

# THE BIG ISSUE IN THE north

## Vendor Audit 2008

The Big Issue in the North carries out a regular audit of its vendors to provide a snapshot of information about who is selling the magazine, why they are selling it and what their needs are.

We carry out these surveys to ensure we are aware of the issues affecting our vendors and to identify any changing trends. It also helps us to ensure the support we offer to vendors is appropriate and we share this information with other agencies.

### What does The Big Issue in the North do?

The Big Issue in the North is an independent, innovative publisher which provides people who are homeless or vulnerably housed with a means to earn a legitimate income. Our vendors tell us that selling The Big Issue in the North helps

them to build confidence and gives them the motivation to change their lives. It gives vendors stability and structure in their day to day lives alongside the opportunity to develop key life skills such as budgeting.

The Big Issue in the North Trust supports vendors of The Big Issue in the North to get the services they need to improve their lives. We see our job as helping people to get the services they need - whether that's permanent accommodation, access to drug and/or alcohol treatment, a GP, English Language courses or other training.

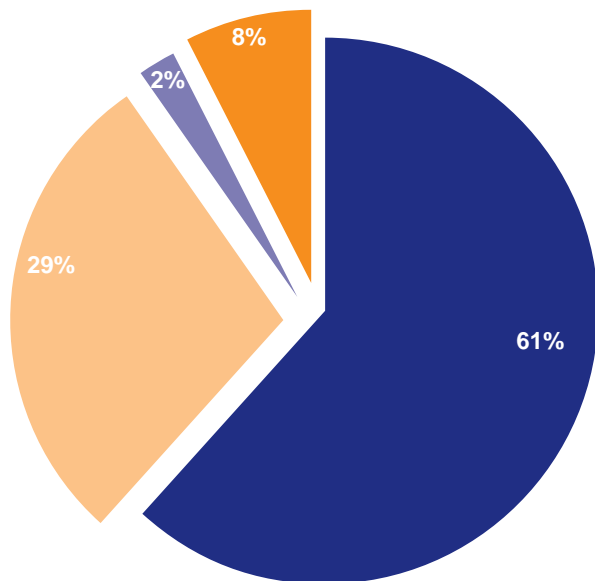
In any given week, over 300 vendors actively sell The Big Issue in the North in 190 locations across the North of England. In a year The Big Issue in the North can work with over 900 people.

### How is The Big Issue in the North funded?

The Big Issue in the North is a social business. Its income is generated through selling the magazine to vendors and from selling advertising space in the magazine.

It is supported by charitable donations (through The Big Issue in the North Trust) but these make up a small part of our income.

All of the income generated by The Big Issue in the North and Trust goes back into running the business and the charity including production of the magazine, staff and building costs.



Income sources 2007/08



## The way The Big Issue in the North works

Vendors buy the magazine from The Big Issue in the North for 70 pence and sell for £1.50 making 80 pence profit on every copy they sell.\*

Vendors of The Big Issue in the North magazine are self employed. The Big Issue in the North sets out guidelines for selling the magazine, which are enforced through the code of conduct. We make regular outreach visits to pitches to support vendors and to ensure that they understand and conform to the code of conduct.

Vendors sell on agreed pitches in city centres and out of town areas across the north of England, from the Scottish

borders to Stoke on Trent and coast to coast (see the map opposite).

All vendors wear a badge which shows their photograph, their unique vendor number and their pitch. Vendors selling in city centres wear Big Issue in the North tabards.

### Selling the magazine is working

At any one time around 300 vendors are actively selling The Big Issue in the North magazine across the north of England.

Most vendors (93%) sell for at least 3 days a week with half of all vendors selling for more than 5 days per week - illustrating vendors' commitment to earning an income.

55% of vendors sell in out of town areas. Selling in out of town areas requires

vendors to plan their time, manage and budget their money and generally illustrates an increase in lifestyle stability.

40% of vendors declared they were involved in criminal activity before they started selling The Big Issue in the North. Of these, 97% state they have committed a lot less crime since selling The Big Issue in the North with vendors commenting that they had no need to commit crime as they now have an alternative income. Some vendors also attributed the change to reduced drug and alcohol use and encouragement from our staff.

65% of vendors have never begged.

\*As of February 2009, vendors will buy the magazine for £1 and sell it for £2, so making £1 profit on every magazine sold.

## Are all Big Issue in the North vendors homeless?

All vendors declare themselves homeless, vulnerably housed or in temporary accommodation when they first approach us to sell The Big Issue in the North magazine. Being homeless or vulnerably housed doesn't just mean that vendors are sleeping rough.

Vendors are asked where they spent the night before the audit and the results are shown in Table I (right)

- 11% of vendors slept rough the night before the vendor audit. We know from our contact with vendors that many resort to sleeping rough from time to time in between staying at hostels or with friends. This means that the number sleeping rough on any given night will not necessarily reflect the total number of vendors who are affected by issues related to rough sleeping.

- 35% were in very short term accommodation including hostel, squat, B&B or with family or friends.

- 37% of vendors stayed in a private tenancy. We know from our conversations with vendors that many of these tenancies are insecure and overcrowded and we are proposing to make more detailed enquiries in our 2009 audit.

Nearly three-quarters of vendors who slept rough the night before the audit did not try to get a place in a hostel or a night shelter. This is a shift from 2001, when the first vendor audit was carried out, and 70% of vendors who slept rough wanted a place in a hostel.

The audit indicates that there are fewer people sleeping rough than there were 15 years ago however there are still significant numbers of people who are covered by the wider definition of homelessness. Every year over 900 vulnerable people come to The Big Issue in the North for help. They often have no other means of earning a legitimate income and they need help to resolve the issues which make it difficult for them to move on from homelessness and unemployment

|                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Slept Rough</b>              | 11% |
| <b>Council / HA tenancy</b>     | 10% |
| <b>Private / Rented tenancy</b> | 37% |
| <b>Homeless Hostel</b>          | 8%  |
| <b>B &amp; B</b>                | 2%  |
| <b>Squat</b>                    | 2%  |
| <b>Family / Friend's Place</b>  | 25% |
| <b>Other*</b>                   | 6%  |

table I. Where vendors slept night before audit

## How did vendors become homeless?

27% of vendors arrived in the country without accommodation

27% of vendors became homeless as a result of a relationship breakdown (partner or parents)

7% of vendors became homeless due to drug/alcohol problems

Other reasons given included leaving prison or the armed forces

## Who are the people who selling The Big Issue in the North?

- Over three-quarters of vendors are male.
- 20% of vendors are under 25, 38% are 25–35, 32% are 35–45 and 6% are over 50.
- 56% of vendors were born in the UK.
- 40% of vendors were born in Romania.
- 37% of vendors say that they have a disability or long-term illness that limits their daily ability.
- 67% of vendors have children. Of these, 31% have children living with them.
- 27% of vendors born in the UK have been in care compared to less than 1% of the population as a whole. Very few Romanian vendors have been in care.



*Areas where The Big Issue in the North operates*

- Big Issue in the North office main sales offices
- Big Issue in the North sub-offices

## Moving on

The Big Issue in the North Trust supports the provision of support services to vendors. When vendors move into stable accommodation, they will not automatically become ineligible to sell the magazine or access services. The assessment and support that our staff provide helps vendors to set their own targets and supports them to access the services that they need to enable them to move on. However, people vary in the amount of time they need to change their lives. Some people make progress and move on quickly, others make progress but slip back from time to time. Because of this, we do not have a time limit for selling the magazine but we encourage people to move on when they are ready.

- The most recent audit showed that 60% of vendors have sold for less than 2 years.
- Around 40% of vendors sell for less than a year.
- No vendor has been selling for more than 5 years

## What stops people from moving on?

Table II (*right*) shows the barriers which stop vendors moving on from selling the magazine. The most common barriers to moving on are:

- Housing situation (46%)
- Drug/alcohol use (48%)
- Finances (46%)

Nearly half of all vendors identified these three areas as stopping them moving on, illustrating the complex and multiple needs of vendors selling The Big Issue in the North.

For Roma clients, finances, language issues and other problems associated with being an immigrant are the major barriers. Drug/alcohol use is the biggest barrier for British vendors.

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Physical Health Problems    | 18% |
| Mental Health Problems      | 20% |
| Housing Situation           | 46% |
| Drug / alcohol use          | 48% |
| Finances                    | 46% |
| Lack of qualifications      | 27% |
| Not enough help / support   | 21% |
| Not wanting to make changes | 9%  |
| Lack of motivation          | 19% |
| Lack of confidence          | 22% |
| Other Barriers              | 18% |

Table II. barriers to people moving on

## What is The Big Issue in the North doing to support people?

Every person who signs up to sell The Big Issue in the North has an initial assessment. During this process we help vendors to identify any issues and

problems and decide what support they need to get them to where they want to be. We will then signpost vendors to the appropriate service providers.

The Big Issue in the North Trust (charity no.1056041) works alongside The Big Issue in the North, and applies for funding to deliver particular projects such as breakfast clubs. Wherever possible, we

involve vendors in the running of these projects. Projects change depending on amount and duration of the funding. Other projects have included an allotment project, where vendors got the opportunity to grow their own vegetables, IT training to learn basic IT skills, and arts and poetry groups.

If you would like to make a comment about vendor behaviour or would like to know more about The Big Issue in the North, please contact your local office:

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