

Graham Walker, from the Centre for Public Awareness of Science in Australia, was one of three ASPAC Fellows who attended ASPAC 2012 in Singapore. This is his reflection on his experience as a Fellow.

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### **ASPAC Fellowship report – Graham Walker**

I would like to thank the ASPAC community for providing a fellowship to attend the Singapore conference – there were so many positives from it. Above all, I was overwhelmed by the sense of community or even ‘family’ at the conference, complete with mad uncles, patriarchs and matriarchs, and young (and young-at-heart) whipper-snappers full of new ideas. For me, the moment at the end of the last day when our Malaysian colleagues presented a gift to the Japanese following the tsunami tragedy captured that sense of community profoundly.

While somewhat intangible, it left me with the feeling that I was part of a larger movement. Being a PhD student and solo science show performer can be a little isolating sometimes so this was a real plus for me – knowing that other science centres, performers, etc. faced similar challenges. Interactions at the conference allowed me to explore these and share solutions, often only reached collaboratively. This exchange of ideas, and the people I shared them with, were priceless.

The experiences the conference provided were wonderful. Places like Gardens by the Bay and the NUS Demo Lab were as inspiring as they were fun, while the range of speakers and sessions within the conference were stimulating. The Singapore Science Centre were great hosts – they even granted one of my long time wishes to be nearly electrocuted by a Tesla coil! It was particularly good to be exposed to the science that other centres are communicating due to their particular audiences and needs, like natural disasters or health issues. It made me think more about our audiences and using science centres to tackle community problems – something I believe we should be doing more of.

The diversity of programs and presenters was inspirational. They were full of crazy but brilliant ideas like mimed science shows, indoor rainforests, nationwide science show competitions for kids, making an exhibit out of an entire bridge that expands due to heat, or designing a rollercoaster to kill people. Ideas like this have helped shake up my own thinking and are already leading to some interesting collaborations. These will soon grow into fruitful projects with other members of the ASPAC family.

Personally, the conference was a great opportunity to share some of my research on science shows. I was buoyed by the positive response and it was valuable for me to discuss some of the more ‘academic’ aspects of a science show with other presenters. The conference provided a bridge between practice and research. I also got a chance to perform for my peers; this fairly rare opportunity has led to some constructive feedback improving my shows, along with the chance to help others with their shows. All in all, ASPAC 2012 Singapore was a great experience to share and I’d like to thank everyone who was part of that.