

Event donates holiday gifts to families of Racine County Jail inmates

- [Jonathon Sadowski](#)
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Sylvia Lohry, left, and Liliansa Gordon look at toys with Gordon's son, Minho, on Dec. 15 at the Dr. John Bryant Community Center. Local nonprofit Giving to the Nations hosted its inaugural Give-A-Gift Holiday Open House that let families of Racine County Jail inmates receive free holiday gifts. [Jonathon Sadowski](#)

RACINE — Liliansa Gordon laughed as her young son, Minho, looked through a table full of new toys just begging to be played with.

He picked up a foam dart gun, his choice finalized.

Gordon and her son were two of about 1,300 people invited Dec. 15 to the Dr. John Bryant Community Center for the inaugural Give-A-Gift Holiday Open House hosted by Giving to the Nations, a local nonprofit, in coordination with the Racine County Sheriff's Office.

Families of Racine County Jail inmates were able to pick out free Christmas gifts to help fill a gap left by their loved one's absence for the holidays.

“It’s why we love to live here,” said Gordon, who said her father relapsed with a drug addiction and will be in jail for the holidays.

“It’s sad that he couldn’t be with us here, but it’s nice he was thinking of the little ones,” said Sylvia Lohry, who was with Liliana and Minh.

In the Bryant Center’s gym were tables filled to the brim with brand-new toys, gadgets, clothes, household supplies and more. They were provided through a partnership with other nonprofits and big-box stores that donate returned items, damaged goods or products missing parts, said Pastor Lynn Nys, a director of Giving to the Nations.

“This is a collaboration between Giving to the Nations and the Sheriff’s Office to give back to the community with the highest level of people that need help,” said Sheriff’s Office Chaplain Anthony Balistreri, who is also a director of Giving to the Nations. “Their family members are incarcerated. They can’t go shopping with them. They can’t even work with them.”



Family members of Racine County Jail inmates gather for a raffle drawing on Dec. 15 at the Dr. John Bryant Community Center.
[Jonathon Sadowski](#)

The Sheriff's Office contacted inmates and asked if they would be interested in inviting their loved ones to the Bryant Center, 601 Caron Butler Drive, for the event.

For each member of participating households, the Sheriff's Office and Giving to the Nations provided tags that let them pick out any gifts on the tables. Larger items — from drones to microwaves to dish sets — were also raffled off.

'Just a seed'

By providing families with necessary supplies and holiday shopping aid, the Sheriff's Office is hoping to fight recidivism, Balistreri said.

"It's just a seed, and the harvest is yet to come. That whole room full of everything is just a seed," he said. The event was supported by more than 60 volunteers and numerous local businesses that donated food and supplies.

"It's a wonderful gift," Lohry said.

Another event is planned for spring, Nys said. Anyone interested in donating to Giving to the Nations or volunteering with the organization can visit www.givingtothenations.org or email Nys at lnys@givingtothenations.org.

One of the biggest needs is storage space for donated goods.