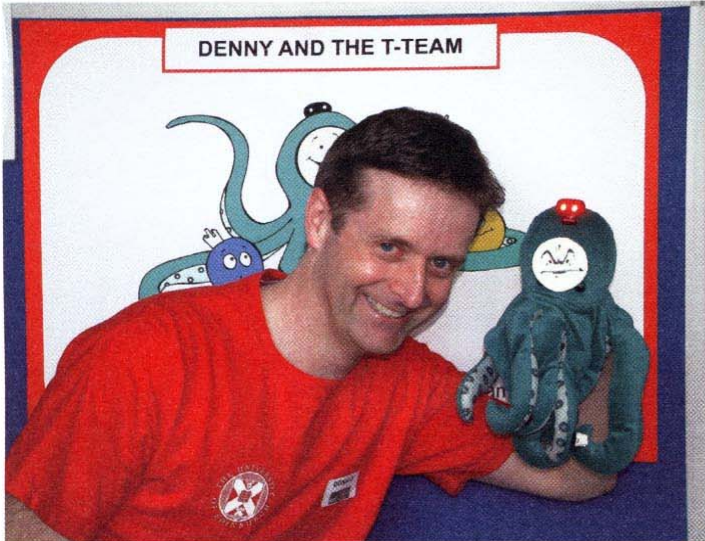




Public Engagement

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE FESTIVAL 2014

5 - 20 April 2014



Donald & Denny

"Would you like to meet Denny the Dendritic Cell"? All eyes stared expectantly at me, wondering if this was going to be fun, or if the bloke with the octopus puppet on his hand was some boring old loser. This was not my usual audience, but here I was, eight months after hesitantly accepting the invitation from **Hannah Hope**, "publically engaging" at the Edinburgh International Science Festival. I'd been confident when I'd conceived my "Denny and the T-team" activity, but now I was about to test drive our creation to that most unforgiving of audiences....children expecting to be entertained!



A volunteer demonstrates the "Rash Decisions" ball pool challenge

Edinburgh's annual Science Festival is one of the largest in Europe; a two-week event that aims to give audiences "amazing experiences through a programme of innovative and inspiring events". Hannah (the BSI's Science Communication Manager) had asked me to consider working with the BSI to develop some new activities to run at the Science Festival, to represent the University of Edinburgh / MRC Centre for Inflammation Research (CIR), where my group is based. So, with the assistance of a fulminating granuloma of CIR staff and students (what is the collective noun for enthusiastic inflammation biologists?), we set out to create some allergy and inflammation-related games and interactive learning activities for children. After weeding out the impractical, the dangerous, the excessively messy (sadly!), and the downright daft ideas, we settled on five main projects. Over the next six months we planned,

designed, rejected, redesigned and created our activities in an apparently ever accelerating tumble towards set up day on the 14 April in the National Museum of Scotland.



The "Operation Protect" games proved popular with kids and volunteers alike!

Our stand was the CIR's debut appearance at the Science Festival and was part of the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine's "Meet the Medical Scientists" drop-in event. With over 2000 visitors to our hall over the five days, our team of twenty CIR staff and student volunteers (gratefully assisted by **Jamie Harris** and **Melanie Lucas** from

the BSI) was kept busy! It was the first time most of us had been involved in this kind of activity and we quickly discovered that it can be a very lively (some might say exhausting!), but thoroughly enjoyable experience. The visiting children revelled in testing their speed at Mel Leech and John Marwick's "Rash Decisions" ball pool challenge; loved getting creative with Iris Mair and Joanne Hay's "Immunological stickers" activity, and had fun with Rhoanne McPherson and team's "Ultraviolet detectives allergen hunt". There were a few glitches; our professionally built "Operation Protect" wrongly identified the thymus as a "NON-immunological" organ! But the effort and enthusiasm of all our volunteers was clearly appreciated by those playing and learning.



Denny and the T-team volunteers

Lastly, what about Denny? This activity involved watching our puppet demonstration before trying to fit the T-cells (table tennis balls with 3D printed receptor blocks) onto the interlocking antigen-blocks on the picture boards hidden around the hall. I am pleased to report that Denny was a smash hit and is already booked for two more events! We are happy to share the 3D designs if anybody is interested, but you'll have to make your own puppet!

So, if Hannah gets in touch, I'd suggest letting that "I've just not got the time" feeling settle and fade, and then say "Yes". It turned out that those children were a much easier crowd than the reviewers for my last paper!

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