

Medal for exceptional contributions 2004



PIONEERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

This year, the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD) salutes the outstanding work of four pioneers who have championed the importance of the early years and improved the lives of young children. The recipients of the 2004 CEECD Medal for Exceptional Contributions to Early Childhood Development are Mrs. Thérèse Gouin-Décarie, Mr. James J. Heckman, Elder Mary Thomas and The Lawson Foundation.

MRS. THÉRÈSE GOUIN-DÉCARIE

An internationally recognized researcher and a much-respected teacher in the Department of Psychology at the Université de Montréal, Thérèse Gouin-Décarie has devoted her professional life to advancing our understanding of the social, emotional and intellectual development of babies and young children. Her work has garnered international attention, helping to create in Quebec a strong foundation of research with young children. Gouin-Décarie was one of the first to study intelligence and affectivity in children born with birth defects from thalidomide. She also pioneered research into the socialization of babies, looking at what they were

attracted to, what scared them and what influenced them.

The mother of four, grandmother of two and recipient of three honorary doctoral degrees and numerous awards, Gouin-Décarie spent almost 40 years teaching and helping students learn about the early childhood years. *"Today, our knowledge has widened and deepened tremendously and is based mostly on countless studies of neurological, motor, affective and social growth during these crucial years. But now we need researchers to tell us how these various aspects of development interact during the most important time of human life."*



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For more information : www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca

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MR. JAMES J. HECKMAN

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Nobel Prize winner James J. Heckman started his career studying job retraining for adult steelworkers and high-school dropouts. His discovery that these training programs were not highly effective led him to embark on groundbreaking research into the long-term effects and benefits of investing in early childhood programs. *"As a society, we cannot afford to postpone investing in children until they become adults, nor can we wait until they reach school age, a time when it may be too late to intervene,"* Heckman notes.

The Henry Schultz Distinguished Service Professor in Economics at the University of Chicago, Heckman has shown that by investing financial resources in programs for very young children, society benefits in the long term with an increase in skilled workers and a decrease in poverty, crime and other social ills. He has also pointed out that since social and emotional skills learned in the period between birth and age five affect school and workplace performance, governments need to support families and people working with young children to ensure they receive the best possible start in life.

ELDER MARY THOMAS

"I'm worried about the children. I want to make people whole again"



ELDER MARY THOMAS

ANeskonlith Elder of the Secwepmec (Shuswap) Nation in British Columbia and the recipient of two honorary degrees, Mary Thomas has used her skills, knowledge and experience to ensure a healthy future for all aboriginal children. *"I'm worried about the children. I want to make people whole again,"* she has said. She has been involved with the First Nations/Inuit Child Care Initiative on both the provincial and national levels. The initiative helped create thousands of new child-care spaces while providing children with care that reflected the cultural and traditional values of their communities. Elder Thomas, who has raised 15 children, has kept alive both the language and the traditions of her people and shared them with Natives and Non-Natives alike through various teaching programs. She and members of her family are now working on creating the Shuswap Centre, an eco-cultural centre focusing on the Interior Salish peoples. The centre's programs will combine science, art and native culture with a particular focus on reaching out to children. A dedicated environmentalist and an expert in traditional Secwepmec plant knowledge, Elder Thomas has been honoured by many organizations, governments and universities.

THE LAWSON FOUNDATION

"We believe the future of a child is so dependent on the support he receives in those early years"



MRS. CONSTANCE GARDINER
on behalf of THE LAWSON FOUNDATION

In 1956, the Honourable Ray Lawson, a former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, established The Lawson Foundation. Over the years, the Foundation has promoted the healthy development of young children as its major focus, especially through its Beginning Years Program. It has supported many Canadian institutions working in the field of early childhood development, including the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research.

The Foundation has worked tirelessly to raise national awareness of the importance of the healthy development of very young children, from the prenatal period to five years of age. It has advanced society's understanding of the significance of the beginning years on children's positive social, emotional and intellectual development.

As Constance Gardiner, past President of the Foundation's Board of Directors, notes, *"We believe the future of a child is so dependent on the support he receives in those early years."* She adds that the Foundation has a commitment to *"take research from the shelf and put it into practice."*