

# The TIMES HUNTINGTON

Edition

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## Libraries to exhibit 'I matter' art project

### Group seeks funding for libraries exhibit

BY ROHMA ABBAS

A Huntington photographer is seeking the public's help in funding a community art project to promote self-worth and discourage drug use among local adolescents.

The project, titled "I matter," is the brainchild of Rob Goldman, a photographer, director and teacher. The art exhibit involves plastering local libraries' windows with large-scale photographic portraits of teens, combined with personal "I matter" statements.

The result? "A public declaration of self-worth and a compelling invitation to community support," according to the project's website.

"It is a public venue for kids to have their face and their voice shared with the entire population of a town," Goldman said in a phone interview on Tuesday. "And it's really about empowering kids. I so believe that the problems that our kids are facing today need to be understood by the adult community through the voices of our kids."

Goldman is the founder and director of Huntington-based nonprofit the Center for Creative Development, which created the Just Like Me project, a "transformative drug prevention program for high school students," according to its webpage. The "I matter" project is the first phase of Just Like Me.

"I matter" has already debuted at the Northport branch of the Northport-East Northport Public Library for three months, and was taken down at the end of March,



Image from Dina Rescott

A mockup of what the 'I matter' project would look like at the Huntington village library branch.

Goldman said. It is in the works at both Huntington Public Library branches on Main Street and in Huntington Station, he said.

The project at both Huntington Public Library branches still needs funding — to the tune of

\$9,800. Those costs include a library fee and mounting the portraits on all the library's windows. Goldman said the reception for the project is scheduled for June.

"I matter" will also debut at the Commack branch of the Smithtown Library in September. Goldman's also had conversations with Cold Spring Harbor

and Harborfields libraries about the project.

And it could go even further. Goldman said he plans to meet with the Suffolk Cooperative Library System to talk about the project next week.

***'It is a public venue for kids to have their face and their voice shared with the entire population of a town.'***

— ROB GOLDMAN

tween what we decided 100 years ago a kid's role is — which is to sit behind a desk and regurgitate facts."

The project was received well in Northport, according to James Olney, the Northport-East Northport Public Library director. He lauded the mission of the exhibit.

"Really it [reinforces] the feeling of community and really puts literally a face on the library," he said. "It gives teens a way of building not only self esteem but again, being involved in community functions and community organization."

For Huntington High School junior Justin LoTurco, participating in the "I matter" project — which involved pairing up with a student he didn't know well who asked him personal questions — helped him feel better after a particularly stressful day at school.

"We did a bunch of exercises to

promote self-worth," he said. "It was just really enlightening. I enjoyed it so much. I had so much fun."

The question and answer session is followed by a photoshoot, where the students take photos of each other. The third phase of the project involves students writing a paragraph on why they matter.

Goldman likened the exhibit to an ad. Asked what it was marketing, he said: "A better world."

"Marketing for healthier kids," he continued. "And also marketing for the people of a community to stop for a second and realize that we all have a responsibility to take care of our kids."

Those interested in donating to the Huntington libraries "I matter" exhibit can do so via Kickstarter online.