



Warm the Children shopping trip brings winter clothing to families in need

By [Katie Abdilla](#)

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Madelyn Bates, 2, picks up a pair of pink winter boots during Warm the Children at Meijer on E. Michigan Avenue in Jackson Monday, November 10, 2014. (Danielle Duval | MLive.com)

JACKSON, MI – Jeni Messner spent Monday evening helping her 3-year-old son, Elijah, pick out a pair of winter boots that fit just right.

Once Elijah was walking proudly in his new Batman boots, it was time for Madelyn, the 2-year-old daughter of Messner's boyfriend, to make her pick. She ran excitedly through the aisles donning her new multicolored sparkly hat and pink fuzzy boots.

Messner and many other families shopped Monday, Nov. 10, at Meijer, 3333 Michigan Ave., with the help of Warm the Children, a local program that ensures children from families in need have warm clothing to wear once temperatures drop. Each family is given \$83 per child to spend on coats, boots, hats and other winter clothing.

Messner said the trip lifted a weight from her shoulders.

"A lot of coats and boots are expensive, so this really helps out a lot," she said.

Monday's shopping trip was the third event hosted by Warm the Children this fall. Program coordinator Kate Lambert Lee said the program aims to help more than 750 families who applied for assistance.

She said the organization is trying to branch out and help families with other needs this winter, such as aid with utility bills and foreclosure prevention.

"Need presents itself in many different ways," she said. "If the utility bill doubles, that money comes from somewhere else. We're trying to have more wrap-around service for families."

The program included several volunteers who helped families shop throughout the night. Josnelly Aponte said she and her co-workers came as representatives of Consumers Energy to help families shop. If a certain number of Consumers Energy employees volunteered, Aponte said the program would receive a \$250 grant from the company to help more children in need.

"You may think there are a lot of opportunities for kids to get donations or second-hand clothing, but it's exciting for them to get brand-new items, and they get to pick them out themselves," Aponte said. "It's a very rewarding experience."

Although Elijah wasn't feeling his best, Messner was happy to see him get what he needs to stay warm.

"It's cool that they help single parents out with stuff like this," Messner said. "He was in a very bad mood, but now he's having fun."



Jeni Messner of Jackson shops Warm the Children with her son, Elijah Ronquillo, 3, and Madelyn Bates, 2 at Meijer on E. Michigan Avenue in Jackson Monday, November 10, 2014. (Danielle Duval | MLive.com)



Elijah Ronquillo, 3, tries on a pair of Batman rain boots while shopping Warm the Children at Meijer on E. Michigan Avenue in Jackson Monday, November 10, 2014. (Danielle Duval | MLive.com)



Jeni Messner and Madelyn Bates, 2, of Jackson looks at sweaters while shopping Warm the Children at Meijer on E. Michigan Avenue in Jackson Monday, November 10, 2014. (Danielle Duval | MLive.com)



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