

WOMEN HOMELESSNESS A BIG ISSUE

While the temperature dropped below seven degrees last night, women from across Melbourne braved the cold to sleep in their cars and highlight the plight of Australia's 46 000 homeless women.

Coordinated by WISHIN with the support of The Big Issue and the Victorian Women's Housing Association, the event aimed to raise attention to the issue of women's homelessness in Australia and showcase a ground breaking new program that addresses the needs of homeless women.

Natalie Susman, Head of the Women's Subscription Enterprise, a new initiative by The Big Issue Australia that will provide paid work opportunities to homeless and disadvantaged women, said they were delighted to join together with WISHIN and the Victorian Women's Housing Association for last night's event.

"This is an extremely pressing issue, and not one many people know about," Ms Susman said.

"46 000 homeless women in Australia every night is an unacceptable statistic and we all agree that something needs to be done.

"Two years ago when we began to delve in to the issue we found that homeless women were often fleeing domestic violence situations and presented with a far more complex range of needs than men; including safety and security or somewhere to leave their children while they work.

"Our Street Magazine Enterprise, whereby vendors stand on a street corner selling a magazine was not a suitable option for many women.

"So this week marks the beginning of The Women's Subscription Enterprise - a new social enterprise that will use a model selling subscriptions to The Big Issue magazine to provide work, training and pathway opportunities for disadvantaged women.

"Women will work as Dispatch Assistants preparing the magazine for distribution each fortnight and for every 100 subscriptions sold we can employ one woman to work on the program."

Everyone attending this morning's gathering agreed that while affordable housing for women was a priority, employment opportunities were also vital in order for them to gain economic empowerment and the ability to have control over their futures.

"A big part of the Women's Subscription Enterprise is the provision of training and work experience for the women, to help prepare them for entry into mainstream jobs down the track," Ms Susman added.

The Big Issue will now work to sell 9000 subscriptions to The Big Issue magazine and open their first distribution centre in Melbourne in September.

Already NAB, Telstra, Westpac and AXA have thrown their support behind the program, purchasing a bulk lot of subscriptions and ensuring work placements for homeless women across Melbourne.

Anyone wishing to purchase a subscription can go to www.thebigissue.org.au/womens or call 02 88770374.

ENDS

Images from the Sleep Out can be downloaded at

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