

FRIENDS OF BIG ISSUE NORTH

Back to work

Cristina has been selling Big Issue North in Birkenhead for over ten years. When lockdown measures were announced in March, forcing us to pull Big Issue North from the street for the safety of our vendors and customers, she found herself out of work for the first time since 2009. With five children to look after, this news was devastating.

“The last few months have been very bad,” she said. “We had very little money and it’s been expensive to buy things for my kids and to pay my bills and my rent. I was desperate.”

At just 30 years old, she has been working since her teens. “I first came to the UK when I was 15 to visit my aunty,” she said. “But I decided to stay. There is nothing in my country. No work. No money.”

Cristina is from a Roma family of ten children and grew up in a village near Bucharest in Romania, where most of her siblings still live. Her childhood was tough. “My mum was a good mother. She always tried to get whatever I needed, even though life was very difficult for my family. When I was a child, if I had just one biscuit, I was happy. Now, because I sell the magazine, I can buy a whole packet of biscuits for my children! I can buy food, clothes, shoes – all the things that they need.”

Cristina didn’t go to school, or at least not for any length of time. She can’t read or write, even in her own language. “I could not speak English when I first came here. When I started selling the magazine people would walk past and swear at me and I would say ‘thank you very much’ because I thought they were saying hello.”

Despite these challenges, very little gets Cristina down. “I am not sad. Never. Because my children are here. I am here. I am always happy for my children.”

Now she has many regular customers who look after her and negative encounters are thankfully rare, although someone did try to harass her a few



weeks ago while she was working.

“He said I should go back to my own country. He said I was stopping homeless people from selling the magazine. I told him Big Issue North is for everybody who needs it. He doesn’t know my situation. I need to sell the magazine for my children. I’m not stopping anyone else.”

This encounter is backed up one of her regular customers, Phil. “He was a bully,” he said, stopping by on Cristina’s pitch at a crossroads in the middle of the Pyramid shopping centre. “I’m always happy to see Cristina. She works hard for her kids.” With a cheeky grin, he added: “I’ve asked her to marry me twice!”

The shopping centre is fairly quiet. Many of the shops have their shutters pulled down. Some have yet to reopen after the lockdown; some went before the virus hit as locals crossed the river to use the Liverpool One shopping centre. Cristina’s noticed a drop in footfall over the years and feels like she’s often competing with the many beggars in the area.

She returns home around four in the afternoon, with her youngest in

a pushchair and flanked by her other children. “My mum works hard,” said Alina, her eldest daughter, aged nine, with ambitions of one day becoming a doctor. “She cleans the house and looks after us.”

The family gather on a black sofa in the small living room at the back of the two bedroomed house in the Toxteth area of the city. The other downstairs room has been converted into a third bedroom for Cristina’s aunty, who does much of the childcare when Cristina is working. Cristina shares one of the bedrooms upstairs with two of her children.

Recently, one of her sons had his bike stolen, and Cristina is still struggling to earn as much as she did before lockdown. “I only made £25 today,” she said. “And I have to buy milk and nappies and something for us to eat tonight.”

What does she wish for in her life? “I don’t know. A bigger house maybe. But I am happy. Sometimes life is okay, sometimes it’s not. I don’t want anything but for my babies.”

Whatever challenges Cristina faces, Big Issue North will always be there to help.

Your generosity allows us to support vendors like Cristina, helping them to change their lives for good. To make a donation, please text BINORTH to 70970 to give £5, call 0161 848 2420 to donate by credit or debit card or to set up a standing order, or visit www.justgiving.com/BigIssueNorth

REMEMBERING WILL

On the 9th of September, we received the incredibly sad news that Will, who sold Big Issue North in Doncaster for several years, had passed away.

Ben Stevenson, who runs our Sheffield office, remembers Will with great fondness. "Will was someone who faced many obstacles during the years I worked with him, and the challenges and fluctuating circumstances he experienced would have taken a toll on even the most resilient of us," he said.

"Through all this, and all the time I worked with Will, I was struck by his resolute desire to help himself through these setbacks, and he used selling the magazine as a way to do this, and to provide himself with every opportunity to positively change his situation. This was evidenced by his amazing work ethic, and frequent visitors to Doncaster Town Centre will have been aware of him as a regular and widely valued part of the Town Centre community.

"Will's desire to help and support himself, and the value placed in his own hard work, meant he was, in many ways, a private man, but he always had time to speak to staff and other vendors, and was well known and liked by vendors across the region, not just those in Doncaster; on many occasions Will brightened up the office with his jokes and discussions about his keen interests of music and football.

"Will's ability to connect with people

and the enjoyment he derived from the social side of selling the magazine, was demonstrated by the amount of public support and compliments we received about him, and enquiries about his wellbeing during times when he wasn't selling; this was on display throughout the years he was a vendor, and, sadly, in response to the tragic news of his passing. It is clear that Will will be greatly missed by many people, very much including all of us at Big Issue North who were fortunate enough to meet and get to know him."

He is also warmly remembered by Andy Lynch, a local photographer with whom he forged a strong bond. "Will was a kind and generous man, always happy to engage in conversation with people and share what little he had with others," Andy said. "He was humble yet had pride, he loved his work with Big Issue North and despite his health issues, he applied himself to working 7 days a week, he knew all his customers and they appreciated him greatly. As he did them.

"Will was poetic and lyrical, he had a bright mind with a philosophical outlook, combined with a great eclectic taste in music it made him good company to be around as conversation was never difficult with him. We would often send messages back and forth to each other quoting song lyrics, we shared some great common ground in this.

"Will was gracious in both his highs and lows, he had many wonderful



aspects to his character and I shall miss Will greatly, he offered me an opportunity to learn about myself at the same time as learning about the difficulties that others face. We spent many hours talking about anything, including politics, music, history and literature and the issues of the world. He was easy to like and comfortable to be around. He was a good guy."

If you would like to share your memories of Will, please email fundraising@bigissueinthenorth.com

NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL

Twenty five years ago, Big Issue North worked very differently to how it does today. Nearly all of our vendors slept rough, and many struggled with substance misuse. In the intervening years, the demographics of our vendors have changed substantially. While the remainder are vulnerably housed, people experiencing homelessness now make up a third of our vendors, and under a sixth suffer from addiction. Instead, many vendors face numerous other barriers to alternative employment, such as a lack of qualifications or work experience, language barriers, or disability. As such, the needs and aspirations of our vendors have changed, too.

Ion, who sells Big Issue North in Liverpool, has another part-time job, but his zero hours contract is too precarious to provide for his family. "I have another job, in an office, but the hours are not reliable," he said. "Sometimes I get many hours and sometimes nothing. This is no good for me. I have seven kids and a wife



and I must earn money for the family and for rent." Like Cristina on page 1, the income he earns from selling Big Issue North is essential to keep himself and his family afloat.

For other vendors, Big Issue North provides a means of working towards a particular goal. When our offices reopened after eleven weeks of closure during lockdown, our vendors were provided with photo ID, such as a driving license, allowing them to accept contactless payments. For Kev, who sells Big Issue North in Beverley, this sparked an ambition to save for a car. "I

may as well get one if I'm going to have a driving licence," he said. "I last owned a car about 15 years ago or something like that. Having a car will really help me get magazines. I can drive to Leeds on a Monday morning and pick them up in one go and then be back on my pitch the same day to start selling."

Since lockdown restrictions have begun to be lifted and our offices have reopened, many new people have come through our doors with an interest in becoming a vendor. All have their own stories, challenges and dreams. Whoever someone is, whatever they have been through and wherever they want to go, Big Issue North is there, and, with your help, will be there for many years to come.

It costs £30 to provide someone with the basics to become a vendor. To take someone from begging to working today and help them to realise their ambitions, please text NEWJOB to 70191 to give £30, or go to www.justgiving.com/BigIssueNorth



TUCK INTO THE NEW YEAR

Our 2021 calendar will soon be available to buy from your local vendor and our online shop!

The theme this time around is vendors' favourite dishes. Twelve vendors from across the north worked with renowned chef Mary-Ellen McTague to create mouthwatering renditions of their favourite meals, ranging from classics like spaghetti bolognese to overseas dishes you may not have heard of, like tocana de pui cu erez, a Romanian chicken stew.

Photographed beautifully by Rebecca Lupton, the calendar comes complete with Mary-Ellen's recipes, so you can recreate the meals that mean the most to our vendors at home.

Calendars will cost £5, with all proceeds supporting our vendors.

To find your local vendor, go to www.bigissuenorth.com/find-a-vendor

SHOW VENDORS THAT YOU CARE



Like many charitable organisations, Coronavirus has posed many challenges for Big Issue North. One is that while supporters could previously donate items for our vendors to our offices, reduced opening hours and efforts to restrict face-to-face contact as much as possible have made this much more difficult.

Thankfully, web and app donation platform the Hope Revolution has provided a solution. We now have our very own Hope Revolution shop, where you can see which items we need and have them sent directly to our offices.

For as little as £1.50, you can donate toiletries, PPE, clothing or coffee to your local office, where they will be provided free of charge to vendors who need them. Lockdown has been an incredibly difficult time for our vendors, but thanks to the Hope Revolution, you can show them that you still care.

If you would like to donate much-needed items through the Hope Revolution, go to www.hope-revolution.org/bigissuenorth

AROUND THE REGIONS

In **MANCHESTER**, two people have gone from begging to working through the Street Engagement Hub, where Big Issue North works in partnership with Greater Manchester Police and numerous other organisations to provide people experiencing homelessness a means to earn an income.

In **LIVERPOOL**, Migrant Help have been offering twice-weekly drop-in sessions for vendors from EU member states. Equipped with PPE and ID, vendors have received the support they needed to apply for settled status, with several successes over the past few months.



In **LEEDS**, several vendors have been supported by staff to open bank accounts. This will not only allow them to accept contactless payments, but also to take more control of their finances, and apply for alternative employment when the time is right for them.

In **SHEFFIELD**, the Hepatitis C Trust and Specialist Nursing Team from Sheffield Hallamshire Hospital have been conducting drop-in tests for vendors, recognising that they often come to buy their magazines, then leave services straight away to sell, and subsequently may have missed opportunities to get tested and discuss treatment options available elsewhere. Eighteen vendors have been tested so far.

THE NEW ISSUE: ISSUE 3

The third edition of *The New Issue*, our glossy quarterly subscription magazine, is out now!

Comprised of real stories beautifully told, it offers stunning photography combined with high-quality independent writing; covering everything from changing landscapes and social issues, to lifestyle and fiction. It's a long read; something to take time over and savour.

All profits from *The New Issue* go to supporting vendors of Big Issue North, helping them overcome barriers to employment and find secure accommodation.

The new edition contains brilliant reportage and photography from Glasgow, where Black Lives Matter protests take to streets divided by a sectarian history.

We meet the girls and women skating their own path in Blackpool, and speak to care home residents whose rich lives

can teach us much about place, time and humanity.

Lessons in democracy from Frome show us that there is political life outside of the main parties, and craftmakers of colour give us a vibrant insight into their life and work.

Prolific writer Joyce Carol Oates' exclusive new short story, *Monstersister*, is dark and uncanny, but not so dark as Britian's colonial history, which an illustrator to life from work by historian Toby Green.

Elsewhere, the body of a bat reminds us to see beauty in difference, Robert Waterhouse gives exiled Hungarian artists the recognition they deserve, and Antonia Charlesworth reminds us to take what we think we know about our favourite garnish with a pinch of salt.



To buy, subscribe or find out more, go to www.bigissuenorth.com/the-new-issue

FEELING CRAFTY?

In these difficult times, we have had to find innovative ways of supporting our vendors.

Our friends at the Greek street paper Shedia avoid waste by upcycling unsold copies into jewellery and homeware. They have been kind enough to share some with us, which you can buy from our online shop, shop.bigissuenorth.com. Inspired by their creativity, we have decided to launch our own range, reducing waste and

generating more funds for our vendors.

This is where you come in! We are looking for volunteers to create items such as bracelets, bangles, necklaces and coasters from old copies of Big Issue North using our simple guide. If you're a dab hand at arts and crafts, you are also very welcome to design your own pieces!

Finished items can be sent to the following address:

Big Issue North
463 Stretford Road
Manchester
M16 9AB

We can't wait to see what you make!



For the guide, or for magazines to work with, send us an email at fundraising@bigissueinthenorth.com with your address and how many issues you'd like, and we'll get them sent out to you.

How to donate

We are so grateful to everyone who donates to us, if you haven't donated already, here are some ways to support our vendors.

To set up a standing order to support our vendors please fill in the form enclosed with the newsletter or call 0161 848 2420.



Text BINORTH to 70970 to give £5 or donate online at justgiving.com/bigissuenorth



Please make out donations by cheque to Big Issue North Trust and send it to 463 Stretford Road, Manchester, M16 9AB.



For more ways to raise funds for us please contact fundraising@bigissueinthenorth.com

We need you!

Raise vital funds for free when you shop online with **easyfundraising**.
[.org.uk](http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk)

It's really easy to raise funds for the Trust with EasyFundraising while shopping online. Just remember to set Big Issue North Trust as your chosen charity and start raising at no extra cost!

Go to www.easyfundraising.org.uk today!

DO SOMETHING BIG TODAY

While we always greatly appreciate donations, there are many ways you can support our vendors.

- 1. Volunteer your time.** We will soon have a wide range of volunteering opportunities available, ranging from outreach and skills training to events support and awareness raising. If you are interested in getting involved, please get in touch by emailing fundraising@bigissueinthenorth.com, or phoning us on 0161 848 2430.
- 2. Donate goods.** Many of the comforts we take for granted, such as warm clothing, toiletries and furniture, are an unattainable luxury for our vendors. If you would like to help to make life easier for our vendors, please visit bigissuenorth.com/donations to find out what items are needed and how you can donate them.
- 3. Raise sponsorship.** Are you thinking of doing a sponsored activity in 2020? If so, and you would like your efforts to raise vital funds to help our vendors to change their lives, we will do all we can to support you. For more information, get in touch by emailing us at fundraising@bigissueinthenorth.com, or phoning us on 0161 848 2430.
- 4. Buy from our shop.** Every week, after each issue is no longer being sold on the street by our vendors, it goes onto our online shop. We also sell a wide range of merchandise, from concert posters and t-shirts to jewellery and homeware to. To browse the selection of goods we have on offer, go to shop.bigissuenorth.com/products
- 5. Select Big Issue North as your charity of choice on Amazon Smile.** Every time you make a purchase, we will receive 0.5% of the cost – and 2% on Black Friday! To do this, go to smile.amazon.co.uk and search for 'Big Issue North Trust'

THE TRUSTEES

Big Issue North Trust is supported by the Zochonis Charitable Foundation
The Trustees of The Big Issue North Trust are: Fay Selvan • Edna Robinson • Mark Fitzgibbon • Safina Islam

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