

# Belong Life

AUTUMN 2025



Belong celebrates awards season with multiple accolades: See pages 8 - 11.

The Annual Belong Customer Satisfaction Survey Results Are In: See pages 2 & 3.



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**BELONG**  
VILLAGES





## Word from the team

**With the winter nights coming in, we look forward to the festive season and celebrate the highlights of recent months.**

First of all though, I would like to thank all our customers who responded to this year's satisfaction survey. This is a vital listening exercise which helps us to see where we are doing well, and areas we can strengthen. We were delighted that the percentage of customers and relatives who would recommend Belong crept up further, from 96.4% last year to 96.7% this year. However, we also noted some dips, and we will be making it our priority to address these in the year ahead so that we can make further improvements (see page 2-3).

We are excited that these action plans will be overseen by Rebecca Woodcock, newly appointed as Chief Operating Officer and now a member of Belong's executive team, working alongside our Non-Executive Directors. Becky is a longstanding leader within Belong, previously Head of Operations and before that General Manager of Belong Atherton and Support Manager at Belong Wigan – both villages which she supported to achieve 'Outstanding' ratings from the Care Quality Commission. It has been a pleasure to welcome her to the Board and I have every confidence that her commitment to Belong and thorough knowledge of our village model mean she has the perfect blend of skills, values and experience to help lead the organisation into the future.

Also this autumn, we were delighted to welcome a new chair to the Board, Tony Bristlin, previously vice chair and appointed as Robert Armstrong stepped down at the end of his term. I look forward to working with him in his new capacity and you can read his interview on page 16.

Finally, and equally importantly, it's been wonderful to celebrate a number of successes this autumn, from platinum accreditations in the Gold Standards Framework to our prestigious win of Operator of the Year at the HealthInvestor Senior Housing Awards, testament to our independent living provision.

While this is a fantastic accolade, even more important to us is seeing how this looks on the ground, in the great experiences and outcomes achieved for those who live with us: the most recent of these can be found in the pages which follow. We hope you enjoy the read!

**Martin Rix, Belong Chief Executive**

## Having Your Say... Customer Satisfaction Results

Once again, our annual Customer Satisfaction Survey is here to steer the Belong ship, making sure those journeying with us have the best possible experience. As a listening organisation, we are here to ensure your thoughts and suggestions shape our villages and services, and so all feedback is taken into consideration and used to continuously improve Belong life for everyone.

Thank you to all who took the time to communicate your views to us. Of course, the survey is just one way we collect customer feedback and for those who weren't able to submit a response, be assured our door is always open, so please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Equally, we are also grateful when customers share their positive experience externally, including reviews on [carehome.co.uk](https://carehome.co.uk) and [homecare.co.uk](https://homecare.co.uk) – these really do help us to promote Belong and paint a picture of what we're like for others researching care options available.

### Opinion matters

On to our survey, we received just shy of 650 responses from across the villages and Belong at Home, with household relatives and Experience Days customers also invited to take part.

As at summer 2025, we are pleased that a record 96.7% would recommend Belong to family and friends, with high approval scores for areas such as our people, care quality, homely environments, and great communication.

With the opportunity to provide written feedback, we received many positive comments for our colleagues and have delighted in sharing these kind words with them.

We also recognise that there is always room for improvement, and we take all feedback on board with the view to take swift action where necessary to continue to make Belong the best place to live.

### THE PERCENTAGE OF CUSTOMERS THAT WOULD RECOMMEND BELONG ACROSS ALL VILLAGES AND SERVICES



Published results are available in all villages; please contact reception for your personal copy.





## Summary of strengths

Notable positives from this year's survey were:

- 1 The overall increase in recommendation rate from 96.4% and 96.7%
- 1 All stakeholders rate Belong's colleagues very highly in relation to living the organisation's values of care from the heart and respect for all
- 1 The increase in tenant satisfaction (recommendation rate up from 97.7% to 99%) as we continue to invest in our independent living provision
- 1 Excellent results for our community services, with 99% satisfaction rate for Belong at Home and 100% for Experience Day respondents
- 1 Positive response on co-production measures and the ability to influence village life; this was a new question for 2025 and we were delighted that 92% of our customers feel they can shape their community
- 1 Positive scores for responsiveness and supporting residents to stay connected with friends and family
- 1 Investment in the indoor and outdoor environment is appreciated, resulting in strong scores in these areas

## Areas of focus for 2026

**Response rates and feedback vary by location, and individual reports are produced and shared at each village. However, there are some global themes to emerge, which we are addressing as follows:**

**Focus on recruitment and retention:** we have seen improvements in this area over the past year but this is an ongoing need and will remain a priority.

**Household meals:** we will review our catering model for household meals and undertake wider consultation to ensure menus match customer preferences.

**Meaningful engagement:** we will revisit our strategy to drive engagement on the households, including in evenings and at weekends.

**Outings:** we will continue to train drivers and continue to increase opportunities for trips out.

**Exercise:** the recent appointment of Barbara Tait as our Lead Exercise Specialist is expected to create new opportunities to drive engagement with this service and even stronger customer outcomes.

**Relative engagement:** we will seek to improve our communication and engagement with relatives so we can harness their input to drive improvements.

**Customer voice:** we will continue to look for new opportunities to harness customer input and ensure this is what drives the way we operate and develop our villages.

## A roundup of what our customers like most about Belong:

### Household Customers

"Everyone is so lovely. The village feels inclusive and I like that."

"It feels like a family and has done from the moment I arrived."

"The staff go above and beyond for me daily. Whether that be getting my favourite food, chatting with me, having a joke, giving me hugs, or emotional support."

### Relatives

"The Belong team are cheerful and kind to mum. She enjoys having interaction with people and sharing laughs and smiles."

"The Bistro is an amazing place for the whole community; we use it a lot."

"The design of the village with its households is one of the best aspects of Belong."

### Apartment customers

"All of your staff are friendly, helpful and professional. I do feel I belong here."

"Nothing is too much for the staff; always very professional and approachable."

### Belong at Home Customers

"We are cared for by people who put our needs before anything else in their busy day. First class staff."



# A Customer's View

**Nothing is more important to Belong than our customers, which is why we love hearing about their experiences.**

**For this issue, we speak to Laura McLoughlin who went to the highest of heights in memory of her grandmother, Helen Wightman of Chanters House at Belong Atherton.**

**"The Twelfth of Never – the number of times I have heard that song!" Laura laughs. Helen, or 'Nana' as she was known with much affection by her family, was a huge fan of music. "She loved the tribute acts that performed at the village. Music calmed her down – she would sing along or mime to it. She also really enjoyed the VE Day garden party. And being pampered in the village salon!"**

Hailing from Blackley, Greater Manchester, former seamstress Helen had been living close by in Chadderton with husband, Charlie, before he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and sadly, he passed away in 2021.

It wasn't long after when she started showing symptoms of dementia herself and Laura's mother began looking after Helen, as Laura explains: "As Nana's needs increased it all became a bit much and we felt it wasn't safe for her to stay at home any longer, and so we moved her into a care home. In fact, we had to move her a number of times as they couldn't meet her needs. She was also left without mental stimulation resulting in a change in her behaviours. (She would try to escape, and she was successful on one attempt.)

"As a family, we had reached a conclusion that the level of care available was just how it was, that it would never be like how we would look after her at home, even if we were able to."

## Ray of hope

It was a chance conversation between Laura's mother and a friend who happened to be going through a similar experience in which she was recommended Belong.

"I first visited Nana once she had settled in and I remember thinking, 'Wow, this is different!'" Laura continues. Belong were vastly different in their approach to wellbeing, keeping Nana stimulated and happy. We also took great comfort from the household's two cats, Harriet and Tom Tom.

**If you would like to contribute to the next 'A Customer's View' column, please pass on your details to a member of staff or email the editor at: [tracy.brookes@belong.org.uk](mailto:tracy.brookes@belong.org.uk)**



*Pictured: Laura, just seconds away from her skydive*

"As a family, we were made to feel incredibly welcome. A carer came into Nana's room to drop some washed clothes off and rather than just putting the clothes away, she held her hand and asked if she could get us a brew. She made the effort to make sure we were all okay and it's small gestures like that we really appreciated."

When the time came for Helen to be supported with end-of-life care, the family had previously considered moving her into a hospice, or into the family home. At Belong Atherton, they were happy for her to remain in the home she had grown to become fond of.

Laura shares more: "The support for us as a family really was incredible. In Nana's final days the staff explained everything to us and gave us a lot of a lot of comfort, encouraging us to make it our second home and use the guest suite. Chanters House often eats meals together, like a family around the dining table and they were very kind in inviting us to join them. They became like friends, even though we'd known them for just six weeks."

## To the highest height

This summer, Laura and her father, Damian, skydived from 15,000ft over Lancashire in Helen's memory, raising a £1,500 donation to the village as a thank you to the team.

Laura finishes: "Our family really can't speak highly enough of the Belong Atherton team, and we just wish that Nana had moved in sooner. We wanted to do something to say thank you as she was given the most fabulous care by all staff and I'm so pleased we were able to make some happy memories whilst she was at the village."



# The power of music

## Chester's Intergenerational Choir Opens Storyhouse Elders Week

**A** unique intergenerational choir with participants aged from two to 100 kicked off Storyhouse Elders Week, the annual Chester arts event featuring, film, song, dance, photography and creative workshops with the goal of celebrating ageing.

Dubbed the 'Sankofa Songsters', the special choir has membership from across 14 care settings, including Belong Chester, as well as pupils from early years settings, primary schools, and members of the wider community. It is part of The Chester Creative Health Partnership, Living Lives Together.

Led by Amanda Wrigley of Live the Beat, the singers achieved national fame last year after being personally invited by the Princess of Wales to perform for ITV's annual Royal Carols: Together

at Christmas concert at Westminster Abbey.

Now, their talents have been heard opening the annual Elders Week exploring and challenging the societal perceptions of age and ageing.

Commenting on the Sankofa Songster's latest achievement, Belong Chester General Manager, Caroline Ray, said: "We recognise the benefits of creative experiences for our older residents and the nursery children, so the launch of Storyhouse Elders is the perfect occasion for them to showcase their talents to the community. Everyone has really enjoyed being involved."

The Chester Creative Health Partnership, Living Lives Together, is a partnership between Ready Generations, Live the Beat, Healthbox CIC, Fountains Medical Practice, and Live Cheshire.

*Pictured: Belong Chester members of the*

*Sankofa Songsters Choir*



## Music Therapy Makes for Joy at Belong Warrington

**When 86-year-old Val Fryer, who lives with vascular dementia, first visited Belong Warrington, she had never played an instrument and had little interest in music. Two years later, she is playing the piano, supporting fellow residents to join in and describing music therapy as the highlight of her week – thanks to the village's collaboration with Nordoff and Robbins, the UK's largest music therapy charity.**

Val makes the weekly trip to the village to enjoy one of Belong's day care sessions, known as Experience Days. Daughter Jane shares more: "It's just been a beautiful thing to see, because while she's never been musical before, in terms of playing an instrument, when we leave here after the music therapy sessions, it's a lovely journey home. She's just so happy. We just chat about the music that mum's played and how she feels, and she can't believe how lucky she is."

For Jane, the benefits extend beyond her mother's wellbeing. "It's changed the atmosphere at home too. Dementia is difficult, but now we have something positive to share. The joy she brings back from sessions flows through the family." Pam Thomson is a trained Nordoff and Robbins music therapist who has led the sessions at the village for the past



*Pictured: Belong Experience Days customer, Val, enjoys the piano with Pam Thomson, music therapist at Nordoff and Robbins*

few years. Highlighting the clinical and social impact of her work, she comments: "Music therapy has been vital for Val's emotional wellbeing and mental health. She says it 'lifts her up'. Dementia can lead to a huge loss of self-confidence, but experiencing yourself making a social contribution to a group is vital for self-esteem and in Val's case, she supports those sitting next to her to play and contribute too."

Jane recalls one particularly moving example: "There was a lady who isn't

very verbal, and Mum helped her to join in on percussion at just the right point. Afterward, they smiled at each other, and they touched hands in a kind of support gesture. And Mum feels that lady is wanting to speak more now. I got a lump in my throat when Mum told me because she's always been quite shy."

Speaking of her newfound enthusiasm for music, Val finishes: "If I'm not feeling so well, it just lifts me up altogether. I go out of here dreaming about it, I feel so lucky."



# Memory Lane...



Pictured: Bill Shufflebotham

**B**elong Newcastle-under-Lyme Experience Day customer Bill Shufflebotham joined the RAF as an engineer in the wake of the Second World War, working on Spitfire engines and the first jet planes and serving in the East. We spoke to him about his memories of these times and experiences with Belong.

Born in July 1932, Bill grew up with an older sister and a younger brother and sister. In the run up to World War II, age 5, he remembers building a Nissen hut with his father.

Between the ages of 11 and 14, he lived with his maternal grandmother to help her, as she was blind.

At 11, he transferred from Bucknall School to Grove School, a move he credits with having a formative influence on his life's direction.

"It was the best thing that ever happened to me," says Bill. "There were bullies at the previous school, and I was behind in English and maths, but the new school had teachers who cared and were supportive. They made things interesting."

Bill was also an accomplished musician, playing the trombone in the Salvation Army band, which led to a

performance at the Royal Albert Hall. His love for maths, science, and history steered him toward an apprenticeship in engineering, which involved working on lathes and planing machines.

## RAF career

Later, Bill was offered a role in the Royal Air Force (RAF) as an engine mechanic, which involved working with Rolls-Royce Spitfire engines.

"I knew every nut, bolt and loading device and could strip them down and put them back together," he says.

His career later led him to work on the first jet engines and De Havilland Vampire and Gloster Meteor aircraft at Full Sutton Airbase.

As an RAF member, he was called out to Malaysia after the Second World War. Bill remembers this time fondly, noting that engineers didn't have to wear boots or heavy clothing because of the heat, and he enjoyed swimming in the sea and making friends with pilots. Although it wasn't his job to fly planes, a pilot allowed him to take the controls and fly the aircraft on one memorable flight from RAF Butterworth to Shanghai.

After returning home in his early 20s, following the deaths of his parents, Bill discovered that he had been adopted and was not biologically related to his siblings or the parents he knew.

After leaving the RAF, Bill continued his engineering career, taking a role at British Gas looking after plant maintenance.

## Life at Belong

He has been attending Experience Days at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme on Fridays for over a year now and says that he wishes he could get there every day.

While he remains active and continues to walk everyday, the Experience Day sessions help him get 'further afield', according to Bill, including visits to local museums, such as the Bampton Museum and Bottleworks. He is particularly looking forward to visiting the RAF museum at Cosford.

As a musician, he continues to engage in musical activities at the village, where he also often watches musicals. He also takes part in chair-based exercise classes at the village to help maintain his mobility and keep as independent as possible.

Bill maintains friendships with his second wife and his stepdaughter. He has made a close-knit group of friends affectionately known as the 'Friday Club'.

"I get on with everyone," says Bill.





Belong Atherton resident Bill Cartwright regaining independence with exercise specialist Kelly Sullivan.



## Multi-sensory activity programme helps Belong Atherton resident regain independence

**A** Belong Atherton resident who was left unable to walk and paralysed on one side following a severe stroke is regaining independence and quality of life thanks to a tailored programme of exercise and multi-sensory activities.

Bill Cartwright, aged 88, who is also living with dementia, is now able to play ball games and other activities after moving into the village and embarking on an initial 12-week rehabilitation programme coordinated by the village's dedicated exercise specialist, Kelly Sullivan.

After just nine weeks, Bill was already showing significant improvements in his motor activity, especially his right side, and demonstrating increasing engagement with the programme, as well as increased autonomy and stamina. His physiotherapist was so confident in his progress that she discharged him, leaving Kelly to continue his rehabilitation.

Bill's wife, Jean, notes the impact on both his physical and mental well-being: "The stroke had a really severe impact on Bill, but he's now able to move his arms and feed himself," she said. "I think part of the reason for the success is that he enjoys the activities, so he always attends them. Kelly has a very bright personality that helps with this."

All Belong village customers have access to a specialist gym, run by a highly qualified exercise specialist who has experience working with older people. Everyone who moves into a Belong village household for 24-hour support is assessed by the exercise specialist and offered a free personalised exercise

or rehabilitation programme, and members of the public and apartment residents can also access the services.

The multi-disciplinary therapeutic approach involved tailored exercise sessions facilitated by the village's on-site gym, focussing on building strength to aid day-to-day living and help Bill regain mobility and movement in his right side and upper and lower body. This included passive and assisted cardiovascular activity with the aid of a combined exercise bike and upper body cycle, as well as progressive resistance training with bands and weights.

Crucially, the programme also incorporated holistic, multi-sensory activities involving music, lights, and chair yoga. Family and friends were encouraged to participate in his sessions, providing vital emotional support and motivation.

Bill has shown continued improvement and is now able to squeeze, hold, and release with increased control and strength and can throw and catch, enabling him to take part in ball games.

Commenting on Bill's progress, Kelly Sullivan said: "Bill has demonstrated significant neurofunctional and emotional progress over 12 weeks of multidisciplinary rehabilitation. Despite a complex medical history, his trajectory reflects the power of individualised care, persistence and strong therapeutic rapport. With continued support, Bill shows potential for further gains in independence, strength, and quality of life."



# Belong Villages Awarded for 'Gold Standard' End-of-Life Care

**B**elong, has seen three of its villages reaccredited the Quality Hallmark Award, demonstrating the highest standards and best practice in end-of-life care for its customers.

Belong villages in Atherton, Macclesfield, and Wigan have received praise from assessors, Gold Standards Framework (GSF), for their 'village living' model being conducive to helping to promote the independence of older people as much as possible. Personalised end-of-life care plans and extensive physical and emotional support offered to residents and their families (as well as colleagues) were also highlighted.

Belong Atherton was judged to have 'compassionate person-centred care is a standout feature', with assessors summarising, 'it is not surprising to hear that it has a reputation for excellent care.'

Meanwhile, Belong Wigan achieved a Platinum rating and was commended for its strength in 'commitment to provide high quality care to each resident and their families until their final days.'

In Cheshire, assessors drew attention to a relative of a Belong Macclesfield resident for sharing 'how happy she was with the compassion and attention to detail from staff' in its reaccreditation of Platinum status.

Speaking of the accolades, Rebecca Woodcock, Belong Chief Operating Officer, said: "We understand the subject of death is a difficult one, for oneself and when thinking about our loved ones. But it's imperative to recognise the importance of supporting people to experience a good, dignified death that meets their wishes.

"This starts with collaboration between the resident, their family, and our carers, underpinned by leading clinical expertise and care that prepares well for end of life.

"We are therefore pleased to be reaccredited with three GSF Quality Hallmark Awards, which serves as testament to the hard work and dedication of our team who have perhaps one of the most challenging but rewarding of jobs."

Julie Armstrong-Wilson, Chief Operating Officer for GSF added: "The quality of care and the compassionate cultures we have seen is truly inspiring, reflecting a deep commitment to ensuring people receive the right care at the right time, making a real difference to them and their families. Supporting our ageing population to live and die well is so important, our award winners are leading the way in demonstrating what good end of life care looks like."



Pictured: Belong accepts its Quality Hallmark Award reaccreditations for its end-of-life care provision.



HealthInvestor  
Seniors Housing  
Awards 2025



OPERATOR OF THE YEAR

WINNER

BELONG VILLAGES

# Belong Crowned Operator of the Year at Health Investor Seniors Housing Awards



(L-R) Martin Rix, Belong CEO; Joan and Edmund; Rebecca Woodcock, Belong COO; Mark, Joan, and Barry Devine, General Manager.

**B**elong has been named **Operator of the Year** at this year's **HealthInvestor Seniors Housing Awards**, recognising the company's innovative approach to integrated retirement living that challenges traditional models of older people's housing.

Belong's drive to innovate in order to better the lives of customers leads the organisation to do things differently, and its villages include a number of UK-firsts, including the nation's first fully integrated children's day nursery under the same roof as older people's care at Belong Chester.

The award recognises Belong's influence on the wider sector, with the organisation described as a 'trailblazer' by the Centre for Social Justice in its Lonely Nation report for its focus on creating community and social connection. Belong has attracted significant interest from policymakers and has been invited to speak at national and international events about its pioneering intergenerational model, with extensive media coverage, including broadcasts on BBC One Show and ITV This Morning.

Judges were full of praise, singling out Belongs collaborative approach with residents in shaping their

home, and praising its specialist in-house exercise service for 'making a real difference to residents' quality of life'. They summarised the organisation's pioneering approach to care as 'a sustainable and resident focused model for the future'.

Commenting on the win, Belong's chief executive, Martin Rix, said: "We are delighted to be named Operator of the Year. The award is a testament to our dedicated teams and our unwavering commitment to putting people at the heart of everything we do. Our unique model is changing what's possible for later life, and it's wonderful to see that recognised at a national level."

The award win follows Belong's 2024 accolade for the HealthInvestor Seniors Housing Award Best Health and Wellness Service.



Martin Rix, Belong CEO (centre), accepts the award along with Head of Marketing, Maha Hamer (L) and Head of People, Mike Griffiths (R).



# Belong Shines Bright at the Great British Care Awards



The Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme team collect their award.

**W**e are pleased to congratulate our brilliant colleagues for their highest standards of care being recognised at the regional Great British Care Awards, with five wins, a high commendation, and many finalist placings.

The annual Great British Care Awards acknowledge those working in the care sector throughout the UK, with winners from November's North West, and West Midlands finals advancing to national awards in early 2026.

Belong Chief Operating Officer, Rebecca Woodcock, said: "We are so proud of our team for their achievements at the Great British Care Awards, and we are delighted to see their commitment and impact recognised in this way."

## Sarah Scott, Belong Warrington

From the Bistro & Catering team, Chef Sarah won **Cook of the Year**, impressing judges, who heralded her for being "highly knowledgeable and committed to continuous learning to provide the best possible service to her clients when whipping up dishes."

The culinary expert spends each day preparing fresh and fortified, tasty meals specially for older people, with judges also praising her "dedication, professionalism, and a strong sense of [team] collaboration in her work."



Pictured: Belong Warrington Chef with her award

## Paul Woodcock, Belong Atherton

Village Nurse Manager, Paul scooped the **Social Care Nurse** accolade with judges commending him for 'delivering exemplary complex care ... and making a profound difference for individuals and the wider care community'.



Pictured: Belong Atherton Village Nurse Manager accepts his award.

A bumper year for Paul, this summer saw him designated a Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Nursing Workforce



Standards Champion after successfully implementing its recommended workforce standards, with bosses describing his leadership as 'brilliant, compassionate, and deeply inspiring'. He joins its network of circa 100 standards champions working with senior nurse leaders to drive standards and best practice across the nation's nursing.

### Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme Nurse Team

The hotly contested **Care Home Team Award** went to Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme's Village Nurse Team. Judges summarised the nine-strong group: 'They tailor care for individuals, embrace holistic, person-centred approaches, [as well as] provide compassionate end-of-life support for residents and families.'

### Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme

The Village also accepted the **Care Innovator Award** for its assistance lobbying for resident Pauline Dawson to become one of the town's first female Burgesses after she spent more than 20 years campaigning for women to be given a ceremonial title normally reserved for men. The achievement has been marked with a special Burgesses display in the Belong Heritage Gallery, the landmark museum and exhibition space integrated within the village.

### Yasmin Platt, Volunteer

Yasmin was praised for her dedication to both residents and colleagues, with judges commending her 'selfless, committed, and compassionate efforts' supporting Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme customers, earning her the **Unpaid Carer Award**.



Pictured: The Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme team.

### Mia Stennet, Belong Crewe

It was a well-earned high commendation for Care Assistant, Mia Stennet, with judges noting a 'patient and compassionate individual with a genuine passion for personal growth', handing over the recognition for the **Care Newcomer Award** in the process.



Pictured: The Belong Crewe team and finalists with Care Assistant, Mia Stennet (4th from the right).

## Well done to all our finalists for achieving shortlistings – you've done us proud!

- Kelly Haddock, Belong Atherton
- Kelly Sullavan, Belong Atherton
- Vicky Smith, Belong Atherton
- Nursing team Belong Atherton
- Belong at Home Chester team
- Alicia Spurrier, Belong Crewe
- Sam Doherty, Belong Crewe
- Duke House team, Belong Crewe
- Taya Terry, Belong Crewe
- Jessica Murphy, Belong Crewe
- Sharon Bull, Belong Crewe
- Abby Warren, Belong at Home Crewe
- Angela Luckett, Belong Morris Feinmann
- Mehrab Rahman, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme
- Shelley Hartford, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme
- Jessica Tilstone, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme
- Stefania Floreana, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme
- Nicola Oxtan, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme
- Belong at Home Warrington team
- Lisa Moseley, Belong at Home Wigan



The Belong at Home team.



# Belong at Home Southport Names New Leader



**B**elong at Home has appointed Debbie Moore to head up its Merseyside debut as the home care service launches in Southport.

Debbie will be responsible for leading a team of dedicated support workers assisting older people in homes throughout the area, providing one-to-one personal care, housekeeping and food preparation, as well as running errands, helping with excursions and offering companionship.

The experienced senior carer is promoted from Belong at Home's Wigan team for the expansion, bringing with her over two decades of knowledge, experience, and awards with her. Since joining the team over 20 years ago, she has advanced her expertise whilst achieving an NVQ Level 5 in Health & Social Care.

Passionate about her vocation, Debbie's performance has been recognised with nominations at the Great British Care Awards, as well as being part of the team scooping The Above & Beyond Community Team accolade at the Stars of Social Care – Home Care Awards 2023.

Commenting on her latest career milestone, Debbie Moore, Team Leader at Belong at Home Southport, said: "I'm very excited to be looking after our new Southport team. It will be our first ever shop-front style service and we are already recruiting for the best talent in social care to join us, so if you're looking for an employer that really values its colleagues, we're keen to hear from you."

Belong at Home Southport will operate from new premises on Eastbank Street in the town centre, with new jobs created as part of the expansion. The renowned

service has already assisted hundreds of families at its eight established locations across the North West and is the only non-profit home care group to feature in the UK's top 20 every year since 2018, as judged by customers on leading reviews website, Homecare.co.uk.

Recruitment is underway for a number of positions at varying levels of seniority and hours to meet the high demand anticipated for the service. Community support workers will benefit from extensive professional development coupled with a market leading remuneration package, including earnings during travel time between customer appointments. Belong also holds the Gold Investors in People accreditation, signifying its strong commitment to developing its teams.

Andrew Shield, Head of Operations at Belong at Home, commented: "We are thrilled to have Debbie managing the next chapter in the Belong at Home story. Her dedication to our customers is nothing short of exceptional, so we're more than confident she will continue the highest standards of quality care we have come to be known for."

The news comes ahead of the opening of Belong Birkdale, our first state-of-art care village in the county, set to open in 2026. The Oxford Road village will be a welcome addition to the community, with a vibrant centre also open to Belong at Home customers and local people, and will include a bistro, hair and beauty salon, exercise studio, and entertainment venue with licensed bar.

More information about Belong at Home Southport, including job opportunities, can be found at [www.belong.org.uk](http://www.belong.org.uk) or by emailing [enquiries@belong.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@belong.org.uk)



# BELONG'S GOT TALENT



## Laurie shares her artistic talents with younger generations

**B**elong Chester resident Laurie Walsh is sharing her artistic talents with younger generations after volunteering to support art classes for children at the village's integrated nursery and shaping how arts activities are structured to improve the well-being of older people.

Laurie's artistic journey began later in life when she found herself with the time, motivation and patience to explore a new passion after retirement. It was after taking drawing classes that she fell in love with watercolours, with birds and flowers being her favourite subjects.

Since moving to Belong Chester last year, Laurie has not only continued her hobby, but been able to share it with others. Notably, along with son-in-law, Nick, she volunteered to support art classes for children at The Nursery in Belong.

Her talent was also recognised last year when her watercolour of a robin was chosen for Belong's Christmas card design.

Upon hearing about Laurie's artistic flair and teaching role, the National Activity Providers Association (NAPA) invited her to contribute to the advisory forum for their new Arts in Care

## Artist Laurie Walsh



*Laurie with the winning card.*

Homes guide, with a meeting taking place via Zoom. This guide offers practical ideas, activity 'recipe cards' and advice on incorporating various art forms, from visual arts and music to creative writing, as well as gardening and cooking, into daily activities to improve well-being.

A draft of the guide shared with Belong has also been adapted to create personalised versions for individual residents at Belong Chester including Laurie, to support her in participating in intergenerational sessions. In this way, Laurie is, in turn, continuing to shape the activities programme at Belong Chester, as well as personalising her own experiences.

Commenting, Belong Chester General Manager Caroline Ray said: "Laurie's version of the guide, which features pictures of her own artwork and of her with the children, makes a real difference for her. She loves her time with the children, and this has a real positive impact on both her and the children. She also very much appreciated being invited to contribute to the guide, and NAPA have said that the input she and her family have provided was extremely useful."

If you'd like to nominate someone for the next Belong's Got Talent feature, we'd love to hear from you. Please speak to your village's experience coordinator or email the editor at [tracy.brookes@belong.org.uk](mailto:tracy.brookes@belong.org.uk)



# In The Spotlight:

## Barbara Tait

**B**elong is pleased to announce Barbara Tait has taken the reins of our award-winning, in-house exercise provision responsible for remarkable outcomes for customers, heading up the department as Lead Exercise Specialist.

Barbara was part of the team behind Belong's fitness and wellbeing strategy, having successfully developed the vision for the organisation's launch fifteen years ago. She returns to the post following a stint volunteering in disaster relief in her native South Africa.

With supporting customers to enjoy an active lifestyle whilst maintaining their independence at the heart of its thinking, Belong's holistic approach maximises health through use of an in-house gym and a dedicated exercise specialist within each village.

The pioneering approach to dementia care sees exercise specialists like Barbara devise personalised fitness programmes to complement customers' care plans, also linking with external ancillary services, such as NHS health practitioners, physiotherapy and rehabilitation.

Regular one-to-one gym sessions make use of state-of-the-art equipment selected specially to meet the needs of an older audience, such as accessible bike machines for wheelchair users. Meanwhile, weekly group sessions and walking clubs focus on falls prevention whilst promoting the social benefit of exercise.

### Champion results

One beneficiary of Barbara's vision is Belong Macclesfield resident Maureen Fitzpatrick, for whom exercise has been life changing. Following a stroke, the 90-year-old Scotswoman was left wheelchair-bound and coming to terms with losing both the ability to walk and function in her left hand.

Following months of work, she has relearned to walk with use of a walking frame by strengthening balance and coordination, taking advantage of an assisted bike, a stepper machine, and interactive cognitive games.



*Pictured: Barbara Tait, Lead Exercise Specialist at Belong, with resident Maureen Fitzpatrick.*

Barbara said: "I'm especially pleased to be returning to lead Belong's exercise department. I believe in – and have seen many times over – the truly transformative power that exercise can have for older people.

"In Maureen's case, without the service she would have digressed and most likely require two carers for 24-hour support. Instead, she's maintaining a good level of independence. Many of our customers tell us that as they age, they want to retain their physical and cognitive health as much as possible, so our goal is to assist in making this happen."

Maureen added: "Thanks to Barbara, joy has returned as I feel I've got my life back. On top of all the exercise, she's taught me about posture, hydration and breathing, and I value that she dignifies me and treats me as a person. I'm proud to have achieved what I have and I'll keep it up to be able to hold my grandson when he is born later this year."



# Living the Values

**Belong aspires to redefine what's possible for the wellbeing of older people, integrating services, housing and community to operate a continually improving and innovative care model.**

**We give our customers and colleagues a genuine voice in how we go about it and we speak to colleagues who embody Belong's values in their day-to-day work.**

## STRONGER TOGETHER

We are here for each other and believe that every member of our community contributes to the best possible experiences and outcomes. We are united in our purpose and working together enables us to achieve more.

## RESPECT FOR ALL

Honesty and openness are central to our culture. We understand everyone is an individual and encourage an inclusive environment where every voice is heard, and different perspectives are valued.

## CARE FROM THE HEART

We approach every interaction with empathy, kindness and compassion.

We always seek to uplift others and create a nurturing, supportive environment. We foster a caring and vibrant community for our team and the people we support.

## BE YOUR BEST

We empower others to reach their full potential. We give each other the confidence to see beyond limits, learn new skills and take control of our futures.

## BETTER TOMORROW

We are constantly evolving towards a brighter future. We are not afraid to challenge the norm, explore ideas and create new opportunities. Our focus on innovation enables us to continually improve.

**For this issue, we have a chat with Donna Peacock, Bistro Assistant at Belong Wigan who, for the past two years, has built a reputation as perhaps one of the village's biggest advocates. .**

### What influenced you to work in care?

I've always wanted to work in care. I was previously a waitress in my local chippy and my former boss used to say to me, "You'd be great working with older people or children."

I'd say working with older people has always been my passion.

We have some guests who come to The Bistro and haven't got anyone to talk to. I take five minutes to ask them about their day, and they appreciate it. There's been lots of feedback from families and they equally say a thank you for my kindness and compassion.

### How do you go 'above and beyond' in your role?

I care very deeply about the people I work with and all our customers. We once had a gentleman dining with us who wasn't feeling too well. Straight away I got a wheelchair for him and took him back to his apartment with this daughter-in-law. I phoned NHS 111 to get some advice, and we made sure he was okay. They popped back in a few days to thank me for my help. I go out of my way to help people. Everyone here looks out for each other, and I love it; I love my work.

### We hear you tell everyone and anyone about Belong Experience Days. Tell us more.

It's true! If I'm serving in The Bistro or out and about in town, I'll tell anyone who'll listen about our day care service and what's on offer at the village and all the trips they have, like to Blackpool, Southport, and Manchester.

It's a great way for them to get to know people. Say we have a new tenant move in, I'll encourage them to come to The Bistro and have a coffee or a glass of wine with Charlene (the Experience Coordinator).



Or, I'll introduce them to one of our regulars and ask if they can sit with them so they're not feeling left out. Everyone knows what it feels like to be the new person, so if I can make them feel a bit more included, I know I've made that person's day.

### And finally, what do you get up to in your spare time?

I have four gorgeous grandchildren, aged between nine and 19, and I love spending time with them, as well as taking my dog, Betty, for a walk. Other than that, nothing exciting, just staying at home and watching TV. Oh, and I am getting married next year, so planning for that is taking up a lot of time!

**To Donna we say, congratulations and we all wish you the very best for your big day!**



# Interview with Tony Bristlin



**W**e are pleased to welcome Tony Bristlin as Chair of the Belong Board. Having been part of the Board as a Non-Executive Director since 2019, he brings a wealth of experience including a professional career in finance and NHS health service boards. We caught up with him to find out more.

## **How does the Belong Board support the organisation?**

We, as a board, are committed to our vision and values by supporting our customers to live the best life they can and ensuring our team members have a fulfilling work life.

Our role is to provide a strategy for Belong to guide how we move forward over the next few years, as well as other important duties such as ensuring financial stability and compliance with regulatory frameworks. Also, as Belong is a not-for-profit organisation, part of the role of the board is to make sure we reinvest any profit we make into improving services for our customers. As an example of this we will be opening our new village in Birkdale in 2026 and continuing to invest in our established villages. It's my job as chair to ensure we keep a focus on all these important parts of what we do.

## **How do you see the Board and Belong's Executive Team working together?**

One of the strengths Belong has is the balance of experience across the executive and non-executive board members, offering a deep understanding of the care sector blended with wider knowledge and expertise from different walks of life.

We are lucky to have a very experienced and highly motivated team of executive directors in Martin Rix, Chris Hughes and Rebecca Woodcock, combined with a broad range of experience in our non-executive directors. I've served on many boards and know it's our ability to be open, transparent and work together for a common goal that makes it work and enables us to tackle any challenges that we will face.

## **What inspired you to take on the role as Chair? What are your hopes and priorities?**

I am, and always have been, proud to be a part of Belong as a member and now as Chair of the Board. Belong is a great organisation providing fantastic services and vibrant villages to support people to live the lives they choose. In my many

hours spent at our villages and speaking to our colleagues providing care I see so many inspiring examples of the support we provide and how proud those colleagues are to be part of the Belong family.

Now feels like the right time to take on the leadership of the board and build on the successful foundations laid by my predecessors. Supporting Belong's growth, with Belong Birkdale opening next year and building on the success of our established villages and Belong at Home, is what excites me most. Of course, as we grow, it's also essential to ensure we are financially stable to achieve our vision.

## **Finally, what's something you've learned from your time with the organisation?**

Since I joined the board, there's been enormous change, not least the challenge of the pandemic. The way our teams reacted and supported our customers was just one example of how they care deeply about the people who choose to live with us.

Our innovative model of care, combined with how our colleagues provide that care is what sets us apart, and I am committed to maintaining this and developing it through innovation.

We've also had the opening of Belong Chester and seeing the positive impact of a children's nursery within the village. It's a really good example of innovation and demonstrates what can be achieved by working together with our partners.

What strikes me most is the dedication of the colleagues in Belong – in the villages, Belong at Home and the central team. Altogether, they create a fantastic environment for our customers, Belong is the place I would choose for my wife and I if we were to need care later in life.



# Belong Appoints Chief Operating Officer Ahead of Expansion

**Belong has appointed Rebecca Woodcock to the post of Chief Operating Officer (COO) as it prepares to expand into Merseyside with its ninth care village, Belong Birkdale.**

Rebecca joins Belong's executive board having been promoted from group operations manager. Highly experienced, she has worked for the organisation for over 20 years, and previously held the roles of general manager and registered manager at the group's Atherton and Wigan villages, respectively. During her tenure, she played a key role in leading both services to achieve and retain CQC Outstanding ratings, a distinction earned by only 2% of adult social care settings in England<sup>1</sup>.

Martin Rix, Chief Executive at Belong, commented: "We are pleased to welcome Rebecca to the Belong Board. With a long and distinguished career history with us, she has consistently demonstrated an outstanding performance, with strong leadership, technical competence, and passion her key attributes. We are more than confident she will enjoy continued success in her new role."

Rebecca Woodcock, Chief Operating Officer at Belong, added: "I am thrilled to be joining the leadership team of our wonderful organisation. I pride myself on being a true 'Belong Champion' and working hard to promote our ethos of pushing the boundaries of dementia care. With our new village, Belong Birkdale, opening next year, this is really an exciting chapter for all of us."



The news comes ahead of the Belong Birkdale opening, next year. Set to be home to over 100 people, customers will be able to choose between 24-hour residential care, with nursing support available, or buy or rent one of 30 one and two-bedroom independent living apartments. Its corresponding home care service, Belong at Home, launches in the Southport area later this autumn.

The £19m state-of-the-art Oxford Road location will add to the group's established sites across the North West and West Midlands, expanding its sector-leading support for older people living with dementia. Its vibrant village centre, also to open to the local community, will include a bistro, hair and beauty salon, exercise studio, and entertainment venue with licensed bar.

<sup>1</sup> Care Quality Commission (2025). The state of health care and adult social care in England 2024/25. Article last accessed 04 November 2025 at: <https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications/major-report/state-care/2024-2025/>

## Volunteer Profile: Margaret Goldrein

**In this feature, we recognise the outstanding contributions of volunteers to the Belong community.**

Every fortnight, Margaret Goldrein can be found moderating lively debates at Belong Morris Feinmann. Typically, the former judge will introduce the session's theme, with inspiration taken from topical news, world events, and often contentious matters, before inviting the thoughts of attendees and arguments for and against the issue in hand.

The sessions are open to anyone living locally, as well as village customers and their loved ones, with around 20 participants taking part. The goal is to involve everyone, enrich participants' lives and 'bring the world in' to the village, as Margaret explains:

"It's important to the participants – for some, it's a big part of their week. I believe that older people can sometimes be treated as though they won't understand such things; however, as we hear each session, it's very much the opposite that's true. They've lived through so much, seen many historic moments, and have lots to contribute."

Politics commonly features, though the idea is to promote discussion, rather than take sides. For example, considering how to approach a policy or situation if one were prime minister. Other themes include war, ID cards, party conferences, as well as international politics, and,

Check out volunteering opportunities at the nearest Belong village by scanning the QR code, or visit [bit.ly/BelongVolunteers](https://bit.ly/BelongVolunteers)



drawing inspiration from Margaret's former professional life, crime and legal cases.

"There are some amazing people here, all delightful, and very clever," Margaret continues. "They can remember discussions from previous sessions which I can't! We had one lady who is sadly no longer with us, Gisela, she was brilliant. The way she would disagree was just wonderful."



"This is one of the things which has surprised me, that is, the degree to which participants disagree amongst themselves with such respect. We have much contradictory debate, yet it is done with such politeness. And their humour is amazing. It all makes for healthy, interesting debate. I always come away with new information and a fresh perspective on things. It's an invaluable, humbling experience for me, personally."

Angela Luckett, Experience and Cultural Coordinator, adds: "Margaret is a delightful, formidable, force to be reckoned with! We all love her, and I'm sure I speak for us all when I say that we are privileged to have her time, enthusiasm and moderating prowess in our community."



## Belong Wigan Raises Funds with the Community

This year, Belong Wigan wanted to do something a bit different for their Macmillan World's Biggest Coffee Morning. The village's experience team consulted with their residents and apartment tenants who agreed they wanted to invite their friends from Platt Bridge Community Centre. Belong Wigan customers can often be found at the centre, enjoying bowls, bingo, shuffleboard and many of the activities available.

Customers wanted to share the special fundraiser with their friends and so welcomed them with open arms to join

them for their coffee morning, featuring a fun raffle, a (lively) game of bingo, plenty of cuppas and of course, delicious cakes!

Charlene Frodsham, Experience Coordinator at Belong Wigan, said: "It was a fabulous morning, full of smiles, laughter, and community spirit – all while supporting such an amazing cause. We raised £236 and it was wonderful to have the Platt Bridge community as our guests. A big thank you to everyone who joined in and made it so special!"



*Pictured: Belong Wigan welcomed Platt Bridge Community Centre for the Macmillan World's Biggest Coffee Morning.*

## Royal Garden Party Adventure for Chester's Doreen

Chester resident, singer, and 'grandfriend' Doreen Barnes has had the adventure of a lifetime with a trip to Buckingham Palace to mingle with Their Majesties the King and Queen, thanks to her dedication to the development of the city's children.

The sunny summer reception saw the 89-year-old make her way to the capital from her home at Belong Chester to represent the Sankofa Songsters, the city's intergenerational choir featuring fellow residents, children, and other members of the wider community.

Speaking of the experience Doreen said: "We walked into the Palace gardens to the sound of music from the band and then we saw the King and Queen on the garden steps, waving to everyone. It was a lovely day, and I've never had one like it – to sum it up in one word: unforgettable!"



*Doreen (centre) at The Palace.*

Joining her at the palace were choir lead, Amanda Wrigley, volunteer pianist, Pete Legge, and singer Hollie McDiarmid. The invitation came after the choir performed at last year's Royal Carols: Together at Christmas ceremony, the annual event hosted at Westminster Abbey by Catherine, Princess of Wales.

## Pumpkin Workshop Fun Lights Up the Village!

There was a fantastic autumn buzz in the air during a pumpkin workshop, at Belong Crewe recently, where residents got stuck in and showed off their creativity. From spooky faces to intricate designs, everyone carved out their own unique masterpiece – and no two pumpkins were the same.

In the spirit of friendly competition, we also delivered pumpkins to every household as part of our village-wide pumpkin decorating contest. The judging took place on Halloween, thanks to the keen eyes of the children from Pebble Brook Primary School, who had a wonderful time choosing their favourites.

A huge thank you to the pupils for being such thoughtful judges and congratulations to all of our worthy winners.



*Belong Crewe residents get creative for Halloween.*



## Intergenerational Book Buddies Finish School Year on a High

There has been excitement for bookworms young and old in Didsbury as intergenerational reading friends, the Book Buddies, enjoy a special celebration featuring a meet and greet with children's author, Liz Kessler.

The Emily Windsnap writer was guest of honour at Belong Morris Feinmann as its residents played host to pupils from neighbouring Moor Allerton Preparatory School for their final meet up of the school year.

Readers relished the chance to interview their favourite author and take the opportunity for photographs before receiving

signed gifted copies of Valley of the Kings, the newest release in the popular fantasy series. The group then came together over sweet treats to share their learnings from the experience.

*Pictured: Didsbury's Book Buddies welcome author Liz Kessler (centre, left) to Belong Morris Feinmann.*



## A Flying Visit: Bill's Surprise Trip to RAF Museum Cosford

The team at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme recently organised a heartfelt surprise for Experience Day customer, Bill Shufflebotham (featured in our Memory Lane article on page 6), with a special trip to the Royal Air Force Museum in Cosford — joined by fellow Experience Day customers.

Bill, a former RAF engineer, joined the Royal Air Force shortly after the Second World War. One of his most cherished memories includes being stationed in Malaysia, where he enjoyed swimming in the sea and forging lasting friendships with the pilots.

The visit to the museum was both nostalgic and inspiring, with plenty to see and reflect upon.

Susan Hemmings, Experience Day support worker, shared: "We had the most amazing day at RAF Cosford Museum. We saw so many planes, tanks, and fascinating memorabilia. All the staff there were fabulous — they looked after us so well and made the day really special for everyone."

The day was not only a trip down memory lane for Bill but also an opportunity for all involved to learn more about aviation history and enjoy a memorable shared experience.

*Pictured: Bill and fellow Experience Days customers at the Royal Air Force Museum.*



## Sign Language Ambitions Get the Thumbs Up

Compassionate carers at Belong Warrington, have earned a big thumbs up from residents after taking on the challenge of learning British Sign Language (BSL) to support older people who are hard of hearing at the village.



*Image caption: Sybil Ward and colleagues from Belong Warrington.*

Prompted by the imminent arrival of new

resident and deaf Warringtonian, Sybil Ward, colleagues enrolled on their entry level BSL certification under the tuition of Warrington & Vale Royal College. The course was tailored specially to meet the aim of being able to communicate with and assist Sybil to enjoy everything Belong life has to offer.

Louise Kelly, Experience Coordinator at Belong Warrington, shares more: "We were really touched when we met our Sybil, and it was important to include her warmth and personality in our family as it's our goal to be inclusive of everyone's needs. The Greenall House team and key colleagues embraced the BSL challenge and we're now looking to sign up more to keep our signing culture going indefinitely."

Communicating her thoughts of her home and carers, Sybil signed: "I love you all. Thank you."

The team took inspiration from Old Hands: New Tricks, the recent, heartening TV documentary featuring care village residents learning to sign. As a not-for-profit operator, Belong Warrington continually reinvests to enhance its care provision, including exploring ideas and opportunities to make life better for those in its care.

## Festive Fun at Birkacre Garden Centre!

Customers at Belong Wigan enjoyed a truly magical outing to Birkacre Garden Centre recently, soaking up the sights, sounds, and sparkle of the festive season.

The day began with a delicious lunch in the cosy on-site café, where everyone enjoyed warming drinks and sweet treats. Afterward, they wandered through the beautifully decorated displays, taking time to browse the wide range of Christmas decorations from twinkling lights to festive ornaments and everything in between.

A perfect way to kick off the countdown to Christmas.





# #Join us

We are pleased to invite the Belong community to join us on Instagram to keep up-to-date with life in the villages and with the Belong at Home teams.

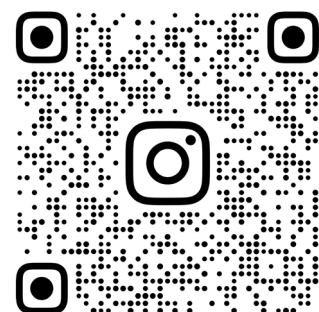
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