



Roots of Empathy  
Racines de l'empathie

## Media Backgrounder

### About the Roots of Empathy Organization

Roots of Empathy stands at the forefront of the global empathy movement, spearheading positive change by championing emotional literacy and empathy. As an international acclaimed charity, our mission is to build caring, peaceful and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults and we have a vision to change the world, child by child. Established in 1996 by Founder and President Mary Gordon, Roots of Empathy has evolved into an award-winning organization that has impacted over a million children across Canada and in 10 other countries through innovative programs offered in schools and child care settings.

### Impact and Methodology

An intensifying surge of violence, populism, xenophobia, fundamentalism, racism, and misogyny in many quarters, is most effectively countered through an elevation of empathy. Over two decades ago, Mary Gordon catalyzed a crucial insight that the common thread of power abuse, be it bullying in childhood, violence in the home, bullying in the workplace, or on the world stage, is the absence of empathy. This revelation gave birth to our flagship classroom program Roots of Empathy, celebrated as a model of social innovation and described as "Canada's olive branch to the world."

Empathy is necessary to build healthy relationships and resilience - the core to mental health and sustained wellbeing. Early experiences in school are an important determinant of health – physical, cognitive and emotional. If childhood aggression is unchecked, it can be a gateway to poor mental health and violence. Rigorous independent academic research spanning two decades and three continents consistently demonstrates the program's remarkable ability to reduce aggression and bullying in children. Moreover, it instills lasting pro-social behaviors, making children kinder, more cooperative, and inclusive.

Annual program evaluations involving teachers, students, and Instructors affirm its positive effects on mental health and wellbeing, emotional literacy and resiliency, as well as preparing children for responsible parenting and citizenship.

The program's unique approach involves designating a baby as the "Tiny Teacher" in the classroom. Local community parents volunteer to bring their babies, from two months old, into a classroom every month. Guided by a Roots of Empathy Instructor, children engage in discussions, deciphering the baby's emotional cues and perspective, witnessing the loving relationship between the parent and the

baby, gaining an understanding of the baby's feelings and a vocabulary to express their own feelings. The experiential learning lays the foundation for more safe and caring classrooms by empowering children to express their own feelings, even their deepest and most troubling, and to bridge those insights into feeling for others and becoming "Changers", more socially and emotionally competent and more likely to challenge cruelty and injustice.

## Program Levels

The Roots of Empathy program is thoughtfully structured into four curriculum levels with lessons that span the school year: Kindergarten (ages 4-5), Primary (ages 6-8), Junior (ages 9-12), and Senior (ages 12-14). A sister program, Seeds of Empathy, caters to young children aged three to five in child care centres. Both programs provide comprehensive professional development through in-depth training and ongoing mentoring.

## Indigenous and Cultural Responsiveness

Roots of Empathy places immense value on diversity, actively celebrating differences, and seeking to integrate a wealth of perspectives. We proudly collaborate with Indigenous peoples, including the Māori of New Zealand, by incorporating traditional teachings and worldviews. Endorsed by the Assembly of First Nations in Canada in 2008, both Roots of Empathy and Seeds of Empathy are recognized and recommended as compatible with Indigenous values.

For a glimpse into the transformative impact of Roots of Empathy, we invite you to watch [our short video](#) and this [testimonial video](#).

## About the Founder and President Mary Gordon

Internationally recognized social entrepreneur, educator, author and child advocate Mary Gordon creates innovative programs informed by the power of empathy. She created the Roots of Empathy program in 1996, the Roots of Empathy charitable organization in 2000 and created Seeds of Empathy in 2005. In 1981, she initiated Canada's first school-based Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, which have been used as a best-practice model internationally.

Mary Gordon speaks internationally and consults to organizations such as The World Health Organization, Civil 20 a policy feed for the G20, the United Nations and the Nelson Mandela Foundation. She has had several dialogues with His Holiness the Dalai Lama. She is a member of the Order of Canada, the Order of Ontario, the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador, and was a recipient of both the Queen's Golden and Diamond Jubilee Awards. Ms. Gordon was elected an Ashoka Fellow in 2002 and an Ashoka Globalizer in 2011, the same year she was named Canada's Top Social Innovator. In 2018, Ms. Gordon received the Governor General's Innovation Award. She is the recipient of honorary doctorates in Canada and Europe. To read more about Mary Gordon, [click here](#).

### For additional information or to arrange an interview, kindly contact:

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