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March 1, 2016

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Special to the Omaha Jewish Press

WE DID IT !!!!!!!

**By Karen M. Gustafson, MS, NCC, LIMHP,
Omaha Yachad Chapter Supervisor and Jewish Family Service Executive Director**

Last month, when [Yachad's](#) New York-based international headquarters called to ask if [Omaha Yachad](#) would be participating in a collective program to assemble care packages for Israel Defense Force soldiers, with 15 other Yachad chapters in the United States and Canada, I don't think they expected "little Omaha" to produce 100 care packages.

[Yachad](#) is the [Orthodox Union](#) agency dedicated to enhancing the opportunities of individuals with disabilities; promoting *Inclusion* and independence through a full array of integrated activities; and ensuring their full participation in mainstream Jewish life.

The care packaging initiative was organized as a project for **North American Inclusion Month (NAIM)**, an annual February initiative of Yachad.

In the spirit of NAIM, the initial intent was to "include" all of the North American Yachad chapters, but I wanted to "include" all of our Omaha community in a united effort to give back. Our Yachad members are so fortunate to have many people in Omaha give to us and contribute to programming and other initiatives. For all of you to help Yachad give back to others in need, helps everyone feel valued and inclusive....that no matter who we are, we all have something to contribute to others. We set a lofty goal, but thanks to a true community-wide effort we were able to meet that goal.

This past Sunday, Yachad and **Bnai Brith Youth Organization (BBYO)** came together to assemble 100 care packages to IDF soldiers, thanks to the following community efforts:

Source	Items
Beth El Synagogue	100 pairs of socks
Temple Israel	100 Word Find/Sudoku Books
Beth Israel Synagogue	100 sticks of Chapstick
Pennie Z. Davis Child Development Center	300 sticks of Twizzlers
Friedel Jewish Academy	100 Personalized Notes to soldiers
Bag-N-Save	Kosher candy donated to JFS
BBYO	100 purse-sized packs of tissues
JFO staff, community, & JSS Board	100 decks of playing cards & 100 tubes of Neosporin

The packages are now on their way to New York, where they will be shipped to Israel's lone soldiers by *Nefesh B'Nefesh* together with the packages from other Yachad chapters.

Batya Jacob, Yachad's director of Educational Support Services and coordinator, of its national programs, explained, "The response we received from our chapters across North America for the Lone Soldier Project this past month was astounding. Every Yachad chapter packed gifts for the lone soldier *olim* (immigrants to Israel) through *Nefesh B'Nefesh* together with Orthodox Union's [Seif Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus \(OU-JLIC\)](#) or **Hillel** students from local college campuses."

She continued, "Our Omaha chapter exceeded these parameters by inviting the entire Jewish community to participate and be a partner in this important project. Kudos to **Karen Gustafson** and Omaha Yachad program director **Jan McCarthy** for their leadership on this and the many Yachad projects that they run each year. In addition, we thank *Nefesh B'Nefesh* for partnering with Yachad and OU-JLIC by delivering the packages to the soldiers in Israel who are protecting our homeland, the State of Israel."

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