

# PUT YOURSELF IN

my shoes

Meet JoAnn.

I moved to Mason County from Kalamazoo with my three children, because we lost our housing. When my children started attending school, I was connected to Mason County Family Link's Community Resource Coordinator for support and assistance.

Money has always been extremely tight for me, because of not receiving child support on a regular basis. When I met the Community Resource Coordinator, she immediately started working with me to have my Department of Health and Human Services case transferred from Kalamazoo County to Mason County. She introduced me to my new Department of Health and Human Services caseworker in person, so I was able to work with DHHS on a one-to-one basis. In addition, she also connected me to Friend of the Court to see about receiving child support payments on a more regular basis to help gain financial stability. With my children going through a major life change, I talked to the Community Resource Coordinator about how I would like them to receive counseling, but I knew I couldn't afford it at the time. I didn't realize that Mason County Family Link had this service available for free. The CRC was able to arrange to have all three children see the school-based mental health clinician. She also referred my youngest daughter to Staircase Youth Services so she could attend their summer youth program.

The following school year, she stayed in contact with me to ensure my youngest child was still receiving counseling. She also made sure that we received Thanksgiving and Christmas basket, helping us to celebrate the holiday in our new home.

My three children and I were doing well until the COVID pandemic. When school closed, we no longer had access to free and reduced lunch, causing us to have a food shortage. However our CRC reached back out to me and offered to make regular food deliveries to us, because I was unable to get to the school's meal program pick-up locations. She did this for the remainder of the school year and into the summer. I can't tell you how much of a difference this made to our family during an extremely stressful time.

In the fall, I needed to decide if my children should attend school in person or virtually. I made the difficult decision to have them attend virtually due to underlying health conditions. Our biggest challenge was not having access to internet. The Mason County College Access Network partnered with Mason County Family Link to manage an internet connectivity grant that was available to twelfth grade and WSCC students. Since my oldest daughter was a senior and intended to go to college, JoEllen was able to secure internet services for the school year through this grant, and I didn't have to pay anything for it. This allowed my children to successfully attend school virtually and remain healthy, while allowing my family to stay financially stable. Our CRC would routinely check-in on us to make sure everything was going well. Having internet services not only helped my children with their schoolwork, but my oldest daughter was able to apply to colleges and was accepted into Central Michigan University. She would have never been able to attend college without the support of the Mason County Access Network Grant and Mason County Family Link.

Today, my daughter is in her second year of college and is doing so well - she's going to become a nurse. I am also happy to say that my other two children and I are doing well too. I am so grateful for the support that my children and I received through Mason County Family Link and the other services that Mason County Family Link connected us to.

