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## **Embracing Our Differences Presents** **"Embrace Courage: Bully Prevention in Schools"**

**A Workshop for Area Teachers**

**June 3 - 5 • USF Sarasota-Manatee**

*This inaugural, three-day workshop will provide area educators with information and support to help them recognize and curb bullying in and out of the classroom.*

(Sarasota, FL) Embracing Our Differences has partnered with the curriculum and instruction department of the Sarasota County school district and nationally recognized educators from the Anti-Defamation League and Facing History and Ourselves to create "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. The inaugural workshop is June 3-5, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., at USF Sarasota-Manatee, 8350 N. Tamiami Trail in Sarasota. The institute is funded, in part, by grants from the Kates Foundation and the Gulf Coast Community Foundation.

"No community is immune to the devastating effects of bullying, including cyber bullying. Surveys of Sarasota and Manatee county students show that nearly 40 percent of them fear bullying and that nearly 11 percent have skipped school to avoid it," says Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences. "This new initiative is designed to provide our educators with the support they need when they encounter

such incidents. It will also give them the resources necessary to create a safe environment in which students can develop a healthy respect for diversity and inclusion.”

According to Shelton, 64 educators, responsible for more than 10,000 students from Sarasota and Manatee counties, have already signed up for the workshop. “We’re very grateful to the Kates Foundation and the Gulf Coast Community Foundation for helping make this a reality,” he says. “We’re also thankful to USF Sarasota-Manatee for opening up its campus to host this event.”

Over the course of the workshop, teachers and counselors, representing grades K –12, will create lesson and action plans to be used to provide support to both students and faculty if they encounter incidents of bullying. Community partners, including district representatives, law enforcement officers and counselors, will provide information regarding local resources.

“We hope to give area educators access to the resources that are necessary to create a safe environment for their students,” says Bernadette Bennett, program specialist for K-12 social studies for the School Board of Sarasota County, and chair of Embracing Our Differences’ Education Committee. “We understand that things don’t change overnight; we’re not going to end bullying, but we are going to do our part to heighten awareness about it.”

"Embrace Courage: Bully Prevention in Schools" is the latest in a variety of annual education initiatives offered by Embracing Our Differences. Other education 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 the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Florida Studio Theatre. These are designed to tackle the abstract topic of diversity by teaching students to express themselves through critical thinking and creative writing. **Collectively, the 105 teachers participating in 2014 were responsible for more than 15,000 students from Sarasota and Manatee counties.**
  - **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. **Last year, 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.
- 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. **Nearly 14,000 students participated during the 2014 school year.**
- A **docent program** that, via partnerships with Riverview, Southeast and North Port high schools, provides student-led docent tours of the annual

exhibit. **Student docent tours were provided to 8,709 K-8 children visiting the 2014 exhibits. There are approximately 200 student docents.**

Since 2004, downtown Sarasota's Island Park has been the backdrop for Embracing Our Differences' centerpiece event, their exhibit of colorful, larger-than-life canvases integrating powerful imagery and thought-provoking messages celebrating diversity. The scale and impact of this outdoor exhibition has continued to grow since its inception. Since 2004, more than 1,900,000 visitors have viewed the exhibit including 293,000 in 2014 alone. In 2013, the organization marked its tenth anniversary with an expansion of the exhibit to Riverwalk in downtown Bradenton. The annual outdoor exhibits are the heart of a year-round program of activities designed to use the arts as a catalyst to create awareness and promote diversity. **The 2015 exhibition runs through May 22 at Island Park and at Riverwalk.**

*For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://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 transformative power of the arts to educate and inspire to create a better world. **[www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org); 941-404-5710.**