When thinking about this summer, there are three concepts that come to mind. First, the idea of “a safe space for LGBTQ youth.” Secondly, the concept of family, the one you are born into and the one you create. Last of all, and probably one that encompasses the other two is the importance of following a set of values. I am honored to have been given the task of working with my amazing staff and campers this summer to integrate those three concepts into our camp program.

This summer, Ga’avah was a safe space in so many ways both literally and figuratively. In order to ensure that Ga’avah was a safe space physically, the Friedberg JCC staff, including counselors, maintenance workers, bus drivers and directors, as well as the

From the New York Times...

What I Learned as a Parent of a Transgender Child
This article, written by Dr. Paria Hassouri, appeared in the NY Times on September 8, 2020. Dr. Hassouri is a pediatrician in LA as well as the author of “Found in Transition: A Mother’s Evolution During Her Child’s Gender Change.”

Still Together Virtually, Even When Apart
By June Finkelstein
campers, had to follow camp protocol and NYS guidelines. Once we were able to create a safe space physically, we were then able to work on creating a safe space emotionally and socially for Ga’avah campers and staff - a place, where people are free to be themselves without the fear of being judged, bullied or harassed. This summer during our fireside chats, we spoke a great deal about how it was all of our responsibility to make Ga’avah a space where everyone felt comfortable, seen, and heard.

I have said before, that Ga’avah is more than a camp, we are a family! I am so grateful that despite the pandemic, we were able to expand our family this summer. Not only did we have five new campers, but we also expanded our age range from ages six to 16! I was proud of our campers who made sure that our youngest family member was always cared for, especially during swim time!

What makes Ga’avah such a special place are the values that we continually strive to follow. We know what it is like to be part of a marginalized community and because of that, we work hard to respect each other and honor our similarities as well as our differences.

I want to thank our incredible counselors, Faigy and Lizzie, for working with me to put together an exciting and varied camp program this summer. Each week had a theme with a variety of activities. We made volcanoes, created jewelry, did some pickling and created our own drag runway! In addition we had daily fireside chats, led by both staff and campers. We

Working with our group has brought me so much joy and hope.

In keeping up with each other virtually, we’ve bridged the camaraderie and community of camp life into our lives at home and school. What is so unique about us is our willingness to understand before being understood. Each week we learn not just about each other, but the distinctive ways in which we communicate and how we might become more effective leaders in our communities. I’ve witnessed first hand the long term effects of Ga’avah campers grounding themselves in an ever growing circle of friends: increased self esteem, outgoingness, and social mediation abilities. Given the opportunity to direct our time, I’m impressed with how the students aim to discuss pressing issues related to their social lives, their districts, and their generation at large. I see them offer up their own experiences and share how we might help each other out in times of stress or confusion. I have learned so much from each and every one of them.

We truly are a vibrant cross section of Long Island, each with individual passions and strengths. We know we are stronger because of our
spoke on a wide array of topics. We had Zoom meetings with Lauren from Pride For Youth, Dubbs Weinblatt from Keshet and we met Adam Eli, an author who spoke about his book and his activism as a Jewish person and a member of the LGBTQ community. June has resumed our weekly zoom meetings and our parent group will start again this month. In conclusion, I wish everyone a L’shana tova.

Have a happy, healthy and peaceful New Year!

Ellen
she/her/hers
open and safe space for all past campers and new campers alike. 3 of our original 9 campers returned and 1 original camper was a counselor for the first time! Ga’avah welcomed 5 new campers this summer as well. This summer our program was held at the Friedberg JCC alongside Camp Friedberg. There were many adjustments that had to be made due to Covid-19, but our staff and campers took it all in stride. I was not able to spend as much time as I would have liked to with Ga’avah, but every time I visited, I could always feel how special it was to be part of this camp family. I am truly amazed by the staff and campers of Ga’avah. Ga’avah is not just a camp or a monthly meetup. It is a community that grows each summer to become stronger and stronger. We look forward to this coming year and everything we have planned! And we especially look forward to being back at our beautiful campsite at the Henry Kaufmann Campgrounds for summer of 2021!

Thank you all for your continued support.

Stephanie Abrams
she/her/hers
Director of Camping Services

Check out some of the fun we had....

We created chemical reactions with rainbow volcanoes!

Getting ready for the runway....
We decorated cookies!

Our very talented artists painted their own runway for our Drag Show!

Projects brought all age groups together especially our puppet show.

We baked fresh Challah and celebrated Shabbat weekly!
We celebrated the HS graduation of Lizzie! One of our original campers who became a counselor this summer! Congratulations Lizzie!

Monday, October 12—Meet us for a hike and chat at the Norman J. Levy Park & Preserve. We’ll meet at 1:00 PM in the parking lot. Bring lunch for a picnic!

Sunday, October 25—Open House at the Henry Kaufmann Campgrounds. 11:00 am -2:00 pm Please RSVP here to Stephanie if you will be attending!

Wednesday, November 11 (Veterans Day)—We will meet at Long Beach (National Blvd Entrance) to do a beach clean up. Community Service hours can be provided. 1:00 PM

Parent Support Group (Virtual)
Join us for the first Thursday of each month for a virtual parent group. Register for Virtual Parent Group Here

Questions about our events? Email Ellen at ediamond@friedbergjcc.org today!

Book Corner
Thank you to author Adam Eli, who shared copies of his book with Camp Ga’avah this summer. Adam also joined us for a virtual Q
& A with our campers and staff. Everyone enjoyed reading and discussing the book and we recommend adding this to your LGBTQ reading list today!

Follow Adam on Instagram! Learn more about Adam Eli here

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**Ga'awah Scholarship Fund**

We aim to provide every child who wants to attend camp and year-round programs with the opportunity to do so! Please make a donation to the Ga'awah Scholarship Fund to help LGBTQ youth participate.

Contact Stephanie Abrams at sabrams@friedbergjcc.org to make your gift today.

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Visit our website

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Thank you to our partners!
Thank you to UJA Federation New York for their continued support.

Elisa Waters, LMSW, elisa.waters@gmail.com