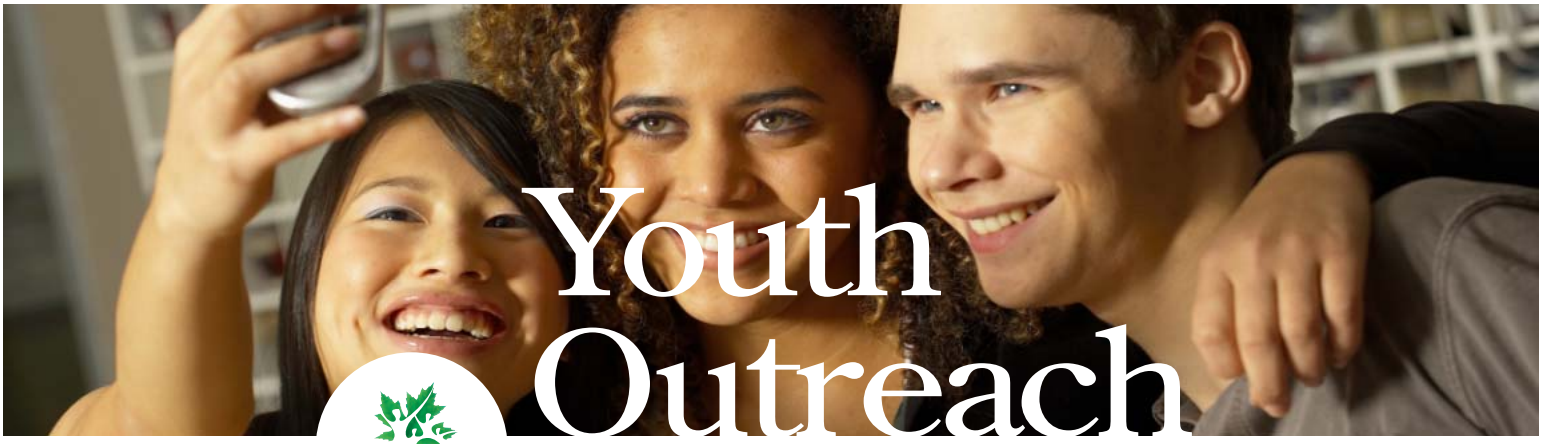

Youth Outreach

CIHR IRSC

Reaching Out to Youth

Synapse, CIHR's youth engagement program, brings Canada's youth together with health researchers in schools, labs, summer camps and at science fairs so that they can explore the world of health research.

Canada has demonstrated that it can be a world leader in health research. For Canada to increase its international impact and to remain competitive, innovative and productive, we need a workforce literate in science and technology. As part of CIHR's knowledge translation activities, CIHR launched a new program called Synapse to help stimulate this literacy among young people and encourage a new generation of researchers. Synapse is a meeting place, a junction that brings together youth with CIHR-funded researchers. The program helps young people learn more about science and research directly from persons immersed in these issues on a daily basis.

Youth Outreach Activities

Identifying and training mentors

In the past year, CIHR launched a new tool for attracting and identifying potential mentors among the over 11,000 Canadian researchers currently supported by CIHR. At present, over 2000 researchers expressed interest in becoming mentors. The Synapse program matches mentors to opportunities offered by national and local science outreach organizations located across Canada. Possible projects include: science fair judging, school lectures, workshops or lab participation. To help potential mentors be more effective, in the past year CIHR began offering a special communications training workshop called *Science with Impact.* Sessions were held at universities across Canada and were attended, on average, by about 20 Synapse mentors per session.

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About CIHR

The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) is the Government of Canada's agency for health research. CIHR's mission is to create new scientific knowledge and to catalyze its translation into improved health, more effective health services and products, and a strengthened Canadian health-care system. Composed of 13 Institutes, CIHR provides leadership and support to more than 11,000 health researchers and trainees across Canada.

Building partnerships

Synapse has established partnerships with a variety of non-profit and charitable organizations as a way for potential mentors to easily and quickly reach young people in their area. Partners include: The Science and Technology Awareness Network (STAN), Let's Talk Science, ACTUA, Youth Science Foundation, Conseil de développement du loisir scientifique and Expo-Sciences.

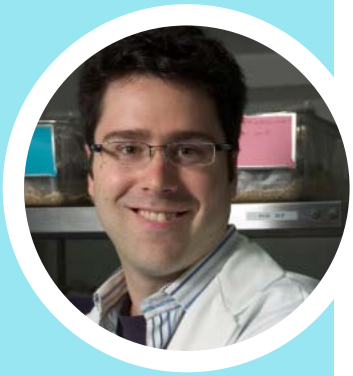
Research and mentorship

The Synapse program also encourages researchers to build mentorship activities into their ongoing research programs. For the next two years, five different research teams were awarded funding to achieve this goal.

Dr. Michel G. Bergeron, director of the Infectious Diseases Research Centre at Laval University in Quebec City, launched the "Researcher for a Day: Synapse" program. Each week, the facility will welcome a new student group (Grade 11-13) for a day. Eight students and two science teachers will get the chance to learn about the latest research into infectious diseases, everything from antibiotics to new AIDS prevention techniques. The education process itself involves safe use of microscopes and lectures.

Dr. Jim Koropatnick, from the University of Western Ontario started a program called "Partners in Experiential Learning" that will give students from 38 high schools in the region a chance to receive hands-on training experience in three areas: cancer biology, circulatory systems and primary health care. Under the supervision of researchers, students can work either part-time in a laboratory over a five-month period during the school year or full-time for a two-month period in the summer.

Mentor Profile



Dr. Frédéric Charron – Building the next generation of health researchers

As a boy, Dr. Frédéric Charron started repairing broken stereo systems. Over the years, this passion for repair found an outlet in science. Now, at Montreal Clinical Research Institute (IRCM), he specializes in helping find ways to repair wiring problems in the central nervous system due to spinal cord injury, strokes and other neurological problems.

But Dr. Charron doesn't plan to do all of this work by himself. He has always believed in mentoring youth, so that they can contribute to health research in the future. He served as a judge at Expo-Sciences science fairs early in his career. Now Dr. Charron acts as a mentor within his lab for nine students who are either at the undergraduate, graduate, PhD or postdoctoral level.

"The lab is an environment where I think I can help students most by transmitting a passion for health research," he says.

Dr. Charron also tries to help younger students reach their scientific goals. Through Synapse, Dr. Charron met Sami Obaid, a high-school student at Cégep André-Grasset. He was impressed with Sami's interest in neurological research and his participation on Team Canada at the 2005 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair competition. Now, Sami has been offered the chance to work in Dr. Charron's lab for the summer of 2007.

"Sami is very motivated in science," Dr. Charron says. "I think he's someone who will be a good candidate here in the summer. I think this will also benefit the lab."