

REDISCOVERING THE CIVIC AND ACHIEVING BETTER OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC POLICY

Policy Briefing Number 10

Title: Books for Schools in South Africa: A Pledge and Publicity Campaign

Brief Description of the Project:

- A randomised controlled trial to test the effectiveness of different “nudges” in encouraging people to make charitable donations. The idea is that if people make a commitment to do something positive for society they are more likely to do it.
- Letters were sent to 12000 households in two electoral wards in Manchester asking them to donate a book to help set up school libraries in South Africa. Households were randomly assigned to one of 3 groups of equal size:
 - Pledge group. We sent a letter advertising the book collection and asking them to pledge (postcard, email or phone) a book. A few weeks later we sent a reminder letter, with details of drop-off points.
 - Pledge & Publicity group. We sent two similar letters, and in addition told households that a list of book donors would be displayed in the local drop-off points.
 - Control group. We sent two similar letters, without the pledge or the offer of publicity.
- Residents were asked to take donated books to one of six book collection points, three in each area, during Children’s Book Week, 27th Feb – 6th March 2010.
- The book collection was organised with Community Heart, a charity formed by Denis Goldberg, which takes books from the UK to set up school libraries in South Africa (UK registered charity no. 1052817).
- Afterwards, we posted the results and the names of book donors in all the local collection points, to thank donors.

Key findings

- 7000 books were donated. They are currently being sorted and packed ready to go to schools in South Africa. The books were very high quality and included books for all ages of children.
- 7.2% of the control group gave books, compared to 8.1% of the pledge group and 8.8% of the pledge & publicity group
- Asking households to pledge increased book donations from 7.2% to 8.1%, a 12.5% increase but the difference is too small to be statistically significant.
- The combined approach of asking for a pledge and promising local publicity increased book donations from 7.2% to 8.8%, a 22%** increase ($p < 0.01$).
- The response to the book collection was highest in less deprived neighbourhoods; in areas with a high proportion of retired residents and in areas with a low proportion of single person households. After taking those into account, the effect of an area having high numbers of children under 16 or a high number of religious people was not significant.

Policy Relevance and Implications:

- A pledge campaign which tells people their donation will be made public led to a 22% increase in book donations.
- A pledge and publicity campaign could potentially be applied to other situations where citizens are encouraged to adopt civic behaviour. Examples might include:
 - A pledge to undertake environmental action such as recycling, energy saving, or alternatives to car travel, followed by publicity for those who stick to the pledge.
 - A pledge to volunteer or campaign for a cause, with a promise that a list will be displayed as a thank you to those who gave their time.
 - At the neighbourhood level, a pledge to keep to tenancy agreements followed by publicity for those who stick to it.
 - A pledge to attend an annual workplace blood donation session, with a thank you list of donors displayed afterwards

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