



EMBRACING OUR DIFFERENCES

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

“Broaden your mind and open your ears because you never know whose story has the ability to change you.”

Catelyn Meyer
Cary, North Carolina



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Embracing Our Differences is a not-for-profit organization based in Sarasota, Florida, that uses the power of art and education to expand consciousness and open the heart to celebrate the diversity of the human family.

Mission & Vision

Through the transformative power of the arts, we educate and inspire to create a better world. We envision a world that embraces diversity, respects differences and actively rejects hatred and prejudice.

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Aundria Castleberry	Roxie Jerde	Jane & Paul Rosenstein	In Memoriam: Carroll Buchanan & Carol Poteat-Buchanan * Of Blessed Memory

Community Partners

We are very proud of the relationships developed with our Community Partners - each of which plays an integral role in the success of our programs. Without their support, our work would be impossible.



Letter from our Executive Director

18
YEARS

One year ago, we were still in the early days of the pandemic and the disruption it caused. EOD vowed to adapt and continue our mission by any means necessary. That's exactly what we did.

Despite the odds, our two annual reading days were the most successful ever, with more than 250 volunteers presenting unique virtual classroom reading experiences to 14,600 students in pre-k through third grade classes throughout Manatee and Sarasota counties.

From January 20 through April 1, we used the power of art and words to change minds and open hearts—and brightened Bayfront Park in downtown Sarasota with billboard-sized artwork and inspirational quotes. The 50 artworks, proclaiming messages of love, diversity, and inclusion, were experienced by more than 384,000 visitors.

Our beloved exhibit became a movable feast when we brought it to Nathan Benderson Park this summer. With the support of Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, all 50 banners hung proudly during May and June.

We also created a mini display of six banners at Ed Smith Stadium. These were on view for the Baltimore Orioles' entire spring training season.

We relaunched the Education Ambassador initiative, a year-long program that empowered 25 educators across the tri-county region to carry messages of diversity, inclusion, respect, and integrity into their schools. These educators participated in professional development workshops led by teaching artists and presenters from around the country. Each educator worked with their students to create original, EOD-inspired projects centered on community-building activities that inspired cooperation, communication, and empathy.

In the classroom and in our parks, we promoted inclusion, respect, and kindness throughout the area. When I say “we,” I don’t mean only Embracing Our Differences’ incredible staff of three. EOD’s extended family of educators, students, volunteers, dedicated board members and generous supporters made it all possible. I know I say this every year—and I say it because it’s true ...

We couldn’t do it without you! And we can’t thank you enough!



Sarah Wertheimer
Executive Director





2021 EXHIBIT

The centerpiece of Embracing Our Differences is a juried, outdoor art exhibit featuring 50 billboard-sized images created by local, national and international artists, writers and students reflecting their interpretations of the theme “enriching lives through diversity.” The exhibit welcomed 384,000 visitors this past year, bringing total attendance, since 2004, to more than 3,692,000. The 2021 Exhibit received a second showing at Nathan Benderson Park from May 20 through July 3, 2021, and a mini-exhibit was displayed at Ed Smith Stadium.

2021 exhibit attendance
384,000

Attendance since 2004
3,692,000

Thank you to our
volunteers in 2021
500

ART & QUOTE SUBMISSIONS

“I am inspired by the insightfulness of the artists and quoters. I’m so proud to be a part of a community that promotes this theme!”

– Exhibit Visitor

This year’s exhibit had an impressive response to the call for artwork and inspirational quotes, with 15,912 entries pouring in from 128 countries and 48 states. Students from 412 schools around the world submitted artwork or quotes to the juried exhibit, with more than 65% of this year’s submissions coming from students.

15,912
2021 entries

105,807
Submissions since 2005

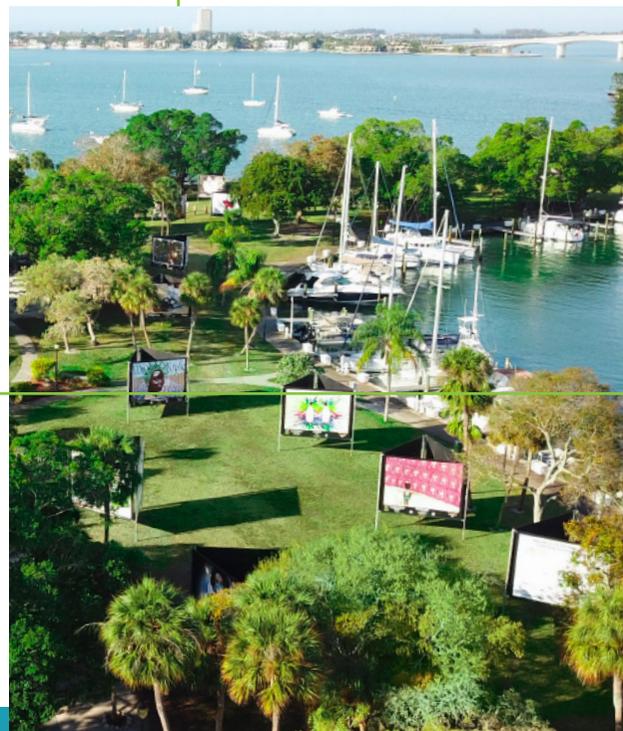
128
Countries

48
States

412
Schools

“I am always so impressed and enlightened by this thought provoking, exceptional project!”

- Exhibit Visitor



EDUCATION INITIATIVES

Our education initiatives represent the most important aspect of our efforts. Students participate year-round in a variety of activities based upon a well-planned curriculum of art appreciation, social-emotional learning and diversity education. Our education initiatives include:

Free Field Trips

Bucket Fillers Reading Day

Embracing Our Differences Reading Day

Student Docent Program

College Scholarships

Coexistence Clubs

Workshops for Educators

In the Classroom

Lesson Plans

Community Collaborations

Independent evaluations, as well as our own internal evaluations, have consistently shown that teachers rate the Embracing Our Differences' education initiatives as "outstanding" or "very good" and as "meaningful and beneficial" experiences for their students.

"Fantastic job! This year brought many challenges, but I think Embracing Our Differences rose to the challenge and provided even more support and growth opportunities than ever!"

- 5th Grade Teacher

Free Field Trips

Tours of our annual exhibit have become a signature of our education efforts with tens of thousands of students benefiting during the past school year. Through peer-guided exploration with high school-aged docents utilizing Visual Thinking Strategies pedagogy, exhibit tours embrace diversity and inclusion while providing connections to Social Emotional Learning, critical thinking and community building. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we offered three unique ways for students and teachers to tour the exhibit this year: in-person, live virtual, and on-demand webisodes.

"I love this program and I'm so glad it continues to be funded and free for schools to attend. It is the highlight of my springtime every year!"

- 9th Grade Teacher



41,585

students participated in our education initiatives in 2021

How would you rate the overall EOD educational experience?

★★★★★ 4.7 / 5 Stars

EOD resources are aligned to the Florida Standards.

★★★★★ 4.5 / 5 Stars

EOD resources are aligned to Social Emotional Learning.

★★★★★ 4.8 / 5 Stars

The EOD lesson plans were meaningful and beneficial tools.

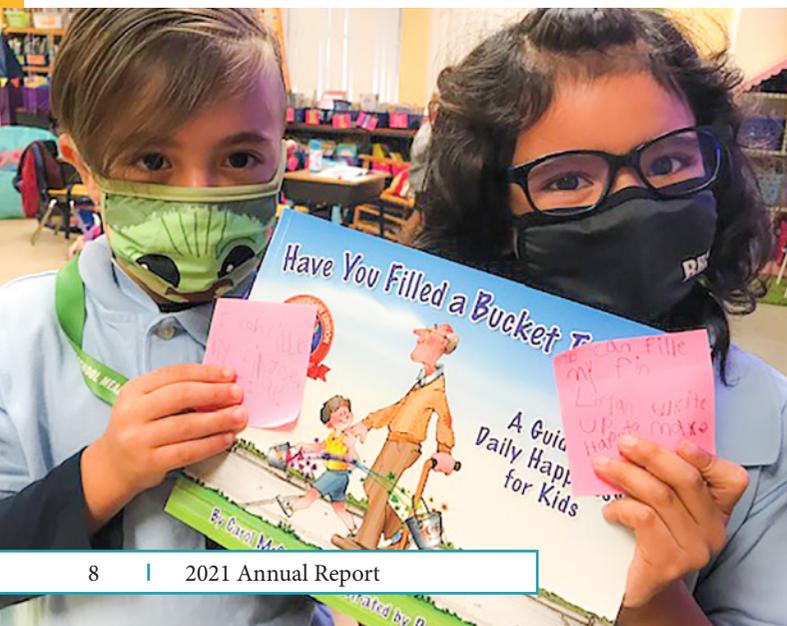
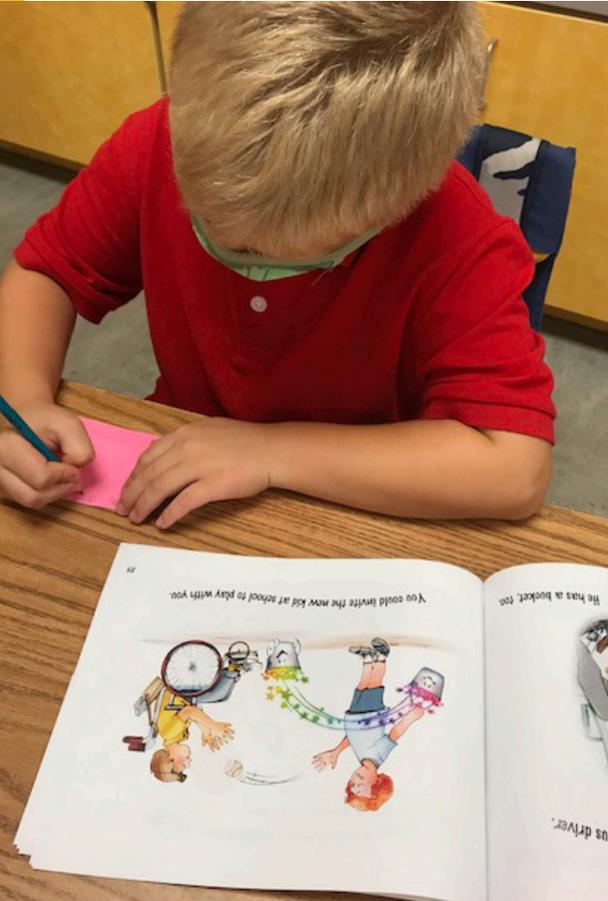
★★★★★ 4.5 / 5 Stars

* Based on average rating



Bucket Fillers Reading Day

The Bucket Fillers' books are heartwarming stories that encourage positive behavior by using the concept of an invisible bucket to show children how easy and rewarding it is to express kindness, appreciation and love by "filling buckets." We were able to offer this unique, virtual reading opportunity in partnership with Manatee and Sarasota County school districts and the Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County to pre-k through third grade classrooms.



6,522

students participated in Bucket Fillers Reading Day

6,900

books donated

2

counties

82

schools

369

classrooms

“This is such a great connection to our school wide initiative about being an upstander and not a bystander with bullying. We are now practicing ‘filling buckets’ in our classroom.”

-3rd Grade Teacher

“One of our bilingual students was so inspired by the story that she has been reading books in English to her younger siblings and asking her father to read to her in Spanish.”

- 1st Grade Teacher

Embracing Our Differences Reading Day

In partnership with the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, EOD Reading Day engages elementary school students throughout Manatee and Sarasota counties. The objective has been to show children that reading is fun and important by stimulating student-mentor conversations about diversity, bullying and respect through BIPOC, Latinx and Asian authored and illustrated books.

A virtual family engagement event with teaching artist Cedric Hameed was also offered this year to help encourage multigenerational reading at home.

8,078

students participated in EOD Reading Day

8,500

books donated

151

volunteers

2

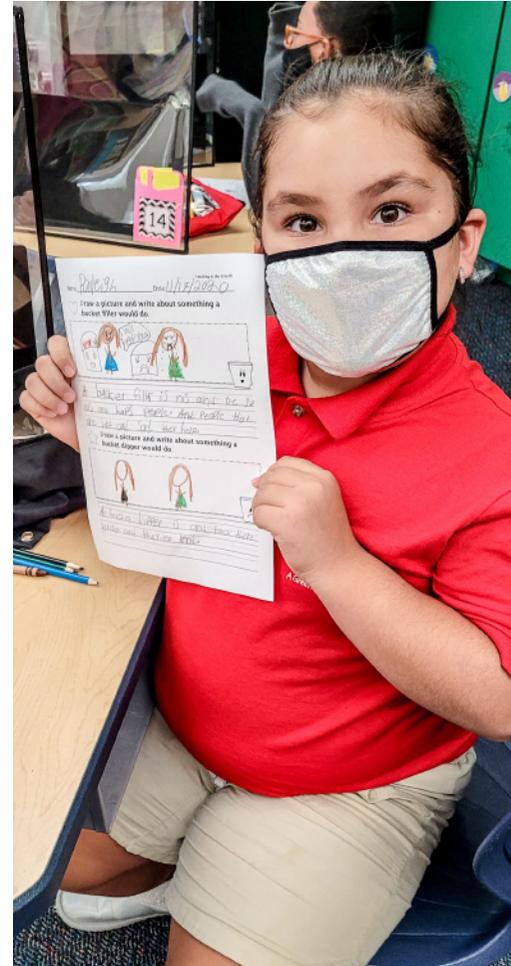
counties

77

schools

450

classrooms



“The story touched the heart of a little girl in my class from India. She has an Indian name that is very different but actually goes by an American name. After the story she asked me if she could show her real name written in her native language tomorrow.”

- 2nd Grade Teacher

Coexistence Clubs

Coexistence Clubs consist of dynamic high school students who promote Embracing Our Differences' vision of creating a world that embraces diversity, respects differences, and actively rejects hatred and prejudice. They accomplish this through various initiatives, including activities that help make their schools a safer and more inclusive environment for everyone. During the 2020-2021 school year, we maintained active Coexistence Clubs at Booker, IMG Academy, North Port, Riverview, Sarasota, and Venice high schools, as well as Laurel Nokomis School and Venice Middle.



8 clubs
142 high school docents
9,204 students benefiting from docent tours
290 club members

Student Docent Program

Under the guidance of EOD's docent coordinator, Dena Sturm, student docents serve as guides for thousands of area elementary, middle and high school students who experience the outdoor exhibit every year, inspiring these young visitors with the life-changing truths of the art and quotes. With their guided questions and planted seeds of inquiry, docents help younger students arrive at realizations of their own about diversity and acceptance.



EOD College Scholarship

For the second year, we were able to offer college scholarships to high school seniors who serve as members of their schools' Coexistence Clubs. These \$1,000 renewable scholarships were awarded to Emilia Przepiora of Riverview High School, Melanie De La Rosa-Rein of Booker High School, and Kennedy Hart of IMG Academy. They join Chloe Labrecque and Cam Pham, rising sophomores at the University of Florida who received their first scholarships in 2020.

"I loved the artwork and could tell from the students' reactions that they did as well. The docents did a great job eliciting responses from all."

- 1st Grade Teacher

Workshops for Educators

Art Intensive

The 2021 Art Intensive brought together 41 visual art teachers for an in-person experience at Nathan Benderson Park's Finish Tower. Featuring sessions from local artists and scholars from Eckerd College and The University of Tampa, participants engaged in powerful presentations and interactive lessons geared toward inspiring and reinvigorating teaching practices. Collectively, this year's participants are responsible for more than 12,300 students in Manatee and Sarasota counties.

Education Ambassador Program

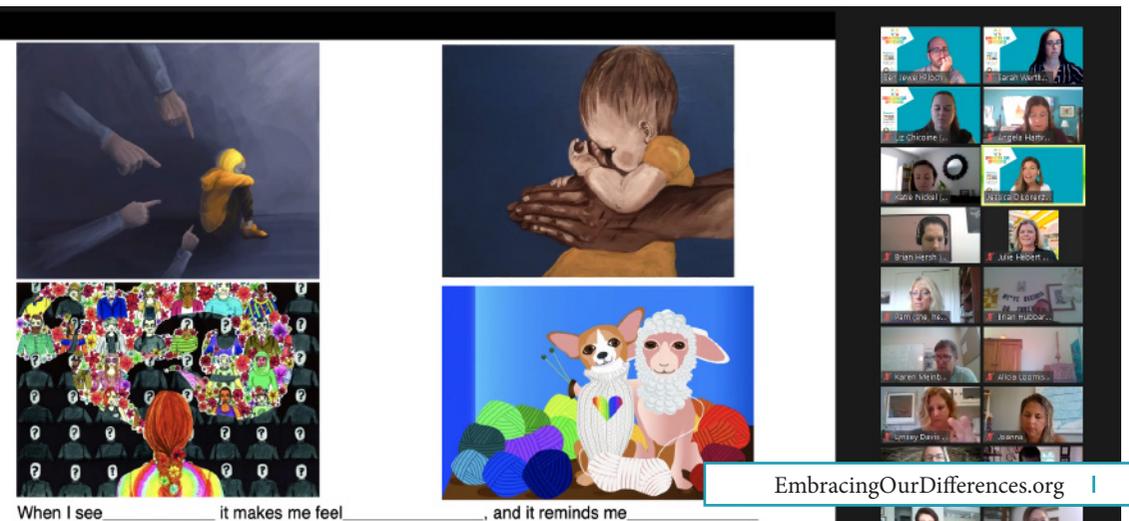
The 25 members of the Education Ambassador Program 2020/2021 cohort represented 20 individual schools and 5,485 students from Manatee and Sarasota counties. Through nine hours of professional development workshops and the creation of EOD-inspired projects with their students, each worked toward creating more inclusive and respectful school cultures while highlighting EOD's core values of diversity, inclusion, respect and integrity.

VTS Counselor Training

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is a collaborative, student-centered teaching method that improves critical thinking skills and fosters inclusive community-building dialogue through facilitated discussions of visual images. More than 150 school counselors from Sarasota County Schools participated in virtual workshops with EOD staff to better understand how and when to utilize VTS with students.

"Everything was amazing! The people I met, the material I was taught, the work I participated in and the projects were all spectacular and I felt proud to be a part of this amazing group."

- 1st Grade Teacher



In the Classroom

Each fall, thousands of students in Sarasota and Manatee counties spend time creating art and quotations for submission to our annual exhibition. Each student benefits by engaging in a comprehensive approach to critical thinking and visual inquiry that provides a safe and healthy means of clarifying their own identities. It also helps them develop an enhanced sense of self-esteem and social skills. Developing new and different perspectives from their peers is an added bonus.



Lesson Plans

Interactive student participation is one of the most effective delivery methods for the often difficult and abstract concepts of diversity and inclusion. Prepared under the supervision of curriculum development specialists from the Sarasota County School District, the age-appropriate lesson plans identify the relevant curriculum standards, educational objectives, instructional strategies and assessment guidelines.

1,439 teachers participated in our education initiatives

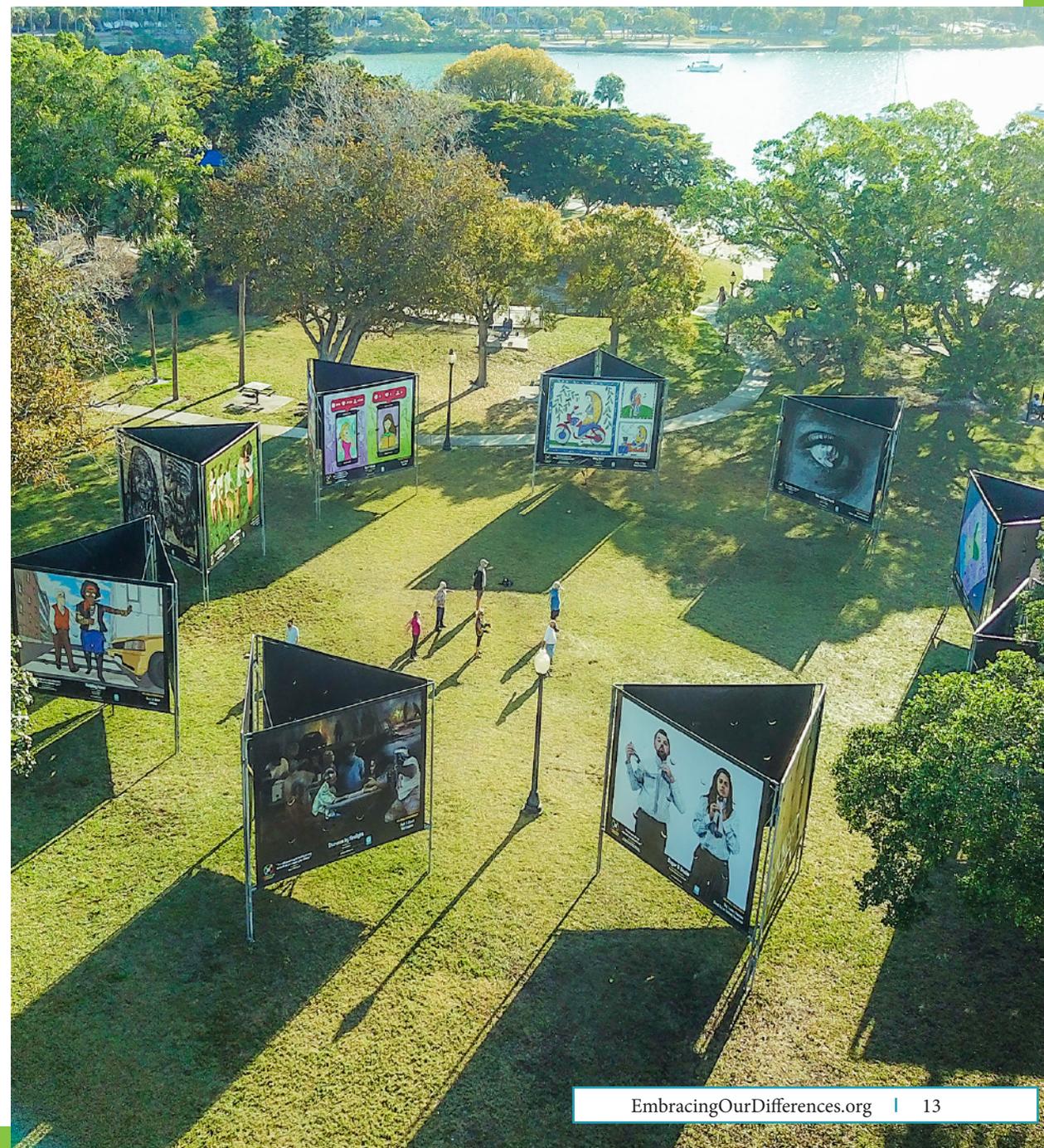


“I was approached by a teacher from our Emotional/Behavioral Unit who said she was so impressed with the way her students interacted with the artwork and the docents. She was pleasantly surprised by how seriously and thoughtfully they ‘read’ the art.”

- 2nd Grade Teacher

Community Collaborations

Embracing Our Differences is proud of its many collaborations throughout the last year. A past recipient of The Patterson Foundation’s “Collaborative Innovator Award,” Embracing Our Differences partnered with the Asolo Rep, Boxser Diversity Initiative, Bucket Fillers, Inc., Community Foundation of Sarasota County, Early Learning Coalition of Sarasota County, Easter Seals of Southwest Florida, The Florida Holocaust Museum, Florida Studio Theatre, Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee, Manatee Community Foundation, Manatee County Bar Association, Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Mote Marine, NewGate School, Sarasota County Bar Association, Sarasota Film Festival, Sarasota Opera, Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, The Patterson Foundation, The Ringling, United Way Suncoast, Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe and many others to bring innovative diversity education programming to Sarasota and Manatee students during the 2020-2021 school year.



IF WE WERE TO EXCHANGE SHOES, WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO WEAR MINE?

-TEMILOLA ADEREMI, IBAFO, NIGERIA



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For a complete list of sponsors, visit our website at EmbracingOurDifferences.org



The 19th Annual Outdoor Exhibit Celebrating Diversity and Inclusion



On Display
January 15 - April 10, 2022 

Bayfront Park, Downtown Sarasota

Learn more at
EmbracingOurDifferences.org

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