



## Royce Abbey Fellowship winner named Postdoctoral Fellowship

As a clinical psychologist at the University of New South Wales Psychology Clinic, Dr David Hawes regularly sees young children who display anti-social behaviour or have what is known in medical circles as conduct problems.

“Conduct problems cost society millions of dollars every year through the mental health and criminal justice systems,” said Dr Hawes.

“This doesn't take into account the emotional cost of this behaviour on the young children themselves, their families, their teachers and friends.

“Fortunately we have a very good success rate with most children if they are treated early.

“However there are still a small number of children who go on to experience chronic problems.”

Dr Hawes investigated this disparity in treatment outcomes for children with conduct problems for his Doctor of Philosophy which he completed at the University of New South Wales last year.

In his research Dr Hawes identified “callous-unemotional traits” for example, limited empathy and guilt and constricted emotions, in children with exceptionally severe and chronic anti-social behaviour who were not responding to treatment.

He said: “This was the first study to show that children with these traits are unlikely to benefit from standard treatments for conduct problems.

“The behaviour of these children is motivated more by rewards than punishments, so they don't respond as well to common discipline strategies such as time-out.”

The Australian Rotary Health Research Fund has awarded Dr Hawes the prestigious Royce Abbey Fellowship.

This is a three-year scholarship worth \$65,000 per year for a researcher who has already completed a PhD and is looking

to build a research career in mental illness.

Dr Hawes' research project is titled *The role of family and child processes in the treatment of conduct problems in children with callous-unemotional traits.*

“My research has already shown that we can identify a form of temperament in early childhood that not only increases a child's risk for future anti-social behaviour, but increases risk for poor treatment outcomes,” Dr Hawes said.

“The traditional approach to understanding childhood conduct problems is to look at the parents' discipline style.

“We now know that it's also important to consider why different children respond to different styles of discipline, and how different children elicit different parenting practices.

“I will be using this scholarship to look at how the characteristics of the child influence parenting styles and how we can improve parent-training interventions by taking these characteristics into account.”



R.I. Past President  
Royce Abbey

## RESEARCH REPORTS

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### Value in family involvement in school mental health program

Researchers in Western Australia have shown that a family-based mental health program improves the mental health and resilience of young adolescents in socially disadvantaged communities.

With the help of grants from the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund (\$48,344 in 2002, \$39,178 in 2003, \$10,000 in 2004), Dr Roberts and Associate Professor Cross from Curtin University of Technology recruited students in their final year of primary school as well as their families to the study which focused on improving family support and co-operation, reducing family isolation and conflict, and strengthening personal and social competence.

At a 30-month follow-up, the children and families who took part in the program reported better levels of healthy functioning, e.g. problem-solving and communication, than those who had not taken part in the program.

The family-based program is now a key part of a school program called Aussie Optimism which is taught in primary schools across Western Australia, Tasmania, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory.

### Research out of the lab and into the real world

The Australian Rotary Health Research Fund has helped finance one of the first studies in the world to investigate the benefits of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) as a treatment for children with anxiety disorders in a real-life clinical setting (\$24,000 in 2000).

While research in universities and schools has previously shown a high success rate for CBT, few studies have compared CBT with other treatments for anxiety, in everyday clinical settings.

Professor Margot Prior and Julie Barrington from the Royal Children's Hospital in Victoria showed that cognitive behavioural therapy and other treatments worked equally well.

Around 70 per cent of children were anxiety-free after 12 months. However,

the children of highly anxious mothers were twice as likely to have an anxiety disorder at the 12 months follow-up. As a result of this research, mothers' anxiety levels are now addressed as part of a treatment program for children with anxiety disorders.

### Depression and heart disease link explained

Scientists have a greater understanding of why depression is a major risk factor for the development of heart disease thanks to research funded by the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund (\$40,000 in 2002, \$40,000 in 2003, \$48,621 in 2004).

A team of researchers led by Dr Gavin Lambert from the Baker Heart Research Institute in Victoria has shown that the sympathetic nervous system, which is part of the nervous system that makes the heart beat harder and faster, is extraordinarily active in patients suffering from major depression.

High rates of sympathetic nerve activity are known to increase the incidence of sudden cardiac death.