

Mary Gordon C.M, O,N.L, LL.D

Founder/President, Roots of Empathy



Mary Gordon is recognized internationally as an award-winning social entrepreneur, educator, author, child advocate and parenting expert who has created programs informed by the power of empathy. Ms. Gordon is also the founder of Canada's first and largest school-based Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, which she initiated in 1981. These centres worked with the parent-child relationship and play-based problem solving was the vehicle for learning. They became public policy in Ontario and have been used as a best practice model in Canada and internationally.

In 1996, she created the Roots of Empathy program in Toronto. In 2000, she established the national and international organization Roots of Empathy, which now offers programs in elementary schools in every province of Canada, New Zealand, the USA, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, England, Wales, Scotland, Germany, Switzerland, Netherlands and Costa Rica. In 2005, Ms. Gordon created the Seeds of Empathy program, a social emotional and early literacy program for 3-5 year olds in childcare.

Ms. Gordon is the recipient of several awards recognizing her contribution to innovation in education and international social entrepreneurship, including the Governor General's Innovation Award, 2018. She is also the recipient of the Manning Innovation Award for the top social entrepreneur in Canada. She is a Member of the Order of Canada, the Order of Newfoundland, and is the recipient of two honorary doctorates. In 2002, Ms. Gordon was named the first female Canadian Ashoka Fellow, recognizing her as a member of an international circle of social entrepreneurs who have the creativity and skill to envision and bring new ways of addressing persistent social problems. In 2011, she was named an Ashoka Globalizer, joining a select group of Ashoka Fellows supported in extending their message and impact to the global level. Ms. Gordon was awarded the Commemorative Medal for the Golden Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in Education and the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for significant achievement and remarkable service. In 2004, she was awarded the Ontario Teachers Federation Lifetime Fellowship Award and in 2009, the Public Education Advocacy Award from the Canadian Teachers' Federation.

Mary Gordon has presented to and advised governments, educational organizations and international bodies such as The World Health Organization, the United Nations and the Organization for Economic Co-operation. The Nelson Mandela Children's Foundation brought Ms. Gordon to South Africa in the late '90's to share her expertise. Ms. Gordon is often a keynote presenter at international conferences such as Skoll World Forum and UBS Global Philanthropy Forum, among others.

Roots of Empathy is recognized as one of the top evidence-based social and emotional learning programs by the George Lucas Foundation's Edutopia. Having reached close to a million children, Roots of Empathy was described by Roman Krznaric, cultural historian and founder of Empathy Museum London, as "the world's most effective empathy teaching program". In 2008, National Chief Phil Fontaine and the Assembly of First Nations passed a resolution to support Roots of Empathy and Seeds of Empathy in First Nations schools across Canada.

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Ms. Gordon has had three 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 and in 2011 at the Delhi Dialogues. The Dalai Lama has expressed that programs like Roots of Empathy will build world peace. In 2008, Roots of Empathy was one of three winners in an international competition from Changemakers for programs that help youth at risk. In 2018 and 2019, Roots of Empathy was selected by the Finnish organization HundrED as one of the 100 most inspiring educational projects in the world. Roots of Empathy was also chosen as one of the world's top two best practice children's organizations by the Klaus J Jacobs Foundation and furthermore won an UpSocial global competition of evidence based programs that address the challenge of children at risk of social exclusion - "Accelerating Change for Social Inclusion."

Ms Gordon is one of the social entrepreneurs featured in Beverley Schwartz's 2012 book, *Rippling – How Social Entrepreneurs Spread Innovation throughout the World*. She is featured in the 2012 documentary *Love Hate and Everything in Between* by director Alex Gabbay and has been featured in other films on bullying and social innovation. Both Ms. Gordon and the program have been featured in the New York Times, the LA Times, the Washington Post, the BBC, Time Magazine and in features on PBS, CNN and the Huffington Post. Her book, *Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child*, is a Canadian best seller and is available in multiple languages.