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Nationally Acclaimed Anti-Bullying Music Tour Returns to Area Schools November 9-13

Young artists from "X-Factor," "The Voice," and "American Idol" will perform at eight free concerts for over 6,700 students from Sarasota and Manatee counties.

(Sarasota, FL) The Sarasota-based Embracing Our Differences has partnered again with the Allstar Nation Tour (ANT) to bring eight free concert assemblies for students from 12 schools in Sarasota and Manatee counties, November 9-13. The Allstar Nation Tour delivers powerful, anti-bullying messages to students across the nation through concert assemblies that feature popular musical artists. Some of the artists have appeared on such top entertainment shows as *The Voice*, *X-Factor* and *American Idol*. Between songs, performers speak out against bullying, share personal experiences, and discuss prevention methods.

Former *X-Factor* Top 6 finalist **Drew Ryniewicz**, *American Idol* finalist **Robbie Rosen**, Indie Music Channel's "Best New Teen Artist" winner **Lauren Carnahan**, and *The Voice* contestant **Branden Mendoza**, with his band **My Only Escape**, are the artists scheduled to perform eight concerts in North Port, Osprey and Sarasota for over 6,700 students from Booker Middle School, Booker High School, Gulf Gate Elementary,

North Port High School, Phillippi Shores Elementary, Pine View School, Riverview High School and Wilkinson Elementary in Sarasota, Lincoln Middle School in Palmetto, and Team Success School and State College of Florida Collegiate School in Bradenton. The concerts will be held at the performing arts complexes at North Port High School, 6400 West Price Blvd., North Port; Booker Middle School, 2250 Myrtle Street, Sarasota; Booker High School, 3201 N. Orange Ave., Sarasota; Pine View High School, 1 Python Path, Osprey; and Riverview High School, 1 Ram Way, Sarasota (***See schedule attached***).

According to the latest Florida Department of Education report on school safety and discipline, more than 4,300 total incidents of bullying in Florida schools was reported with more than 4,700 threats, 1,700 harassment, and 1,700 sexual harassment incidents claimed.

In-school bullying is of increasing focus at Florida schools and districts. In 2008, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) required each school district to create a policy prohibiting bullying. Each school district creates its own policy based on the FDOE guide. Statute 1006.147, also known as The Jeffrey Johnston Stand Up for All Students Act, requires school districts to adopt an official policy prohibiting bullying and harassment of students and staff on school grounds, at school-sponsored events, and through school computer networks.

"These concerts, with their appealing music and powerful anti-bullying message, really resonated with our young audiences when the tour was here last spring," says Sarah Wertheimer, associate executive director of Embracing Our Differences. "Kids want and need to hear it--now more than ever. Bullying, especially cyber-bullying, is on

the rise across America. It's time to turn that around with events like this. Every child should feel valued, respected and safe."

Tour founder and manager Dillon Smith agrees with Wertheimer. "Bullying affects nearly one in three American schoolchildren in grades six through 10 and it is a major factor in teen suicide and shootings," says Smith. "Six out of 10 teenagers say they witness bullying in schools once a day and it is estimated that 160,000 students miss school every day due to fear attack or intimidation by other students. It's a phenomenon that needs to be addressed more aggressively."

Inspired by research supporting the powerful effect of music on memory, mood and behavior, Smith launched his tour and schools across the nation are requesting concerts. "One of the artists had just finished his performance and speech when a young girl approached him, handed him a razor blade and said, 'I was going to cut myself with this tonight and your story really changed my life,'" says Smith. The tour travels with its own sound system and a truck festooned with banners and lights to provide a full-out concert experience. Smith adds that students are invited to meet the artists after the concert.

The scheduled lineup for this leg of the Allstar Nation tour includes former *The Voice* contestant Branden Mendoza, and his trio "My Only Escape," featuring drummer Daniel Roscoe and guitarist/vocalist Spencer Fort, former *X-Factor* standout and top 6 finalist Drew Ryniewicz; *American Idol* finalist Robbie Rosen; and pop singer, songwriter and musician Lauren Carnahan, who was named Indie Music Channel's 2014 "Best New Teen Artist of the Year."

“This event works perfectly with Embracing Our Differences’ mission to use the transformative power of the arts to educate and inspire to create a better world,” says Wertheimer, who adds that EOD will provide the funds to transport students to the concerts free of charge.

Since 2004, downtown Sarasota's Island Park has been the backdrop for Embracing Our Differences’ 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, attracting over two million visitors since 2004. 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 2016 exhibition runs through March 30 – May 31 at Island Park.**

For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org. For more information about the Allstar Nation Tour, visit www.allstarnationtour.com or call 713-562-1708.

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. Information: www.embracingourdifferences.org; 941-404-5710.

About Allstar Nation Tour

The Allstar Nation Tour is a free national anti-bullying school concert assembly featuring nationally recognized recording artists who perform and speak out against bullying. Based in

Houston, the tour's main message is "Support, Report, and Defend!" with the mission to educate and empower students to support one another, report when a bullying incident occurs, and defend against bullying. Performances are free to schools. The Allstar Nation Tour launched in August 2014. Since then, the tour has visited hundreds of schools in Michigan, Texas, Wisconsin, Florida, and Oklahoma performing and speaking to more than 75,000 middle and high school students, faculty, and community members.