

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community Foundation of Sarasota County Awards Grant to Embracing Our Differences

The \$5,000 grant will help fund the organization's annual teacher workshops. A key component of its ongoing educational initiatives, Embracing Our Differences' annual teacher workshops provide area teachers with new skills, strategies and resources to bring their students creative new ways to think, learn and succeed at the annual Embracing Our Differences exhibit and beyond.

(Sarasota, FL) The McCauley-Brown Fund of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County recently awarded Embracing Our Differences a \$5,000 grant to help fund its acclaimed teacher workshops. A key component of its ongoing educational initiatives, Embracing Our Differences' annual teacher workshops provide area teachers with new skills, strategies and resources to bring their students creative new ways to think, learn and succeed at the annual Embracing Our Differences exhibit and beyond.

Since 2004, Embracing Our Differences' international outdoor art exhibit celebrating the theme of "enriching lives through diversity," has showcased the work of artists and writers from all walks of life, including that of many area students. In 2014, the organization received 6,079 total artworks and statements from people representing 52 countries and 44 states. Students from 126 elementary, middle and high schools

comprised 65 percent of the submissions. Submissions of art and quotes by 38 local students were included in the juried exhibit.

According to Michael Shelton, EOD's executive director, the high percentage of local students' winning contributions can be attributed, in part, to the participation of area teachers in Embracing Our Differences' teacher workshops.

Presented in partnership with the curriculum and instruction department of the Sarasota County school district and nationally recognized educators, these workshops provide teachers with the skills, tools and resources they need to teach their students art appreciation, character building and diversity education. The workshops identify the relevant curriculum standards, educational objectives, instructional strategies, step-by-step lesson plans and assessment guidelines. All workshops and related resources are linked to Florida's newly adopted Next Generation Sunshine State Standards and Language Art Florida Standards. One hundred and fifty area teachers, responsible for more than 15,000 students, are expected to participate in Embracing Our Differences educator workshops during the 2014-2015 school year.

"Since 2004, 847 teachers have participated in our workshops, which represent one of the most important aspects of our efforts—to positively impact the lives of regional students," says Shelton. "Not only do the children explore effective ways to tap into their creativity; they also experience new ways to learn and succeed in the world."

With more than 30,000 students participating in 2014, Embracing Our Differences continues to be one of the largest education programs in Southwest Florida," says Shelton, adding that grant funds will be used to strengthen and enhance teacher workshops, while fully incorporating all aspects of Florida's newly adopted state standards.

"The resources we provide to our teachers are a top priority for us. This generous grant from the Community Foundation of Sarasota County will provide teachers with the resources and best practices necessary to create a comprehensive approach to critical thinking and visual inquiry, as well as a safe and inclusive environment rich in academic, social and emotional opportunities for all students."

Embracing Our Differences' annual juried international art exhibit returns to Sarasota's Island Park and Bradenton's Riverwalk, March 29-May 31, 2015. **The 2015 Call to Artists and Quotation Writers is open to amateurs, professionals and students until January 5, 2015.** *Artists and writers can submit directly online at: www.embracingourdifferences.org/call-for-artists.html. For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.*

Embracing Our Differences' education programs include:

- The **"Make-a-Day-of-It!" program**, providing free bus transportation for area students and teachers to the outdoor exhibit and to other cultural venues, including Florida Studio Theatre, Mote Marine Aquarium and Ringling Museum.
- An **annual teacher workshop** designed to provide teachers with a well-planned curriculum for use before, during and after their students' visit to the annual exhibit.
- An **art teacher retreat** presented in partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design, designed to reinvigorate teaching practices while inspiring teachers' art and art integration skills.

About the Community Foundation

The Community Foundation 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 over \$273 million in more than 1,200 charitable funds, the Community Foundation awarded grants and scholarships totaling \$19.3 million dollars last year in the areas of education, the arts, health and human services, civic engagement, animal welfare and the environment. *For more information, visit www.CFSarasota.org.*

About Embracing Our Differences

Embracing Our Differences is a project of Coexistence, Inc., a local non-profit that began in 2004. The project showcases a community-based outdoor exhibit promoting positive, inspirational artistic and verbal expressions of inclusion, acceptance and respect. The mission of Embracing Our Differences is to use the transformational power of the arts to educate and inspire to create a better world. *For more information, visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.*

