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## Community group pitches in to 'repair the world'

Article by: ANNA PRATT , Special to the Star Tribune | Updated: December 16, 2014 - 3:13 PM

Adults with disabilities and others who meet at the Sabes Jewish Community Center take on projects inspired by a call to social action.



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Last month, the Tikkun Olam group at the Sabes Jewish Community Center, which brings together adults with disabilities and others, crafted colorful Hanukkah cards for Israeli soldiers who can't be home for the holidays.

The project falls in line with the group's purpose. "Tikkun olam" is a Hebrew phrase meaning "to repair the world," said Anita Lewis, the center's inclusion director. "It's a call to social action, to pursue social justice," that rests on everyone's shoulders, she said.

The group tackles a different cause every month. Youth and other volunteers participate in their endeavors. They're paired with adults with disabilities, Lewis said.

Over the past several years, the group has done everything from packing meals for Feed My Starving Children to putting together photo boards for nursing home residents. Also, the Tikkun Olam group sometimes sings or practices yoga, and occasionally it takes field trips.

The group has a core group of attendees who have been coming since the beginning, along with more recent arrivals, Lewis said. Depending on the day, the group fluctuates from six to 30 people.

For each session, which always falls on the last Tuesday of the month, the group has a \$5 fee to defray the cost of materials and staff time, but nobody is turned away for lack of money.

For the greeting cards, which the group produced just before Thanksgiving, members used recycled postcards and prints. That became a lesson all its own. The craft was one way to "be aware of the Earth and what we're throwing away and what we can reuse," Lewis said.

The cards are cheerful-looking and come from the heart, she said.

Lewis didn't get a count of how many cards people made, but it was enough to fill much of a grocery bag, she said. Already, the cards have been mailed overseas.

Photos of the Tikkun Olam group fashioning the cards have also been included with the package, she said. Likewise, pictures will be taken of the soldiers receiving the cards, so in turn, "the group can see its impact on them," she said.

Last year around this time the group sent similar cards to American soldiers.

Lewis started the Tikkun Olam group, which is supported by the [Minneapolis](#) Jewish Federation, after she realized that adults with disabilities have few opportunities to mingle with their peers.

As children, people with disabilities are integrated with the general population at school. However, once they reach adulthood, too often they're cut off from the mainstream, she said.

In her role at the center, "My job is to help generations from babies all the way to seniors to be able to access and participate in all kinds of programs at the center," from the fitness area to the theater, Lewis said.

She thought of the Tikkun Olam group as a way to bridge that gap.

Too often, people with disabilities are seen as "those in need of our help." The group is about "embracing people with disabilities as contributing and engaging members of our community," Lewis said.

"I wanted them to know they're as capable as anyone else," and to teach the "tikkun olam" concept, she said. "I try to do things that fit them physically and intellectually and that connects to the Jewish component," Lewis added.

At the same time, it's a chance for participants to make friends and have fun, she said.

People with disabilities are an important part of the community. "They make a lot of what happens here at the center happen," she said, citing the nearly 30 adults with disabilities who volunteer with mail delivery, filing, baking bread and so much more, she said.

### A lot of love in the room

Jacob Frankel, a staffer at the center, is a regular with the Tikkun Olam group. It's his job to set up the different projects.

Frankel especially likes doing the messy, hands-on-type projects. During the activities, he's able to be himself, "goofy at times, fun in the moment," he said.

Frankel enjoys the social time. For him, the group underscores the fact that "we are more alike than we are different, that we all struggle in different ways," he said. "Being together to help those in our community who are less well off than we are reminds us all that we have something to give."

Connecting with the group, it brings about "a sense of my own belonging to both the Jewish community" and the community at large, he said.

Cathy Mogelson, a volunteer with the Israel Center at the Sabes, led a group of Israeli teenagers in an exchange with local teens nearly a year ago. As a part of the program, the teenagers spent time with the Tikkun Olam group at the center.

The group did a variety of activities that day. Everyone was "super-expressive. They were clearly having a good time," she said.

"You could see that clearly relationships were developing," Mogelson said.

The fact that it's a learning, supportive atmosphere that meets consistently makes it all the more meaningful, she said. "It's the kind of things where it starts to feel like a second home," she said. "There was lots of love in the room. You could feel it."

Anna Pratt is a Minneapolis freelance writer. She can be reached at [annaprattjournalist@gmail.com](mailto:annaprattjournalist@gmail.com).

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Feed My Starving Children is one of the projects taken on by the group at the Sabes Jewish Community Center. Photo courtesy of Anita Lewis

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