



**Every night there are more than 46,000 women who are homeless in Australia....**

Many of these women have faced horrendous histories of abuse and neglect. And many have children.

Two years ago The Big Issue recognised this problem and went about finding a solution. While the Street Magazine Enterprise (whereby vendors sell The Big Issue magazine on the streets of Australia) is very successful, it primarily helps men - with only 10% of vendors being female. Homeless women are often fleeing domestic violence situations and present with a far more complex range of needs than men; including safety and security or somewhere to leave their children while they work. Standing on a street corner selling a magazine is not a suitable option for many of them.

So with a dedicated team at The Big Issue working tirelessly for the past two years, June 2010 saw the launch of The Women's Subscription Enterprise - a new social enterprise that will provide work, training and pathway opportunities for disadvantaged women.

Subscriptions are sold to The Big Issue magazine through professionals so there is no pressure on the women to sell and revenue is directed into the pockets of disadvantaged women, through provision of wages, training, mentoring and support.

With every 100 subscriptions, a disadvantaged woman will be employed to work as a Dispatch Assistant to collate, sort and insert the magazines for distribution every fortnight.

Women are given economic empowerment and the skills to change their lives and control their futures. As a stepping-stone, the program also provides work experience and skills to help prepare women for entry into mainstream jobs.



To find out more or to subscribe to The Big Issue magazine visit [www.thebigissue.org.au/womens](http://www.thebigissue.org.au/womens)

## The WOMEN'S SUBSCRIPTION ENTERPRISE



**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.**

## From Living On The Streets To Helping The Homeless: One Woman's Tale Of How She Turned Her Life Around.

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 tramping 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 fulfill 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.