

'Dreams Matter'

Photojournalist's program to help children build self-esteem returns

By Michael Waddell

Agape Child & Family Services on Tuesday, Aug. 20, welcomed back award-winning photojournalist and author [Linda Solomon](#) and her nationally acclaimed program, "Pictures of Hope," for the second straight year.

Children selected for the program live in homeless shelters or are in at-risk situations. They take pictures with donated cameras that express their "hopes and dreams" for better lives.



Photojournalist and author Linda Solomon this week brought her "Pictures of Hope" program to Agape Child & Family Services, where participants, including Bernard Nory, got to try out her camera.

(Daily News/Andrew J. Breig)

"It's important to show kids that their dreams matter," said Solomon, who explained that the program helps children build self-esteem and puts them on the path toward achievement. "I was so touched by the devotion to the kids last year here in Memphis that we had to come back. Agape is such an outstanding agency with what they do for families that I suggested to Chevrolet that we come back for a second year."

Memphis is one of 13 cities chosen for the program this year, and the children are selected from the more than 10,000 that are served at the various Agape locations around the city.

"We pick the children either through our community-based programming called Power Lines or our transitional housing program called Families in Transition, which is for homeless women and their children," said Lori Humber, Agape volunteer coordinator responsible for all of the center's event planning. "This is probably the first exposure to photography for most of these kids other than on their smartphones."

Solomon is partnering with Chevrolet for the third year on the program, with the goal of helping homeless and under-resourced children across the country express their hopes and dreams.

"Last year's event was incredible, and we feel fortunate to have been selected to participate for a second year," said [Henry Hutton](#), president and general manager of Chuck Hutton Chevrolet, which also supports local schools and other charitable interests throughout the year. "Hopefully we can convince her to come back again next year."

"Pictures of Hope" has been featured on "The Oprah Show," the CBS Evening News twice, ABC World News and in People Magazine, USA Today, and numerous local newspapers and magazines across the country. Solomon has received numerous awards and honors for "Pictures of Hope" and was inducted in 2011 into the Michigan Journalism Hall of Fame.

"I'm inspired because these kids express true values – life lessons for us as adults," Solomon

said. “They only hope for things that truly matter, and generally not for materialistic things like toys.”

One 10-year-old boy at the Agape event said that his hope was “to show people that I’m not a nobody.”

The group of 14 children (aged 7 to 12) were surprised with free digital cameras provided by co-sponsor Walgreens, and Solomon gave a photography lesson with examples of her work, including shots of Beyoncé, [Will Smith](#), Usher, Miley Cyrus and Justin Bieber.

Immediately following the event, the children went on their photo assignments at the University of Memphis campus with their volunteer mentors to capture and reveal their hopes and dreams. Between 17 and 20 volunteers helped, including members of the Memphis Photography Club and the Memphis College of Art senior photography class.



Photojournalist and author Linda Solomon brought her “Pictures of Hope” program to Agape Child & Family Services this week. Here, participant Javion Holt gets his new camera from Henry Hutton.

(Daily News/Andrew J. Breig)

The photos will be collected and turned into Christmas card sets that will be sold in the fall by Agape and local Chevrolet dealers. Last year sales of the sets generated an estimated \$9,000, all of which went back to Agape.

Last year local Chevrolet dealers also went one step further to help the kids in the program by donating money for holiday gifts specifically tailored toward their passions, along with other winter necessities like coats, socks, underwear and hygiene products for their families.

“These kids touched my heart last year, and I wanted to do something special for them,” said Cynthia M. Johnson, Chevrolet district sales manager. “I can remember a point in my life where my family had to reach out to the Salvation Army, and I still remember the baton that I got.”

The dealership plans to do something similar this holiday season for the kids in the program.

Solomon will return to Memphis on Nov. 25 to attend a “Pictures of Hope” celebration at Chuck Hutton Chevrolet on Mount Moriah Road, where the children’s photography will be on display and Christmas card sets will be available for purchase.