

EMBARGOED PRESS RELEASE: TO BE RELEASED ON OCTOBER 10, 2014

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The Jacobs Foundation announces the recipients of the Klaus J. Jacobs Awards, endowed with 1.2 million Swiss francs (1.25M USD)

- **The 2014 Klaus J. Jacobs Research Prize goes to Professor Michael Meaney, McGill University, Ludmer Centre for Neuroinformatics and Mental Health, Douglas Mental Health University Institute, Montreal, Canada.**
- **Winner of the 2014 Klaus J. Jacobs Best Practice Prize is the Serenity Harm Reduction Program Zambia (SHARPZ) in Lusaka, Zambia.**

***Zurich, October 10, 2014* – The Jacobs Foundation, an international Zurich-based foundation, which promotes child and youth development, has announced the recipients of this year’s [Klaus J. Jacobs Awards](#). The Research Prize, endowed with one million Swiss francs, goes to neurobiologist Michael Meaney. The Best Practice Prize, which includes an award of 200,000 Swiss francs, goes to the trauma intervention program SHARPZ in Zambia. The Klaus J. Jacobs Awards will be presented on December 5, 2014, at an award ceremony at the University of Zurich, Switzerland.**

Michael Meaney – 2014 Klaus J. Jacobs Research Prize Laureate

McGill University Professor Michael Meaney is awarded the 2014 Klaus J. Jacobs Research Prize in recognition of his groundbreaking achievements in child and youth development. A [jury of experts](#) selected Meaney for this honor because of his “pioneering, cutting edge research on the biological mechanisms by which parental behavior affects offspring development. Beyond the purely scientific value of his research, Meaney’s work has tangible implications for psychosocial interventions and social policy measures to promote child and youth development.”

Meaney studies how experiences shape biology at the molecular level. His research focuses on the following questions: How do genes and environment interact to produce individual differences in brain function? Why are some better able than others to deal with illness, psychological problems or adverse life circumstances? Is it possible to determine an individual's susceptibility to certain environmental influences by looking at that person's biology, and can interventions reduce or even eliminate that susceptibility?

Life experiences alter genes

In the 1990s, using studies of mother rats and their pups, Meaney was able to identify biological mechanisms by which a mother's care for her young – that is, her behavior, rather than her genes – can result in a long-term change in the offspring's development. In 2009, Meaney and his colleagues applied these insights to human studies. They looked at samples of brain tissue from suicide victims who had been abused as children, suicide victims who had not been abused, and individuals who had not been abused and had died of natural causes.

For the first time, it was possible to show for humans that childhood experiences leave biochemical markers in an individual's DNA. Experiences in the family context, particularly during the first years of life, become part of a child's biology and influence the child's health and attainments throughout life – in positive as well as negative ways.

“One size doesn't fit all” – The future of intervention lies in customization

“Our biggest challenge now is to understand the biology of vulnerability,” explains Meaney. “The risk an individual carries. Second, can we then chart the reversibility through intervention programs? And can we evaluate the biological impact of the intervention at the level of the individual?”

Meaney's research has the potential to produce significant changes in social policy. Now that we know that childhood experiences change how genes are expressed, we may be able to identify the children who are most at risk and put in place appropriate interventions. This will make it possible to develop therapies tailored to the needs of each child – therapies that are likely to produce the greatest benefits and to be most cost-effective over the long term.

Serenity Harm Reduction Program Zambia – 2014 Klaus J. Jacobs Best Practice Prize Laureate

In Zambia, many of today's young people are trapped in poverty, with harmful consequences for their future. It is not uncommon for them to use alcohol or drugs as a means of coping with economic and social stress. The Serenity Harm Reduction Program Zambia (SHARPZ) is a collaborative agency that offers comprehensive alcohol- and drug-abuse prevention services as well as targeted programs to promote mental health and reduce or prevent harmful substance use. SHARPZ takes a public-health approach to the issue of drug and alcohol abuse, influenced by the social and medical realities of the response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Zambia. It has developed evidence-based interventions designed to address not just the issues that arise from substance abuse, but the factors that contribute to it, such as childhood trauma.

SHARPZ currently has twenty staff members and collaborates with six external clinical resource persons.

SHARPZ is guided by a *Public Health/Harm-Reduction Approach* to health care. This approach is based on the conviction that there are three dimensions of drug and alcohol abuse that need to be addressed in order to design meaningful interventions: the AGENT (the substance); the HOST (the person who is susceptible to abusing alcohol or drugs) and the ENVIRONMENT (the person's family/community). Rather than advocating a one-size-fits-all approach, SHARPZ facilitates 12 step-inspired programs for clients who have chosen a path of total abstinence on their road to recovery.

SHARPZ has used Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) as an evidence-based approach to address the needs of children who have been affected by trauma and their families. SHARPZ is not only an active participant in many of the studies of TF-CBT that have been conducted in Zambia; it is also the one organization that has continued to provide counselors trained in TF-CBT and ongoing supervision, and that offers these services to the community on a regular basis.

“This is an exceptional achievement that is extremely rare in low-resource countries – the art of sustaining an evidence-based intervention,” according to a statement by the Jacobs Foundation Board of Trustees. “SHARPZ has been chosen to receive the 2014 Klaus J. Jacobs Best Practice Prize in recognition of its leadership in implementing evidence-based best practices to help traumatized children in a low-resource, high-stress population.”

The Klaus J. Jacobs Awards

In memory of its founder, entrepreneur Klaus J. Jacobs, who passed away in 2008, each year since 2009 the Jacobs Foundation has presented two awards for outstanding achievements in research and practice in the field of child and youth development. The awards are endowed with total of 1.2 million Swiss francs.

The **Klaus J. Jacobs Research Prize**, which includes an award of one million francs, honors scientific achievements that are of exceptional social relevance in promoting the development of children and youth. The Jacobs Foundation attaches great importance to the practical application of scientific findings achieved through interdisciplinary research.

The **Klaus J. Jacobs Best Practice Prize** recognizes extraordinary efforts by institutions or individuals to implement, in a practical setting, innovative ideas related to child and youth development. This prize includes an award of 200,000 francs.

The Jacobs Foundation

The [Jacobs Foundation](#) was established by Klaus J. Jacobs and his family in 1989 in Zurich, Switzerland. In 2001, the founder surrendered his entire share of the Jacobs Holding AG to the Jacobs Foundation. The Foundation's endowment in 2013 totaled 4.5 billion Swiss francs (\$4.8 billion). The Jacobs Foundation's goal is to contribute to productive youth development by supporting research and intervention projects and through dialogue and network building. The Jacobs Foundation is one of the leading European foundations in the space of child and youth development. The Foundation's grant making totaled Swiss francs 40.1M in 2013. [Annual report 2013](#). About two-thirds of the grantmaking goes to scientific research in youth and child development.