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Homeless children snap their dreams

GEORGE HUNTER
/ The Detroit News

Detroit – When asked what she wishes for, Julie, a 10-year-old resident of a homeless shelter, said she wants her mother to feel better. Nine-year-old Dearon, also a shelter resident, wants to go to college. Diamond, age 7, hopes to make her mother proud.

The children were among 15 Detroit kids living in the Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries shelter who articulated their hopes and dreams by taking photographs as part of the nationally acclaimed Pictures of Hope project.

The program for children ages 7-12 was founded in 2006 by photojournalist and former Detroit News columnist Linda Solomon. It's sponsored by Chevrolet, which foots the bill for the cameras used by the children and for printing their photographs on holiday greeting cards, which are sold to raise money for the mission. Detroit is one of 10 cities involved in the program.

All proceeds from card sales go to the Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries.

In addition to the funds raised, there are also spiritual rewards, Solomon said.

"When you ask a child to photograph their hopes and dreams, they come up with some really amazing photographs," said Solomon, a best-selling author who was inducted this year into the Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame.

"It's so sad when a kid lives in a shelter; they're not dreaming about iPads or iPods, let me tell you. They want things like their mother to get better; or they want to get an education. Often, the cameras we give them are the only Christmas gifts they get."

Julie illustrated her wish for her mother to feel better by photographing the clasped hands of a woman and child. Dearon captured his dream to go to college by shooting a picture of a Michigan State University diploma, while Diamond's photograph of a toddler's drawing articulated her wish to make her mom proud.

"I treat the kids as journalists: They get assignments and deadlines," Solomon said. "It's very empowering for them. When you photograph a dream, you can actually see it; it's right there in front of you. It also gets these kids on the path of achievement, filling their self-esteem and encouraging them that a dream is something that can actually come true."

Solomon's program has garnered national attention. The "Today" show and "ABC World News" were among the national media outlets that have covered, or are scheduled to cover, her efforts.

"ABC is going to do a story about a child who was living in a San Diego Salvation Army" facility, Solomon said. "Because of her photograph, she was given a scholarship to San Diego State University. She said she wanted to go to college and photographed the exterior of the school. Someone from the college saw the photograph and (the girl) was granted a scholarship. She's the first one in her family to attend college. So you can see, these pictures really do change lives."

"Now, let's hope the same thing happens to the child who photographed the Michigan State diploma."

Besides Detroit, cities in the program are Tucson, Ariz.; San Diego; Miami and Tampa, Fla.; the Bronx and

Queens in New York; and Fort Bend, San Antonio and Dallas, Texas.

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Additional Facts

Meet the young artists

The photographers involved in the Pictures of Hope project will host a reception at 3 p.m. Tuesday at Gordon Chevrolet, 31850 Ford Road in Garden City. The dealership will give the set of 15 cards to every customer who buys a car until Christmas and make a matching donation to the Detroit Rescue Mission Ministries. To order the cards, or for information on how to donate, call the Detroit Rescue Mission at (313) 993-4700; or email info@drmm.org.

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