

Pictures of Hope: Homeless kids photograph their world

Jay Grossman, hometownlife.com

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(Photo: Linda Solomon)

A mom and her daughter holding hands.

Two sisters hugging.

A home with its walkway neatly shoveled.

They're pictures of hope taken by a group of young photographers who, quite frankly, don't have a lot of hope.

Under the watchful eye of Birmingham photojournalist Linda Solomon, 24 homeless children living at COTS (Coalition on Temporary Shelter) were given digital Kodak cameras in December, and told to spend the day capturing images of their hopes and dreams through the lens of a camera.

"The photographs are so heartfelt," said Solomon. "Every child, when you asked them to share their dreams, said they hope their mother or their siblings would be happy ... these kids could dream for anything and yet they are so unselfish."



For this photo, Azariana, 8, wrote, "My hope is to have a better life." (Photo: submitted)

The "Pictures of Hope" exhibition is on display at the [North American International Auto Show \(http://naias.com/\)](http://naias.com/) that runs through Jan. 22. The exhibition is being sponsored by NAIAS and the [Detroit Auto Dealers Association \(https://www.dada.org/\)](https://www.dada.org/). Walgreens donated the digital cameras.

The budding photographers are between the ages of 7-20. They come from different backgrounds, but they all share one thing in common: they're homeless.

An astonishing 2.5 million children are homeless in America today. That number represents about 1 in every 30 children in the U.S., according to the [National Center on Family Homelessness \(http://www.air.org/center/national-center-family-homelessness\)](http://www.air.org/center/national-center-family-homelessness). It's a significant increase from 2010, when around 1.6 million children were classified as homeless.



Photojournalist Linda Solomon (right) with 13-year-old Mahogany and her mentor, Carolyn Clifford, at NAIAS. (Photo: submitted)

Solomon began "Pictures of Hope (<http://www.lindasolomonphotography.com/picturesofhope/>)" in 2006, working with homeless children in 50 major U.S. cities - including Detroit and Flint. The goal of the program is to empower these children with the opportunity to share their innermost feelings and dreams – all through a snapshot.

"These kids who have so little are able to show us how much they have in their hearts," she said. "They all want a good education, they all want a home."



In taking this photo, Torian, 11, wrote: "My dream is for my sisters to make it in life" (Photo: submitted)



"My dream is to always help my mom," wrote a 7-year-old homeless child in taking this photo. (Photo: submitted)

Congresswoman Brenda Lawrence, Detroit Police Commander Todd Bettison and other community leaders partnered with the young photographers on their assignments. All 24 children and their families were being invited to attend the auto show Friday, where NAIAS (<http://naias.com/>) plans to present each child with a medal and commemorative copy of their photograph.

The oldest member of the group is a young man who's currently attending Henry Ford Community College. On Friday, he's being presented with a scholarship to Blackburn College in Illinois.

"He knows he has to live up to the admission standards," Solomon said. "But if he can keep up his grade point average, he's getting a full ride to attend college. And that's really the motivation behind "Pictures of Hope," to change lives ... one life at a time."

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