

NEWS

Grants aim to help women

This year, Kristen Williams was able to attend all five days of the annual meeting of the American Physical Society (APS). And she participated in an important tutorial a day earlier — all without fretting about her four-year-old daughter.

Williams, a second-year graduate student in computational materials science at Texas A&M University in College Station, was a beneficiary of Elsevier Foundation's New Scholars grant programme, which is now in its second year. (The foundation, which supports libraries as well as early-career scholars, is an offshoot of Elsevier publishing.) The funds, which she received as an APS grant, allowed her to send her daughter to stay with family in Alabama while Williams spent six days in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

"If it weren't for the grant, I would have skipped the tutorial and gone to the meeting for only a couple days," says Williams. "My daughter would have stayed at home with her father, and I would have been thinking, 'Was it OK, was my husband able to pick her up from school today?' With the grant, I was focused at the meeting and not worrying about her."

The APS's Committee on the Status of Women in Physics is one of five organizations globally that collectively received about \$200,000 recently in grant funds from the foundation. The grants are designed to help finance new programmes that will support women in science. The APS is, in turn, granting



David Ruth: focus on early- to mid-career.

its share of those funds — which it is matching — to individual applicants for child-care costs associated with society conferences. Committee chair Mary Hall-Reno says that the APS has tried other family and child-care programmes for its annual meetings but none has been as effective as this. "It's very flexible," she says. "The child doesn't even have to be at the meeting site."

The other recipients of the New Scholars grants are the

Association for Women in Science, which is developing a coaching and support programme for early- to mid-career women; the Maternal and Childcare Union of Tbilisi, Georgia, which is helping women scientists build networking and other career skills; and the European Molecular Biology Organization, the University of the Pacific and the Museum of New Zealand, all of which received child-care funds for their annual conferences.

David Ruth, foundation executive director, says the grants' focus on childcare, family issues and career advancement grew out of discussions with organizations and agencies internationally, all of which identified early- to mid-career women scientists as most likely to leave the field. They found that concerns about work-life balance were a central reason for the exodus. Ruth says the foundation is trying to spur the development of new programmes to address these conflicts, in hopes of reducing the dropout rate. ■

Karen Kaplan

POSTDOC JOURNAL

The moving blues

I wholeheartedly agree with whomever said that getting married and moving are two of the most stressful things in life. With my husband Brett now in the United States, trying to find his way in his new postdoc position, I am left alone to host the garage sale, sell the car and pack our belongings, while still juggling work and the everyday trials and tribulations of motherhood.

Making a move across the globe is both an exciting and a terrifying prospect at any time, but doing it with a three-year-old brings many

other considerations. While Brett struggles to find us an affordable house in a child-friendly neighbourhood and organize suitable day care in the United States, here I try to calm an upset toddler who is missing his daddy, has lost 90% of his toys in the past week and is now sleeping on a mattress.

And sizeable moving costs, which we have to cover, have exacerbated our already shaky financial circumstances. I know we're not alone. This financial crunch is common for postdocs taking a position overseas, and we can only

have faith that the move will reap financial and professional rewards in the future.

Add to the mix the inevitable sadness of leaving behind good friends and familiar surroundings (and, of course, the tropical Australian climate!), and I think I am justified in feeling a little melancholy. And yet I remain excited. I eagerly anticipate our new adventures — even the possibility of celebrating a snowy Christmas. ■

Joanne Isaac was a postdoc in climate-change effects on biodiversity at James Cook University, Townsville, Australia.



IN BRIEF

Grant funding cuts

Researchers may have trouble securing funding from US foundations this year, according to a survey from the New York-based non-profit Foundation Center. Nearly two-thirds of the 1,200 foundations that responded plan to cut the number and/or size of grants. Less-established organizations are at a particular disadvantage, says Steven Lawrence, the centre's senior director of research. However, 14% of the foundations plan to make 'exceptional' grants as a result of the downturn, funding more humanitarian programmes or initiatives outside their usual domain.

Solar R&D in Arizona

Science Foundation Arizona, a non-profit organization that helps to diversify the state's economy, is creating the Solar Technology Institute (STI) with a \$4 million investment. The new partnership of universities and energy industries will launch five solar R&D projects, says STI co-director Dick Powell. One of the project leaders, Roger Angel, a University of Arizona astronomer and optical scientist, will hire about six researchers to produce commercially viable satellite-based reflectors to concentrate sunlight onto photovoltaic cells. Other projects will focus on the use of nanotechnology in energy storage, smart-grid management and reduction of photovoltaic-cell cost.

University research

The quality and amount of a university's research is linked to three factors, a new study reports. These are research funding; ability to decide on its own programmes, hires and budgets; and the level of competition it faces for resources, faculty and students. *The Governance and Performance of Research Universities: Evidence from Europe and the US*, a draft by the non-profit National Bureau of Economic Research, states that if one of the three is missing, research output and quality drops. More research spending spurs more patents if universities are autonomous and have to compete for grants, faculty and students — but whether the relationship is causal or correlative is unclear. Proximity to regions of high innovation and productivity also raises the quality and amount of a university's research output, the report finds.