

MEDIA CONTACTS

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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 educator workshops and retreats. A key component of its ongoing educational initiatives, Embracing Our Differences' annual teacher workshops and retreats provide area educators with skills, strategies and resources to provide curricula and lesson plans relating to art appreciation, character building and diversity education.

(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 educator workshops and increase the number of Sarasota County teachers, by 12, who participate in Embracing Our Differences in-service training classes. A key component of its ongoing educational initiatives, Embracing Our Differences' annual teacher workshops and retreats provide area educators with skills, strategies and resources to provide curricula and lesson plans relating to art appreciation, character building and diversity education.

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. For the 2016 outdoor exhibit, the organization received 8,350 art and quote submissions from people representing 104 countries and 44 states. Students from 106 elementary, middle and high

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

Michael Shelton, Embracing Our Differences' executive director, says the high percentage of local students' winning contributions can be attributed, in part, to the participation of area teachers in Embracing Our Differences' arts education workshops and retreats.

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 2016-2017 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 Community 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.*

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:
 - **Mastering the Art of the Quote Workshops:** This workshop is designed to take the difficult topics of diversity, prejudice and inclusion and teach students to express themselves through critical thinking and creative writing. Presented in partnership with Florida Studio Theatre, the workshop fulfills a critical need of providing teachers with creative resources to meet Florida's Language Arts Standards.
 - **Art Teacher Retreat:** This two-day seminar, developed in partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design, is designed to reinvigorate educators' 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 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 deliver new and innovative methods of engaging students in critical thinking while creating the perfect environment for a rich discussion of the value of diversity and inclusion, all lesson plans identify the relevant curriculum standards, educational objectives, materials needed, activities, step-by-step instructional strategies and assessment guidelines.
 - **Summer Diversity Institute (Bully Prevention in Schools):** This three-day annual event provides information and support on bullying in our schools, in cyberspace, and in our community. The workshop offers support and structures for educators to use with students in their classrooms and on the school campus. Participants work individually and in small groups based upon grade level, as well as school location, to create lesson plans and action plans that will be used within each school to provide support to both students and faculty as they encounter incidents. **More than 65 Sarasota school guidance counselors, psychologists and sociologists participated in a recent condensed version of the workshop, organized out of popular demand by area school administrators.**
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- 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 the Community Foundation

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 over \$292 million in more than 1,300 charitable funds, the Community Foundation awarded grants and scholarships totaling more than \$16 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.*

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