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Photojournalist helps children imagine hope

By **Lindsay Melvin**
Contact
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What does hope look like to a homeless child?

For 9-year-old Marteja Martin, a resident of the Salvation Army's Emergency Family Shelter in Memphis, it's a house of her own.

Advertisement Award-winning photojournalist Linda Solomon asked more than a dozen children living at the shelter on Tuesday what their dreams are for a better life.

As part of a "Pictures of Hope" workshop, she trained them in taking photographs, had them compile a list of their hopes and then sent them on assignment to capture them on film.

There were no wishes for video games or toys.

Many wished for their own beds, to one day go to college and for a safer world.

Eleven-year-old Rodriguez Foster stood before the group and rattled off his list -- including hopes of becoming a gentleman and that his dad gets out of jail.

"Now, he's going to use that camera to show the world who he is," Solomon said after handing out disposable cameras to the group.

A celebrity photographer, Solomon is also a former television correspondent for "Good Morning America" and photographer of the New York Times Best Seller "People We Know, Horses They Love."

Working in partnership with General Motors, Solomon's Memphis stop was part of a 10-state tour, visiting with children sheltered by the Salvation Army.

Following the workshop, children have a week to photograph their hopes for the future.

Their best work will be enlarged and mounted at a Saturday exhibition at Audubon Park .

The best of the best will be turned into holiday cards and sold to benefit the shelter.

Most of the children Solomon visits have come through stressful situations.

They are primarily from single-parent families. Many have been evicted from their homes because their parents have lost their jobs or are battling drug addictions.

"These are kids whose lives are in crisis. When you're homeless, there's not much time for fun," said Elizabeth Duncan, director of development with the Memphis Salvation Army.

As Solomon showed the kids a slide show of her work, the children were enthralled by her brushes with fame as musical artists like Beyonce and Jay-Z flashed across the screen.

It's a powerful thing to have a well-known professional willing to take time to cultivate the skills and imaginations of these children, Duncan said.

"This teaches them anything is possible," she said.

-- Lindsay Melvin: 529-2445



Mike Maple/The Commercial Appeal

Linda Solomon helps Rodriguez Foster with some photography techniques as part of the the "Pictures of Hope" workshop on Tuesday. The kids tried to capture their dreams on film.

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