Evaluation Implementation Grant

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Evaluating Towhee: Determining the efficacy of a summer residential therapeutic program for youth with Learning Disabilities

Integra

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Executive Summary

Children and youth with learning disabilities (LDs) have more trouble developing and maintaining social relationships (Kavale & Forness, 1996). Difficulties in processing information and/or in regulating emotions and behaviors make it harder for youth with LDs to acquire social competence (Elksnin & Elksnin, 2004; Gadeyne et al, 2004). However, traditional intervention to foster social competence, such as social skills training groups, has had limited effectiveness (Greenberg et al., 2001). Research suggests that social skills interventions are most effective when they are relevant to the challenges that the children actually face and when the treatment also provides these criteria, therapeutic summer residential programs, such as Camp Towhee, offer a unique opportunity for intensive intervention in social competence. Moreover, summer camps have been associated with effecting positive change in youth development, particularly in the areas of positive identity, social skills, and leadership (Henderson et al., 2007; Thurber et al., 2007; Mishna et al, 2001).

56 children/youth between the ages of 10 and 18 years and their caregivers participated in a program evaluation of Integra’s Camp Towhee, a three-week therapeutic summer residential program in Haliburton. Founded in 1968, Towhee’s mission is to increase the social competence and self esteem of children and adolescents with LDs and related psychosocial difficulties, and to assist them in learning new skills in a safe and accepting environment.

The Towhee program begins months before camp starts with careful attention to assessment and screening of potential campers in order to ensure optimal matching of youth for Camp provides youth with unique opportunities to learn to interact with others
and to manage one’s own emotions and behaviors during an intensive time period, away from the safety net of familiar family and friends. Cohesive cabin groupings. Staffed at a ratio of two campers to one staff member, camp staff is recruited from related professional fields and is provided with considerable staff training. Structurally, staffing includes multiple levels of clinical supervision to ensure that clinical needs are met and that programming is optimal for each child. Once at camp, the two three-week Towhee sessions integrate traditional camp activities such as outtripping, swimming and campfires with adventure-based learning (e.g., high and low ropes course) and therapeutic arts programming.

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative research methods to determine whether Towhee effects positive change in social competence and self esteem. Campers and parents were asked to complete two questionnaires (the Camper Growth Index (CGI) and the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) at three points in time: on the first day of camp, on the last day of camp and at three months’ follow-up. Both parents and campers reported positive gains in social skills after attending the three-week session and parents reported that the social skills gains were maintained at the three month follow-up. Campers reported gains in self-esteem immediately after camp, although those gains were not maintained at the three-month follow-up.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with five campers, five parents and five camp staff to explore the factors that contribute to a perception that Towhee evokes transformational change in the lives of these youth. Analysis of the interview data suggest that it is the immersion into the Towhee community and its philosophy of acceptance, emphasis on ‘challenge by choice’, and low staff-to-camper ratio with highly skilled counselors that are essential in contributing to each camper’s individual growth.
and success. Key for these youth who typically experience frustration and failure in
learning environments, Towhee provides safe and supportive opportunities to take risks
and to experience success in overcoming fears and obstacles or in meeting individual
goals.

The results of this study suggest that Towhee offers an invaluable and unique
intervention for youth with LDs and mental health challenges. Moving forward, Integra’s
task will be to develop better methods of fostering gains that are initiated at camp
throughout the school year, such as improving communication between camp
counselors and Integra therapists regarding client goals, and enhancing social
opportunities for campers to maintain friendships outside of camp.

This project provided opportunities for research capacity building within Integra and led
to greater collaboration between Integra / Towhee management, therapists and camp
staff. In addition, this project fostered a partnership with the University of Toronto which
led to the implementation of a follow-up research study to understand more about the
mechanisms of change at Towhee in promoting social competence and self esteem.
With this work, we are advancing our knowledge in the under-researched field of
therapeutic summer camps which will be of value for children’s mental health
intervention.
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Introduction

Learning Disabilities (LDs) refer to a variety of neurologically-based disorders that affect a person’s ability to take in, understand, remember or express information (Silver et al., 2008; LDAC, 2002). Learning Disabilities are the most common form of disability for children aged 5 to 14 years and within Canada, LDs are estimated to affect over three million Canadians (Stats Canada, 2006). A lifelong and universal disability (Paulesu et al., 2001), LDs can have a negative impact on academic functioning (Shaywitz et al, 2008), social functioning (Schectman & Katz, 2007) and on tasks of everyday life (Root & Resnick, 2003). Moreover, having LDs is associated with an increased risk for mental health problems including depression (Svetaz, Ireland & Blum, 2000) and lower levels of self esteem (Conley et al., 2007; Alexander-Passe, 2006; Riddick, 1996; Scott, 2004).

Children and youth with LDs often experience more difficulties than most in developing social competence. In a meta-analysis of social skills research, Kavale and Forness (1996) found that 75% of students with LDs have lower levels of social competence than comparison children, as assessed by teachers, peers, and themselves. Effective social competence requires an ability to: (1) perceive and understand verbal and nonverbal social and emotional cues; (2) differentiate between central and peripheral information; (3) understand social consequences; and (4) make an attribution about another’s mental state (theory of mind) (Baumeister, 2005). However, impairments associated with LDs, such as understanding sarcasm, reading body language, recalling information about social situations, or engaging in effective social problem solving (Bauminger, Edelsztein, and Morash, 2005; Elksnin & Elksnin, 2004), interfere with the development of social competence. Without the protective factors of positive social relationships, children and youth with LDs experience greater peer victimization and bullying (Mishna, 2003; Baumeister, Storch & Geffken 2008), social rejection (Bryan, Burstein & Ergul, 2004; Kavale & Forness, 1996).
and increased feelings of loneliness (Valas, 1999). Chronic social and academic failures are associated with decreased feelings of self-worth (Bender & Wall, 1994; Sideridis, 2003).

Intervention efforts to improve social competence have been evaluated to have modest success (Kavale & Forness, 1996; Greenberg et al. 2001). Traditionally, interventions targeted specific social skills deficits and were often effective at changing specific social behaviors (Dirks, Treat & Weersing, 2007). However, social competence is understood to be a more complex construct than a collection of isolated social behaviors, and failures to take into account additional factors, such as the social environment (Dirks, Treat & Weersing, 2007) or the child’s self-regulatory skills (Gumpel, 2007), may result in changes that are not sustained. Research suggests that intervention models should target both social cognition processes (i.e., making sense of verbal and nonverbal cues) and social-emotional processes (i.e., understanding complex feelings in oneself and in others) (Bauminger, Edelszteyn & Morash, 2005). In addition, interventions are most effective when they are relevant to the challenges that the children actually face and when the training also provides opportunities to use new skills in a reinforcing environment (Hennessey, 2007).

Residential summer programs such as camp offer a comprehensive and multi-faceted forum for social competence intervention. Summer camp provides opportunities that are outside the norms of everyday life, such as developing a sense of community living and independence from family while enjoying new activities in the outdoors (Thurber et al., 2007). Camp provides youth with supported opportunities to learn to interact with others and to develop new skills in a safe and structured environment (Henderson et al, 2006). Summer camps have also been associated with effecting positive change in youth
development, particularly in the areas of positive identity, social skills, and leadership (Henderson et al., 2007; Thurber et al., 2007; Mishna et al., 2001).

Integra’s Camp Towhee program has a mission to increase the social competence and self esteem of children and adolescents with learning disabilities and related psychosocial difficulties. Established in 1968, Towhee is a three-week summer residential therapeutic program for children and youth aged 10 to 18 years with LDs who experience social, emotional and behavioral problems.

The Towhee program adopts a philosophy of “challenge by choice” in which campers are actively supported to try new opportunities and to experience success in arenas defined by the camper’s own goals, such as making friends, increasing confidence, or gaining independence. Adventure based learning is a cornerstone of camp, along with traditional camp activities such as swimming, canoeing, therapeutic arts and out tripping. In addition, campers have opportunities to participate in cabin group activities with their cabin counselors, special camp-wide evening programs and theme days, special interest clubs such as the “Towhee Tribune” newsletter, and day trips away from camp with their cabin group. These activities enhance the campers’ overall camp experience by providing variety and breaks from the daily routine, creating a fun and enriching camp atmosphere, and developing a strong “camp spirit”.

Towhee is able to provide a summer camp experience for children and youth whose behavior (including social and emotional difficulties) is not managed by mainstream camps. In part, this is achieved by means of superb staff at all stages of the process. First, over the fall and winter, Integra’s Child and Family Therapists conduct clinical assessments with all appropriate clients to determine ‘readiness’ for camp and individual
camp goals. Next, potential campers attend Integra activity-based “assessment groups” to provide additional clinical information about the child’s interpersonal skills and self regulation, as well as to determine cabin groupings to promote compatibility. At the camp, cabin groupings include three counselors for the five to seven campers. Cabin counselors are supported by a counselor supervisor, program staff, a managing supervisor, assistant Camp Director, and Camp Director, who reports to Integra’s Clinical Director. Towhee staff includes post secondary education students and professionals with a passion for the learning disabilities and children’s mental health, recruited from a variety of fields including education, social services, recreation, child and youth work, and health. Towhee places heavy emphasis on staff training: Camp staff participates in weekend retreats, a two-week pre-camp training, mid camp sessions, and post camp debriefing. Ongoing clinical supervision is provided at all levels to ensure optimal programming for each child.

In its forty year history, Towhee has undergone two formal evaluations. In 1978, Dr. Judith Wiener evaluated the effect of a six-week remedial summer camp on the emotional and social development of 33 children ages 8 to 12 years with learning disabilities. The design included a pre/post/follow-up administration of parent and teacher questionnaires, self report measures, and observations of problem-solving, in addition to an intensive case study of three campers. The results provided support for the hypothesis that camp intervention was associated with positive change in interpersonal cognitive problem solving skills, self concept and classroom behavior.

The format of Towhee changed to a three-week camp in 1998 and a second formal program evaluation was completed by Dr. Faye Mishna & Dr. Joseph Michalski to assess the outcome. Again, a pre-test, post-test, and six month follow up design was
implemented to evaluate outcomes for 96 children and youth, including increased self-confidence, decreased perceptions of isolation, and increased social competence.

Analysis of the results indicated that scores on a self-esteem index showed non-significant gains from pre-camp to follow-up; however, the sample’s baseline scores were comparable to that of a general population, suggesting a possible ceiling effect. Campers did report reduced feelings of loneliness that were strongest at post-camp though maintained with modest gains by follow-up. Finally, social competence scores (SSRS) varied as a function of age and subscale. Parents reported positive changes in cooperation, responsibility and self-control. In their discussion, Michalski et al. (2003) noted that standardized test scores did not capture the parents’ perceptions of the immediate impact of camp on social/ emotional development.

In the intervening years, Integra has mailed out a consumer satisfaction survey to parents of all campers at the end of the summer. In 2006, the survey return rate was 47% (46/98). Parent report is generally positive with anecdotal reports that camp has a profound and unique impact on their child’s wellbeing.

It has been a decade since the last formal evaluation of Towhee and during that time there have been refinements and additions to programming, such as the inclusion of adventure based learning. A comprehensive evaluation of Towhee was recommended at this time to better understand the value of the program for Integra clients. Summer residential therapeutic programs are an expensive resource for children’s mental health with Towhee total costs per child estimated at close to $6000.00. Critically evaluating the outcome is an important factor for agency strategic planning and resource allocation. Moreover, families provide anecdotal reports that camp fundamentally differs from traditional mental health intervention. However, it has been difficult to empirically
evaluate the impact and most particularly, to begin to identify the components of the program that contribute to its success. Finally, the proposed evaluation of Towhee provided an opportunity for capacity building within Integra on a number of levels, with camp staff, Child & Family Therapists, and Integra research staff working together. Moreover, the project facilitated active collaboration between Integra and a number of community partners, including Dr. Rosemary Tannock of OISE, University of Toronto and Dr. Judith Wiener of OISE and the Ontario camping community.

In addition to the capacity building objectives outlined above, the program evaluation project had two main research objectives: First, to evaluate the efficacy of the program at improving social competence and self esteem; and second, through the collection of qualitative data, to identify critical components of camp that may contribute to positive outcomes.

**Methodology**

*Participants:*

All Integra clients who were selected to attend Camp Towhee during the summer of 2008 (N=100) were invited to participate in the program evaluation study. 56 campers consented to participate in the study. Campers ranged in age from 10 years to 18 years (mean age of participant in the study was 12.5 years, standard deviation = 2.0 years) and all were diagnosed with Learning Disabilities (LDs).

For the qualitative portion of the study, 5 campers, 5 parents and 5 camp counselors were invited to participate. The aim was to interview a diverse sample of participants who varied in age and gender of campers, staff position, and years attending or working
at Towhee. Participants were either recommended by Towhee directors and/or Integra therapists or, in the case of the staff group, were self-nominated.

**Design:**

As outlined in the logic model (Appendix A), the service components of the program were categorized into two parts: (1) pre-camp assessment and planning; and (2) residential camp programming. As outlined in the Outcome Indicators table (Appendix B), a mixed method design was used to evaluate the efficacy of the program as a whole to improve social competence and self esteem. Quantitative data was collected independently from campers and parents at the beginning of camp, at the end of camp and at a three month follow-up period. Observational data was collected at the beginning and end of each camp session. Qualitative interviews were conducted at Integra in Toronto during the fall of 2008.

**Assessment Measures**

The *Camper's Growth Index* (CGI; Hederson et al., 2006) is a 43-item Likert scale developed specifically for summer camp experiences to measure constructs including positive identity, social skills, positive values, thinking skills, and physical skills. The scale includes versions for caregivers and for campers and has been shown to have adequate reliability and validity (Hederson et al., 2006). (Appendix C)

The *Social Skills Rating System* (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990) is a 39-item scale for children and youth ages 3 to 18 years that measures aspects of a child's social skills (subscales include cooperation, empathy, assertion, self control, and responsibility), problem behaviors (clustered to reflect externalizing problems, internalizing problems,
and hyperactivity) and academic competence. This scale has been shown to have high psychometric properties (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) and includes versions for elementary school children, secondary school children and caregivers.

The \textit{Behavioural Observation of Students in Schools} (BOSS; Shapiro, 1996) is a behavioral template that was designed to facilitate systematic recordings of observations of children’s behavior. The BOSS template was modified for this project to reflect observations of engagement in program activities (Appendix D). The BOSS system is based on theory that positive social engagement with peers may facilitate the development of social competencies (Brown et al., 2003). Using a timed cue from a discretely placed ipod, the observer tracks the frequency of active vs passive engagement and on-task vs off-task behavior for target children and select ‘controls’.

\textit{Procedure:}

a) \textbf{Recruitment:}

In March 2008, eligible participants received a letter of introduction and an invitation to participate in the program evaluation of Towhee and a consent form to be completed by camper and by parent and to be mailed back to Integra (Appendix E). In mid June 2008, a second invitation to participate was issued during an oral presentation by Integra research staff to campers and families at a Parent Information Day for Towhee. Consent forms were completed on site by additional families who were interested in participating. In addition, a presentation about the research was made to camp staff during the two week pre-camp training period at the end of June 2008. At that time, staff was invited to volunteer for the qualitative component of the study, to be conducted at the end of the summer.
b) Quantitative data collection:

The Campers Growth Index – Child version (CGI) and the Social Skills Rating System – Children and Youth version (SSRS) were administered to all consenting campers at Towhee on the first day of camp for both sessions. Upon arrival at Towhee, campers rotated through a series of check-in stations with their cabin groups. The research questionnaires were set up as another station in the rotation, along with stations such as a health check and tuck shop. Those campers who had consented to participate in the study were assisted by their counsellors to complete the two questionnaires. Those campers who had not consented to participate were provided with alternate activities. For parents, a pre-camp package with the two questionnaires (CGI & SSRS – Parent versions) was mailed out with camp forms in May 2008 and was returned before the beginning of camp.

On the last full day of programming at camp, campers were invited to complete the CGI and SSRS (post test) in cabin groupings with the assistance of camp staff as needed. For parents, a post-test package was mailed out on the last day of camp with the request to complete the questionnaires and to return them to Integra as quickly as possible. Follow-up reminder calls were made by Integra staff to optimize the rate of package return.

In November 2008, a three-month follow up package was mailed to all consenting participants with copies of the CGI and SSRS for camper and parent. Participants were requested to complete the questionnaires and to mail them back in the stamped, self-addressed envelope as soon as possible. Follow up phone calls were made to all participants who had not returned their packages within a month. In addition, therapists of campers who were active clients at Integra provided verbal reminders to complete the research data.
c) **Observational data collection:**

A subset of campers was observed on two occasions during each session of camp. Baseline observations were conducted by Integra research staff on the first full day of programming (second day of camp). A target and consenting camper was identified for each cabin grouping, along with a comparison cabin mate. The target campers were nominated by their counsellors as having been particularly low in their social interactions or self confidence and the comparison cabin mates were rated as relatively higher on both constructs. The observations were conducted during one of two structured camp activities: therapeutic art or music periods. Using a modified version of the BOSS, campers were systematically observed for twenty minute periods, resulting in two target campers and two comparison campers for each of three cabin groupings. A total of 12 campers were observed. The process was repeated on the second last day of camp.

d) **Qualitative data collection:**

The qualitative research portion of this project involved individual, in-depth interviews with five campers, five parents, and five staff in the months following camp. Interviews followed a semi-structured guide (Appendix F) that was developed based on review of Towhee program materials (e.g., Camp Towhee therapeutic approach guidelines, Staff Manual) and through consultation with various Integra staff (e.g., Towhee Director and Assistant Director and Integra’s psychology department). Parallel forms of the same question were developed for each group interviewed.

The majority of the interviews took place between October and November, 2008 and were conducted either by Dr. Lesley Daniels, a psychologist at Integra with expertise in qualitative research, or by Ms. Emily Case (OISE/UT psychology graduate student),
following training and observation by Dr. Daniels. Interviews ranged from approximately 30 minutes to 1½ hours long.

e) **Method of analysis:**

Quantitative: A Repeated Measure MANOVA was completed to examine changes in social competence as determined by pre-post-follow up change scores on the CGI and SSRS. A Repeated Measure ANOVA was completed to examine changes in self-esteem, as determined by pre-post-follow up changes on the CGI positive identity subscale.

Qualitative: With participant consent, all interviews were recorded on DVD and were later reviewed by Integra psychology staff (Dr. Lesley Daniels, Dr. Marjory Phillips, and research assistant Chris Bluthardt). Of note, while the scope of this study did not allow for word-for-word transcription of the interview data, the unique approach to analysis developed in the context of this study appears to have carried significant advantages. Perhaps most importantly, having at least two observers review each interview, then meeting as a psychology staff to discuss themes that emerged from each group interviewed, allowed for “investigator triangulation” (i.e., the use of two or more investigators to examine the same phenomenon) in interpreting the data; such collaboration can reduce the risk of biased interpretation that could occur if only one individual were to analyze the data.

Working from within a modified grounded theory framework, the goal of this stage of the analyses was to extract categories or themes that emerged directly from what the participants had to say and were thus grounded in the data. This allowed for a much
richer understanding of the processes being investigated than could be afforded by
questionnaire data alone. The overall goal of the qualitative portion of this research
project was to develop a theory or model, grounded in the data, regarding how and why
Camp Towhee improves the mental health of youth with learning disabilities.

Observational Data: Total scores were tallied for three subscales: Active Engagement;
Passive Engagement; and Off-Task behaviors. However, the sample size was markedly
small (N=12) and there were no significant differences between baseline and post-test
scores.

f) **Methodological Limitations**
Sample size was a primary limitation of the study. 56% of the eligible Towhee campers
participated in the study and it is possible that those who volunteered did not fully
represent the range of Integra clients in the program. Moreover, having to complete the
same two questionnaires three times may have contributed to the rate of attrition and
low N for the follow up data. A second limitation concerned the attempts to observe
social competence as operationalized through social engagement for a small number of
campers. The campers were observed during structured group activities (art or music)
and thus there were constraints imposed on social interactions. Future studies will
observe all consenting campers during their free or unstructured time. Third, since all
campers had LDs, many struggled with the paper-and-pencil questionnaires. Future
studies will explore creative solutions for obtaining self-report ratings for youth who have
difficulty with reading and writing.
Results

Quantitative Analyses:

Descriptive Statistics

Means and standard deviations for each of the measures pre and post camp are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Given the possible shared variance between different measures of social skills and self-esteem and between these two constructs, correlations between measures were examined. Social skills measures (SSRS and CGI social skills) were highly correlated (>.50; Cohen, 1988). The correlations between parent and child ratings on measures of social skills were non-significant and small in strength. Social skills measures were not significantly related to measures of self-esteem. All social skills measures are therefore analyzed together. Parent and child measures and changes in self-esteem are considered separately.

Changes in Social Competence From Beginning to End of Camp

A Repeated Measure MANOVA was completed to examine changes in social skills (SSRS and CGI). After attending 3 weeks at Camp Towhee, parents reported significant change in their children's social skills, (Wilks lambda of .82, $F(2,45) = 4.82, p=.01$. ) The proportion of partial population variance explained by the within subjects main effect is large, as indicated by the partial eta squared = .18. Partial Eta Squared is an index of effect size indicating the observed proportion of explained variance in which .01 is considered small, .06 is considered medium, and .16 is considered large (Snyder & Lawson, 1993). Statistically significant differences were found for parent ratings on the SSRS ($p=.04$, partial eta=.09) and CGI social skills ($p=.004$, partial eta =.17) Similarly, significant gains in social skills were indicated on child report measures of social skills (Wilks lambda of .86, $F(2,41) = 3.36, p<.05$, partial eta = .14). However, only a trend
toward significance was found for the CGI social skills measure ($p=.10$, partial eta $=.06$).

Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
*Mean Scores on SSRS and CGI Pre & Post Camp*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Pre-camp (SE)</th>
<th>Mean Post-camp (SE)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SRSS Parent Total Social Skills Standard Score</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>86.55 (2.014)</td>
<td>89.74 (2.205)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRSS Child Total Social Skills Standard Score</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>104.46 (2.107)</td>
<td>106.04 (2.265)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGI Parent Positive Identity</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26.96 (.604)</td>
<td>27.02 (.662)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGI Parent Social Skills</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>46.43 (1.292)</td>
<td>49.11 (1.203)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGI Child Positive Identity</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31.60 (.623)</td>
<td>32.65 (.642)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGI Child Social Skills</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>52.08 (1.180)</td>
<td>55.42 (1.083)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further analyses were completed to examine the possible impact of gender, age, session (child or adolescent) and whether or not it was the child’s first time at Camp Towhee on changes in social skills. No significant effects were found.

**Maintenance of Gains in Social Skills**

Analyses were completed to examine if gains in social skills and self-esteem found at the end of camp were maintained at 3-month follow-up. Only campers with complete data across all three time points were included in this analysis (N=34). A Repeated Measure MANOVA was completed to examine changes in social skills (SSRS and CGI) across 3 time points (pre, post, and 3 month follow up). Results indicated a significant change in parent-reported social skills, (Wilks lambda of .66, $F (4,30) = 3.84$, $p=.01$). The proportion of partial population variance explained by the within subjects main effect is large, as indicated by the partial eta squared $=.34$. Statistically significant differences were found for parent ratings on the SSRS only ($p=.006$, partial eta=.14). Pairwise
Comparisons using the Bonferroni procedure indicated significant difference between pre and post-camp and pre-camp and follow up ($p=.04$), suggesting that gains in social skills seen on the parent SSRS are maintained at 3-month follow-up. Similarly, child-rated social skills differed over time, Wilks lambda of .64, $F (4,24) = 3.45, p=.02$, partial $\eta = .37$. Statistically significant differences were found for on the CGI social skills scale only ($p=.008$, partial $\eta=.23$). Bonferroni pairwise comparisons indicated significant difference between pre and post-camp only, suggesting that gains made in child rated social skills are not maintained at 3 month follow-up. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 2.

Further analyses were completed to examine the possible impact of gender, age, session (child or adolescent) and whether or not it was the child’s first time at Camp Towhee on changes in social skills. No significant effects were indicated.

Changes in Self-Esteem From Beginning to End of Camp

A Repeated Measure ANOVA was completed to examine changes in self-esteem (CGI positive identity). The correlations between parent and child ratings on measures of social skills were non-significant and small in strength and are therefore considered separately. Children’s reports indicated significant change in self-esteem (Wilks lambda of .89, $F (1,51) = 6.17, p=.02$). The proportion of partial population variance explained by the within subjects main effect is large, as indicated by the partial eta squared = .11, which is considered to be a moderate to large effect. In contrast, parent ratings of their child’s self esteem did not significantly differ from the beginning to end of camp (Wilks lambda of 1.00, $F (1,46) = 0.01, ns$). Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.
Further analyses were completed to examine the possible impact of gender, age, session (child or adolescent) and whether or not it was the child’s first time at Camp Towhee on changes in self-esteem. There was a significant correlation between age and changes in self esteem ($r = .32$, $p = .02$), with older children making more gains than younger children. Similarly, a significant interaction between time and session was found (Wilks lambda of .89, $F(1,51) = 6.17$, $p = .02$). Interestingly, children in the first session (ages 10 to 14) made more gains than children in the second session (ages 14 to 18). However, a significant interaction was not indicated for Time and session when age was controlled for.

**Maintenance of Gains in Self Esteem**

Analyses were completed to examine if gains in social skills and self-esteem found at the end of camp were maintained at 3-month follow-up. Only campers with complete data across all three time points were included in this analysis (N=33). A Repeated Measure MANOVA was completed to examine changes in self- esteem (CGI positive identity) across 3 time points (pre, post, and 3 month follow up). Child-ratings of self-esteem approached significance, Wilks lambda of .86, $F(2,31) = 2.47$, $p = .10$, partial eta $= .14$. Examination of Bonferroni pairwise comparisons indicated significant difference between pre and post-camp only, suggesting that gains made in child rated self-esteem are not maintained at 3 month follow-up.
Table 2
Mean Scores on SSRS and CGI Pre-Camp, Post-Camp, & 3 Month Follow-up

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Pre-camp (SE)</th>
<th>Mean Post-camp (SE)</th>
<th>Mean 3 Follow-up (SE)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SRSS Parent Total Social Skills Standard Score</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>85.26 (2.372)</td>
<td>89.62 (2.670)</td>
<td>89.79 (2.502)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRSS Child Total Social Skills Standard Score</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>105.30 (2.738)</td>
<td>108.20 (2.981)</td>
<td>106.50 (2.650)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGI Parent Positive Identity</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>27.53 (.714)</td>
<td>27.35 (.821)</td>
<td>26.97 (.842)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CGI Parent Social Skills</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>46.79 (1.465)</td>
<td>49.26 (1.491)</td>
<td>48.12 (1.517)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CGI Child Positive Identity</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32.27 (.767)</td>
<td>32.58 (.842)</td>
<td>32.42 (.758)</td>
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<tr>
<td>CGI Child Social Skills</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>53.55 (1.440)</td>
<td>56.70 (1.205)</td>
<td>53.70 (1.750)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Analyses:

Based on a detailed analysis of the qualitative interviews, we developed a model that helps to elucidate factors thought to contribute to the “transformational” effects Camp Towhee has on campers (Appendix G). Three core categories emerged, each of which contained subcategories that further define or operationalize factors of relevance, including mechanisms of change and specific mental health outcomes. (These will be described in the first person voice to reflect the interpretive nature of qualitative research.) Of note, while areas for improvement, comments on camp facilities, and messages for camp staff, donors, and parents of kids with learning disabilities were not incorporated in the model, this information will undoubtedly be used to inform both future evaluation efforts and ongoing refinement of camp programming.
At the centre of our model is the notion of immersion in the therapeutic milieu of Camp Towhee. We learned that it is not necessarily specific program components or camp activities that transform campers but, rather, the general Towhee atmosphere and the sense of community developed within it. Indeed, Towhee’s philosophy of acceptance, its emphasis on ‘challenge by choice’, and staff-to-camper ratios that allow for individualized work with each youth are essential in contributing to campers’ growth and success. Foundational to the Towhee milieu is its staff, a group of highly qualified individuals committed to the camp’s mission and active in their support of campers.

Secondly, we heard of the social-emotional outcomes experienced by, and observed in, campers: increased self-confidence and self-awareness and a positive social experience. Finally, we learned that continuity, in terms of both the preparations that take place prior to camp and the activities that follow, is instrumental in enhancing, and maintaining, these outcomes.

The following reflects a brief summary of what we learned from campers, parents, and staff with respect to each of these themes.

**Immersion/Milieu** – “Everything about camp …”, “More about being there”, “Inexplicable phenomenon …”, “Could really feel the treatment focus but in a very fun, playful environment”

At the root of Towhee’s “transformational” effect, it seems, is the simple fact that campers are immersed, for 3 weeks, in a “fun” setting that offers a variety of activities in which they might not normally have opportunity to participate and, more importantly, an intimate camp community that becomes “like a family”. Towhee staff understands that, for immersion to be successful, campers need to feel safe, not only physically but also psychologically. To that end, there is a clear philosophy of acceptance that permeates
all activities and interactions at the camp and is central to its mission. Campers explained, “You feel you’re welcomed”, “They care about bullying”, and “Everyone there are friends”. Their parents commented, “She wasn’t ostracized” and “It would be nice if you could have the Towhee atmosphere at school year-round”. Campers were aware of the fact that LDs were understood and were not barriers to being accepted (“They are nice to special ed. people like myself”). Towhee’s atmosphere of acceptance sets the stage for a “challenge by choice” philosophy in which campers are “pushed, but supportively and not beyond what they can deal with”. The low camper-to-staff ratio at Towhee allows for a high degree of tailoring and individualized instruction “in the moment”. As one parent explained, “If a kid is struggling, someone immediately has time to help them work it out”. Campers have opportunity for natural practice of social skills in context and problems are “easily diffused” with staff support. Furthermore, the skilled and highly trained staff presence at Towhee ensures that each camper’s learning and social needs can be accommodated; there is a clear “effort to help every camper in the areas that they need most help”.

- **Towhee staff** – “You can have a beautiful facility, but without (such staff) it’s just another camp”

Numerous comments by campers and parents attest to the high caliber and passion of the Towhee staff who serve as role models for the campers and are sophisticated in their problem-solving and their care for each camper’s well-being. At the same time, staff members are described as “fun” and engaging, qualities that contribute to their success in relating and attuning to individual campers. The staff interviewed noted that their interactions with one another provide models of effective social interaction.

**Outcomes**
• **Increased self-confidence** – “I learned if I push myself I can do more than I think”,

“*Made him realize he could do things he wouldn’t normally have tried*”

The outcome most frequently mentioned across interview groups was increased self-confidence gained by overcoming fears and obstacles and learning new skills. While the out-trip and adventure-based learning activities were highlighted as key confidence builders, it was clear that campers’ successes were not limited to these programs. Indeed, campers commented on a wide variety of accomplishments ranging from “(getting) over my fear of spiders” to “(getting) in the water for the first time in years”.

Staff noted campers’ “psychological” successes (including being able to have fun, calmly respond to problems, or even attend camp for the first time) and described the “huge range” of accomplishments they observed (e.g., from “eating a strawberry” to passing the swim test). The demand for independence as campers leave the comforts of home was also emphasized, as was the notion of generalizability beyond Towhee; having developed new skills and “really experienced being great at something”, campers learn their potential for success is greater than they had once believed.

• **Increased self-awareness** – “Kids with disabilities that really need help have to go there so they can … learn something new about themselves … lots of people are finding themselves”, “(She is) clear about who she is … camp helped her make that realization”

When asked to comment on changes they had seen in themselves having attended Towhee, many of the campers described personal qualities and strengths they had come to discover during their time at camp (e.g., “I’m really funny”, “I can control my anger”, “In water I’m extremely athletic”). Some even referred to less desirable characteristics they had become aware of and were learning to change (e.g., “Sometimes I get over bossy or really hyper … Towhee helped me to [learn] how to calm
Parents referred to such increased self-awareness, explaining their children were better able to verbalize their strengths and seemed to have returned from camp with increased insight. Future implications were indicated by all groups interviewed in terms of self-acceptance, a clearer sense of direction, and a more hopeful perspective.

- **Positive social experience** – “Everyone there are friends … nobody is behind”, “It teaches you you’re not alone”

Towhee provides an environment for youth with learning disabilities to find their place socially. Campers make new friends (a success some have not experienced prior to Towhee) and are able to enjoy meaningful connections and experience “common ground” with others who share similar interests, aptitudes, or struggles. Campers are required to live and work together closely and learn to trust one another. They enjoy the support of their peers and encounter frequent opportunities to practice and develop even the most basic of social skills. Those interviewed emphasized increased social comfort and hope as products of such a positive social experience.

**Continuity** – “Not just 3 weeks in isolation … still have friendships and the possibility of going back”, “There are staff who live from summer to summer … what they do in between is just time filler”

At Integra, the months prior to camp are busy as clinical staff and camp directors meet with youth individually and in groups, aiming to ensure suitability for camp and goodness of fit with other campers. A significant amount of thought and planning goes into this phase of preparation for camp, and Towhee staff reap the benefit of this “level of homework”, noting that the profile they receive on each camper provides “good background” that allows for meaningful individualized work. In a related vein, campers and their parents described the benefit of participating in Integra treatment groups, explaining that connections with other campers prior to the summer eased their anxiety.
and gave them a good footing socially. Staff emphasized the 2 weeks of pre-camp training they receive, something “missing from … comparable jobs”; the wealth of information covered during this period and the opportunity to “bond” as a staff appear to be key factors with respect to their readiness to lead once campers arrive.

Following camp, youth may face a difficult adjustment period and may struggle to maintain the gains they made while at Towhee. Campers and their parents also reported varying degrees of success in maintaining contact with other campers after the summer. Individuals from each group interviewed emphasized the importance of “seamless” follow-up work at Integra, either individually or through groups, in supporting campers’ growth after the summer. Clearly, the supporting role of Integra and its staff, both pre- and post-camp, is essential. In the words of one parent, it is “hard to separate (camp) from what goes on at Integra”. Other ideas with respect to helping campers maintain gains included “booster sessions” following camp, more frequent camp gatherings, increased contact with staff after camp, and informal “get-togethers” in cabin groups. Even the concrete reminders of Towhee (in particular, the individualized mementos made by staff for each camper) appear useful in this regard.

Of note, when asked to tell the story of positive changes noticed in a camper, most staff spoke of the experience of campers who had returned for multiple summers, highlighting their growth and progress over time. Campers, parents, and staff alike described the benefits of successive summers at Towhee, emphasizing the opportunity to build on accomplishments and the reinforcement of gains. Just as many campers are eager to return to camp year after year, so are the staff, most of whom described the benefits of work at Towhee: personal growth, development of “life skills” that extend beyond camp, increased understanding of learning disabilities, and lasting friendships with other staff.
This continuity of returning campers and staff serves to promote the sense of community so apparent at Towhee.

**Discussion & Lessons Learned**

The key findings of this project provided validation that Integra’s summer residential program, Towhee, is associated with positive outcomes in the areas of social competence and self esteem. Of interest, we learned that youth with LDs who attend Towhee were reported to show improvements in social skills that seem to have persisted beyond camp. All participants reported gains in self esteem but of particular interest was the finding that senior campers showed larger gains. It may be that maturity and readiness for self-growth are important factors for change. Of greatest interest, the rich qualitative data from the study suggested that Towhee’s reputed “transformational” change is not defined by a narrow set of outcome variables. Rather, the program provides immersion into a milieu in which Integra clients experience feelings of acceptance and belonging while being challenged to reach for individual success with the support of highly skilled staff. The outcomes are reported improvements in self confidence and self awareness, and feelings of hope that stem from having had a positive social experience. For youth with LDs who have had frequent failure experiences in academics, social relationships and in everyday life, Towhee provides them with confidence to take risks and on-site coaching and individual tailoring of supports to allow campers to achieve personal success.

There were a number of interesting and unanticipated findings that emerged from this study. First, we learned that acquiring social skills is only part of what is needed to achieve social competence. Having hope and optimism for social success is a vital
foundation upon which specific skills can be learned, practiced and generalized to a
variety of settings. Through careful planning and cabin matching before camp, and
active role modeling and on-site coaching throughout camp, Towhee provides clients
with positive social experiences that bolster optimism for future social successes. A
research study planned for summer 2009 at Towhee will continue to explore the
construct of social competence by looking at the role of close friendship acquisition and
maintenance at camp. In addition, Integra therapists will consider ways to sustain and
generalize social skills gains made at camp when reviewing Toronto-based group
counseling programs.

Second, we learned that understanding each camper’s LDs was essential for staff in
order to tailor the program effectively; however, campers themselves did not focus on
their LDs. The Towhee experience allowed campers to accept their learning differences
without being defined by them. Next steps have already incorporated this lesson into the
development of a new system for communicating information about LD profiles to
agency staff, families, clients, and camp staff.

Third, we learned that successful outcomes for each camper were individually defined
and were not a result of one particular camp component, such as the out trip or
adventure based learning. Rather, it appears that being immersed in the milieu for the
three-week period, away from families and familiar settings, with the support of highly
trained counseling staff, provided clients with the opportunity to try new things and to
learn more about themselves.

Finally, we learned that continuity with the Toronto-based Integra services is a vital
aspect of the process. Towhee provides clients with unique opportunities to consolidate
and put into practice therapy goals at Integra, such as regulating emotions and
behaviors or initiating social interactions. More is needed to ensure that a similar
process occurs at the end of camp to support Towhee gains back at Integra and the issue will be the focus of team and clinical discussions throughout the coming year.

The project provided opportunities for collaboration and communication at a number of levels: within the agency; with our university partners; with the camping community; and within children’s mental health. The project required close collaboration between Integra’s research/psychology staff, Towhee senior administration, Integra senior administration including the Clinical Director, and faculty at the University of Toronto (OISE) to design and implement the study. Relatively new to the agency, Integra’s psychology staff gained a tremendous understanding of the clinical needs for camp and as a result of this research collaboration, a new system for communicating information about client LDs was successfully implemented for Towhee 2009. Moreover, training in administration of the quantitative questionnaires was provided to camp counseling staff, who gained an appreciation for program evaluation as an outcome of the project. Over the course of data collection and of discussing the findings, the project strengthened the relationship between the Haliburton-based camp staff and the Toronto-based agency staff. The project also strengthened the relationship between Integra and the University of Toronto: a graduate student of Dr. Rosemary Tannock, Emily Case, functioned as the liaison between the institutions by utilizing this Towhee 2008 data as pilot data for her doctoral dissertation, which is continued into the 2009 Towhee season. Finally, the results of this research are of significant interest to Integra’s senior management and its Board of Directors. In the spring of 2008, Integra underwent strategic planning and questions about the cost and efficacy of Towhee were raised. Led by the Integra Board of Directors, a subcommittee was struck to review the entire Towhee program and to generate recommendations for change. The results of the current program evaluation
are of particular value for this subcommittee, who will incorporate the current findings into their formal review.

Lastly, over the course of the project’s timeframe, the principal lead for this project moved into the role of Clinical Director, responsible for the clinical wellbeing of all Integra clients, including Towhee campers. This change in position provided an unexpected opportunity for both formal and informal application of the research findings: The time spent on site and in review of the processes at Towhee in 2008 was of tremendous assistance in adjusting to the responsibilities for Towhee clinical direction in 2009.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

Central for consideration by Integra’s Board of Directors and senior management staff is the conclusion that Camp Towhee provides a fundamentally important and unique service to children and youth with LDs who have significant social and emotional needs. Although it is an expensive service with a high demand on agency staffing and financial resources, Towhee’s milieu treatment is not duplicated elsewhere. Children and youth who attend Towhee leave the three-week program with greater confidence and hopefulness; outcomes which cannot be undervalued for youth with LDs who typically experience frustration, anxiety and failure. Moreover, this research suggests that the program’s success hinges upon the support of highly trained, knowledgeable and empathic staff at all stages of the camp process, from comprehensive assessment and careful cabin matching to intensive counselor training and follow up therapy services back in Toronto.

This project generated concrete and practical recommendations to improve Integra’s services.
1. **Focus on learning disabilities:**

   The results suggested that campers are not receptive to the idea of additional Towhee programming to foster self-advocacy skills or to gain better understanding of their LDs. However, the results do support the importance of improved knowledge transfer between Integra psychology staff and camp staff with regard to LDs.

   **Action:** Under the leadership of Dr. Karen Milligan and in consultation with Camp Directors, Integra’s psychology staff developed a new template for campers that breaks down complex psychological data into practical applications for camp (Appendix ??). This system was successfully implemented for the 2009 camp season and recent feedback from camp counselors suggests that the clear, applied information for each of their campers has improved staff ability to tailor interventions to meet individual needs.

2. **Challenge of sustaining gains made at camp:**

   The results suggested that campers improved social skills over the course of camp; however, they had difficulty generalizing those skills to home and school environments. Generalizability is a common problem for social competence interventions, which are most effective when any skills taught are directly relevant to the setting and include opportunities for supervised practice (Hennessey, 2007). It appears that Towhee provides clients with time to practice and consolidate social skills in a camp setting. The challenge for Integra therapists is to capitalize on the momentum and experience of social success gained at camp while building in opportunities for greater generalizability to home and school.

   **Action:** The Integra clinical team is undergoing a review of our Group program for social competence. We will incorporate these lessons from Towhee by developing a better system of communication between camp counselors and Integra therapists to ensure
specific skills and gains are noted and also by enhancing the role of caregivers and schools in implementing social skills between group sessions.

**Action:** Second, Towhee senior management and Integra staff will consider creative ways to foster and maintain friendships that are initiated at camp. For example, this might include consideration of email address exchanges while at camp or of reviewing the annual camp reunion.

There were no specific recommendations for the Centre of Excellence. We found the Centre staff to be highly supportive, helpful, and always accessible. The regular check-ins provided Integra staff with opportunities to share progress with Centre staff and to incorporate ideas in a timely fashion.

**Knowledge Exchange**

This project is of high relevance to a number of partners and stakeholders: Knowledge exchange has already begun and will continue over the next two years. First, preliminary results were collected and analyzed in the spring of 2009 prior to the start of the 2009 Towhee summer sessions. The basic findings were shared with the Camp Director, Assistant Director and senior Integra management staff in April and May 09.

This coming year (2009-2010), we will begin to implement recommendations from this project to help social-emotional gains made at Towhee to flourish throughout the school year. For example, the management group (including Towhee Directors) and clinical team at Integra will brainstorm ideas for how to foster continued friendships that are initiated at Towhee and for ways in which to better communicate therapy progress on camp goals to Integra therapists.
In June 2009, a presentation of the 2008 results was made to camp staff and to campers and their families at an annual Towhee Information Day. The findings about the important role that camp counselors play with regard to camper outcomes were incorporated into staff pre-camp training for summer 2009. For example, the project lead gave a workshop on counseling skills to camp staff in late June 2009 that was adapted to reflect the current research findings.

The findings of the research project are also of interest to a number of agency and community partners. As described above, the Integra Board of Directors has formed a subcommittee to review Towhee as an outcome of the agency strategic planning process in 2008. This evaluation of the program will be of value to the subcommittee as they consider the efficacy and cost-benefit of Towhee. A formal presentation of the project will be made to the Board of Directors in the fall of 2009 and a formal report will be provided to the Towhee subcommittee chair.

The project findings have been shared with faculty at the University of Toronto (OISE). In particular, under the direction of Dr. Rosemary Tannock, Emily Case (psychology doctoral candidate) secured consent from Integra clients to utilize this 2008 data as pilot research for her doctoral thesis entitled, *Social and Emotional Development during Summer Camp: The Role of Active Social Participation and Friendship*. Goals for her 2009 follow-up study include continued assessment of the program’s efficacy at improving social competence and self-esteem, along with further evaluation of the process of friendship development at Towhee.

The results are also of interest to those who offer therapeutic residential programming and to specialized summer camp programs. The results of this study will be posted on
the Ontario Camping Association website ([http://www.ontariocamps.ca/about/research](http://www.ontariocamps.ca/about/research)), which provides ready access to the large camping community worldwide. In addition, we will share the information directly with Camp Directors of camps for children with special needs, such as Camp Kirk. We also hope to present the findings at OCA / Ryerson University Camp Research & Education Symposium (2010) and at the International Congress for Camping Professionals, although the Call for Proposals for both conferences has not yet been announced.

Lastly, the findings are applicable to the broader children’s mental health community with regard to social competence and self esteem interventions. To that end, we hope to submit the project findings for publication in a children’s mental health journal (e.g., *Social Work with Groups*). We will submit a proposal to present the findings at all available conferences. In particular, a poster presentation is planned for a Centre of Excellence conference in Ontario on November 27 2009.
References


Appendix A
Logic Model: Towhee Program Evaluation

Long Term Goal: Improved social-emotional and behavioral functioning in home, school & community

Service Components
- Screening & assessment group
- 3 week residential camp

Population Of Interest
- Children ages 10 to 18 with a LD who are interested in residential camp
- Children ages 10 to 18 with a LD admitted to camp

Activities
- Conducting application review and individual screening with families and to assess child’s readiness for camp
- Observing child in structured social activities with other children (assessment groups) to determine ‘goodness of fit’ for cabin groupings
- Conducting individual meet with counselor and family to determine child’s individual goals for camp
- Adventure Based Learning Program: participating in activities that challenge and encourage youth to stretch beyond their perceived or self imposed limitations, to discover untapped resources and strengths, and to explore problems or challenges rather than become overwhelmed or incapacitated by them.
- Outtripping and Outdoor Living Skills Program: Working with others to learn and practice outdoor skills
- Aquatics Program: Acquiring new skills in swimming and water safety
- Experiential Arts Program: Encouraging self-expression and creativity through music, fine art and drama
- Yak & Snack Program: Providing a safe group environment in which to share feelings and topics of concern

Short-Term Outcomes
- To ensure referrals to Towhee are appropriate
- To ensure child/parents/agency staff are in agreement about treatment goals for camp
- Increased self-confidence
- Increased self-reliance
- Increased skills in managing social situations, social problem-solving
- Increased skills in managing emotions such as anxiety & frustration

Intermediate Outcomes
- To ensure that cabin groupings optimize opportunities for successful social interactions among youth
- Increased social competence
- Increased self esteem
## Appendix B

### Towhee: Outcome Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Indicator(s)</th>
<th>Source of Data</th>
<th>Who Collects Data</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased social competence and</td>
<td>1. <strong>Self report:</strong> Positive change scores:</td>
<td>1. Camper ratings</td>
<td>1. RA with assistance from camp counselors</td>
<td>1. Administered first day of camp, last full day of camp &amp; by mail 3 month follow up</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased self esteem</td>
<td>- Social competence (cooperation, leadership, social skills)</td>
<td>- Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) - camper</td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Mailed to parents before start of camp, given to parents at camper pickup, and mailed out 3 months follow-up</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Self-esteem (positive identity)</td>
<td>- Camper Growth Index – Camper (subscales)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. <strong>Parent ratings</strong> Positive change scores:</td>
<td>2. Parent ratings</td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Observations taken during same activity, once each week x 3 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Social competence (cooperation, leadership, responsibility)</td>
<td>- Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) - parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Self-esteem (positive identity)</td>
<td>- Camper Growth Index – Parent (subscales)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. <strong>Observation</strong> of active engagement</td>
<td>3. Behavioral Observations of Students in Schools (BOSS)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. <strong>Targeted qualitative interviews</strong> to gather information about mechanisms of change through camp</td>
<td>4. Qualitative interviews:</td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Booked individually for within 1 month of the end of camp</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Campers</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Camp staff</td>
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## Appendix B (cont’d)
### Towhee: Process Evaluation Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Target Pop.</th>
<th>Indicator(s)</th>
<th>Measures / Source of Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Recruitment: Clients (campers) Conducting application review and individual screening to assess child’s readiness for camp Observing child in structured social Determining individual goals for camp | Children ages 10 to 18 with a LD who are interested in residential camp | • N= 100 youth with documented LD  
• N= 100 completed treatment plans / goals for residential program (for each camper)  
• Client & caregiver feedback about the process of camp selection; how well camp met individual goals; compatibility of cabin groupings | • Client File review to elicit demographics (are we recruiting who we say we’ll recruit) & completion of treatment plan for each camper  
• Client impressions: Qualitative in-depth interviews (1.5 hrs) with 5 campers representing different experiences  
• Family impressions: Qualitative in-depth interviews (1.5 hrs) with 5 caregivers representing different experiences |
| Recruitment & Training: Camp staff Sending recruitment letters to colleges & universities; Interviewing Educating staff: includes weekend supervisor retreat; 2 week pre-camp; midcamp workshops; post camp debriefing; follow-up ‘fall reunion’ | Compassionate camp staff who have a passion for working with kids with LD & emotional/behavior problems | Successful hires of full staffing complement:  
• N= 24 cabin counselors  
• N= 8 support counselors & supervisors  
• N=13 program staff  
• N=9 kitchen & support staff  
• N= 2 health team staff  
• N= 2 senior mtgt  
Staff feedback: Identification of challenges & barriers to learning/staff development | • Qualitative in-depth interviews (1.5 hrs) with 5 staff representing different experiences  
• Camp staff surveys completed by all staff at the end of the summer (N = 62) |
| 3 week Residential Program: Participating in activities such as | Clients: Children & youth age 10 -18 with LD | Impressions of summer program:  
• Camper | • Qualitative in-depth interviews (1.5 hrs) with 5 staff , 5 campers, 5 caregivers representing different experiences |
| adventure-based learning, outdoor living & outtripping; arts; aquatics; group discussions | admitted to camp Caregivers of campers Camp Staff | • Caregiver  
• Camp staff  
Successful management of camper behaviors and problems to optimize enjoyment of camp | • Reduced number of critical incident reports |
PRE
(Integra planning, staff training)

POST
(Integra follow-up, camp activities, return to camp)

STAFF

IMMERSION / MILIEU

• acceptance
• challenge by choice
• teachable moments
• tailoring

OUTCOMES

✓ increased self-confidence
✓ increased self-awareness
✓ positive social experience
Appendix D: Camper’s Growth Index – Child Form

Directions: Below are questions about how you feel about yourself, activities, and other kids. Please circle 1 if you disagree a lot, please circle 2 if you disagree a little, please circle 3 if you agree a little, and please circle 4 if you agree a lot. Please try to answer all the questions as best you can.

1) I am a good leader.

2) I follow the rules.

3) I’m a special person.

4) I like to talk to kids I don’t know yet.

5) We should take care of our planet.

6) I worry about making friends.

7) I need my parents to help me do things.

8) My friends and I get along.

9) In the past week, I did a new activity.

10) If kids were choosing a leader, they might vote for me.
11) Before I make a decision, I think about what might happen.

12) Good things will happen to me.

13) I like to play with new kids.

14) I care about nature.

15) It’s hard to make new friends.

16) I’m good at doing things on my own.

17) Other kids think I’m fun to be with.

18) In the past week, I tried something new.

19) Other kids look up to me.

20) I respect other people.

21) I have a good life ahead of me.
22) I introduce myself to new kids. | Disagree a Lot 1 | Disagree a Little 2 | Agree a Little 3 | Agree a Lot 4

23) Recycling is important. | Disagree a Lot 1 | Disagree a Little 2 | Agree a Little 3 | Agree a Lot 4

24) It’s hard to keep new friends. | Disagree a Lot 1 | Disagree a Little 2 | Agree a Little 3 | Agree a Lot 4

25) I do just fine without my parents around. | Disagree a Lot 1 | Disagree a Little 2 | Agree a Little 3 | Agree a Lot 4

26) I get along with others. | Disagree a Lot 1 | Disagree a Little 2 | Agree a Little 3 | Agree a Lot 4

27) I like to try new activities. | Disagree a Lot 1 | Disagree a Little 2 | Agree a Little 3 | Agree a Lot 4

28) I’m pretty bad at leading activities. | Disagree a Lot 1 | Disagree a Little 2 | Agree a Little 3 | Agree a Lot 4

29) Before I make a decision, I talk with other people. | Disagree a Lot 1 | Disagree a Little 2 | Agree a Little 3 | Agree a Lot 4

30) I’m an important person. | Disagree a Lot 1 | Disagree a Little 2 | Agree a Little 3 | Agree a Lot 4

31) I talk to kids who are different from me. | Disagree a Lot 1 | Disagree a Little 2 | Agree a Little 3 | Agree a Lot 4

32) Wild animals should be protected. | Disagree a Lot 1 | Disagree a Little 2 | Agree a Little 3 | Agree a Lot 4
33) I worry my feelings will be hurt if I like other people too much. Disagree a Lot 1 Disagree a Little 2 Agree a Little 3 Agree a Lot 4
34) I need help with most things I do. Disagree a Lot 1 Disagree a Little 2 Agree a Little 3 Agree a Lot 4
35) Other people like it when I’m around. Disagree a Lot 1 Disagree a Little 2 Agree a Little 3 Agree a Lot 4
36) I like to go on new adventures. Disagree a Lot 1 Disagree a Little 2 Agree a Little 3 Agree a Lot 4
37) I help lead a club or team. Disagree a Lot 1 Disagree a Little 2 Agree a Little 3 Agree a Lot 4
38) I help other people. Disagree a Lot 1 Disagree a Little 2 Agree a Little 3 Agree a Lot 4
39) I’m not worth much. Disagree a Lot 1 Disagree a Little 2 Agree a Little 3 Agree a Lot 4
40) I get other kids together for games. Disagree a Lot 1 Disagree a Little 2 Agree a Little 3 Agree a Lot 4
41) I know how to make good decisions. Disagree a Lot 1 Disagree a Little 2 Agree a Little 3 Agree a Lot 4
42) I feel confident in myself. Disagree a Lot 1 Disagree a Little 2 Agree a Little 3 Agree a Lot 4
43) I think about how I can help other kids. Disagree a Lot 1 Disagree a Little 2 Agree a Little 3 Agree a Lot 4
Camper’s Growth Index – Parent Form

Directions: Below are 42 questions about how your child feels about him/herself, activities, and other children. Please circle 1 if you disagree a lot with the statement, please circle 2 if you only disagree a little, please circle 3 if you agree a little, and please circle 4 if you agree a lot with the statement. Please try to answer all the questions as best you can.

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<tr>
<th>1) My child is a good leader.</th>
<th>Disagree a Lot</th>
<th>Disagree a Little</th>
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<td>2) My child follows the rules.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
<td>Disagree a Little</td>
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<td>3) My child is a special person.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
<td>Disagree a Little</td>
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<td>4) My child likes to talk to kids he/she does not know yet.</td>
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<td>5) My child believes he/she should take care of our planet.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
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<td>6) My child worries about making friends.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
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<td>7) My child needs his/her parents to help him/her do things.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
<td>Disagree a Little</td>
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<td>8) My child gets along with his/her friends.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
<td>Disagree a Little</td>
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<td>9) In the past week, my child did a new activity.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
<td>Disagree a Little</td>
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<td>10) If kids were choosing a leader, they might vote for my child.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
<td>Disagree a Little</td>
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11) Before my child makes a decision, he/she thinks about what might happen.

12) Good things will happen to my child.

13) My child likes to play with new kids.

14) My child cares about nature.

15) My child finds it hard to make new friends.

16) My child is good at doing things on his/her own.

17) Other kids think my child is fun to be with.

18) In the past week, my child tried something new.

19) Other kids look up to my child.

20) My child respects other people.

21) My child has a good life ahead of him/her.
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<td>22) My child introduces him/herself to new kids.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
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<td>23) My child thinks recycling is important.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
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<td>24) It’s hard for my child to keep new friends.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
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<td>25) My child does just fine without his/her parents around.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
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<td>26) My child gets along with others.</td>
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<td>27) My child likes to try new activities.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
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<td>28) My child is pretty bad at leading activities.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
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<td>29) Before my child makes a decision, he/she talks with other people.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
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<td>30) My child thinks he/she is an important person.</td>
<td>Disagree a Lot</td>
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<td>31) My child talks to kids who are different from him/her.</td>
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<td>32) My child believes wild animals should be protected.</td>
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<td>33) My child worries his/her feelings will be hurt if he/she likes other people too much.</td>
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<td>34) My child needs help with most things he/she does.</td>
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<td>35) Other people like it when my child is around.</td>
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<td>36) My child likes to go on new adventures.</td>
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<td>37) My child helps lead a club or team.</td>
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<td>38) My child helps other children.</td>
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<td>39) My child does not think he/she is worth much.</td>
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<td>40) My child gets other kids together for games.</td>
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<td>41) My child knows how to make good decisions.</td>
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<td>42) My child thinks about how he/she can help other kids.</td>
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Appendix E: Operationalized criteria for BOSS

Arts Program (Music, art & drama) – 1 hour session / 45 minute coding; each minute – 4 x 15 second intervals – 15 minutes for each target camper

**Instruction:** At start of Auditory cue, observe whether camper is on-task or off-task. If on-task, decide immediately if active or passive. For the remainder of the interval, observe if camper goes off task (has to be at least 3 seconds).

Every 5th interval:
- code for a non-target camper. Pick a different camper each time.
- Code teacher directed instruction

**On-task:**
1. **Active engagement:**
   - Defined as “those times when the camper is actively attending to the target activity”
   - Examples include:
     - Playing an instrument
     - Singing
     - Talking to camp staff about the activity
     - Talking to other campers about the activity
     - Asking a question / raising their hand
     - Hands-on participation in art activity
     - Acting
     - Reading a script aloud
     - Participating in drama game

2. **Passive engagement:**
   - Defined as “those times when the camper is passively attending to the target activity”
   - Examples include:
     - Listening to camp staff or another camper (related to camp activity)
     - Looking at art activity or instrument
     - Reading script silently
     - Observing demonstrations

3. **Off-Task**
   - Defined as “any instance of an activity (motor, verbal or passive) that is not directly associated with the target activity”.
   - Multiple occurrences of the same behavior within a single interval are noted only one time.
   - Examples include:
     - Motor activity that is unrelated to the activity (physically touching another camper, fidgeting, etc)
     - Verbal activity unrelated to activity (disruptive, audible sounds, remarks, calling out)
• Passive off-task (staring off, looking around the room, listening to campers talk about topics unrelated to activity)

4. Teacher-Directed Instruction
• Defined as “those times when the instructor is directly teaching the class or individuals”
• Coded every fifth interval; present or absent
• Examples include:
  • Instructing the whole group
  • Demonstrating an activity
Appendix F: Camper Invitation to participate

Welcome to Camp Towhee!

At Camp Towhee, we try to offer a really cool program to our campers. We think that this year’s program will be the best yet! We need your help to see how it works.

We value your ideas and opinions about how to make camp the best possible experience for you. We want camp to be fun for everyone but we also want campers to learn stuff about themselves and to improve their self-confidence. We really want the camp to make a difference for everyone who attends.

This summer, we are asking for your help in finding out about how the camp can make a difference to you. We are asking all campers to complete a couple of questionnaires at the beginning and at the end of camp, and after you are back home. The staff will help you with the questionnaires at camp and they should only take about an hour. There are no right or wrong answers for these questionnaires. We really just want to find out if the camp helps you in any way to feel better about yourself and to get along well with others.

You do not have to participate in this research study, but if you decide to, you may also stop at anytime. We think you have important ideas to tell us and we would really like to hear them. If you agree to participate, please sign this form at the bottom. If you have any questions, just ask any of our program staff.

Thanks a lot! Hope you have a great time at Camp Towhee this summer!

___ I agree to participate
___ I do not wish to participate

________________________________________  ______________________
Camper’s Signature                              Date

_______________ ______________________
Camper’s Name (please print)
Dear Parent(s):

At Integra, we are committed to providing an enjoyable and highly valuable summer program for your son or daughter. Each summer, we rely on feedback from parents, campers and staff to help us to adapt programming and to ensure that we are delivering a top quality service. This summer, we have an opportunity to evaluate Towhee in a more systemic manner to gain more information. To that end, we are asking for the participation of you and your child in a pilot program evaluation study at Towhee.

*What are you studying?*

We would like to know how camp may help your child. Specifically, we are interested in learning about whether the Towhee summer experience is associated with positive changes in social skills and feelings of self-confidence for your child. Since this is a pilot study, we are also looking at whether there are other changes that emerge as a result of attending the three-week camp.

*How will you find this out?*

For this pilot study, we have three ways to look at outcomes: (1) questionnaires completed by parents and campers; (2) observations of the campers in an activity at camp; and (3) interviews with a sample of parents, campers and staff. Emily Case, a psychology graduate student at OISE University of Toronto, will help us to collect the data.

*What is required of me?*

First, we require your permission to participate in the program evaluation study. If you consent to participate, the study would involve the completion of two questionnaires before your child goes to camp (“pre-test”), immediately after your child returns home (“post-test”), and by mail, three months after camp (“follow-up”). For a small number of parents, you may be asked to participate in a 60 minute interview about the camp experience. We will also ask for your permission to allow Emily Case to use the pilot data as part of her doctoral thesis research, looking at the efficacy of a summer residential program for children and youth with LD. Emily will work under the supervision of Dr. Phillips and Dr. Rosemary Tannock of HSC and OISE. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Ethics Review Office at U of Toronto (ethics.review@utoronto.ca).

*What is required of my child?*

If you consent to have your child participate, the study involves the completion of two questionnaires, administered three times (at camp on the first day – “pre-test”; at camp on the second last day – “post-test”; and three months after camp – “follow-up”). In addition, Emily Case, OISE graduate student, would collect systematic observations of randomly sampled children to evaluate their active engagement in camp social activities at three select times during camp. Finally, a small number of campers will be invited to participate in a 60 minute interview about the camp experience.
How is the information kept confidential?
All participants in this study will be assigned a subject number: Names and identifying information will not be included on any research data. The information that you provide will be kept confidential and will be stored securely at Integra.

What if I do not want to participate in the study?
If you choose not to participate in this program evaluation, it will not affect your child’s participation at Towhee or his/her service delivery at Integra. Moreover, if you give consent to participate, you may withdraw that consent at any time.

What if I have more questions?
We would be pleased to answer any questions you may have. You may contact Dr. Marjory Phillips, Director of Psychology & Community Consultation at Integra (mphillips@integra.on.ca or (416) 486 8055 ext. 224) for more information.

Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Director of Psychology & Director, Camp Towhee
Community Consultation
Towhee Program Evaluation Consent Form

✓ I understand that Integra staff members are undertaking an evaluation of the Camp Towhee program and have asked for my participation and for the participation of my child.

✓ I understand that my child and I will each be asked to complete two questionnaires (the Campers Growth Index and the Social Skills Rating System), repeated three times (before camp, immediately after camp, and three months following camp). I understand that completing the questionnaires should not take more than an hour.

✓ I understand that during camp, my child may be selected for observation of his/her engagement in a social activity, measured three times over the course of camp. I understand that the observations will be unobtrusive and that my child will not be identified in any way during the observations.

✓ I understand that either I or my child may be invited to participate in an hour-long interview conducted within one month after the end of camp in order to obtain qualitative information about our views of Camp Towhee.

✓ I understand that the information collected will be kept confidential and will be stored in a secure location at Integra. I understand that only the staff involved with the evaluation of the program will have access to the information. I understand that all identifying information will be removed from the information collected.

✓ I understand that graduate student, Emily Case, will use the non-identifying information as part of the data for her doctoral thesis to look at the role of summer camp for children with Learning Disabilities.

✓ I understand that participation in this study is completely voluntary and that both my child and I may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time. I understand that this will not affect my child’s participation at Camp Towhee or our services at Integra.

Camper’s Participation:
___ I agree to participate in the program evaluation of Camp Towhee
___ I do not wish to participate in the program evaluation.

Parent Participation:
___ I give permission for my son or daughter to participate in the program evaluation.
___ I do not wish for my son or daughter to participate in the program evaluation

Camper’s Name: _____________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

Parent’s Signature __________________________ Date ___________
Towhee Program Evaluation Consent Form

✓ I understand that Integra staff members are undertaking an evaluation of the Camp Towhee program and have asked for my participation.

✓ I understand that I have been invited to participate in an interview asking for my observations and feedback about Camp Towhee. I understand that this interview will be videotaped and is expected to last approximately 1½ hours.

✓ I understand that the information collected will be kept confidential and will be stored in a secure location at Integra. I understand that only the staff involved with the evaluation of the program will have access to the information. I understand that all identifying information will be removed from the information collected.

✓ I understand that the Directors of Camp Towhee will not have access to any information that might identify me or my responses during the interview.

✓ I understand that graduate student, Emily Case, may use the non-identifying information as part of the data for her doctoral thesis to look at the role of summer camp for children with Learning Disabilities.

✓ I understand that participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw or choose not to participate at any time.

✓ I understand that my participation in this study will not affect my status with respect to Camp Towhee.

____ I agree to participate in the program evaluation of Camp Towhee
____ I do not wish to participate in the program evaluation.

Staff member’s name: _____________________________________________

_____________________________________  _______________________
Signature      Date
Appendix G: Semi-structured qualitative interview guide

This part of our research involves asking you questions about your experience with Camp Towhee in order to get a more in-depth perspective than we could get using questionnaires.

**PART A – General Evaluation**

First, we’d like to find out more about what you think of Camp Towhee in general.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAMPER</th>
<th>PARENT</th>
<th>STAFF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the best things about Towhee?</td>
<td>1. What are the best things about Towhee?</td>
<td>1. What are the best things about Towhee?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. If you could change anything about Towhee, what would you change?</td>
<td>2. Do you see any areas where the Towhee experience could be improved?</td>
<td>2. Do you see any areas where the Towhee experience could be improved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Think back to the time before you went to camp. How were you feeling about going to Towhee? How did you feel on the last day of camp?</td>
<td>3a. How did your child feel about going to Towhee? How did he/she feel about returning home?</td>
<td>3. What aspects of the staff training were helpful in preparing you for work at Towhee? What else could have been done to prepare you for your work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Have you been to any other camps? (If yes) What makes Towhee different?</td>
<td>4. Has your child been to any other camps? (If yes) What makes Towhee different?</td>
<td>4. Have you worked at any other camps? (If yes) What makes Towhee different?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What do you think of the facilities at Towhee? (e.g., cabins, waterfront, dining hall, other buildings)</td>
<td>5. What was your impression of the facilities at Towhee? (e.g., cabins, waterfront, dining hall, other buildings)</td>
<td>5. What was your impression of the facilities at Towhee? (e.g., cabins, waterfront, dining hall, other buildings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How did you feel about the camp staff? In what ways did they help you?</td>
<td>6. What were your impressions of the camp staff? In what ways did they help your child?</td>
<td>6. What were your impressions of the camp directors?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

**PART B – Mechanisms of Change**
Next, we’d like to find out about any changes that you saw in (yourself, your child, the campers) as a result of attending Camp Towhee this summer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAMPER</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What changes have you seen in yourself as a result of going to Towhee this summer? / Did you learn anything about yourself while you were at camp?</td>
<td>1. What changes have you noticed in your child since he/she returned from Towhee?</td>
<td>1. Tell the story of positive changes that you noticed in one camper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Towhee’s motto is “Where success is an adventure” – what successes did you experience at camp? (What was your greatest accomplishment?)</td>
<td>2. Towhee’s motto is “Where success is an adventure” – what successes has your child experienced at camp or since camp? (What do you feel was his/her greatest accomplishment?)</td>
<td>2. Towhee’s motto is “Where success is an adventure” – what successes did you observe in campers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What is it about Towhee that helped you to be successful?</td>
<td>3. Was there anything particular about Towhee that contributed to those successes?</td>
<td>3. Was there anything particular about Towhee that contributed to those successes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What were some of the challenges you experienced at camp? How did you handle them?</td>
<td>4. What were some of the challenges your child experienced at camp? How did he/she handle them?</td>
<td>4. What were some of the challenges you encountered in working at Towhee? How did you handle them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is the best part of the day at camp? Why?</td>
<td>5. What, in your opinion, is the most important part of the Towhee program?</td>
<td>5. What, in your opinion, is the most integral component of the camp program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Tell me about the friends you made at camp. Did you learn anything new about getting along with other kids?</td>
<td>6. How important was it to your child to make friends at camp? Was he/she successful?</td>
<td>6. What aspects of camp promote the development of social relationships amongst campers?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Prompts re: positive changes, successes → work out problems better, make friends, feel better about yourself, express feelings better, control your behaviour, become more independent, etc. …

**Notes:**

**PART C – Summary**

Finally, we’d like to ask you a few general questions about your experience with Camp Towhee and what you might tell others about it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAMPER</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. As you know, Towhee is a</td>
<td>1. As you know, Towhee is a</td>
<td>1a. How familiar were you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>camp for kids with learning disabilities. Did you learn anything new about your LD while you were at camp or do you view it any differently?</td>
<td>camp for kids with learning disabilities. Do you think your child learned anything new about his/her LD while at camp or does he/she view it any differently?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Some kinds find that after they get back from Towhee, they lose some of the gains they made at camp … how can Integra and Towhee staff help you keep up your positive changes?</td>
<td>3. Some parents notice that their kids lose some of the gains they have made after they return from camp … how can Integra and Towhee staff help your child maintain his/her gains?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If you had a message for the staff at Towhee, what would it be?</td>
<td>4. If you had a message for the staff at Towhee, what would it be?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lots of generous people donate money so that kids can go to Towhee. If you had a message for them, what would it be?</td>
<td>5. If you had a message for the donors who make Camp Towhee possible, what would it be?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If you could tell other kids with learning disabilities about Towhee, what would you say?</td>
<td>6. If you had a message about Towhee for other parents of kids with learning disabilities, what would it be?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**