

THE BIG ISSUE FOUNDATION:

SMALL STEPS BIG CHANGES

WALK WITH BILLIE

Hi I'm Billie Bickley, I took part in the first ever Big Issue Night Walk in 2009. This year The Big Issue Foundation has asked me to be the Vendor Ambassador for the 2010 night walk.

Me and my dog walked 18 miles through the night last year and I raised over £1600 in sponsorship money. I loved every minute of it, it was hard work but I meet some great people and it gave me a chance to give something back.

I've got 96 criminal convictions – I was nicked almost every other month for 17 years until a Big Issue Foundation (BIF) outreach worker told me about The Big Issue. I started selling The Big Issue in 1999. I've not been in trouble with the police now for 10 years. I remember the last sentence I got, the judge said to me, "Billy, if I see you back here, you're going to go away for a long time." So the Big Issue saved my life, pretty much.

I was brought up in Coventry. My mum kicked me out when I was 14, so I caught a train and ended up in Euston. I was hooked on crack and heroin for the next 17 years. I slept in this old red bus shelter out the front of King's Cross station for eight years, until they took it down. I'm writing my life story at the minute, and my ghost writer, he says, "Billy, you lived in a little square for eight years!" It wasn't until then that I realised, 'S**t! That's where I lived, where I scored my drugs, made my money, for eight whole years!' I was hooked on Kings Cross, hooked on drugs, hooked on the street. I used to beg, I used to do terrible things, shoplift, clip punters –whatever I could to make money. When I first got badged-up as a Big Issue vendor, it was just a way to make money without getting arrested for it.

The BIF finally persuaded me to move into a hostel and with the help of the outreach team I'd managed to get clean. I was living in a hostel full of addicts and dealers and doing everything within me to stay clean. I'd been with my partner for four months when she said, 'Billy you can't live like this, come and lodge with me.'



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I've been there ever since. I signed off the dole, and I support my girlfriend and her two beautiful kids by selling the magazine. It's nice to know that the Big Issue is still there to support me, even though I've got myself sorted out. Because of my record, it's impossible for me to get a normal job, I'm turned down every time.

My customers sponsored me £1,600 for last year's walk and I was one of the top fundraisers. One of them said, 'Billy, it's because you're always cheery in the morning and you're always willing to stop and chat.' I love doing it – I've always loved it.

So why not join me for a chat on Friday 1st October as we walk the streets of London in support of The Big Issue Foundation.

See you on the 1st

L. Bickley.

Billie Bickley