

## In words and pictures, homeless children tell their dreams



Asia looks at images on the LED screen of her camera.

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The photograph that 6-year-old Logan Reed snapped near the place he once lived as a homeless child conveys not a thousand words, as the saying goes, but one plain desire.

"My hope is to have friends," says a quote printed beneath his photo, on a greeting card bearing an image of two young girls holding hands at a playground. His words convey a bittersweet longing against a sanguine snapshot taken by a boy with a fetching, toothless smile.

"Maybe because we moved around so much," said his mother, Berniesha Crosby, 22, taken aback by what had been on her son's mind, laid bare on the card. "I'm very, very overprotective of who he plays with."

Logan's is among 15 photos and quotations turned into cover art for "Pictures of Hope" cards, impressions through the lenses of cameras given to children currently or formerly homeless in Philadelphia.

They were part of a nationwide project this summer whose benefits, it is hoped, may linger for a lifetime.

Though the children had little to say about it during a recent interview, they and their mothers clearly found meaning in dreaming through a lens.

"Maybe now he'll want to become a photographer. Or see the beauty of nature. Or just want to explore," said Tierra White, 24, whose 5-year-old son, Tae'Marr Tubbs, photographed his shadow set against a jungle gym with the quote: "My hope is to be a superhero."

White, who spent a decade of her youth in group homes without parental nurturing, entered Drueding Center in April, hoping the transitional housing program would offer stability for a family that had lost an apartment.

"We've had rough times. We've laughed. But this is something that Drueding gave you - a keepsake," said Izzy Pagan, 23, whose 6-year-old daughter, Asia, shot rail tracks on a street, adding the quote: "My dream is to travel the world."

Pagan entered Drueding in March after losing her job at a hardware-store chain. She had fallen ill but had no sick days. She was fired.

Logan's mother, whose own early teens were marked by sexual abuse and a transfer into foster care, moved out of Drueding in November 2012 but brings her son there for after-school programs to keep ties strong with his pals.

And best pals they are: Logan, Asia, and Tae'Marr. All three participated in the project put together by Michigan photojournalist Linda Solomon and underwritten by Chapman Chevrolet, which paid to print and box the cards.

The children received free digital cameras. They snapped pictures with help from mentors. And selected photos were turned into greeting cards. The finished batch went on sale this month for \$22.50 at <https://www.holyredeemer.com/DruedingCenter/DruedingCenterpicturesofhope.aspx>.

What did Logan mean when he said of his photo that he hoped to one day have friends? His answer, as he sat in a colorful chair alongside his buddies: a wordless smile, baring toothless gums, and tilting his head abashedly to one side.

"I wish I could move back across the street," Logan said of the Drueding apartments he left.

After moving out with his mother, who now has a full-time job at Macy's and insists that he not befriend just anyone in their new neighborhood, Logan had come to miss his old friends.

"I liked being Asia's friend when I lived across the street," Logan said.

Asia smiled.

"But she kept being grumpy on me."

Everyone laughed - even little Tae'Marr, whose mother said he will "be somebody" one day. She has been through too many bad times to see them repeated on her little boy.

"I never had nobody to keep pushing me, keep pushing me," she said.

Tae'Marr has the energy, it seems. He hops on every passing set of steps as he walks through the city with his mom, pretends he can fly, and loves to imagine he has magic powers.

White believes her son lights up with the camera in his hand.

"He looks happy. He looks free. He looks like he really wants to become somebody's superhero," she said.

"I want to be everything," Tae'Marr said.

"You can't be everything," his mother replied.

"You can be a lawyer - that's what I want to be. A lawyer," said Asia.

Asia's mom laughed proudly at her daughter's lofty ambitions. Pictures of Hope, she said, tapped into a sparkling spirit:

"It's my shy, giggly, bubbly daughter expressing herself."

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