

Belong Life

SPRING 2024



**Belong celebrates best of the best in social care
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Getting better all the time... Customer Satisfaction Results: Pages 10 & 11.



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BELONG
VILLAGES



Word from the team

We are delighted to be stepping into spring celebrating the wonderful lives of our customers and the impressive achievements of our colleagues.

We started 2024 in style at the Hallé St Peter's concert venue in Manchester, where we celebrated the winners of our latest Belong Champion Awards, recognising colleagues and volunteers from around the organisation. It was a night to remember, broadcast to our villages and remote colleagues and customers via a livestream on the night. You can read more about this inside (pages 8-9).

In other awards news, we were delighted to win two prestigious awards at the 3rd Sector Care Awards: the Social Care Nursing Award was won by Jemma Sharratt of Belong Atherton and the Development and Innovation Award was awarded for the Nursery in Belong Chester.

Residents enjoyed special treats when colleagues at Belong Morris Feinmann, Belong Wigan and the Nursery in Belong Chester arranged memorable occasions, including a trip to the Midland Hotel (page 7), a Valentine's visit from butlers in the buff (page 14) and a pit stop with an 'Indian' make Motorcycle at Belong Chester (page 6).

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who took the time to complete our annual customer satisfaction survey last year. While we are always delighted to be able to share positive feedback with our teams, it is equally important to us to receive any feedback which helps us to drive continuous improvements in our services. We have listened carefully to everything that has been said, and many initiatives are already well underway to address the areas where we can do better.

Please do continue to share your feedback with us and we look forward to supporting all our customers to live their lives to the full with us over the year ahead.

Susan Goldsmith
Belong Chief Operating Officer



Double win at the 3rd Sector Care Awards

It was a successful night at the 3rd Sector Care Awards this year, as Belong celebrated wins in two categories: Social Care Nursing and Development and Innovation.

Jemma Sharratt, Lead Nurse at Belong Atherton, won the Social Care Nursing Award for her contribution to modelling and driving nursing best practice in the region.

Amongst her achievements she piloted the introduction of the trainee nurse associate role in conjunction with the University of Salford, a role which has subsequently been rolled out to the wider organisation. She has also made immense contributions to the village's role driving quality in end-of-life care in the region.

The Development and Innovation Award was won by the Nursery in Belong Chester: the culmination of five years of collaborative planning with early years charity, Ready Generations, which operates the nursery.

As the UK's first care village to incorporate a fully integrated research nursery, Belong Chester facilitates daily interaction between children and their grand-friends, who come together to learn and play together, enjoying a sense of purpose and fun!

Belong Head of Dementia and Quality Assurance, Caroline Baker, who attended the awards, said: "These are two tremendous examples of the transformational work taking place in Belong villages and it was wonderful to see them recognised at these prestigious awards."



Pictured left to right: Sue Egersdorff, Ready Generations; Sally Lindsay; Liz Ludden, Ready Generations; Amie Adams, Belong Chester Support Manager



New managers fulfil career ambitions

Pictured: Josephine Mollison (left) and Nicola Johnstone (right)

Belong Atherton and Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme, have named new general managers, marking a career milestone for the rising stars, and a new era for the care villages.

Josephine Mollison - Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme

Josephine's care career began in 2013 when she embarked on an ambitious career change from hospitality retail to support worker.

New to the care industry, she began her on-the-job training and swiftly made her mark to earn progression in seniority and head-up her own teams. In 2020, her dedication to her work was further recognised, earning her the organisation's Dementia Champion honour at its annual colleague awards.

A year later, promotion to the Support Manager position came with the responsibility of registered manager with the Care Quality Commission (CQC). More recently, Josephine was instrumental in Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme's accreditation of the Quality Hallmark Award for demonstrating best practice in end of life and palliative care - one of only two operators in the county to hold the Gold Standards Framework (GSF) distinction.

Now, drawing on more than a decade of experience, she plans to build on the village's strengths and its reputation as a leading care provider the local community. Speaking of her appointment and her future plans, Josephine Mollison, General Manager at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme, commented: "It's an exciting time at the village and I'm thrilled to be heading up our fantastic team who are going from strength to strength providing exceptional care for our customers.

"Looking back to when I started my Belong career, to now, it almost doesn't seem real! I wouldn't want to be anywhere else than with my colleagues and the people we care for - we really are one big family."

“ We are delighted to welcome Josephine and Nicola to the General Manager team. They are both shining examples of individuals who have grown their careers with Belong while maintaining their focus on putting customers at the heart of everything we do. ”

~ Susan Goldsmith, Chief Operating Officer at Belong



Nicola Johnstone - Belong Atherton

Nicola's care career began in 2003, when new to the care industry, she began her on-the-job training and swiftly made her mark to earn progression in seniority and head up her own teams. Five years later, following the completion of her BSc degree in adult nursing, she joined the village's nursing team, before progressing to lead nurse in just a year.

In 2019, promotion to the Support Manager position came with the responsibility of registered manager with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and maintaining Belong Atherton's 'Outstanding' rating. More recently, Nicola was instrumental in the village's accreditation of the Quality Hallmark Award for demonstrating best practice in end-of-life and palliative care - one of only three operators in the county to hold the Gold Standards Framework (GSF) distinction.

Other accolades earned by Nicola include two wins at the Great North West Care Awards and the Nurse of the Year title at the Wigan and Leigh Hospice Awards; she was also previously invited to meet then Prince Charles alongside other nurses for their distinguished contribution to frontline care.

Now, drawing on more than two decades of experience, she plans to build on the village's strengths and reputation as an outstanding care provider in the local community. Speaking of her appointment and her future plans, Nicola Johnstone, General Manager at Belong Atherton, said: "I am very proud to lead our wonderful village and I'm looking forward to continuing the inclusive culture and innovative approaches to care that we have. Supporting our customers to live well and relationships with the community are my top priorities."

A Customer's View: Mary Steele

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

For this issue, we spoke to **Mary Steele**, who lives in an apartment at Belong Crewe with her husband Brian. Together they have benefited from him being able to access respite care on one of the village's households.

Brian and Mary moved to Belong Crewe four years ago, when Mary, who was taking Brian to attend Experience Days at the village, was impressed by the warm and welcoming environment. Brian lives with dementia, and they anticipated his future care needs increasing.

"I especially liked how kind and caring everyone was when visiting, and the safety that living in the village would bring really appealed to us," says Mary.

The couple took a tour of the village and eventually chose to move into a ground-floor apartment.

"The patio doors meant that we could enjoy the outdoor space and sunshine and potter about with plants," says Mary.

Help at hand

Mary and Brian both take advantage of a range of village facilities, including ordering freshly cooked meals from the Bistro, as well as visiting the Salon, where Brian enjoys going for his morning shave.

"I am partial to a treatment or two myself," says Mary. "The massages are wonderful, and so are the beauty treatments – I enjoy a manicure and a pedicure. It is great to have everything on your doorstep. To be waited on hand and foot by the Bistro team is a bonus."

When Brian suffered a stroke last year, the nursing team was on hand to help and address Mary's concerns. After being discharged from hospital, he briefly moved into one of the village's households for a period of respite, which Mary says was a great help as she was also feeling unwell. The support from the household teams allowed her to recover while knowing that Brian was in good hands.

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



Pictured: Mary and Brian

"It was reassuring to have Brian in the same building and know that I could visit him at any time and that he could also come home during the day and return to the household in the evenings."

Where they Belong

Nowadays, the pair are back to joining in with village life.

"There is such a fantastic varied programme of activities, which the girls work so hard on organising, and the effort they go to shows. We have made some great friendships by getting involved. Before coming to Belong, I was a bit unsure if it was the right choice, but it has been the best thing for both me and Brian. I could never go back to my old style of living."

Mary is careful not to leave anyone out of her praise for the village teams.

"The building is kept spotless by the lovely housekeeping team, and reception and management are so welcoming and friendly. Nothing is too much for them, and they support and offer guidance to me and my family. I want them all to know how wonderful they are."



Older artists paint portraits for new exhibition

Pictured Left: Vera, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme

Older people in Newcastle-under-Lyme are aiming to make themselves as famous as Mona Lisa as their self-made portraits take pride of place at the Belong Heritage Gallery, the local landmark documenting the town's rich history and integrated with their home, at the Belong village.

Led by the in-house experience team as part of its activities programme, the special classes saw Belong's residents and independent living apartment tenants schooled in the skill of self-expression with only pencils, paints and the art of memory to bring their creative ambitions to life.

Emma Palin, Experience and Heritage Co-ordinator at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme, explains more: "With a reflections theme for the project, we wanted to challenge our budding Leonardos technically and get them to think about how they perceive themselves."

"They each had a personal photograph to work with, and, after teaching them what to do, much concentration was required to translate what they saw and could remember onto canvas, as well as get the proportions right, the eyes in the correct place. The rest was up to them, and we encouraged the group to have fun communicating their self-perception through their work."

The theme was inspired by a project launched by the National Activity Providers Association (NAPA) championing the use of arts in care environments for the benefit of those involved. Research evidences the positive impact on participants' wellbeing gained from the pleasure of taking part, sharing ideas with others, and the sense of achievement earned on completion. The arts can also help support brain function and memory through the thought processes and concentration needed to carry out the activity.

Vera Billington, 93, apartment tenant at the village, said: "I think mine looks nothing like me! But I'm proud to have it on display in the gallery for everyone to see – it's been a wonderful project."

Emma continues: "The result has been a fascinating insight into how people see themselves, particularly for our customers living with dementia. We've enjoyed a lot of laughs, and our customers told us they appreciated the opportunity to learn a new skill and have their portraits showcased for families and friends to see. We invite everyone to visit our mini-Louvre to view the final pieces!"

The Reflections exhibition is available to view at Belong Heritage Gallery, Lower Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme, ST5 2RS. For more information, contact 01782 986300.



Bill Gets Back on his Bike

Pictured: Bill Wall

88-year-old motorcycle enthusiast, Bill Wall, is back in the saddle for the first time in over 10 years after a superbike made a surprise visit to his home at Belong Chester as part of a celebration of intergenerational connections.

Colleagues at the Nursery in Belong Chester, which is operated by national charity Ready Generations, arranged for an 'Indian' make motorcycle to be brought into the village as part of a surprise party for Bill.

The nursery team submitted an application to the National Association of Activity Providers (NAPA) 'Living the Dream Fund', part of its 'Grow Old Disgracefully' campaign, set up to help older individuals to engage in activities that challenge ageist stereotypes, to support the event.

Ready Generations co-founder Sue Egersdorff explains the idea behind it: "We wanted to do something for Bill to show how much we appreciate him. Bill and the children have had a huge impact on each other's lives since the nursery opened."

Shared learning experiences

Bill often talks to the children about the motorcycles that he used to own and spends time supporting their learning by reading and singing nursery rhymes, as well as helping them to eat at lunchtimes.

The integrated nature of the Nursery in Belong within the care village provides a wealth of opportunities for such intergenerational connections to flourish.

Special memories

The £25,000 Indian superbike was provided by Bill Smith Motors, in Chester, where Bill used to buy his motorcycles and spare parts.

Commenting on the day, Bill said: "It was great to see the bike. I last rode mine when I was 75, shortly before I sold it, so it really brought back memories, and I was very touched by the gesture. The children really made my day. They were also able to sit on the bike and gave me a copy of Bill Smith's autobiography, which they read from."



Pictured: Martin Rix

Martin Rix elected to NCF Board

Belong Chief Executive Officer Martin Rix has been elected to join the Board at the leading association for not-for-profit social care operators after securing the support of its members.

The voluntary role is not remunerated but will see Martin work alongside peers at other innovative care organisations as they work together to influence policy, bringing about positive change in the social care sector.

Speaking of his appointment to the NCF Board, Martin said: "I'm delighted to have this opportunity to work with the National Care Forum at this level, particularly with the general election and local elections on the horizon, now really is a crucial time to ensure our sector's voice is heard. I believe the NCF does a brilliant job supporting social care and I'm looking forward to putting forward my ideas and supporting their mandate to represent members and champion social care at this important time."

Professor Vic Rayner OBE, Chief Executive Officer, commented: "We are very pleased to welcome Martin alongside the other elected and re-elected board members. Our new board members will increase the breadth of knowledge and experience of our board and ensure the further representation of the diverse range of services provided around the country by NCF members."

Last summer, along with international partners, Martin helped form a global aged care alliance to promote the benefits of small household models, which sees Belong join forces with Australia's HammondCare and US based The Green House Project to advocate for the wider adoption of this model.



Manchester memories: David's surprise visit 60 years after wedding reception

Pictured left: David Cotton, Belong Morris Feinmann resident, was surprised with the trip by the village team

Pictured right: David with wife Mary (née Kurer) on their wedding day

For 85-year-old David Cotton, what he thought would be a quiet day at home turned out to be one to remember when his friends and support workers at Belong Morris Feinmann surprised him with a special trip to one of Manchester's most famous hotels, returning for the first time in over 60 years, having celebrated his wedding there.

Arriving at the city's Midland Hotel, guest of honour David was welcomed for a sparkling afternoon tea, joined by fellow residents who also made the trip from their care village home in Didsbury. Tucking into dainty sandwiches, fluffy cakes and scrumptious scones, the group were entertained with a vocal performance and a goody bag, courtesy of the tearoom manager, later followed by the sharing of happy memories of marriages, the Midland, and Manchester.

Providing more background and speaking of his experience, David said: "I'd mentioned a few details about the big day from all those years ago, and I'd thought nothing of it, but before I knew it, I was standing in the hotel reception with all these recollections of the past flooding back - I've not been back since the wedding reception."

Growing up in north-west London, it was at a synagogue youth activity where he first met future wife, Mary, a Viennese refugee who had settled in Manchester. After their respective congregations had come together for a shared summer camp, it was fate that would facilitate the rekindling of their relationship years later, with David's employment as an ice machine salesman sending him north.

With the young couple reunited, they began courting, meeting weekly at the Manchester Reform Synagogue on Jackson's Row before later tying the knot there, followed by the reception at the Midland.

Married life was enjoyed in Chorlton with David continuing his sales job, whilst Mary set up a renowned private catering business with high profile clients, including the Bank of England. Over the years, the happy couple were blessed with daughters, Caroline, Sarah, and Emma.

In later life, the pair moved to Belong Morris Feinmann care village, a not-for-profit dementia specialist, allowing the continuation of their Jewish way of life whilst being supported to live independently. Mary died peacefully in December 2022.

David continued: "It's so typical of [experience coordinator] Angela to take a fleeting comment and turn it into something so momentous and personalised. It was all very nostalgic. We shared our stories of the venue from over the years and I could recall the band, the dancing, the food. I can't say the ballroom has changed! It was a wonderful afternoon."

The occasion's organiser, Angela Lockett, Cultural and Experience Co-ordinator at Belong Morris Feinmann, commented: "A big part of our role is helping our customers have the best experiences, recall special moments in their life, and create new memories for them, so when David told me of his life story, I was pleased to put a plan into action. We're grateful for the kindness of the Midland Hotel team for making the day so wonderful for us all, and especially for David."



Belong celebrates best of the best in social care

Pictured above: Belong colleagues celebrate their success

It was a night to remember as colleagues from every Belong village and our home care service, Belong at Home, gathered at the iconic Hallé St Peter's venue in Manchester for the gala evening of the Belong Champion Awards, the organisation's annual celebration of all those who go the extra mile on behalf of our customers.

Winners collected handmade trophies, enjoyed fine dining and danced the night away with colleagues, with the event livestreamed back to the villages, where satellite parties took place to mark the occasion and recognise all nominees recognised through the awards process.

The event is made possible, thanks to the support of our generous sponsors, which this year included AES, Arjo, Barons, Search, Triangle PR, Howden, Jantex and JLA, with the winners' Prosecco this year sponsored by Almanhall.

Over 500 entries were received this year. The winners were determined by a panel of independent judges who interviewed finalists chosen from nominations from customers, relatives and colleagues.

Summarising the event, Belong's chief executive, Martin Rix, said: "It's been another year of hard work and dedication from our teams and so we're pleased to give them the recognition they deserve. To all our finalists and winners: thank you and congratulations for making Belong the best place for our customers to live and for our colleagues to work." The news follows a year of success, with Belong picking up national accolades at the Great British Care Awards, LaingBuisson Awards, and The Dementia Care Awards, amongst others. Meanwhile, its community home care service, Belong at Home, was crowned first place at Homecare.co.uk's Top 20 Large and Mid-size Home Care Groups and is the only not-for-profit operator to have placed every year since 2018.

Pictured right top to bottom: Belong Crewe finalists, Belong Warrington finalists, Belong Wigan finalists and members of the central services team.



The handmade trophies were designed by Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme customer, Beryl Cadman, pictured above.



The winners of this year's Belong Champion Awards:

- Newcomer of the Year** – Erin Duffy, Support Worker, Belong Warrington
- Leader of the Year** – Dean Pepper, Lead Senior Support Worker, Belong Crewe
- Mentor of the Year** – Caroline Clifton, Admiral Nurse
- Team of the Year** – Duke Household Team, Belong Crewe
- Compassion Award** – Samantha Smith, Community Support Worker, Belong at Home Warrington
- End-of-Life Care Award** – Cedar Household Team, Belong Wigan
- Made-My-Day Award** – Jackie Green, Lead Hairdresser, Belong Macclesfield
- Community Engagement Award** – Experience Team, Belong Morris Feinmann
- Innovation Award** – Jessica Butler, Belong Crewe
- Volunteer Award** – Cavell Meakin, Belong Crewe
- Central Services Award** – Lisa Armstrong, Recruitment Business Partner
- Belinda Jones Dementia Champion** – Jessica Moore, Community Support Worker, Belong at Home Wigan





Getting better all the time... Customer Satisfaction Results

As always, Belong is grateful to all our customers and relatives who took part in the annual Customer Satisfaction Survey. Your thoughts and suggestions are vitally important to inform how we shape our villages, services and experiences for everyone and we take this process very seriously, working hard to acknowledge and address the findings.

This survey was carried out in summer 2023 and we had over 500 responses from across the villages and Belong at Home, with household relatives and Experience Days customers also invited to take part.

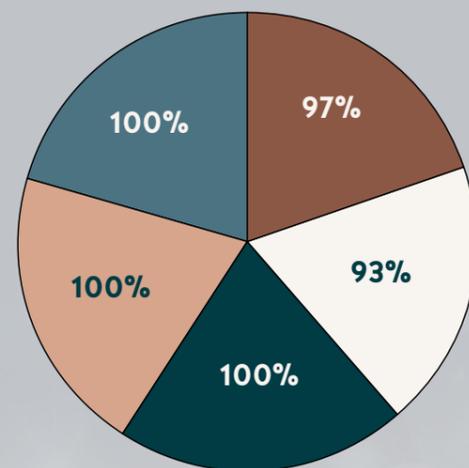
We are pleased that 98% of those surveyed would recommend Belong to family and friends, with high approval scores for areas such as care quality (95%), being treated with compassion and respect (96%), and feeling safe (95%). There have also been marked increases in satisfaction with the bistros, gyms, and activities provision.

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.

Of course, the survey is just one way we collect the thoughts of our customers, in addition to online reviews, village feedback and customer review meetings. As a listening organisation, we are always happy to talk through your experiences, however positive or constructive, so please don't hesitate to get in touch.

The percentage of customers that would recommend Belong across all villages and services:



- Experience Days
- Belong at Home
- Apartments
- Relatives
- Households

Published results are available on our website and all villages; please contact reception for your personal copy.

Areas of focus for 2024

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 will be addressing as follows:

- **Promoting household activities:** customers tell us how much they enjoy the options provided in the experiences programmes and are generally happy with the experience teams' efforts to involve everyone. There has been feedback that there could be more opportunities for residents to enjoy these on their own household and our teams are reviewing this as part of their planning.
- **Household meals:** whilst most Belong customers are happy with the food provided, following feedback, our bistro and catering managers have been reviewing the mealtime experience for residents. As such, we have relaunched our Marvellous Mealtimes initiative to refocus attention on this area and we have also made changes to shift some of the more complex aspects of meal preparation to Bistro kitchens. This should drive greater consistency in food quality, while the later stages of cooking will continue to take place on the households so we maintain the homely kitchen aromas.
- **Continuity of staff:** results of the survey have largely been positive in this area but some feedback has been provided regarding staff consistency. While we aim to keep agency staff to an absolute minimum, recruitment continues to be an ongoing issue affecting the whole care sector and at times, it is necessary to ensure safe staffing level.

In response, Belong offers industry-leading remuneration packages for all colleagues, including the same pay for the same job, regardless of age, and paying the Real Living Wage as a minimum. Further, we continue to drive recruitment through proactive campaigns.

- **Keeping up communication:** we received positive feedback for communication, including use of Relatives Gateway as an effective tool, although this was not consistent across all locations. As such, more training has been planned for our colleagues to get the most out of the system to ensure the best possible communication is provided for families. Further, regular resident and relative meetings have been diarised across all households to ensure timely feedback on an ongoing basis.
- **Maintaining state-of-the-art villages:** customers and relatives are generally very happy with the high-quality environments, though the speed of some repairs could be quicker. We are reviewing our processes and service level agreements to achieve timely ongoing maintenance and improvements. There will be specific focus on investing in our gardens and outdoor spaces in the year ahead, to maximise the enjoyment of time spent outdoors.
- **Ensuring access to the outdoors:** there was some feedback that more could be done to help customers enjoy fresh air and everything nature has to offer. We will monitor this proactively and relaunch walking and gardening clubs as the weather improves.



Household Customers

"Everyone has a caring nature and wants the best for those in their care. I feel like we are family here and I don't see them as care staff I see them as my family."

Relatives

"We are always made to feel very welcome. The Bistro is a fantastic asset. Belong seem to employ some fabulous staff in all areas - reception, bistro, household, cleaners."

"Amazing events programme. Great household caring teams. Really good exercise programme."

Apartment Customers

"[They] maintain the buildings and gardens and the staff are helpful and friendly."

Belong at Home Customers

"Respond well to changing needs. [Support workers] encourage and motivate the customer. Patient and professional. Friendly, warm and positive."

"Care for people in a very friendly polite manner. Everyone goes the extra mile."

Experience Days Customers

"Very caring and compassionate. Able to adapt to the needs of each customer. Excellent communication."



In The Spotlight: Chris Kelly

This issue, we chat with Chris Kelly, newly appointed Experience Support Worker at Belong Macclesfield and self-professed village entertainer who has taken on a daring challenge in the name of helping the village's customers.

When Chris popped in for a quick chat ahead of the village's opening in 2007, shaving off all his hair was perhaps not something he envisaged as part of a new career.

He recalls: "I was working in security at Manchester Airport and felt like I was ready for a change. Living locally, I knew the village was soon to open and so I popped in for chat. They were all very nice and I ended up applying and was successful in joining the team."

Though it would be 16 years before he moved from support worker to the experience team, Chris has always been something of an in-house entertainer. He continues: "I'm known for my singing and dancing on the households - no-one can stop me! I'd always thought about joining the experience team and so, when the opportunity came up, I jumped at it. It helps that I don't mind making myself look a bit silly; if it makes someone laugh, then it doesn't matter, because people's happiness is what it's all about."

Experiences expert

In his new role, Chris can be found setting up the day's activities, before welcoming Experience Days customers for daycare. "It's my role to look after our guests, as well as the residents and tenants who join us. I enjoy earning their trust - you can tell when people are a bit anxious, particularly those with us for the first time, and that's to be expected. It's great

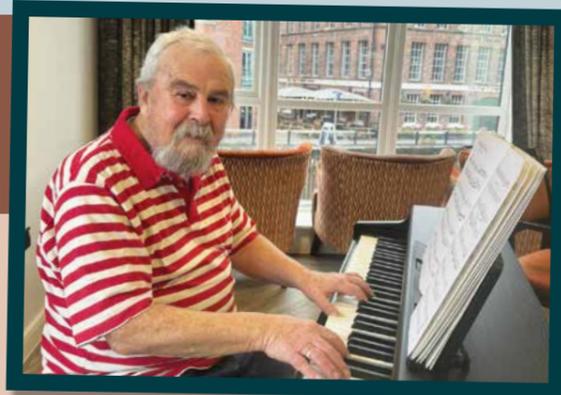


Pictured: Chris Kelly

being able to spend time with them, allay their reservations and see them enjoy themselves as they settle in."

Last year, Chris was the recipient of a monthly A.C.E. (Achieving, Caring, Extra Mile) Award, having been nominated by a family. He explains: "One of our residents was admitted to hospital, so in my spare time I visited them so they could have another familiar face. It was a lovely surprise to receive the award."

Keen to ensure his customers have the best possible time, Chris recently took it upon himself to raise some extra funds to put toward activity provisions by braving a sponsored head shave. "Funnily enough, I was the only volunteer, but I was happy to take one for the team," he chuckles. "I always think, we [Belong colleagues] are carers, working in our customers' home and if I can help them in any way, make them feel good, then it's all worth it."



Pictured: Pete Legge

Volunteer Profile: Pete Legge

In this feature, we recognise the outstanding contributions of volunteers to the Belong community. Pianist Pete Legge is a member of the Sankofa Songsters, the intergenerational choir spreading the joy of music at Belong Chester and beyond.

"Music seems to reach people in a unique way. It's wonderful to see people with dementia and other conditions responding. I've met people who aren't usually responsive but when they hear others singing, they join in and it's the most heartwarming thing to be a part of."

Pete visits the village on Tuesdays, joining rehearsals with village customers and children from the Nursery in Belong, who are led by Amanda Wrigley of Live the Beat. A former church organist, he has been a performer all his life, finding his passion as a child and now his work with the choir means he can continue sharing his enthusiasm.

Chester's Got Talent

In the run-up to Christmas, the group gave their inaugural public performance at a local church concert, alongside local schools. "One girl came up to me and said, 'I've been playing the piano for three years!' Pete recalls, "I said, 'I started when I was four years old. Keep practising and keep up the good work!' - it's great they can relate to me, and they seem to appreciate the older people singing, and vice versa."

Among his favourite tunes to play are The Grandfather's Clock, You've Got a Beautiful Baby Face, and songs from The Sound of Music. Pete continues: "It's enormous fun playing for the residents and the nursery children, I thoroughly enjoy it."

"I really look forward to visiting the village. It's a lovely place with a wonderful happy atmosphere. People pop in, have food in the Bistro and chat to residents, it is just lovely."

Thank you, Pete - from all of us at Belong and the Nursery in Belong, your contribution really is invaluable and may your good work continue!



We speak to colleagues who embody Belong's values in their day-to-day work.



Heather Mills Belong at Home Chester

For this issue, Heather Mills, Team Leader at Belong at Home Chester, shares more about herself and how she's getting on with her customers.

Tell us about your Belong career, so far?

I originally joined the Belong at Home Atherton team before my partner got a promotion and needed to relocate to Chester.

Before then, I'd worked in a residential care home, having moved from retail management. I'd been building a career in high-end sports fashion, though following the birth of my little boy, I reassessed my situation and felt at 30 years old and being a new mum, it was no longer the path I wanted to follow.

Then the pandemic hit and put a spotlight on social care, and I felt like it could be my calling. Working at the residential home, I felt I'd found my passion and progressed in seniority before hearing about Belong from my mother-in-law. She'd popped into the bistro for a coffee and catch-up with a friend and said how nice it was. I did some research and before I knew it, I had a new employer!

What do you like about your role?

Many of our customers either don't have loved ones, or their family doesn't live nearby, meaning they don't see them often. For me, it's comforting to know that my work really does make a difference to their day, even if it's just popping in for an hour. We are a big part of their lives, and they look forward to seeing us.

Any special moments?

It's really important to me to find out what customers like, their lifestyle and interests, and then I make it my goal to help them enjoy these, wherever possible.

For example, one gentleman is an avid Manchester United fan and he'd always expressed how it's been many years since he'd visited his team's home ground. So, I arranged for us to pay a special visit to Manchester for a stadium tour and lunch at Old Trafford. He loved the experience, and I could tell that it meant the world to him and for me, it was heartwarming to be able to do that as part of my job.

I'm also passionate about supporting charities - I organised a group of us to attend the Glow Walk in Liverpool to raise money for Alzheimer's Society, raising £600 for the worthy cause. I also headed-up Elf Day and the Macmillan Coffee Morning to raise funds.

How have the first couple of years for Belong at Home Chester been?

We've had a good response - there's lots of interest in our services and people like the connection we have with the village and being able to support them to use the facilities and attend experiences. They don't just get us as new friends but a whole village full!

We are open to new enquiries, as well as anyone interested in working for us - it's a very exciting time for the team!

Love is in the air

Cupid paid a special visit to the villages back in February, when there were crafts, card making and chocolate creations, live entertainment, flower arranging, a 'besties brunch', a trip to Italy (via the bistro) and even a cheeky butler in the buff!

There were also many cosy dates for two – yes, love is very much all around us.

Pictured top right: Belong Warrington's Vera and Frank Leyland enjoy a special date, hosted by support

Pictured bottom right: Kath Parr, Belong Wigan resident, meets visiting butler, Taz



Belong Chester and The Nursery in Belong welcome the media



Pictured: Tillie Amartey presents from Belong Chester and The Nursery in Belong. BBC Studios – Factual Entertainment Productions

Belong Chester and The Nursery in Belong have been attracting much media attention over the past few months.

Belong and Ready Generations teams welcomed The Guardian's north of England editor, Helen Pidd, who has written a lovely article. You can read Young, old and marvellous: how a care home built a nursery – and everyone thrived, by scanning the QR code or via this link: <https://bit.ly/GuardianBelongChester>



A podcast version, Today in Focus: what happens when you put a nursery in a care home?, featuring interviews from the visit, can be listened to by scanning the QR code or via this link:

<https://bit.ly/GuardianChesterPodcast>

News of our intergenerational village has spread far and wide, with television cameras from BBC's The One Show, ITV's This Morning, and Germany's Deutsche Welle all popping in. We've also enjoyed interviews and stories in press and radio all over the world, from here in the UK all the way to New Zealand!



Pictured: Liz Ludden from Ready Generations (left), talks to Deutsche Welle's UK correspondent, Birgit Maass

Flipping good pancakes!

The month of February means Shrove Tuesday, also known as Pancake Day, marking the last day to tuck into treats before the beginning of Lent.

Customers certainly made the most of the occasion, indulging in a variety of sweet and savoury meals served up on the households and in the bistros. Yum!



Pictured: Belong Atherton's Muriel and Paul tuck into their treats.



Pictured: Chef Sarah Hilton prepares for a day of flipping at Belong Crewe



Tomforte choir Purim concert

The Belong Morris Feinmann Tomforte choir put on a joyous and uplifting concert to mark the Jewish festival of Purim, welcoming guests for an impressive repertoire of songs from the Elvis Presley to the Beatles, as well as traditional songs for Purim.

The performance made for a lovely mid-week treat for attending visitors, who were soon singing along to timeless classics, including Bring Me Sunshine and As Time Goes By. The Tomforte choir was established last year, thanks to the legacy and generosity of Tom Einstein and his wife Elaine. The choir meets weekly on Tuesdays at 3pm and it's well worth attending – and joining in – one of its rehearsals – you'll be in for a treat!

Ducklings delight at Belong Macclesfield

Residents and tenants at Belong Macclesfield watched in wonder as five ducklings came into being at the village, after Team Leader, Laura Barsted, introduced 'Incredible Eggs' to Poplar House in the run-up to Easter.



Five eggs arrived at the village, complete with incubator, and within 24 hours, the first of the eggs had hatched. Roll on 72 hours and Dwayne, Daphne, Donald, Delilah and Delwyn were firmly established as fully fledged members of the Belong Macclesfield community, even attending one of the village 10@10 management meetings!

The ducklings brought great delight to residents, tenants and colleagues alike over the Easter period, before moving to their new home with one of our relatives. Thank you!

#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.

Keep us posted with what you get up to by tagging us in your pictures and videos (just remember to get permission before you capture other people in your happy moments!).



Follow us by searching @belongvillages on your Instagram account or scan the QR code with your smartphone or tablet for direct access to our page – see you there!



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