

## Dreams Depicted

Homeless kids seek to capture their hopes on film

By Danyelle Khmara



Children experiencing homelessness at the unveiling party of their "hopes and dreams" photo gallery.

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Standing in front of midtown Tucson's Yikes Toys, Mayor Jonathan Rothschild had a message for a group of children experiencing homelessness: He hoped they'd always remember the day they took a camera out in search of a photo of their dreams.

"Remember what that dream is," he said earlier this month at a party held for children participating in the Pictures of Hope program.

Fifteen children residing at the Salvation Army Hospitality House took a photography lesson in October with photojournalist Linda Solomon. The kids were then surprised with cameras and sent out with volunteer mentors to find images that represented their hopes and dreams—simultaneously ambitious, universal and heartbreaking.

To have fun in life; to be a teacher, a pediatrician, a veterinarian, a NASA engineer; to go to college, write songs, see dad again.

Rothschild was one of the mentors, and he went on the dream hunt with 13-year-old Nataly. Like all the children, she began by writing down 10 life dreams. They drove from the Salvation Army to the University of Arizona and began their two-hour search.

Nataly took a picture of a photo she saw, at the UA's planetarium, of a mother bird feeding her baby. It represents her dream to help animals. She also took a photo of a UA sign that represents her dream to go to college.

Solomon, the program's founder, collects all the memory cards and creates a portfolio for each child. Each one's best photos are on display at the party and printed on "Pictures of Hope" greeting cards. Money raised by sale of the cards will raise money for the Salvation Army.

The children live in group homes, for intervals that vary from temporary to extended and frequent. Their parents struggle with different issues, from drugs and alcohol to domestic abuse and poverty.

"At our shelter, we witness firsthand the struggle of what many children go through each and every day in order to survive," said Dawn Rocheleau, Salvation Army Tucson Area Coordinator, in a press release about the program. "Linda Solomon and Pictures of Hope will have a positive impact on our children at the shelter. Through their program, it will allow each child to create goals for themselves in order to achieve their hopes and dreams."



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Eleven-year-old Angelique's dream is to help animals.

Rothschild said the mentors have to be sensitive to the kids' struggles when helping them identify their dreams.

"We try to bring them out a little and talk to them," he said. "They're just great kids."

Solomon started the program after a career of working with children. She's brought it to 50 cities with high populations of children experiencing homelessness, including Tucson seven times, and has reached over a million kids, she said. She teaches them to express their dreams.

After one 14-year-old girl in Illinois took a photo representing her dream to go to college, the president of Blackburn College, in Illinois, awarded the girl a full scholarship worth \$100,000, Solomon said.

Walgreens donated the cameras, which the kids get to keep. Bisbee Breakfast Club catered the party, and clothing company Skinnytees sponsored the rest of the program, including costs related to the photography class, printing the cards and putting together gift bags for the children.

Skinnytees founder Linda Schlesinger Wagner was friends with Solomon when she decided to get involved with Pictures of Hope, as one of the company's philanthropic ventures. Over the last two years, Skinnytees sponsored the program in Denver, El Paso, Los Angeles and in Tucson twice.

The Skinnytees philanthropic work "makes a difference on one or a small group of people's lives," said Annie Schlesinger, the company's marketing director and founder's daughter.

She said by focusing on small groups, they can truly make a tangible difference—like the time they raised \$7,000 to donate to one woman's cancer treatment.

During the party and photo unveiling, Schlesinger calls the children up one by one. Most of them have their cameras hanging around their necks. She tells the crowd of about two dozen what each child's dream is. And they sign their names to the photo prints hung on the toy store's window.

"Bringing these programs to shelters is so powerful," Solomon said. "One photo changes a life forever."

*Boxes of cards cost \$20, and 100 percent of sales goes to the Salvation Army. They can be purchased at The Salvation Army, 1002 N. Main Ave., online at [salvationarmytucson.org](http://salvationarmytucson.org) or by calling The Salvation Army Public Relations Director Corey Leith at 448-5494.*

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