

## Joy's 3SquaresVT Story

Newly divorced. Three young children at home. Little to no child support that she could reliably count on. That was the situation Joy found herself in at age 26.

With a bachelor's degree and steady job, she made just enough money to pay the bills. But there was no room for extras, no buffer in case of emergencies. If fuel prices spiked, either the furnace had to be set at 50 degrees or some bill would not get paid.

So she looked for programs that could help, and she found 3SquaresVT – a federal program that helps eligible Vermonters to put food on the table.

"Completing the application was a bit of work, but totally worth it" said Joy. "I filled it out at home, mailed it in, and then took part in a 20-minute interview by phone. Not having to take time off of work to go into an office to complete the application process was a big deal."

The money she got every month meant she didn't have to worry about food. Most importantly, it gave her CHOICES as well as flexibility in her budget.

"I could choose to buy healthier, more nutritious foods for my children", said Joy. "I could afford to give them normal childhood experiences like school field trips and birthday parties."

As her income increased and she no longer qualified for a monthly amount, she stayed on the program a few years longer because her children still qualified for free meals at school.

"Getting free meals at school was a huge help. It was basically the equivalent of a utility bill."

Joy eventually earned a master's degree and enough money to make it on her own. Looking back, she is grateful that help was available when she needed it.

"What the program provided for my kids was much more important than any embarrassment I might have felt. Because it allowed me to give them the same experiences as other children. While they always knew money was tight, they never saw us as being poor. As a result, they never felt that their possibilities were limited by our circumstances. And that perhaps was the greatest gift of all."