
'Values' project crosses the border in Sonoma

KATE WILLIAMS

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Despite current rhetoric and partisan politics, Sonoma artist Peter Hassen believes human harmony is possible. Last week, Hassen's optimism took physical form in a project called "Values Beyond Borders" at the La Luz Center.

Funded by a "pop-up creativity grant" from Creative Sonoma, a county artist-support program, Hassen's idea was to find common ground between disparate cultures – the place where shared values bind all people together. Culminating in "value words" being chalked onto pavement in English and Spanish, the installation underscored the shared ethos of the project's participants. Words like "courage" and "community" were brainstormed in collaborative workshops and, once finalized into a list, die-cut onto enormous steel plates. Hassen and project participants arranged the plates around the La Luz campus and then filled in the templates with chalk.

Ann Trinca, a consultant who has worked with art organizations throughout the Bay Area, encouraged Hassen to pitch the project. Normally, as in Napa and Sacramento where Hassen's "Values Project" has installed over 800 words in long-lasting traffic paint and different languages, the idea is to make an indelible mark, for the words to serve as a permanent reminder that shared human values bridge the divisions of culture and creed.

But at La Luz, Hassen and Trinca chose to use chalk because the "pop-up grant" that funded the project was expressly interested in transient projects. Despite that, "Values Beyond Borders" tapped into something elemental for participants,

allowing reflection on lasting truths.

Trinca describes "values" as an "integral part of a person's character."

"(They) transcend race, gender, nationality or creed, and this project examines the commonality of values in our splintered society," Trinca said. "In the current political climate, immigration has become a topic that divides us and diverts attention from core values. 'Values Beyond Borders' serves to focus on those points where individuals come together and discover the importance of a diverse population."

Diversity has become a loaded word in certain circles of late, with immigrants often vilified for election-year political gain. But at La Luz, inclusivity is the key to evolved human consciousness. And last week Hassen and Trinca chalked aspirational words on the pavement with those same immigrants, in a demonstration of how humanity tethers us all.

Email Kate at kate.williams@sonomanews.com.