

MEDIA CONTACTS

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Bank of America Client Foundation Awards Grant to Embracing Our Differences

The \$15,000 grant will help fund the organization's annual teacher workshops, a key component of its ongoing educational initiatives.

(Sarasota, FL) The Bank of America Client Foundation, Virginia White Clark Fund, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee, recently awarded Embracing Our Differences a \$15,000 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 exhibits celebrating the theme of "enriching lives through diversity," have showcased the work of artists and writers from all walks of life, including that of many area students. In 2015, the organization received 6,454 artworks and statements from people representing 80 countries and 42 states. Students from 118 elementary, middle and high schools comprised over 60 percent of the submissions. Submissions of art and quotes by 35 local students were included in the juried exhibit.

According to Michael Shelton, Embracing Our Differences' 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 and include the relevant curriculum standards, educational objectives, instructional strategies, step-by-step lesson plans and assessment guidelines. In 2014/15, all workshops and related resources were redesigned to incorporate Florida's newly adopted Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, the Mathematics Florida Standards and Language Art Florida Standards. Two hundred area teachers, responsible for more than 20,000 students, are expected to participate in Embracing Our Differences' educator workshops during the 2015-2016 school year.

"Since 2004, nearly 1,000 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 2015, "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 very generous grant from the Bank of America Client Foundation will help us provide more

teachers with the resources and best practices necessary to create a comprehensive approach to critical thinking and visual inquiry."

Embracing Our Differences' annual juried international art exhibit returns to Sarasota's Island Park March 30-May 31. *For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.*

Aside from the annual outdoor exhibition, Embracing Our Differences' ongoing educational outreach programs and initiatives include:

- **Teacher workshops** developed by nationally acclaimed educators to provide curricula and lesson plans relating to art appreciation, character building and diversity education. These include:
 - **Creative Writing Workshops** presented in partnership with Florida Studio Theatre and nationally recognized educators. These are designed to tackle the abstract topic of diversity by teaching students to express themselves through critical thinking and creative writing. Since 2004, 993 teachers have participated.
 - **Art Teacher Retreat:** Presented in partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design, this two-day retreat is focused on reinvigorating art educators' creativity while teaching new skills and strategies for inspiring students to explore the concepts of prejudice and diversity. **In 2015, the 37 participating art teachers were collectively responsible for more than 12,000 students from Sarasota and Manatee counties.**
 - **Lesson Plans Workshops:** Designed to provide curriculum-aligned lesson plans and other resource materials. Participating teachers discover new and innovative methods of engaging students in critical thinking while creating the perfect environment for a rich discussion on the value of diversity.

- **Embrace Courage: Bully Prevention in Schools:** A three-day workshop designed to give area educators the skills and tools they need to take a stand against bullying on and off campus. **Over 50 area educators participated in the recent inaugural edition of the workshop.**
- 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 Laboratory, Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, The Ringling, Sarasota Film Festival, and Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. **13,320 students participated during the 2015 school year.**
- **Coexistence Clubs**, via partnerships with Riverview, Booker and North Port high schools, provide student-led docent tours of the annual exhibit. **Student docent tours were provided to 7,706 K-8 children visiting the 2015 exhibits. There are approximately 115 student docents.**

For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, please call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.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. **Information: www.embracingourdifferences.org; 941-404-5710.**

About the Bank of America Client Foundation

In 1961, Sarasota, Florida, Bank and Trust Company (now Bank of America) formed the Bank of America Client Foundation to support charitable endeavors in the local area. The Foundation is set up with funds from several donors with varying interests. The Foundation typically makes grants to local Sarasota organizations with a successful track record. Support is given to arts, community, natural science, historic preservation, education, and human service organizations.

For more information, visit fdnweb.org/boacf/.