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## **Prevent the Predictable Crisis**

*The Big Issue's* Founder says Government's approach to tackling poverty has failed

Poor people are failed by the measures designed to help them says John Bird, Founder of *The Big Issue*, in this year's *Politeia Christmas Address*. Not only are the huge sums spent over their lifetime doing little to help many poor people exchange failure for success, but they may be a factor in failure.

John Bird explains that it costs over £1 million to produce at 16 many of those who become homeless and unemployed, a far higher sum than that spent producing many of the success stories in society today. Likewise, each Christmas, great efforts and sums of money go towards helping the poor and homeless with food and shelter. But the problems remain as too many continue their lives often in abject poverty. As Bird explains:

Virtually all of the failing people who will be attending the Christmas homeless "oases" will have been macro managed into failure at great cost. Though housing, education, local authority social work support, medical and state support have all been provided, it does not enable failing people to prosper. The poor are getting more costly with each new government initiative.

'We need', Bird says, 'to rethink our ... approach so that we get preventative action and not only emergency responses'. He suggests that 'we have to cut off the supply of the needy as much as we help the needy'.

The emphasis should be on prevention. Different people need different support to help build their lives. The mentally ill or those suffering from drug or alcohol dependency need stable long-term care and the right shelter providing the safety and security necessary to combat their condition, and in the long term, to counter it. The homeless unemployed need safe and decent accommodation with stability and training on which to build a slow return to working life. Work, training, a decent home and medical care are all needed to turn lives round.

And what about the children, so often sentenced to grow up without the stability of committed parents? We must, says Bird 'look at the big oxygenators that create social failure....the housing, the parenting, the social security, the education'. He urges that family life must be recreated with the structures in place to give stability, a good education and the incentives provided elsewhere for those who succeed.

The text is available on Politeia's Website [www.politeia.co.uk](http://www.politeia.co.uk). Enquiries to Politeia at 02072405070 or [info@politeia.co.uk](mailto:info@politeia.co.uk), or to John Bird at [patrick.lisoire@bigissue.com](mailto:patrick.lisoire@bigissue.com)

\*John Bird MBE founded *The Big Issue* in September 1991 and is Trustee of *The Big Issue Foundation*