



Volunteering with CHaOS

British Science Association Science Communication Conference 2011

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Cambridge Hands-On Science (more fondly known as CHaOS) is a volunteer organisation based in Cambridge that aims to bring fun, hands-on science experiments to children and families. CHaOS is run entirely by student volunteers from the University of Cambridge, and expects to see over 7,000 people this year in schools and in public events. These events are run both in Cambridge itself, where we see 2,000 people at our largest one-day event, and in areas as far apart as Devon and Scotland during our month-long Summer Roadshow.

CHaOS began from an event in Cambridge Science week, organised by students who thought science outreach events should be more interactive. They begged, borrowed and stole enough equipment to open an event to the public, using space in the Dept of Zoology. The first science week event "Crash, Bang, Squelch!", took place in 1998, and we've continued to build on this successful format. In 2003 the student volunteers decided to take the experiments on the road to areas less accessible to science outreach; the first CHaOS Science Roadshow ran for one week. In 2011 the Summer Roadshow will be running for five weeks, visits schools, town halls, festivals and even a scout camp. Each of these events has a similar format- same groups of children/ families rotate freely around a range of experiments, each of which is explained by an enthusiastic student volunteers.

We think that there are three elements to the CHaOS model that are key:

- 1) Hands-on experiments, which pack in boxes: these fun hands-on experiments pack easily into boxes, allowing them to be set-up in a wide range of venues.
- 2) CHaOS website: provides information to the public, hosts our experiment explanations, and helps us to manage our volunteers
- 3) Enthusiastic volunteers: we recruit students, who often have little experience of science outreach. After giving them basic training they are almost always very successful at engaging with members of the public. By repeating their explanation of a simple experiment to different groups they can discover first hand what makes an engaging interaction!

Find out more about CHaOS by:

Visiting our website www.chaossience.org.uk

Emailing us: contact@chaossience.org.uk