

getEmotional



A RECENT 'getEmotional' event for children was not an invitation to have a tantrum, rather an opportunity for families with young children to find out more about expressing emotions and how scientists use imaging tools in their research to see the emotional brain at work. SINAPSE (Scottish Imaging Network - a platform for scientific excellence) held a public engagement event called 'getEmotional' at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Edinburgh on 7 March 2009. Children and adults alike discovered more about the brain through activities such as 'making a neuron' and 'making an emotional dial'.

The event was part of the National Science and

Engineering Week and was supported with funds from both SINAPSE and Edinburgh Neuroscience. (Edinburgh Neuroscience has an umbrella group of public engagement events called 'getBrainy').

The event was also hosted under the Darwin 200 theme as Charles Darwin was one of the first researchers to investigate the expression of emotion. Whilst everyone is familiar with his work on evolution, not so many people realise he wrote the book 'The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals' in 1872, on how humans and animals express their emotions. He was fascinated by expression and published a set of photographs showing the standard expressions.

Approximately 250 people visited the getEmotional event - the first public engagement activity for the SINAPSE research pooling - and the children really engaged with the activities and enjoyed discovering facts about the brain. Even the very young

joined in by colouring pictures of the brain which highlighted areas where the emotional processing occurs.

The event also included a 'reading Emotions game' designed by Dr Katherine Lymer. Participants had to guess the emotion being expressed from sets of standard facial expressions and videos of gestures. This game was very popular - children were thrilled to learn how to tell emotions by looking at facial expressions, body language and listening to voices. One of the accompanying adults particularly enjoyed the experiment with the emotion perception and said: 'It's great to show work on neuroscience



to a wider audience, especially as many results really challenge our understanding of what it is to be human. It's therefore extremely relevant to everybody but unfortunately hasn't really diffused into many of the mainstream museums and science centres, so this kind of activity is ideal.'

The SINAPSE PhD students who helped on the day meantime, gained an enormous amount of experience by learning how to explain the brain in a clear and straightforward manner - as well as how to be entertaining and engaging! They found it challenging but were very impressed with how the children who took part could take on board many facts about the brain with ease.

The event will now be rolled out across Scotland with further help from SINAPSE staff and PhD students.

SINAPSE is funded by the Scottish Funding Council, the Chief Scientist Office and an alliance of 6 Scottish universities (Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh Glasgow, Stirling and St Andrews) to improve brain imaging research across Scotland.

Call for entries

SCOTLAND'S TOP award for innovation carries a cash award of £50,000. The Gannochy Trust Innovation Award of The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) is presented annually to a young innovator whose work benefits Scotland's wellbeing.

Targeted at a new generation of Scottish innovator, any individual aged 45 and under working in Scotland

is eligible to compete for the award. The award carries a valuable cash prize of £50,000 to an individual, and a prestigious specially commissioned gold medal. Closing date for entries for this year is 8 May 2009.

Application forms are available from The Royal Society of Edinburgh.

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A choc a day

RESEARCHERS FROM Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh have shown that dark chocolate rich in polyphenols can serve as a convenient daily source of antioxidant, reduce blood pressure and lower blood sugar levels. Surprisingly, results also showed that participants involved in the research did not gain any weight while consuming their quota of dark chocolate!

Dr Emad Al-Dujaili, senior lecturer in Biochemistry explained: 'Our research into the effects of dark chocolate consumption has shown that it can reduce blood pressure and therefore has the potential to alleviate hypertension. It can also reduce blood sugar levels which is helpful for diabetics. These effects can benefit patients with metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular disease and obesity.'