

How camping improves lives

By Dianne Schiffman

Most of us who went to summer camp remember the experience with great fondness: We remember the friends we made, the independence and self-confidence we learned – skills that helped to shape the people we became. For those of us who grew up in stable and healthy families, camp was a bonus in a life that was already happy and full.

For those whose families are experiencing a difficult period, however, time at summer camp can, quite literally be a life-changing experience.

The *JFS Camping Program*, which provides children with a Jewish camping experience, is one of the many ways in which the agency helps families.

Families like 11-year-old Jonathan's. Jonathan (not his real name) had become introverted and depressed as a result of his parents' difficult, acrimonious divorce. He lives on the South Shore and his family's limited financial means, as well as a lack of



transportation, kept him isolated from the larger Jewish community on the island of Montreal.

A month at a Jewish camp helped the boy to come out of his shell. He learned to play soccer – and he has stayed with the sport at school. He has become more outgoing, so much so that his outlook on life has been transformed. And his improved perspective has helped, in turn, to create a more positive outlook for his entire family.

Sam's summer camp experience is one that will resonate with anyone who remembers a special counsellor. As he studied for his Bar Mitzvah, Sam (not his real name) was withdrawn and sad. He would think of his father, who had died when he was small, and of how his father would not be at his Bar Mitzvah. His mother, who had Sam's siblings to look after in addition to him and who worked full-time, was not always available to provide the emotional support he needed.

At summer camp, one of Sam's counsellors was able to be the adult male role model he craved, to provide the advice and the companionship he so sorely missed. Sam went home from camp a happier and more sociable boy, one who was better able to function at school and at home.

There are many other Sams and Jonathans having memorable camping experiences, with enduring benefits, because of the JFS camping program: **Last summer alone there were more than 400.**