



**Outreach Scholarship Community  
Partnership Award**

In recognition of a mutually beneficial and sustained  
campus–community research partnership.

**Rachel Fisher**

**DREAM-M Project: Deafness Research and  
Education Across Mid-Michigan**

The Outreach Scholarship Community Partnership Award is  
supported by the MSU Quality Fund.



*From left: Rose M. Smith, Rachel Fisher, and Clare Koenigsknecht*

### **Rachel Fisher**

*Department of Pediatrics and Human Development,  
College of Human Medicine*

### **DREAM-M Project: Deafness Research and Education Across Mid-Michigan**

Geneticist Rachel Fisher and the DREAM-M Project: Deafness Research and Education Across Mid-Michigan provide an exemplary model of campus–community collaboration that has applied rigorous research methods to identify critical information related to genetic hearing loss.

A plan for the project was formulated in the mid-1990s when a team of scientists—Dr. Fisher; Karen Friderici, professor of microbiology and molecular genetics; and Jill Elfenbein, associate professor of communicative sciences and disorders—discovered several individuals who shared a form of congenital deafness, ranging from mild to profound, in a close-knit farmland community encompassing three villages. Looking to form a model for community-based research that was sensitive and effective, Dr. Fisher and the research team worked with deaf and hard of hearing individuals, their families, and members of the community to form two community advisory boards, an ethics committee, and a research advisory committee.

The work has resulted in identifying several mutations in two different genes that cause the inherited deafness within these families. Early detection and treatment are beneficial for patient and family support. "Dr. Fisher taught us the intricacies of genetic study, made it understandable, and helped us understand what information was important to the project," said Rose M. Smith, a community advisory board founding member.

The work by Dr. Fisher and the DREAM-M Project participants has led to development of a new and innovative partnership between the participating community and MSU researchers. Named CoSAGE—Community-based Cooperative for Studies Across Generations, the partnership seeks to discover the genetic factors within this community that contribute to common diseases such as Alzheimer's and breast cancer and to translate the information collected into meaningful interventions that improve the lives of community residents and their families.

The accomplishments achieved over the past several years provide visible evidence that Rachel Fisher, the team of MSU researchers, and the DREAM-M Project: Deafness Research and Education across Mid-Michigan deserve recognition by Michigan State University with the Outreach Scholarship Community Partnership Award.