

**Outreach Scholarship Community Partnership Award honors  
MSU geneticist Rachel Fisher and the Dream-M Project: Deafness  
Research across Mid-Michigan**

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EAST LANSING, Mich. – MSU geneticist Dr. Rachel Fisher and the Dream-M Project: Deafness Research across Mid-Michigan were named co-recipients of the **2010 Outreach Scholarship Community Partnership Award** during the annual MSU Awards Convocation on Tuesday, February 9, 2010.

Fisher and a team of scientists have worked with community members in a compact mid-Michigan area for more than a decade to identify critical information related to genetic hearing loss.



In the mid-1990s Fisher and the team discovered several individuals in a closely knit farmland community who shared a form of congenital deafness. Karen Friderici, professor of microbiology and molecular genetics, and Jill Elfenbein, associate professor of communicative sciences and disorders, worked with Fisher to identify several mutations in two different genes that cause the inherited deafness within these families. They found a new mutation in the Connexin 26 (Cx26) gene. Mutations in this gene result in the most common forms of deafness.

While collecting family histories, the research team discovered the hearing loss involved five related families in the area, where residents were predominantly descendants of German immigrants.

Looking to form a model for community-based research that was sensitive and effective, the MSU research team worked with deaf and hard of hearing individuals, their families, and members of the community to form the Dream-M Project, comprising two community advisory boards, an ethics committee, and a research advisory committee.

More than 30 project participants were notified of the award and invited to the MSU Awards Convocation, including fellow researchers, community advisory board members, and community residents who were involved with the study. Mrs. Rose Smith and Mr. Clare Koenigsnecht represented the Dream-M Project on behalf of the community at the ceremony.

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“This is most certainly a shared honor,” said Fisher, who is now professor emeritus of Pediatrics and Human Development in the College of Human Medicine. “The most gratifying aspect is that the community valued the Dream-M Project and our contributions, and continued their support and participation with another innovative partnership named CoSAGE – Community-based cooperative for Studies Across Generations.”

The CoSAGE goal is to discover genetic factors within this community that contribute to common diseases such as Alzheimer’s or breast cancer, and translate the information collected into meaningful interventions that improve the lives of community residents and their families. The goals are similar to the community-based research model formed with the Dream-M Project: conduct community interviews to collect health and genetic information and, after analysis, discuss the findings with community participants.

MSU’s Outreach Scholarship Community Partnership Award is conferred annually and provides University-wide recognition of highly engaged community-based research collaborations that positively impact both the community and the scholarship of MSU faculty work.

Learn more about current and past recipients of the [Outreach Scholarship Community Partnership Award](#).

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