



Staying warm through the winter shouldn't be too much to ask

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JACKSON, MI – As we head into the holiday season, it's important to take a break from celebrating to think about how and when it's appropriate to give back. One of the great things about Jackson is that there's no shortage of ways to help.

Service clubs, nonprofit agencies and churches – way too many to count – help provide struggling families with food, clothing and much more all year-round. All are worthy causes, and I commend those of you already involved in these efforts.

But, there's one local initiative that's particularly close to my heart.

Warm the Children started in 1998, a joint effort by the Jackson Community Action Agency, Meijer, Inc., the Jackson Junior Welfare League and the Jackson Citizen Patriot.

It's brilliant in its simplicity. Families in need are identified and vetted by the CAA, which chooses those most in need. For example, a family of four must have a household income of \$23,000 or less. Sadly, there's no shortage of families in that category; Warm the Children serves between 700 and 1,000 children a year.

Families selected for the program are then paired up with a volunteer shopper, who are recruited and organized by the Jackson Junior Welfare League. The family and the shopper meet up at Meijer – either one in Jackson is fine – and together they purchase \$83 in coats, boots and clothes for each child.

Trust me, that \$83 can go a long way for smart shoppers. Each year, Warm the Children provides roughly \$50,000 to upwards of \$80,000 in coats, boots, shoes, hats, mittens and clothing to Jackson area kids. If you're willing to give up a few hours to be a volunteer shopping, you won't be disappointed.

I know it sounds cliché, but it's a humbling experience. I've volunteered several times over the years, and believe me, you'll leave feeling good about how you spent the last hour or two. Whatever worries were weighing you down earlier in the day will suddenly feel lighter.

However, what Warm the Children needs most this year are donation. Already, volunteers have shopped for about 250 children, but there are 900 children on the list. Give it some thought – especially the next time you see a kid walking to school in a T-shirt in the middle of December. No child should have to brave winter without a warm coat.

Checks, payable to Warm the Children, can be sent to the Jackson Community Action Agency, 1214 Greenwood Ave., Jackson, MI 49203. Or go to the CAA's website, www.caajlh.org, and click on donate.

(Sara Scott is the community news director for the Jackson Citizen Patriot, mlive.com/jackson and mlive.com/lansing, overseeing all local content.)