

The Role of Empathy in Entrepreneurship by Ashoka

What does empathy look like in action, and how can you incorporate into your business model? Last week saw the Ashoka Change Week host the Ashoka Support Network Global Summit, with social enterprises from around the world sharing their stories of how develop empathy in business...

Empathy - the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, is a key skill for entrepreneurs that want to create impact.

Without this foundational skill, we will hurt people and disrupt institutions.

Everyone needs the empathic skill in order to adapt, make good decisions, collaborate effectively and thrive. Research in cognitive neuroscience has shown a strong correlation between mindfulness and our ability to empathize. Stress, meanwhile, activates our less social, more primitive survival instincts, which impedes our ability to empathize and be compassionate and even makes it harder to absorb new information.

Name: Mary Gordon

Organisation: Roots of Empathy

Getting to the root of empathy

Roots of Empathy helps young school children develop their emotional competence. In multiple studies across various countries it has been proven to reduce levels of aggression and bullying. So far, the organisation has reached over 500,000 children around the world. Mary Gordon believes that the root of empathy is the bond between a mother and her child.

How does it work? The organisation brings a new baby and mother into the classroom of primary school students. During the class, a trained facilitator prompts the students to interact with the baby, and understand how it feels. For this lucky class, Mary Gordon Founder of Roots of Empathy is the facilitator. She asks the class about baby; How is she feeling? How do you know? What is she focused on? How do you feel when she is sad?

The students answer with surprising clarity. They talk about how the class has affected them in other ways. From one 9 year old, We can tell when someone is sad, and we know how that feels. We've learned to how to feel empathy for each other.

The students were asked what their hopes and dreams are for Abby. To do well in school,

to grow up safely and to be happy. The program runs in 11 countries, in different languages, and as Mary Gordon points out, someone always says to be happy. Children around the world are not different in their hopes for next generation.

At the end of the class, the head teacher of the school has an admission. This was the most challenging class in the school this time last year. Many of the children have learning difficulties. Since Roots for Empathy started, everyone has noticed a dramatic change for the better. Well be rolling it out in two more classes at the start of the next school year.

As the programme continues to grow, it sows the seeds of empathy in the next generation.

Name: Lili Lapenna
Organization: MyBnK

MyBnK leading the way to ethical banking

By designing programmes that teach financial literacy, Lapenna is paving the way for ethical banking, spending and investment. MyBnk is training school children to make informed financial decisions as they become young adults and face the challenges of an increasingly competitive job market.

Empathy plays an important role in the work we do at MyBnk, says Lapenna. MyBnk involves a youth advisory council of 16-35 year olds to redesign their programs to keep them relevant.

Lapennas latest project is to bring the work she has been doing with children, to the adult market as well. The first step in designing a programme is to get deep, honest feedback from different audiences and engage them in the process.

Lily is fostering and educating a generation of people who will become the enterprising and financially empowered citizens of the future. Her aim is to fundamentally change the way they relate to finance, financial services, enterprise, and ultimately their attitudes toward achieving a fulfilled life.

Name: Charlie Murphy
Organization: Partners for Youth Empowerment

The transformative power of creativity

At the core of Charlie Murphys work is the belief in the transformative power of creativity. His vision is to revolutionise the way teachers, educators, facilitators, and youth workers engage with young people to bring out their sense of purpose in the world. Young people tend to thrive in the company of adults who are alive to their own creativity, says Murphy. Partners for Youth Empowerment currently works in seven countries, having reached over 150,000 young people through camp programmes and trainings in 2012.

In an engaging and interactive sessions Charlie enticed workshop participants out of their

comfort zones by focusing on creativity based engagement. Activities centred around sharing and listening exercises, role playing games, and creating metaphors for how people can see themselves as changemakers. He invites social entrepreneurs to think of themselves as the crack that opens up over time to bring down the wall.

We're working to create a world where education becomes synonymous with engagement and real-world solutions and problems, because you don't need to be an artist to use the arts in your work or your life.