

UNDER ONE ROOF



SPRING AHEAD

A big spring clean is breathing new life into a communal space used by young parents and their babies.

The room at Seacole Court, our housing scheme for supported young families in Wolverhampton, was underused and in need of brightening up. So when Surrinder Mall started as the scheme's manager, she suggested some changes which she and the Nehemiah team soon got underway.

The room was redecorated. New blinds were fitted and the carpet replaced with wipeable flooring. Play mats and new furniture will soon complete the transformation. There are new toys too; many donated by local charity The Well.

Working with The Gem health centre, Surrinder has ideas for the room including baby massage and first aid sessions. Cooking activities, using a slow cooker in the room's kitchen, are also planned.

"Residents' self-contained flats here are lovely but everyone benefits from the chance to socialise," says Surrinder. "It's also a relaxing place for me and a young parent to go for a private chat sometimes."

Young mums or couples with a baby can live for up to two years at Seacole Court. During their stay, families receive a range of support from our staff and other agencies. This includes help to maintain a tenancy, budget and manage bills, plus support to look at education and work options.

"We give young families a safe and supportive environment to take stock and make positive choices for their future," explains Surrinder.

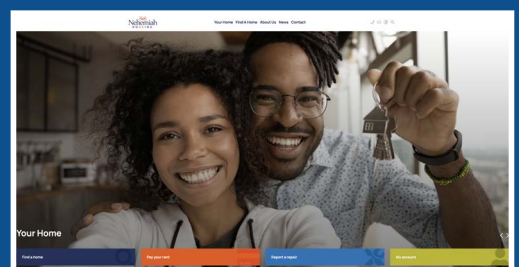
"When they leave, we want them to feel ready to thrive independently. A family moved out last week; they were smiling and excited to move ahead with their lives."

NEW WEBSITE

You've given a great reaction to our new website, with comments like "much brighter and clearer...easier to find information".

It's regularly updated with helpful content for you and prospective tenants. You can also view your rent account at any time.

Thank you to the tenants who helped us develop it. We'll continue to improve it in response to feedback so please let us know what you think. Visit the website at www.nehemiah.co.uk



SECRET HOARD

Unmanageable amounts of clutter in your home can interfere with daily living. It can also be a health and safety risk, creating a fire hazard or affecting access for essential repairs and safety checks.

People living with hoarding disorder collect and store an excessive amount of items. The chaos and distress it causes damages their quality of life, relationships and overall wellbeing.

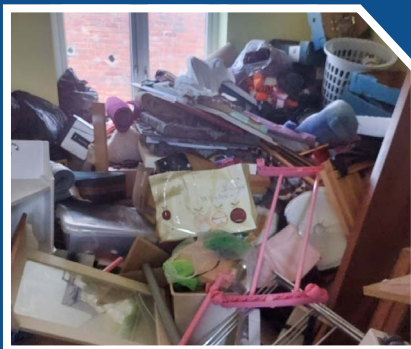
Hoarding disorder is more common than most people realise. Fortunately, with support many individuals can find relief and a way to manage the problem.

“The reasons for hoarding can be complex, but there is usually an emotional trigger,” explains our tenancy support officer Lusefa Salamon.

“There could be family history of hoarding, strongly held beliefs about discarding items – “I may need these someday” – or using it to cope with a stressful life event such as bereavement. Whatever the cause, asking for help is the first step to getting on top of things.”

Lusefa is currently helping five tenants affected by hoarding. The clutter in Tom’s* bedroom reached the ceiling and he was sleeping on the lounge sofa. After several months of sensitively building trust, Tom was helped to declutter and clear the room. He’s now looking forward to making it his bedroom again.

If hoarding is an issue for you, please let us know. We can find the right practical or emotional support to help.



NEW FACES

“Friendly and kind. She makes everyone feel welcome.”

These are some of the lovely written compliments we’ve received about Lynn Gannon (pictured far right), our new scheme manager covering our retirement housing schemes Woodside House in Shard End and Father Joe Taaffe House in Digbeth.

Lynn has just organised an open day at Woodside to promote opportunities to live there, independently in a self-contained flat with the reassurance of support if needed. There is availability too at some of our other retirement schemes, including Shanti Niketan and



McCalla House in Wolverhampton where Aliyah Denton is the new scheme manager.

Aliyah joins with experience gained working with all age groups in mental health and in residential care. “I’m keen to encourage a greater sense of belonging,” she says. “Artistic expression can help so we’re looking at ideas like music making, poetry and creative writing.”

ZEROING IN



Any damp or mould in your home can expect a zero-tolerance approach from us.

This means if you report damp to us – or we find it on a visit – action will be taken to get rid of it. We won’t let you live with the problem.

We will remove the mould from walls and ceilings. We will then look to identify what’s causing the damp. Sometimes repairs are needed, such as fixing damaged pipes or replacing a broken extractor fan.

Once we know why it’s happening, we will put a plan in place to stop it returning.

Mould grows when the air is still and surfaces are cold. Daily tasks can create excess moisture, trapped in our homes. We all bathe, cook and dry washing at home. But small things can help, like wiping down condensation and opening the window so steam goes out and fresh air gets in.

Warm homes are less likely to be damp. So, if at all possible, keep your home heated and avoid heating it less.

Most of our properties were built only 30 years ago, with modern insulation. All are double glazed. Every year we continue to make improvements to keep them energy efficient. For example, we’ve recently upgraded windows and doors at 100 properties, spending an average of £2000 per home.

We want to tackle this issue together. So please call us or visit our website for advice.

AGREEMENT UPDATE

All Nehemiah tenancy agreements have been reviewed to make sure they are fully up to date and as helpful to you as possible.

Your tenancy agreement tells you the rules about living in your property. It is an important legal contract between you and us, which sets out your rights and responsibilities as a tenant and our responsibilities as your landlord.



As the law and other details can change, we review our tenancy agreements every few years to check if anything needs adding or amending to stay current.

This has been done by our solicitors, and checked by some of our involved tenants.

As a result, we've made some small updates, mainly to add information about property boundaries and to reflect changes in data protection. These updates do not change your rights.

You will soon receive this latest version of your tenancy agreement in the post and be asked to sign to accept it. If you have any questions please speak to your housing officer or scheme manager. If you recently moved to your home after 6 February 2023, you will already have the latest tenancy agreement in place.

POCKET ADVICE



If you are struggling to pay your rent, it is important that you talk to us so we can find ways to help you.

Worried about debt or managing your money? No matter where you live, we can arrange for free and impartial money advice from Birmingham Settlement.

Just like we did for Nehemiah tenant Kelly*, who felt a huge sense of relief when she asked her housing officer for help with her rent arrears.

Kelly is a single mum to a disabled son. We put her in touch with Birmingham Settlement's money advisor who helped Kelly to check her benefit entitlements. She wasn't missing out on anything but was advised about cost of living grants and other ways to maximise her income.

Kelly was also helped to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment from her local council to prevent further rent arrears.

It was soon discovered that Kelly had water bill debts too - and higher than she was aware. The money advisor helped Kelly to get discounts from Severn Trent's Big Difference Scheme. These have reduced her arrears and cut her future water bills too.

Happily, Kelly is feeling less anxious and more positive after taking control of her finances.

It's rewarding to get involved.

I like to think I show this, including to my adult children and five grandchildren. Whether it's helping to shape Nehemiah's new website or assessing which repairs contractor is up to the job, everyone's point of view is valid in their circumstances. You can't expect something to be done if you don't say or do something yourself. And sometimes you just have to compromise.

MEET A TENANT

Miriam Campbell was the first tenant to sit on the operations committee of our management board. It monitors our housing services, tenant involvement and value for money. From her home in Handsworth, she told us more.

I've been a committee member for two years. I'm treated equally to everyone else. I'm listened to and information is broken down if it needs explaining. For example, if something can't be done, I'm keen to understand the reasons why.



Being an involved tenant is insightful. As an individual with a problem, you don't know the ins and outs of how a housing association runs. I've gained a greater understanding of what goes on behind the scenes. There are always new things to learn.

My father encouraged me to speak up and get my point across well.

I wanted to be a nurse but a health condition meant I couldn't do long hours on my feet. I volunteered as a mental health support worker for several years. The staff encouraged me to study and I gained a social care diploma.

I hate to see injustice.

On occasions I saw this in the mental health service. I remember challenging staff on how quickly they restrained a man loudly protesting to them. They hadn't taken time to understand what he was trying to usefully tell them; he was speaking Jamaican Patois. Another time I helped someone move successfully from full care into independent living. The psychologist said he could see how passionate I was.

YOU SAID, WE DID

All your feedback is useful. Listening to you helps us to improve.

In this newsletter you can read about how you tenants have helped us develop our new website and make sure the wording in tenancy agreements is clearer.

Here are a few other examples of what we've done recently thanks to tenants' ideas and input:

- Held an online evening meeting to discuss and answer questions about the rent increase
- Involved tenants in the recruitment of customer-facing staff
- Arranged and paid for tenants involved in organising social events to gain food hygiene qualifications
- Fitted bright new furniture in the lounge at Father Joe Taaffe House in Digbeth (pictured being enjoyed) and redecorated communal spaces at Shanti Niketan in Wolverhampton



- Made updates to our policy for dealing with complaints
- Fitted over 100 new bathrooms in the past year, all with electric showers
- Increased ways you can get involved, including our plans to set up a tenants' panel to help us with future editions of this newsletter. Interested? Please get in touch with Marcia; see below for details.

SUGAR HIGH

Type 2 diabetes affects many people in our communities. It's a serious condition which can lead to lots of health complications.

Supported by West Bromwich African Caribbean Resource Centre, we ran a diabetes awareness course for older tenants in Sandwell led by diabetes health champion Tony Kelly.

The engaging and empowering sessions explored how even small lifestyle changes can reduce your risk.

"It's made me more mindful of my food choices, and encouraged me to walk more," says one participant. "Being borderline diabetic, I feel more informed and positive about what I can do."




Nehemiah
HOUSING



Please let our customer engagement officer Marcia Cunnison know if you have any comments about this newsletter or would like to help us plan the next issue.

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*Not their real name