

vendor life

WHO SELLS THE BIG ISSUE IN THE NORTH?



Name	Mark Morris
Age	43
Pitch	Huyton

“We sing recovery songs. It’s given me strength and hope. It’s very uplifting”

I’m from Newton-le-Willows. I’ve been selling the magazine on and off for seven years. I live with a good friend in a house in Orrell Park. I rent a room off him. It’s private, warm, healthy. It’s a strong community. I’m still classed as being vulnerably housed. But I’m happy there.

I have a little dog; his name is Austin. Sometimes he works with me. Funnily enough, I got the dog from Huyton itself. I lost my first terrier, and one of my customers had a Jack Russell. She offloaded him on to me.

I was homeless before I started selling *The Big Issue in the North*. I had health problems; I had addiction problems. I was isolated. I wasn’t doing nothing, basically. I was like that for 17 years. I slept in back alleys, on couches, anywhere and everywhere for about four years. I stayed in St

Helens, Warrington, Liverpool and Newton. I was stressed, I was broken. I was weak, and very emotional at times.

The Big Issue in the North helped pull me out of it. They referred me to other agencies who gave me support. I’m in recovery at the moment. I’ve had 14 months’ total abstinence. I’ve sung in a choir for the last ten months, through SHARP [a Liverpool-based addiction recovery centre]. We are made up of people who have been through addiction problems; they are all loving, caring people. We’ve been on a little tour, and we performed with the group Squeeze, which was amazing. We sing recovery songs. It’s given me strength and hope. It’s very uplifting.

I do drama as well and I’m doing a short film through the Spider Project [a Liverpool

recovery project]. I’ve just passed a coaching course at Anfield and I’ve played on the sacred ground. It was only half an hour but it’s what dreams are made of. I’ve done a lot of Outward Bound courses; I’ve dived and swum and canoed in the Albert Dock. I did a sponsored dive on Christmas Eve last year when we had the snow. And I loved it. Maybe that’s my inner child coming out of me. With me having addiction problems, although I’m 43 years of age at times I feel 19. There’s still a bit of a craziness in me but I’ve learnt to take it out in a positive way.

The choir opened a café last week on Parr Street called The Brink. Hopefully I’ll get employment there. It’s recovery based. Everybody knows everybody so they can relate to what they’ve been through. It’s

going to be amazing. A couple from London saw the choir sing and made a donation to get us started.

These services helped me get through what I needed to get through. They gave me self-discipline and strength of mind.

Selling the magazine itself has helped me to socialise, and communicate with my friends. It’s helped me mix with other people. It pays my electric bills, and puts food on the table. If it wasn’t for *The Big Issue in the North* I would most probably have ended up in a coffin. Dead. I know that’s shocking, but that’s the reality of it.

Today, I feel there is no need to suppress my feelings. I feel anger, I feel compassion, I feel caring. And I’m happy. And I have hope. I haven’t got dreams – I just keep it to the next 24 hours. And God will lead me in the right direction. My faith is very important to me. I pray a lot. God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change and the courage to change the things I can.

**INTERVIEW: HELEN CLIFTON
PHOTO: REBECCA LUPTON**