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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUTISM SCIENCE FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES ADDITIONAL 2016 RESEARCH ACCELERATOR GRANT RECIPIENTS IN THE U.S. AND PORTUGAL

First-Ever International Research Grant Offered by ASF

NEW YORK, NY (August 16, 2016) - The Autism Science Foundation, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to funding innovative autism research, today announced two additional recipients of its 2016 Research Accelerator Grants. These grants are designed to expand the scope, speed the progress, increase the efficiency and improve final product dissemination of active autism research grants. The recipients are Clare Harrop, Ph.D., of the University of North Carolina, and Astrid Vicente, Ph.D., of Instituto Nacional de Saúde Doutor Ricardo Jorge (INSA), in Portugal, the first international grant ever offered by ASF.

Dr. Harrop is conducting research using eye tracking technology in order to gain a deeper understanding of what captures attention in females with autism spectrum disorder. One theory of why fewer females than males are diagnosed with autism is that females are more adept at compensating for, or camouflaging, their autism symptoms. Therefore, specific research methods and stimuli need to be developed for males and females. Dr. Harrop is using eye tracking technology to determine what captures each person's attention. Video clips are recorded to show children interacting with varying "levels of sociability," (different numbers of people in different situations), as well as showing children playing with objects that are traditionally targeted at either male or female interests. By understanding what boys and girls pay attention to in social situations, this study will address how more effective instruments can be developed to detect and better understand sex-specific differences in autism and identify factors that may underlie the lower rates of autism in females.

Dr. Vicente is conducting research on the use of the Early Life Exposure Assessment Tool (ELEAT) for autism in Portugal. While both genetic and environmental factors influence an autism diagnosis, very few studies have integrated genetic and environmental data together in an analysis. This is due to a lack of environmental data in genetic samples and the lack of genetic data in most epidemiological studies with exposure data. Recently, ELEAT was created and validated for this purpose and has modules that collect information online or in-person on pre- and post-natal factors, including diet, chemical and lifestyle exposures, and medical information. The accelerator grant will help Dr. Vicente's team translate and culturally adapt the ELEAT into Portuguese so this information can be combined with existing genetic data to speed up the research and discovery of gene/environment interactions in ASD. The Portuguese translation may be used in multiple culturally diverse settings, including

South America, Africa and Asia, where genetic collection in autism samples is already in process.

“Our accelerator grants offer opportunities for researchers to push ahead quickly with promising autism science and rapidly translate their findings into new resources that will help people with autism today,” said Autism Science Foundation President Alison Singer. “We know that there is important science happening around the world, and we will support exciting research everywhere it is taking place.”

Accelerator grants are supported in part by the Karma Foundation.

Accelerator grants are awarded twice per year; in February and August. Applications are currently being accepted for the February 2017 round. Visit www.autismsciencefoundation.org for more information.

About the Autism Science Foundation:

The Autism Science Foundation (ASF) is a 501(c)(3) public charity. Its mission is to support autism research by providing funding to scientists and organizations conducting autism research. ASF also provides information about autism to the general public and serves to increase awareness of autism spectrum disorders and the needs of individuals and families affected by autism. To learn more about the Autism Science Foundation or to make a donation, visit www.autismsciencefoundation.org.

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