



## Junior League of Sarasota Awards Grant to Embracing Our Differences

*The \$5,000 grant will help fund the organization's Make-a-Day of It! program, which provides free transportation for thousands of students and teachers to visit Embracing Our Differences' annual outdoor exhibit and other arts and cultural venues.*

(Sarasota, FL) The Junior League of Sarasota recently awarded Embracing Our Differences a \$5,000 grant to help fund its Make-a-Day of It! program, which provides free bus transportation for thousands of students and teachers to visit Embracing Our Differences' annual outdoor exhibit and other arts and cultural venues. Four other area non-profits were also awarded grants, including Easter Seals Southwest Florida, the Family Network on Disabilities of Manasota, Transition Sarasota, and the Van Wezel Foundation.

Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences, explains that the Make-a-Day of It! program is a key component of the organization's ongoing educational initiatives. "This offers students the rare opportunity to visit a museum, botanical garden or an aquarium, experience live performance, and explore an art exhibit. For many, this is the first time they've ever done this."

Last year, Make-A-Day of It! provided school bus transportation for 12,469 students to attend the exhibit. "With this generous grant from the Junior League of Sarasota, our goal is to increase that number by 250 students this year."

With more than 780 teachers and 37,000 students participating in EOD's exhibit and educational programs in 2016 alone, Embracing Our Differences continues to lead as one of the largest education programs in southwest Florida.

Since 2004, Embracing Our Differences' annual juried art exhibit has graced downtown Sarasota's bayfront with billboard-sized images created by artists, writers and students from around the world reflecting their interpretation of the message, "enriching lives through diversity." These exhibits are the heart of a year-round program of activities designed to use art as a catalyst to create awareness and promote diversity. The 2017 exhibition season runs April 1 through May 31, in Sarasota's Island Park.

**Aside from the annual outdoor exhibition, Embracing Our Differences' educator workshops will be presented throughout the 2016-2017 school year for an anticipated 200 teachers who are responsible for 20,000 students. These programs and initiatives 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 2016, the 30**

**participating art teachers were collectively responsible for more than 9,000 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:** This three-day annual workshop provides information and support for the creation of a respectful and civil classroom culture, while offering tools and structures for educators and guidance counselors 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. **48 participants from 11 schools took part in the 2016 workshop.**

**Other 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 Laboratory, Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, The Ringling, Sarasota Film Festival, and Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. **12,469 students participated during the 2016 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 6,820 K-8 children visiting the 2016 exhibit. There are approximately 145 student docents.** *For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, please call 941-404-5710 or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).*

**About The Junior League of Sarasota**

The Junior League of Sarasota is an organization of women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women, and improving the community through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Its purpose is exclusively educational and charitable. In 2017, the League celebrates 60 years of service in Sarasota.

**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 arts as a catalyst for creating awareness and promoting, throughout our community, the value of diversity, the benefits of inclusion and the significance of the active rejection of hatred and prejudice.