

Pictures Of Hope

Cristina Olds

Photographer Brings Cameras to N.M. Homeless Children

"We were living in a car," Josette said, speaking about her 8-year-old son, Reynaldo, 10-year-old daughter, Jerrae, and herself. "I'd never been homeless before." Josette talked about her life recently as Reynaldo snapped a picture of his friend with a camera he'd just been given as part of "Pictures of Hope," a program for homeless children started by nationally acclaimed photojournalist Linda Solomon. While sharing her love of photography, she aims to show the kids one way to visualize their dreams. "Photography is something we can all do," Solomon said. "It encourages children to express their feelings, which is sometimes difficult verbally and easier accomplished through photography."

Josette and her children are currently living at the Barrett House Shelter in northeast Albuquerque. The shelter provides meals, skills training and case management to help women live independently and lead productive lives.

Solomon chose Albuquerque's Barrett House as one of 12 locations across the United States to present her Pictures of Hope program. Her usual gigs include shooting movie stars strutting up the red carpet at the Oscar Awards.

On a recent day, Solomon handed her heavy digital camera with a zoom lens to several of the 17 kids – who practiced portraiture photography on their friends and moms – as she demonstrated some tips on taking pictures. The group viewed a slide show of other children using donated cameras and noted errors. "His finger is over the hole!" They shouted, and, "They're too close!"

The children then composed lists of hopes and dreams that they used as a base for photographing the concepts. "My hope is that all kids have shoes to wear," said Kami, reading from her list. "And how can we take a picture showing that dream?" Solomon asked the 12-year-old. Several of Kami's contemporaries pulled off their sneakers and sandals and Solomon helped them compose a still life on a corner of the table.

"My hope is to have a house for me and my mom," read another child from his list. After the presentation, the kids and some volunteer mentors headed outside to practice their new photojournalism skills across the city.

Ranging from big dreams ("I hope for world peace" and "I hope for the human race to be more positive and to express yourself freely without discrimination") to simpler ones ("I hope to walk outside and see kids playing" and "I hope to help my family"), many children simply said they dreamed of food, shelter and water for themselves and others.

A November celebration will showcase the young photographers' pictures at the local sponsor's dealership, Galles Chevrolet, and holiday cards featuring their images will be for sale with all proceeds supporting the Barrett House.

Living within the security of the Barrett Shelter, Josette said her kids were thriving now. "I hope that someday everyone's dreams come true," read Reynaldo, "even mine."

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