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Gemma Alexander   October 30, 2018

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Science is not strictly the domain of academics in white coats. Anyone can be a citizen scientist, collecting and analyzing data from the natural world. It's a great way to learn more about science and the environment, but citizen science can be more than just a self-improving hobby. Eleven-year-old Stella Bowles combined citizen science with social media savvy to rescue the river near her home.

LaHave River

When Bowles was 11, she wanted to swim in the LaHave River, which runs near her home in Nova Scotia, Canada. Her mother told her the water was too contaminated to swim in because toilets in homes along the LaHave flushed directly into the river through illegal straight pipes.

Bowles didn't just take her mother's word for it. Bowles collected water samples from several locations along the river where people swam or boated. She enlisted the help of her science mentor, Dr. David Maxwell, for help testing her water samples. Maxwell researched and compiled a water testing kit, and assisted Bowles to ensure she conducted the tests accurately.

Science and Social Media

Finding levels of fecal contamination far above Canada's federal standards for swimming or boating, Bowles started a campaign to inform her neighbors, many of whom did swim and boat on the river. She put up a sign on the wharf and set up a Facebook page to spread the word. The information reached thousands of residents in and around her small town of about 25,000 people. Many locals didn't know that hundreds of homes in neighboring communities