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Gary Malerba / Special to The Detroit News  
Linda Solomon, "Pictures of Hope" founder, helps Will Bunch, 4, use a camera at the Salvation Army shelter in Detroit during her visit.

## Snapshots of hope

Photo project lets Metro homeless children put their dreams in focus

Susan Whitall / The Detroit News

**DETROIT** -- A disposable camera is the kind of gift most children would accept with a bored sigh. But on a breezy May morning at a Salvation Army shelter on the near west side, a group of homeless children given their own cameras wiggled with delight. Three little girls clutched their hands to their chests in the universal symbol of: *Oh, wow!*

Ranging in age from fidgety and 4 up to wide-eyed, polite 12-year-olds, a dozen children gathered for a photo workshop in a room at the shelter, where most live with their mothers. The shelter has the tongue-twisting name of "Salvation Army Detroit Harbor Light Ellen A. Thompson Center for Booth Services."

Its mission, though, is simple: to give shelter to homeless families and help them move into their own homes.

Photojournalist Linda Solomon was at the center to show the children how to take photographs as part of her "Pictures of Hope" project, which she and General Motors Corp. launched last fall in Orlando and Raleigh, N.C.

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**Mike Riehl's Roseville Chrysler Jeep**

She passed out the cameras, paid for by General Motors, and gave the children their assignment: to take photos of what they hoped for in life.

The children were given three days to take their photographs. In the fall, Ed Welburn, GM's vice president of global design, will pick the best photos taken by the Detroit children, as well as those from shelters in the 10 cities Solomon will visit this summer, including Washington, D.C., Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio, and Tucson, Ariz. GM will then pay for having the photos made into high-end greeting cards, available by December, with all proceeds benefiting the Salvation Army.

As the cameras were handed out, Solomon, a former Detroit News columnist, explained what an assignment is. "See the News photographer, Gary? His assignment is to photograph us today. Your assignment is to use photos to tell your story, to show what you wish for in life."

To help the children focus, Solomon handed out sheets of paper with the words "I hope for" and "I hope to" printed out a dozen times. Armed with pens, the children wrote down their hopes.

### One wish: Helping others

Starr Teaivia Copeland, 9, wants to be a policewoman and a moon traveler.

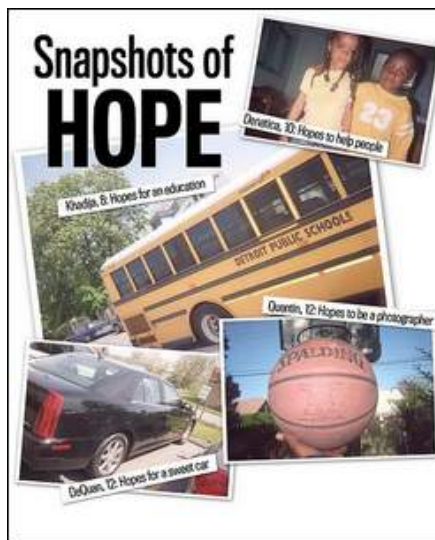
Her sister Tiashiana, 10, hopes for a new house, a van, to go to college, "that my brothers and sisters succeed in life," to help people in need and "to help Mom when she gets old."

Quentin Ryals hopes to go to college, wants his brothers to grow up and have a good life and his mom to be happy.

DeQuan Smith, 12, writes: "I hope for the homeless and poor to get a house and job." "I hope for my family to stay safe." "I hope to be an engineer and designer."

DeQuan, his sister Khadija Cole, 8 and their family, including mother Ataa Brown, 34, recently moved out of the shelter into a house on Detroit's east side. DeQuan explains that he got the idea to be an engineer and designer because one of Khadija's cousins works as a designer for an automaker.

"You know the thing where you push a button, then you don't have to stick a key in?" Khadija says proudly. "He designed that."



[See full image](#)

### How you can help

The Pictures of Hope greeting cards featuring photos taken by homeless children will benefit the Salvation Army shelters where the children live. The greeting cards won't be available until December, but to donate to the Salvation Army now, call (248) 443-5500 or visit [www.salmich.org](http://www.salmich.org).

### Related Articles and Links

[Audio slideshow: Project allows homeless children to capture their dreams in photos](#)



Gary Malerba / Special to The Detroit News  
 Starr Teaivia Copeland fills out her hope list. She wants to be a policewoman and a moon traveler. [See full image](#)

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Most of the children expressed a desire to go to college, to have a house, for their mothers to be happy and healthy and -- perhaps influenced by their current environment -- to help people in need.

"These children hope for what's important in life," Solomon said later.

And yet, they are like children from all backgrounds, with cravings for a few nice things for themselves. DeQuan also writes "I hope for a real sweet car" and "Cartier glasses."

Said Solomon: "This has given me more gratification than any other aspect of my career."

In early May, the Salvation Army released a Michigan Poverty Report that revealed that demand for services from the Eastern Michigan Division increased 76 percent for food and 25 percent for shelter between 2005 and 2006. In 2006, the charity's Eastern Michigan Division provided 781,692 people with shelter.

The Detroit shelter is one of the few that doesn't divide families up or refuse to take children over the age of 12.

"We have ladies here who live in our building but are in drug and alcohol treatment across the street," said the Thompson Center's Maj. Donna Miller. "We take Mr. Moms and their children as well."

The center helps with child care and getting the older children to school, and places the families who don't need drug and alcohol treatment into their own homes as soon as possible.

### **'It was very emotional'**

As the first African-American to become design chief at an automaker, GM's Welburn remembers wishing as a child growing up in a Philadelphia suburban home that he could be an auto designer.

When Solomon asked the auto executive to judge the photos for the final selection last year, for the first round of Pictures of Hope, "I was very interested," said Welburn. "But the day that I received the photographs was a day I'll never forget. It was very emotional; the photos had a lot of impact.

"They were almost like dreams in a way," he explained. "One photo was of a small house, not a big, fancy one. They were dreaming of owning a house. Another one photographed some shoes, because they needed shoes. It's like, wow!

"This was a day when I was running from one meeting to another, working on all kinds of global initiatives, then I went into an area where the photos were laid out on a table, and this is someone whose dream was a pair of new shoes. I'll never forget it."

The children surpassed Solomon's and Welburn's expectations, although the very young ones, not surprisingly, take photos that are usually unusable.

Major Miller sighs. "Part of the thing I struggle with is that people will have higher expectations than our kids can fulfill," she said. "Will they realize what's appropriate, will they make a good decision? But I feel that sometimes this is the only chance these kids will get."

Tiashiana Copeland, a fifth-grader at the Owen Academy, now understands photo composition. "My pictures are getting better. And now my mama got me a camera of my own."

For Solomon, Pictures of Hope offers the children a chance at some much-needed, wider attention. She cites what happened to a bright 12-year-old, Anneka Hooper, whom she met in a Raleigh, N.C., shelter. Hooper's wish was to go to college, so she photographed a diploma she found in one of the shelter offices. The dean of a local college saw the photo and offered the girl a scholarship.

"The goal is to give the children a sense of hope," Solomon said. "This situation is a slice of life in every American city. Many of these families just can't make ends meet and are too proud to tell members of their family that their situation is this grim. It's heartbreaking."

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