

MEDIA CONTACTS

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Embracing Our Differences Awarded Strategic Partnership Grant from Community Foundation of Sarasota County

The \$33,000 grant will support educational initiatives that foster kindness, empathy and respect among Sarasota County students.

(September 17, 2026) Last year, Embracing Our Differences' (EOD) Bucket Fillers Reading Day put nearly 12,000 books into the hands of young readers in 611 classrooms and early learning centers throughout Sarasota and Manatee counties. But demand exceeded available resources, leaving more than 1,000 students without books of their own. A new \$33,000 Strategic Partnership Grant from the Community Foundation of Sarasota County will help EOD continue expanding the reach of programs that use education to foster kindness, empathy and respect. Funding for this grant was made possible by the Community Foundation's Allen Wirtz Nobbe and Jo Bowen Nobbe Fund, Libby Yungblut FOI Charitable Fund and Robert and Willa Bernhard Fund for Books and Literacy.

The grant includes \$20,000 to support EOD's Unity Day initiative in Sarasota County and \$13,000 for Bucket Fillers Reading Day, including \$5,000 to provide books to Sarasota County students.

"Every child we reach represents an opportunity to build a kinder, more compassionate community," says Sarah Wertheimer, EOD's president and CEO. "The

Community Foundation of Sarasota County has been an extraordinary partner in that work. Its investment goes far beyond funding programs; it helps students become leaders in creating more welcoming school communities, gives educators meaningful tools to reinforce kindness and respect, and puts books into the hands of young children at a formative time in their lives. Together, we're helping Sarasota County students recognize that how they treat one another can change a classroom, a school and, ultimately, a community."

EOD's annual **Unity Day** initiative fosters empathy, respect and resilience through an interactive, multi-part workshop centered on team-building activities. Each workshop serves approximately 75 students, who participate in exercises designed to strengthen communication and collaboration while encouraging them to recognize their shared humanity and appreciate individual differences. A core group of student leaders and faculty members receives specialized training before each event, preparing them to help guide the activities and carry those lessons back into their school communities.

Bucket Fillers Reading Day serves pre-kindergarten through third-grade classrooms and early learning centers throughout Sarasota and Manatee counties. Inspired by Venice author Carol McCloud's Bucket Fillers book series, the program uses the metaphor of an invisible bucket to help young children understand how acts of kindness, respect and compassion affect others. Participating teachers may choose an in-person volunteer reader or a pre-recorded read-aloud featuring performers from local arts organizations. Every participating student receives a personal copy of the book, and each classroom receives a copy for its library.

EOD's work extends beyond its educational programs. The centerpiece of the organization's arts programming is its annual international outdoor exhibition of 50 billboard-sized works of art paired with written reflections. Since 2004, the exhibition has attracted more than 5.6 million visitors, including more than 449,000 in 2026. EOD's year-round educational initiatives have reached more than 743,000 students to date.

For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710, or visit embracingourdifferences.org.

Photo captions:

- *Venice author Carol McCloud, whose Bucket Fillers book series inspired Embracing Our Differences' Bucket Fillers Reading Day, joins students at Glenallen Elementary School with copies of "Have You Filled a Bucket Today?"*
- *Elizabeth Topp, capital campaign manager with Child Protection Center, joins students at Glenallen Elementary School during Embracing Our Differences' Bucket Fillers Reading Day.*
- *An Embracing Our Differences docent guides young students through the nonprofit's annual outdoor art exhibition, which pairs 50 billboard-sized works of art with written reflections.*
- *Riverview High School students and participants gather for Embracing Our Differences' Unity Day, an interactive program that uses team-building activities to foster empathy, respect, resilience and collaboration.*

About the Community Foundation of Sarasota County

The Community Foundation of Sarasota County is a public charity founded in 1979 by the Southwest Florida Estate Planning Council as a resource for caring individuals and the causes they support, enabling them to make a charitable impact on the community. With assets of \$605 million in more than 1,600 charitable funds, the Community Foundation awarded grants and

scholarships totaling \$44.7 million last year in the areas of education, the arts, health and human services, civic engagement, animal welfare and the environment. Since its founding, the Community Foundation has been able to grant \$542 million to nonprofits in our community thanks to the generosity of charitable individuals, families and businesses. For more information, visit cfsarasota.org or call 941-955-3000.

About Embracing Our Differences

Embracing Our Differences is a nonprofit organization that uses the transformational power of art and education to celebrate and promote our individuality and common humanity. 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.