THE BIG ISSUE

2026 Impact Report

Celebrating 30 years of proven, employment-led solutions to homelessness and poverty

thebigissue.org.au

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

In our 30th year, The Big Issue continues to offer solutions to poverty and homelessness. We remain focused on why we began: creating practical opportunities for people living on the margins to work, earn an income, build confidence and move towards greater stability.

Our work supports people who have experienced homelessness, women rebuilding their lives after family violence, people facing mental health challenges or long-term unemployment and, increasingly, older women and others struggling with rising living costs.

Whether through magazine sales, safe and supportive employment, Street Soccer or sharing lived experience with students, the principle is the same: supporting people beyond crisis to build independence and shape their own future.

As a society, we rightly respond to homelessness and disadvantage with food, clothing, shelter and immediate assistance. These supports are essential but are not long-term solutions on their own. Sustainable income, secure housing, connection and purpose are fundamental to lasting change, this is what The Big Issue does.

Our 30th anniversary in June celebrated that purpose and demonstrated that our model remains as relevant as ever. Since 1996, we have published more than 750 editions, with vendors collectively earning around $44 million. We estimate our work has generated approximately $250 million in savings for the Australian community.

Despite declining foot traffic and rising magazine production costs, we continue to adapt without losing sight of the people at the centre of our model.

Our special anniversary edition demonstrated what is possible. Vendors earned more than $320,000 collectively during the campaign, compared with around $90,000 in a typical month. That income helped people meet rising costs through their own work.

It was wonderful to see prominent Australians stand alongside vendors on street corners across the country, experiencing first-hand the challenges of street selling and showing their support for a practical solution.

While magazine trading income largely sustains the core model, government and other partnerships help us extend proven programs and create opportunities.

In Western Australia, government support enabled us to establish a customer support centre providing meaningful employment for women returning to the workforce, including women who have faced extremely difficult circumstances. Today they are working, building confidence and reconnecting with employment. Their determination is what we should celebrate. Our responsibility is to create opportunities and the conditions in which they can succeed.

Our Community Street Soccer Program has supported thousands of people to change their lives, demonstrating the power of belonging through connection, confidence and community.

Through The Big Issue Classroom, students hear directly from people with lived experience of homelessness and disadvantage. Sharing these stories takes enormous courage.

Photo: Michelle Grace Hunder

"Around 320,000 Australians engage positively with The Big Issue. Our challenge – and our opportunity – is to provide more ways to deepen that support."

We now reach around 21,000 students each year, building empathy, understanding and stronger communities.

Around 320,000 Australians engage positively with The Big Issue*. Our opportunity is to give them more ways to deepen that support. Greater support can reduce magazine costs for vendors, create more safe and supportive jobs for women, extend Street Soccer and bring more lived-experience speakers into classrooms.

The Big Issue creates opportunities and puts income, confidence and choice into the hands of people working to shape their own future.

After 30 years, The Big Issue remains part of the solution to poverty and homelessness: helping people work, earn, belong and build a more secure future.

S.Persson

Steven Persson
Chief Executive Officer
The Big Issue Australia

*Roy Morgan Research May 2026

Cover image: *The Big Issue* vendor Amanda. Photo: Luke Hemer

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

Accessing the benefits of meaningful work, including income, routine, community and other support, empowers people to make positive changes in their lives.

64%
live with a long term physical or mental health condition or disability

71%
are aged 45 years or older

9%
are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background

27% women **71%** men **2%** non-binary or prefer to self describe

For every $1 invested in The Big Issue, $5.50 is saved in healthcare and other costs, that's $250 million in social value returned since 1996*.

*This social return on investment for The Big Issue's street magazine enterprise was calculated using a 'costs avoided' methodology

Photo: James Braund

"The Big Issue gave me a chance to have conversations with people...I was on the street for 20 years, and I didn't have a chance to talk to people in a normal setting. I'd completely forgotten how to. When you've been on the street for so long, how are you going to change your mindset? Now I walk with my head high everywhere."

SIMON, *THE BIG ISSUE* VENDOR AND THE BIG ISSUE CLASSROOM LIVED-EXPERIENCE SPEAKER

Reduced demand on community services because of people's involvement with The Big Issue#:

73%
have reduced their need for support from social services or charities

69%
have avoided health crises that require emergency care

55%
fewer interactions with police and law enforcement

#Surveys asked participants to select 'yes', 'no', or 'not applicable'. Percentages shown reflect answers for when the question was applicable.

STREET MAGAZINE ENTERPRISE

The Big Issue is our fortnightly street magazine sold across Australia. It provides people experiencing homelessness and poverty with an opportunity to earn an income and connect with their community.

8,508
vendors
since inception (1996)

$43.7m
in vendors' pockets
since inception

470
vendors in FY26

$1.8m
in vendors' pockets in FY26

Improved lives for participants since becoming involved with The Big Issue[#]:

88%
have maintained stable work at *The Big Issue* for three or more years

80%
have found more stable housing

79%
have spent less money on gambling

34%
have been able to participate in education or training

[#]Surveys asked participants to select 'yes', 'no', or 'not applicable'. Percentages shown reflect answers for when the question was applicable.

Photo: Chad Hedley

WHEN YOU BUY A MAGAZINE, YOU'RE SUPPORTING VENDORS LIKE RON.

Ron lost his father when he was just 12. After that, it was just Ron, his brother and his mum. Ron fondly recalls his mum taking good care of him and his brother. "She made sure we went to school and always had lunch."

As a teenager Ron played sport and "was a pretty good runner" until epilepsy changed everything. Once he had the diagnosis, he knew he had to slow down.

Because his mum needed a "bit of help", Ron left school early and started selling newspapers on the street. Several years later, while selling newspapers in Perth CBD, he met a man who was selling *The Big Issue*.

"He was telling me about the magazine and that's how I signed up. I thought, I'll give it a try. I've now been a vendor for 13 years, and I sell all over Perth. When I first started, I sold in London Court, and now I sell between King Street and Hay Street, Myer's Bridge and David Jones. I start at half past six, because that's when my customers are around. The places are good and the customers are good.

"You may have your ups and downs, but the customers are real friendly. My customers love having a chat. I tell them they'll be late for work, but they don't mind. They just want to hang out and talk to me, and then they come back at lunchtime.

"I also give out referral cards to customers and people experiencing homelessness on the street who are looking for work, and I encourage them to get a job with *The Big Issue*. I give them a card and tell them to go to the Perth office and mention me, and we'll sign you up. Then I help teach them how to sell the magazines properly."

Today, Ron says that while the seizures have gotten worse – recently, he had a bad fall and couldn't sell for months – The Big Issue community keeps him buoyed. For instance, he was blown away by the volume of messages of support he received after his fall.

"I had all the vendors and customers ring up and say they're missing me. It's very nice. I'm getting better, going for walks and my strength is coming back, I'll be selling soon. The Big Issue is my family. I'm very happy doing this - I'll keep going until I retire. And who knows, maybe one day I'll even be on the cover!"

COMMUNITY STREET SOCCER PROGRAM

The Community Street Soccer Program uses the power of sport to improve people's health and positively change lives, with free weekly training sessions that build confidence, purpose and community.

14,511
players since inception (2007)

30
sites currently active

1,649
new players in FY26

Participants have reported an improvement in their health and wellbeing with The Big Issue[#]:

99%
improved physical fitness & increased activity

98%
improved psychological wellbeing

97%
have a more positive outlook

87%
eat better

For every dollar invested in the Community Street Soccer Program $14.30 is saved in healthcare and other costs. That is $324 million in social return since inception (2007).

[#]Surveys asked participants to select 'yes', 'no', or 'not applicable'. Percentages shown reflect answers for when the question was applicable.

WHEN YOU SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY STREET SOCCER PROGRAM, YOU'RE SUPPORTING PLAYERS LIKE LESLEY.

Proud Kaytetye man Lesley experienced homelessness for most of his young life. Growing up, Lesley would "walk along in the middle of the night to my other family camp" for a moment of rest from the "fighting, yelling, screaming, chucking stuff around", as he told the ABC.

Respite and opportunity came in the form of the Community Street Soccer Program which Lesley discovered while in Alice Springs. Over the years, the program brought out the leader in Lesley, culminating in being chosen to be part of the Australian team at the 2025 Homeless World Cup – the first-ever Street Socceroo representative from the Northern Territory.

"I was playing and this guy walked up to me...and said, 'Hey, you want to play soccer overseas?' He showed me a map and a video of people playing, showed me what the different places look like."

From there the then-18-year-old took his first-ever plane ride to Canberra to be presented with his jersey. A month later and he was on a plane again, this time to Norway – a place he would never ever have dreamed of going to – for the competition.

Post-tournament, Lesley is a mentor in his community and speaks proudly of his dream of becoming a ranger.

"I love being up bush, hanging with family and taking care of animals... snakes, kangaroos, goannas, echidnas and kookaburras," Lesley says. "I have to wait for the ranger mob to call me and to train me. It's a chance to show my people what you can do when you get older... Do something with your life and by doing something you'll get somewhere."

Photo: Hillary Wardaugh

WOMEN'S WORKFORCE

The Women's Workforce program is designed with women's lived experience at its core, creating meaningful work, and inclusive and supportive workplaces for women facing homelessness and marginalisation.

233
employees since inception(2010)

$1.35m
in women's pockets since inception

44
employees in FY26

$107,243
in women's pockets in FY26

Improved lives for participants since becoming involved with The Big Issue#:

96%
have improved self-confidence

91%
have made new friends

82%
have been able to care for themselves better

75%
have been able to connect with services that improve their lives

For every dollar invested in the Women's Workforce, $5.50 is saved in healthcare and other costs. That is $7.4 million in social return since 2010.

#Surveys asked participants to select 'yes', 'no', or 'not applicable'. Percentages shown reflect answers for when the question was applicable.

Photo: Maree Agapitos

WHEN YOU ENGAGE THE WOMEN'S WORKFORCE, YOU'RE SUPPORTING WOMEN LIKE HELEN.

Being diagnosed as neurodiverse in her 60s was the turning point Helen needed to make other changes in her life. "I'm on the spectrum, but I also have other impacts of past trauma," she says. "I'm approaching 13 years of sobriety, too."

For Helen, being neurodiverse means that she "was always good at certain subjects, but it took me a lot longer to catch on to things. Later on, I found that I was reacting to sounds in a totally different way and not only did it affect the way I was able to process information, but it also affected my energy and body."

Helen first heard about The Big Issue Women's Workforce while working at the Council to Homeless Persons.

"I found it quite simple and I started working soon after. At the Women's Workforce everyone finds their own little niche and pace. We may each have our limitations, but they don't get in the way of being able to do the work. We have that flexibility and understanding, and we work together as a team."

Now, Helen says she's found not only her place but also her people. "I've become really close to some of the women and gotten to know them well, we've been there for each other. It's those sorts of things that are precious."

Through the Women's Workforce other doors have opened, too. "It's been a stepping stone to changing my life," says Helen. "It's enabled me to do work elsewhere, it's provided these opportunities that I never thought I could do or would be possible. If I ever wanted to be a public speaker I could, or if I wanted to write a book I could because I have those skills now.

"The Big Issue is great because it shows that we're more than people without a home, we're multi-skilled and talented and we do have abilities. We come in here thinking that we don't have a lot to offer, but we come away with this belief that I can do a lot more than I think I can. It's energy that you just can't manufacture."

CLASSROOM

The Big Issue Classroom is a unique work opportunity for people with lived experience of homelessness and poverty, empowering them to share their stories and shape young people's understanding of disadvantage.

251,992
students' engaged since inception (2009)

$664,021
in guest speakers pockets since inception

21,922
students engaged in FY26

$58,601
in guest speakers' pockets in FY26

"I first came as a student and couldn't wait to bring my own students along to The Big Issue."

LUCIE, ATTENDING TEACHER

Pictured: Deb sharing her story with students.

WHEN YOU BOOK A CLASSROOM, YOU'RE SUPPORTING SPEAKERS LIKE DEB.

Childhood wasn't a happy or safe place for The Big Issue Classroom speaker Deb, who was born with a genetic condition that left her in chronic pain. "I didn't really have a childhood," she says. "There was past trauma, so I was in and out of psych wards all the time."

At 18, Deb suffered a severe spinal injury after falling down concrete stairs. Eight years later, a devastating flood took everything away from her – including her home. "The water was as high as the old chain-link fences, and I was stuck on the front veranda," she shares. "Because I need crutches, I couldn't push through the water. I ended up homeless and had to sleep on my mother's floor for nine months while I was waiting for housing that was suitable for my disability."

Deb then moved to Melbourne and started selling *The Big Issue*, which led to a semi-regular gig speaking to university students about homelessness and disadvantage. The Big Issue Classroom was a logical next step.

"I've been here for 11 years." By Deb's calculation she's spoken to 11,000 students – and possibly opened thousands of young minds – in that time. Deb says The Big Issue helped build her confidence. "I haven't been in the psych ward now for about 20 years, whereas before I was in and out nearly every week dealing with my traumas and being homeless.

"Now I feel I can do things. I can handle stress, because I have stable accommodation and work. My life is stable, and if I put my mind to something I can achieve it."

Photo: Luke Hemer

JOIN US

Help alleviate poverty in Australia.

To find out how you can get involved, scan the QR Code below or go to **thebigissue.org.au**

Thank you for your support.

Basement Level, 227 Collins Street, Melbourne VIC 3000
Phone: (03) 9663 4533

thebigissue.org.au

The Big Issue acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.