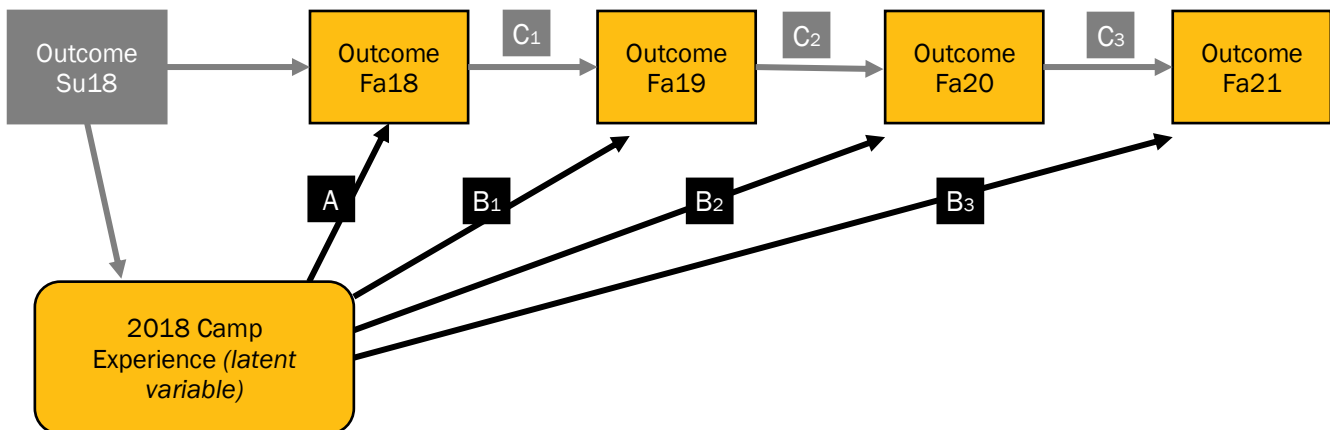


Table 6. Explanation of Conceptual Model

Path	Explanation
A	The short-term effect of camp experiences on the outcome.
B	Lagged effect of 2018 camp experience on the outcome at later time points. A lagged effect suggests that some of the benefits of a great camp experience take a while to emerge.
C	Autoregressive effect on the outcome, indicating stability in the outcome over time. By considering short-term and lagged effects in conjunction with stability in the outcome over time, we can assess how long camp effects endure.
$A+C_{1,2,3}$ $B_1+C_{2,3}$ B_2+C_3	Carryover (indirect) effects of 2018 camp experiences on the outcome at later time points <i>through</i> effects at earlier time points.
$(A+C_{1,2,3})+$ $(B_1+C_{2,3})+$ $B_2+C_3)+B_3$	Cumulative effects of 2018 camp experiences on 2021 outcomes through all pathways.

Note: While we use the term “effect” here for the sake of brevity, it is important to keep in mind that we cannot draw causal conclusions from these analyses. We can say for certain that camp experiences in 2018 *predict* outcomes in subsequent years, but we cannot say that camp experiences in 2018 *cause* outcome levels to shift. It is possible that some unmeasured factor in youths’ lives is driving these effects.

Table 7. Short-Term and Cumulative Effects of 2018 Camp Experiences on Outcomes

	Short-term effect	Lagged effects			Cumulative effects		
	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021
Child-reported outcomes							
Affinity for nature	X	-	-	+	-	+	X
Willingness to try new things	X	-	X	X	X	X	X
Independence	X	-	-	-	-	+	-
Social awareness	X	-	X	-	-	X	+
Grit	X	-	X	-		X	X
Parent-reported outcomes							
Affinity for nature	+	-	X	-	X	X	X
Willingness to try new things	+	+	+		X	X	X
Independence	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Friendships	+	-	-	-		+	X

Note: X indicates a significant relationship between overall camp experiences and the outcome ($p < .05$). + indicates a marginally significant relationship ($p < .10$). - indicates no relationship. Darker green represents longer-term effects. Models adjusted for the effects of gender, race/ethnicity, family income, and age, as well as outcomes at previous waves.

Short-term and cumulative effects of 2018 camp experiences on all outcomes are summarized in Table 7. Considering camp experiences holistically using a **Latent Variable approach**, we found evidence that a high-quality camp experience in 2018 was connected to improved outcomes in the short-term *and* several years after camp attendance, with the most enduring effects emerging for affinity for nature, willingness to try new things, grit, and child friendships. These relationships emerged even after accounting for the effects of gender, race/ethnicity, family income, and age, as well as outcomes at previous waves. For example, comparing youth who entered summer 2018 with similar levels of willingness to try new things, those who had higher quality camp experiences than their peers in 2018 were *still* reporting higher levels of willingness to try new things than those peers in Fall 2021. Effects on social awareness were present through Fall 2020, but dissipated by Fall of 2021. Effects on child-reported independence were short-lived, while no effects emerged in relation to parent-reported independence.

For most outcomes, these relationships were driven by significant short-term effects that carried forward over time. For instance, camp experiences in 2018 predicted willingness to try new things in Fall of 2018, which predicted willingness to try new things in Fall of 2019, and so on. Some evidence of lagged effects also emerged, particularly in Fall 2020. This suggests that some benefits of a high-quality camp experience may take several years to emerge.

However, the timing of these lagged effects indicates that the COVID pandemic may have played a role. In short, youth who had great camp experiences in 2018 fared better than their peers during the first Fall of the COVID pandemic, at least in terms of willingness to try new things, social awareness, grit, and parent-reported affinity for nature. It is possible that by promoting key outcomes, earlier camp experiences helped youth cope with the pandemic. However, it is also possible that youth who had the best experiences at camp had other things going on in their lives that helped them cope with the pandemic, such as great family functioning or high-quality community resources.

Lasting Camp Memories and Appreciation for Being Present

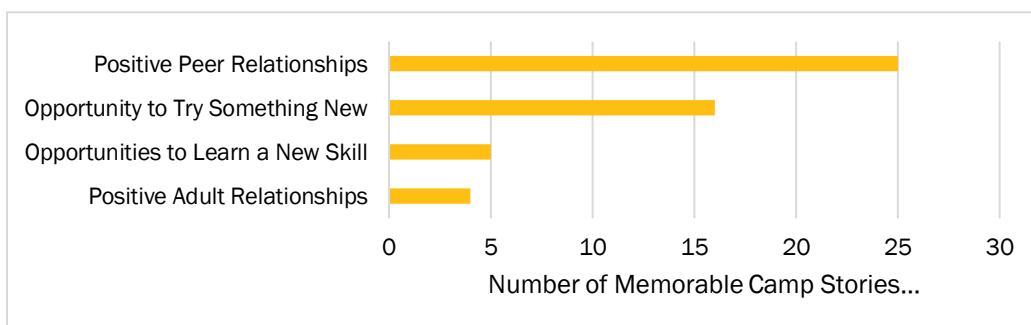
What Makes for a Memorable Camp Experience?

There was a rainstorm, a really big rainstorm. We had been stuck on our cabins for a plenty of hours that day and many hours on the previous day because we have strict rules on lightning and stuff and you can't be outside when there's lightning. So, there's finally break in the lightning. It was still raining but we just decided that we just wanted to go outside. So, we all went out in shorts and socks and we just started running around our village. Then someone decided it would be a good idea to ride bikes all around camp so we decided to do that which maybe wasn't the brightest idea but it was really fun. We all rode around. I'm surprised. We didn't really get in trouble but we almost felt like liberated which is further a strange way to describe it, but we were just sort of tired of being stuck in a small cabin with 15 boys. So, 20 of us decided to run around and be crazy. Probably, we're doing it for about an hour, but I probably will remember just because I felt like that was the point when we all actually felt like a village instead of just like a couple small group of boys. The first time everyone did something together at that point. There are a big group of kids and there are a couple little groups of boys that were friends, but I feel like this time almost everyone was doing it. So, I think it sort of brought us together in a way. - Camper

As reported in the [ReAC Spring 2022 Youth Impact Longitudinal Report](#), we asked youth to tell us two stories about memorable summertime experiences. We then analyzed the stories for evidence of developmentally supportive characteristics, including opportunities to try new things, opportunities to learn a new skill, positive peer relationships, and positive adult relationships.

We found that youths' memorable summer narratives were often set at camp, despite the fact that youth generally spent much more time at home than at camp. Many stories were about experiences that occurred during unprogrammed time, often at the beginning of camp, during meals, or in the cabins. As seen in Figure 6, stories from camp often involved positive peer relationships and opportunities to try something new. In contrast, positive adult relationships came up somewhat infrequently.

Figure 6. Developmental Characteristics in Memorable Stories about Summer Camp



Collectively, findings suggest that positive peer relationships and new opportunities are part of what makes camp experiences memorable to youth. Memorable experiences like these may help explain the enduring effects of a high-quality camp experience.

Appreciation for Being Present

*I remember every night we would start a bonfire and tell ghost stories. It was one of the nights with a meteor shower that me and my friend watched and so it was like sitting at the fire we just lay down and watched all the meteors go by and it was honestly really relaxing. I feel like we created more of a bond while we were there, the group made our bond stronger. Just sitting in the same cabin for a whole week, really like understanding what it's like to live with each other for a whole week. Just gives us a better understanding of each other in general. – **Camper***

*I feel like every good kid should get a chance to experience camp because it's so different than school. It's just that in school there are so many rules and expectations and homework and stresses that, like, just to be able to have those eight weeks of just, like, fun and calm and no worries, especially [in this] day and age where there are so many stresses in the world around us, I just think it's so beneficial. Otherwise, I would be a completely different, like, more serious and introverted person today. – **Former camper***

*I think something that's very specific to camp as cliché as it sounds is how to have fun, because I think like often times we kind of got caught up in school and just like so many complications of life, I think that kind like how to slow down and have fun and kind of enjoy yourself is something that I learned at camp specifically. I think that would have been difficult to learn outside of camp. – **Former camper***

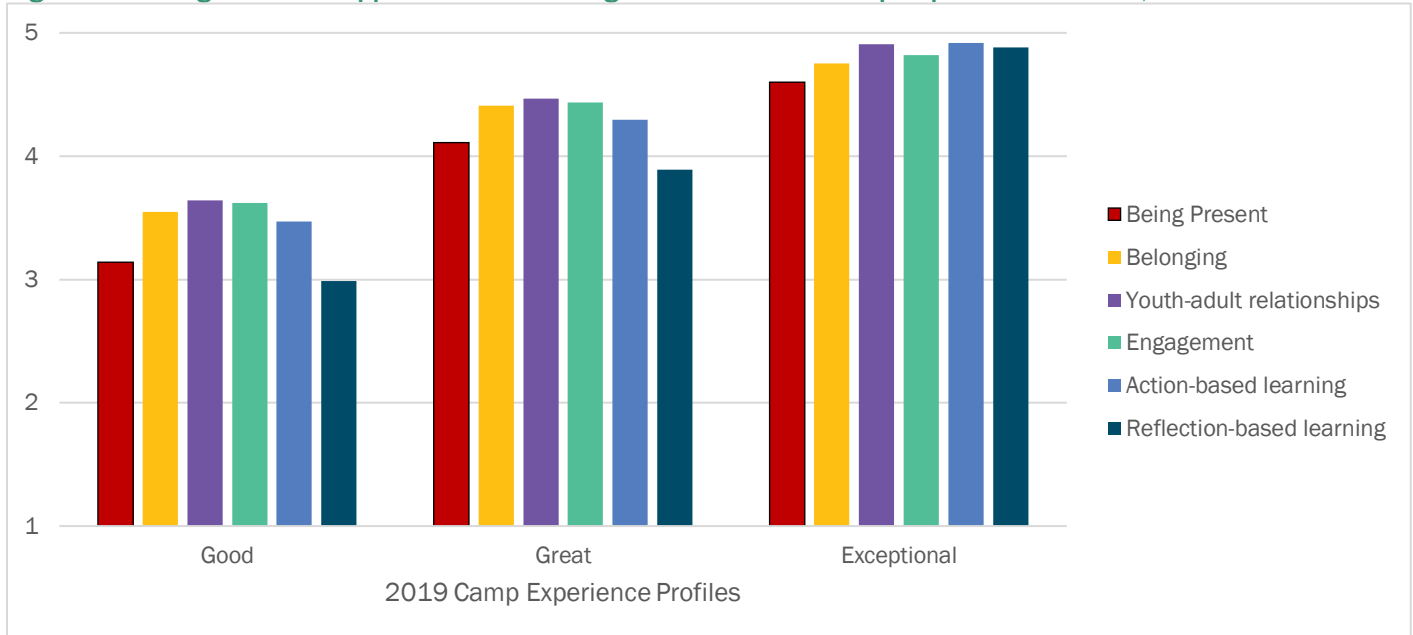
*I've always felt the summer camp is very important. Now especially with the media and phones and this technology being so prevalent and society. I feel like if anything, now it's more important than ever because at least you go to camp and you leave your phone at home for two weeks. At first is weird, [but you] get used to it and you adapt, and you are actually spending time with people and learning about the world around you and just getting in touch with nature which is a huge thing that we are forgetting to do now because we're so consumed by our screen. – **Former camper***

In 2019, we began collecting data on how camp supported youths' appreciation for being present – specifically, for taking time away from technology, developing in-person relationships, taking breaks, and reducing distractions. Across years, 58% of youth reported that their time at summer camp helped them appreciate the importance of being present in the moment (4 or 5 on five-point scale ranging from 1 = not at all true to 5 = totally true).

Further analyses show that in general, youth who had higher-quality camp experiences in terms of engagement, belonging, youth-adult relationships, and experiential learning than peers also reported higher levels of appreciation for being present after camp. The interconnected nature of these different aspects of the camp experience makes it difficult to determine whether high-quality camp experiences promote appreciation for being present, or whether youth who already appreciate being present are more likely to have positive experiences at camp.



Figure 7. Average Level of Appreciation for Being Present Across Camp Experience Profiles, 2019



Camp Experiences Related to Identity Development Among Staff

Camp experiences benefit staff as well as campers. In particular, we found that summer camp employment may be a fertile setting for identity development among emerging adult camp staff. In this section, we share findings from several analyses. First, we considered how characteristics of camp employment were linked to meaning-making and self-perception years after camp employment, and how camp employment compares to other early-life employment. We also examined whether camp employment supported staff in developing independent, self-aligned decision-making.

Characteristics of Camp Employment Linked to Meaning-Making

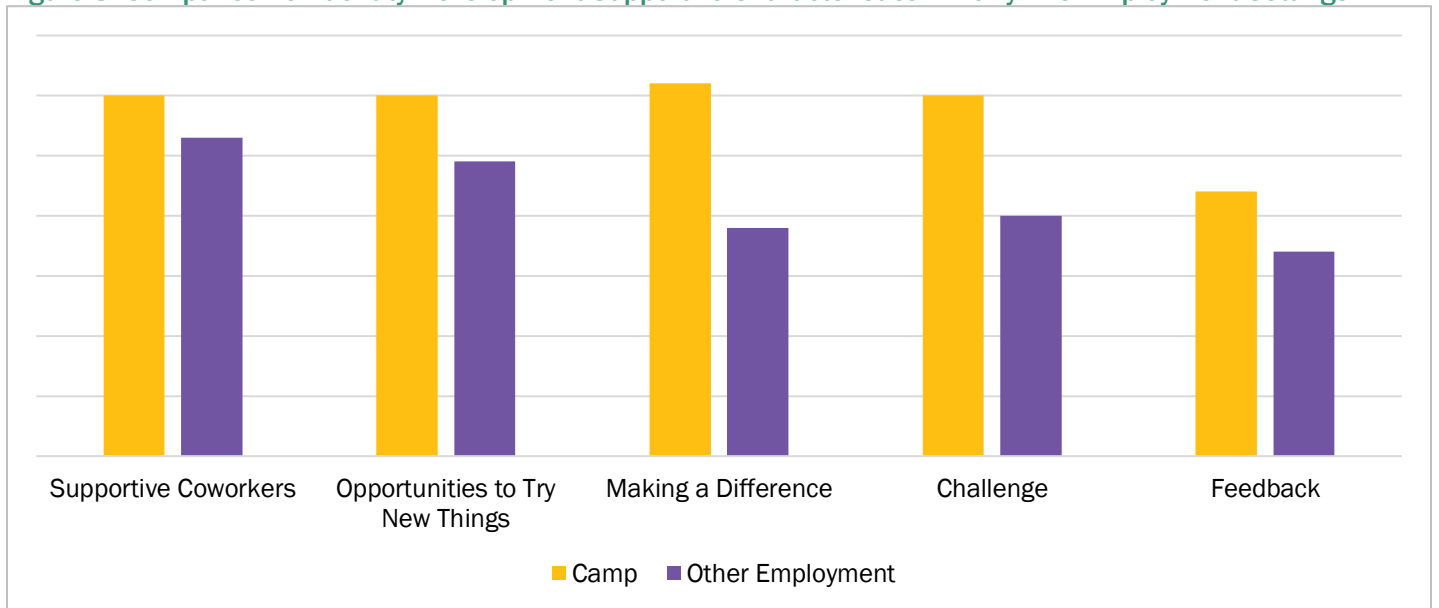
Camp really revealed to me the career path that I wanted to follow. And I think in a lot of ways, being a teacher becomes a very big part of your identity. I mean, your life kind of tends to revolve around it... And so, throughout college when I was considering making sure this is the right career for me, and making sure I was doing something that I was really going to enjoy for the rest of my life, I leaned on my experiences at camp to kind of reaffirm that. – Camp counselor

Anecdotally, camp professionals and former camp staff suggest that working at camp shaped them as a person. Although researchers have examined this phenomenon (e.g., Johnson et al., 2012), it remains a relatively underexplored topic. To this end, we aimed to understand how working at a summer camp related to emerging adults’ identity development and how the work compares to other early-life employment. In the spring of 2021, we asked participants ($n = 67$) to tell us stories about an experience working at camp and in another early-life employment setting. Broader developmental psychology and personality science (e.g., Bruner, 1987; McLean et al., 2016) suggests that people make meaning of their experiences in ways that align with their identities, thus making stories about past employment experiences a useful way to look at their influence. We learned several things from this investigation.

- Participants’ stories about their work at camp had more evidence of lasting meaning than their stories about non-camp early-life employment. The quote above illustrates how camp employment can influence emerging adults’ identity development, and in this particular case, their occupational identity.

- Participants also reported that they felt that they had **opportunities to try new things, make a difference, and feel challenged** more at camp than their other early-life employment. The bar chart below compares the frequencies that participants identified these identity development supportive characteristics at camp and in their other early-life employment setting.

Figure 8. Comparison of Identity Development Supportive Characteristics in Early-Life Employment Settings



The table below compares one participant’s responses about the identity development supportive characteristics she perceived at summer camp and the ice cream shop where she had also worked.

Table 8. Example of Identity Development Supportive Characteristics in Employment Settings

	Camp	Ice Cream Shop
Supportive Coworkers	X	
Trying New Things	X	X
Making a Difference	X	
Challenging	X	X
Feedback	X	

Self-Authorship

To me camp is the place where I really found myself. I found out what I did like and what I didn't like, who I wanted to be, and who I didn't want to be, just because of all of these experiences, regardless of whether they were positive or negative. – Camp counselor

There was a time [on the off-site trip] we were at a gas station. I happened to look at myself in the mirror. I remember thinking for a split second that I didn't recognize myself. Not in a negative 'she looks awful' way, but just there was something in a way, I don't know, that I piled my hair on my head or... I was probably a lot tanner than the last time I looked at myself in the mirror. At first, I was thinking, 'who is this person?' I remember thinking in my head, 'this is who your students see.' My students see this person who is maybe a little bit messy, but in charge and on top of it... But they don't know the rest of me. It was a little bit like, 'Oh my gosh this person who I am becoming - this is who my students see.' They don't see the quiet insecurities in my head or the fact that I'm



like, 'This is only my second time. Don't tell anybody that I might not know what I'm doing.' I was just like, 'Oh my God, they see this awesome person who's in charge. I didn't realize that person was in there.' – **Camp counselor**

I learned that I can't run from my race, which is kind of a crazy thing to hear. But honestly, I was applying for summer camps in California, because I thought that getting out of the South would be safer. And I wouldn't have to deal with so many racially charged things or inequality and stuff like that. And what I learned is that, that's not true. Because obviously my race and my color follow me. And there are going to be people all over this planet that are going to treat me differently for something like that, something that I didn't choose. – **Camp counselor**

We also examined identity development among emerging adult camp staff by considering the role of camp employment in self-authorship development. Self-authorship is fundamentally concerned with how people make decisions about their lives based on their values and beliefs (Magolda, 2001). To this end, we conducted case-studies of various participants to examine how camp employment might support self-authorship by offering developmentally effective experiences. These experiences prompt people to see the world in a different way, such that they begin to make decisions with greater focus on alignment with self. We found:

- Camp employment can be an experience that supports emerging adults' self-authorship development – for instance, making decisions on one's own, and making decisions that are value-driven.
- Camp employment supported the development of self-authorship when camp served as a developmentally effective experience (one that sparks change or confirmation).

In all, results suggest that summer camp employment is rich in developmentally supportive opportunities. These opportunities provide young adults an avenue for exploring and solidifying their identities, and for making decisions that align with their values and beliefs.

Summer camp is one piece of a larger developmental ecosystem. Though it may offer unique benefits compared to some settings, camp is best understood as a setting that can complement youths' other life experiences.

While there is value in assessing how summer camp is uniquely associated with youth and staff development, it is important to recognize that camp does not exist in isolation. Youth spend time in an array of settings, including in school, at home, and in other out-of-school activities. The analyses in this section consider how summer camp fits into youths' developmental ecosystem.

Despite the fact that youth reported better experiences at camp than in school, on average, analyses revealed that youths' experiences at camp and school were generally mutually-reinforcing. Specifically, youth who had better experiences in one setting tended to have better experiences in the other setting. More than demonstrating that some youth thrive across contexts, however, our findings suggest that a high-quality camp experience may actually *promote* improvements in school experiences, just as a high-quality school experience may promote improvements in camp experiences. Additionally, positive connections between camp experiences and youth outcomes were sometimes transmitted *through* improved school experiences. These findings point to the iterative nature of experiences in different developmental settings and suggest that improving youths' experiences at camp may have benefits across contexts.

In terms of summertime experiences, camp was generally reported to be more developmentally enriching than being home or on vacation. However, camp was comparable to sports and arts/music activities in terms of engagement, belonging, experiential learning, and positive adult-youth relationships.

There were generally three approaches to time use: 1) balanced, in which youth spent a little time in a variety of settings, 2) focused, wherein youth spent a large portion of time in one specific extracurricular setting, and 3) home-centered, wherein youth spend most of their summer at home. While it remains unclear why some youth took a balanced approach versus a focused approach, data suggest that financial considerations may have contributed to youth staying home for a larger portion of the summer.

While these three approaches were consistent over time, the amount of time youth spent in specific contexts shifted. Specifically, youth appeared to spend more time at home and less time at camp as they aged. While COVID-19 undoubtedly contributed to this dynamic, it may also be that youth interests, needs, and control over summer change over time.

For staff, camp employment seems to offer benefits compared to many other settings. For example, experiences working at summer camp were generally more meaningful than experiences in school and other employment settings. Benefits of camp employment are not limited to the camp environment, however, as experiences with summer camp employment seem to support staff in solidifying their career interests and understanding what about their work they find meaningful, which may guide their future career-related decisions.

Connections Between Camp and School

"I'm the kind of person who didn't want to do their homework or probably even touch math. But at the camp, it got me excited because I never knew you could do such stuff way better with math."
– Former camper

"At camp, you don't have the distractions of phones, and the technology, social media, or even just to your homework. And a lot of times, those things can get in the way of genuine connection to people. And so after being at camp, I learned in high school...the type of relationships I wanted to



have. How to pursue them, how to make friends, extend myself, because at camp it's a very low "stuff" environment, and you're encouraged to extend yourself. And in high school, there's not always that encouragement from outside forces to kind of make sure that you're trying new things and trying to be friends with new people. So it was helpful for me to go to camp because I already knew how to do that and so getting to school, I was able to figure out what I really wanted for my friendships and relationships with people." – Former camper

"This is super cliché, but at camp everyone says it's a place where you can take off your mask, where you can be yourself and no one will judge you and I would say that camp definitely has made me more self-confident because everyone is so embracing and you just build such crystal relationships that you feel so comfortable. So being at camp has made me a lot more comfortable with myself. So then being in high school, I guess I'm not as insecure as I would be and I'm very confident and sure of myself and I definitely think that that comes from camp." – Former camper

In the [Spring 2022 Youth Impact Longitudinal Report](#), we explored how youths' camp and school experiences compared in terms of engagement, sense of belonging, adult-youth relationships, and action- and reflection-based experiential learning. On average, **youth reported better experiences at camp than school across all indicators**. Additionally, whereas youth reported gradually decreasing levels of engagement, sense of belonging, youth-adult relationships, and action-based experiential learning at school over time, declines were generally not observed at camp. This suggests that **camp may remain a stimulating environment for youth even when school loses some of these qualities**.

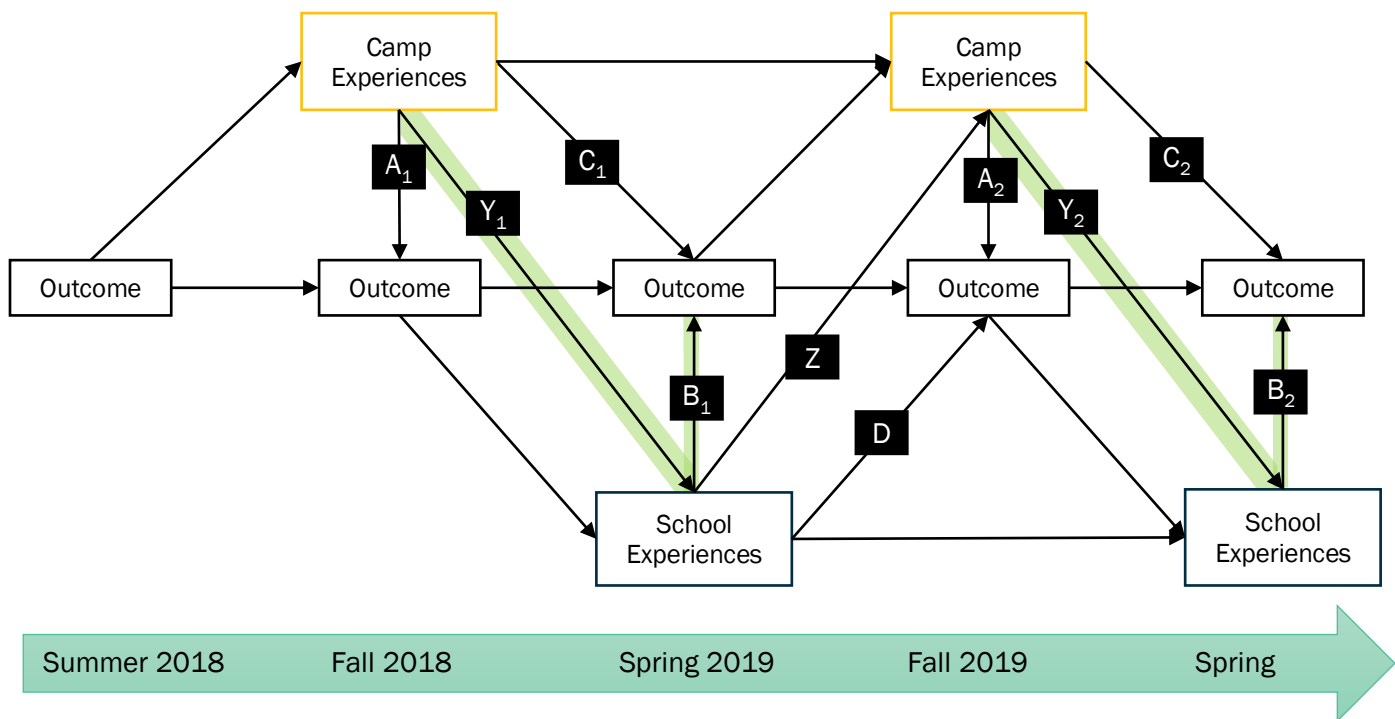
In the prior section, we documented how high-quality camp experiences are related to improved outcomes among camp-attendees, even after accounting for youths' experiences at schools. However, experiences at camp and school are not entirely independent from one another. Although camp and school represent different contexts, the experiences that youth have in one setting may impact how they behave in and experience the other setting.

In the [Spring 2022 Youth Impact Longitudinal Report](#), we reported on **Lagged Mediation Models** that assessed whether links between camp experiences and outcomes were mediated by school experiences. In other words, we tested whether the relationship between high-quality camp experiences and youth outcomes was explained, in part, by improved school experiences. We found evidence of these relationships for some outcomes. This pointed to a complementary relationship between camp and school settings. However, these analyses were limited in important ways. For one thing, they took a piecemeal approach, only examining relationships for one year at a time. Furthermore, these analyses did not account for the potentially iterative, bidirectional nature of these relationships. To better understand these relationships, we undertook more sophisticated analyses.

To further explore the joint contributions of camp and school experiences to youth outcomes, we ran a series of **Cross-Lagged Structural Equation Models**. The conceptual model for these analyses is displayed in Figure 9. These analyses examined relationships between camp experiences, school experiences, and outcomes between Summer of 2018 and Spring of 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic had fully taken hold. By explicitly modeling the complexity of these relationships, we could more effectively account for the interrelated nature of different contexts and experiences. We focused on the sample of youth who attended camp in the summers of 2018 and 2019 ($N = 311$), which allowed us to retain a relatively large sample (and thus sufficient statistical power) and avoid major COVID-19 impacts.

To simplify the interpretation of findings, results are presented in two sections: one that focuses on the relationships between camp experiences and school experiences, and a second that considers links between camp and school contexts and youth outcomes.

Figure 9. Conceptual Model Considering Links between Camp and School Experiences and Youth Outcomes



Note: Green highlighted pathways illustrate indirect effects of camp experiences on the outcome at hand *through* school experiences.

The Mutually Reinforcing Nature of Camp and School Experiences

Results show that in general, **youth who had higher quality camp experiences than their peers also had better school experiences the following Spring** (paths Y₁, Y₂), controlling for gender, race/ethnicity, income, and grade. In fact, even when we compare youth who reported similar school experiences in Spring of 2019, those who had better camp experiences in Summer of 2019 generally reported improved school experiences the following Spring compared to their peers who had worse camp experiences (Y₂).

Results also indicate that **youth who reported higher quality school experiences than their peers in Spring 2019 tended to have better camp experiences than those peers the following summer** (path Z), even when comparing youth who had similar camp experiences in summer of 2018.

These patterns suggest that some youth thrive across contexts, while others struggle across contexts. However, the emergence of these relationships even after accounting for prior camp and school experiences suggests that this is not the full story. Rather, these patterns indicate that a high-quality camp experience may actually *improve* youths' subsequent school experiences. Similarly, a high-quality school experience may improve youths' subsequent camp experiences.

Joint Contributions of Camp and School Experiences to Youth Outcomes

These models also explored how camp and school experiences jointly and independently relate to youth outcomes. Several patterns are worth noting.

First, **experiences at camp predicted all child-reported outcomes at the same wave** (paths A₁, A₂). Youth who reported higher quality camp experiences than their peers in Fall 2018 tended to also report higher affinity for nature, willingness to try new things, independence, social awareness, and grit than those peers at the same wave. Similar patterns emerged in 2019, though links were slightly weaker. Experiences at camp did *not* consistently predict parent-reported outcomes at the same wave.

Second, **school experiences were similarly linked with most youth outcomes at the same wave** (paths B₁, B₂). Youth who reported higher quality school experiences than their peers reported higher outcome levels than those peers, on average. These links emerged for child-reported outcomes more than for parent-reported outcomes.

Third, for the most part, neither camp nor school experiences were directly associated with outcomes at the subsequent wave (paths C₁, C₂, D). However, there were significant *indirect effects* of camp experiences on later outcomes through school experiences (see highlighted paths in Figure 9), particularly in the first year of the study. In other words, **“camp effects” carried over to the next wave through school experiences**. Youth who had great camp experiences during summer 2018 generally had better school experiences in Fall 2018 compared to peers who had worse camp experiences (path Y₁), which in turn predicted heightened outcomes in Fall 2018 compared to peers (path B₁). This led to significant indirect effects of 2018 camp experiences on social awareness, grit, parent- and child-reported willingness to try new things, and parent-reported affinity for nature *via* improved school experiences. Indirect effects of camp through school were less common from Fall 2019 to Spring 2020, perhaps due to the emergence of COVID-19 in Spring 2020.

These results emerged after accounting for gender, race/ethnicity, income, and grade, as well as outcome level at the prior wave. Adjusting for prior outcome levels allows us to more effectively isolate the contributions of camp and school experiences to youth outcomes. Still, it is possible that unmeasured factors may drive some of these results, or that results will not generalize outside of this sample. For instance, an improvement in youth mental health could lead to improved camp experiences, improved school experiences, *and* improved outcomes. In this case, high-quality camp experiences would not be the main reason for improved school experiences or improved outcomes. This is not to discount the possibility that experiences at camp *do* impact experiences at school and youth functioning, but to underscore that even with rigorous analytic methods, we cannot account for all alternative explanations.

Considered holistically, these results point to the mutually reinforcing nature of camp and school settings. The evidence suggests that the experiences that youth have at camp may have carryover effects into school; at the same time, experiences youth have in school may impact subsequent camp experiences. Moreover, both camp and school experiences are associated with youth outcomes, such that higher quality experiences in these settings predict improved outcomes. On the positive side, this suggests that an exceptional camp experience may support improvements in youths’ school experiences, with benefits for developmental outcomes. Conversely, however, having a less-than-ideal camp experience may dampen youths’ school experiences and outcome levels. This underscores the importance of promoting high-quality camp experiences. Youth who enter summer camp following a negative school experience may benefit from additional support and opportunities to succeed.

Camp as Part of an Enriching Summer

“I just feel like she needs to have, you know, something to do during the summer. She needs to have a routine. She needs to be outside and learning and, you know, having things that interest her...just having a great of experience that she can have for herself during the summer. I don't want her sitting here being bored at the house and you know, not out there making friends and I definitely want her to be outside doing stuff. – Parent of camper

I will say that not all of our summers are quite this packed. It was largely we were trying to fit in, you know, some quality time with family both in Oregon and down in California...Overnight camp we do every year, but the other camps were dual purpose to do something he's interested in, but also keep him occupied while I'm at work. – Parent of camper

[Camp] keeps his mind busy. So even if he's not academically engaging...at least he is engaging on some other level that'll teach him a life skill...He's learning coping mechanisms, so when he has to learn something new, he's not frustrated. Or teamwork, and learning to depend on other people when needed, and also learning to be independent when necessary. – Parent of camper

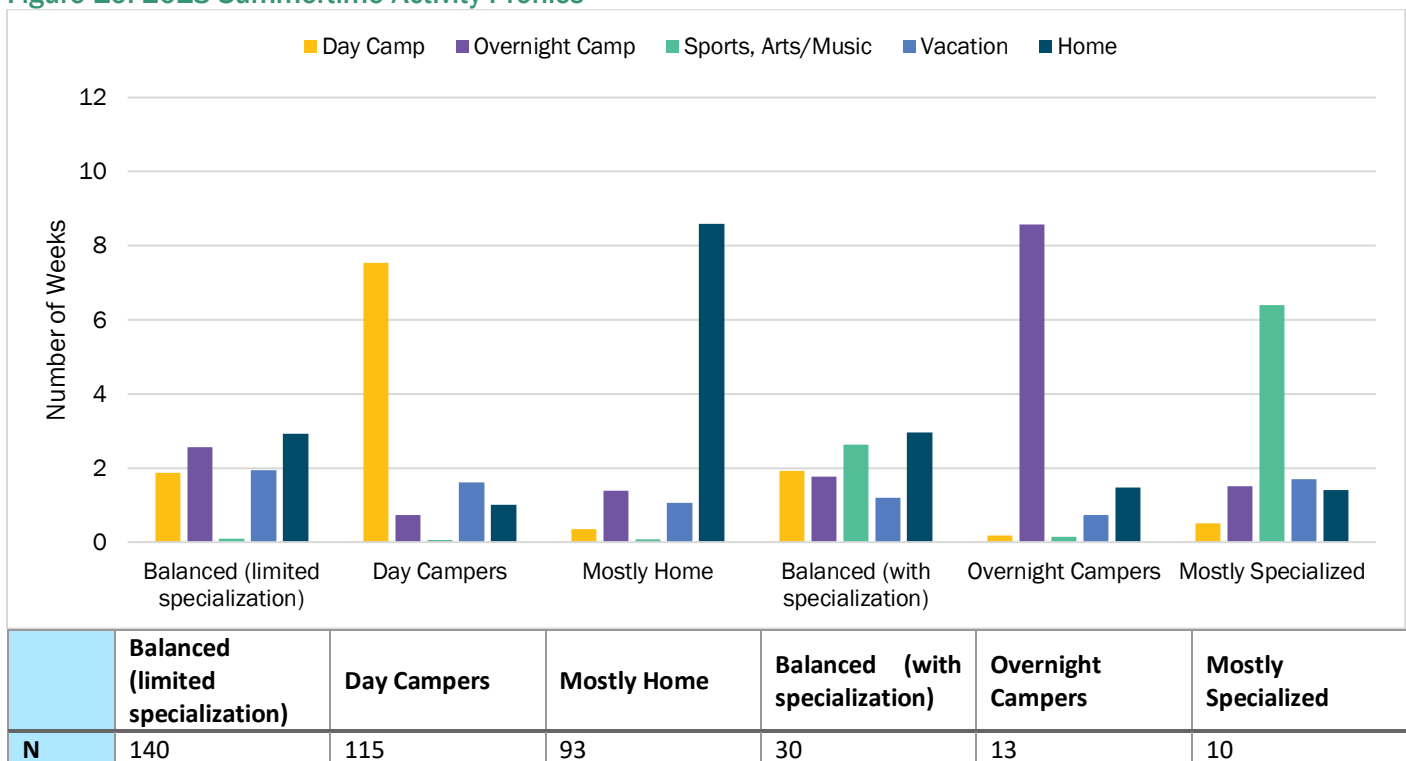


The Summer Activity Landscape

For most youth, camp is just one piece of a larger summer landscape. Youth in our sample generally spent their summertime split between home, vacation, and enrichment activities including day camp, overnight camp, sports, and arts/music, with some also spending time in childcare or in other contexts. As documented in the [Spring 2022 Youth Impact Longitudinal Report](#), youth spent less time at day camp as they got older, while spending more time at home and in sports. Weeks spent at overnight camp did not change dramatically, except for a sharp drop in 2020 related to COVID.

It is important to note, however, that most youth spent time in multiple settings during summer. Moreover, the amount of time youth spent in different settings varied substantially. We explored diversity in youths' use of summertime using **Latent Profile Analyses (LPA)**. Considering the number of weeks youth spent in day camp, overnight camp, specialized activities (sports or arts/music), on vacation, and at home, these analyses identified distinct profiles of summer activities for each year. Figure 10 displays the six summertime activity profiles that emerged in 2018. Visuals for 2019, 2020, and 2021 summertime activity profiles can be viewed in APPENDIX A: SUMMERTIME ACTIVITY PROFILES. Examining these profiles across years helps us understand how parents and children navigate summer schedules while attending to the inherent development and changing needs of each child and family over time.

Figure 10. 2018 Summertime Activity Profiles



In 2018, the most common summertime activity profile was a Balanced Summer that involved few-to-no specialized activities (sports or arts/music), but *did* involve several weeks of day camp, overnight camp, vacation, and time at home ($n = 140$). Also common were the Day Camper profile, in which youth spent most of their summer (greater than 7 weeks, on average) in day camp ($n = 115$), and the Mostly Home profile ($n = 93$). Some youth had Balanced Summers that *did* involve specialized activities ($n = 30$). The smallest profiles were Overnight Campers, in which youth spent over 8 weeks in overnight camp, on average ($n = 13$), and Mostly Specialized, in which youth spent much of the summer in sports or arts/music activities ($n = 10$).

In 2019, a seven-profile solution emerged from the data. Several profiles were closely aligned with those that emerged in 2018. These included Balanced Summer with limited specialization ($n = 120$), Mostly Home ($n = 93$), and Overnight Campers ($n = 15$). In contrast to 2018, two Day Camper profiles were present. The first, Moderate Day Campers, included youth who spent over six weeks, on average, in day camp, but also spent some time in other settings

(particularly on vacation and home; $n = 77$). The second was Intense Day Campers, who spent more than 12 weeks in day camp, on average ($n = 14$). Thirty-five youth had a balanced summer that was weighted towards specialized activities and home. Finally, there was a very small group of youth who spent a large portion of their summer on vacation ($n = 8$).

Given the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, few youth experienced an activity-rich summer in 2020. The vast majority of youth were Mostly Home, with a few weeks of specialty activities (perhaps offered virtually; $n = 301$). Still, 16% of the reporting sample ($n = 58$) experienced a Balanced Summer. Though much of the summer was still spent at home for these youth, they also spent several weeks on vacation and at camp, on average. Whether camps were offering programming virtually or in-person is unclear.

In 2021, the most common profile was again Mostly Home ($n = 152$). Though fewer youth fell into this profile in 2021 than in 2020, this does represent a sizable increase from 2019. While this may reflect shifting preferences of youth as they age, it may also be a consequence of ongoing caution around COVID-19 in summer 2021. Next most common was a Balanced Summer weighted towards time at overnight camp and home ($n = 74$), followed by a Balanced Summer weighted towards time at day camp and home ($n = 51$). A mostly specialized profile reemerged in 2021, wherein youth participated in sports or arts/music during a large part of the summer. The least common profiles in 2021 were Intense Day Campers ($n = 11$) and Vacationers ($n = 8$).

Factors Connected to Use of Summertime

To identify factors that may contribute to profile membership, we examined descriptive statistics across the six 2018 Summer Activity Profiles. These descriptive statistics are provided in Table 8, below. Each row is color coded such that the highest value is darkest green, while the lowest value is white.

Table 8. Family and Child Characteristics by 2018 Summer Activity Profile

	Balanced, limited specialization N = 140	Balanced, with specialization N = 30	Mostly Home N = 93	Day Campers N = 115	Overnight Campers N = 13	Mostly specialized N = 10
<i>Means</i>						
Hours in programmed OST Fall 2018	11.09	11.26	6.85	8.76	10.20	14.00
Family Income	\$136k	\$145k	\$99k	\$150k	\$168k	\$153k
Neighborhood median income	\$88k	\$83k	\$64k	\$91k	\$108k	\$95k
Extracurricular spending 2018	\$5.0k	\$3.9k	\$2.3K	\$4.9K	\$8.6k	\$5.8k
Parent respondent years of education	17.60	18.07	17.26	18.28	19.08	17.20
Household size in 2018	4.06	4.17	4.25	3.70	3.85	4.00
Number of kids in household 2018	2.26	2.30	2.51	1.93	1.92	2.10
Family functioning across years	3.54	3.47	3.48	3.44	3.25	3.52
<i>Proportions</i>						
Two-parent household	85%	87%	75%	76%	85%	90%
Child sex: male	42%	53%	46%	46%	62%	40%
Child race:						
White or Caucasian	65%	67%	63%	70%	92%	40%
Asian	6%	7%	2%	5%	0%	10%
Black or African American	12%	10%	14%	5%	0%	10%
Latinx	6%	10%	8%	4%	8%	10%
Multiracial	10%	7%	13%	13%	0%	30%
A different race	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%

Descriptive statistics suggest that youth who spent the summer Mostly Home in 2018 came from families and communities with lower income levels than youth in other profiles. These youth spent less time in OST over the school year, and their families spent less money on extracurricular activities compared to others in the sample. It is likely that

this profile contains families who are economically constrained, regardless of youth preferences, in addition to families with sufficient economic resources with kids who are somewhat introverted and/or prefer to engage in fewer activities.

The small collection of Overnight Campers were the most economically advantaged out of all profiles, as well as including an overrepresentation of White youth. Interestingly, these youth also had the lowest levels of family functioning. While differences in family functioning across profiles were not statistically significant, this pattern does align with trends observed in some affluent communities wherein youth spend much of their time in scheduled activities and get limited quality time with parents (Luthar et al., 2006; Luthar & Latendresse, 2005).

It is also interesting to note that youth who fell into the Day Camper profile during summer 2018 came from smaller households than youth with more balanced summers and those who stayed home. Similar trends were present for Overnight Campers, though differences were not always statistically significant. This provides credence to the idea that camp may serve as childcare in some families. It may also be that only-children are more likely to go to camp because their parents think they need socialization, or because they are likely to be bored at home. On the flip side, youth in the Mostly Home profile were in significantly *larger* households than youth in most other profiles. Youth may thus stay home because they have older siblings or relatives there to care for them, or because they are needed to take care of younger siblings.

Connections between Use of Summertime and Youth Outcomes

In addition to considering how youth and family characteristics may be related to summertime activity profiles, we also considered whether youth outcomes differed across profiles. Specifically, we tested whether summer 2018 profiles were predictive of outcomes in fall of 2018, in general and accounting for initial outcome levels. Accounting for initial outcome levels allowed us to compare youth who had similar outcome levels pre-camp. Outcome levels by profile are displayed below, with rows color-coded such that the highest value is darkest green, while the lowest value is white.

Table 9. Mean Outcome Levels by 2018 Summer Activity Profile

	Balanced, limited specialization N = 140	Balanced, with specialization N = 30	Mostly Home N = 93	Day Campers N = 115	Overnight Campers N = 13	Mostly specialized N = 10
Child Report						
Affinity for nature	5.49	5.45	5.26	5.38	5.15	5.14
Willingness to try new things	5.50	5.55	5.51	5.43	5.28	5.55
Independence	5.37	5.28	5.17	5.12	5.20	4.91
Social awareness	3.92	3.92	3.86	3.88	3.76	4.00
Grit	3.66	3.73	3.63	3.64	3.44	3.73
Parent Report						
Affinity for nature	5.23	5.43	5.01	5.02	5.26	5.17
Willingness to try new things	5.20	5.32	5.22	5.02	5.26	5.50
Independence	4.68	4.81	4.46	4.48	4.23	4.30
Friendships	4.36	4.28	4.33	4.30	4.31	4.16

Mean outcome levels were relatively consistent across different activity profiles. Descriptively, youth who had balanced summers generally had the highest outcomes, on average, while overnight campers tended to have the lowest child-reported outcomes. However, these differences were generally not statistically significant. While a few statistical differences did emerge (e.g., affinity for nature was significantly lower for youth who were mostly home versus those who had balanced summers), these were small in nature and were not consistent across outcomes. The evidence thus suggests that the nature of youths' summer time use does not drive outcomes. It seems likely that outcomes are more related to youth experiences, as the first section of this report would suggest.

Continuity and Change in Youths' Use of Summertime

She's getting older, so [summer activities] are less of a necessity. You know, it's nice for her to have somewhere to go during the day so she's not home by herself, or on her phone, or whatever the situation is. But it's not like she has to go somewhere because she's too young to stay home by herself. – **Parent of camper**

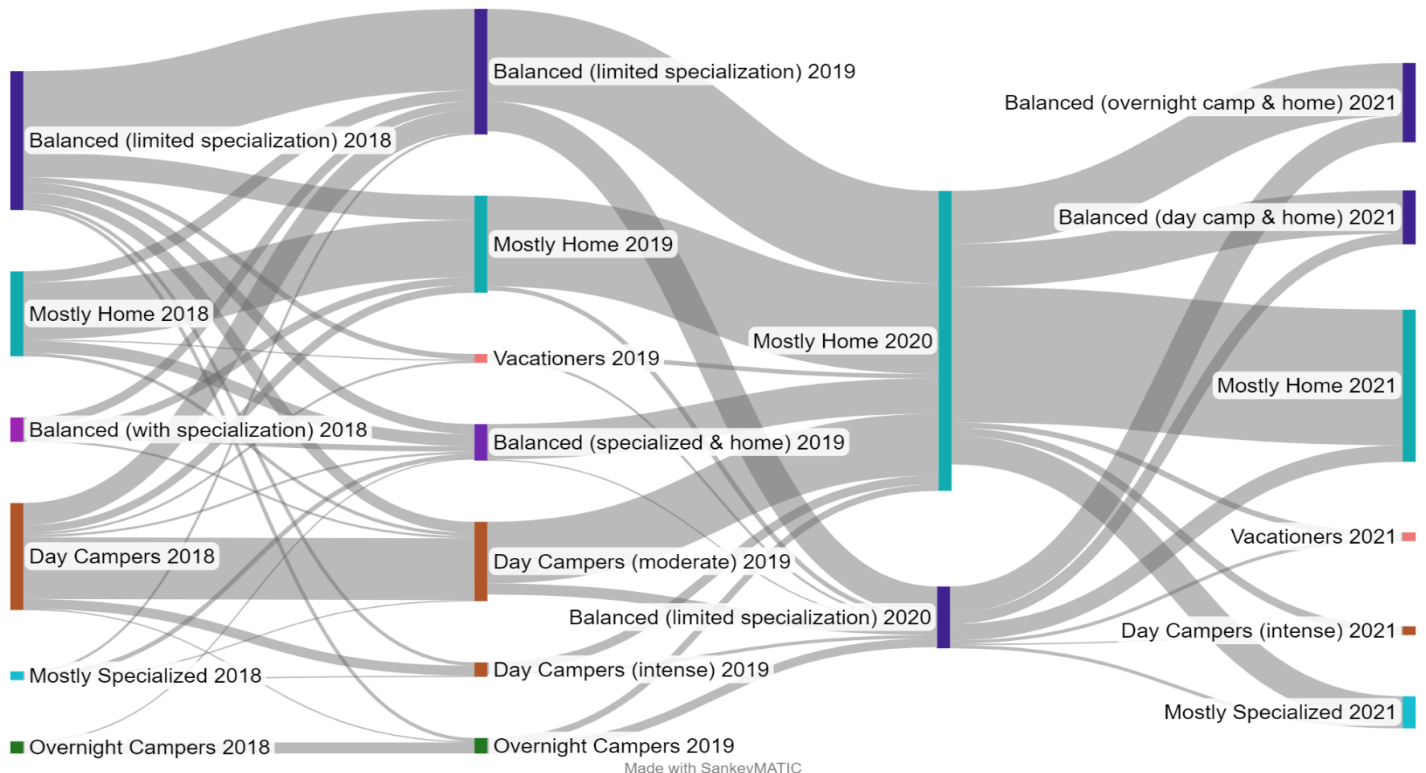
I think that [camp] really helps them move through different stages. So, for John, it's like he's older now, so it's an 'I need to trust him more' kind of thing. So, like, sending him to camp, which is very far from our house is telling him that 'I'm trusting you because you are not a little boy.' - **Parent of camper**

"Some years ago, when we started doing camps and everything I would just pick a wide variety of things to give him exposure and see what piqued his interest, and so it was everything from soccer camp, gymnastics camp...just lots of different kinds of things. And a few things have started to really stick...He's really started to identify with that 'I am a blacksmith, I am a future material scientist.' That kind of thing has really taken hold. So, we're sticking with that." – **Parent of camper**

"I know as I got older I was not willing to take the time commitment to go to camp." – **Former camper**

To understand the level of continuity in youths' use of summertime across waves, LPAs were followed by descriptive analyses that considered how youth transitioned between summertime activity profiles over time. Using the most likely profile membership of youth at each wave, we assessed flow of youth between different profiles from 2018 to 2019, 2019 to 2020, and so on. Results are presented the visual below.

Figure 11. Latent Profile Transitions for Summertime Activity Profiles



Made with SankeyMATIC

Note: This Sankey Diagram shows the flow of youth between different summertime activity profiles between 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021. For youth who filled out the summer time diary for the given year, profile membership at each wave was estimated based on the number of weeks youth reported spending the majority of their daytime hours in day camp, overnight camp, specialized activities (sports, arts, or music), on vacation, or at home.

This diagram illustrates both continuity and variation in youths' profile membership across waves.

Considering patterns outside of the summer of 2020, which was unusual due to the pandemic, we see a good deal of movement across profiles. For instance, 70% of youth with time diary data across 2018, 2019, and 2021 ($N = 272$) experienced a Balanced Summer at some point. However, only 12% had a Balanced Summer across all of those years. Similarly, only about 13% of youth were in the Mostly Home profile across 2018, 2019, and 2021, even though a majority of youth were Mostly Home for at least one summer (excluding 2020, wherein almost all participants were confined to this profile). This suggests that many youth change up their approach to summer from year-to-year.

Still, continuity was also evident. For instance, most youth who fell into the Day Campers profile in 2018 were still Day Campers in 2019, though most used their summer differently in 2021. Nearly all youth who fell into the Overnight Campers profile in 2018 remained in this profile in 2019. By 2021, most of these youth were still attending more overnight camp than average, falling into the Balanced (overnight and home) profile. This suggests that camp is a staple summertime activity for some youth.

There are many factors that likely contribute to shifts in use of summertime. These include child maturation and interest development; pragmatic concerns related to childcare, expenses, and COVID-19; and parent views about how their kids should use summertime. For example, as discussed in the [ReAC Fall 2021 Youth Impact Update](#), the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped how some families were thinking about summer. Many reported elevated appreciation for the importance of socialization and activities, while others had gained more appreciation for downtime. Some also reported wanting to more carefully prioritize things that were important to them (time with family, meaningful activities) during future summers.

Holistically, the LPAs point to three overarching approaches to summertime: 1) **a balanced approach**, in which youth spent a little time in a variety of settings, 2) **a focused approach**, wherein youth spent a large portion of time in one specific extracurricular setting, and 3) **a home-centered approach**, wherein youth spend most of their summer at home. Though each of these approaches was present at each time point, the number of youth employing a balanced approach declined over time. Rather than pointing to increasing specialization with age, however, this seems to be reflective of a growing number of youth spending most of their summer at home. This may be a product of developmental maturation (i.e., youth no longer need supervision), youth preferences (e.g., teenagers wanting to spend time with friends), lingering caution regarding COVID-19, or a combination of these factors.

Most youth spent at least a few weeks at camp during the summers of 2018 and 2019. However, analyses revealed distinct groups of youth who spent *most* of their summer at either day camp or overnight camp during these years. By 2021, camp participation attenuated somewhat, particularly for youth in the Mostly Home, Mostly Specialized, and Vacationers profiles. Few youth spent almost their entire summer in camp in 2021, but many still spent over four weeks at camp, on average. Overall, this suggests that **while some youth de-prioritize time at summer camp in favor of other settings, others continue to prioritize camp**. However, with fewer weeks at camp compared to prior years, even those committed to attending summer camp may be more selective when choosing camps.

Qualities of Youths' Summertime Settings

I really only have positive memories from camp. I used to love it. I really just think it's a super important thing to do for any kid whether it's a sports camp or biblical-based camp or just anything... I just learned all sorts of little skills that I wouldn't have just going to school or staying at home. – Former camper

[Camp is] beyond the world of technology, you know, or the phone, which I think is kind of becoming where adolescents live these days in our culture. – Parent of camper



Growing up I was bullied quite a bit and so I would love summer because I wouldn't be at school. But some of my friends would hate summer because they didn't have a great home life so it was kind of hit and miss. [Camp was] that escape to get through that, they could run a way and just be somewhere that was safe and everything else. - Former camper

As documented in prior ReAC reports, **camp settings shared key qualities with several other summer settings, especially specialized activities like sports and arts/music.** These types of enrichment settings were reported by youth to be highly engaging, foster a strong sense of belonging, involve high levels of experiential learning, and foster positive adult-youth relationships. Camp settings were most differentiated from being at home, which was the least engaging, and from family vacation, which involved less experiential learning (ReAC Youth Impact Longitudinal Report, 2022).

Considered alongside results of the Summer Activity LPAs, this suggests that youth had uneven exposure to the most enriching settings (i.e., camp and specialized activities). Of youth who *did* spend a good deal of time in enriching settings, some spent the majority of their summer in one setting (e.g., Overnight Campers), while others moved between different settings (e.g., Balanced with specialization). In contrast, some youth – e.g., those who were Mostly Home during summer – had very limited exposure to enriching settings relative to youth who fit into other profiles.

What do these patterns mean for youth? On the one hand, it is possible that greater exposure to enriching settings like camp, sports, and arts/music confers greater benefits to youth. However, neither the amount of time spent at summer camp (ReAC Youth Impact Longitudinal Report, 2022) nor 2018 summer activity profiles were consistently predictive of youth outcomes (see Connections between Use of Summertime and Youth Outcomes). It may be that benefits of enrichment settings depend on youth personalities. For instance, some youth may benefit more from enriching activities if they have sufficient time at home to decompress and relax, while others may thrive with an intense schedule of activities. Additionally, as the first section of this report highlights, it may be that youths' unique experiences in a particular setting – rather than the amount of time in that setting – is most important.

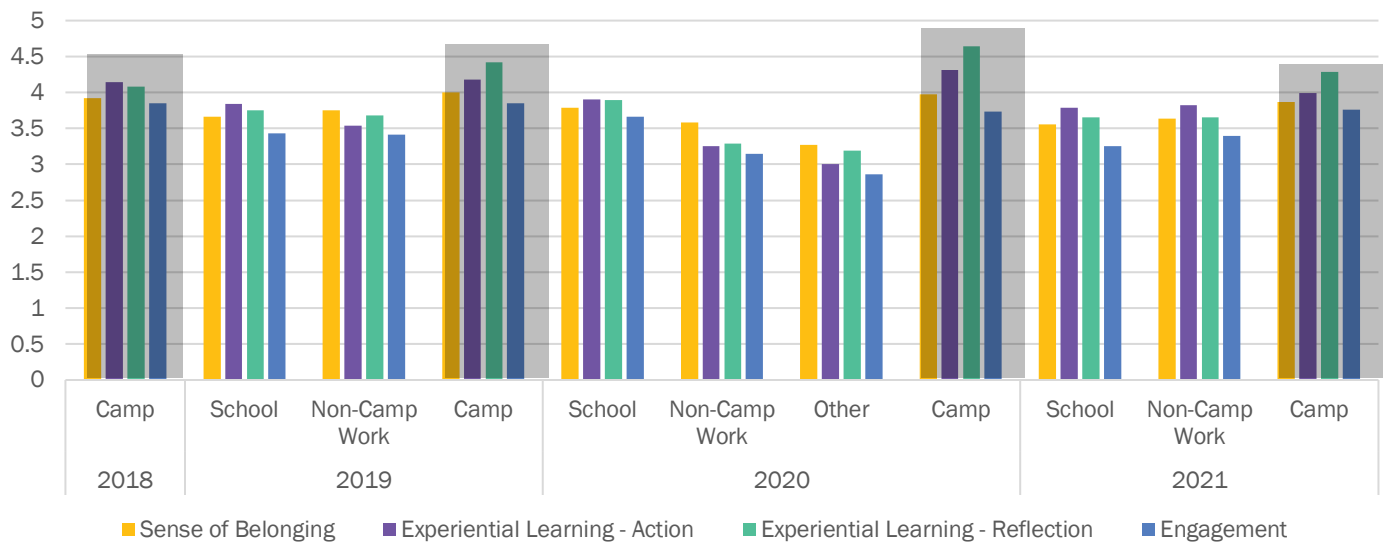
Comparing Camp Employment to School and Other Work

The big benefit I got from going to camp was meeting so many different people...before I went to camp, I would say that I was really shy... but now I've talked to people who I never thought I'd get a chance to talk to. And now I'm making all these different kinds of friends.” – Camp counselor

Since I worked at camp it's been a really cool journey of an increased confidence in myself and my ability to work with youth... Up until I actually got hired on as a substitute, I had only observed and I wasn't actually the autonomous one and only adult in a classroom full of 25-30 kids making all the decisions. So, having been a counselor of 10 to 11 campers for an entire week and several evenings alone, it kind of scaffolded me up to having that confidence that, no, I can do this.” – Camp counselor

In addition to considering how camp fits into summertime for youth, we also explored how experiences of employment at summer camp compared to emerging adults' experiences in other settings. First, we compared participants' perceptions about their experiences in camp employment, school, and other work. We found that **summer camp often offered significantly higher levels of belonging, engagement, and experiential learning than school and other work** (e.g., see semi-annual phase 3 reports for the Staff Impact Study). The table below illustrates how camp employment compared to other settings throughout the study.

Figure 12. Comparing Camp Employment to Other Settings for Summer Staff



Moreover, across the first three waves of this study, we examined how working at camp was related to the development of certain social-emotional outcomes (i.e., task leadership, social awareness, grit, and self-management) compared to school and non-camp employment. We found that camp employment was more strongly connected than school or non-camp employment to select social-emotional outcomes (Povilaitis, Sibthorp, & Richmond, 2021). For example, across both quantitative and qualitative data, **we found that camp employment seems more related to the development of social awareness/relationships skills and leadership skills than school or non-camp employment.** The table below illustrates the outcomes associated with camp employment and the strength of our findings across multiple data sources.

Table 10. Data Sources Linking Camp Employment to Social-Emotional Outcomes

Outcomes	Quantitative data	Open-ended qualitative data	Interview data	Overall
Social Awareness	++	++	++	++
Self-Management	-	++	-	+
Grit	-	+	-	+
Task leadership	++	++	+	++
Career orientation	-	-	+	+
Working with diverse populations	-	-	-	-
Appreciation for being present in the moment	++	+	++	++
Importance of self-care	-	+	+	+

Note: The symbols indicate strength as follows: ++ = strong evidence, + = moderate evidence, - = no evidence

Overall, our findings highlight that summer camp is a rich developmental setting compared to other spaces that emerging adults spend time in, such that employment at summer camp may offer unique social-emotional benefits.

Contributions of Camp Employment to Career Development

In addition to offering opportunities for socioemotional development, summer camp employment may be a fertile setting for important career-related development. We explored this idea through two key concepts: meaningful work and work values.

Meaningful Work

Summer camp is meaningful because the effects I have on others are very personal and tangible. I can see how I am impacting the lives of the campers, watch them grow in a positive way, and see how they improve over the course of the summer. - Camp counselor

Working at summer camp is often described as being a meaningful and impactful seasonal summer work experience. Despite anecdotal evidence, prior to the National Impact Study, researchers had yet to examine the meaningfulness of camp employment and what specifically about the employment made it meaningful. **Meaningful work** is employment that provides people with a sense of meaning and purpose in their life.

Using data collected as part of the Impact Study, [Warner, Poviliatis, Sibthorp, & Richmond \(2021\)](#) learned that many participants considered their employment at summer camp to be meaningful work. **Participants who worked at a camp during the summer of 2019 reported that their work was more meaningful than did participants working in other settings.** Participants said working at camp was meaningful because of their relationships with coworkers, opportunities to make a difference, and opportunities to learn and develop skills.

Further analyses revealed that these connections endured for several years. Specifically, **participants who had better camp employment experiences in 2018 in terms of engagement, belonging, and experiential learning reported that their work in the fall of 2021 was more meaningful than participants who had worse camp employment experiences in 2018.** Similarly, the more meaningful participants found their camp employment to be in 2019, the more meaningful their work was in fall 2021. Thus, it seems that young adults are using camp employment to determine qualities that make work meaningful for them, and then seeking these qualities in future employment.

Work Values

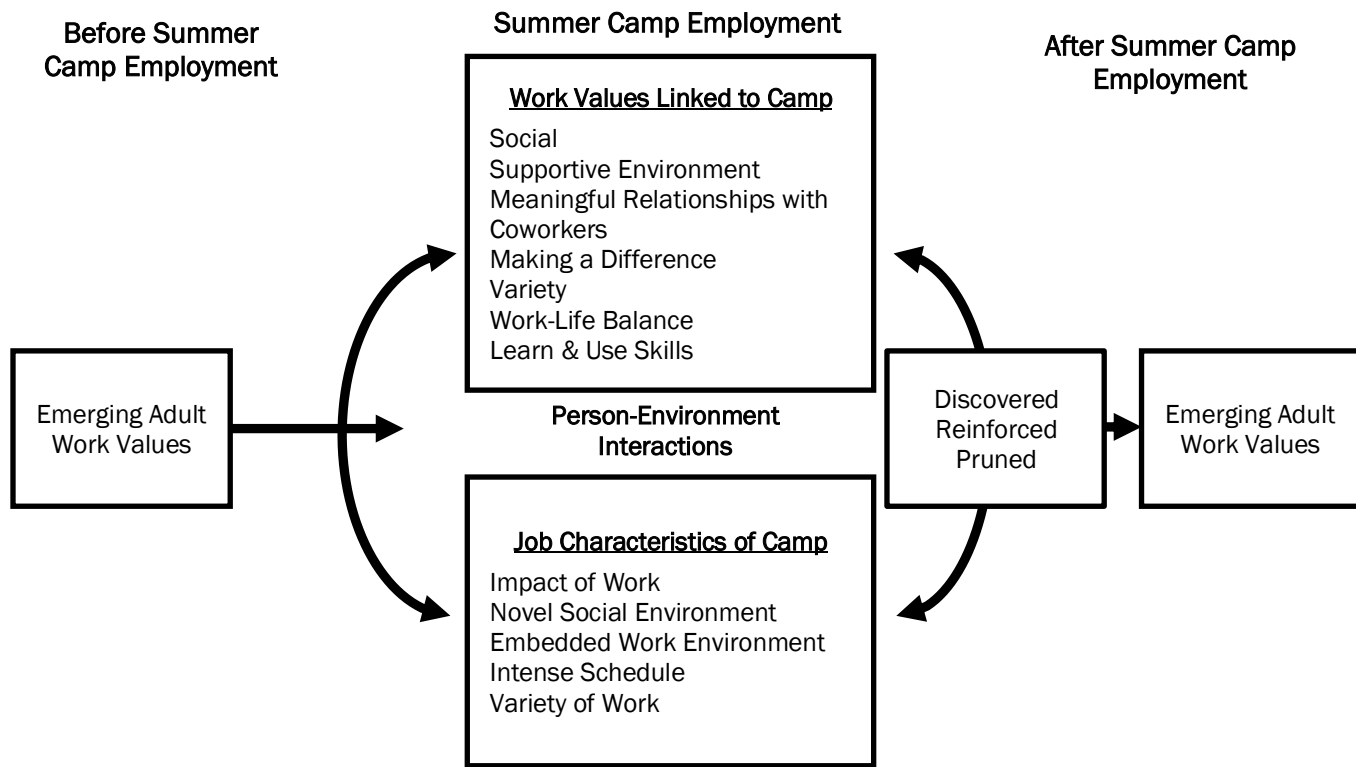
I think that [camp] definitely impacted the way that I see myself working with others and how important it is for me to have strong working relationships. - Camp counselor

[Camp] opened my eyes to the fact that I want to be in a place where I'm developing close relationships with my co-workers. - Camp counselor

[Camp] really reaffirmed for me that I don't want my co-workers to be just my co-workers. I want them to be my friends. - Camp counselor

Prior to this National Impact Study, little was known about how working at a summer camp impacted staff's career development. Using data collected as part of the Impact Study, [Warner, Sibthorp, Povilaitis, & Taylor \(2021\)](#) learned that working at summer camp is a seasonal employment setting that can support the discovery, reinforcement, and pruning of **work values** (i.e., what people want in work). Staff bring their work values with them to their work at summer camp. **The unique characteristics of summer camp employment, such as the novel social environment, the impact of the work, and the embedded work environment, provide staff opportunities to clarify their work values, including the importance of having meaningful relationships with coworkers, work-life balance, and making a difference, among others.** For example, someone may begin camp employment with the idea that the primary goal of future work experiences will be to have a large salary. After seeing how their work impacts the kids they serve at camp, the same staff who was initially focused on making large sums of money may decide that finding work that allows them to make a difference is more important. The figure below illustrates the types of work values participants associated with their camp employment experiences, as well as the characteristics of camp employment that supported this process.

Figure 13. Connections Between Summer Camp Employment and Work Values



Decision-Making About Camp

People consider a myriad of factors in making decisions about camp attendance and employment, from economic constraints to socioemotional needs.

Understanding the benefits of camp necessitates understanding how people end up at camp. We thus worked to understand decision-making about camp attendance among youth and their families, and decision-making about camp employment among staff.

We found that in making decisions about camp attendance, parents tend to act as gatekeepers. While youth do play a role in the process, particularly in guiding parents to consider camp as an option, it is ultimately parents that take on the majority of the responsibility. This may be because parents balance many competing interests and demands in making decisions about camp. These include their own interests and goals for their kid, their child’s interests, their evaluation of camp fit, and an array of contextual factors that shape the decision-making process.

Income seems to be a particularly salient factor in the decision-making process, not only in determining what families can access, but also in shaping what they hope to gain from camp and what camp features they value most. Given this, it is unsurprising that factors such as income, education, race/ethnicity, and family composition were linked to how many summers youth attended camp over the study, as well as the total number of weeks youth spent at camp. More research is needed to unpack the degree to which differences in camp attendance reflect structural inequities that camps can address versus divergent preferences and priorities for youth development.

For staff, we explored factors that drove camp employment. Working at camp was a natural next step from campership for many, who saw camp employment as an avenue to give back, make a difference in the lives of youth, and maintain connections with a meaningful community. Camp was also viewed as an avenue for skill development and having fun. Staff who had great experiences their first year were more likely to return to camp in future years. However, some staff did not return, with key barriers being low pay, poor fit, and better opportunities elsewhere. Holistically, results suggest

that while some young people may not be well-suited to camp employment, others' decision-making around camp employment could be shifted through continual improvement initiatives, pay increases, and opportunities for career advancement.

Drivers of Camp Attendance

Parent and youth contributions to decision-making about camp

As a mom, I made I choice. I'm the one that made camp happen. – Parent of camper

As reported in the [2022 Longitudinal Report](#), there is evidence of both continuity and change in camp-related decision-making over time.

In the late Spring/early Summers of 2018 and 2020, parents reported on how much they and their child contributed to decision-making about camp attendance at three points in the decision-making process: initiation (i.e., thinking about going to camp), information search (i.e., researching potential options for camp), and final purchase (i.e., making the final decision about camp attendance for the child). Descriptive analyses suggest that parents – often mothers – contributed most to camp-related decision-making ([Richmond et al., 2022](#)). Youth contributed more to the initiation phase than other phases ([Richmond et al., 2022](#)). However, there were minimal changes in youth contributions to decision-making over time ([Longitudinal Report, 2022](#)). This points to continuity in parent and child contributions to camp decision-making across early adolescence, with parents taking on the dominant role. However, it is important to note that the emergence of COVID-19 may have impacted the degree to which youth participated in camp decision-making in 2020. It may be that youth *would* have played a larger role if not for the pandemic.

As documented in the [Longitudinal Report \(2022\)](#), we did find some evidence that decision-making about camp and other summertime activities shifts as children age. Over the course of Phase 3, parent-child dyads were interviewed about summertime decision-making. Many parents noted that as their child has gotten older, they have allowed them to take on a greater role in deciding how to use their summer. In particular, parents reported supporting their children's ideas about what to do during summer rather than redirecting them toward activities the parents found valuable.

Taken together, these findings indicate that youth play an increasing role in shaping their summer as they age, but that decision-making about camp still relies a great deal on parents. It may be that youth have more power to decide whether or not they want to go to camp when they are older, but that parents remain key drivers of the decision-making process, especially regarding the final purchasing/enrollment decisions.

Factors that shape decision-making about camp

His activities are based on things that he is really interested in, so we had to make a few decisions a while back whether he was going to go to academic enrichment camp during the summer or if he was going to go to [our primary camp]. So we have to prioritize and then we also have to make sure that it doesn't conflict with the other things that he wants to do. So [the challenge is] finding the time to get all of his wants done or seeing what compromises we can make - Parent of camper

It was kind of like, 'hey kids, we're going to do one special thing every winter and one special thing in the summer like camp that cost money.' And so, these have become huge staples in their lives, quite unlike their more affluent peers who also do these things but also go to Costa Rica and doing this and that. For us, these are the things that are kind of the glue in their year. – Parent of camper

[Choosing a camp is about] finding a balance between down time and things that push them to grow, but gives them time to relax while staying active, being engaged, and growing their faith. – Parent of camper



Richmond and colleagues (2022) explored decision-making about camp attendance using data from the first wave of the National Impact Study. The sample included 354 families with children who attended camp during summer of 2018. Principal Components Analysis (PCA) revealed three types of camp-related goals parents tend to have for their children: interactive learning, intrapersonal development, and fun/belonging. Specific items pertaining to each goal are presented in Table 11. These camp-related goals were correlated, such that parents tended to rate all three as similarly important.

Table 11. Types of Parent Goals for Children at Camp

Interactive Learning	Intrapersonal Development	Fun and belonging
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learns to appreciate nature • Learns to get along with others • Learns to be a leader • Meets kids that are different from them • Able to disconnect from technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learns to be more independent • Learns to be more responsible • Able to learn about who they are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has fun • Feels like they belong at camp • Makes new friends • Has new experiences • Is able to live in the moment

Another PCA identified five “camp fit” factors that parents consider when deciding what camp to send their child to. These were logistics/cost, program quality, child fit, institutional ties, and social connections. Items that loaded onto each factor are shown in Table 12. These factors were *not* highly correlated, suggesting that different families place different weight on each of these factors.

Table 12. Camp Fit Factors

Logistics/cost	Program quality	Child fit	Institutional ties	Social connections
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camp proximity to home • Location of camp • Cost of camp fits in the family budget • Need for summer childcare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation of the camp • Quality of staff • Programming and activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child was interested • Child was ready for camp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious or spiritual affiliation • Connection to child’s school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child has friends attending the camp • Recommendations from other parents

A key goal of this study was to assess whether family contextual factors including household income, parent education, family structure, and prior experience with camp were related to parents’ camp-related goals and consideration of camp fit. The authors found that **income was a significant predictor**. Specifically:

- Low-income parents rated interactive learning, intrapersonal development, and fun/belonging as *more* important to camp-related decision-making than high-income parents.
- Low income-income parents rated logistics/costs and institutional ties as *more* important for choosing a camp than did high-income parents. Program quality, child fit, and social connections were similarly important for low- and high-income parents.

Other contextual factors that were related to decision-making around camp included **family history** and **household composition**. Those with more family history with camp rated logistics/costs as less important than those who had less camp history. Additionally, families with a higher number of children tended to view institutional ties as more important than others.

Result of this study suggest that overall, most parents want their kids to have fun, build social skills, and develop independence and other intrapersonal skills at camp. However, what families prioritize in choosing a camp differs in some key ways. **Income appears to be a particularly salient factor when it comes to decision-making around camp**. Parents with low levels of income generally want their children to get more out of camp than do higher income families, but they also tend to be constrained in terms of costs and logistics. These parents appear to value institutional connections more than their high-income peers in choosing a camp, perhaps as an avenue for reducing costs and/or ensuring that their child will be in trusted hands. These findings underscore that camps need to continue to find ways to reduce barriers to camp attendance for children from low-income homes through scholarship programs and relationship building with local institutions, such as churches and schools.

Factors that shape camp attendance across years

“I went to summer camp and I loved it and now she goes. In a lot of ways, it’s her first experience building a sort of life outside of our family structure. Summer camp is a big thing because we make time for it, we really want her to go and there’s so many positive things that come from it.” – Parent of camper

While the aforementioned analyses provide insights into the contextual factors that shape decision-making about camp, they do not tell us how these factors relate to youths’ camp attendance over time. We therefore ran a series of **OLS regressions** to consider how individual and contextual factors at the start of the study (in 2018) predicted **a)** years of camp attendance, and **b)** total weeks at camp over the course of the study.

While these are both measures of duration of camp attendance, they have slightly different meaning.

- Years of camp measures how **enduring** camp attendance was over time.
- Total weeks at camp measures how **intensive** youths’ attendance was overall.

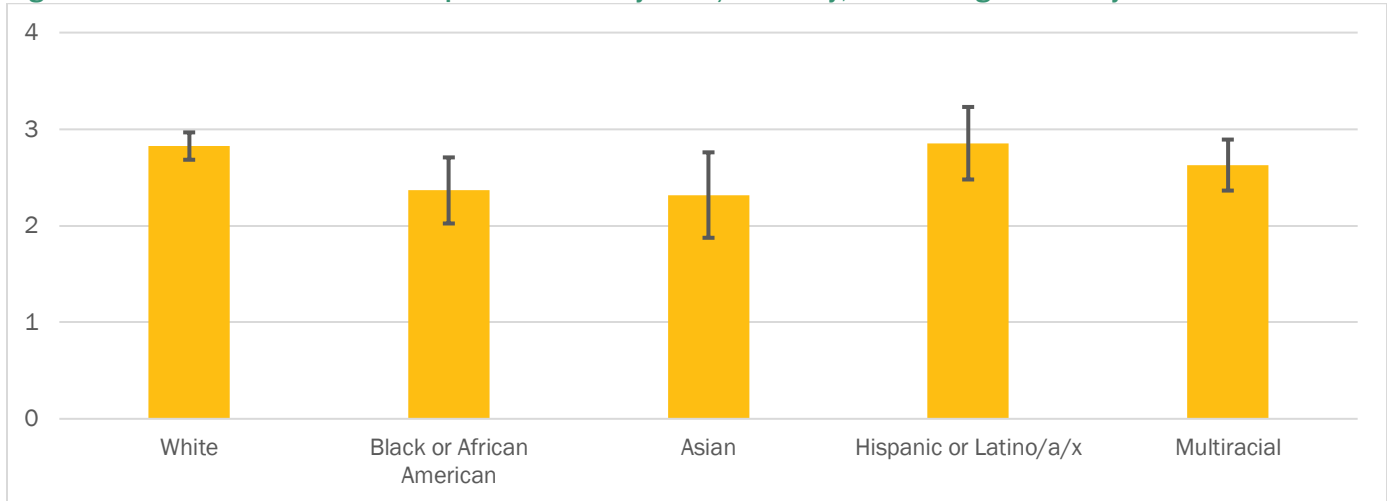
Analyses were run separately for the two outcome variables, focusing on the sample of youth who participated in Fall data collection for at least three years ($N = 342$). In addition to considering contextual factors included in the aforementioned study on decision-making, we also considered the role of child race/ethnicity and gender. Additionally, due to their interrelated nature, family income and parent education were combined into a single measure of family socioeconomic resources. All predictors were included at once, such that a significant relationship represents the association between the predictor and the outcome variable holding all other variables constant. Results are presented in Table 13 and Figure 14.

Table 13. Contextual and Individual Factors Predicting Camp-Attendance Over the Study

Predictor	Number of Years Attending Camp	Total Weeks at Camp
Family socioeconomic resources	X	X
Household includes two parents (vs. one)		-X
Number of children in household		-X
Family history with camp		X
Child gender		
Child race/ethnicity	X	

Note: X denotes a significant relationship between the predictor and the outcome under consideration, controlling for all other predictors. Cells highlighted in green represent positive relationships, where higher levels of the predictor are linked with higher levels of the outcome. Cells highlighted in orange represent negative relationships (-X), where higher levels of the predictor are linked with lower levels of the outcome. Due to the multiple categories present for child race/ethnicity, this relationship is unpacked further in the visual that follows.

Figure 14. Estimated Years of Camp Attendance by Race/Ethnicity, Controlling for Family Context and Gender



Note: This visual shows the predicted number of years of camp attendance by race/ethnicity, holding constant household income, parent education, household composition, family history with camp, and child gender. Error bars represent the 95% confidence interval around estimates. A wider error bar indicates that estimates are less precise. Estimates are less precise for non-White youth due to the relatively small number of these youth within the sample.

Results show that family and individual factors were linked with camp attendance. Specifically:

- **FAMILY SOCIOECONOMIC RESOURCES:** On average, youth from families with more socioeconomic resources (i.e., higher levels of income and education) attended camp over **more years** and for **more weeks** than youth whose families had fewer socioeconomic resources.
- **HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION:** Two-parent households and households with more children tended to send their children to camp for **fewer weeks** than single-parent households and households with relatively fewer children.
- **FAMILY HISTORY WITH CAMP:** Households with more family camp history generally sent their children to camp for **more weeks** than those with less prior experience with camp.
- **RACE/ETHNICITY:** Black youth attended significantly **fewer years** of camps than their White and Latinx peers, on average. Asian youth similarly spent **fewer years** at camp than White peers.

Overall, results indicate that camp attendance was less **enduring** for select groups of youth, including Black and Asian youth, and youth from families with fewer socioeconomic resources. Why might these patterns emerge? In terms of socioeconomic resources, it may be that families with fewer resources deprioritize camp as children age due to its associated expenses. Meanwhile, parents with more socioeconomic resources may send their kids to camp regardless of their children's interest, perhaps as a way of ensuring structure or reducing screen time. Differences by race/ethnicity are less easily accounted for. It may be that in general, a larger portion of Black and Asian youth deprioritize camp as they get older and opt into other summertime activities. This could be due to changing interests, or it could be related to differential experiences in camp settings (e.g., lower levels of belonging compared to other youth). Further research should be conducted to understand these patterns.

Similarities and differences emerged in relation to **intensity** of camp attendance. Youth from families with more socioeconomic resources attended camp for more weeks than youth from lower income families. Family history also predicted more weeks at camp, perhaps because youth are more excited about attending for longer stretches when they have grown up hearing about the virtues of summer camp. Meanwhile, youth with more siblings and youth in two-parent households spent **fewer weeks** at camp. This may be because youth in larger households do not need to rely on camp as a mode of childcare. Additionally, more children leads to fewer financial resources for each child, such that each child may be able to spend one or two weeks at camp, but more than that would become cost-prohibitive even for families with moderate-to-high levels of income.

Looking across analyses, results suggest that families balance competing needs and interests in making decisions

about sending their children to camp. Unfortunately, some families have to navigate more constraints than others, resulting in key inequities in camp attendance *even within a sample of families that send their children to camp*. Such inequities are likely to be elevated in the general population.

Economic inequities seem most obvious and approachable. The fact that low-income families within this sample had higher hopes for what their children would gain from camp than high-income families suggests that these families may not need to be convinced that camp is valuable. However, high expectations could invite more room for disappointment. Racial/ethnic differences in years of camp attendance *may* point to inequitable access to camp, but they may also be reflective of racially or culturally unique developmental pathways (García-Coll et al., 1996). Given the relatively small samples of racially minoritized youth in the present sample, these questions warrant further investigation.

Decision-Making About Summer Camp Employment

Motivations to Work at Summer Camp

I love this camp and want to give others the experience I had. – **Camp counselor**

[I wanted to work at camp] to gain great career-building experiences, and to build new relationships and friendships. – **Camp counselor**

The Staff Impact study provided an avenue for exploring why emerging adults start working at a camp. Over 80% of the staff interviewed had previously been campers, which shaped their interest in camp employment. Across surveys and interviews, we learned that for many, working at camp allowed them to feel like they were giving back to their camp community. Relatedly, many staff said their camp counselors impacted them and that they wanted to be able to make difference in campers' lives, too. Many also said that working at camp would allow them an opportunity to create a meaningful community with other staff. For some, the meaningful community was an extension of the community they had at camp when they were a camper. These findings underscore the importance of pathways from campership to camp employment.

Some staff identified reasons for working at camp that were less connected to prior experiences at camp. For instance, many noted that working at camp could result in a summer accented by fun. Others discussed the development of skills that would be useful for future employment. These results suggest that to recruit those who have limited prior camp experience, it may be valuable to emphasize the skills and experiences likely to come from camp employment, as well as opportunities for fun and community building inherent to camp work.

Decision-Making About Returning to Summer Camp Employment

The main reason I came back was because I am passionate about making a difference to the people that surround me. I want to use my gifts and skills to make sure that hundreds of kids every summer have the best week of their year at camp. – **Camp counselor**

It's my second home. It's my escape from 'the real world.' I have never missed a summer (don't plan to either). – **Camp counselor**

I don't want to be a camp counselor for a living. It's good being a camp CIT. That will get you to college, but being a camp counselor is not that good of a resume for any job except a baby sitter, and I don't want to be a baby sitter. No offense to my baby sitter, but it isn't for me. – **Camper/Counselor-in-training**



In addition to understanding why staff begin to work at camp, this study has also provided insights into why staff return to camp employment after their initial experience. When asked about their motivations to return to camp in open-ended surveys and interviews, many staff suggested that they intended to return to camp because of the impact they feel they make (i.e., ability to make a difference, be a role model, mentor others) and an embeddedness with the camp (i.e., emotional attachment to camp, positive memories and friendships) (Richmond et al., 2020). The reasons that staff returned to work at a camp for a second or third year often overlapped with reasons why they started working at camp in the first place, including an interest in working with kids, making a difference, and building community.

Staff who did **not** intend to return to camp said it was because of low pay, poor fit with the job, or other opportunities related to their career or life more broadly (Richmond et al., 2020). Indeed, these were the key challenges staff who ended up not returning after the first summer reported in open-ended responses and interviews. Other staff who did not return said they had “aged out” of the camp employment experience.

Finally, we examined how experiences of camp employment were linked to continued camp employment in later summers. Using data collected through the online surveys, we found that having a positive camp experience characterized by belonging, engagement, and learning predicted returning to camp for a second summer. We found similar trends regarding the impact of early camp employment (in 2018 and 2019) on return rates in 2021, a full four summers after their first camp employment experience. This suggests that positive camp employment experiences are meaningful and reinforcing. On the other hand, this also indicates that camp employment experiences that are *not* characterized by belonging, engagement, and learning may serve as an impediment to retention. It may thus be important for camp leadership to evaluate staff employment experiences in order to identify areas for improvement.

As families consider sending their children to camp, costs are important, but families also want their kids to have fun, feel connected to others, actively learn, and have opportunities for personal development. While children participate in the decision-making process, and increasingly so as they age, parents are still making the final purchasing decisions based on whether the camp fits with their goals, values, and family resources. Ultimately, even in a sample of camp families, there is some evidence that summer camp is prioritized more readily by White families with educated and affluent parents who, themselves, have a history with summer camp. Similar dynamics may play out for staff, who balance a myriad of considerations – financial, social, emotional, and career-based – in deciding whether to pursue and return to summer camp employment. Major draws include connectedness to the camp community and alignment between camp employment and the person’s interests and educational goals. Major barriers include low pay, poor fit with the job, and the lack of long-term career viability inherent in seasonal employment.

SECONDARY FINDINGS

This section summarizes secondary findings that came out of the National Impact Study. Most of the studies described below have been published in academic journals, though some are still under review or in preparation. Many came from Phases I and II of the Impact Study. The results of these studies informed the development of the longitudinal study, from which most primary findings were drawn. Publications on primary findings are forthcoming.

It is important to note that some of the studies discussed below from Phases 1 and 2 asked former campers, now young adults, to reflect on their time at summer camp. Participants were generally camp alumni who had had good experiences at camp and were still connected to their camp community. As such, the findings of these studies provide valuable insights into how camp can benefit youth, and what features of camp may be responsible for those benefits. However, those who participated in camp cannot know what would have happened had they *not* participated in camp. For instance, might they have participated in another activity with similar developmental benefits? Moreover, it is possible that camp alumni who participated in these studies had exceptional experiences compared to most. Because of this, these findings should be interpreted with some caution. Rather than providing evidence that summer camp is uniquely promotive of youth development, studies of this nature provide insight into whether and how attending summer camp benefits youth, according to their own recollections. This work informed the longitudinal phase of the Impact Study, which allowed more systematic evaluation of the benefits of camp for a broader range of people.

Potential Benefits of Camp

Examining the Role of Summer Camps in Developing Academic and Workplace Readiness (Phase 1)

Wilson, C. & Sibthorp, J. (2018). *Journal of Youth Development*.

The primary aim of this study was to investigate learning outcomes from camp most applicable to academics and workplace readiness. As a secondary aim, the researchers sought to identify the mechanisms at camp that support this learning. Youths' primary learning outcomes include relationship skills, teamwork, how to live with peers, self-confidence, organization, responsibility, independence, perseverance, career orientation, and emotion regulation. In general, mechanisms that supported participants' learning of outcomes included experiential learning, camp as separate time and space, camp schedules, the role of counselors, communal living, safe and supportive environments, and diversity of people. The implications for camp staff include furthering their programming efforts by placing an emphasis on the mechanisms that elicit academic and workplace readiness. With intentional effort, summer camp can be an important setting for youth to learn valuable skills that are beneficial for them to succeed in academics and work.

Fostering Distinct and Transferrable Learning Via Summer Camp (Phase 1)

Wilson, C., Akiva, T., Sibthorp, J., & Browne, L. (2019). *Children and Youth Services Review*.

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore how summer camp may fit into the learning landscape of young people's lives. We identify areas distinctly learned at camp and transferable to other contexts, ways that learning may happen, and how summer camp may compare to other learning contexts. We conducted structured interviews with former camp attendees and coded transcripts for salient themes. Interviewees reported learning interpersonal skills (e.g., relationship skills), intrapersonal skills (e.g., confidence), identity development (e.g., self-identity), and technical skills (e.g., sport and leisure skills). The program elements that supported this learning fell into the areas of the programming (e.g., experiential learning), people (e.g., counselors), and setting (e.g., safe/supportive environment). Camp fit into the learning landscape for these interviewees by being complementary to school and a social respite from school. These data suggest that youths' social emotional learning may be accelerated at camp and camp may serve as a "north star" for young people to use as a reference point in their life.



Understanding the Role of Summer Camps in the Learning Landscape: An Exploratory Sequential Study (Phase 2)

Richmond, D., Sibthorp, J., & Wilson, C. (2019). *Journal of Youth Development*.

Summer camp is an important setting within the learning landscape of youth—a landscape that also includes school, sports, arts and music, religious settings, home, and eventually, work. While research on camp outcomes is abundant, practitioners and policymakers have little empirical evidence that summer camp participation offers long-term impact and value. The purpose of this study was to build on existing camp research to identify learning outcomes that are highly attributable to camp participation and to determine whether these outcomes are considered important in everyday life. A second purpose was to identify other settings that may contribute to learning outcomes often associated with camp participation. This study used mixed methods design and involved a national sample of 352 individuals (18-25 years old) who had attended camp for at least 3 weeks in their youth and had not worked at a camp. Alumni reported that the development of independence, perseverance, responsibility, appreciation for differences, and appreciation for being present were camp-related outcomes that were highly attributable to their camp experiences and that these outcomes were also of high importance in daily life. Among all outcomes that were highly attributable to camp, study participants noted that camp was a primary setting for developing affinity for nature, how to live with peers, leisure skills, a willingness to try new things, independence, being present, and empathy and compassion. School and home were primary learning settings for other outcomes. Findings from this study help identify where camp is particularly effective in promoting lasting outcomes and areas where camps may need more intentionality and resources.

Variation in Benefits of Camp

The Role of Behavioral Loyalty in Youth Development at Summer Camp (Phase 2)

Wilson, C. & Sibthorp, J. (2019). *Journal of Leisure Research*.

Behavioral loyalty, or consistent participation in summer camp, may impact how and in what ways young campers develop. Specifically, this study examines how two factors of behavioral loyalty, dosage (e.g., weeks at last camp) and developmental progression (e.g., transitioning from camper to camp employee), are associated with youth development attributed to the camp experience. Campers categorized as core participants (i.e., those reporting higher dosage and further developmental progression) were compared to fringe participants (i.e., those who reported lower dosage of camp and less developmental progression). As hypothesized, there were significant differences in development for core and fringe participants based on both dosage and developmental progression. Although both core and fringe participants benefited from camp, core participants reported greater development of measured outcomes such as relationship skills, appreciation for diversity, and self-identity. These findings offer insight into the benefits of increased behavioral loyalty in summer camp participants.

Similarities and Differences in Summer Camps: A Mixed Methods Study of Lasting Outcomes and Program Elements (Phase 2)

Warner, R. P., Sibthorp, J., Browne, L. P. Barnett, S., Gillard, A., & Sorenson, J. (2021). *Children and Youth Service Review*.

Summer camps are a setting well-suited for social-emotional learning. Increasing evidence supports this claim, yet little research has investigated the similarities and differences in the lasting outcomes of attending camp based on camp types characterized by different programmatic foci and the populations served. In this study, we sought to determine if there were similarities and differences in the outcomes and the program elements responsible for lasting outcomes based on camp type. Using a mixed-methods approach, 744 former campers from four camp types (medically-focused, faith-based, all-girls, and camps serving youth from low-income backgrounds) and a comparison group (referent panel) reported on the outcomes they learned at camp that they identify as important to their daily lives. Visualizations of key findings are presented in Figures X and X. Profile analysis results suggested both common and different outcomes across camp types. Qualitative data largely supported the quantitative results and provided

details to help explain similarities and differences based on camp type. This study provides evidence of the developmental outcomes afforded by camp that last past attendance and the program elements important to outcome development regardless of camp type.

Figure 15. Similarities and Differences by Camp Type



Important Features of Summer Camp

Active Ingredients of Learning at Summer Camp (Phase 2)

Sibthorp, J., Wilson, C., Povilaitis, V., & Browne, L. (2020). *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*.

“Active ingredients” are one way to describe the elements of a program that are responsible for the targeted change in behavior, skill, attitude, or belief (Li & Julian American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 82(2), 157 –166, 2012). This term

assumes a connection between program elements (ingredients) and participant outcomes, and assumes that a typical program includes inactive ingredients that are less directly tied to these outcomes. Delineating active and inactive ingredients will help program providers more effectively train staff and design programs to intentionally target desirable camper outcomes. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify the ingredients of the camp experience former campers believe most actively contributed to lasting learning. Specifically, we asked 524 former campers between the ages of 18 and 25 to identify the most valuable thing they learned at camp and then to tell us more about the aspects of the camp experience that most directly facilitated this learning. Consistent with the literature, it appears that former campers achieve primarily social-emotional outcomes at camp and that these outcomes are most useful after camp. When asked what at camp fostered these outcomes, participants identified a range of camp features from which we identified active ingredients and their relation to specific outcomes. These include: camp staff and the ways they support campers and serve as role models; camp programming that is novel, active, and provides opportunities to work with peers; a social context that is safe and supportive and fosters interaction among people from different backgrounds; and in overnight camp experiences, separation from home.

“It’s Not Real Life”: Liminality and Summer Camp Employment (Phase 3)

Povilaitis, V., Sibthorp, J., & Warner, R. P. (2021). *Journal of Adolescent Research*.

Liminal spaces occur separately from everyday life and are important to human development. Due to increased technological connectivity, young people are rarely separated from their home lives. Understanding young adulthood is a transitional time and summer camps can be settings for development, the purpose of this study was to understand the nature of summer camp employment as a liminal space. Individuals from a national (USA) study of summer camp employment ($n = 77$, $Mage = 21.3$) participated in in-depth interviews. Participants were 77.9% White ($n = 60$), 9.1% Black or African American, 9.1% Multi-Racial, 2.6% Asian, and 1.3% Latinx. About 64.9% identified as female ($n = 50$), 33.8% identified as male, and 1.3% identified as gender non-conforming. Interview transcripts were inductively analyzed using thematic coding. Participants described camp as a liminal space with four dimensions of separation: physical, psychological, social, and technological. They also described experiencing a liminal time of life. In combination, the separation and time-of-life dimensions created an experience of liminal intensity manifested through a closed social system, blurred boundaries between work and non-work life, and increased autonomy. A revised conceptualization of liminal space is suggested and considerations regarding liminal intensity for young people are discussed.

Comparing Summer Camp to Other Summertime Settings: A National Explanatory-Sequential Study of Developmental Settings (Phase 3)

Warner, R. P., Sibthorp, J., Wainryb, C., Froehly, M., & Taylor, J. (in review)

The purpose of this study was to examine how the important developmental qualities of summer camp compared to other summertime experiences. More specifically, we aimed to understand the extent to which summer camp offered similar and different levels of engagement, belonging, experiential learning (action and reflection), and positive adult-youth relationships compared to youth’s most impactful other summertime setting. Our results suggest that summer camp can be more engaging and offer more opportunities for experiential learning than many other summertime settings. Our results also suggest that for some youth, other summertime settings, such as family vacation and structured activities like sports or creative arts, can offer similar opportunities for developmental experiences and relationships as summer camp. Our results provide continued evidence of the impactful qualities of summer camp and better situate summer camp’s potential as a developmental setting among other common summertime experiences.

The Roles of Summer Camp in Summertime: A Cross-Case Analysis (Phase 3)

Richmond, D., et al. (manuscript in preparation)

While several studies have reported differences in summer activities based on demographic factors, often finding that children from lower-income families tend to participate in fewer structured enrichment activities (Barnett, 2008; Coulton & Irwin, 2009; Simpkins, Delgado, Price, Quach, & Starbuck, 2013; Snellman, Silva, Frederick, & Putnam, 2014), few studies have examined how parents decide what their children will do each summer (Simpkins, etc.). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to learn how parents intentionally use summer camp as a part of their child's summertime. Based on case studies of six families, we found that families are highly intentional about using summers for value-consistent experiences for their children. Summer camp fills important roles for many families, including childcare, developmental needs, respite, and opportunities to further interests not otherwise accessible.

How Families Negotiate Access Constraints to Summer Camp (Phase 3)

Dickerson, J. (2020). *Master's Thesis*.

Developmentally enriching experiences can be beneficial for all youth. Summer camps provide a fertile, enriching context for development. Due to the opportunity gap, not all youth have access to these experiences. The purpose of this study was to determine what factors constrain access to summer camp participation and understand how families negotiate these constraints in order to participate. Leisure literature provides a model to help understand constraints to leisure activities: the Leisure Constraint Negotiation Model (LCNM; Crawford et al., 1991). Understanding how this model might align with, and might not, can help understand how families experience and negotiate constraints to accessing summer camp. A revised model, the Youth Recreation Program Constraint Negotiation Model (YRPCNM), is proposed in this thesis with the goal of helping researchers and practitioners better serve all youth.

Participants were recruited from a sample of 359 families who sent at least one of their children to a participating summer camp during summer 2018. This study employed a pragmatic and theory testing design, including quantitative surveys, open-ended qualitative survey questions, and semi-structured interviews with a subsample of 19 families. Data were analyzed using hypothesis coding, comparison analysis, and theoretical thematic analysis. The results of this thesis show that while families do experience significant constraints to accessing summer camp programs, they also display an ability to negotiate them. This negotiation is driven by their preference for camp programs and their motivation to participate in them. In order to increase access to camp programming for all youth, it's important to recognize that the data in this thesis show that low-income families experience constraints to a higher degree than high-income families. Finally, this thesis confirms that the YRPCNM can assist researchers and practitioners alike in understanding constraints and the negotiation strategies families employ in order to access youth recreation programs such as summer camp.

Differential Impacts of COVID-10 on Summer Activities and Environments for Children from High-and-Low Income Families (Phase 3)

Richmond, D., et al. (in press). *Children, Youth, and Environments*.

This study examined how the COVID-19 affected the summer activities and environments of children from high- and low-income homes. Results show that youth from high-income homes had access to more enriching activities both before and during the pandemic, even though COVID-19 restricted access to programming for all youth. While all families struggled in many ways to make the most of the pandemic summer, there were silver linings that included more family time and less hectic schedules. The paper also identifies how work-from-home arrangements and virtual programming that arose during the pandemic could help bridge the opportunity gap moving forward.

Lessons Learned: Staff Perspectives of Racial Injustice at Summer Camp (Phase 3)

Povilaitis, V., Froehly, M., & Warner, R. P. (in review).

The purpose of this paper was to understand camp staff perspectives of how racial injustice arises within the summer camp industry, how camps currently address racial injustice, and how summer camps and staff may address these issues moving forward. Staff reported racial injustice occurs at systemic, institutional, and interpersonal levels within camp, as camp is financially inaccessible to many campers of color, there is a lack of racial diversity present at camp, and that campers and staff of color experience micro- and macroaggressions. Camps address racial injustice by offering scholarships and reduced fees, occasionally offering training, and addressing aggressions. Staff suggest camps continue to offer more comprehensive financial aid, commit to increased representation of BIPOC staff at all levels of camp staffing, provide training, and continue to have direct conversations about racial injustice at camp, should they arise.

SUPPLEMENTAL EXPLORATIONS

This section describes supplemental explorations that were undertaken as part of the Impact Study but were discontinued for a variety of reasons. These include investigations that were central to the Impact Study when it was conceived, but that did not offer useful insights upon analysis, as well as constructs that were added into the Impact Study based on researcher interest, but that were not central to the project’s initial research questions. Some of these constructs warrant further attention, as noted below.

Inputs

Exposure to Camp

Over the course of the Youth Impact study, we gathered information on how many weeks per summer youth spent at day and overnight camps, as well as in other activities and settings. While the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 made longitudinal comparisons difficult, we ran several analyses to consider whether time at camp was predictive of youth outcomes. Analyses assessed whether attending camp (versus not attending camp) in a given summer was connected to outcomes, whether the number of weeks and years youth spent at camp predicted outcomes, and whether connections between camp participation and youth outcomes varied by exposure to camp (e.g., attending for two or fewer weeks vs. three or more weeks per summer). Results suggested that neither camp attendance (versus non-attendance) nor amount of time spent at camp were meaningful predictors of youth outcomes (Youth Impact Longitudinal Report, 2022). We thus turned to considering youth experiences at camp.

It is worth noting that in Phase 2, research by Wilson & Sibthorp (2019) found that camp alumni who were “core participants” – i.e., attended for more than 7 weeks, worked at camp, or were CITs at camp – were more likely to report that camp was critical to development of key skills than those who were “fringe participants.” While this research suggested that spending many weeks at camp *may* relate to developmental outcomes, this study did not compare developmental outcomes of “core participants” to “fringe participants.” As noted above, findings from Phase 3 did not find evidence that youth who attended camp for more weeks saw greater developmental benefits than others. Considering these findings together, it may be that “core participants” do benefit from camp more than others, but that “fringe participants” gain similar benefits from other settings, resulting in similar outcome levels for youth across the two groups. Given this, we can say that “core participants” report benefitting from camp more than others, but we **cannot** say that “core participants” are developmentally better off than “fringe participants, nor that amount of time at camp drives developmental benefits.

Out-of-School Time

In addition to investigating potential benefits of camp participation in particular, we also examined connections between out-of-school-time (OST) activity participation and youth outcomes. Specifically, we ran a series of analyses testing relationships between amount and variety of summertime and school year OST with youth- and parent-reported social-emotional outcomes. Although we had hypothesized positive relationships would exist, we only found weak evidence in the analyses we conducted. This topic is ripe for future investigations with the existing dataset, as well as future studies. These investigations may benefit from either more sensitive SEL measures or alternative strategies for measuring OST usage. It is important to note that we did *not* investigate how summertime activity profiles resulting from latent profile analyses (see Camp as a Complementary Setting section) were connected to youth outcomes. This may be a good starting point for further analyses.

Outputs

Longitudinal Shifts in Youth & Staff Outcomes

A key objective of the Impact Study was to understand how youth and staff outcomes changed over time in response to experiences at camp. As such, an important step in our analytic process was assessing the degree to which youth and staff outcomes changed over time, as well as exploring different patterns of change. Latent Growth Curves were

fit to longitudinal outcome data. While there were small shifts in select outcomes over time, these changes were minimal for both youth and staff ([Youth Impact Longitudinal Report, 2022](#); [Staff Impact Report, 2022](#)). Additionally, Growth Mixture Models showed limited variation in *how* outcomes changed over time for youth ([Youth Impact Longitudinal Report, 2022](#)). Meanwhile, we found evidence that camp experiences were linked to outcome *levels* (i.e., being higher vs. lower in affinity for nature), despite not being linked to growth in outcomes. Given these findings, we decided to focus on outcome levels rather than changes in outcomes over time.

Appreciation for Diversity

In the first two phases of the Impact Study, appreciation for diversity emerged as an important lesson for some of the former camper (ages 18+). Thus, a youth-report measure of appreciation for diversity was initially included in phase 3. However, it became clear from the responses and subsequent interviews with youth that the questions were not working well. The youth, who were approximately 9 years old when the study began, were often not able to gauge cultural and racial diversity amongst their peers. Youth instead viewed diversity through the lens of activity preferences (she likes sports and I like reading). The appreciation for diversity items were subsequently removed from the youth survey and replaced with items related to emerging research questions such as spark (below).

Social Perspective-Taking

Much of the outcome data collection throughout the Youth Impact Study relied on youths' self-perceptions about specific outcomes. Unfortunately, self-report measures have the potential to be biased, as people may not be aware of their own skills relative to those of others. As a means of capturing more objective data related to important social-emotional skills during adolescence, in the final wave of data collection, we asked youth to complete a performance-based social perspective-taking measure as part of the survey. This measure had been previously validated with adolescents and appeared promising.

Although most youth who completed the survey provided responses for these questions, the coding of participants' responses was complicated and time-consuming. As a result, we only established sufficient inter-rater reliability for one of the three potential components captured by the measure: positioning. Positioning refers to someone's ability to understand how different actors within a situation view the situation given their own roles, experiences, and circumstances. To determine whether to pursue further coding, we ran preliminary analyses using positioning as an outcome. In particular, we assessed whether camp participation (e.g., years attended, weeks attended, camp qualities) and other out-of-school-time (OST) activity participation (e.g., weeks of OST during summer; variety of school-year OST activities) over the course of the study predicted positioning at the final wave. No clear patterns emerged from these analyses, perhaps due to limited variance on this component of the social perspective-taking measure. If acceptable inter-rater reliability can be established with the other components of this measure, it may be worthwhile to investigate these relationships further. However, it is important to note that because no parallel data were gathered in earlier waves, it is not possible to control for baseline social perspective-taking skills. As such, it is not possible to ascertain whether camp or other OST participation is connected to *improvements* in social perspective-taking, regardless of the analytic strategy used.

DIDS

Given initial evidence suggesting that working at a summer camp may impact identity development, we included the Dimensions of Identity Development Scale (DIDS) for waves 4–8 of the Staff Impact Study. The DIDS is comprised of 5 subscales, each of which measures a component of identity development (i.e., exploration in depth, exploration in breadth, ruminative exploration, commitment making, identifying with commitment). We did not find any relationships between the DIDS and camp employment; however, there is great potential to use these data to answer other research questions. For example, we have considered relating changes in DIDs to wellbeing. There are very few studies that use the DIDS for more than 3 waves of data collection, making these data unique.

Wellbeing

Starting in Fall 2020, we included a subjective wellbeing measure in the Staff Impact Study. We were interested in how wellbeing would shift over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Though we began collecting this data after many staff had ceased working at camp, making it difficult to assess links between camp employment and wellbeing, there is great potential to use these data to answer other research questions.

Miscellaneous

Spark

One theme that emerged early during phase 3 of the study was youth sparks. Parents and children would explain during interviews how some of the child's activity choices (e.g., horseback riding, soccer) shaped both their summer camp and other OST choices. This motivated us to more systematically define sparks and to ask about them over time. Although sparks can be defined in many ways, scholars suggest that sparks are interest-driven activities that youth find engaging and that nurture development. For example, in this study, many youth identified sports as a spark. Other youth identified playing instruments or a love for animals or horseback riding as sparks. Given that camps often provide youth opportunities to try new things, we thought that camps may be a setting that supports youth sparks. Despite our hypothesis, there was not strong evidence that summer camps played a large role in youth developing their sparks. We did, however, continue to explore how youth sparks, especially the persistence of spark over time, may be linked to social-emotional outcomes. Some evidence suggested that youth with a persistent spark reported higher social-emotional outcomes, but this was not consistent across outcomes or across waves. Further exploration can be done to better understand why sparks persist, how this might relate to youths' choice of activities, and how these choices may shape youth development. This area of inquiry has promise within the existing dataset.

Family Typologies

Based on early survey and interview data from families, early results from phase 3 pointed toward different types of summer camp users amongst our families. We initially proposed four types of families that engaged with summer camp: Constrainers (~15%), Dabblers (~15%), Ecologists (~40%), and Evangelists (~30%) (see [ReAC Spring 2019 Youth and Staff Report](#)). Dabblers were subsequently renamed Explorers and Evangelists were renamed Enthusiasts. However, as we further attempted to classify our families, it became apparent that constrained families existed across the other three categories (e.g., a family could be enthusiastic about camp and either constrained or not). The focus on constraints ultimately led to our work using the Leisure Constraints Negotiation Model (e.g., Dickerson 2021). Further, the expansion to six categories diluted the parsimony of our typology model. As the study progressed, some families switched categories or reduced camp attendance (COVID greatly affected 2020 camp attendance). Although the family typology model was attractive, and was published in *Camping Magazine*, it ultimately did not provide a useful frame for our primary research question. Instead of typologies, we gravitated toward trying to understand how families use camp and what constrains summer camp access and continued involvement.

Family Functioning

In addition to gathering data on family composition and demographics, we included items pertaining to family functioning starting in the fall of 2019. Although we have many waves of parent-reported family functioning data, we did not spend time examining its relationship to other constructs. We initially used this measure as a covariate in models examining OST and social-emotional outcomes; however, the significant relationships that did exist were difficult to explain via theory and appeared more spurious than theoretically sound. Despite these initial dead-ends, the amount and quality of the data, as well as extant theory relating family functioning to social-emotional outcomes, this variable offers great potential for future examinations with the existing data.

Parenting Styles

We initially collected data on preferred parenting styles from the parent/caregiver who completed the Phase 3 enrollment survey in 2018. These data proved difficult to use, as many parents scored highest as authoritative

parents, making comparisons within our sample challenging. We had very few permissive parents. Based on these results and insights from the interviews, we gravitated away from preferred parenting styles toward family typologies (above), which were more focused on how parents approached summer camp and less focused on their approach to parenting.

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APPENDIX A: SUMMERTIME ACTIVITY PROFILES

Figure A1. 2019 Summertime Activity Profiles

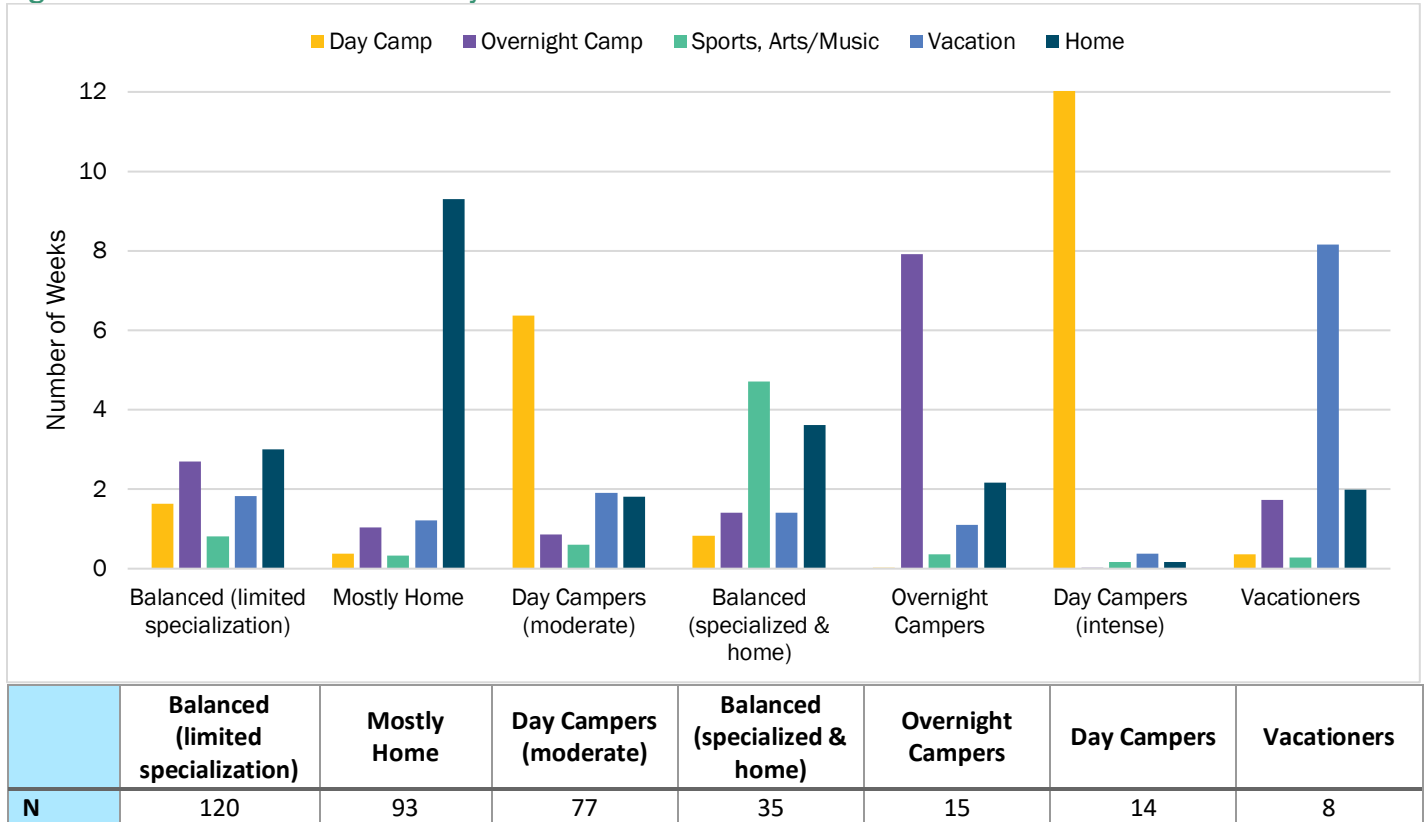


Figure A2. 2020 Summertime Activity Profiles

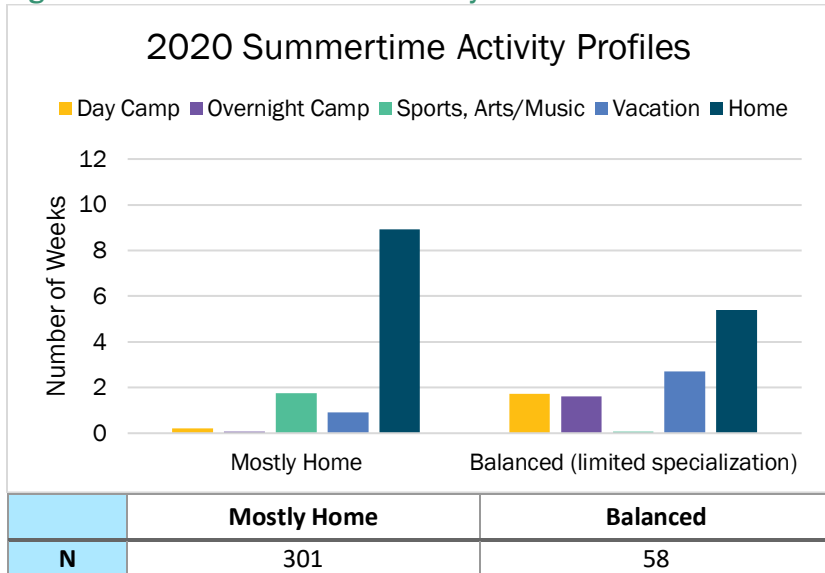
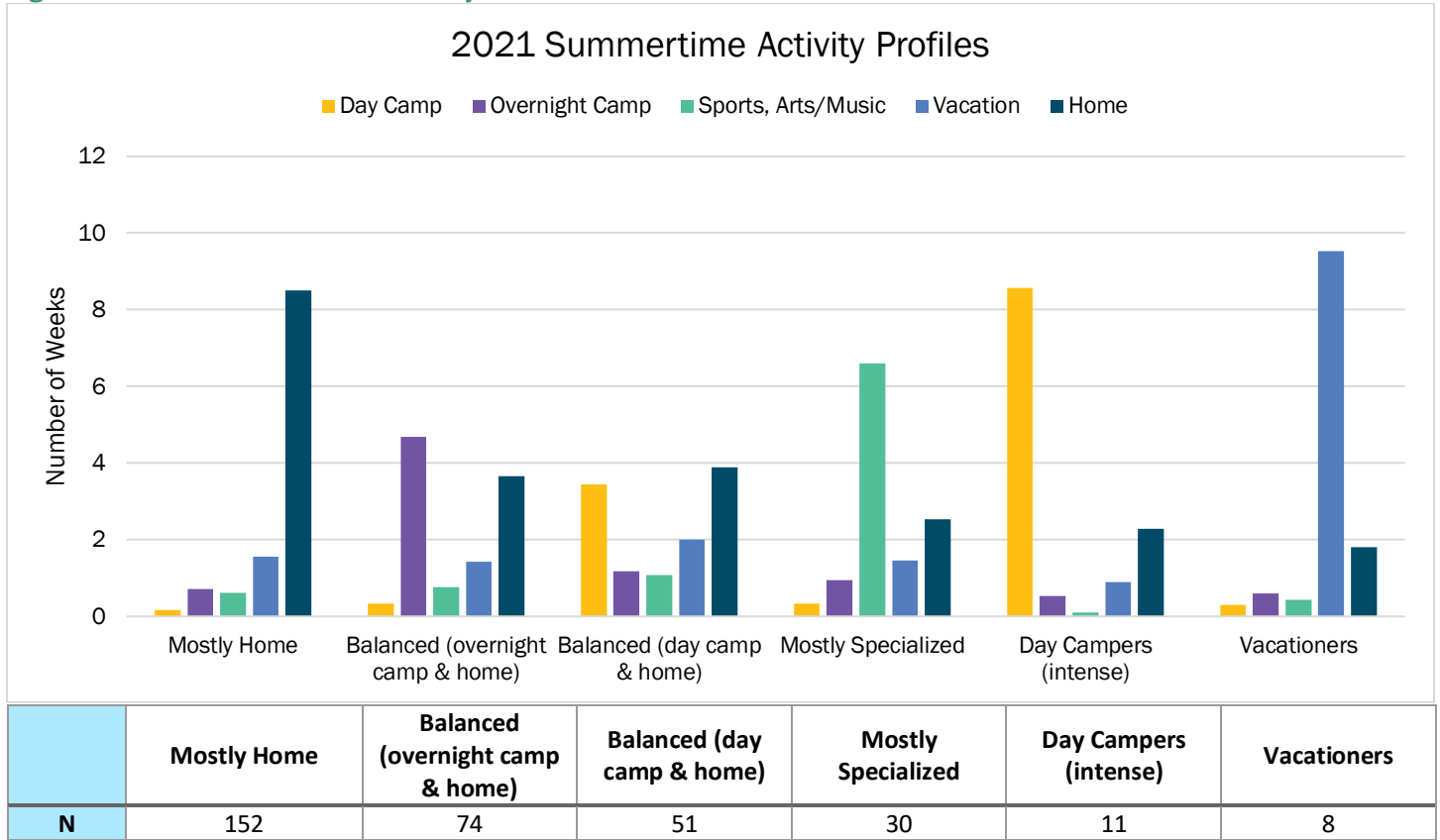


Figure A3. 2021 Summertime Activity Profiles



APPENDIX B: PEER-REVIEWED RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

The list below includes all peer-reviewed research publications resulting from the National Impact Study as of October 6, 2022. Publications are organized chronologically in ascending order, and alphabetically within year. Work that is in press or under review is included under Forthcoming Publications, while manuscripts that are in preparation or in development are included under In Development. All published work is described in the main report, either within Primary Findings or Secondary Findings depending on the nature of the study and the phase in which it was conducted.

Published Research

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Forthcoming Publications

Richmond, D., (**in press**). Differential impacts of COVID-19 on summer activities and environments for children from high- and low-income families. *Children, Youth, and Environments*.

Povilaitis, V., Froehly, M., & Warner, R. P. (**under review**). Lessons learned: Staff perspectives of racial injustice at summer camp.

Povilaitis, V. & Sibthorp, J. (**under review**). Examining self-authorship in seasonal work: Case studies of summer camp employment and developmentally effective experiences.

Warner, R. P., Sibthorp, J., & Richmond, D. (**under review**). Comparing summer camp to other summertime settings: A national explanatory-sequential study of developmental settings.

Warner, R. P., Sibthorp, J., Wainryb, C., Froehly, M., & Taylor, J. (**under review**) Summer camp employment as a setting for identity development among emerging adults.

Publications in Development

Richmond, D., et al. (**in preparation**). The roles of summer camp in summertime: A cross-case analysis.

Warner, R.P., Spielvogel, B., Akiva, T., Sibthorp, R., & Brown, L. P. (**in preparation**). Identifying Relationships Between Summer Camp, School, and Social Awareness: A Longitudinal Study of Early Adolescents.

Spielvogel, B., Warner, R. P., Sibthorp, R., & Browne, L. P. (**in development**). Within- and between-person links between quality summer camp experiences and youth outcomes.

Warner, R.P., Spielvogel., B., Sibthorp, R., & Browne, L. P. (**in development**). Examining the importance of a summer camp experience on social emotional development across four years.

APPENDIX C: NATIONAL IMPACT STUDY REPORT ARCHIVE

During Phase 3 of the National Impact Study, biannual reports were prepared for the Research Advisory Committee to share updates on data collection and research findings to-date. Below, these reports are listed in ascending chronological order, along with a summary of Phase 2 results. PDF versions of these reports can be accessed here: <https://uofu.box.com/s/fqgdr2u40kzkj4ohyu341oabjzgc83dw>

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2018). *ReAC Fall 2018 Phase 2 Results Summary.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2018). *ReAC Fall 2018 Staff Impact Update.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2018). *ReAC Fall 2018 Youth Impact Update.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2019). *ReAC Spring 2019 Youth and Staff Impact Update.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2019). *ReAC Fall 2019 Staff Impact Update.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2019). *ReAC Fall 2019 Youth Impact Update.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2020). *ReAC Spring 2020 Staff Impact Update.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2020). *ReAC Spring 2020 Youth Impact Update.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2020). *ReAC Fall 2020 Staff Impact Update.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2020). *ReAC Fall 2020 Youth Impact Update.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2021). *ReAC Spring 2021 Staff Impact Update.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2021). *ReAC Spring 2021 Youth Impact Update.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2021). *ReAC Fall 2021 Staff Impact Update.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2021). *ReAC Fall 2021 Youth Impact Update.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2022). *ReAC Spring 2022 Staff Impact Longitudinal Report.*

Outdoor Education and Youth Development Lab (2022). *ReAC Spring 2022 Youth Impact Longitudinal Report.*

