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NIAGARA'S YOUNGEST TEACHERS HONOURED

Niagara Region, Ontario – A group of babies only marking their first birthdays are being celebrated as classroom heroes on May 31 at the District School Board of Niagara Education Centre Atrium, 191 Carlton Street, St. Catharines, for their contribution to teaching over the past school year. These babies, alongside their parents, have been teaching children important lessons about expressing feelings, respect, inclusion, infant development and safety, and the power of a loving bond between parent and child.

Roots of Empathy (ROE) is an evidence-based classroom program that reduces levels of bullying and aggression among school children while raising social/emotional competence and increasing empathy. The internationally recognized and award-winning Program developed by social entrepreneur, educator, and author Mary Gordon, has been offered within Niagara's classrooms since 2002. Thirty-three (33) classrooms are participating this year within District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) and Niagara Catholic District School Board (NCDSB), impacting over 600 students.

The heart of the program are monthly visits to the classroom by a neighbourhood infant and parent, where children are coached to connect with the vulnerability and humanity of the tiny baby. An ROE Instructor, using a gold-standard curriculum, coaches students to observe and recognize the baby's feelings and then to reflect on when they felt similar emotions. In this experiential learning, the baby is the "Teacher" and a lever, which the Instructor uses to help children identify and reflect on their own feelings and the feelings of others. Children learn about all domains of "their" baby's development, in particular emotional development. Within Niagara Catholic District School Board the Child and Youth Workers are trained Roots of Empathy Instructors and within the District School Board of Niagara the Youth Counsellors are trained to play this vital role. The Niagara Catholic Child and Youth Worker or DSBN Youth Counsellor visits the participating kindergarten and elementary classrooms before and after each baby visit to prepare and reinforce teaching using a specialized curriculum for specific age ranges.

The Baby Celebration is an opportunity to recognize the many community partners who contribute to the success of Roots of Empathy in Niagara. The Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC), a local charitable organization offering a pedagogical resource library, mentoring supports, and professional learning opportunities is honoured to have the opportunity to work alongside the International Roots of Empathy Team and partners within NCDSB and DSBN as a Key Point Agency, supporting the coordination of the program in classrooms across Niagara. The ECCDC's Executive Director Lorrey Arial Bonilla shares in the excitement of the event "we are so honoured to have the opportunity to recognize the commitment of so many families who participated in the program with their newborn baby this year. We are also tremendously grateful for our dedicated community partners within DSBN and NCDSB who continue to be passionate advocates for building caring, peaceful, and compassionate classrooms through Roots of Empathy."

Roots of Empathy is a registered charity and non-profit organization with award-winning national and international programs. Founded in 1996, the program is delivered within 58 Ontario school boards – 76% of all boards in Ontario and continues to grow as more trainers receive training, more programs can be offered.

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For more information, please visit www.rootsofempathy.org or www.eccdc.org or contact:
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