

WOMEN'S HOMELESSNESS

CORPORATE AUSTRALIA AGREES - IT'S A VERY BIG ISSUE

Australia's most respected social enterprise, The Big Issue, today thrust the issue of women's homelessness firmly into the spotlight.

With more than 46,000 Australian women homeless every night, it has become a critical issue which needs immediate attention.

Under the banner of The Big Issue's ground-breaking initiative – the Women's Subscription Enterprise, a panel of high-profile experts from the business and community sectors joined 100 influential corporate guests at a "round table" event at NAB in Melbourne's Docklands to discuss the issues surrounding women's homelessness, and practical solutions which can address this critical social issue.

Panelists included the 2011 Australian of the Year, Simon McKeon, the Barefoot Investor, Scott Pape, NAB deputy group CEO, Michael Ullmer, anthropologist and general manager of research and service development, Hanover Welfare Services, Dr Shelley Mallet, CEO of McAuley Community Services for Women, Jocelyn Bignold, the head of the Women's Subscription Enterprise, Natalie Pryles, and Jenna, formerly homeless and now a dispatch assistant with the Women's Subscription Enterprise. The event was facilitated by news reader Helen Kapalos.


With every 100 subscriptions sold to The Big Issue magazine, the Women's Subscriptions Enterprise can employ one homeless woman to sort, collate and insert the magazine for distribution to subscribers every fortnight.

While helping to shape corporate and community opinion on the issue, the goal for the "round table" event was to sell 1,000 subscriptions to The Big Issue magazine, and give another 10 disadvantaged women an opportunity to earn an income and turn their lives around.

With domestic and family violence the largest single cause of homelessness in Australia, which overwhelmingly affects women and children, The Big Issue identified the need for a program addressing the specific needs of homeless women.

"While the Street Magazine Enterprise (where The Big Issue is sold on the street), shows remarkable outcomes for homeless and marginalised vendors, 85 per cent of those vendors are male," said Natalie Pryles.

"Selling The Big issue on the street is unsuitable for many homeless women for a variety of reasons, including child care responsibilities and the unwelcome connotations that come with working on a street corner.



“Something needed to be done that specifically targeted the issues of women’s homelessness in a safe and appropriate way.

“It is financially self-sustainable and entirely scalable – the more subscriptions we sell, the more women we can employ.”

With every 100 subscriptions to The Big Issue magazine, another disadvantaged woman is given the chance to earn an income in a safe, secure and rewarding environment. They can develop the skills necessary to change their lives and control their futures. As a stepping stone, it provides participants valuable work experience and skills to help prepare for a mainstream job.

2011 Australian of the Year, prominent investment banker, philanthropist and social entrepreneur, Simon McKeon, spoke of corporate Australia’s responsibility to support social initiatives such as The Women’s Subscription Enterprise.

“It’s the right thing to do,” McKeon said. “Homeless women are among the most vulnerable in our society.

“Businesses work best on a ‘hand up’ rather than a ‘hand out’ basis, so supporting a social enterprise such as The Women’s Subscription Enterprise, which provides women with opportunities to earn an income, is a no brainer.”

Jenna, an Indigenous Australian who grew up in the Tiwi Islands, shared her story of homelessness with three small children on the streets of Melbourne, and the hurdles she faced in trying to start a new life.

“Working at the Women’s Subscription Enterprise has given me a lot of confidence,” said Jenna. “I’ve met a lot of people with the same experiences as me, and we can share stories, support and advice. I also like being a role model for my kids and having them look up to me.”

As a foundation subscriber, NAB is already behind the Women’s Subscription Enterprise with 225 subscriptions to The Big Issue distributed throughout their business banking centres.

Deputy Group CEO, Michael Ullmer, believes that corporate social responsibility must be a sustainable part of the business structure.

“We are exposing our staff to The Big Issue magazine across the country, which provides our staff with a better understanding and awareness of homelessness.

“We believe that when employees participate in community activity through the organisation, they are more engaged and more productive. We are also helping others to achieve their full potential.”



ABOUT THE WOMEN'S SUBSCRIPTION ENTERPRISE

A ground-breaking initiative of The Big Issue, the Women's Subscription Enterprise is a sustainable social enterprise that uses a model selling subscriptions to The Big Issue magazine to provide social and economic empowerment to women who are abused, isolated, vulnerable, homeless or living in poverty.

Subscriptions are sold to businesses, so there is no pressure on the women to sell. As subscriptions are sold, revenue is directed into the pockets of disadvantaged women, through provision of wages, training, mentoring and support.

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ABOUT THE BIG ISSUE

The Big Issue Australia is an independent organisation that develops and manages innovative and sustainable business-based solutions which address issues faced by homeless and disadvantaged people.

For almost 15 years, The Big Issue magazine has been sold on the streets by homeless and marginalised Australians as an opportunity to earn an income and be included in society. Vendors purchase magazines for \$2.50 and sell them for \$5, keeping the difference.

BACKGROUND – JENNA

An Indigenous Australian, Jenna grew up in the Tiwi Islands. She had her first child at 16 and another three years later, unfortunately enduring an extremely violent relationship in the process. She found the courage to leave her partner, who was subsequently sent to prison. Jenna then met another partner, but three months into her third pregnancy he passed away in tragic circumstances. She decided to leave the Tiwi Islands and move to Melbourne to give her kids the opportunities that she never had as a child. Without support or income, Jenna soon found herself alone on the street with her three very young children. But determination, positive thinking and her involvement with The Big Issue has turned that around. Today, Jenna has permanent housing, is enrolled in university, is earning an income and has made load of friends through working with the Women's Subscription Enterprise.

Media contacts:

Eszter Vasenszky on 0415 319 421 or evasenszky@bigissue.org.au

Kirsty Hardt on 0438 123 184 or khardt@bigissue.org.au

For images from the event, visit

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bigissueaustralia/5612522760/>

For higher resolution, contact Eszter or Kirsty