

Open Eyes, Open Doors: Making Hidden Homelessness Visible

This past weekend, something remarkable occurred directly beneath one of London's most iconic modern landmarks.

Dozens of activists, enthusiastically supported by the public, gathered at the foot of the London Eye. Dressed in red and white t-shirts, they stood shoulder to shoulder in a choreographed formation. The shape was instantly recognisable from above: a giant human eye with a door at its centre.

Captured by drones and seen from the London Eye itself, our message was clear: it's time to open our eyes to the housing emergency and open doors to safe homes.

This stunt, which we called *Open Eyes, Open Doors*, was formed as a way of drawing eyes to the hidden homelessness crisis. This scandal affects tens of thousands of families but is often unseen by the public.

The Hidden Housing Emergency: Child Homelessness in England

In the popular consciousness, and too frequently in the media, homelessness is seen **only** as people sleeping on the streets. But this is merely a part of the crisis.

Currently, more than 169,000 children in England are living in temporary accommodation. This can include hostels, B&Bs, converted office blocks, or short-term flats. That's a 12% increase in just a single year.

For many, temporary is becoming permanent. Families are finding themselves stuck for months and years in conditions that nobody should have to endure. This includes sharing bathrooms and kitchens with strangers, sleeping in a single cramped room, and regularly moving from place to place.

This creates a childhood of instability for children. For parents, it creates a constant state of anxiety surrounding safety, routine, and the future.

Why We Staged This Stunt: Temporary Housing Reform

It's all about seeing. The eye symbolises the need for the public, politicians, and the media to truly see the extent of the housing emergency. Meanwhile, the door symbolises safety. A door isn't merely wood, glass, and hinges. Rather, it's stability, security, privacy, and belonging. Behind it is where families grow together and children thrive.

"No child should ever grow up in a hostel, B&B, or other environment where they feel unsafe. Yet, every day we hear from families who are stuck in these exact same conditions," said Jane Doe, Campaigns Lead at Shelter. "We staged Open Eyes, Open Doors to show the public what's really happening behind closed doors."

By creating these symbols using dozens of our activists in the heart of London, we wanted to send a message that was too big to ignore. The location was chosen deliberately, making sure that the stunt was visible from the ground, from the air, and vitally from the London Eye, which ties perfectly into our campaign. As a major tourist hotspot, images and footage from the event went

viral across social media under the hashtag **#OpenEyesOpenDoors**, reaching thousands of people in a matter of hours.

The London Eye event follows Shelter's long-standing tradition of public activism. From the cardboard house protest in Parliament Square to demonstrations outside council chambers, we've always believed in making the unseen seen.

The Real Solutions: Social Housing and Support

Stunts can raise awareness of an issue, but awareness alone doesn't solve the housing emergency. That can only come through political will and systemic change.

What we call for:

- **Investment in new social housing:** Under-investment has left the country with a chronic shortage of social homes for decades. We need a new long-term programme to deliver genuinely affordable housing to those most in need.
- **Reform of housing benefits:** Many families are forced into debt because the freeze on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) means it no longer covers real rents. LHA must be unfrozen so families aren't left to make impossible choices.
- **End unsafe temporary accommodation:** No child should grow up in a hostel or other unsafe accommodation. Councils need to be given the funding and resources to provide safe, permanent homes.

These are not unreasonable. These are not luxuries. They are basics. A home is a human right.

What Can You Do

- **Donate:** Your donations help us answer calls from families facing eviction and homelessness. They help with legal support and emotional support. Donating £10 monthly could help us answer six urgent calls each year to our helpline, often the first port of call for people in housing need.
- **Join our campaigns:** Support Shelter's work by writing to your local MP, signing our petitions and open letters, supporting our campaign for social housing, or becoming one of our Housing Emergency Response Operatives (HERO). Your voice is powerful.
- **Share the message:** The images taken at our stunt at the London Eye are powerful, but they only matter if people see them and the message behind them. Share some pictures on social media with the hashtag **#OpenEyesOpenDoors** and help us open more eyes to this ever-expanding crisis.

Opening Our Eyes, Opening Their Doors

The London Eye gives everyone a unique look at our capital city, yet we need to widen our view even further. Behind too many temporary doors, families and children are living with worry, instability, and poverty.

With *Open Eyes, Open Doors*, we wanted to make the reality of hidden homelessness visible. But our stunt is just a symbol. It's just one moment on one single day. What matters most is turning any awareness we may have raised into action: opening real doors to safe, permanent homes.

We all need to open our eyes to the truth of the housing emergency. And then we need to open the doors that will end it.