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High school senior project provides joy through Christmas portraits for homeless, poor

AP

By TOM FOREMAN Jr. Associated Press
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In this photo taken on Monday, Dec. 21, 2015, Tracy Humphries of Spartanburg, S.C., displays a picture of her family taken at the Spartanburg Soup Kitchen in Spartanburg, S.C. High school senior Jeremiah Drummond led an effort as part of a project to provide Christmas portraits to the poor and homeless in the community. (AP Photo/Skip Foreman)

SPARTANBURG, South Carolina — It has been a difficult year for Tracy Humphries and her family, who lost both their home and their jobs in 2015. But for at least a moment, a Spartanburg high school senior helped ease some of their pain.

Humphries was among a host of people who gathered at the Spartanburg Soup Kitchen recently to have their Christmas portraits made. The photos were courtesy of Jeremiah Drummond, a student who decided he would combine his love of photography with a project focusing on helping his community.

"I know what makes a great project is incorporating a passion which you already have and also a need in the community," Drummond said. "There was a need in my community for people who couldn't get pictures taken."

Drummond, the student body president at Dorman High School, developed his mission as a class project of the Emerging Public



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Leaders program conducted by The Riley Institute at Furman University in Greenville. He spent two days using a corner of the dining room at the soup kitchen as a temporary studio and taking pictures for people who otherwise might not be able to buy a photo for the holidays.

Printers set up on a table next to the backdrop allowed Drummond and his helpers to provide the photos within moments after they were taken. He even provided picture frames.

By the time he finished his effort, he and his partners had produced at least 120 portraits from the sessions, which were held from Friday to Monday. On the second day of the shoot, about 20 were lined up to take advantage of his offer before he even opened the door. People who came to get their pictures taken were also offered lunch in a spacious dining area.

The soup kitchen has been a daily sanctuary for Humphries, who is living with her daughter, Christina Greene, and Greene's three children in nearby subsidized housing.

"Since we were recently homeless and I've lost everything, this is the first picture I got," said Humphries, tears welling in her eyes and her voice quavering.

Neither Humphries nor Greene currently has a job; Christmas, Humphries said, will be rough because she can't provide gifts for the grandchildren.

"But we're going to try to figure out something," she said. "I mean. I'm just glad I've got my family."

Humphries' three grandchildren sat alone for a picture and then Humphries and Greene sat with them for another portrait.



Greene described her family's plight this way: "We went from having a lot to hitting rock bottom and working our way back. It crashed all at one time."

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Last year, Greene, said, she went to jail for driving with a suspended license. While behind bars, the man she was dating at the time left with everything the family had, including their money. Greene says the family's comeback has been slow, and to add to their problems, she cannot work to rebuild their finances because her husband cut her while she was pregnant with her youngest daughter, leaving her with a debilitating muscle injury that limits the use of her right arm.

With all that has gone on, Greene said the chance to get a picture provided a moment's peace.

"This is actually going to be a moment to remember that I can enjoy for this year to end with," she said.

"I'll have one good thing to think of."

Drummond gained a new perspective as well.

"I feel great. I feel fantastic," he said. "Now, I am excited to give instead of receive for my Christmas."

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