

## **MEDIA CONTACTS**

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### **Community Foundation of Sarasota County Awards Grant to Embracing Our Differences for its Outstanding Education Initiatives**

*The \$4,500 grant will help fund the organization's educator workshops during the 2016-2017 school year. Embracing Our Differences' annual teacher workshops provide area educators with the resources necessary to create safe learning environments where students can thrive while fostering a healthy appreciation of diversity and inclusion.*

(Sarasota, FL) The Our Sarasota and McCauley-Brown Funds of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County recently awarded Embracing Our Differences a \$4,500 grant to help fund and enhance its 2016-2017 educator workshops. A key component of its education 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. Teachers are also shown the importance of creating an inclusive and safe environment for all students—specifically those who do not conform to gender norms.

Since 2004, Embracing Our Differences has been a pioneer in promoting the virtues and benefits of equality and inclusion. Over the years, its outdoor art exhibit celebrating the theme of "enriching lives through diversity" has attracted more than 2.3 million visitors to Sarasota's Island Park and has showcased the work of thousands of artists and writers from around the world, including that of many area students. Also crucial to the organization's mission are its education initiatives. Presented in partnership

with the Sarasota County school district and nationally recognized educators, these programs positively impact the lives of thousands of area teachers and students every year.

“We're grateful to the Community Foundation of Sarasota County and to the founders of these funds for their commitment to providing resources to create an environment in which educators recognize that a healthy respect for diversity and inclusion is the cornerstone of any progressive society,” says Michael Shelton, Embracing Our Differences' executive director. "The resources we provide to our teachers and students are a top priority for us. This grant will help us provide more teachers with the best practices necessary to create safe environments that inspire our youth to develop a sense of identity and confidence, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, color or religion.”

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

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](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).*

**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 (Bully Prevention in Schools):** 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 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. 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. **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 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](http://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](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).*