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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Children and Family Development  
Ministry of Education

### **B.C. EXPANDS EMPATHY PROGRAM FOR PRESCHOOLERS**

PRINCE GEORGE – The Province will invest \$800,000 to expand the Seeds of Empathy program to 50 preschool and child care settings over the next two years, announced Linda Reid, Minister of State for Childcare, and Shirley Bond, Minister of Education and Deputy Premier.

Reid and Bond made the announcement today at a celebration for Roots of Empathy babies and program founder Mary Gordon.

“The Seeds of Empathy program fosters the development of positive social and emotional behaviours in the critical early years of a child’s life,” said Reid. “The earlier we can help teach little ones about vulnerability, diversity and respecting and valuing others, the better off we all are when those children enter the school system.”

The program is currently offered in nine preschool, child care and Aboriginal Head Start settings throughout the province. The new grant will allow expansion of the program to an additional 16 centres in the next school year and another 25 centres in 2008/09.

“Reaching out to youngsters at an early age to nurture these critical social skills will pay dividends once they enter the school system,” said Bond. “It’s one more way we can provide children every opportunity to achieve their full potential.”

Children who participate in the Seeds of Empathy program get to interact with families with small babies from a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds and take part in a reading program.

“B.C. was the first province to provide funding for Roots of Empathy, the big sister of Seeds of Empathy, and now they’ve shown great initiative in introducing Seeds for three-to-five-year-olds,” said Seeds of Empathy program founder Mary Gordon. “Like the Roots program, Seeds of Empathy develops children’s pro-social skills, reduces aggression and develops positive attitudes to literacy and literacy skills in preschoolers.”

The Province has just renewed annual \$1-million funding for the Roots of Empathy Program for school-aged children.

Sixteen-thousand students between the ages of five and 14 in 640 B.C. classrooms in 478 schools are involved in the Roots program this year. Since 2000, Roots of Empathy has reached 43,575 students in British Columbia. The program is offered in English, French and French Immersion classrooms. For more information on these programs, please visit [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/early\\_childhood/roots.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/early_childhood/roots.htm).

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