

The Body Shop
02 August 2010
From living on the streets to helping the homeless: One woman's tale of how she turned her life around.



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FROM LIVING ON THE STREETS TO HELPING THE HOMELESS: ONE WOMAN'S TALE OF HOW SHE TURNED HER LIFE AROUND.



Prepared by: Sunny Oliver-Bennetts, The Big Issue

I have two dogs. I've also got three cats and two rabbits; one of whom weighs 12 kilos and swings on a hammock. I've got two kids, one husband and some great in-laws. I consider myself lucky. I've got a stable, supportive family, a job that I am passionate about and my own home. But it wasn't always like this...

My mother was a heroin addict and had me very young. Unable to cope with the responsibility of raising a child, my maternal grandmother decided to remove me from my mother's care and I became a Ward of the State. I spent the majority of my childhood in and out of foster homes and by the time I was a teenager I was living on the streets.

I think one of the worst parts about being homeless, was having to deal with other people's prejudices. I remember going to a job interview when I was about 16; I was so excited! I'd gone over to my friend's house to borrow some clothes (they would have been better suited to a wedding but at least I tried), before traipsing across Melbourne for the interview. When I arrived (on time), the man who was interviewing me looked me up and down, bewildered. I don't think he was prepared for a teenage girl dressed in formal wear! I didn't get the job. That happened a lot to me while I was homeless. When I was in my late teens however my luck changed and I was offered a traineeship with The Body Shop.

Working for [The Body Shop](#), and subsequently [The Big Issue](#), completely turned my life around. I was given the opportunity to be part of something; to earn an income and given the chance to study. For the first time, I was given hope. I had the opportunity to learn in a safe and non-judgmental environment where I was treated exactly the same as any other staff member, my opinions were sought after, which was a great confidence boost for me. I was given the opportunity to mix with the type of people I had never really associated with before, which helped me to mould myself into the kind of person I wanted to be. The Body Shop also taught me basic life skills like cooking and managing finances...things which a lot of people take for granted but essential for living a normal and stable life. I believe that all you need to change your life is just one person who believes in you. One person, one bit of encouragement, one chance, is all it takes. [The Body Shop](#) was my one chance.

When Steven Persson, CEO for [The Big Issue](#), initially spoke to me back in 2007 about the idea of starting a subscriptions service to The Big Issue magazine, where homeless women could work to fulfil the subscriptions, I knew from my own experience that this was going to be a program that would result in 'real' change for so many women right across Australia. To say I am excited about [The Women's Subscription Enterprise](#) is an understatement... I could not be prouder to be working with The Big Issue on this program and feel nothing but overwhelming pride and satisfaction at the incredible work everyone is doing to get it up and running.

My life, my success, my happiness is all a result of the support and opportunities I received from my traineeship with The Body Shop 16 years ago and I can't wait for other women to have the same chance at life.

Kirstie Papanikolaou has spent the past 14 years working for The Big Issue in Vendor Support. After completing a traineeship for homeless youth with The Body Shop in 1996, Kirstie was asked to help launch The Big Issue in Australia and has been an integral member of the team ever since. Help disadvantaged women turn their lives around, just like Kirstie did. Purchase a subscription to The Big Issue magazine and for just \$155 per year you will get a quality publication delivered every fortnight, and the knowledge that you are giving Australia's most disadvantaged and vulnerable women hope for a brighter future.

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