



Camp Sarah was founded in 2023 as a Jewish educational and cultural day camp for youth from the Nigerian Jewish community. The first camp was held in August 2023 in Abuja, bringing together 42 children and a staff comprising Nigerian Jewish youth leaders and a group of volunteers from abroad. Based on this success, Camp Sarah is expanding as a Nigerian Jewish youth movement with the aim of providing an educational and fun experience that fosters personal growth, a cohesive community and a love of Judaism. With links to Jewish communities abroad, Camp Sarah is a unique opportunity for mutual learning and appreciation of the richness and diversity within Am Yisrael.



*Clockwise from the top: Campers and staff in front of the Jewish calendar mural created by campers; Celebrating the Bar Mitzvah of Shmuel ben Avraham during morning Tefillah; campers holding the list of things for which they are grateful (Hakarat Hatov).*



"We filled the children with reminders that they are not alone in this, nor are they unknown, that out there, outside their synagogues, there are millions of Jews just like them and all that is between them is no more than land mass and seas." - *Olachi Dimunah, Camp Sarah Counselor*

## Origins

Camp Sarah was founded in 2023 by Moshe Hezekiah Nwafor of Tikvat Yisrael synagogue in Abuja and Debbie Isser, an American based in Abuja, to support the growing Jewish community in Nigeria. In the 1980s and 90s many Nigerians, primarily of Igbo origin, began to 'rediscover' their Jewish roots, tracing their ancestors back to the Israelite tribe of Gad. Through interactions with individual Israeli and American Jews, support of organizations such as Kulanu, exchanges with the Abayudaya Jewish community in Uganda, and connections forged over the internet, the community has developed a strong Jewish identity grounded in liturgy and halacha. Today there are an estimated 10,000 practicing Jews, including ninety that were converted by a Bet Din in 2021, and a young generation that has been raised with Jewish traditions. In addition to three synagogues in the Abuja environs, there are dozens more serving Nigerian Jews mostly in the southeast part of the country.<sup>1</sup> Camp Sarah responded to the community's desire to provide a fun and educational environment for their children to feel connected as Jews.

## Camp Sarah Pilot August 20 – 26, 2023

Camp Sarah was piloted in August 2023 as a week-long day camp for 42 campers on the premises of the Tikvat Yisrael synagogue in Kubwa, Abuja. Campers were divided in three age groups (5-8, 9-12, 13-16) and were led by Nigerian counselors paired with American volunteers. The week began with a full day staff orientation and leadership training, followed by five days of camp and culminated in a community Shabbaton with campers and their families.

**Curriculum.** The overall theme was the Jewish calendar year, which was incorporated in sessions on Jewish learning, art projects and music. Rabbi Kerrith Solomon, Education Director of Adas Israel Congregation in Washington DC, together with Kadmiel Emmanuel of the Gihon Hebrew Synagogue in Abuja, led the curriculum, introducing the major Jewish holidays and corresponding values, building understanding of how the Judaism of our tradition can be woven together with the Judaism of our daily lives.

**Monday:** בצלם אלהים B'tzelem Elohim, Respect  
Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot

**Tuesday:** גבורה Gevurah/Strength  
Simchat Torah, Hannukah

**Wednesday:** אחריות Achrayit, Responsibility  
Tu B'Shvat, Purim

**Thursday:** כוח הדיבור Koach HaDibbur/Power of Speech  
Pesach

**Friday:** הכרת הטוב Hakarat Hatov/Gratitude  
Shavuot



*Yahadut session with Rabbi Kerrith Solomon and Kadmiel Emmanuel*

<sup>1</sup> For more background on the Nigerian Jewish community, see Samanth Subramanian, The Lost Jews of Nigeria, The Guardian, April 26, 2022; Daniel Lis, Jewish Identity Among the Igbo of Nigeria: Israel's Lost Tribe and the Question of Belonging in the Jewish State, Africa World Press: Trenton, New Jersey.





"How I am feeling now is wow; mind blowing. I am feeling happy and feeling like I am in a good place where I should be. My message to Camp Sarah is that they should continue to organize more programming for kids."  
- Chidimma Miriam Levi, camper from Gihon Hebrew Synagogue

**Daily activities.** Campers began the day with morning prayers (Tefillah) and then divided into age groups for a series of activities including Yahadut, team-building and leadership, arts and crafts, and games. Campers showed off their dance moves accompanied by Hebrew songs, including original works by counselor Menashe Obinna, in addition to popular afrobeats. After a delicious lunch cooked on premises, campers could choose between an afternoon of sports in the nearby field, individual lessons in Hebrew language and/or text, and quiet games in Camp Sarah Hall. Campers enjoyed trying things for the first time, like playing frisbee, painting and untying a 'human knot'. Each camper contributed a drawing and text that was compiled into Megillat Camp Sarah – a scroll documenting their experience. To reinforce the pedagogical values and group dynamic, campers assembled in a large circle at the end of each day for a debrief and camp songs.



*Clockwise from top left: Counselor Prosper Ekwueme and camper Yosiah in front of the Jewish calendar mural painted by campers; Debbie Isser teaching Hebrew to camper Kristen; counselor Elinor Waskow leading campers to the field for sports; campers Sarah A and Sarah B drawing; campers show off the havdallah candles they made.*



"My message for Camp Sarah is that of appreciation; let them continue with what they are doing. It is a wonderful program. If they continue with this, we will have better things ahead as Jews in Nigeria."  
 - Sar Habbakuk, leader of Tikvat Yisrael Synagogue, Abuja

**Resources and logistics.** Camp Sarah was piloted thanks to generous volunteers and with \$10,000 raised from family and friends through a GoFundMe campaign. The bulk of funds were used to support renovations of the Tikvat Yisrael compound to ensure safety and hygiene, to cover visas and airfare for the volunteer counselors from abroad, to provide food, snacks and supplies for campers, and to cover transportation costs for camper carpools. Camp Sarah benefited from in-kind donations of art supplies, materials and books (with thanks to PJ Library). The community provided on-site accommodation for counselors, security arrangements and prepared meals.

**Camp Sarah Staff.** The most important asset of Camp Sarah is the staff, who serve as leaders, teachers and role models for the campers. The staff included four male and four female counselors, and seven additional core staff that covered security, transport, food and overall logistics. These included a musician, an artist, a writer, a football player and several university students. Nigerian counselors were paired with 5 Americans, all veterans of Jewish summer camps. In addition, 2 American and 1 French volunteer provided leadership training to staff while supporting overall camp administration. Rabbi Kerrith Solomon designed and led the Jewish learning content.



*Clockwise from top left: Counselor and musician Menashe Obinna; Counselors Tifi, Debbie, Olachi, Sarah, Anya and Ednah; Counselors Kadmiel, Sarah and Olachi; Counselor Elinor with camper Aviela; Rabbi Kerrith Solomon with Sar Habbakuk.*





"Kudos to Camp Sarah; it is a great thing indeed. It is a great way to unite Jewish Synagogues in Nigeria. It is a very good way to bring us together. I know we will grow more as Jews if we continue this way." - David Levi Abraham leader of HaGadol International Synagogue, Abuja

### Camp Sarah Holiday Programming

Campers, staff and parents alike considered Camp Sarah an overwhelming success. Building on this momentum, Camp Sarah staff organized special events for children to learn about and celebrate Jewish holidays together. Under the banner of Camp Sarah, 50 children joined in celebration of Simhat Torah at the Gihon Hebrew Synagogue in Jikoyi, Abuja, while Camp Sarah staff taught about the five books and fifty-four parashiyot of the Torah. For Hanukkah, campers gathered at Tikvat Yisrael to make hanukkiyot, sing songs, play dreidel, eat fried snacks and play in the field.



*Clockwise from top left: Learning the parashiyot on Simhat Torah; drawing pictures for Hanukkah; playing dreidel; making hanukkiyot with wood and pasta.*



*"Camp Sarah wasn't just a success but a blessing of endless friendship and baseless love. Staff and campers are all excited and looking to camp next year. It's so beautiful thinking about it."*

*- Moshe Hezekiah Nwafor*

### **Looking Ahead: Sustaining Camp Sarah as a Nigerian Jewish youth movement**

Following the successful pilot phase, we are taking several steps to ensure the sustainability of Camp Sarah as a Nigerian Jewish youth movement through a funding model that balances limited foreign sponsorship with local resources. Priorities for the first half of 2024 include:

**Leadership Training.** In April 2024, we will hold a 5-day leadership training to build a cohort of Nigerian youth leaders (ages 20 – 30) who can take on increasing responsibilities for organizing Camp Sarah activities. Summer 2023 staff will be joined by an additional 15 people from Jewish communities outside Abuja.

**Camp Sarah summer session 2024.** We are currently planning for the second Camp Sarah summer session to take place in July/August 2024 and, resources allowing, we hope to double in size (up to 80 campers) and in duration (2 weeks) to accommodate the demand from campers in Abuja as well as other parts of the country. Safety and security remains our first priority. We are currently seeking funding and in-kind resources to cover costs of camper transportation, accommodation for out-of-town campers and staff, food and other supplies and materials.

**Holiday Programming.** In line with the Camp Sarah 2023 theme of the Jewish calendar year, Camp Sarah will continue to hold one-day programming for each of the major Jewish holidays. Over the next few months this will include Purim, Pesach and Shavuot.

**Partnerships and exchange.** A highlight of Camp Sarah 2023 was the opportunity for American volunteers and the Nigerian staff and campers to appreciate the diversity and richness of Jewish culture, to form meaningful friendships, and to create lasting bonds among Jewish communities across the globe. We welcome the expression of interest from individuals and organizations who wish to contribute and be part of the broader Camp Sarah community.





### Get involved in Camp Sarah

- **Volunteer to join Camp Sarah 2024 as staff.** If you are over 18 and have experience as a camp counselor you can express interest and apply to volunteer.
- **Support Camp Sarah through grants and institutional partnerships.** We welcome organizations interested in exploring partnerships with Camp Sarah through grants, exchange programs, speaking events or otherwise.
- **Make a monetary donation.** Our aim is to raise \$15,000 to cover costs of the Leadership Training, Camp Sarah 2024 and holiday programming. See resource needs on the next page. Camp Sarah is considering formalization of its legal status as a non-profit organization. In the meantime, we are accepting donations through GoFundMe. You can provide a donation at the following link <https://gofund.me/b9679293>
- **Contribute materials in-kind.** Camp Sarah is accepting donations of Judaic materials (siddurim, chumashim, tefillin, tallitot, kippot, candle sticks, holiday-specific items), craft supplies, small sports equipment and books.

For all expressions of interest and queries Please contact Debbie Isser at [deborah.isser@gmail.com](mailto:deborah.isser@gmail.com).



### Camp Sarah Resource Needs: January – August 2024

Camp Sarah 2024 (note budget is for 60 campers and 15 staff for 2 weeks)		
Site preparation	Fumigation and repairs	\$2,000
Transportation for campers and staff from outside Abuja	\$80 x 15	\$1,200
Daily transport to and from camp	2 buses x 12 days	\$3,500
Accommodation for campers and staff from outside Abuja	Provided in kind by community members	N/A
Food	Lunch, snacks and water	\$3,500
Basic supplies	Hygiene, cleaning, reusable plates and cups	\$2,000
Camp Sarah siddur	Printing	\$250
Materials for activities	Sports equipment, art supplies, white boards	\$2,500
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$11,250</b>
Transportation for volunteers from abroad	Flights, visa	\$2,500 per volunteer
Accommodation for volunteers from abroad	Provided in-kind	N/A
Holiday Programming (for a half day program for 50 participants)		
Transportation	Bus hire, fuel reimbursement	\$100
Materials and snacks		\$200
<b>TOTAL for 5 events</b>		<b>\$1,500</b>