NW Noggin: Connecting SfN outreach volunteers and schools in San Diego and DC

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Science needs investment, and engaging the public explains discoveries and builds support for education and research. Integrating arts in STEM ("STEAM") fosters engagement. Here we report on efforts to reach K-12 students and the public about brain research at the 2016 Society for Neuroscience conference in San Diego.

NW Noggin (nwnoggin.org) is an education non-profit that organizes graduates, undergraduates, K-12 students, scientists and artists to collaborate, learn from each other, and excite people about brain research through the arts in both formal and informal settings. Our outreach volunteers (from Portland State University, Oregon Health & Sciences University and other Northwest campuses) have worked with over 12,000 academic priority students since 2012, presenting art projects and research in schools, art museums, symphonies, homeless youth centers, breweries, theaters and even bike shop pubs!

In spring 2016, we brought 26 volunteers to Washington DC to present in DC public schools, Congress, the White House, and the Phillips Collection! In October 2016, we were recognized for an "innovative" outreach model by the Obama White House.

In November of 2016, we were invited to offer insights on outreach by the Society for Neuroscience, during their 2016 annual conference in San Diego, California. In addition to participating in productive discussions at SfN, we also contacted San Diego Public Schools, ArtReach (a local arts institution), and the Neuroscience department at UC San Diego to arrange for actual visits by graduate and undergraduate SfN attendees to local public classrooms!

Students at Jefferson and Linda Vista elementary schools learned about neurons, and how dendrites, soma and axons are structured to perform different functions. Students built their own colorful brain cells out of pipe cleaners, and our volunteers brought them back to the SfN conference to create a captivating and compelling display! Many neuroscientists stopped by to discover how their research had inspired young people in the broader community.

After the conference, we returned the vibrant neurons to the schools, and student artists built their own network, along with drawings and text describing what they'd learned about brain research.

Learn more about these efforts, and our plans for the 2017 SfN conference in DC: http://nwnoggin.org/2017/02/28/brains2dc/

Building excitement and awareness of discoveries in neuroscience through arts-integrated outreach across institutional, state, federal and generational lines trains new scientists to collaborate and communicate, and increases awareness and support for further investment in brain research, and the arts.

For more information go to nwnoggin.org

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