

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **VSA Festival will return as an in-person event to celebrate artists with disabilities** 46th annual event to showcase creative writing, dance, music, theater and visual art

SANTA ANA, Calif. — After two virtual years of virtual events, the 46th annual VSA Festival will return to MainPlace Mall in Santa Ana on Saturday, April 30 to celebrate the artistic achievements of individuals with disabilities.

The Orange County Department of Education will team up once again with VSA Orange County to host the daylong event, which, as part of Arts Orange County's annual "Imagination Celebration," provides opportunities for students and adults with disabilities to exhibit artwork and showcase their talents in writing, dance, music, theater and visual art.

The festival, which is free and open to the public, will begin at 11 a.m. in Macy's Court with an opening ceremony featuring performance vignettes based on the theme "Rise Up."

"This year's theme reflects a call to action for the creative spirit to 'rise up' from the challenges presented by the pandemic over the past two years," said Marleena Barber, director of VSA Orange County. "We are proud of our students and artists who have demonstrated that creativity can thrive in even the darkest of circumstances."

The festival will welcome back long-time friend and celebrity emcee William Allen Young, whose acting credits include "Code Black," "This Is Us," and "Moesha." American Sign Language interpreter Paula Dunn will also reprise her role alongside Young.

Groups will perform on the main stage until 4 p.m., including students from Straight Up Abilities, Orange County Children's Therapeutic Arts Center, Braille Institute, the Villa Fundamental Intermediate School Theatre Troupe (from the Santa Ana Unified School District), Creative Identity, Hope Center for the Arts, and cheerleaders from OCDE's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program at University High School in Irvine.

Art activities, a mall-wide scavenger hunt, an art exhibit and a resource fair will also be available to help the public learn more about arts and disability. Participating organizations include Autism Speaks, Beyond Blindness, Hope Center for the Arts, Hidden Truths Project and Alzheimer's Orange County. VSA Orange County's Small Paintings Project will be offered from 1 to 3 p.m.

Those who can't make it on April 30 will still be able check out the Festival's expansive art exhibit, which is scheduled to remain on display at MainPlace through May 9.

This year's VSA Festival is sponsored by the Orange County Department of Education, VSA Orange County, MainPlace Mall and the Orange County Community Foundation. For additional information, contact Marleena Barber, OCDE Visual and Performing Arts consultant and director of VSA Orange County, at [s.mbarber@ocde.us](mailto:s.mbarber@ocde.us).

## **About VSA**

VSA, the international organization on arts and disability, was founded in 1974 by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith to provide arts and education opportunities for people with disabilities and to increase access to the arts for all. With a network of national and international affiliates, VSA is changing perceptions about people with disabilities around the world. Each year, 7 million people of all ages and abilities participate in VSA programs in every aspect of the arts, including visual, performing and literary arts. VSA Orange County began its program in 1976 and is now celebrating its 46th annual VSA Festival.

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