

Renée and family: Living with damp

[Hackney, Inner London]

Renée: My name is Renée Johnson. I have four children. Girvan is the eldest; Cheyrice second eldest; Tyrone is the middle and I have the last one, which is Zennisha, she's three years old. And I also have my mum living with me.

[Captions with the name and age of each child and Edith]

Edith: On the 28th of last month, of January, I was 80 lovely years – I am still young. I'm not old, I'm still young.

[Renee is a single parent and works full time as a mental health support worker. The family of six live in a three-bedroom council flat. Only two bedrooms are habitable.]

Tyrone: No one sleeps in the back room because of the damp. The damp in this room is right in the corner of the room and there is damp at the sides and on the window sills. If we did sleep in there, we would get sick.

Renée: As you can see, the bathroom is full of damp – all on the ceiling it's cracking, all down the walls ... even though they've put in the double glazing, it hasn't made it better, it's got worse. Even if you clean the walls, wipe the walls off, it comes back again, it doesn't make no difference. It can affect the children's health. They constantly have colds as well, quite frequently. More than they usually should have due from timing of year. This is what I have to live with.

[The family is forced to share bedrooms and beds.]

Edith: Girvan sleeps up here. This is Girvan. Me and Tyrone. Tyrone sleeps back there and I sleep at the front. And then there is no room for a wardrobe ... All this is my clothes hung up there. There's nowhere to put the clothes.

Cheyrice: We are in my mum's room, my room and my sister's room and this is where we all sleep. I sleep at the end, my sister sleeps here *[in the middle]* and my mum sleeps here.

Renée: We are overcrowded. Everyone is on top of each other. When one child is doing work you've got another making noise, another wants to watch TV. It's difficult.

[Girvan sometimes stays with his uncle in South London but has come home for half-term.]

Tyrone: My brother couldn't study when he was here because of me and Zennisha. When we play we make noise.

- Renée:** I had to send him to my brother so he could focus on helping him get his GCSEs. Due to the situation, the overcrowdedness, he gets affected more so he needs to have that little time and space away.
- Edith:** If Renée could have a bigger home I might be able to have a room for myself, it would be a lot easier. And then the children would have theirs. Everybody would be more comfortable.
- Cheyrice:** I feel cramped cos there isn't enough space and it smells quite damp all the time. I get colds quite easily and sometimes I get nose bleeds from it as well.
- Renée:** Due to the circumstances of the flat with the damp and mould, me as a parent, as a mother, I feel greatly embarrassed. Quite shameful.
- Renée:** It's hard on the children because they do need to have fresh air. They need an area to play in. They are entitled to that but unfortunately it's not happening. You always want the best for your children. You always want them to be safe as well.
- Tyrone:** We heard gunshots around the estate and that's why I can't go downstairs by myself. I don't feel safe and I don't get to do much things because of the danger around here. It feels like I am in a cell because I don't get to do anything freely and I don't have any freedom so I only get to stay inside the house.
- Renée:** I never thought I'd be living in this situation. I thought I would have my own home. In this day and age you'd never think that people would be living this way. You may not see it on the outside, but within the heart it's very, very shocking.

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