



JPC brings presents, food and family for the holidays.

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UTICA, Dec. 25, 2009 --Some local mothers have battled personal demons on their way to this year's holiday celebration.

However, they say that those obstacles made the prospect of a rich family holiday this year all the more exciting.

"The things I'm able to do now, I haven't wanted to do in the past," Tiffany Young said. "Now, seeing what it is, it opened my eyes to know what life is really about."

For Young, life is about the four kids she ate a Christmas Eve dinner at Johnson Park Center with. Today will be the first time she spent Christmas with all four of them in three years. Early in their lives she battled drug addiction, and admits to being less responsibly than she wishes she would have been.

But now she says she's sober, and she listened to her kids give the reasons they'll never use drugs -- something she's proud of them for declaring at the dinner. She was able to give them toys, partially thanks to donations that came into the center. When she talks about the prospects of watching them open the gifts, she gets downright giddy.

"I don't think I'll be able to sleep," she said. "I'm very much looking forward to seeing their faces, and I have a lot of people to thank for that, but this is my special moment. I know that, and I want to have that feeling every year from now on.:"

The feeling Young is talking about is similar to the one Melissa Green Described. When she was going through harder times, Green would see her kids on Christmas, but it was a single-day event. She made sure to get them presents, but may have forgotten something else:

"They never went without gifts, but, in a way, they went without me," she said. "I was there but it wasn't the same, it was just for that day. It's all about that quality time, and that's what we're going to do."

Since moving into Johnson Park in March, Green has seen her kids more. They shuttle back and forth to Rochester, but see their mom more often. Now that teenager Bethany and 2-year-old Nygel have a clean and sober mother, they're looking forward to the holiday as well.

"I used to just open my gifts, then I wanted to leave," Bethany said. "You know, now it's not even about the gifts. I just want to be a family."

Bethany admits to having a little more fun in Rochester than in Utica. She said there's just more to do. However, she has found a reason to keep coming back:

"I like it here because my family is here," she said. "Isn't that the most important thing?"