

# THE PLAIN DEALER

## Moms find recipe for happiness

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**Plain Dealer Reporter**

Mentor -- Two-year-old Imari Mitchell lifted the spatula to her tiny mouth, dropping gobs of sugar cookie dough on her chair. Her little lips smacked together in disbelief that none of the sweet goopy goodness actually made it to her taste buds.

"You're making a mess," said Imari's mother, Marlene, mildly frustrated, but mostly amused.

"I'm making a mess!" the little girl declared proudly, earning laughter from the other women around the table.

After more than a decade of marijuana and alcohol abuse, Marlene Mitchell's reward for four months of sobriety is this moment with her daughter.

She and several other women in varying stages of recovery from substance abuse gathered in the community center of Faith Lutheran Church in Mentor Saturday morning to bake and decorate cookies with their children.

For many, it was a simple holiday event long overdue for their healing families.

The Women's Center of Greater Cleveland, which helps women struggling with drug and alcohol addiction gain control of their lives, sponsored Baking Memories this year as a way for the center's clients to establish family traditions with their children.

The event, funded largely by private donations, provided the women and their children with materials to bake and decorate a dozen cookies from scratch and create customized wooden photo frames to take home.

Mary Jane Chichester, executive director of the Women's Center, said changes in the women's sense of responsibility to their families after only a few months of sobriety are evident when they work with their children on creative projects like baking and crafts.

Mothers cleaned up spills, delicately guided their children's hands as they measured and poured ingredients, and corralled rambunctious toddlers back to their tables.

All are signs of progress in the three-phase sobriety program, counselors said.

The mothers said their little ones can sense the difference, too. They're free to be kids when their moms are sober -- and that is the most important reason to stay the course.

Zippering between tables and chairs, two little boys waved guns made out of rolling pins, letting their aprons fly behind them like capes. Others sat still for a few moments while their mothers wiped marker smudges from their fingers and noses.

One 4-year old pixie-nosed girl named Angel pressed chocolate sprinkles onto rows of heart-shaped cookies. Her mom, nearly three months sober after a cocaine addiction, helped steady the bottle of sprinkles in the girl's little fist.

Angel wiped her messy hands absent-mindedly down the front of her clothes. The Disney princesses on her pink T-shirt smiled through the little clumps of dough and sprinkles strewn about their fairytale landscape.

The T-shirt princesses danced beside a message that said in whimsical letters: "And they lived happily ever after."