

# Stimulating recycling behaviour in Australia

UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures  
isf.uts.edu.au

Jenni Downes  
Senior Research Consultant  
@JenLouiseD



## About ISF

The Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) conducts solutions-focused, transdisciplinary research in areas that address the most pressing sustainability challenges of our time.



Creating change towards sustainable futures

# About ISF

We're in it for the long run.  
That's why the Sustainable  
Development Goals matter.

- No Poverty
- Zero Hunger
- Good Health and Well-being
- Quality Education
- Gender Equality
- Clean Water and Sanitation
- Affordable and Clean Energy
- Decent Work and Economic Growth
- Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- Reduced Inequalities
- Sustainable Cities and Communities
- Responsible Consumption and Production
- Climate Action
- Life Below Water
- Life on Land
- Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
- Partnerships for the Goals




# Overview

**What  
behaviours  
we need to  
change**

**Why its hard  
to change  
(recycling)  
habits**

**Tested ways  
to stimulate  
change**



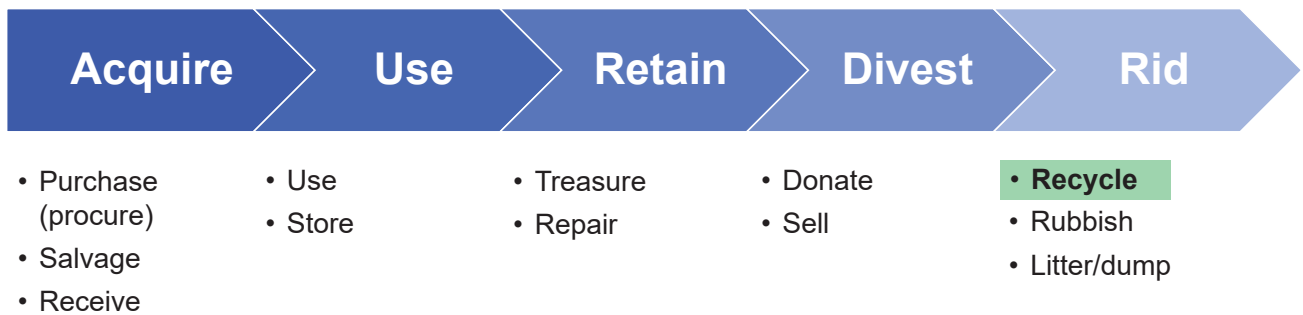
What behaviours  
we need to  
change



What behaviours do we  
need to change?

Uh, recycling ?!

# What behaviours do we need to change?



# What behaviours do we need to change?



# Why its hard to change habits



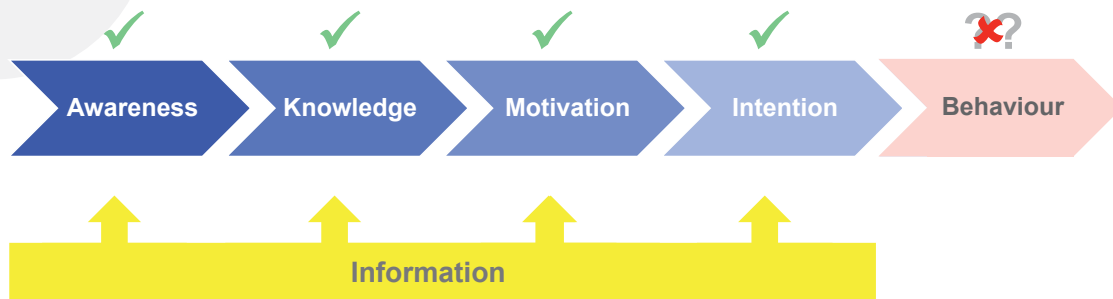
## Barriers to effective recycling

Laziness? (#1 reason cited by others)

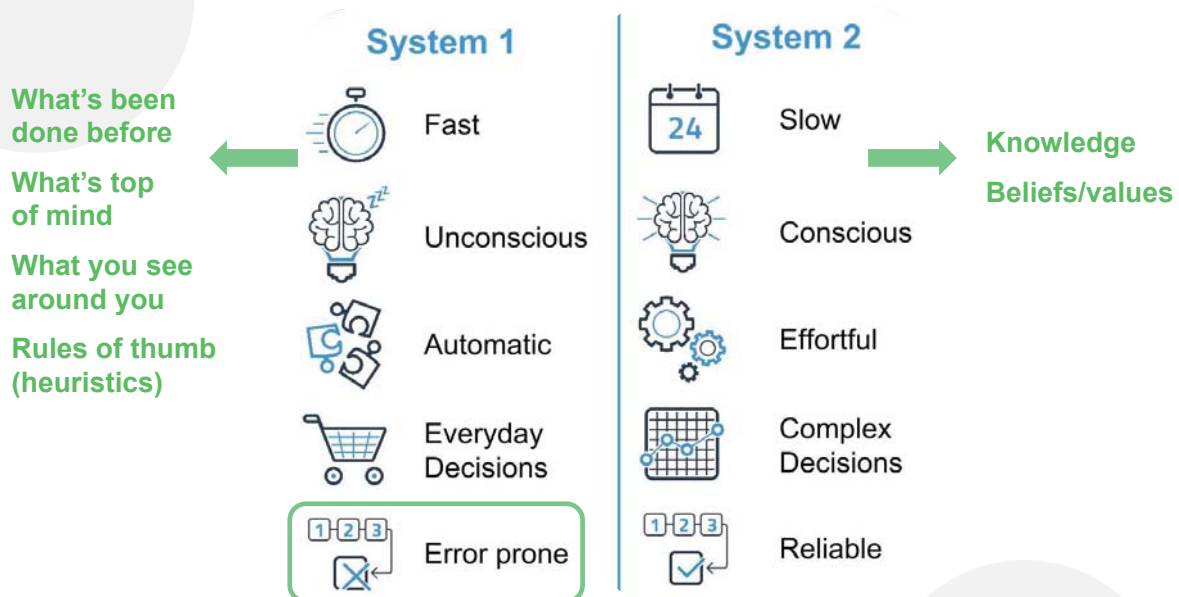
Lack of knowledge? (traditional target for programs)

- Habit
- Inconvenience
- Confusing/complex products
- Broken window syndrome

# Traditional behaviour change



# Habitual behaviour / fast brain



## → Fast brain quiz



**\$100**

**\$50**

20min

Would you drive 20min to save \$50?

13

## → Fast brain quiz



**\$3,000**

**\$2,950**

20min

Would you drive 20min to save \$50?

Why not??

14

# Habitual behaviour / fast brain

## COGNITIVE BIAS CHEAT SHEET BECAUSE THINKING IS HARD



### 1 TOO MUCH INFO

SO ONLY NOTICE...

- CHANGES
- BIZARRENES
- REPETITION
- CONFIRMATION



### 2 NOT ENOUGH MEANING

SO FILL IN GAPS WITH...

- PATTERNS
- GENERALITIES
- BENEFIT OF DOUBT
- EASIER PROBLEMS
- OUR CURRENT MINDSET



### 3 NOT ENOUGH TIME

SO ASSUME...

- WE'RE RIGHT
- WE CAN DO THIS
- NEAREST THING IS BEST
- FINISH WHAT'S STARTED
- KEEP OPTIONS OPEN
- EASIER IS BETTER



### 4 NOT ENOUGH MEMORY

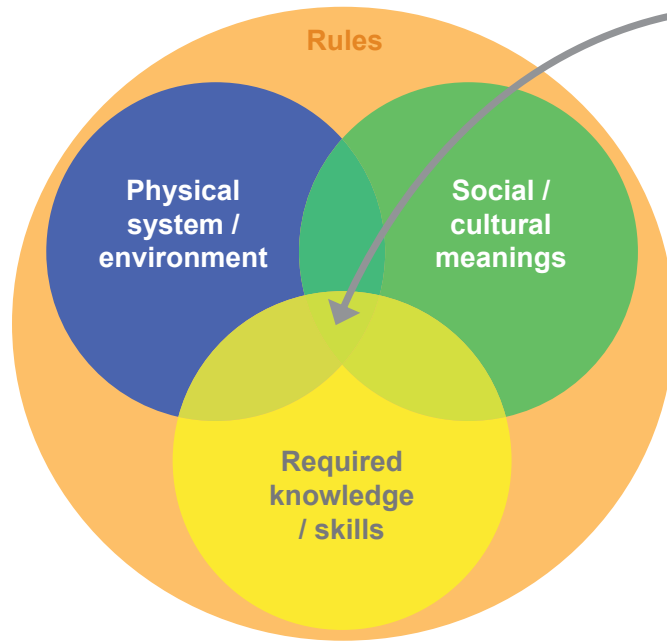
SO SAVE SPACE BY...

- EDITING MEMORIES DOWN
- GENERALIZING
- KEEPING AN EXAMPLE
- USING EXTERNAL MEMORY

BY @DAUSTER  
[HTTP://BIT.LY/THINKING-IS-HARD](http://bit.ly/thinking-is-hard)

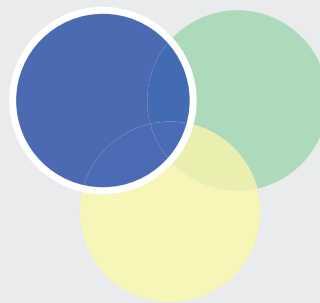
## Ways to stimulate change

# Behaviour 'system'



Behaviour

# Physical system / environment



# Physical system / environment

## Number of waste streams



# Physical system / environment

## Number of waste streams



# Physical system / environment

## Number of waste streams



# Physical system / environment

## Number of waste streams



# Physical system / environment

## Location of bins: convenience



23

# Physical system / environment

## Location of bins: convenience



24

# Physical system / environment

## Location of bins: convenience

Rubbish bins  
in common areas



Recycling  
bin at desk



25

# Physical system / environment

## Location of bins: convenience

**!** But can increase  
contamination

Recycling  
bin at desk



26

# Physical system / environment Salience (arresting, memorable)



# Physical system / environment Salience (arresting, memorable)



vs



Physical system / environment  
Nudging (subconscious cues)



29

Physical system / environment  
Nudging (subconscious cues)



30

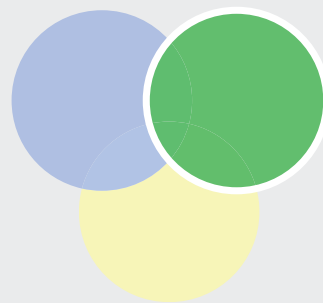
# Physical system / environment

## Nudging (subconscious cues)



31

## Social / cultural meanings



32

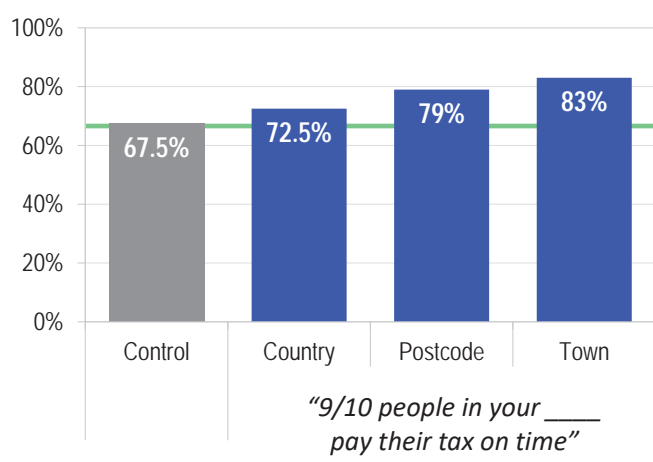
# Social / cultural meanings

## Social proof (desire to conform)



# Social / cultural meanings

## Social proof (desire to conform)



Social / cultural meanings  
Social proof (desire to conform)

**!** But negative  
proof backfires



35

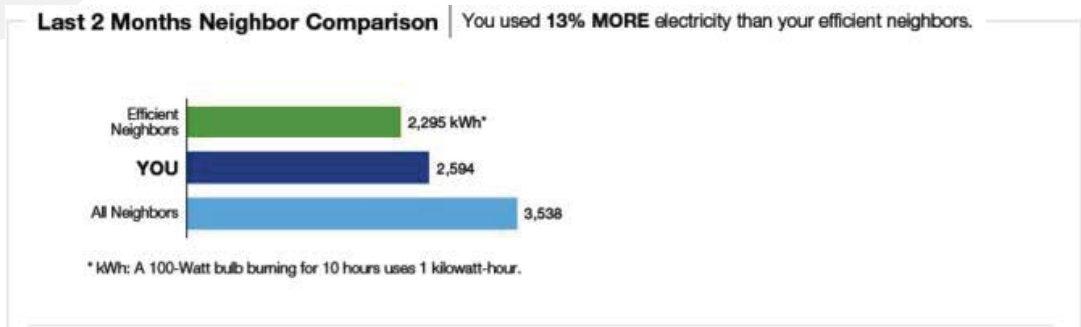
Social / cultural meanings  
Social norms (perceived expectations)



36

# Social / cultural meanings

## Social norms (perceived expectations)



# Social / cultural meanings

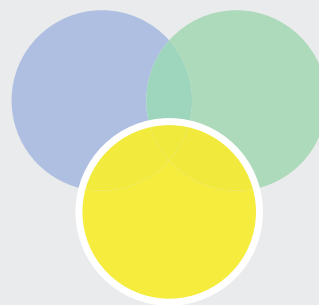
## Social norms (perceived expectations)



Social / cultural meanings  
Social norms (perceived expectations)



Required  
knowledge



# Required knowledge Signage



# Required knowledge Signage



# Required knowledge Signage

**What's Recyclable:**

- Plastics marked #1 through #7 (look on the bottom – red plastic cups are #6, so they're ok)
- Newspaper
- Cardboard (corrugated boxes, cereal & cracker boxes, etc)
- Paper grocery bags
- Magazines, junk mail, stationery and envelopes (even window envelopes are ok)
- Glass bottles & jars (empty & rinsed)
- Aluminum/tin cans, foil, trays (again, rinse them out first)
- All plastic food containers marked #1 & #2
- Microwave food trays

**What's Not:**

- Plastic wrap
- Plastic grocery bags
- Pizza boxes (because of the grease)
- All wax laminated cartons/containers (milk and juice cartons)
- Styrofoam (including disposable coffee cups)
- Frozen/microwave food boxes (trays are ok)
- Wax cereal/cracker box liners
- Paper towels, napkins, tissue paper
- Paper plates, soiled paper
- Aluminum foil boxes
- Fast food wrappers
- Food waste

Remember, if an item is covered in food, it is not recyclable. Food is one of the worst contaminants in the recycling process, and some estimates put the costs of irresponsible contamination in the neighborhood of \$700 million per year industry-wide\*. So please be sure to rinse out cups, cans, jars, etc before throwing them in the bin. Thank you!

\* Source: <http://wprovide.com/wprovidel>

Brought to you by **WPROVIDE**

**UTS:000 Cleans Up**

**WHAT GOES IN EACH BIN?**

**FOOD WASTE**

- Coffee grounds
- Tea bags
- Bread
- Meat
- Cheese
- Rice
- Vegetable and fruit scraps
- Indoor plant leaves
- Flowers

**GENERAL WASTE**

General waste and recyclable containers in this bin, to be sorted for recycling.

- Plastic, metal and glass containers and bottles
- Milk cartons and papers
- Coffee cups and lids
- Packaging, such as chip packets or food wrapping
- Stationery, such as pens, ring binders or CDs
- Wet or soiled paper
- Tissues and paper towels
- Pizza boxes

**PAPER RECYCLING**

- Plain and coloured paper
- Gloss paper
- Shredded paper
- Envelopes
- Paper folders
- Dividers and document wallets
- Cardboard boxes
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Books
- Cardboard and paper bags

**NO**

- NO food containers
- NO plastic bags
- NO packaging
- NO coffee cups
- NO tissues or wet paper towels
- NO coffee cups
- NO dirty food wrappings
- NO tissues or wet paper towels
- NO pizza boxes

There are separate bins for specialist items, such as batteries, e-waste, Styrofoam, cartridges and construction waste around the University. Visit [www.uts.cleansup.uts.edu.au](http://www.uts.cleansup.uts.edu.au) for more information.

# Required knowledge Signage

- Simple terms
- Clear, real pictures
- Limited text
- Common mistakes
- Colour coded

**Greensboro Recycling Guide**

Recycle the items below. They should be clean and dry. Rinse only if needed.

**Recycle First. It Matters.**

PAPER	PLASTIC	METAL	GLASS
All Paper	All Bottles	Aluminum, Steel, Tin Cans, Aerosol Cans	All Jars
All Cardboard	All Containers	Pots and Pans	All Bottles
Chipboard	All Jugs	Aluminum Foil, Pans, Trays	
<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>NO</b>
Paper Towels, Tissues, Diapers	Bags, Sheets, Styrofoam, Hoses	Cords, Auto Parts, Electronics	Mirrors, Windows, Dishware

# Thank you



**Jenni Downes**  
Senior Research Consultant  
E: [Jenni.downes@uts.edu.au](mailto:Jenni.downes@uts.edu.au)  
P: 02 9514 4376

**Institute for  
Sustainable Futures**  
[isf.uts.edu.au](http://isf.uts.edu.au)



Creating change towards  
sustainable futures

