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**CHILD WELFARE**

**Photo project helps abused kids picture happiness**

**A photography project aims to help abused children visualize a better life in order to achieve it.**

Posted on Wed, Aug. 13, 2008

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BY DANIEL CHANG  
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Not all dreams come true, but most can be visualized. Linda Solomon, a photographer, is a firm believer in this.

On Tuesday, Solomon handed out cameras at Kristi House, a Miami treatment center for sexually abused children. Then she told the kids to take pictures of the things that they hope for in life.

That will be easy if the children want a Nintendo GameBoy or an iPod Touch. But how does a child photograph a desire for a better life?

Even the abstract can be photographed, said Solomon, who launched a project in partnership with General Motors three years ago called Pictures of Hope to empower children in at-risk situations to realize their dreams.

What's important, she added, is "to show children their hopes and dreams matter. When you know someone believes in your hopes and dreams, you can achieve them."

**CELEBRITY PHOTOS**

Solomon introduced herself to two dozen children at Kristi House as a photographer. Then she showed them her work, taken from the red carpet at the Oscars and elsewhere.

There was the actor Will Smith and singer-actress Miley Cyrus, among others.

The children gasped and shrieked. They were impressed.

Then Solomon showed them how to frame and shoot a picture: hold the camera steady, don't stand too close to the subject, keep your finger off the lens.

Then the children filled out a list of the things they hope for.

First wish on the list for Jesenia V. was "a new begin," as in a fresh start in life. She is 13, and she would like to forget the past.

"All the things I did in the past," she said, "I wouldn't do it again. In a new beginning, I would do things right."

Jesenia prefers not to discuss the details of her past. But she knows exactly how she will photograph her deepest wish: with the birth of her godsister.

"My godmother is having a baby," she said. "That way I can capture life just being produced."

Jesenia has more than one wish, though. She made a list of 26 -- a mix of the specific and the vague: go to a good college; have a better relationship with her mom; not drop out of high school; things to get better at doing; make the honor roll to make her mom proud; courage; more dreams.

Mariely B., 8, listed her first wish as "a happy life," and Clarrie P., 8, hopes for "a good life." Clarrie doesn't know how she will photograph that dream, but she said that she also hopes "that I have a good a house and nice things and my mom gets money in case my mom needs to buy food and drinks and stuff like that."

By the end of the week, the children will have snapped pictures of their dreams and returned the cameras to Solomon.

**CARD SALES AID HOUSE**

Solomon will select some of the photos to be reproduced as greeting cards, which will be



PETER ANDREW BOSCH / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

Linda Solomon shows students at Miami's Kristi House, a home for sexually abused youth, how to shoot pictures. Some will go on greeting cards.

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**LOCAL NEWS VIDEO**

sold for the benefit of Kristi House.

Kristi House treats about 600 children a year, said Trudy Novicki, executive director of the center. About 90 percent of abuse cases are perpetrated by someone known to the child victim and their family, she said.

"Whenever we think of children, we think of happily ever after," Novicki said. "So many of these kids haven't had dreams. They've only had nightmares."

A project like Pictures of Hope, she added, "it helps them to begin to have hope for happiness in their future."

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