

ACCELERATING CHANGE FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION



Roots of Empathy
Canada
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REINVENTING INNOVATION



An evidence-based emotional literacy programme that brings babies into the classroom during regular school hours to improve empathy and reduce violence among children from ages 5 to 12.

SOLUTION

Through Roots of Empathy, emotional literacy —the ability to recognise and understand each other’s emotions— becomes a core academic subject within the educational programme. Its curriculum aims to reduce levels of child aggression, countering the physical, psychological and neurological effects of violence and helping children acquire those abilities needed to build successful relationships. By teaching empathy and emotional literacy, students develop a sense of responsibility, learn to challenge cruelty, recognise and manage their own emotions.

PROVEN EVIDENCE



Outputs:

- Programmes have reached over 800,000 children worldwide¹.

Outcomes:

- Compared with pupils from the control group, participants significantly increase their affective empathy and prosocial behaviour and exhibit a decrease in levels of aggression².
- From the teachers’ perspective, prosocial behaviour, physical aggression, and indirect aggression improve significantly after the programme and are maintained three years later. Some behaviours continue to show improvement³.

Sources: Roots of Empathy (ROE) is supported by 17 years of research conducted across three continents, including a variety of randomised and non-randomised control studies.

¹ Summary of Roots of Empathy Research 2001- 2017.

² Wrigley, J. et al. (2015) “Evaluation of Roots of Empathy in Scotland 2014-2015, Final Report for Action for Children”

³ Santos, R.G., et al. (2011). “Effectiveness of school-based violence prevention for children and youth: Cluster randomized controlled field trial of the Roots of Empathy program with replication and three-year follow-up”. *Healthcare Quarterly*, 14, 80-90.

RECOGNITIONS AND AWARDS

HundrED Innovation (2019). Canada's Top Social Innovator, Manning Innovation Award (2011). Ashoka Globalizer (2011). Ashoka Fellowship (2002).

HOW IT WORKS

The programme is delivered during regular school hours, using a comprehensive, specialised curriculum that is adapted to four different grade levels, reaching students in different stages of their development and allowing for maximum impact.

Each class 'adopts' a baby, who visits the classroom along with a parent and a trained instructor once a month during a school year. The instructor meets with the class before and after each visit, for a total of 27 sessions. Each visit focusses on a different issue related to the baby's development, including sleep, crying, safety and emotions. During a typical visit, the students observe, ask questions and discuss the baby's behaviour and temperament, learning to respond appropriately to what the baby is trying to 'tell them' through non-verbal language.

Through recognising the baby's emotions, students learn to identify and label the feelings of others, while being able to explore and discuss their own feelings. This helps them understand how violent attitudes, like bullying, affect their peers.

PROVEN INTERREGIONAL ADAPTATION



Initially developed in Canada. Implemented in Costa Rica, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Switzerland, the United States and the United Kingdom.

THE OPPORTUNITY FRAMEWORK

Programmes designed to reverse levels of violence and abuse often fail because they focus on consequences, rather than on providing individuals with alternative ways of interacting; and also because they exclusively target the victim or bully. ROE is focussed on prevention and works with the whole class, enabling students to develop a sense of responsibility, challenge cruelty and, at the same time, recognise and manage their own emotions.

Empathy cannot be successfully taught through traditional instruction, but it can be developed experientially. That is why, in this learning process, the baby is the "teacher" and a catalyst to create a safe space and help children identify and reflect on emotions. In addition to reducing levels of aggression and bullying within the class, ROE changes teachers, the school culture and communities as a whole, contributing to create more peaceful, caring and civil societies.

When it comes to maximising the opportunities of children at risk of exclusion, ROE works in the prevention lever, laying the foundations for later success in life.

SCALABLE INCOME MODEL



In Canada, Roots of Empathy is primarily funded through government grants (61%). Additional funds come from sponsorships and private donations as well as fees from training programmes and consultancies.

ADVANCED TRANSFERENCE MODEL



TOOLKIT FOR IMPLEMENTATION ROOTS OF EMPATHY

Expansion strategies vary depending on the local context and the demand volume: scaling often occurs through lead agencies and, as the programme grows beyond agency jurisdictions, Roots of Empathy creates non-profit organisations. The role of lead agencies is mainly to organise and fundraise, and ROE provides the programme and works to keep its integrity, frequently visiting and speaking to groups, assigning ROE staff to form relationships and building local capacity by training instructors.

Roots of Empathy would begin with a 6-to-8-month start-up phase in order to lay the groundwork in the country. This would include:

- Hiring, orientation and training of a local programme manager.
- Building awareness in the local community.
- Establishing communication and promotional materials.
- Legal and regulatory requirements to operate.
- Translation of the curriculum.

With the groundwork in place, the programme would launch at the beginning of the school year. Services from Roots of Empathy consist of:

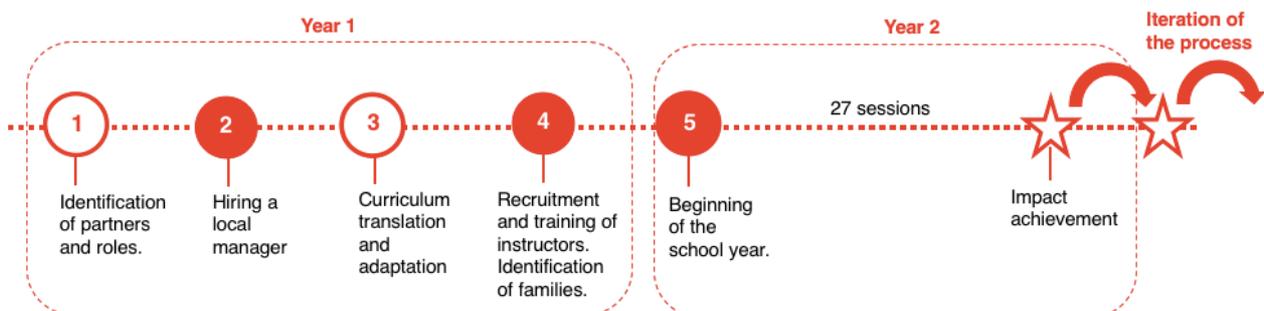
- A full four-day training and a one-day mid-year training for new instructors.
- Mentoring throughout the year.
- Copies of the curriculum, learning materials and literature.
- Programme support and strategic oversight over the 27 weeks (the baby and its mother participate in 9 sessions, and instructors also visit the class before and after each family visit).
- Baby celebration at the end of the year.

KEY AGENTS AND ROLES

The model relies on a diversity of funding supporters and relationships with individuals and organisations:

- A local manager acting as a representative for the programme and a liaison between Roots of Empathy and potential stakeholders. This person would be required to speak English, have a local network and access to community influencers, experience with fundraising and in education, and a background in working with families and children.
- Lead agencies. Education, community and human service organisations who provide organisational capacity, local knowledge and connections with schools, instructors and volunteer families.
- Certified instructors and volunteer parents and infants who deliver the weekly lessons.
- Schools and teachers committed to supporting the programme, providing the time, space and resources required, as it takes place during the instructional school day.
- Governments. Relationships with various ministries or departments (from education to public health, social justice and welfare) help develop networks of connections throughout the country.

FIRST STEPS



1. Identification of partners in all needed roles.
2. Hiring a local manager.

*TOOLKIT FOR IMPLEMENTATION
ROOTS OF EMPATHY*

3. Translation and curriculum adaptation.
4. Recruitment and training of the instructors. Identification of volunteer families at the end of the school year: a pregnant woman expecting a baby, thus the new born will have less than 4 months at the beginning of the school year.
5. Programme launch at the beginning of the next school year.
6. Iteration of the process with other groups and schools.

OTHER RELATED LINKS

Video presentation

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/fNxkCt9Pm3o>

Summary of Roots of Empathy Research 2001- 2017

<http://www.rootsofempathy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Roots-of-Empathy-Research-Summary-1.pdf>

Wrigley, J. et al. (2015) "Evaluation of Roots of Empathy in Scotland 2014-2015, Final Report for Action for Children"

https://www.rootsofempathy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/ROE_Scotland_Exec_Summary.pdf

Santos, R.G., et al. (2011). "Effectiveness of school-based violence prevention for children and youth: Cluster randomized controlled field trial of the Roots of Empathy program with replication and three-year follow-up". *Healthcare Quarterly*, 14, 80-90.

https://www.longwoods.com/articles/images/HQ_vol14_ChildHealth_Issue2_Santos.pdf

Ashoka profile

<https://www.ashoka.org/tr/fellow/mary-gordon>

ACCELERATING CHANGE FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION - ACSI

Catalysing the transfer of successful innovations among European cities.

Project implemented by UpSocial in collaboration with partner cities (Athens, Barcelona, Lisbon, Rotterdam and Stockholm), with the generous support of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and "la Caixa" Foundation.

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March 2019

