



**Fondation Pôle Autisme**

Place du Cirque 2  
1204 Genève  
T. +41 (0)22 322 89 20

To the generous donors who supported the  
« Alexis for Autism » campaign

Geneva, 17 March 2019

---

**Subject** Update on the usage of your donation to the « Alexis for Autism » campaign

---

Dear Madam, Dear Sir,

Time has passed since the wonderful charity event organized by Alexis last June at the Geneva Golf Club, and with this letter I wanted to give you an update on how your generous donation in favor of the « Alexis for Autism » campaign has been used so far.

As I had the opportunity to show you last June, the aim of our research project is to contribute to an earlier diagnosis of autism, so that children get immediate access to interventions that will change their lives. For that purpose, we seek to delineate autism markers in very young children. We are also highly interested in understanding how early intervention help children on the autism spectrum to achieve a better prognosis, and understand how these treatments affect their brain development.

Among all these important questions and after fruitful discussions with Alexis, we decided that the money raised with his campaign would be used to examine a highly innovative research topic scarcely examined so far, namely how early intervention can alter the DNA expression. With this research, we hope to unravel a potential mechanism, known as epigenetic regulation, by which therapeutic intervention durably change genetic expression, in a way that could in turn be transmitted to the offspring of the person who benefitted from the intervention.

Thanks to you and to Alexis, we are now in the process of addressing this unique research question. As I had told you last June, we already collected a large part of the genetic samples required to address this issue, and we mostly needed resources to analyze the genetic samples. For that purpose, we secured a collaboration with an international expert in the field, Prof. Nadine Provençal at the Simon Fraser University (Vancouver, Canada), and completed all the administrative steps to ship and start analyze the genetic samples. I am very happy to share that we just got the approval of our ethic committee so that the samples will be ready to ship to Canada before the end of March. We also hired a lab technician who will prepare the samples for analyses, and a bright Master student who will start analyze the data from this Summer. In the meantime, we also continued to follow children on the spectrum, with about 25 new children who entered our research protocol, and almost 30 children who completed their 2 years follow up and contributed genetic data for this project.

Thanks to your tremendous generosity, we will now be able to analyze how 2 years of early intervention alter genetic expression in a sample of 140 young children. The total amount of over 300'000CHF will cover all the genetic analyses for these children, and contribute to the salary of the afore-mentioned team members dedicated to this specific project. After all this preparation steps, I am very excited to see this project taking off, and would like to warmly thank you for your support in this adventure, which will directly contribute to a greater understanding of the best way of helping young children on the autism spectrum develop to their highest potential. Of course, a special thank goes to Alexis, whose high enthusiasm and contagious can-do attitude has made all of this possible.

I will keep you posted about further development, and I reiterate my deepest gratitude and thanks for your generosity.

With my warmest regards,

**Prof. Marie SCHAER**

SNSF-Assistant Professor at the Department of Psychiatry, University of Geneva  
& Head of the Autism Outpatient Clinic, Fondation Pôle Autisme