



PEOPLE & BUSINESS

## **SYC Cares Awards Grant to Embracing Our Differences**

By [Scene](#) |

SYC Cares recently awarded Embracing Our Differences a \$5,000 grant to help enhance its year-round education initiatives. With 932 teachers and 39,211 students participating in EOD's annual exhibit and educational programs in 2018 alone, Embracing Our Differences continues to lead as one of the largest education outreach programs in southwest Florida.

“We are extremely honored to support Embracing our Differences,” says Kim Bleach, SYC Cares committee co-chair: “Our members are proud to be associated with this nonprofit that makes such a positive impact on our community and our children.”

“A vital part of our mission is to reach young people through the power of art and language,” says Sarah Wertheimer, executive director. “Since 2004, more than 1,500 teachers and counselors have participated in our annual retreats and workshops. This significant grant will further empower those and other efforts.”

Wertheimer explains that, through these initiatives, educators learn to “teach concrete strategies to inspire students to reject destructive attitudes and embrace the full potential of inclusion and diversity. For both educators and students, this new awareness can be life-changing.”

EOD’s education outreach initiatives include:

**Art Teacher Retreat:** This two-day seminar, developed in partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design, is designed to reinvigorate teaching practices while offering new skills and strategies for inspiring students to explore the abstract concepts of prejudice, diversity and inclusion. Substitute teachers are provided for participating educators. **In 2018, the 44 participating art teachers were collectively responsible for more than 13,000 students from Sarasota and Manatee counties.**

**Creative Writing Workshops:** These workshops take the difficult topics of diversity and inclusion and teach students to express themselves through critical thinking and creative writing. The workshop fulfills a critical need of providing teachers with creative resources to meet Florida’s Language Arts Standards.

**Lesson Plan Workshops:** These are designed to deliver new and innovative methods of engaging students in critical thinking while creating an ideal environment for an enriching discussion about the value of diversity and inclusion. Lesson plans identify the relevant curriculum standards, educational objectives, materials needed, activities, step-by-step instructional strategies and assessment guidelines.

**Diversity Institute:** This intensive workshop is designed to serve as a model for providing educators with all the resources necessary to create a safe environment for students to appreciate that a healthy respect for diversity and inclusion is not only a way of thinking but, most importantly, of acting.

**In the Classroom:** Each fall, thousands of students in Sarasota and Manatee counties spend time creating art and quotations for submission to EOD's annual competition. 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, as well as developing an enhanced sense of self-esteem and social skills. Developing new and different perspectives from their peers is an added bonus.

The **"Make-a-Day-of-It!" program** provides free bus transportation for students and teachers to the outdoor exhibit and to other cultural venues, including Florida Studio Theatre, Mote Marine Laboratory, Asolo Rep, Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, The Ringling, Marie Selby Botanical Gardens and West Coast Black Theatre Troupe. **6,955 students participated during the 2018 school year.**

The **Docent Program**, via partnerships with Riverview, Booker and North Port high schools, provide student-led tours of the annual exhibit. **Student docent tours were provided to 6,450 K-8 children visiting the 2018 exhibit. There are more than 150 student docents.**

**Embracing Dr. Seuss' Differences Day:** For the past six years, Embracing Our Differences has coordinated hundreds of volunteers to read Dr. Seuss books to students in Sarasota and Manatee counties. This offers students an opportunity to see that reading is fun and inclusion is important. EOD's partnership with the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and an anonymous family foundation provides thousands of books each year for classrooms and individual students for their home libraries. **In 2019, more than 6,000 students from 45 schools participated.**

*For more information about Embracing Our Differences, please call 941-404-5710 or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).*