

“Residents have a sense of pride and ownership. They are more inclined to engage with Thames Valley and people now approach me rather than display hostility.”

When Jay took up his ‘patch’ in Slough he encountered difficulties in engaging with residents:

“It is a diverse area with many people from different backgrounds and cultures; Pakistan, Indian, Eastern Europe, and the UK. They were insular and didn’t want to engage or mix with neighbours.”

Some of the areas also had historical problems such as drug dealing and there were a large number of single parents, many of whom felt isolated. There was a general sense of hostility and aggression towards Jay who was seen as a representative of authority who was there to enforce unwelcome regulations.

However, following the introduction of Community Champions there has been a noticeable and positive change. For example, in Moray Drive there is a park that was largely derelict and not used by the local children. It had become a place for teenagers to congregate and take drugs.

One of the first Community Champion driven projects was a drive to make the park more hospitable and child-friendly. Residents had pointed out it was in a state of neglect and not used by the children.

Over 30 children from Moray Drive became involved in designing and painting a mural on a Thames Valley Housing-owned wall in the park, as a first step towards renovating the park.

Jay said: “It involved a lot of residents. Many of them would not have previously spoken to each other. By coming together, it has created a feel good factor in the community which has been sustained. Residents have a sense of pride and ownership. They are more inclined to engage with Thames Valley Housing and people now approach me rather than display hostility.”

**Jay Narwal,**  
Housing Officer Slough, Thames Valley Housing



The neglected and bleak-looking play area on Moray Drive



Door knocking and community listening on Moray Drive, Cippenham, Sovereign Heights, and Littlerook Avenue

## “It proved our belief, that if you give people positive opportunities they will respond positively.”

Neequaye’s role in the success of the Community Champions project has been both central and pivotal. Specifically employed to become the conduit of communication between residents and Thames Valley Housing he was charged with finding out what the residents’ concerns were.

It was a task he initially approached with some apprehension: “I didn’t think there would be a great deal of receptivity. However, when people realised that we were offering them a voice they were genuinely interested and engaged with the one-to-one personal approach. It proved our belief, that if you give people positive opportunities they will respond positively.”

Neequaye’s approach was based on offering an empathetic ear, asking a series of questions, relaying to Thames Valley residents concerns and coming back to them with suggestions for improvement.

In one small example, an elderly resident at Hoylake Close expressed his fears about a group of youths who gathered in the evening around a fence. The fence was approximately one metre from a row of houses and clearly close to the kitchen windows of residents who felt intimidated by the youths. Neequaye relayed this back to Thames Valley Housing. The fence was taken down and lights installed. The youths no longer gathered there.

Neequaye had no previous experience in housing or even working in an office. His background is in art and design though he does have extensive experience in community projects. His success in both listening to residents and helping them articulate their concerns has been central to the success of the project. It illustrates the importance of an approach that is informed by empathy and understanding.

**Neequaye Dsane,**  
Community Investment Officer,  
Thames Valley Housing



Howard's view on the project is informed by a rise in customer satisfaction levels across Slough and a significant reduction in anti-social behaviour, as well as a greater depth of relationship between housing officer Jay Narwal and residents.

"It has clearly made a difference to Jay's work and community liaison. Neequaye has made a success of it which has been hugely supportive for Jay."

Customer satisfaction levels in Slough were measured at 86 per cent compared to 79 per cent for the same period the previous year. At the same time the number of anti social behaviour incidents has plunged dramatically.

Prior to the project there were 11 live anti-social behaviour cases in Slough. Nine have been closed in the last 10 months and there are no new reported cases in the past 10 months, demonstrating the effectiveness of the project.

"The project is not just about savings, it's about the soft and often immeasurable benefits that make a real difference to people's lives," he says.

**Howard Dawson,**  
Deputy Housing  
Director,  
Thames Valley  
Housing



"Helping people is what we are about. The Community Champions project illustrates that perfectly. It's about positive relationships, which serves to strengthen our values. It leads to other opportunities for residents. It also helps create committed staff because they can see in a very obvious way how we are supporting and empowering people."

**Alex Noonoo,**  
Communications Manager, Thames Valley Housing