

Fitchburg community unites to keep children warm this winter

Empower Children for Success and MOC work together for coat drive

January 24, 2026



Pictured, left to right: Stephanie Dondero (MOC), Marites MacLean, Brittany Pagourgis (MOC), David Oldenquist-Spellman (North End Subaru), Mariana Burgos (MOC), Jennifer Plummer, and Bianca Lor (MOC). Not pictured: Isabelle Mascary and Kyria Salgado. (Courtesy of Marites MacLean)

FITCHBURG — On Jan. 13, the Fitchburg community came together in a powerful show of compassion and collaboration to ensure that local children would face the winter season with warmth, dignity, and confidence.

The Kids Winter Coat Giveaway, hosted at 110 South Street, distributed 132 brand-new winter coats to children and families in need, demonstrating what is possible when community partners unite around a shared purpose.

The event was led by Empower Children for Success (ECFS) in close collaboration with Making Opportunity Count (MOC) and brought together nonprofit leaders, community partners, and families for an afternoon centered on care and connection. More than a simple distribution, the event was intentionally designed to uplift families and affirm the value of every child served.

Unlike traditional clothing drives, every coat provided during the giveaway was brand new. This choice was central to the mission of the event — ensuring that children not only stayed warm, but also felt respected, confident, and proud as they stepped into the cold winter months.

“This event was about more than coats,” said Marites MacLean, President and Co-Founder of Empower Children for Success. “It was a reflection of our commitment to dignity, equity, and community, and a reminder to families that they are seen, supported, and valued.”

The success of the event was made possible through the generous partnership of Operation Warm and North End Subaru, whose commitment extended beyond donation alone. North End Subaru played a critical role in ensuring the coats were delivered directly and efficiently, allowing organizers to respond quickly to the needs of families. Operation Warm’s mission to provide new winter coats to children aligned seamlessly with ECFS’s community-centered approach, creating a meaningful and immediate impact.

“North End Subaru has always been fully committed to the community and with Subaru’s Love Promise, they have given us an outlet to further our reach,” said Jason Cote, Manager of North End Subaru. “Partners like Empower Children for Success are the shining example of what it means to give to the community. We are grateful for our partnership and the work ECFS does all throughout the year to make our community not only warmer of body, but warm in our hearts.”

Equally essential to the event’s success was the outstanding work of the Making Opportunity Count staff, who managed the distribution with professionalism, warmth, and care. From organizing coat sizes to welcoming families and maintaining a smooth flow throughout the afternoon, MOC staff created an environment that was efficient, joyful, and deeply respectful. Many families shared their appreciation for the welcoming atmosphere and the thoughtful attention given to each child.

“MOC’s mission is to empower families to achieve economic security by eliminating barriers and creating opportunities,” said Mariana Burgos, Director of Enrollment & Family Service at MOC. “Our partnership with Empower Children for Success created a great opportunity for families to keep warm this winter. We look forward to continuing collaboration such as this one and others that will support our mission in empowering families.”

For many families, rising costs and difficult financial choices — often described as a “rent-or-eat” reality — make purchasing quality winter clothing a significant challenge. By removing this burden, the Kids Winter Coat Giveaway provided more than physical warmth; it offered relief, reassurance, and a sense of collective support during a demanding season.

The Jan. 13 event stands as a reminder that when nonprofits, businesses, and community organizations align their resources and values, the result is lasting, tangible impact. Together,

ECFS, MOC, Operation Warm, and North End Subaru helped ensure that 132 children are better prepared for winter — and that families feel the strength of a community that stands with them.

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