

Reunited for the holidays

Families that took part in the Family Preservation Project, a project to unite mothers and children at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, came back together for a night of fun and celebration



Mimi Clinton, 31, from Lake Oswego (pictured in center) reunites with other mothers who participated in the Family Preservation Project while incarcerated at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville. It was the first time many of the women had seen each other since being released from prison. "Being able to remember how to be a mom, you know," Clinton said. "Having that connection with other moms and how they deal with stuff and being able to bounce things off of each other. It really feels like I wasn't even gone."

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Ashley Dorety, 29, from Lake Oswego, and her daughter Sophia, 7, outside of the Keller Auditorium before the Oregon Ballet Theater's performance of *The Nutcracker* on Dec. 20. "I believe that if I lost my parental rights that I would have probably lost my hope in everything and probably gone back out into my addiction. I don't know, but that's what scares me. But I don't have to know because I did get that hope. ... That's what this program gives a lot of people hope to be a part of a family again. To be a mommy again, and you don't have to let your worst mistake - your worst one decision - define you for the rest of your life."

In celebration of the holiday season, participants with the Family Preservation Project enjoyed a performance of *The Nutcracker* on Dec. 20, courtesy of the Oregon Ballet Theater. It was a special reunion for FPP members, all of whom are mothers who served time in prison.

Through the FPP, the women were able to continue parenting their children while they served their time, including regular visits, homework sessions and play time. The program helps preserve the personal family bonds often lost when a member goes to prison. It also provides adult and child education opportunities for parents and their families - inside and outside the prison. It is a partnership between Portland Community College, the Oregon Department of Corrections and the families and children of incarcerated mothers.

The program, and the women and children involved in it, were the subject of a documentary by Portland filmmaker Brian Lindstrom, titled "Mothering Inside." Lindstrom said he made the film to raise awareness about the work of FPP, even while it faced elimination under state budget cuts.