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A TV show prompts donors to open hearts for Camden

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The Camden children who broke America's heart on network television with a view into their desperate poverty and their dreams of a better life are being showered with gifts from across the country.

On ABC's *20/20* Friday night special "Waiting on the World to Change," Diane Sawyer introduced eight endearing children struggling in what has been called America's poorest city.

Viewer response to the program has been overwhelming, said leaders of two organizations featured in the special.

"It's astounding. The phones have been ringing off the hook," said Shannon Oberg, development coordinator at Urban Promise Ministries, a faith-based educational campus in East Camden, where several of the children attend programs.

Urban Promise is acting as coordinator for donations for the Camden children.

One of the featured children, a 4-year-old homeless boy named Ivan Stevens, told Sawyer that he wanted to be Superman so he could help his family.

On Monday, stacks of Superman comics - along with Superman pajamas and Superman blankets - began to arrive at the Urban Promise complex.

A 13-year-old girl in Massachusetts sent Ivan a note, along with \$200 of her bat mitzvah money. A woman in Texas, writing on an ABC Internet message board, offered to adopt him.

A man offered Ivan and his family a house, said the Rev. Tony Evans, spokesman for the city of Camden. Unfortunately, the house was in Knoxville, Tenn., the man wasn't going to pay to move Ivan to Tennessee, and Ivan and his family have no intention of leaving New Jersey.

Yesterday, producers from *20/20* remained in Camden, helping Ivan's mother, Precious, look for a house.

"They want to make sure it gets handled right," Oberg said. "I'm sure by Friday he'll have a house. In the meantime, all his needs are being met.

Ivan was basking in all the attention Saturday at church, said his pastor, the Rev. David King.

"He was singing 'Down by the Riverside' at the top of his lungs in church on Saturday," King said. "They're going to get a home. I'm just praying that other good things come out of this, too."

Urban Promise has received 3,500 donations and gotten 20,000 hits on its Web site, urbanpromiseusa.org, since the program aired.

Trust funds have been set up for the children and area lawyers have donated services to create them, Oberg said.

The outpouring of charity doesn't appear to be limited to just the eight children spotlighted on the Sawyer special.

Urban Promise has asked people to consider pairing with some of the 700 other Camden children their program serves. Many have complied.

The city yesterday announced its own Camden Youth Enrichment Fund to take donations for needy Camden children.

Thousands of e-mails have been received at ABC, said Claire Weinraub, who produced the show.

"I've been really impressed at the number of kids across America who saw the program and see it as a call to action," Weinraub said. "I was really touched by it."

A teenage girl in Orlando, Fla., wrote that she planned to start a club at her high school to draw attention to poverty in Camden, Weinraub said.

A boy in Monroe, N.Y., said he wanted to do whatever it takes so that any kid in Camden could be "a regular kid like me."