

# The Homelessness Partnership BCP names the empowering Big Issue as its 'Hero of the Month' for June 2023



A familiar sight on the streets of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, the Big Issue has been awarded the title of 'Hero of the Month' for June by the Homelessness Partnership BCP.

Co-founded in 1991 by social entrepreneurs Lord Bird and Gordon Roddick, the Big Issue is published in four continents and while the magazine is firmly established in British culture, intense work goes on behind the scenes to help its vendors across BCP to move on from homelessness and lead fulfilled, independent lives.

While its editorial is rooted in social justice and raising the profile of homelessness, sales of the magazine provide vendors who have experienced homelessness with an opportunity to earn income, igniting entrepreneurial spirit that helps those in need to embark on a journey of recovery from rough sleeping.

The Big Issue's motto is that it provides a 'hand up, not a hand out' to people without a home, as well as to those who are at risk of losing their home, experiencing long-term unemployment or dealing with mental health issues.

Vendor Outreach Worker at the Big Issue Group in Bournemouth, Helen Tucker, says: "Our vendors are a mix: some are rough sleeping and will come in and buy small number of magazines each day to sell in Bournemouth, for example. Others have slept rough in the past and are now living in privately rented or housing association properties but keep selling to get out and earn income. Vendors who have mental health issues find that our flexible approach to selling – they don't have to work from 9 to 5 – works well for them."

## **Partnership working at its finest**

The Big Issue's business model is simple: vendors buy copies of the magazine for £2 and sell them for £4, so £2 per issue sold goes directly into their pockets. The operation, however, runs much deeper than simply selling magazines and embraces partnership working, as Helen explains: "I look after welfare needs of vendors, working with St Mungo's to help them into housing and providing support with citizenship where needed."

"We work with the Multi-Disciplinary Team [a service in BCP that strives to find successful pathways for the most serious situations of rough sleeping], while also referring vendors to food banks, Half Time [a collaboration between YMCA and Faithworks that helps people to get off the streets] and BH1, The Salvation Army's drop-in centre in Boscombe. We have

vendors who have sold with us for years and are now successfully housed while some have even been helped into retirement.”

The Big Issue works with its Romanian vendors who can have a different set of needs. Most live in privately rented accommodation; can experience citizenship issues and are at risk of poverty. Many have families and are referred to Bundles That Love, a project of Bournemouth Foodbank that provides families with young children in BCP with essentials.

### **Thriving in a post-lockdown world**

The shift from print to digital, combined with the cost-of-living crisis, has hit many UK publishers hard but up to 45,000 copies of the Big Issue still roll off the press every week – an impressive achievement in a world that’s increasingly dominated by online media. Last year the organisation saw a 58% growth in reach and a 10% increase in Big Issue vendors, while collective earnings for vendors rose by 38% to £3.76million.

Helen adds: “People who prefer to read online can take out a digital subscription directly from their local vendor via the Big Issue’s website. But many still enjoy going out and having a conversation with their local vendor and buying a physical copy of the magazine. We still have occasions where vendors come in to buy more copies, because they have sold out. There was a major cultural shift during lockdown when subscriptions increased, but big challenges remained after Covid eased, with less footfall in town centres. Fortunately, it feels like the situation has now recovered.”

### **Looking to the future**

With a healthy circulation, the Big Issue is a powerful platform that can drive homelessness issues to the top of the political agenda. The cover of a recent issue asked if ‘renters can now feel safe in their homes’ – scrutinising the Renters Reform Bill, dubbed ‘the most significant bill in a generation’ by the magazine. Hard-hitting editorial examines if the Bill will shift the balance of power towards people who rent or risk a ‘much talked about landlord exodus’ from the private rental sector.

According to the magazine, since the Government promised to axe Section 21 (no-fault) evictions, 63,160 households asked councils for help to avoid homelessness after receiving a Section 21 notice. This bleak national picture underpins the need for the Homelessness Partnership BCP’s Let’s Talk Renting campaign (visit [www.bit.ly/ltr2023](http://www.bit.ly/ltr2023)) which is providing free advice for private tenants who are in rent arrears or at risk of losing their home.

For Helen, however, the focus is on transforming the lives of vendors in the BCP area. She sums-up: “Our focus is on helping to get sales up and providing vendors with the opportunity to help themselves out of poverty through selling the magazine. They can register as earning money with the DWP through our operation and it’s up to them how many magazines they buy and the hours they work. The Big Issue enables vendors to become their own mini-enterprises, it’s a real job that enables people to help themselves out of poverty. We’re a social enterprise, so please continue to support your local vendors.”

Please visit [www.bigissue.com](http://www.bigissue.com) to find out more.

## About the Big Issue Group

- **Big Issue Group** is a social enterprise whose mission is to create innovative solutions through enterprise that unlock social and economic opportunities for people trapped in poverty.
- For over 30 years, the Big Issue Group has worked to dismantle poverty by creating opportunity through:
  - Supporting over 107,000 marginalised individuals to earn over £150 million in collective income, improving social and economic prospects through selling the Big Issue magazine
  - Facilitating investment in social businesses and charities through Big Issue Invest to deliver social, economic, and environmental impact. Since 2005 we have supported over 550 organisations with over £80 million in funding
  - Always at the forefront of social activism, campaigning for policy change in Government
- The Big Issue Group is deliberately constructed to create the greatest level of positive impact for individuals, organisations and communities through alignment to a shared mission. Big Issue Group consists of a number of different entities:
  - **Big Issue Media:** includes the Big Issue magazine, an award-winning weekly entertainment and current affairs magazine, and BigIssue.com, which provides breaking and in-depth news reporting as well as relevant culture, lifestyle and opinion content. Vendors who sell the magazine are their own mini enterprises, buying magazines for £2 and selling them to the public for £4, keeping the difference. The magazine provides a means to earn a legitimate income direct from vendors, through subscription and via our app.
  - **Big Issue Invest:** our social investment arm, founded in 2005 offers loans and investment from £20,000 to £3 million to social enterprises and charities across the UK. The capital raised by BII is from private sources and not from sales of the magazine. [www.bigissueinvest.com](http://www.bigissueinvest.com)
  - **Big Issue Shop** offers a platform for social trading that will make social and ethical shopping a truly accessible option for consumers, giving people the opportunity to use their spending power to make a positive difference to the world we live in. For more information go to: [www.bigissueshop.com](http://www.bigissueshop.com)
  - **Big Issue e-Bikes:** In 2020, Big Issue Group partnered with ShareBike in the UK to create bike-sharing solutions in combination with social impact. The first eBikes were rolled out in Bristol in early 2022 and have recently launched in Aberdeen with plans to expand nationwide and to provide hundreds of green jobs to under-served communities. To find out more please visit: <https://bigissue.bike/>.
  - **Big Issue Recruit:** is a new person centric recruitment services to support people who face barriers to work into sustainable employment. For more information visit <https://jobs.bigissue.com/>
  - **Lord John Bird's parliamentary office:** Lord Bird, founder of Big Issue Group, is an independent 'People's Peer', appointed in 2015. In 2022, we launched our Big Futures campaign to break the cycle of poverty now, calling for the government to make policy change in the following areas: keeping people in their homes, ending the low wage economy and creating millions of green jobs. For more information visit [www.bigissue.com/campaigns/big-futures/](http://www.bigissue.com/campaigns/big-futures/)
  - **Big Exchange:** co-founded by Big Issue Group, enables the public to choose financial investments that are creating positive solutions to the world's biggest challenges. Invest through ISAs, JISA's and GIAs [www.bigexchange.com](http://www.bigexchange.com)

For further information on the Big Issue Group visit [About Big Issue Group](#) or <https://www.bigissue.com/group-impact-report-2022/>