



Brooks Tracey and Kim Farrell want to bring positivity to Sarasota Middle School through the Inspirational Art and Quotes Project.

Positivity through art: Sarasota Middle School project promotes acceptance

Sarasota Middle School students and teachers work to bring positivity into each day with project.

by: [Whitney Elfstrom](#) Community Reporter

For Brooks Tracey and Kim Farrell, the drive to spread positivity at Sarasota Middle School is personal.

Farrell, a sixth grade language arts teacher, wanted to find a way to give back to her school. Together, she and Tracey, the school's art teacher, decided to cover the school's white walls in positive quotes.

“My biggest thing that I want for the kids is for them to see a form of positivity every day . . . if I could say something positive to every kid every day I would,” Farrell said.

For the past year, the teachers have been leading the Inspirational Art and Quotes Project, which takes students’ winning quotes from Embracing Our Differences and then paints them on the white walls of the school.



Brooks Tracey, Sarasota Middle School art teacher, (left) and Kim Farrell, Sarasota Middle School language arts teacher

Embracing Our Differences, a nonprofit that uses art and education to promote diversity, holds a yearly international quote and artwork competition and accepts submissions that embody positivity, acceptance and equality. The organization chooses 40 quotes and 40 paintings to be displayed at Bayfront Park.

Sarasota Middle School has participated in the competition for 15 years and has had more than 50 winning quotes and 10 winning paintings.

Tracey and Farrell’s classes were already submitting quotes and art, but after Tracey joined the organization’s ambassador program in 2018, the teachers decided to take it to the next step.

“One of the components of the ambassador program is (Embracing Our Differences) wanted us to do a schoolwide project,” Tracey said. “When we started brainstorming this, it kind of blended from just doing positive quotes to actually using Embracing Our Differences quotes.”

The idea for the project came from Farrell’s drive to take action after the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting. Her students made posters and sent them to survivors, but Farrell wanted to do more for her students.

“As the kids were coming up with quotes and ideas, I thought, ‘We need to have something like that here,’” Farrell said.

"If I could say something positive to every kid every day I would," Farrell said.

20 years later

Farrell's love of Sarasota Middle School runs deep. She's held many roles there, including language arts teacher, education intern and, at one time, student.

When she was in fourth grade, Farrell learned she had leukemia and underwent treatment until sixth grade. After being homeschooled for fourth and fifth grade, she was enrolled at Sarasota Middle School.

Her language arts teacher, Karen Hamilton, who taught in the same room where Farrell now teaches, was the teacher who helped her get through the "big and scary" chapter.

"This is my home," she said. "This is where I've always wanted to be teaching, and I'm so thankful to be here."

Tracey was also a Sarasota Middle School student and was one year ahead of Farrell in school.

Oddly enough, Tracey is also teaching in the same classroom he attended art classes in — something the pair calls "coming full circle."

Winning quotes

Now, a new generation of Sarasota Middle School students are looking to give back to their campus.

For sixth graders Ashby Thompson and Luka Perry, seeing their quotes painted around the school gives them a sense of pride.

"I think it's really nice to be able to see positivity just like walking to class," Ashby said. "It makes you happy to see that."



Ashby Thompson, a sixth grader at Sarasota Middle School

Ashby's quote, "A lifetime of friendship can start with hello," came from looking at the diversity in her family.

"I think it's really important to be nice to everybody," she said. "Because if you have an open mind to who you become friends with, I think people can be a lot happier."

Luka thought about what different objects symbolize while brainstorming her quote.



Luka Perry, a sixth grader at Sarasota Middle School.

"We have a lot of bridges in Sarasota," Luka said. "So that's what came to mind, and I know a bridge connects one place to another and it paves the way for other people."

Her quote? "Be a bridge of acceptance over an ocean of inequality." It's the one Farrell said she would have liked to see on the wall while she was a student at Sarasota Middle School.

"How awesome it would have been to see something like that ... as a student here struggling with fitting in and feeling weird?" Farrell said.

Let there be paint

The project garnered attention from former Sarasota Middle School students and art students from the Ringling College of Art and Design. Several of them helped with painting.

"(The artwork has) been designed by our past students who are in high school now," Tracey said. "It's been a great challenge for them to try to figure out how to use different typography to display different words and messages on there."



Madeleine Harwell designs and draws the quotes for the Inspirational Art and Quote Project.

Madeleine Harwell is a former Sarasota Middle School student who helped design the calligraphy that goes with each quote.

Harwell is also a two-time winning Embracing Our Differences artist.

Funded through a \$500 grant from Embracing Our Differences, the project has enough resources to put up every winning quote, said Tracey.

Five of the 50 quotes have been painted around campus and Tracey and Farrell plan to continue.

“If there is space on the walls, we are going to paint,” Farrell said.

[The Author: Whitney Elfstrom](#)

I’m the Sarasota community reporter, which means I cover the people, places and things of Sarasota. I graduated from the University of South Florida St. Petersburg with a degree in journalism and digital communication and a minor in English.