

## MEDIA CONTACTS

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### **Spreading Kindness and Respect through Literacy: Embracing Our Differences' Annual "Bucket Fillers" Reading Initiative Reaches Over 9,000 Students**

*The "Bucket Fillers" series of books, written by the nationally acclaimed author and Venice resident, Carol McCloud, teaches children the value of kindness. More than 9,200 students read McCloud's books in 511 pre-kindergarten to third grade classes in Manatee and Sarasota counties on Tuesday, November 14.*

(November 16, 2023) Embracing Our Differences' "Bucket Fillers" reading initiative took place at 83 elementary schools and early learning centers throughout Manatee and Sarasota counties on Tuesday, November 14.

Since her first book, "Have You Filled a Bucket Today? A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids," was published in 2006, Carol McCloud, a nationally acclaimed author and Venice, Florida resident, has inspired millions of people of all ages to become daily "bucket fillers" through her books, seminars, and other publications. Her ten children's books have sold over three million copies worldwide and are used in schools around the world to inspire classrooms built on kindness and respect for all students.

For the past six years, EOD has coordinated an annual Bucket Fillers reading initiative—through a partnership with Sarasota County Schools, the School District of

Manatee County, and the Early Learning Coalitions of Sarasota County and Manatee County.

Ben Jewell-Plocher, EOD's learning and engagement director, explains it this way. "The 'Bucket Fillers' books use the concept of an invisible bucket to encourage positive behavior and warm hearts. Each book shows children how rewarding it is to express kindness, appreciation, and love to others."

On November 14, EOD coordinated hundreds of volunteers to read from "Bucket Fillers" books to more than 9,200 students in pre-kindergarten through third grade classes in Manatee and Sarasota counties. Each participating classroom and student also received a gifted copy of the Bucket Fillers book selected for their grade, thanks to the support of the Kiwanis Club of Sarasota, Manatee Education Foundation, Cardinal Rule Press and Embracing Our Differences' donors.

This year's participation numbers represent an increase of 1,000 students and 45 classrooms over last fall, with an additional 71 classrooms on the waiting list. To support this increased participation, some classrooms virtually read along with artists from Asolo Rep, Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, Venice Theatre, and Westcoast Black Theatre via pre-recorded interactive videos.

For 20 years, Embracing Our Differences has drawn on the passion and perception of artists, students, and writers to create powerful statements of inclusion, kindness and respect in its annual outdoor public art exhibition consisting of 50 billboard-sized works of art and accompanying quotes. The scale and impact of this outdoor exhibition has continued to grow, attracting more than 4.3 million visitors since its inception. This exhibit is the heart of a year-round program of activities designed to

use art as a catalyst to create awareness and promote diversity. **Next year's Bayfront Park exhibit runs January 21-April 14, 2024. For the first time since 2004, the exhibit will also be displayed in St. Petersburg, Florida March 2-March 31, 2024, at Poynter Park.**

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

### **Photo Captions:**

- *Ashton kindergarten students participate in Embracing Our Differences' "Bucket Fillers" initiative on November 14. Courtesy photo.*
- *Volunteer Haley Diess with the Pittsburgh Pirates leads a reading session with kindergarten students at Ballard Elementary as part of Embracing Our Differences' "Bucket Fillers" initiative on November 14. Courtesy photo.*
- *Volunteer Kirsten Russell with the Community Foundation of Sarasota County leads a reading session with kindergarten students at Emma E. Booker Elementary as part of Embracing Our Differences' "Bucket Fillers" initiative on November 14. Courtesy photo.*
- *Volunteer Mary Glass with Manatee Education Foundation leads a reading session with kindergarten students at Harvey Elementary as part of Embracing Our Differences' "Bucket Fillers" initiative on November 14. Courtesy photo.*
- *Teachers Kimalee Rowley and Susan Porvaznik lead a reading session with volunteer (and "Bucket Fillers" author) Carol McCloud (seated—far right) with second grade students at Laurel Nokomis School as part of Embracing Our Differences' "Bucket Fillers" initiative on November 14. Courtesy photo.*
- *Volunteer Carolina Franco with CreArte Latino Cultural Center leads a reading session with second grade students at Palma Sola Elementary as*

*part of Embracing Our Differences' "Bucket Fillers" initiative on November 14. Courtesy photo.*

### **About Embracing Our Differences**

Embracing Our Differences is a nonprofit organization that uses the transformational power of art and education to celebrate and promote the diversity of the human family. It accomplishes this through an annual, large-scale outdoor juried art exhibition and a comprehensive series of educational initiatives, programs and resources designed for teachers and students. Visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).