



## Embracing Our Differences Receives Donation For Art, Inclusion Programs

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A recent donation will allow even more K-12 students in Sarasota and Manatee Counties to appreciate diversity through art.

Sarasota-based home builder Neal Communities recently donated \$10,000 to support the efforts of Embracing Our Differences. A project of Coexistence Inc., Embracing our Differences' mission is to create awareness and promote the value of diversity and inclusion, particularly among youth. The nonprofit achieves this through community-based outdoor art exhibits as well as teacher training.

The organization's pinnacle event is its annual juried art exhibit, which displays billboard-sized images in downtown Sarasota and Bradenton. The images depict diversity and acceptance through the use of art and writing.

"It's about teaching the next generation how to get along," says Michael Shelton, Executive Director for Embracing our Differences. The organization focuses on relevant topics such as bullying, making a statement in a visual and effective way.

Through working with the Sarasota and Manatee County school districts as well as other educational organizations, Embracing our Differences was able to reach over 30,000 children during the 2013-14 school year.

The funding will be used to support educational programming such as the "Make-a-Day-of-It!" program, which provides free bus transportation for students and teachers to view the outdoor exhibit and other cultural venues, including Florida Studio Theatre, Mote Marine Aquarium and Ringling Museum. More than 13,000 students participated in the program last year, and the additional funding will make it possible for close to 25,000 to participate this year.

"Teaching children at a very young age will have not only a societal benefit, but a huge economic benefit as well from those who buy into it and accept it," says Shelton.

Writer: Megan Hendricks

Source: Michael Shelton, Embracing our Differences