

**The WOMEN'S
SUBSCRIPTION
ENTERPRISE**

Mail subscriptions find a home with The Big Issue

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MAGAZINES

SELLING *The Big Issue*, the fortnightly general interest magazine set up to help homeless and other disadvantaged people, gave Clarissa Hall a foothold in the workforce and a chance to get out and meet people.

But after more than 10 years standing on often inclement street corners, Ms Hall is looking forward to learning new skills in an indoors job when the not-for-profit enterprise launches a world-first subscription initiative.

It is a radical move for *The Big Issue*, which has had a street-sales model since it began in Australia 14 years ago, with vendors keeping half the price of each copy sold.

The subscription orders will be handled by mail centres in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide which will employ disadvantaged women as dispatch assistants.

"I'm interested in doing some training and seeing where it leads. I see it as an opportunity that could lead into bigger and better things," said Ms Hall. "I like (selling) because it's flexible, you can make a

bit of money and it's a way of getting involved in the community. (But) it can get cold and miserable and sometimes sales are a bit slow."

For other female vendors, the street-sales model poses a bigger problem than just bad weather.

"A lot of the time women are homeless because of domestic violence or sexual abuse, and more often than not they have children, so selling on a street corner is not a safe option," said *The Big Issue's* marketing and communications manager Natalie Susman.

Because of that, about 85 per cent of vendors are male, although more than 40 per cent of Australia's homeless population is female.

"We felt we weren't doing enough to work with women and the feedback we got was that the model didn't work for women," said Ms Susman. "So we felt it was incumbent on us to come up with a new model."

From this week, *The Big Issue* will promote its Women's Sub-

scription Enterprise with a media and direct-mail campaign to libraries, schools, public agencies and corporations.

Its first-year goal is to sell 9000 annual subscriptions at \$155 each. Revenue will be used to provide wages, training, mentoring and other support for the mail-centre employees.

"There's around a million businesses we could mail to and I would like to think most big businesses would back us with multiple subscriptions," said Ms Susman. "One of the beautiful things about this program is that it's totally scalable. The 9000 (target) for year one would result in 90 jobs (in the mailing centres). If we were to sell 12,000, that would mean 120 jobs, and so on. So we hope the business community will come on this journey with us and help us to create those jobs."

She did not believe selling subscriptions will cannibalise street sales, which averaged about 30,000 copies a fortnight.



Natalie Susman and Clarissa Hall at The Big Issue's Melbourne headquarters