

Belong Life

Summer 2026



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BELONG
VILLAGES



Word from the team

“We’re always happy, life’s for living. Yeah, that’s our philosophy”, as the Ray Dorset vocals went for the 1970 Mungo Jerry hit, In the Summertime. Indeed, judging by all the goings on throughout the organisation over the past few months, that is very much our mantra.

First up, you may have spotted we’ll be returning to Southport Flower Show in late August. Ahead of the opening of Belong Birkdale, we’re pleased to sponsor Ladies’ Day and we’ll be based at the event for its entirety, so pop over to the stand and say hello.

Equally exciting, we’ve been back on the small screen with Belong Chester and the Ready Generations Nursery in Belong appearing on BBC Songs of Praise. The famous, long-running programme paid a visit to meet the Sankofa Songsters choir and get a feel for intergenerational life, with the final broadcast perhaps feeling more like ‘The Belong Show’ – we’ll take that one!

Turning to what now feels like a customary update, we’ve had more awards success, picking up multiple finalist placings at the Palliative & End of Life Care Awards, and the Stars of Social Care Awards.

We must also congratulate Belong at Home for truly exceptional results, retaining its position at the UK’s only not-for-profit home care service to appear in the Homecare.co.uk top 20 annual ranking every year since 2018. On top of this, Belong at Home Wigan and Southport teams have attained an Outstanding CQC rating.

Across all the villages we’ve welcomed communities for the annual village summer fayres, with many a barbecue feasted, ducks hooked, and tombolas spun. Meanwhile, an abundance of furry friends have been moving in, colleagues have been rubbing shoulders with royalty at Buckingham Palace, and we’ve celebrated another 15th birthday, this time for Belong Atherton – many happy returns.

Wherever you are, whatever you’re up to, raise your glass of lemonade, indulge in the (sporadic) good weather, and make like Mungo, this wonderful summertime.

Martin Rix,
Belong Chief Executive



Belong at Home Wigan



Belong at Home Southport



Belong at Home Wigan

‘Outstanding’ says Care Regulator

Belong at Home, Wigan and Southport have been awarded an Outstanding rating by the industry regulator, with the carers spotlighted as a key strength of the service supporting the town’s older community.

The new Care Quality Commission (CQC) rating promotes the service to a small group of around just 4% of adult social care services nationally to hold an Outstanding classification from England’s independent regulator of health and social care.

CQC inspectors praised the service’s people, highlighting their ‘genuine compassion, kindness and respect’ for customers in their care, paired with an approach that takes time to understand individual needs, preferences and life histories. As a result, relationships are described as being built on trust and therefore enable people to feel ‘valued, listened to, and safe’. Attention was also drawn to staff’s consistency and reliability, as well as the service’s leadership.

Sophie Walls, area manager at Belong at Home Wigan & Southport, said: “We are exceptionally pleased to achieve an Outstanding CQC rating – we have a culture of continuous improvement to achieve a goal of providing the best care for our customers, and so have been working hard to build on our past

success. To be awarded the top rating is something we’re truly honoured to achieve.”

Debbie Moore, team leader at Belong at Home Southport, said: “We are exceptionally pleased to achieve an Outstanding CQC rating – we have a culture of continuous improvement to achieve a goal of providing the best care for our customers, and so to be awarded the top rating is something we’re truly honoured to achieve.”

The CQC verdict marks an impressive upgrade on its last review, having been previously judged as ‘Good’ in 2018.

Since then, the service has continued to go from strength to strength. In 2023, the team picked up The Above & Beyond Community Team accolade at the Stars of Social Care Awards for exceeding the duties of their job. More recently, it retained its coveted spot in the North West top 20 home care services, based solely on independent reviews on [homecare.co.uk](https://www.homecare.co.uk).

Andrew Shield, head of operations for Belong at Home, added: “Congratulations go to our Wigan & Southport team. Our customers tell us how much they appreciate the hard work and dedication of our colleagues, and to have it rightfully recognised by regulators is a fantastic achievement.”

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 **Chris Ellis**, whose mother, Alicia, 92, was one of the very first customers of the Belong at Home Southport which has launched ahead of Belong Birkdale opening, later this year.

“In my view, you get what you pay for in life, and I didn’t want Ryanair care for Mum – I wanted British Airways,” former travel agent Chris tells us.

“Debbie was just marvellous,” he continues, speaking of Debbie Moore, Team Leader and Belong at Home stalwart, who climbed the ranks with the Wigan team for over 20 years before taking the reins of the Southport service, last winter.

“She came up with the idea of doing a jigsaw with Mum. Each time I’d visit, a little more would be complete. She’d help Mum to make lunches, or a cup of tea. Her colleague Michelle was equally great. Without them, Mum wouldn’t have cooked. She wouldn’t have done anything, really. I can’t speak highly enough of them both.”

Family matters

Chris enlisted the assistance of Belong at Home when supporting Alicia on his own understandably became too much. His father passed away 18 years ago, and his mother continued living in what was the family home since 1969. Brother Martin is in Wiltshire, so the carer baton fell to Prescott-based Chris – though, it was still a 90-minute round trip to Southport.

“She forgets things but can be sharp when she puts her mind to it,” he explains. “She uses a frame and a wheelchair, and I can just about manage to get the chair into a car, but it’s awfully hard work.”

As time progressed, things proved to be increasing difficult to manage, including panic alarms being pressed accidentally in the early hours of the morning, meaning Chris was juggling extra welfare checks alongside work.

After a couple of stints in hospital, Alicia returned to her home, though her doting son was now travelling



Pictured: Alicia

back and forth to support her on a daily basis, including at one point, 33 days in a row.

Setting it up

After a bit of research, Chris made an enquiry to Belong at Home based on, he says, the service having a dedicated office hub on Eastbank Street demonstrated credibility, and ‘not just operating from a house’. What really swung it was the process: “I liked the fact that two people came to Mum’s for the initial chat. They had brochures, information, and were keen to make it work for us. It really showed effort and that’s what tipped it for us.”

Within a week the relationship was up and running, with Debbie popping in three times weekly, which Chris describes as ‘terrific, in a good way’ because it took the pressure off him and allowed him to continue working alongside regular, planned visits.

Alicia has now been supported in moving into a residential care facility in the area. Chris finishes, “It was a great relationship and it’s almost unfortunate that it’s come to an end. British Airways had a famous advertising campaign in the ‘70s and ‘80s which said, ‘We’ll take more care of you’ and that’s what we got. It really was a godsend.”

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

Belong Blooms at Southport Flower Show



Pictured: Belong village colleagues mingled with locals at Southport Flower Show

Southport Flower Show welcomed the return of Belong at the weekend, as colleagues fostered connections with the community ahead of the opening of its new, multi-million-pound Birkdale village, later this year.

Sandgrounders had the chance to mingle with the Belong team at the annual Victoria Park gala as it sponsored Ladies' Day, and shared details of its award-winning care as part of the show's trade exhibitor line-up.

Belong previously enjoyed medal success at the show after teaming up with designer Carolyn Hardern for its 'Memories Come in Waves' entry, in recognition of its plans for Belong Birkdale.

Rebecca Woodcock, Chief Operating Officer at Belong, explains more: "We truly believe our approach to the care of older people offers something different for the people of Southport, not least with our focus on promoting an active later life. It was a real pleasure to meet with local people at this colourful event and talk them through what's to come."

Apartments now available to reserve

With Belong Birkdale scheduled to open in autumn 2026, its one and two-bed independent living apartments have now been released to reserve a place to purchase or rent.

Information is also available for its 24-hour residential care 'households' – small cohorts of residents living together with shared lounge, kitchen, and outdoor space.

The Oxford Road village doors will be open to local people to enjoy its centre, bringing much welcome amenities to the neighbourhood, including a bistro, salon, gym, and entertainment venue with licensed bar, all of which are set to help build a strong community in the area.

Belong's outstanding-rated home care service, Belong at Home Southport, is already operating in the town and surrounding areas, supporting older people's independence in their homes with personal care, domestic duties, and companionship.



Pictured: Artist impression of Belong Birkdale (opening autumn 2026)

Rebecca continued: "We're thrilled to be here for our first Merseyside village and are equally excited to welcome our first customers to Belong Birkdale, later this year. Anyone who wants to find out more is welcome to get in touch with us."

More information about Belong Birkdale and Belong at Home Southport can be found at www.belong.org.uk or by emailing enquiries@belong.org.uk

Memory Lane...



Pictured: Henry and Audrey



What started as a means of transport soon evolved into a serious sporting pursuit as Henry became involved in trials riding, road racing and long-distance touring, travelling throughout Britain to compete in events. In preparation, he rebuilt racing machines from the ground up, stripping engines and gearboxes, modifying frames.

One of his most memorable adventures is the 1960 Highland Two Day Trial, which involved riding hundreds of miles from Cheshire to Fort William before

tackling challenging Scottish terrain.

Expanding horizons

In his professional life, Henry landed himself an apprenticeship at Metropolitan-Vickers, widely known as 'Metro-Vicks' in Trafford Park, at one of the largest heavy and electrical engineering facilities in the world. "I took to it like a duck to water!" he remembers fondly.

Indeed, more like a duck to Atlantic water as it was to mark the beginning of a remarkable career, and life, across the pond. His venture abroad, however, had been for another reason, a special lady, Audrey.

Having met in a bar on the Isle of Man when Henry and friends had nipped over to watch the Manx Grand Prix, he describes the moment his and Audrey's eyes first met as 'a thunderbolt striking me'. However, his initial excitement turned to dismay as she was to emigrate to the States the following month.

The American (and Canadian) Dream

Of course, Henry wouldn't let anything come between them and having managed with some difficulty to book a charter flight (they were still in their infancy), he found himself in New York City, staying a few doors down from the Empire State Building.

After settling permanently, he built himself a career in industrial engineering, whilst seeing as much of Audrey as he could. Finally, he popped the question and the couple returned to England for the big day, spending three weeks in the country (including their honeymoon in Henry's childhood home!) before returning.

Married life ensued in Ontario, Canada, with the couple living and working in the city, as well as across the river in Detroit. Later, they relocated to New York State when Henry landed a motorcycle manufacturing position at Ossa/Yankee. Here, he helped oversee production, testing and development, including riding prototypes during factory trials, thus bringing his US venture full circle and realising his American Dream.

For Belong Macclesfield's Henry Feay, reminiscing about his life is more than just a pastime – he's written a whole book of memories! Here, we share just a few extracts of his colourful life, so far.

Henry grew up in Hale Barns, then part of Cheshire, and concedes at school he 'wasn't very studious' whilst also recalling his friend Malcolm teaching him to swear. Teacher, Miss Waterhouse later accused Harry of being a ringleader in foul language and his parents responded by making him come for lunch every day so as not to mix with other children on the playground.

In another humorous tale, Uncle Edgar, a former musician, bequeathed the family his violin. Henry's mother briefed him to sell it to a second-hand music store, for which its owner paid £120 (about £3,000 in today's money). Six weeks later, Henry read in The Times of a violin being sold in Stockport for £10,000 (£258,000). He popped back to the shop and discovered his late uncle's treasure had indeed gone to auction!

Petrolhead life

Growing up, Henry's attention was instead focused on his passion: motorcycles. Of his first purchase, he fondly recalls, "It cost me £55 (£1,400). During the driving test, the engine wouldn't run properly but the examiner passed me anyway!"

Belong and Ready Generations As seen on Songs of Praise



Pictured: Shared mealtime.

This summer, Belong Chester welcomed the camera crew from BBC Songs of Praise who produced an intergenerational-themed episode featuring the village and its integrated Ready Generations Nursery.

Multiple generations' voices filled the air as the production team filmed the episode about faith and what people of different ages can learn from each other. A focus of the visit was a performance by

the Sankofa Songsters intergenerational choir, led by Amanda Wrigley of Live the Beat.

Bringing together village residents, children from the onsite nursery, and members of the wider community, including pupils from Hoole CE Primary School, the choir features members aged from two to 102. They sang renditions of 'Let Your Light Shine' and 'Hope', written by Virginia Kettle of Stay Curious, for cameras.

Intergenerational benefits

The visit highlighted the unique model of the village. It was the UK's first care village to incorporate a fully integrated research nursery, the Ready Generations Nursery in Belong, with children and residents sharing daily life to improve well-being, reduce isolation and foster lifelong learning.

Apart from the music, the film crew captured the daily rhythm of life at the village, including shared experiences, such as flower arranging, art sessions, gardening and prambles – where residents and nursery teams go on walks with the children in prams. Presenter Claire McCullum chatted to residents, colleagues and children.

Inclusive environment

The episode also explored how the village supports the spiritual lives of those in its community. In line with its values, Belong promotes an environment where everyone can be comfortable in who they are, welcoming people of all faiths and none. Anyone moving into the village is given the opportunity to share their faith along with other details about themselves and their life in order for teams to better support them to continue to live how they wish.

Apartment resident Val Goodall said: "Finding this intergenerational community has been an answer to a prayer. It's made a huge difference to be surrounded by so much love and joy."

Caroline Ray, General Manager at Belong Chester, commented: "It was a joy to welcome Songs of Praise to witness the magic that happens when different generations come together. Promoting an environment where everyone feels like they belong is central to everything we do, and part of this is supporting people to practise their faith."

Nursery manager Ruth Sandbach added: "This is a reminder of what we do best: bringing people together, sharing joy and making sure everyone feels heard and valued."

Belong Crewe Celebrates Silver Pride

Silver Pride, the annual celebration of LGBTQ+ life and culture specially for the over 55s, made a welcome return to Crewe for 2026.

Hosted by Belong Crewe, in partnership with sexual health charity, Body Positive Cheshire & North Wales and its social network, Silver Rainbows, guests of all ages painted the village rainbow as they revelled in the festivities with live entertainment from TGA Street Dance, and a fashion catwalk parade competition. Face painting, tombola and stalls, sweet treats and a barbecue also brought the community together.

Jess Butler, Experience Coordinator at Belong Crewe, said: "We're thrilled that Silver Pride has now become a regular fixture in the Crewe calendar as it's important to us that everyone can be themselves and express who they are. Many of the older community have memories of living in a society when it was illegal for them to do this and our day is designed to say you have the support of Belong Crewe; this is a safe space where everyone belongs, regardless of your age or who you love."



Pictured: Belong Crewe customers celebrate the return of Silver Pride



Pictured: Belong Wigan colleagues celebrated their Lottie Award.

LOTTIE & HOMECARE.CO.UK

Crown Us the Best

Belong villages have been named as one of the UK's top 10 small provider care homes by leading care comparison website Lottie. Our Wigan, Atherton and Macclesfield villages were all listed in the top 100 care homes for 2026, whilst Belong Wigan also ranked as one of the top 10 care homes for wellbeing.



Pictured: Belong Atherton colleagues celebrated their Lottie Award.



Pictured: Belong Macclesfield colleagues celebrated their Lottie Award.

This success builds on Lottie's inaugural awards last year, in which Belong had three villages listed in the top 100 care homes. This recognition from Lottie highlights care homes that excel in providing for residents, family and colleagues, by assessing a range of factors including their quality of care, facilities and customer satisfaction.

Belong CEO Martin Rix commented on the accolades: "To be recognised as a top UK care provider for a second consecutive year demonstrates the unwavering dedication and effort of our team in providing outstanding care and support for residents and their loved ones. Our unique village model enables us to

readily adapt our service to our residents' preferences, enabling every individual to set the pace of their lives, resulting in a truly personalised experience."

Congratulating Belong, Founder and CEO of Lottie Will Donnelly observed, "This is a standout achievement among the many care providers operating across England, Scotland and Wales, and one Belong's whole team should feel hugely proud of. Our Top 10 Providers are chosen through a rigorous, data-led review of their homes, making the result genuinely reflective of the strongest providers out there."



Pictured: Belong Macclesfield colleagues celebrated their Lottie Award.

The Whole Nine Yards: Belong at Home Retains Top Carers Crown

Belong at Home has retained its crown as the UK's only not-for-profit operator to be named in the top 20 home care groups every year for the past nine years running – signalling its continuous success in supporting older people with the highest quality of care.



Pictured: Belong at Home Chester celebrate their Homecare.co.uk Award.

The exceptional result is based solely on independent reviews on leading website homecare.co.uk, often dubbed the 'Tripadvisor of home care', with service users and their families reporting on the performance of Belong at Home teams across the North West and West Midlands.

Its rigorously trained and compassionate carers support older people to retain independence in their homes through personal care, domestic duties, and running errands.

Core to its approach is person-centred care, empowering carers to assist customers to enjoy later life, for example, by arranging excursions, indulging their hobbies and interests, or even help them to try something new. Customers can also enjoy the amenities at their nearest Belong village, including bistro, salon,



Pictured: Belong at Home Macclesfield celebrate their Homecare.co.uk Award.

specialist gym, and an entertainment venue, as well as partake in its vibrant experiences programme.

One son of a customer reviewed: "Their kindness, reliability and professionalism made an enormous difference at a time that was very emotional and challenging. Knowing I could trust them completely gave me peace of mind, especially when I was exhausted or needed to step away briefly. I always felt we were working as a team and that they genuinely cared."

Another said: "We cannot say enough positive things about the care my mum has received from Belong at Home over the last few years.

We felt all the carers went above and beyond what [we] would have hoped for. Notably mum's small group of carers hardly changed as Belong has low staff turnover. Huge thank you."

Speaking of the award, Andrew Shield, head of operations at Belong at Home, said: "Making the nation's top 20 home care services for another year is a fantastic result and we appreciate our customers' feedback. They tell us they like the fact we are not for profit, so they and their care are our focus. We genuinely love what we do, and this win really is down to the incredible work our colleagues do every day."





Pictured: Julie and Chris in the Gym

Couple Reunited After Personalised Exercise Journey

An 80 - year - old resident of Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme, who was told by medical professionals she would never walk again, has regained her independence and

returned to live with her husband after embarking on a tailored exercise programme at the village.

Chris Bougourd, who previously enjoyed playing tennis, bowls and swimming, saw her life change overnight after developing severe complications from surgery for cancer, including sepsis, which resulted in a period in intensive care. Within just two weeks, she went from being a highly active person to requiring a wheelchair.

After spending time in other care settings, and with Chris no longer able to live at home, the couple, who married in 1964 following a holiday romance in Guernsey, where Mike is from, moved to Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme. This allowed them to remain close to each other as Mike could live in an independent living apartment while Chris could receive the care she needed on one of the village's households for people requiring 24-hour support.

Despite being told at a rehabilitation hospital that she would never walk again, the couple refused to give up hope.

Upon moving to the village, Chris began a personalised recovery programme of regular functional strength and mobility exercises facilitated by the village's on-site gym and exercise specialist, focusing on walking with increasingly reduced support to get her first standing and then moving around. This has evolved to include functional stepping exercises designed to prepare her for the physical demands of an upcoming holiday.

After the first month, Chris was able to spend much of her time in the couple's apartment, returning to the household only at night. Four months later, she moved out of the 24-hour care environment entirely to live with Mike. Although she gets tired quickly, she is now able to perform most daily tasks for herself.

Reflecting on the journey, Mike said: "The support has been tremendous throughout the whole village. We can't fault them. Support workers on the household were fabulous in adapting to support Chris to move to and from the apartment. The physiotherapy has a transformative effect on Chris's quality of life. We are both very grateful to them."

Julie Whittingham-Jones, Exercise Specialist at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme, added: "Chris is a very determined lady, and we are delighted by her progress. Her commitment to attending personalised exercise sessions twice a week in the Belong gym are helping her to regain her strength, balance and mobility. She is truly inspirational."

Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme Thanks Local Community for Garden Refurbishment

Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme has reopened its garden as a sensory space for residents thanks to the help of local college students and the Mayor's Charity Fund.

Construction and engineering students from Newcastle and Staffordshire College Group have proudly supported the refurbishment of the village's residents' garden in one of the largest community projects it has delivered across several curriculum areas..

The garden opening follows a successful partnership between the Mayor's Charity Fund who sponsored the project and supplied materials, and NSCG Newcastle College as its students completed hours of design and labour to see the project to completion.

Using classroom knowledge to fulfil the live brief, learners from a variety of departments including Bricklaying, Joinery, T Level in Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction and Foundation Learners, worked together to plan, design, build and plant the sensory garden with Belong residents in mind.

T Level students and winning design team Skye Barker, Victoria Silva and Luke Elk-Oldham spent time researching dementia in order to design a space to perfectly cater to the needs of its users.



Story and image credit to Newcastle and Staffordshire Colleges Group

The Mayor and Mayoress of Newcastle Robert and Judy Bettley-Smith, along with Deputy Principal of NSCG Shelley Brown, officially reopened the garden for use joined by local government representatives, NSCG students and Belong customers and colleagues.

Emma Palin, Experience and Heritage Coordinator at Belong who was key in the implementation of the project said: "It was fantastic to see how the students engaged with the process.

"Not only were they hardworking and committed, but also really enthusiastic – our residents had a great time watching them work, and they're really eager to get outside and start using the space."

Shelley Brown, Deputy Principal of NSCG, commented, "It was a privilege to be part of the re-opening of the sensory garden at Belong. Thank you to the Mayor and Mayoress Robert and Judy Bettley-Smith for their support and to our fantastic staff and students for their hard work and commitment in bringing this project to life. A wonderful example of partnership and community in action."

BELONG'S GOT TALENT



Pictured: Hazel Morrow

Poet Hazel Morrow

Hazel has earned herself something of a reputation since moving into her new home, last autumn. You might even call her The Bard of Belong Macclesfield, as she can often be found with pen to paper, working on her next creation to share with the world.

Indeed, the poet and illustrator has already enjoyed publishing success, what with her *Fantastic Fables* featuring the tales wildlife and animals delighting young readers.

Having a way with words has always been a gift for the 76-year-old former primary school teacher, whose aptitude for writing began at an early age. She tells us poetry features prominently in her childhood memories, alongside singing and long car rides, and that she particularly enjoys exploring words, as well as the history of poetry itself.

It was as a young woman that her confidence in the art grew, thanks to seeing the success of a contemporary, Britain's beloved poet-in-motion, Pam Ayres, with her humorous, quirky tales of everyday life, including the famous, "Oh, I Wish I'd Looked After Me Teeth".

Hazel's work differs in that she typically writes for children's audiences, though she has been inspired by her favourite poet to undertake her most ambitious challenge yet. She is currently penning a poem for each and every member of the team at Belong Macclesfield, using their little ways in their work as the focus of each poem.

We say, way to go, Hazel, and we look forward to hearing the final result!

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

In The Spotlight: Sharon Bull



Pictured: Sharon Bull

1 985 was the year of the first mobile telephone call in the UK; Live Aid launched; the miners' strike ended; the shipwrecked Titanic was located; and BBC soap opera, EastEnders hit television screens. And it was to be just the beginning of a 40-year career for Sharon Bull. We caught up with Belong Crewe's Practice Development Facilitator (PDF) to hear more.

"There was no formal training back then. It was one shadow shift and then 'off you go'," Sharon recalls being briefed as an eighteen-year-old care assistant – a far cry from one of the rigorous training inductions she leads for Belong's newest recruits, today.

"It was all very institutionalised. Medicine trollies. Toilet rounds. We had people sharing bedrooms and they weren't couples, strangers in fact! When I worked nights, we had to have all the residents up, washed and dressed, beds stripped for the 8am handover. Can you imagine that today?!"

Despite leaving education not knowing what she wanted to do and applying 'because there was a care home up the road', Sharon instead found a vocation that put fire in her belly. In subsequent years she learned the ropes and progressed in seniority to care officer, nights care officer, and care team leader positions, working all over Cheshire.

Mover and shaker

Stripes earned, coupled with stints as registered care manager and a trainer, would lay the foundations for Sharon's current role heading up inducting new colleagues and the continuing professional development of the village team, embedding dementia care best practice, and guidance on having fun in the workplace.

Indeed, at the time the former CLS home closed, and Belong Crewe was under construction, Sharon was instrumental in its preparation. "Setting up the village was a real highlight," she says. "Interviewing staff, getting everything ready and then seeing it all through to the Outstanding CQC rating in 2017 was fantastic."

Sharon has built a reputation for herself thanks to her creative training ideas, such as inviting customers to sit in on new inductions. "It's part and parcel of Belong, supporting customers to continue to have that purpose, in this case, helping with colleague learning. Customers might be living with dementia, but it makes a difference to them and shows newbies what we're all about."

Words of wisdom

Thinking about advice she'd give to her younger self, Sharon continues: "Whilst care practice was institutionalised years ago, it's sad to say that in many cases it still is. I've always been uncomfortable with it and didn't feel confident to challenge some of the things I saw or give residents a voice. Now, I train our colleagues just that, that they do have a voice, as do our customers. It's about setting the right standards from the off and we're fortunate to have the right culture which I believe comes from the top.

"The Belong vision and the way we work is something I'm very passionate about. I don't think there's a better place that I could be that supports my values and continually innovates. It's 100% for the customer to live as they choose at Belong; to live a fantastic life and it's our job to help them do that. It's true that if you find a job you love, you'll never work a day in your life."

A big congratulations and thank you, Sharon, from your Belong family. Here's to the next 40 years!

Volunteer Profile: Michael Melville



Check out volunteering opportunities at the nearest Belong village by scanning the QR code, or visit bit.ly/BelongVolunteers

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

This issue we meet Michael Melville, who lives on Bluestone household, Belong Chester, and organises interfaith services and tends the village's gardens.

Born in Birmingham and raised in Wales, he later joined the RAF, a career that allowed him to travel extensively across the globe and experience a rich tapestry of cultures.

Michael made the decision to move to Belong Chester six months ago, just before Christmas. Living with Alzheimer's, he wanted to find an environment where he could maintain his independence while being part of a supportive, vibrant community.

"It was definitely the right move for me," he says. "It gave me the independence I wanted, but with the reassurance of a community right on my doorstep."

The community inspired Michael to found the village's interfaith services. Held regularly on Sundays, these gatherings feature readings, reflections and songs from a wide range of traditions. While attendees are predominantly Christian, Michael wanted to

ensure the services were inclusive of all perspectives, incorporating readings, reflections, and songs from Hindu, Muslim, and Bahá'í traditions alongside Christian ones.

On the inspiration for this, he said:

"People like to have a religious service. We all have different truths. It's about bringing people together and learning about and understanding different cultures. The region is secondary really."

When he isn't coordinating services, Michael keeps active and busy with his own hobbies, including gardening, staying fit with regular exercise, enjoying games of Scrabble, knitting and taking part in the village book club. He is also a regular fixture of intergenerational activities, joining children from the on-site Ready Generations nursery for shared singing sessions and gardening projects.

"They provide the energy that we don't have," says Michael.



Pictured: Michael Melville

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.

This issue we catch up with Jemma Sharratt, who has recently taken up the role of Belong Chester Village Nurse Manager, having previously enjoyed the role at Belong Atherton, and is a finalist at the Palliative & End-of-Life Care Awards 2026.

How have you been settling in at your new village?

I've really fallen in love with Belong Chester. Everyone really cares about what they do, are very eager to learn and strive for continuous improvement. The intergenerational relationships between our customers and Ready Generations Nursery in Belong children is a lovely thing to see.

In the nursing team, we have a good mix of colleagues. Some have been in social care for years and others are newer to nursing. It's great to be able to build on the expertise we've got and learn from one another. We also attend local college to refresh clinical skills, and we are looking to support student nurses here at the village – watch this space.

How does having the nursery children in the village impact your work?

In adult nursing, we don't get a lot of interaction with children. Belong has always been different, facilitating visits from schools and nurseries, for example, and so having an integrated nursery takes this even further at Chester. To be able to see the impact children have on older people's wellbeing is wonderful. When customers are with them, they laugh louder, they move more, everything feels 'amplified'.

For example, one customer previously worked as teacher, and we encouraged them to help in the nursery. It's given them a new lease of life and where previously they chose to remain in their bedroom, they now come out onto the household when the children visit and join in story time – the impact the children has had on them is just beautiful.

What are your focuses as the new Village Nurse Manager?

We have just started our Gold Standards Framework



Pictured: Jemma Sharratt

(GSF) campaign – end-of-life care is something I'm passionate about, and the team here are really enthused with the training and development the accreditation offers. At Belong Atherton, the team achieved Platinum status, and I've seen first-hand the positive difference the approach makes to customers. We are also fundraising for sensory equipment to enhance customers' experience.



You were awarded the Chief Nurse Adult Social Care Gold Award two years ago, how have things changed since then?

It was an honour to meet and receive the award from Deborah Sturdy. Off the back of the accolade, I now co-chair the National Care Forum's social care nursing forum, and it's humbling to have my opinion and expertise recognised in the profession.

Which Belong value is most important to you?

Can I have two?! Our nursing team have been through a lot of change in the past six months and so Stronger Together, and Better Tomorrow exemplify this best. Despite the challenges, they've risen to the occasion happily and willingly. As a village, Care from the Heart stands out. We really excel in our care, and I believe being an intergenerational village enables us to be even more person centred. Okay, that's three values! Really, all five are equally important in our work.

Noticeboard

For further details on these stories and more, from across our villages, follow us on Facebook, Instagram or X, or visit our news page on our website at: www.belong.org.uk/news

Cheers to 15 Years: Belong Atherton Celebrates Milestone Birthday

Decked in black and gold balloons, bunting, and banners, Belong Atherton has commemorated 15 years supporting the community with a birthday bonanza destined to be the focus of conversation for years to come.

Later came the centrepiece celebratory meal featuring music, dancing, and companionship, with live entertainment from local singer, Joe Parker, taking song requests before leading guests in a group rendition of classic 'Happy Birthday to You'.

Nicola Johnstone, General Manager at Belong Atherton, said: "We've raised our glasses to an incredible milestone, 15 years making a real difference in people's lives. There have been so many wonderful memories created over the years, and it goes to show there is everything to look forward to and embrace in older life when you're part of a caring community like ours."



Pictured: Belong Atherton customers toast to 15 years

In other news...

Swiss Valais blacknose sheep, Chinese Silkie chickens, and Pygmy goats have been spotted in Atherton as Belong customers and the community have been playing host for special meet-and-greet sessions with animals from across the globe.

Tiny African Scops, Eurasian Eagle, and Harris's Hawk owls have also joined the fun at the village, with its older community petting their new companions, finding out all about them, and in some cases, taking on the role of looking after them.



Pictured: Marlene Oldfield

Pictured: Paul Heaton

Feathered Friends Make for New Companions at Belong Macclesfield

Four young, feathered friends have made themselves comfortable amongst Macclesfield's older community as a brood of ducklings is calling Belong Macclesfield their new home.

After much anticipation, James Pond, Dick Van Duck, Pancake, and Theo, hatched as part of a project organised by the village's experience team to create opportunities for residents to get involved, provide care, and give love to their little companions.

The fluffy additions have quickly forged close relationships with customers, including those living with dementia, as Alexis Marsden, Experience Coordinator, explains: "Our customers have adored having the ducks around - it's created a positive energy around our village. They especially enjoy feeding them, helping clean their home, and having lots of cuddles."

The pet therapy is possible thanks to Incredible Eggs, an ethical provider of hatching kits, with Belong Macclesfield's customers and colleagues providing around-the-clock care, before they move on to their forever homes.



Pictured: Belong Macclesfield customer, Jeanette Bayliss, makes a new feathered friend.

From Didsbury to The Palace: Carers Commended by the King

The devotion of General Manager, Carolyn Ball and Religious and Cultural Coordinator, Angela Luckett, have been recognised by King Charles III and Queen Camilla at a Garden Party hosted at Buckingham Palace.

The pair received invitations in a mark of appreciation for their exceptional performances in assisting older people to live as independently as possible whilst enjoying later life.

Speaking of the pair's support for their residents throughout recent challenges faced by the Jewish community, His Majesty King Charles III, said: "Thank God you're there to help."

Angela Luckett said: "The whole day was a treasured memory. From walking up The Mall, seeing the Yeoman of the Guards, all the dashing morning suits and fabulous hats and dresses, to the gardens, tiny 'butties', beautiful cakes and

copious cups of tea. And of course, meeting the King, himself - what a day!"

Carolyn Ball added: "We are honoured to represent our wonderful Belong Morris Feinmann community at the Palace. Our work is more than just a job to us; it truly is a vocation, and one we are privileged to get to do every day."

The pair of care team leaders were selected to attend along with invitees from other not-for-profit organisations, charities and societies, as well as people put forward by the government, armed services, the Church and other faiths.



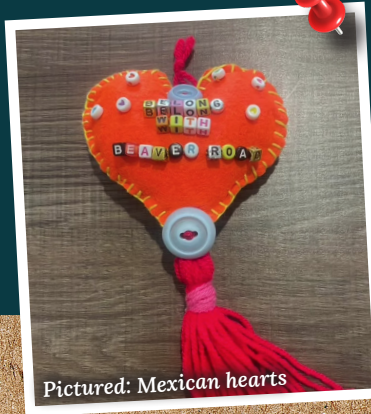
Pictured: Carolyn Ball and Angela Luckett

New Relationships Flourish in Global Intergenerational Week

Belong Morris Feinmann welcomed a cohort of new friends from nearby Beaver Road Primary School for a fun session creating Mexican hanging hearts during Global Intergenerational Week.

Facilitated by volunteers, Linda Price and Lesley Sher, participants exercised their artistic flair cutting, sticking and sewing the hearts into shape, before helping one another out tying tassels and adding gems. Set to add a splash of colour to the village's reception area, the keepsakes serve as a symbol of the newly forged companionships, taking inspiration from traditional Latin American values of love and community.

Comments from the pupils included:
 "I really enjoyed this." – Amira;
 "That lady is my friend!" – Hugo;
 "I want to go back soon!" – Hanna.



Pictured: Mexican hearts



Pictured: Bob Taylor

Intergenerational Community Enjoys Chester Duck Race

Chester Duck Race returned for 2026 and Belong Chester, once again vied for the podium with a special entry bringing together older people and young friends in celebration of Global Intergenerational Week (24 – 30 April 2026).



Pictured: Ali

This year's submission went by Ali, named after the national charity, Alzheimer's Society, and was decorated with distinctive blue painted Myosotis – commonly known as forget-me-not flowers.

Perched on Ali's back was half-duckling, half-bee, DuckBy, named after the village's B's Cafe. The monthly memory cafe invites the public for complimentary coffee, conversation and access to its Admiral Nurse service supporting families in the community with a dementia diagnosis.

The ducks' designs are the result of a collaboration between Belong Chester customers and children from the Ready Generations Nursery in Belong. Together, the friends brainstormed ideas before bringing them to life in their in-house creative studio.

Dyan Crimes, Intergenerational Experience Coordinator at Belong Chester, said: "With Global Intergenerational Week falling on the Duck Race weekend this year, it made for the perfect opportunity to bring everyone together to build our entry.

Marjorie Celebrates Special WWII Recognition

Warrington's Marjorie Goodwin has celebrated a commemoration of her service during WWII with a special party with loved ones and army dignitaries.

The 102-year-old was surrounded by family and friends at her home, Belong Warrington,, as she welcomed representatives of Grappenhall and Thelwall Royal British Legion (GTRBL) for the presentation of a medal and the HM Armed Forces Veterans' Badge, followed by cake and the sharing of stories from her wartime years.

Louise Kelly, Experience Coordinator at Belong Warrington, said: "It was a privilege to be part of such a meaningful occasion and honour Marjorie's remarkable contribution to our country's history. We are incredibly proud to have her as part of our Belong Warrington family."



Pictured: Belong Warrington's Marjorie Goodwin celebrates 102 years young with family, friends, and representatives of Grappenhall and Thelwall Royal British Legion (GTRBL).

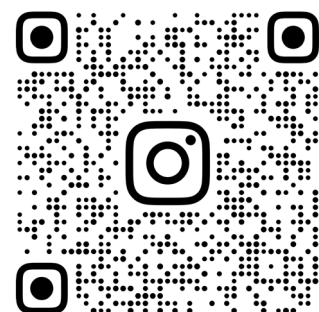
#Join us

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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