

## **Third Sector Commentary: Individual Giving and Philanthropy – a third sector perspective, Jo Curry, The Community Foundation serving Tyne and Wear and Northumberland**

The NETSRG creates the opportunity for academics and charitable practitioners to discuss academic research. It bridges the two sectors effectively and is a welcome addition. When approaching an academic paper I ask the following three questions:

- What does the paper tell me?
- What is the practical application of the research?
- Is the research that underpins it robust?

Whilst my emphasis is on the second question, far too often this is the leanest section of the work. This year we considered three papers on philanthropy.

Private giving and philanthropy - their place in a big society was written by Professor Cathy Pharoeh in 2011, when the buzz around 'Big Society' and expectations were at their greatest, since which time a lot of water has past under the bridge. Pharoeh examines patterns of giving over the last thirty years in which the average percentage of expenditure devoted to giving to charity by the general public did not change, with the over 65s giving the most. The donor base she concludes is increasingly narrowing to older wealthier donors. Philanthropy does not necessarily have sufficient resources and a diverse enough base to extend easily or rapidly into meeting the new demands of building a big society. Even if there were, the things that philanthropists prefer to support and what the state funds does not entirely match. An increase in philanthropy would not necessarily bring help to causes most at risk of statutory spending cuts, and this factor together with the overall policy was underdeveloped by government.

Avoiding the ask - this American field experiment was carried out by Adreoneoni, Rao and Trachtman during the Salvation Army's annual campaign. Researchers observed the behaviour of 17000 people as they passed collectors whilst shopping over a four day period. The paper examines the 'warm glow' that gives experience and what compels rational

altruists to avoid the situation. They conclude that if a person can look ahead and see that they will be confronted with a situation that will require them to engage in empathetic thinking, which in turn may trigger concerns for social image, altruism or guilt, they may wish to avoid this as a means of self-control. Just as we should not eat our favourite dessert at every opportunity, we can also not give every time.

Whilst there was virtually no avoidance of silent collectors, in sharp contrast, one third chose to avoid a short verbal request. Nonetheless, a simple "please give today" increased giving by 65 percent, leading the research to conclude that asking is powerful, and thereby proving the Geordie maxim that 'shy bairns get nowt'

Feeling poor acting stingy by Wiepking and Breeze concludes that understanding a persons perception of money and their attitude to financial security is an important factor in understanding their charitable giving. This is independent of actual income and wealth. The key message to fundraisers being that the most fruitful strategy is encouraging those that already give to give more.

