

About our vendors...

Who do you work with?

The primary purpose of The Big Issue in the North is to offer a means to earn an income to people who have few other options, and to use this as an opportunity to help them change their lives. People may not be able to access mainstream employment because of their mental health, drug addiction, lack of skills or legal right to be employed in this country. This often results in homelessness or people living in poor quality temporary accommodation. We work with all these people.

75% of our vendors are male

Two thirds of our vendors are aged between 25 and 44

54% of our vendors are British

Are all Big Issue in the North vendors homeless?

Vendors do not have to be homeless. Some of the people we work with are in private or council tenancies and are at risk of becoming homeless, some are homeless and are living in hostels, staying with friends or families or sleeping rough.

Why do you work with so many immigrants?

In January 2007 as European Economic Area nationals, Bulgarians and Romanians became able to move and reside freely in any EU member state (of which England is one). They do not need 'leave to enter' or 'leave to remain' to reside legally in the UK. Since 2007 we have seen an increase in the number of EEA nationals selling the magazine.

Do you check if someone is legal to work first?

As all vendors are self employed we are not required to check their residency status and do not do so.



About our magazine and our charity...

How do you decide on editorial content of the magazine?

The editorial content of the magazine is broad mix of news, features and arts coverage and is decided on by a small but experienced team of journalists. It is vibrant, entertaining, informative and provoking – and appeals to a very diverse readership.

Is The Big Issue in the North magazine just about homelessness?

No, the magazine is broad mix of news, features and arts coverage and covers a range of social issues which can include homelessness.

What does The Big Issue in the North Trust do?

The Big Issue in the North Trust is a small charity which raises funds from the public (about £100k per year) to support vendors. The charity pays for some staff time to support vendors – doing things such as crisis work, assessments, action planning and helping them access other services. It also helps pay for some vendor projects such as the breakfast clubs, gardening and arts projects.

Who pays staff costs?

The Big Issue in the North has three main income streams – income from selling the magazine to vendors,

income from selling advertising space in the magazine and a contract with The Big Issue in the North Trust to provide support to vendors. Staff costs make up 50% of the costs of The Big Issue in the North. The Big Issue in the North is a social business – which means that it re-invests any profits it makes and does not distribute profits to shareholders.



About the support we offer...

What support do you provide to vendors?

We assess every vendor and work with them to identify the issues they face and their aspirations, then help them develop an action plan to improve their lives. We then support them to access services and take up opportunities such as basic skills training and English language courses. Across our offices we run a number of projects such as breakfast clubs, computer suites, gardening and arts projects.

We see vendors when they come in to buy the magazine and staff visit them on pitches.

We offer crisis support – dealing with any issues the vendor has when they visit the office or on outreach.

We offer follow up appointments to vendors to help them achieve their action plans.

We provide support with selling techniques.

What's your drug and alcohol policy? Does The Big Issue in the North just allow people to maintain their addiction?

We have a Code of Conduct which all vendors have to abide by. The Code says that vendors should not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs that affect their ability to work.

If people consistently breach the Code of Conduct they can be asked to stop selling.

Our assessment and action planning process enables us to help vendors identify the things they want to change in their lives and to access drug or alcohol treatment services. People need a regular income and secure accommodation to be able to tackle problems such as drug addiction.

Our vendor audit shows that almost half of our vendors have a substance addiction and we encourage them to access treatment services. However, like any addiction, drug and alcohol addiction is a chronically re-occurring condition and we do not give up on people if they are unable to beat their addiction.

We train our staff so that they can give harm reduction advice to people with drug and alcohol addictions.

86% of vendors say selling the Big Issue in the North has increased their self-confidence

Selling the magazine has motivated 75% of our vendors to change their circumstances

About selling the magazine...

What is the employment status of vendors?

Big Issue in the North vendors are self employed.

Are vendors given the magazine or do they buy it?

They buy each magazine from a Big Issue in the North office for £1 and sell it to the public for £2 keeping the £1 profit they make.

Can people selling the magazine claim benefits?

Yes, like anyone self employed, vendors can claim a range of in work benefits such as Housing Benefit. We ask all vendors to inform the benefits office as soon as they sign up to sell The Big Issue in the North.

How long can people sell the magazine for? How do you decide people are ready to move on?

We do not have a fixed time limit on the time people can sell for. We have tried this in the past and found that people who weren't ready to move on lost the stability of a regular income that selling the magazine provides. However, all vendors undergo an assessment to identify their needs and we support vendors to take opportunities to improve their lives – helping them access services such as drug treatment, training such as English Language classes, and seeking alternative employment.

We do not stop people selling, but encourage people to take up opportunities so they are no longer reliant on selling The Big Issue in the North.

Where can vendors sell?

Vendors sell on agreed pitches in city centres and out of town areas across the North West, Yorkshire and Humber. There are currently 385 pitches. The Big Issue in the North works with shopkeepers, city centre management teams and local agencies to agree pitch locations.

How much do vendors earn?

There is no such thing as an 'typical' week's income. Income varies dependent on a number of factors, from the weather to the time of year or season it is.

Why do they have to sell outside in poor weather?

We are legally able to sell The Big Issue in the North magazine on any public thoroughfare, but we rely on the good will of local retailers to provide us with pitches which are undercover.

Do you provide information to the police or benefits agencies?

We co-operate with any legal request for information from statutory agencies. Some vendors will ask us for information which we provide - such as receipts and proof they are vendors – for statutory agencies.