

## Annual Warm the Children event helps local children get essential gear for winter

By [Stephen Brooks](#) on October 29, 2012 at 8:19 PM



[AbbeyOldham](#) Jeanette Shaw shops for warm pants for her grandsons at Meijer on East Michigan in Jackson for the Warm The Children donation event. Families who qualified received \$83 of credit per child to be used to purchase winter clothes. Volunteers from Community Action Agency and Jackson Junior Welfare League helped parents with the transactions. (Abbey Oldham | MLive.com)

JACKSON, MI – Leaves started to change colors weeks ago, but the inevitable plunge into colder temperatures signaling the seasonal transition to winter is on the way. Since 1998, the Warm the Children program has aimed to help needy families in Jackson County prepare for the approaching cold weather by providing money to buy hats, socks, jackets, pants and any other necessary clothing to help keep them warm in the coming months.

Monday evening at Meijer, 3333 E. Michigan Ave., was the second of six shopping days during which volunteers escorted families and calculated cost totals for them as they picked out new gear. Each family receives \$83 per child to spend on clothes. "You've got a lot of kids here who are excited to get coats and excited to pick out their things and get brand new things," said program Coordinator Jessie Murray.

"I know a lot of low-income families get hand-me-downs and things from resale stores and things like that. This is an opportunity to get something new, off-the-shelf, and it's just incredibly exciting for them to get something new."

This year the program – which is a partnership between Meijer, the Jackson Junior Welfare League, the Community Action Agency and MLive Jackson – has nearly 900 kids from eligible low-income families signed up to participate. The funds for the Warm the Children families are completely from individual and corporate donations, Murray said, including Meijer, Eaton Corp. and Gerda.

"I think it's pretty amazing – it's perfect timing for winter because this stuff is expensive," Kristen Szittai said. Szittai had a cart full of jeans, sweatshirts and socks for her daughters, Lily and Devin, who were happy to share space in the cart with the new threads. "It helps me a lot because I can't even get a job with having them," Szittai said. "If I put them in daycare and I have a part-time job, daycare costs way too much. So any little help is good (and) really helpful."

After roughly 70 children were shopped for last week, Monday night's shopping accounted for 100 more of the almost 900 kids signed up – which will cost around \$75,000 – Murray said. Last year in Jackson County, the program shopped for 1,025 children – part of the 14,209 total who participated nationwide in 29 programs.

Sharon Neitling has volunteered to assist the program for years by bagging clothes and assisting shoppers. She said she wouldn't miss the opportunity because of the tangible satisfaction of seeing the children pick out new clothes and winter gear. Aside from one time when a mother she was assisting "wandered around on her phone," Neitling said the families are typically grateful and appreciative of the opportunity. "It makes you feel good to know that this program is here for families because otherwise you don't know what in the world would be happening to them," she said. "You can see what you're doing – you can see the reaction."



Rasool Shakoor, 8, waits in line while his grandmother checks out at Meijer on East Michigan in Jackson for the Warm The Children donation event. Families who qualified received \$83 of credit per child to be used to purchase winter clothes. Volunteers from Community Action Agency and Jackson Junior Welfare League helped parents with the transactions. (Abbey Oldham | MLive.com)



Volunteers help cashiers with transactions at Meijer on East Michigan in Jackson for the Warm The Children donation event. Families who qualified received \$83 of credit per child to be used to purchase winter clothes. Volunteers from Community Action Agency and Jackson Junior Welfare League helped parents with the transactions. (Abbey Oldham | MLive.com)



Christopher Wheaton folds a winter shirt at Meijer on East Michigan in Jackson for the Warm The Children donation event. Families who qualified received \$83 of credit per child to be used to purchase winter clothes. Volunteers from Community Action Agency and Jackson Junior Welfare League helped parents with the transactions. (Abbey Oldham | MLive.com)



Christopher Wheaton scans a small coat at Meijer on East Michigan in Jackson for the Warm The Children donation event. Families who qualified received \$83 of credit per child to be used to purchase winter clothes. Volunteers from Community Action Agency and Jackson Junior Welfare League helped parents with the transactions. (Abbey Oldham | MLive.com)



Brothers Rayshaun (left), 7, and Rasool Shakoer, 8, look at jeans at Meijer on East Michigan in Jackson for the Warm The Children donation event. Families who qualified received \$83 of credit per child to be used to purchase winter clothes. Volunteers from Community Action Agency and Jackson Junior Welfare League helped parents with the transactions. (Abbey Oldham | MLive.com)



Jeanette Shaw shops for jeans for her grandsons at Meijer on East Michigan in Jackson for the Warm The Children donation event. Families who qualified received \$83 of credit per child to be used to purchase winter clothes. Volunteers from Community Action Agency and Jackson Junior Welfare League helped parents with the transactions. (Abbey Oldham | MLive.com)



Jeanette Shaw shops for long underwear for her grandsons at Meijer on East Michigan in Jackson for the Warm The Children donation event. Families who qualified received \$83 of credit per child to be used to purchase winter clothes. Volunteers from Community Action Agency and Jackson Junior Welfare League helped parents with the transactions. (Abbey Oldham | MLive.com)



Jeanette Shaw shops for warm clothes for her grandsons at Meijer on East Michigan in Jackson for the Warm The Children donation event. Families who qualified received \$83 of credit per child to be used to purchase winter clothes. Volunteers from Community Action Agency and Jackson Junior Welfare League helped parents with the transactions. (Abbey Oldham | MLive.com)