

Roots of Empathy, “Canada's olive branch to the world”

From a small pilot reaching just 150 children in Canada to an award-winning international program that has now brought the power of empathy to 325,000 children worldwide, Roots of Empathy has grown dramatically and celebrated many milestones along the way. Here are a few highlights.

1996

Educator, parenting expert and child advocate Mary Gordon creates the Roots of Empathy program. It is first offered as a pilot in Toronto, Ontario, reaching 150 children.

2000

Roots of Empathy becomes a charitable not-for-profit organization. The program begins to expand across Canada, reaching 4,325 children in Ontario, PEI and British Columbia. The organization also initiates a formalized research program where independent, academic researchers conduct evaluations measuring the program’s effectiveness across different locations, grade levels and populations.

2001

Roots of Empathy is introduced in Manitoba and Newfoundland and Labrador. Manitoba also establishes the first Francophone Roots of Empathy programs in Canada.

2002

Roots of Empathy comes to New Brunswick and Alberta. The program has now grown to reach more than 21,000 children in six Canadian provinces. Mary Gordon is named one of the first two Canadian Ashoka Fellows, recognizing her as a member of an international circle of social entrepreneurs with system-changing solutions for the world’s most urgent social problems.

2003

Nova Scotia launches the Roots of Empathy program.

2005

A truly milestone year, 2005 sees a number of exciting developments:

- The program is introduced in Quebec, and Roots of Empathy launches its French-language curriculum.
- *Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child* is published in Canada and becomes a critically acclaimed bestseller. In the book, author Mary Gordon explains the philosophy, evidence-base and values behind the Roots of Empathy program. The *Globe and Mail* calls it one of the top 100 books of the year in the category “Ideas.”
- Mary Gordon creates Seeds of Empathy, Roots of Empathy’s “younger sibling,” a program for three-to-five-year-olds in childcare settings. The program is launched in British Columbia.
- The organization’s flagship program, Roots of Empathy, is now running in nine Canadian provinces reaching 107,000 children.



History and Milestones

2006

In September, Mary Gordon is invited to have a dialogue with His Holiness, The Dalai Lama, at an event held to inaugurate his Center for Peace and Education in Vancouver, British Columbia, and His Holiness expresses his belief that programs like Roots of Empathy will bring world peace. In October, Gordon is invested as a Member of the Order of Canada in recognition of her work founding Roots of Empathy and Canada's first and largest school-based parenting and family literacy centres.

2007

Roots of Empathy is now reaching more than 200,000 children across Canada. The program is also introduced as a three-year pilot in New Zealand, launching what remains today the longest-running Roots of Empathy program outside Canada. In the fall, Roots of Empathy is introduced in Seattle, Washington, for a three-year pilot – the first launch of the program in the United States.

2008

Roots of Empathy is named one of three winners – and the only Canadian organization selected – of an international Changemakers award given to programs that help youth at risk, an initiative from Ashoka. Meanwhile, the Isle of Man launches Roots of Empathy, beginning a three-year pilot, and Seeds of Empathy is launched in the province of Alberta.

In April, Mary Gordon attends the Seeds of Compassion initiative in Seattle, Washington, an event that draws 50,000 people and countless more through webcasts in 24 languages. Gordon is a panelist on two dialogues about empathy and compassion, including one with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama.

On July 18, the Canadian Assembly of First Nations passes resolution 38 to support and endorse Roots of Empathy and Seeds of Empathy, calling both programs “compatible with traditional First Nations teachings and worldviews.” Both programs are offered in a growing number of on and off-reserve Aboriginal communities across Canada, and the organization is also working in partnership with Indigenous people globally.

2009

In September, Toronto becomes the first place in the world to open a Roots of Empathy Centre of Excellence. Six schools at the Toronto District School Board showcase Roots of Empathy best practices in fidelity with the program's curriculum and philosophy. In December, *Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child* is launched in a new edition in the United States.

2010 ... and beyond

British Columbia celebrates a decade of offering Roots of Empathy. Meanwhile, Seeds of Empathy is introduced in Seattle, its first international launch. In the spring, *Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child* is published in Korea.

Roots of Empathy continues to reach children throughout Canada in rural, urban, and remote settings, in English and in French, and in Aboriginal communities. The program is proudly community-based,





Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child

History and Milestones

and supported by many social service, justice, public health, and other agencies across Canada, along with thousands of dedicated Instructors, Mentors and local program coordinators. Internationally Roots of Empathy now reaches children in the United States, the Isle of Man, and New Zealand. A decade of independent research across several countries has consistently shown that the program dramatically reduces aggression and increases social and emotional understanding among children who receive it. To date, the program has impacted an astounding 325,000 children worldwide.

In 2010-11, Roots of Empathy will launch in Northern Ireland (funded partly as a European Union peace initiative) and the Republic of Ireland. A number of other countries are working to launch the program in subsequent years – heralding in what some thought leaders and social historians are calling “the age of empathy.”

