

Reading practice

Read the text. Are the sentences true (T) or false (F)?

- a) *Street News* is sold by celebrities such as Liza Minnelli. ____
- b) The man who launched *Street News* used to be homeless himself. ____
- c) A law was passed prohibiting sales of *Street News* on New York subway trains. ____
- d) *Street News* vendors must give any profits they make to Street Aid. ____
- e) *Street News* now employs more than 3,000 vendors. ____

Street News is a magazine. But it's a magazine with a difference. *Street News* is written and sold almost entirely by New York City's homeless or previously homeless people; and it is not only a magazine, but also a way for homeless and vulnerably housed people to help themselves improve their situations.

Street News (SN) was launched in 1989 by a former rock musician named Hutchinson Persons, using funds from a charity called "Street Aid" that he'd started to raise money for the cause of homelessness. Persons wanted to offer the homeless a legitimate alternative to begging, which allowed them to become self-sufficient rather than relying on handouts.

At first, there was a great deal of media interest and support for the magazine, and initial sales were high. Celebrity contributors included Paul Newman, Liza Minnelli, and musical group the Beach Boys. SN was originally published monthly, and up to 300,000 people were buying each issue. The magazine inspired an entire "street paper" movement worldwide, and spawned countless similar projects, such as *StreetWise* in Chicago, *Megaphone* in Canada, *Straatnieuws* in The Netherlands, and *The Big Issue* in the UK, Australia, Japan, South Africa, Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia.

However, interest in SN eventually began to fade, and sales began to fall. When, in 1991, New York City's Transportation Authority made it illegal to sell newspapers and magazines on subway trains (the main point of sale for most SN vendors), *Street News* almost went out of business. It recovered enough to keep going and is still sold today, but now it is only printed and distributed once every two months by fewer than 20 vendors, to a much smaller audience of around 3,000 readers per issue.

Becoming an SN vendor isn't difficult; as Persons once said, "We'll take almost anybody." Prospective vendors are given ten free copies of the magazine, which they sell for approximately \$1.25 each. With this money, they can then buy additional copies for twenty-five cents apiece, and keep the difference for themselves. Furthermore, five cents

from every magazine they sell goes into a savings account for rent, which Persons said allowed 200 of the original vendors to save enough money for a deposit on an apartment or room. Vendors must therefore manage their sales and finances carefully. These skills, along with the increased confidence and interpersonal skills that people develop through selling the magazine are crucial in helping homeless people reintegrate into society.

Advertising is also accepted in *SN*, and this money is channeled back into the printing and production of the magazine. In the years since it was started, the magazine has helped many individuals regain control of their lives, earn a legitimate income, and reintegrate into the mainstream. But, what is more, it has helped to challenge and shape public perceptions, and raised public awareness, of the issue of homelessness – not just in New York City, but in the dozens of other cities and countries where street papers have followed the example of the pioneering *Street News*.