

Focusing on hope

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Children at Joy Junction participating in the Pictures of Hope program try out their new cameras. From left are Monique Arrey, 12; Kiria...

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By Rick Nathanson / Journal Staff Writer | 13 hours ago

Program gives homeless kids gift of expression

Oblivious to the sluggish early August monsoon heat and humidity, the kids at Joy Junction are lively and excited as they stare at images projected on a screen in the homeless shelter's multi-purpose room.

They raise their hands as celebrity photojournalist Linda Solomon calls on them to offer how to make each of the pictures better:

More light. Less light. Focus better. Turn the camera sideways. Make the picture longer. Stand closer.

The dozen kids, none older than 12, are participating in Pictures of Hope, a national project Solomon started a number of years ago in which kids living in homeless shelters get a crash course in how to operate a camera.

A photo from each child is selected and turned into a holiday greeting card that is packaged as part of a box set and sold to raise money for the shelter - in this case Joy Junction.

Walgreens donates cameras for the Pictures of Hope program. Local sponsor Galles Chevrolet pays for the printing of the greeting cards and has committed to a donation to Joy Junction that matches the amount of money raised from the sale of the cards.

"Through photography, the children really share their feelings, and it is often much easier than doing it verbally, especially when they're given a theme or an assignment like this one - to capture their hopes and dreams," says Solomon, who lives in Detroit.

Not only does the camera allow them to share very personal things, she says, "but it helps to build their self esteem." Seeing their images made into greeting cards shows them "that their hopes and dreams matter and are respected."

Solomon, whose stock in trade is photographing celebrities and celebrity events, such as the Academy Awards, is a former Detroit News columnist and entertainment correspondent for CBS in Detroit. Her work has been featured on "Good Morning America," "World News Tonight" and "The Early Show."

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To help the kids understand the project, she asks them to create lists of their hopes and dreams. Highlighting something from each child's list, Solomon hands the children her personal camera and tells them to look around the room for something they can photograph that somehow relates.

"I want to be a marine biologist and raise money to help save the oceans," says 11-year-old Rhiannon Matheny. She pushes some coins together on a table and takes a photograph.

"I want to be a singer," offers Monique Arrey, 12. She gets a picture of the cordless microphone that Solomon is using.

Antonio Fernandez, 8, dreams of being a fireman. Solomon helps him steady her camera as he snaps a photo of a fire extinguisher hanging from a wall.

Juliana Almentero, 11, hopes to become an artist. She points Solomon's camera at a corkboard displaying pictures that were drawn by children, including herself.

Satisfied that the children understand the assignment, each is given a new GE Smart Series digital camera. Staff members at Joy Junction as well as parents and other volunteers mentor the children in the use of their new camera.

"They do not dream of having superficial or frivolous things," says Solomon. "They're not asking for iPads or iPods; more often we hear kids say they dream of going to college, of having a home, sleeping in their own bed, or hoping for a job for their parents. One boy said 'I hope to be nicer than the people who look down on me.' He photographed the word 'BELIEVE.' "



That good old American can-do spirit and bold imagination was on display this weekend during the second annual Albuquerque Mini Maker Faire at the Albuquerque International Balloon Museum. (Adolphe Pierre-Louis/Albuquerque Journal)

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A Pictures of Hope celebration

A reception to meet the young artists of Pictures of Hope and to celebrate Christmas will be at 4 p.m. on Nov. 6.

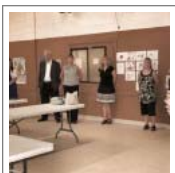
Galles Chevrolet, 1601 Lomas NE, will sponsor and host the event, which is free and open to the public.

Boxes of 15 Pictures of Hope greeting cards will be sold for a recommended minimum donation of \$20. The cards can also be ordered through the Joy Junction website at www.joyjunction.org.

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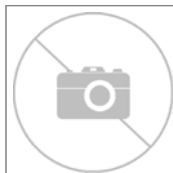
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