



BY LUCY SAWYER

If you walk down the streets of London, or indeed any major city, it is obvious that the number of homeless people living on the streets is ridiculously high and it is obvious that this number should not be so high. However, when researching this article I discovered that there are many more homeless people. Homeless people that we do not see...

I looked up the word homeless in a dictionary and found it to mean "Someone with no housing." At first I was able to accept this on face value, it made sense. If you have no house you must be homeless. After some further research I have found that this definition is not strictly true. You can be counted as homeless if: you are living in temporary accommodation such as a hostel or B&B, you are living in unsafe or overcrowded housing that you should not be expected to live in or you are living with friends or relations who cannot house you permanently.

In 2004 local authorities found that 204,750 households/families were homeless (this figure does not include those families who do not seek advice from local councils). At the end of December of the same year, 101,040 homeless families had been placed in temporary accommodation; 6,450 families were placed in hotels and 10,080 families were placed in hostels.

Again figures do not include those who sought their own accommodation or those who received help from social services.

Given that Britain is the 4th wealthiest country in the world, why are so many people living in temporary accommodation or housing that is unfit to live in? Why do so many people have no accommodation at all?

Money is a huge problem. The average weekly housing benefit is £63.20, however the average weekly rent is £77.30. With a large family or indeed any family, and perhaps a job that doesn't pay so well, what are families supposed to live on? There are around 700,000 empty dwellings in England and more than enough people to fill them, the problem is people just can't afford the cost of living.

According to the latest figures, well over 1 million houses in the UK are unfit to live in, however 90% of them are unoccupied. Thanks to outdated

guidelines the government does not recognise the situation of a lot of these families. These ancient standards mean that rooms such as the kitchen and living room count as spaces to be slept in. When taking a people count, babies under 1 year of age do not count as a person and children under 10 only count as half a person. By these standards a family of 6 could easily only count as 3 ½ people. These guidelines mean that well over 1 million children are living in unfit housing and it is estimated that homeless children miss out on a quarter of their schooling. With education being one of the most important things in life, I believe we are setting our children up to get poorly paid jobs and the whole cycle of not being able to afford housing begins again.