

Little Hands, Big Hearts

How a small act of solidarity made a meaningful impact.

BY RACHEL ZAIMONT, MANAGING EDITOR

“Sending love from New York,” one child wrote in blue and pink marker. “I am thinking of you,” penned another. Colorful drawings of hearts, Stars of David, and friends holding hands brightened scores of cards and letters that PJ Library kids created for a special group of recipients: children in Israel displaced by the war.

Between October and January, PJ Library’s Little Hands, Big Hearts campaign forged heartfelt connections between thousands of Jewish children from the US, Canada, and Latin America and their young Israeli counterparts, through handwritten messages of unity and care.

It all began with a social media post. Days after the October 7 attack, amid shock and sadness, PJ Library’s New York team recognized the importance of providing moments of hope and joy for children. To “turn hopelessness into action,” they invited PJ Library families to have their children write a message or draw a picture to send to a child in Israel.

To the team’s surprise, the campaign took off online, sparking interest far beyond New York. PJ Library program professionals across the country galvanized families to participate. In some communities, entire schools, synagogues, or JCCs took part.

As cards poured in to the New York office, PJ Library team members in Latin America took note. “Everybody was feeling a little helpless in the diaspora,” says Karin Zingerevitz, regional director of PJ Library in Latin America, Spain, and Portugal. “Kids were feeling the tension, but they didn’t know how to help. We said, ‘We have to do this.’”

Thanks to widely shared WhatsApp messages, Jewish communities in Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Panama, Costa Rica, and Colombia made cards for children in Israel. “Kids were sending ‘I love you’ or ‘I know you’re hurting and we’re hurting too.’ They drew flags from their countries next to the Israeli flag,” Zingerevitz says. “People were very touched by being able to participate. It gave kids an opportunity to feel part of the larger Jewish community.”

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MEARA ASHTIVKER

Children made thousands of cards for kids in Israel.

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“The Little Hands, Big Hearts initiative bridged distances and created bonds of compassion,” says Meara Ashtivker, director of PJ Library in New York. “At a moment when families sought opportunities to show their solidarity, this simple act provided a meaningful avenue for connection.”

What happened next? Thousands of letters arrived in Israel, just in time to be packed into boxes and shipped to children in hundreds of evacuee centers alongside Sifriyat Pijama activity kits for Tu B’Shevat.

“The cards were absolutely precious for the children and the adults around them to receive,” says Andrea Arbel, executive director of Keren Grinspoon Israel, the Harold Grinspoon Foundation’s presence in Israel. “Just knowing that there are young people thinking about them overseas, from Jewish communities across the world — it was like a hug. It was heartwarming and beautiful. And it shows the strength of the Jewish people.”

