

ASTEN Fellowship Report

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My Fellowship in 2010 was to attend and participate at the ASPAC conference hosted by the Otago Museum. I was very keen to attend this conference as the three sub themes being covered; Visitor experience, Growing our people and exhibition development all encompass parts of my role at Scitech. The conference message of “come share, learn and grow together” was also very attractive as I was very keen on sharing my experiences and also learning from other science centres across the Asia Pacific regions.

I learnt a lot from the conference from ideas of interacting with visitors to the vast differences between all our science centres. Some of the presenters came from small regional centres and their experiences in handling multiple roles with limited staff was very informative to larger centres. It was also an eye opening experience looking at how large some of the national science centres are in countries like China and seeing how they deal with tens of thousands of visitors each day.

One of the forum sessions highlighted the difficulty that nearly all science centres/museums are facing with secondary school numbers. Initially I thought it was a localised issue but after hearing from delegates from across the Asian and Pacific regions, it showed that we all need to adjust what we offer to secondary schools if we are to increase numbers. Lots of ideas were suggested like Outreach programs, school challenges, tutoring groups and volunteering roles for high school students.

Being given the opportunity to present at the conference was very useful for me professionally. I gained a lot of confidence from presenting the work which is being done at Scitech in regards to non traditional audiences. I also received a lot of feedback from other organisations who are interested in our work and keen to share ideas.

The host of the conference; Otago Museum were excellent in showing how professional and involved all their staff members are at both the Museums and the other conference activities. The level of customer service from every member was of high quality and made the experience at Otago more memorable.

The conference finished in the scenic town of Queenstown. We were broken into subtheme groups and asked to summarise what opportunities we see in each area. I was in the visitor experience group where we had a lot of ideas about enhancing the visit for primary aged students but we needed more time to discuss the more difficult areas of secondary education, adults and non science centre visitors.

Overall the conference was hugely valuable to me in terms of both professional development and in making contacts with employees at other science centres. I would recommend others to apply for a similar fellowship to get a broader understanding of the science centre community.