

For Immediate Release:

Founder and President of Acclaimed Roots of Empathy Program Visits Niagara

The Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC) was delighted to host Mary Gordon, internationally respected author, founder, and president of the acclaimed Roots of Empathy program on October 24th, alongside partners from the Niagara Catholic District School Board (Niagara Catholic) and the District School Board of Niagara (DSBN). The professional collaboration took place at the ECCDC Conference Centre in Thorold and was a unique learning opportunity for Child and Youth Workers, Mental Health Leads, and administration from both boards to explore a variety of topics to support them in their important roles, offer opportunities to develop new strategies, and time to foster relationships with peers.

The Teams explored the topic of the *Crisis of Connection* with Mary Gordon. “You cannot learn if you are lonely, if you are frightened, and if you are anxious. Empathy is a pathway to overcoming these obstacles for children. It was a pleasure to be with Niagara Child and Youth Workers and Youth Counsellors to celebrate all of our combined work supporting empathy development. Thank you to partners ECCDC, the Niagara Catholic District School Board and the District School Board of Niagara for hosting this professional learning collaboration.” Other presentations offered were *Child and Youth Grief* with Danni Kozela and Sue Shipley and *Social-Emotional Learning* with Al Monachino and Rose Perri-Gentilcore.

In addition to their roles, many of these staff support Niagara’s Roots of Empathy Programs as certified Roots of Empathy Instructors and have facilitated approximately ninety programs over the past three years. Roots of Empathy has proven through research to support empathy building, lower bullying and aggression, and promote prosocial skills such as kindness, inclusion, and sharing. Roots of Empathy Instructors offered a virtual Recovery Program during the peak of the pandemic and are excited to return to the Roots of Empathy traditional program, bringing the green blanket and our tiniest teachers (our Roots babies) back into classrooms across Niagara this year. “Niagara Catholic is grateful to the Roots of Empathy program for teaching children social-emotional skills and the importance of empathy. We are also grateful for our partnership with ECCDC to provide support and training for our Child and Youth Workers, supported by our Mental Health Lead, Andrea Bozza. It was a very special day with Mary Gordon in Niagara to celebrate 22 years of the Root of Empathy program in Niagara Catholic Schools.” “Mary Gordon’s vision of the Roots of Empathy Program has nurtured empathy within thousands of DSBN students for more than two decades. The impactful, positive takeaways and outcomes that students receive from this program are lifelong,” said David Peirce, DSBN Mental Health Lead “Today’s professional program empowered our staff to approach their learning with a well-rounded empathetic lens. Staff have benefited from delving deeper into the ways empathy can help elevate their work beyond compassion and be used further in framing their work to the unique needs of each student.”

If you are interested in learning more about Roots of Empathy in Niagara, please reach out to the eccdc@eccdc.org.

The ECCDC exists so that early learning professionals are supported in offering children exceptional opportunities to grow, learn and develop. In the 28 years since its creation by local volunteers, the ECCDC has become Canada’s leading early learning training, resource and referral organization.

Roots of Empathy (ROE) is an award-winning charitable organization that offers empathy-based programming for children. ROE’s mission is to build caring, peaceful, and civil societies through the development of empathy in children and adults. ROE, its flagship program for elementary school children, has reached 1 million children on four continents and is proven by 2 decades of independent research to reduce aggression/bullying and increase prosocial behaviour. Seeds of Empathy is offered to children in early learning and childcare sites. Website: <https://rootsofempathy.org>

Niagara Catholic is a Christ-centered Catholic faith community that celebrates diversity and fosters spiritual growth, inspiring all to reach their full potential in mind, body, and spirit.

At the District School Board of Niagara, we believe in the limitless potential of all children. That’s our starting point. And it’s a good one. The DSBN honours the unique characteristics that make up who you are. However, as members of a school system, there is one trait we all share: we are all learners. No matter our role within the DSBN, our knowledge is constantly evolving. That growth in knowledge changes who we are. It makes us better, as students, as professionals and as people. The DSBN is committed to fostering that growth, so all learners can reach their true and full potential. Everyone interacts with the world through the unique lens of their personal experiences and beliefs. When we feel those ideals are heard and respected, we engage. When we are engaged, anything is possible.

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