

FRIENDS OF BIG ISSUE NORTH

SPRING 2021

Third national lockdown devastates vendors

Simon, diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2017, should be one of the next in line for a vaccine since his condition makes him vulnerable to COVID-19. Like so many others, he's desperate for it to work and the lockdown to come to an end.

Throughout most of 2020, Simon was shielding because of his MS, though he briefly returned to selling the magazine in the latter part of the year. When lockdown prevented him selling, he started travelling from his flat in nearby Knaresborough to Harrogate anyway.

"I have a good chat with most of the people in Harrogate. I missed them a lot in that first lockdown. I live in a first floor flat and to be honest I don't like spending time on my own there. That's why I come here. I just need something to do and it's better for my mental health to be out of the flat rather than sat there doing nothing and staring at the four walls."

The police moved him on once, accusing him of begging, but he feels justified in going back to his pitch. He's always careful to maintain some distance between himself and those he speaks to, and he wears a mask when necessary.

"Most of the people who chat to me are really safe. When I could sell the magazine, they would put the money on a post near where I was selling or whatever. People have got their heads screwed on right here – they're not having raves or whatever they do in the big cities. They look after each other and look after me, and I do what I can to look after them."

Our staff in Leeds helped Simon to apply for his benefits when it was clear that he wouldn't be able to sell the magazine daily like he used to. He receives both Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payments, but these benefits are paid monthly and often at the same time as one another.

"I'm not exactly great at budgeting," he admits. "But I try my best." Right now, he's in the middle of one of those periods between benefit payments and the money has run out. His electric is in danger of



going off and he has other bills to pay, including some child support for his teenage daughter.

When the first lockdown occurred, Big Issue North set up a hardship fund for vendors. With the help of generous donations from the public, we were able to support many vendors like Simon with small pay-outs in lieu of the money they would normally make selling the magazine, but now the hardship fund has started to dwindle, and we have had to prioritise who gets support. Because he is eligible for benefits, Simon knows there are plenty of other vendors worse off than him, although he has had some cash from the fund recently to help see him through.

Originally from Wakefield, Simon, who turned 43 in early February, started selling Big Issue North "years ago" when a relationship ended, and he became homeless. Then, just as he was starting to get his life back on track, he was diagnosed with MS. He first noticed something was wrong when he started limping with his left leg. "I went to the doctor and he didn't know what it was,

and I was sent to a neurologist. Then it just got worse and worse." He takes medication but it lowers his immune system, making him more susceptible to COVID and other illnesses.

In a normal week, Simon's life would still revolve around selling the magazine, despite his condition. Two or three times a week, he would leave his flat and take the two and half hour round trip to buy magazines from the Leeds office before returning to his pitch in Harrogate to sell them. He doesn't mind the journey. "It gets me out and about, so that's okay. Selling the magazine keeps my mind off the MS, gives me something to do and helps me earn a little bit of money at the same time."

Like many vendors, Simon is very grateful to members of the public for their contributions to the hardship fund. Your generosity has never been more needed and has allowed us to provide vendors with financial support to survive lockdown and PPE and contactless payment devices to safely return to work during periods of lower restrictions. Thank you.

To donate to our hardship fund, please text **HARDSHIP** to 70970 to give £5, or visit easydonate.org/HARDSHIP. You can also continue to support the magazine and our vendors by buying physical copies from Sainsbury's, Co-Op, McColl's and Booths or digital copies from issuu.com/bigissuenorth, or by shopping at shop.bigissuenorth.com. Thank you.



REMEMBERING MARCIN

Marcin Makota, a hardworking and much valued vendor in the Sheffield office, sadly passed away over the Christmas period. Marcin sold the magazine for around five years, working for a number of those years outside the shopping arcade in Hillsborough.

Throughout the years that we worked with Marcin, we quickly became aware of his thoughtfulness and consideration for others, demonstrated by his frequent concern about the wellbeing of staff and other vendors. He also put this into practise with material support for other vendors, sharing what he had when he was able to do so regardless of his own situation.

Even in the face of the challenges he encountered throughout his life, he seriously valued his work selling the magazine, choosing not to sell when he didn't feel in the right place to do so effectively while still ensuring he stayed in touch to keep staff updated about how he was. He continually sought to improve his situation through his own efforts, always looking to pursue other employment opportunities and bring his motivation to further endeavours. Marcin conveyed to us how much he appreciated the community in Hillsborough of which he was made to feel part, always stressing his concern that he retained this pitch when he had periods of absence from selling. From the members of the public who have been in touch to express their sorrow at the news of his passing and to share their memories of him, it is clear this was reciprocated. People have spoken of their appreciation of Marcin being approachable and easy to chat to, as well as the generosity mentioned above.

Marcin will be greatly missed by those fortunate enough to have known him, and we in the office appreciated the smiles Marcin would bring when stopping by to speak to us.

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

Hungry Ghosts

"When we were standing in the convenience store looking intently at bread, you asked me what I was thinking, and I said, 'Melon bread has a better bedside manner than any man I've been with.'"

We were delighted when Fish Flash Fiction Prize shortlisted and Bath Flash Fiction Award and Reflex Fiction Award longlisted writer Leonie Rowland decided to combine the launch for her debut book, *In Bed With Melon Bread*, with a fundraiser for the Big Issue North Trust!

The launch was a great success, with thirty attendees raising £400 for Big Issue North Trust, as well as snapping up the five signed copies of the book that Leonie gifted to our shop.

Leonie also recently launched The Hungry Ghost Project, "a small press that publishes flash fiction and creative non-fiction on the topics of food, hauntings, memory and consumption." She is currently taking submissions for the first issue, which will be published in physical form. Submissions are free and each contributor will receive a payment of £5 on publication, with all further profits going to the Big Issue North Trust.

"Having lived in Manchester for three years, I am grateful for Big Issue North's



hopeful presence in a city where so many suffer from homelessness," said Leonie. "In *In Bed With Melon Bread* and The Hungry Ghost Project focus on our relationships with food and each other, and this wonderful charity is dedicated to improving both aspects of people's lives."

We are very grateful to Leonie for her generous support, and to everyone who attended the event and made a donation to support our vendors through this incredibly difficult period.

To buy *In Bed With Melon Bread*, submit to The Hungry Ghost Project or read Leonie's previous work, go to www.leonierowland.com.

THE NEW ISSUE: ISSUE 5

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

Comprising 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 towards supporting vendors of Big Issue North, helping them overcome barriers to employment and find secure accommodation.

Conflict respects neither boundaries nor pandemics. In this issue, a photojournalist bravely and movingly



documents one father's quest to get back the body of his 16-year-old son killed in February in India-controlled Kashmir.

In another continent, Nigerian villagers are learning how to recognise the threat of landmines and improvised explosive devices left behind by the shadowy jihadi terrorist group Boko Haram, aided by the Manchester-based charity Mines Advisory Group.

Elsewhere, Matthew Baker's short story speculates on the origins of anti-vaccine sentiment, Wayne Koberstein roots a strand of rugged counter-cultural individualism in his home state Oregon, and the pheasant pauses to look at one of the most northerly vineyards in the world.

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





GORDON BECOMES FIRST VACCINATED VENDOR!

A seventy-year-old man has become the first Big Issue North vendor to have had a COVID-19 vaccine.

Gordon, who normally sells the magazine outside Sainsbury's in Heaton Park, Manchester, was called in to have his first jab in January and again earlier this month to have a second dose.

"I know loads of people are still waiting to have the first injection so I'm very lucky," he said. "I wasn't worried about getting it. I never even felt the needle to go in."

He reports the only side-effect as a sore arm for a couple of days after each injection.

Gordon, who is originally from Darlington and who suffers from COPD, a lung condition that makes him extremely vulnerable to the disease, has been selling on his Heaton Park pitch for 11 years now. He began selling the magazine after losing a job at an old people's home and started up the pitch himself, convincing the store manager to let him sell outside. Now, he said, he is "like a member of staff there. I look after the shoppers' dogs while they go inside, that kind of thing. I miss the chatter with my regular customers. They have become good friends."

Gordon has kept in touch with the store manager during lockdown. "He phones me up sometimes and he says all my customers are asking after me and want to know how I am, which is good," he said. "They are all waiting for me to come back."

Since Big Issue North vendors were taken off the streets for a third time in January, Gordon has been getting some

support from the Big Issue North office in the way of a hardship payment and help accessing food parcels. But like many vendors he is struggling to make ends meet as he usually relies on weekly sales of the magazine to top up his pension, which covers everything from rent to bills and food.

"I've just got coppers left in my pocket," he said.

But it is not just the money that Gordon is missing. "Selling the magazine keeps my mind occupied as well, but during this lockdown, when I've been sat on my own in the house all the time, I'm bored out of my mind," he said. "I'm using up loads of electric and everything. And I've put some bloody weight on!"

The vaccine is the one ray of hope for Gordon, who is desperate to get back to work as soon as possible. "They reckon things aren't going to change much until March," he said. "But at least the death rate is going down and the infection rate is going down, and numbers of people who have had the vaccine is going up, so that's something."

What would Gordon say to someone who was hesitant about having the vaccine?

"I'd say there's nothing to it," he said. "I've had people asking me about it who haven't had it yet and I tell them there's nothing to worry about. It's really important that people get it. Better to be safe than sorry."

And he said, the quicker we can get out of this lockdown, the better. "I'm sick of this lockdown. I'm bored of it. I just can't wait to get back selling the magazine again."

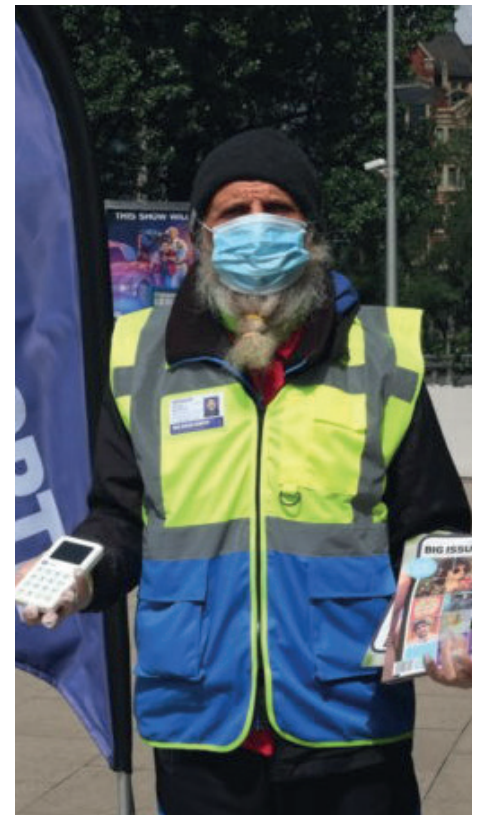
Stefan's home run

Stefan, who sells Big Issue North outside Piccadilly station in Manchester, is a prolific runner. In 2019, he competed in marathons in multiple countries, collecting a total of seven medals. Now he's gearing up for two runs in the new year to raise money for the Big Issue North Trust.

About to turn 60, Stefan is showing no signs of slowing down, and is now gearing up to enter the Manchester Marathon in October to raise funds for the Big Issue North Trust, who he says changed his life. To the tune of Jingle Bells, he sings his vending jingle: "Big Issue, Big Issue, thank you Big Issue! Big Issue, Big Issue, so much I love you!"

"When I was 35 years old, I had a big belly and I was over 90 kilos," he said. "I felt very, very old. After that I started to get better. I changed my nutrition. I stopped eating meat. I stopped drinking alcohol. And then, step by step, I began to renew. I learnt yoga and martial arts and I started running about 12 years ago. Now it is part of my life. It is what I do."

We are all wishing Stefan luck, though with his track record, we don't think he'll need it!



To read more about vendors' experiences of COVID-19, go to www.bigissuenorth.com/our-work/vendor-stories

To sponsor Stefan, please go to www.justgiving.com/fundraising/big-issue-north-trust



WEAR YOUR SUPPORT

You can now wear your support for Big Issue North with a beautiful and eco-friendly necklace!

When England first went into lockdown last March, we were left with thousands of magazines that we were unable to sell. To reduce wastage and transform the issues into another way to support vendors through an incredibly tough time, we invited readers to craft them into jewellery and homeware items to be sold in our online shop.

We received a wave of support, with many items selling out within days of going online, and we now have a new batch of pendants and other beautiful items in stock.

With all proceeds supporting our vendors, they make an ideal treat for yourself or a loved one!

To purchase a necklace, go to shop.bigissuenorth.com/category/handmade-gifts



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



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 at our vendors' pitches to raising awareness about our organisation to support at events to offering skills training. If you are interested in getting involved, please get in touch at fundraising@bigissueinthenorth.com, or call us on 0161 848 2430.
- 2. Donate goods.** Many of the comforts and conveniences we take for granted are an unattainable luxury for our vendors. If you would like to help to make life easier for them, please visit www.givetoday.co.uk/bigissuenorth to send items directly to our offices, or email fundraising@bigissueinthenorth.com about donating used goods.
- 3. Raise sponsorship.** If you would like to undertake a sponsored activity 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 at fundraising@bigissueinthenorth.com, or call 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 subscriptions to music merchandise to handmade jewellery and homeware. To browse the selection of goods we have on offer, go to shop.bigissuenorth.com.
- 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 price – and 2% on Black Friday – at no extra cost to you. To do this, go to smile.amazon.co.uk and search for 'Big Issue North Trust'.
- 6. Become a vendor champion.** If you are interested in making your local area a great place for people to sell Big Issue North, either as a business owner or as an individual, please email simon.kweeday@thebiglifegroup.com for more information.

THE TRUSTEES

Big Issue North Trust is supported by the Zochonis Charitable Foundation
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