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“I Matter” art exhibit has personal touch

BY SETH WALLACH

A groundbreaking new art exhibition, created by a team of local students, is scheduled to open at the Northport-East Northport Library January 14.

Photographs, taken and edited by local teens will be on display in an effort to raise awareness for one of Long Island’s newest social movements: The “I Matter” project. This unique program, developed by Rob Goldman, is designed to empower youth within a community in an effort to minimize destructive decision making such as drug and alcohol abuse.

The “I Matter” project, according to Mr. Goldman, is a town-wide social impact art campaign that empowers teens and young adults by offering them a variety of venues to be seen and heard in their community. The exhibition features large-scale photographic portraits combined with personal “I Matter” statements as a public declaration of self-worth and a compelling invitation to community support.

In August, a group of about 20 students came to the Northport Library to participate in Mr. Goldman’s experimental program. The students were grouped in pairs, given a list of 15 questions and asked to interview one another. Questions ranged from “If you could be any animal, what would it be?” to “Do you consider yourself a good friend?” Each inquiry was succeeding but an

all-important follow up question – “Why?” While the questions may seem innocent, they are actually forcing the participants to connect on a deeply personal and empathetic level.

level of honesty and vulnerability that is apparent [in the photos]. Even though they tend to be silly, they are still extremely human.”

The next step for the “I Matter” program is retouch, print, and display these large poster sized photos all over the library, as well as throughout the town of Northport. Unfortunately for those affiliated with the program, a project of this scope requires a significant amount of funding. Funding that the students alone will be responsible for raising. In order to accomplish their goal of \$6,700, the students have put together an account on

kickstarter.com, a site designed to fund creative projects, allows donors to read up on and easily pledge money to different projects. Should the students of Northport be unable to reach their \$6,700 goal by December 12, any existing moneys raised through the site would be returned to their original donors, and the students would not collect any funds. This all-or-nothing method of fundraising helps to manage risk for donors, but it can also leave worthy beneficiaries such as “I Matter” in dire straights.

As the deadline for donations draws near, Mr. Goldman and his students know that their chances of succeeding through kickstarter are dwindling, but they’re not giving up just yet.

They encourage those interested in donating to head to: kickstarter.com.



The portraits that will be featured in the upcoming I Matter art exhibition at Northport Library.

Following a group discussion, the students working individually, were asked to write a paragraph answering the question “why do I matter?” The interviews, discussion, and personal reflections are designed to help participants get a better feel for how they perceive themselves.

The final stage of the three-hour program had participants take to the studio. The students took turns in front of as well as behind the camera to create a series of distinct and inspiring self-portraits. The photos are coupled with the students’ own written declaration of self-worth.

“I’m an out of the box educator,” said Mr. Goldman, an artist and professor at Suffolk Community College, during a recent interview at the library. “There’s a