

Big Society possible, find researchers

June 23 2010

Research released today by academics at The University of Manchester and University of Southampton finds it is possible to get citizens to do more to create a 'Big Society'.

The team tested a range of techniques to encourage people to give to charities, recycle, volunteer, and discuss controversial topics online.

The project was funded over three years, mainly by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Professor Peter John from the University of Manchester says, “We show citizens are willing to change their behaviour and do more to help themselves and others, if approached in the right way. We also discover how easy it is to get them involved.”

Professor Gerry Stoker from the University of Southampton says, “But this also needs local government to be less paternalistic, more challenging to residents, and have higher expectations of citizens to make this happen.”

The team used experimental techniques to discover that individuals can make a difference - and a 'nudge' from their local council or volunteer group can stimulate change.

The research findings are being released at an event in London on Wednesday 23 June, when Greg Clark, Minister for Decentralisation,

will make his first speech on the subject and join in a discussion.

Research outcomes include:

- Door-to-door canvassing leading to a 10% increase in kerbside recycling
- Book [donations](#) going up by 22% as a result of people pledging to donate, and donators' names being publicly displayed
- Citizens telephoning a call centre were asked if they were interested in civic activity and in a pilot over a short period from two neighbourhoods, 63 people said yes
- Provision of tailored information about [organ donation](#) resulted in a 17% increase in registered donors

Minister for Decentralisation, Greg Clark, welcomed the findings, adding, “This research confirms my fundamental belief that people are perfectly willing and able to take the lead in transforming their neighbourhoods; and the more they take pride in the places they live, the more they want to contribute. The old fashioned use of rules, instructions and directions of ten fails, whereas helping [people](#) to do the things they want to, succeeds. I welcome the work by Manchester and Southampton Universities - it shows that [citizens](#) together can create the Big Society.”

Provided by University of Southampton

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