

# Teens' photos show they matter

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Photos of teens with declarations like "I'm a nerd and proud of it" and "I stand for what I believe in" filled Northport Public Library's windows yesterday as part of an art project aimed at boosting the students' self-worth.

The "I Matter" project, conceived by Suffolk County Community College instructor and photographer Rob Goldman, is a component of his "Just Like Me" drug awareness and character development program.

"If a young person can really cultivate a sense of worth . . . and a sense of belonging in the community, then the idea of feeling alone . . . will hopefully begin to wane," said Goldman during the reception yesterday before a crowd of about 100. "My goal is to create a very public statement of worth, that 'I'm here. Look at me. Take care of me, because I really do matter.'"

The project showcased about 30 large-scale portraits of middle and high school students from Huntington and East Northport.

Goldman said he worked with the library in August to identify teens to take part in the project. Students worked in pairs, spending about three hours interviewing each other, taking photos under Goldman's direction, and writing a paragraph to explain why they matter. One line from the paragraph is posted on their



Ceylan Swenson, 14, of East Northport, looks at her photo yesterday with her mother, Filiz Turhan, and brother Tor Swenson, 9.

photo.

Justin LoTurco, 17, of Huntington, said at first he was embarrassed when he saw his photo. But "you think maybe this could influence the kid who is not self-confident," he added.

Candace Reeder, head of teen services at the library, said the display will remain up at least through the end of the month.

"Everyone from families with preschoolers through retirees comes to the library, so this was the perfect venue to make it available to the entire community," she said of the project.

A similar project is planned at the Huntington Public Library in the coming months, officials said. Seven students formed a Kickstarter.com committee and

helped raise about \$8,000 to cover the costs to run the program, said Goldman.

Ceylan Swenson, 14, of East Northport, who helped with the committee, said she thought the project was "innovative."

"Actually standing in front of the camera myself, you get a little nervous. You don't really know what to do, so I started re-

ally hysterically laughing," she said, looking at her photo, which caught the humorous moment.

Swenson's mother, Filiz Turhan, 46, said she was proud that her daughter took part in the exhibit "I think it's going to be beneficial," she said. "Each individual kid has something to contribute. You can't go wrong with that."