

Remote conferencing: finding community in isolation

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Earlier this year knowing that without a bursary I would not be able to attend UKSG I applied for the **John Merriman Joint NASIG/UKSG Award**. As someone who suffers from imposter syndrome I did not think I had any chance of getting it but as I am not an early career professional or student this was the only bursary (at that time) available to me. Indeed had the extra bursaries that were later released been available earlier I would not have bothered to apply for the Merriman Award despite it including attendance at NASIG!

To my utter amazement I was awarded it and in the weeks that followed and with confidence soaring my mind was already whirling with ideas I could propose and implement to enhance our service. Then COVID-19 turned everyone's lives upside down and the conferences had to be cancelled. Undaunted I still intended to 'attend' UKSG and look up articles written by presenters I had planned to see e.g. [Decolonizing the curriculum](#) by Elizabeth Charles and [Destroying the silo: how breaking down barriers can lead to proactive and co-operative researcher support](#) by Cath Dishman and Katherine Stephan. I also intended to finally read all the *Insights* articles I had bookmarked to read later. However the day UKSG was originally meant to begin coincided with the start of a number of bad mental health days for me and I was not able to. Not surprising really as we are in the middle of a global pandemic and many of us, including myself, are working and living in isolation.

In the following months I felt guilty each time another *Insights* article was published and knowing I had gotten no further with my reading/watch lists. So when NASIG announced that their conference was going online I felt I had chance to redeem myself as I felt I had failed to recreate the conference experience for UKSG. Normally I feel I need to attend every presentation possible including ones not related to my particular role but relevant to a colleague in the library but given that the conference was free and available to all I gave myself no pressure to attend every session especially given the time difference.

A [Statement against Racism](#) and a Land acknowledgment preceded Janetta Waterhouse's opening keynote. Important reminders that there is still a huge amount of anti-racism work to be done in libraries. Despite giving myself no pressure on attending all sessions I did end up doing that anyway for the first day. The imposter's need for perfectionism and to be a workaholic is strong! I particularly want to applaud Tony Zanders for his excellent facilitation of the live chat during the breaks on day one. I appreciated that in addition to the scholarly communications and open research themed talks that I was able to indulge my metadata loving and cataloguer side with the presentations on linked data, authority control workflows, and catching up on the [Keepers Registry](#). All good conferences include great social events and I was able to take part in the 'fun' run and ice cream break (not at the same time). The experience of eating an ice cream alone on a cold and rainy day in Edinburgh was a wee bit different than if it had been in Washington, Spokane though. Despite not being physically close to each other, experiencing the conference together online did generate a feeling for me of community and collaborative learning. Links to slides and recordings are available from the [schedule](#) and NASIG's YouTube [channel](#).

We are often advised to exercise to improve wellbeing and mental health (which is very true) but sometimes when in the throes of a bad mental health day(s) that can be unachievable and the self-chastisement afterwards for not doing x, y or z just feeds the negative thinking. So back on UK time and with UKSG making a number of recorded sessions that were due to take place in Brighton [available](#), my intention is to not go it alone as before but to find two consecutive days to 'attend' an alternative UKSG conference together with the other members of the research support team, to generate discussions and some conference 'buzz' with each other and maybe even include a socially distant social coffee/event.

Who knows what will happen in the future but I hope I can attend these conferences in person next year, to be able to network, gain inspiration from colleagues and share experiences and to get back some of the confidence felt when I heard I had won the John Merriman Award. In these isolating times human contact is even more valuable, and I do still have some soft toy conference swag to bag...



Image of UKSG conference swag from twitter

Link: <https://twitter.com/LesaLionHeart/status/1232825479129903107?s=20>