

Opening intervention by Justine Bark

Excerpts from her 'Diary of a Jobseeker'

blog: <http://justine-diaryofajobseeker.blogspot.com/>

"Hello I am 36 and currently unemployed. I am doing this Blog to share my experiences and feelings, both positive and negative in my quest to gain full time employment. In the past I have had many jobs in factories, pubs, shops and with cleaning agencies. I have two children, one at college and working part- time and one at school with a paper round. I have always done voluntary work in schools and for community organisations. I left school at 14 when my parents split up and started work in a factory when I was 15. I have no formal qualifications but have taken up training opportunities that have been accessible to me. The jobs I have had have not been very rewarding but up until recent times were more easy to find. Now even rubbish jobs are scarce in this area. I become very upset when people look down on those who are unemployed and dismiss lightly the problems that we face. I hope my blog will shed light on the difficulties and the issues that unemployed workers face in 21st Century Britain. People who have never had to deal with the employment services and their outsourced off shoots do not understand what we have to go through. I hope my blog will help to give an insight.

What the Law says

I have wondered for a while now about the amount the Law says you need to live on. For a person over 25 with no illnesses it is £65.45 a week. Whether you live at home with your parents as a non dependent or in a house/flat on your own it would be interesting to know how they came up with this figure. Well this winter has been terrible - the Gas and Electricity have been a killer. I am on key and card meters and have to pay up front. The Gas was £30 a week and Electricity £15. And remember I am not in most days so did not sit with the heating on and my kids are out at college and school. I thought there was a gas leak as we were only having the gas on for about 5 hours. I have two dependents so get Child Tax credits for them. I do worry when they leave Education as it is so difficult now and just can not bear to think that I will not be in paid employment by then. Although I have, officially, been Jobseeker for just over a year. The last time I had any paid work was longer than that.

I am going to write to my MP and see if I can find out about what the Law says I can live on. A loaf of bread is over a quid.

This is the first week day morning that I have been at home in Months. If I am not volunteering then I am at some training course or Job club, or JC referred agency.

I have enquired and applied for 7 jobs this morning. Two had gone, and the others were a mixture of sending my CV or filling in on line application form.

I am always hopeful as if I think about it too much it does my head in. I try to think about the here and now. As thinking I may not have a job in the future is hard, especially as my kids will be leaving education in just over a year, my daughter is doing one more year at college.

I signed on, on Friday so will get paid today, It is a good job as my electricity was on 29p this morning. I am due at the back to work agency at 2 so must go. Will be looking for 2 1/2 hours at the job sites again. Wish me luck.

Feeling down

I always try to stay positive. I am a half full and an optimist, although I usually look between the lines which can be quite tiring at times.

Well, I am feeling a bit low, as it's sometimes hard to stay bright when you are never on top of things. I hate money and the issues surrounding it, which is almost everything. I am behind with my TV license and keep getting calls. I am on a payment plan £8.50 a fortnight. I was also paying a fine for not having a license for 8 weeks some years ago, but as I struggled to pay the fine and the license, I got another fine which I ended up in court for. This is just a quick glance at my issues. I guess I could not have a TV, but then how do you overcome things like not being able to buy decent food, or have the heating on very much, so much so that the pipes burst as they got so cold. Advice was to put heating on more, daaah, how do you buy new clothes, give your kids money for evenings out with friends? Never mind I would benefit loads from a day or night out. I have done nothing wrong yet feel I am somewhat punished for being unemployed. People have a view now that Benefits means cars, posh house, lazy, better off than those who work. Well let me tell you its garbage. It is a miserable existence as you not only find it difficult to manage financially, emotionally but have to defend yourself, not to mention the hoops you have to jump through daily to satisfy a system that is so wrong.

Have received a notice to seek possession of my house and need to go into the council tomorrow.

Things have been slipping for a while now and becoming evermore difficult to stay on top. I do not know what to do. I got into problems with my house before and I know it is a main priority, but it is like juggling, and you learn to juggle with 3, then someone throws you a ball, you manage that and it seems just then, someone throws a few more, so it is then that you drop the lot.

I do not want pity or to hear myself moaning and I really hate it when people say that this is a lifestyle choice, or that I am lazy or a scrounger and why should I have enough money to live on because I have no job. The fact is this, if the worst came to the worst and I lose my house then what???? Is it my kids fault or my fault that everything is so bloody expensive??? - that people like me or in a worse place than me are faced with decisions every single day about things that people take for granted. The basic things in life are a major issue for us.

Anyway enough about all of this I am going to bed. I have not been sleeping too well, and that is not something I usually have trouble doing- so night night."