

Five ways to support Big Issue North vendors through the COVID-19 pandemic

Friday 27 March, 2020

On Monday 23rd March, shortly before Boris Johnson announced a nationwide lockdown to slow the spread of COVID-19, staff at Big Issue North made the incredibly difficult decision to cease all sale of the magazine on the street for the safety of our vendors and customers. This may last for weeks or even months, which poses a disaster to people who rely on selling Big Issue North to earn an income.

Our vendors will face some of the greatest challenges in the weeks to come. As well as losing what for many is only job for the foreseeable future, a third of our vendors are currently homeless, making it incredibly difficult for them to self-isolate for the safety of themselves and others. One in five of our vendors also fall into high risk categories due to their age or existing health conditions, such as asthma, COPD or diabetes. A third of our vendors have also relied on a foodbank or soup kitchen at some point, not only for food, but also for toiletries, cleaning products and fuel vouchers. This number is likely to rise as many vendors now face the prospect of destitution, but an increasing number of these services have been forced to close their doors, leaving our vendors without the support they so desperately need.

As well as the impact on their physical wellbeing, this is also likely to have a severe impact on the mental health of our vendors. Four in five people experiencing homelessness report struggling with mental illness, and this time of increased vulnerability and uncertainty will undoubtedly add to the anxieties of the people in our society who have the least.

Thankfully, members of the public have come forward to offer their support. We have set up a hardship fund to provide financial support to our vendors, whether that's securing them accommodation, paying their rent or bills, or covering the cost of essential shopping, and have received around £1,000 per day in donations since vendors have been unable to work. We have also seen an influx of people taking out subscriptions to Big Issue North and our new quarterly magazine, The New Issue, as well as buying physical and digital issues online.

However, we need to generate significantly more income in the weeks to come to be able to provide all the support that our vendors need. This will include securing accommodation for our vendors who are currently homeless, covering the cost of rent, bills and essential shopping for as long as vendors are unable to work, and enabling our frontline staff to continue to provide support remotely, from helping vendors to register with a GP or for Universal Credit, to providing vital information and translation services that vendors who are not fluent in English or do not have access to the internet, television or radio.

To do this, we need your help. Here are five things you can do today:

1. Make a donation to our hardship fund by texting **HARDSHIP** to 70970 to give £5, or visit easyfundraising.org/HARDSHIP to give as much or as little as you can afford.
2. Purchase a digital issue for just £2, with £1 from each sale going directly to our hardship fund, at issuu.com/bigissuenorth
3. Buy physical back issues or Big Issue North merchandise at shop.bigissuenorth.com
4. Take out a 3, 6 or 12 month subscription to Big Issue North at shop.bigissuenorth.com/category/subscriptions
5. Subscribe to The New Issue, or buy the first or second issue to see what's on offer, at newissue.co.uk

You will now also be able to pick up a copy of Big Issue North for £3 during your weekly shop. The magazine is now on sale in 382 McColl's stores and 32 Sainsbury's stores across the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, as well as at sainsburys.co.uk, with half of our proceeds going directly to the hardship fund.

If you would like to make a donation by an alternative means, or if you can offer any further support, please email fundraising@bigissueinthenorth.com or phone 0161 848 2430.

Thank you very much for your ongoing support at this difficult time.

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