

FEATURED

## 'Without hope, there's nothing': Photos help students experiencing homelessness express their dreams

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Brett Shaw has dreams of being a photographer.

But until Friday, he'd never held a camera.

Shaw, 22, was a student in a photography lesson being held at the Albuquerque Museum as part of a nationwide program called "Pictures of Hope," which aims to help students experiencing homelessness express themselves through photography.

Early on, he was singled out by the program's instructor, Linda Solomon, for his photography aspirations. She put a camera in his hand and brought him to the front of the class, asking him to shoot whatever he thought best captured the room.

At first, Shaw was nervous, and struggled to find inspiration in the somewhat dimly-lit auditorium.

But the more time he spent with the camera, the more comfortable he became, posing a subject pulled from the crowd, circling her until he found the right angle and dropping to one knee when he did — drawing awe from the crowd.

"He's got it, I'll tell you," Solomon, referencing Shaw's eye for photography, told the crowd.

This is the 11th time Pictures of Hope has been held in Albuquerque. Solomon initiated the program in 2005, and for years has traveled throughout the country bringing her experience as a photojournalist to young people in over 50 cities.

But despite all those years, she never tires of it, because oftentimes, young people experiencing homelessness have trouble expressing themselves.

Her program, she said, can offer them hope.

“Without hope, there’s nothing,” she told the Journal.

## Exploring dreams

First, Solomon sat students down for a short photography lesson where she took them through some of the photos she is most proud of and emphasized the importance of thoughtful photography.

Then, she cut the class loose.

With mentors at their side, the students explored the Old Town area, snapping shots that best illustrated dreams for the future they’d written out ahead of time with digital cameras provided by Walgreens.

Brandon Silva, 21, was on the hunt for 1980s-era cars or other memorabilia.

His inspiration was his mother, an avid Journey fan who had passed away, leaving Silva to live on his own in an apartment largely paid for by New Day Youth and Family Services, which partners on the Pictures of Hope program.

While Silva didn’t find exactly what he wanted, he got in the ballpark, stumbling across a few mid-1950s to 1960s era classic cars. He snapped some photos of them, and came away more than satisfied.

His companion, Dylan Barnett, was looking for something just as meaningful.

At the young age of 19, Barnett, who uses she/they pronouns, is in the final stage of kidney disease — meaning Barnett must wear a dialyzer because their kidneys can no longer support their body.

While they declined to go into specifics, Barnett said they’re also more or less on their own, with some support from family.

But for all the bad, Barnett says things are looking up.

Because of their medical and housing troubles, Barnett had to drop out of high school. But next semester, Barnett’s stabilizing health makes them confident they can reenroll, marking the beginning of a return to normalcy and doing things they want to do.

### Exhibition

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Pictures of Hope students’ work will be displayed in an exhibition on May 9 at 10 a.m. at the Albuquerque Museum.

So in honor of that, Barnett was on the hunt for blooming trees — symbolizing their own rebirth. Barnett finally spotted a couple, across the Albuquerque Museum in Tiguex Park, and snapped photos of one of them.

“I’m excited for the future (for) the first time,” Barnett said.

