



Roots of Empathy Key Information

What is Roots of Empathy?

Roots of Empathy is an award-winning charitable organization that offers empathy-based programming for children. Our vision is to change the world – child by child.

Roots of Empathy is considered a model of social innovation and has two evidence-based programs: a flagship program of the same name for children in elementary school (Roots of Empathy) and Seeds of Empathy, its "younger sibling" – a program for children ages three to five in childcare settings. Both programs have shown dramatic effect in reducing levels of aggression among children while raising their social and emotional competence and increasing empathy.

Mission

Roots of Empathy's mission is to build caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults.

History and Reach

In 1996, Mary Gordon created the Roots of Empathy program in Toronto, Canada. Roots of Empathy became a charitable not-for-profit organization in 2000. To date, the program has reached an astounding 325,000 children worldwide.

The Roots of Empathy program is delivered to schoolchildren from Kindergarten to Grade 8 across Canada, in English and French, and in rural, urban, and remote communities. It also reaches children in the United States (in Seattle, Washington), New Zealand, and the Isle of Man. In the fall of 2010, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland will begin offering the program. A number of other countries are working to launch it in subsequent years. The program has been called "Canada's olive branch to the world."

In 2008, the Canadian Assembly of First Nations passed a resolution to 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 works in partnership with Indigenous people globally.

Roots of Empathy was one of three winners – and the only Canadian organization – to win an international competition from Changemakers, an initiative of Ashoka.

Roots of Empathy in Action

In the Roots of Empathy program, a parent and baby (who is two to four months old at the start of the school year) from the community visit a classroom nine times over the course of a school year. A trained Roots of Empathy instructor visits with the family to guide children as they observe the relationship between the baby and its parent. The instructor also visits before and after each family visit to reinforce teachings. There are 27 classroom visits in total in a Roots of Empathy program.





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In the program, the baby is the “teacher.” With each family visit, the instructor leads the children in noticing how the baby is growing and changing over the course of his or her first year of life. The children also watch the loving relationship between the parent and baby and see how the parent responds to the baby’s emotions and meets the baby’s needs. The attachment relationship between a baby and a parent is an ideal model of empathy.

Children learn to understand the perspective of the baby and label the baby’s feelings, and then are guided in extending this learning outwards so they have a better understanding of their own feelings and the feelings of others (empathy). This emotional literacy lays the foundation for more safe and caring classrooms, where children are “Changers.” They are more socially and emotionally competent and much more likely to challenge cruelty and injustice.

Research on Roots of Empathy

A decade of independent academic research across several countries has consistently shown that the program dramatically reduces aggression and increases social and emotional understanding among children who receive it. Children who have participated in Roots of Empathy programs are kinder, more cooperative, and more inclusive of others, and are less aggressive and less likely to bully others compared to children who do not participate in the program. These positive effects have been shown to last years.

For complete details, please visit: www.rootsofempathy.org/research

About Mary Gordon

Mary Gordon is Founder, President, and inspiration behind Roots of Empathy. She is recognized internationally as an educator, best-selling author, child advocate and parenting expert who has created award-winning programs informed by the power of empathy. She is a Member of the Order of Canada and the recipient of a number of awards, including a Public Education Advocacy Award from the Canadian Teachers Federation. In 2002 she was 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.

Ms Gordon is also the founder of Canada's first and largest school-based Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, which have become a best practice model internationally. Her 2005 Canadian bestseller, *Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child*, was ranked as one of the Top 100 Books of the Year in the category “Ideas” by the *Globe and Mail*. The book has since been published in the United States, and a Korean edition is scheduled for release in the spring of 2010.

Ms Gordon has twice had dialogues with His Holiness the Dalai Lama: First in 2006, at the Vancouver Dialogues, and then in 2008, in Seattle, Washington, as part of the Seeds of Compassion event. The Dalai Lama expressed his belief that programs like Roots of Empathy will build world peace.

For more information, visit www.rootsofempathy.org.

