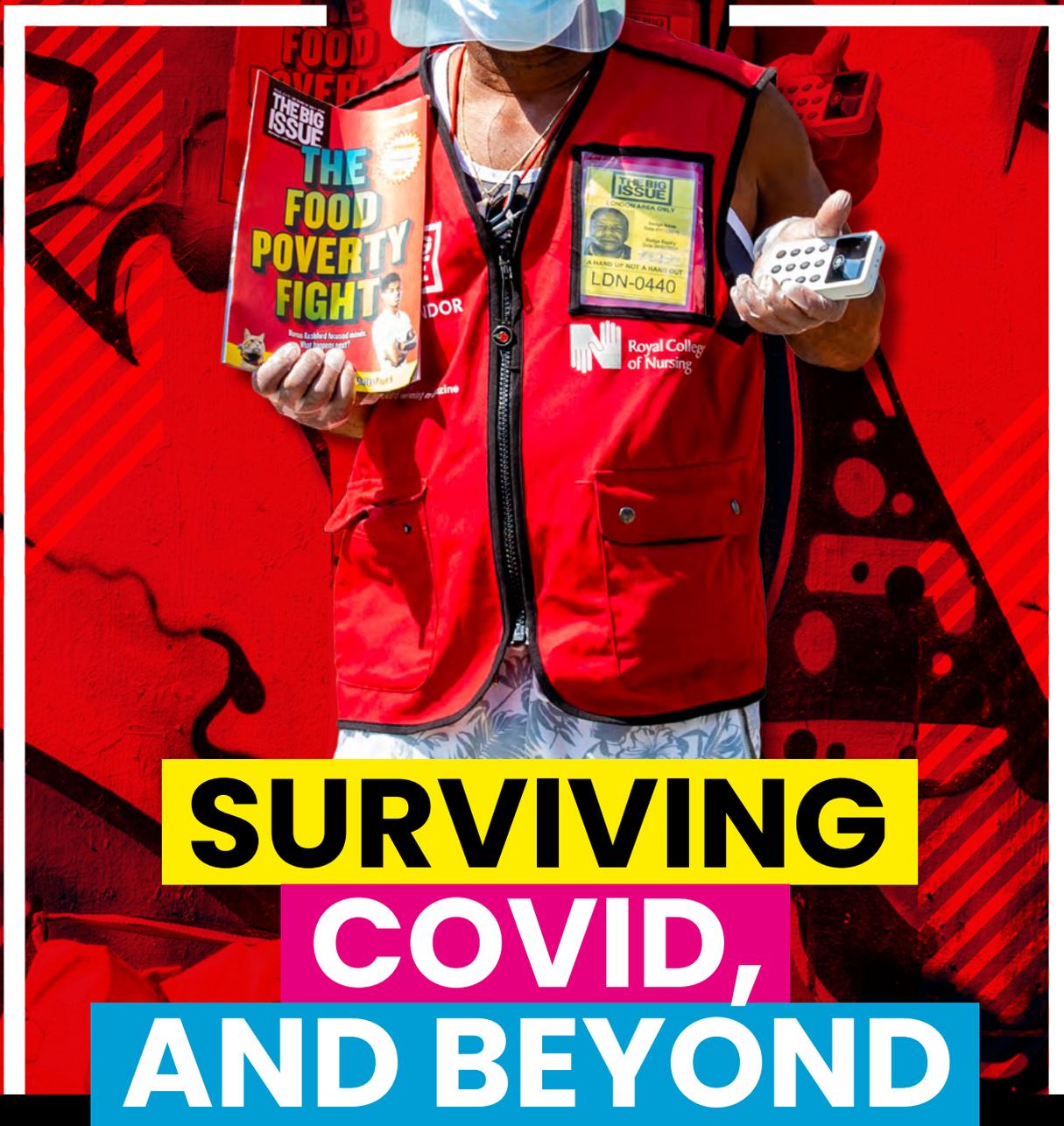


THE BIG ISSUE



SURVIVING

COVID,

AND BEYOND



This year hit The Big Issue like a train.

Until Lockdown, we had a sustainable business that delivered social change and served our readers and vendors. We sold a lot of magazines with a unique voice, great opinions and brilliant access.

Revenue that came from an average of

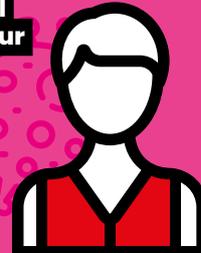
78,000

weekly sales disappeared overnight

Coronavirus changed everything. In the immediate hours following March's lockdown we faced the biggest crisis of our 29 years.

All earning potential was stripped from our

1700



regular vendors who made their living selling The Big Issue on the streets of Britain

IN THE COURSE OF A WEEKEND, WE COMPLETELY RECREATED THE BUSINESS.

We massively accelerated the subscription business, moved into shops, created a digital edition and earned money that could be handed out to vendors. The focus was to extend reach as far as possible in impossible market conditions. If we could do that, we'd make The Big Issue survive AND serve the men and women who relied on us.

At The Big Issue, we pride ourselves on our mantra – a Hand Up, not a handout. We offer a means for people to work themselves back to society. Covid meant we had to become, for a time, a handout operation.

The Big Issue frontline teams, alongside The Big Issue Foundation (the organisation's charitable arm) previously operated a nationwide face-to-face support network for vendors. This had to switch to 100 percent remote. Despite the huge

emotional toll that brought supporting the most vulnerable people, at their most vulnerable, the frontline team did not buckle.

All previous development thoughts and ideas crystallised quickly. From a small number of subs we built a subscription base of 10,000 in 30 days. Armando Iannucci, Chris Packham, Christopher Eccleston, Aisling Bea, Floella Benjamin, Michael Sheen and many more created videos and pushed the message of support through their social channels. They were kind and generous and selfless. As were the readers who answered the call.

We moved The Big Issue into shops for the first time ever. We set up deals with Sainsbury's, Coop, MacColls, Asda, Waitrose and others.

10,000 SUBSCRIPTIONS IN 30 DAYS





An evolving magazine.

As everything changed, we had to change content and tone in the magazine. Like all publications, we saw fewer ads so we gained editorial pages. We focused on those people in local communities going above and beyond. We hired Mr Motivator as our stay-at-home fitness guru. We wanted to provide content that would not let the walls close in. The team worked remotely. The challenge was to keep their morale high so content ideas would come. Also, as belts were tightened freelance budgets were cut so we had to do all the extra work (including the App) without regular freelancers.

As we emerged from lockdown, we put together some big hitting guest-edited editions (including Jarvis Cocker and Rutger Bregman) to come back with a big bang.



Online and beyond.

Working with Puggip we built a digital edition of The Big Issue. Initially an imperfect publication, we continue to develop it. It allows us to move quickly and effectively into markets that we had previously left untapped. We know the strength of The Big Issue brand, and now we have a great opportunity to use it to engage younger readers and to move beyond the traditional view of what The Big Issue is.

As the world moved online, so too did a lot of our development aims. We hired a new digital editor and a digital producer. We reframed our digital editorial goals, focusing on becoming first for subjects including social justice and homelessness. We reimagined how best we could work the incredible cultural content that we have built a lot of editorial reputation upon. And we are building out our newsletter content. As with the app, we are accelerating an incredible untapped potential. December 2020 was our busiest month ever with over 400,000 page views. And our entire aim is one of growth.

Our authority and knowledge gained from nearly 30 years in supporting people experiencing homelessness is informing our online editorial direction, and increasingly reflected in most popular articles. Explainers about the UK's homeless charities, about the number of people without a home in the UK, or about what personal action readers can take to support men and women sleeping rough were visited by tens of thousands of people.

Our exclusive story of one woman's struggles through lockdown on Universal Credit was our second most read in this period. Clara, who has a slipped disc and chronic disabilities, was saddled with £1200 in benefit sanctions after missing a job interview for a physical role in a supermarket, leaving her struggling to pay bills and buy food.

We continue to grow on solid editorial pillars.

The subs part of our business continues to grow. We have hired a subscription specialist to make

sure the gains from March can be build upon. A key part of this is an online space that allows sales and proceeds from subscriptions to be directed to specific vendors. By the end of 2020, 500 vendors across the UK had signed up to be included on this and that number continues to grow.

As we scale up our digital output, we will be able to increase our impact. This goes beyond just the range of our journalism, though that will grow, allowing us to shine brighter lights in places previously too dark for too long.

We're also able to innovate for our vendors. With help from National Lottery funding, we have been able create new products such as our vendor app, we can improve digital inclusion for vendors who are frequently amongst the most digitally excluded in Britain, and we can re-imagine the frontline service we offer for vendors in a ways that will drives better financial and social outcomes for them.

It's a radical overhaul.

December 2020 was the busiest month ever with

400,000 PAGE VIEWS

and

300,000 UNIQUE USERS

500

Vendors across the UK have signed up to be included in the online space from subscription sales and proceeds

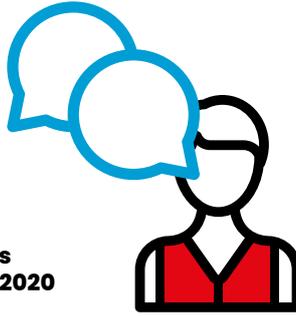


For our vendors.

Our Frontline staff made more than

2,000

support phone calls to vendors during periods of lockdown in 2020



45%

of those calls focusing on financial support.



To date, through the pandemic, The Big Issue has distributed well over

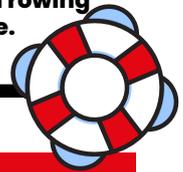
£838,527

to our vendors across the UK.

Thanks also to The Times' appeal for helping raise so much

£100,000

has been distributed since Christmas. It went out as cash, supermarket vouchers and other support payments towards rent, utility bills and family support costs. For one vendor, suffering from longstanding physical problems and an extended period of anxious shielding, we bought a rowing machine. She said it saved her life.



As part of our commitment to our vendors, and their loyal, concerned, customers, we built a podcast - The Big Miss You. We billed it as a virtual street corner. If vendors and their customers couldn't meet, we'd record them giving messages to each other. The Big Miss You podcast became an important way for vendors to continue to engage with their customers as during lockdown.



37%

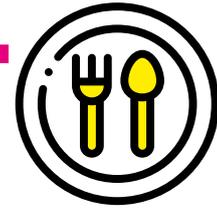
of all vendor engagement focused on wellbeing check-ins with

vendor's experiencing further social isolation and loneliness.



How Big Issue Invest spread its help.

As lockdown bit, Big Issue Invest (the social investment arm of The Big Issue Group) was another part of the company that raced to help those in need. It was part of the consortium of grant makers of The National Lottery Community Fund's Social Enterprise Support Fund. This fund was focused on delivering financial support to social enterprises at sharp end of Covid-19's financial impact. Big Issue Invest alone awarded 118 grants amounting to £3.2 million. One organisation, Bike Works, provided over 65,000 meals to vulnerable people across London who were self-isolating.



Bike works provided

65,000

meals to vulnerable people across London who were self-isolating.



Having invested in over

160

social enterprises and charities across the UK, Big Issue Invest also supported its investees to continue delivering impact in their communities and continues to support new clients

In June, Big Issue Invest made a

£3M

investment into Homes For Good, a social enterprise providing quality social housing across Glasgow. Homes for Good aims to

DOUBLE IT'S PORTFOLIO

and expand its affordable housing solution across the UK.



Street return.

We readied our people for the new normal. We had to make sure they were safe on the street, and their customers felt confident enough to approach them. We equipped all 2745 new and returning vendors with a Comeback kit – a bag with essential PPE, masks, hand sanitiser, wipes. We spent £142,455 on PPE.

We accelerated our move to cashless selling. Over 25 per cent of the selling workforce were supplied with card readers and a further 25 per cent have the necessary pre-requisites to 'go cashless'. Another 350 are close, and nearly 300 more want to go cashless, as soon as we can help them get with the additional support to sort out their ID and a bank account

A Comeback kit was provided to

2,745
VENDORS



This included essential PPE, masks and wipes costing



£142,455

50%

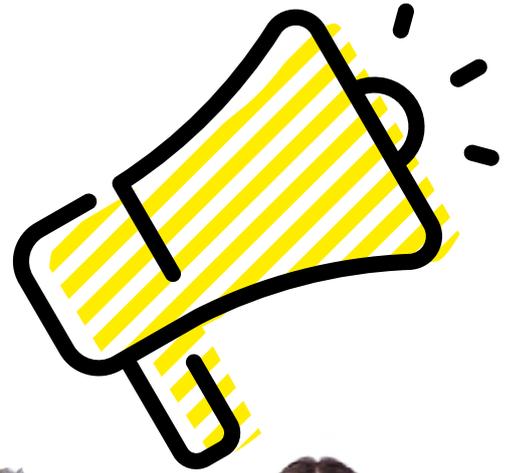
of the selling workforce are ready to work cashless



The Ambassadors.

As The Big Issue evolved, developing new ways to reach new readers and help our vendors, a growing number of high profile supporters rallied around us.

We welcomed new Brand Ambassadors – people keen to give up their time, and influence, to share our message far and wide and appear in the media supporting our work and campaigns.



Our ambassadors are



"I remember when The Big Issue launched," said Eccleston, "to see something like that born makes you proud because you feel like the social conscience of the nation is active." He implored supporters to take out subscriptions or give them as Christmas presents. The former Doctor Who made a number of key media appearances in his new position at Christmas. Fellow actor Daniel Mays likewise appeared on news broadcasts, backing our subscription drive and Christmas campaign, saying that becoming a Big Issue Ambassador was his "most important role to date".

Actor Sophie Winkleman – aka Lady Fredrick Windsor – also joined up, backing our efforts to support vendors through the toughest days of lockdown, adding: "I believe The Big Issue is vital to the heart and soul of our country."

Much loved architect and TV mainstay George Clarke appeared on the cover of The Big Issue, pledging his long-term support for us. "It's a lifetime commitment for me. Because the Big Issue very, very directly and very powerfully makes a difference."

They joined Sabrina Cohen-Hatton – one of the UK's most senior firefighters who, as a teenager, sold The Big Issue to work her way out of extreme poverty and street homelessness, who had joined as a Brand Ambassador in 2019 and has since appeared on television and radio in support of The Big Issue.

In February 2021, shadow Justice Secretary and MP for Tottenham, David Lammy, became our newest Brand Ambassador – adding his voice to The Big Issue's efforts to prevent a homelessness crisis following the pandemic. "In good times, our high streets are busy," he said. "We see vendors and we buy a magazine committed to ensuring that people who are less well off than us have that lifeline. We've got to be there in tougher times as well..."

It's a lifetime commitment for me. Because the Big Issue very, very directly and very powerfully makes a difference."

George Clarke

Next steps.

The Big Issue is a better publication now.



The Big Issue organisation has undergone five years worth of change in a few months.

We're now looking to work for those people who, through no fault of their own, have lost their jobs due to Covid and who face the catastrophe of homelessness. We've created RORA, the Ride Out Recession Alliance, to keep them in their jobs and homes. And we're going to spend a lot of time looking at how to help with their work and training.

Through the work that Big Issue founder John Bird is doing as a peer in Westminster, we're working on a Bill through parliament to build a better future for the next generation.

We're readying roll-out of Ebike schemes across Britain, schemes that involve work and training for former vendors.



How you can support us.

Subscriptions

While we're off the streets, our battle to survive continues. We need individuals and organisations to support us by taking subscriptions. You'll be supporting independent, pioneering journalism, and helping the most vulnerable in society stay afloat and remain in hope.

Partnerships

Our work with cashless payment leaders iZettle, who helped us to help hundreds of our vendors accept non-cash payments, and gain better financial independent, showed the appetite for brands to focus on work with social good. And we want to work with more brands who do.

Through our contract publications work we're creating new content that is helping organisations amplify their social impact to a host of new audiences.

[Bigissue.com/support](https://bigissue.com/support)



**THE BIG
ISSUE**

BIGISSUE.COM/SUPPORT