

Belong Life

AUTUMN 2024



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BELONG
VILLAGES



Word from the team

This issue, chief executive Martin Rix considers what makes Belong a special place, truly different from others operating in the sector.

If you haven't already spotted it, our Social Impact Report for 2023/24 is now available. A quick look at the numbers tells us we have more people than ever accessing our Admiral Nurse service; being visited by our Belong at Home community care teams; enjoying day care in the form of an Experience Day at the villages.

In commonality, these are often the first point of contact with Belong for many of our customers and it would suggest growing demand for sector-leading care well before setting up home in one of the villages – something we expect to only increase, in keeping with international trends.

It also highlights the significance of our 'home for life' approach, meaning that as the needs of our customers change, we have the capacity, facilities, and expertise for support to continue, not least with our truly pioneering household model for 24-hour care, which we hope one day will be the standard throughout the sector.

Underneath the figures, throughout this and every other *Belong Life*, is the wealth of evidence that brings to life the statistics in the form of stories of the many lives we touch. You can read the heartening report on our website: belong.org.uk, via the QR code below, or pick up a printed copy in our villages.

Also related to our approach, we are thrilled to bring home another prestigious award: Health Investor Seniors Housing Award for Best Health and Wellness Service of the Year for promoting an active lifestyle through experiences, exercise, arts and creativity, intergenerational opportunities and community engagement.

I'd like to introduce and welcome Mike Griffiths, our new Head of People as he takes the HR reins for our colleagues, their learning and development, as well as recruiting the best people to support the organisation's growth.

In the villages, I'm sure you will be enjoying the Christmas and Hanukkah season festivities as we approach the end of another wonderful year.

Martin Rix
Belong Chief Executive



Scan the QR code with your phone or tablet to read the Social Impact Report 2023/24.



Belong
joins
ARCO

Belong is pleased to announce it has joined ARCO, the Associated Retirement Community Operators, signifying the organisation's commitment, ensuring the highest standards for customers residing in our villages' independent living apartments.

ARCO's role as the main body representing integrated retirement communities (IRCs) in the UK contributes to the setting of extremely high standards for the sector and serves to advocate for the development of IRCs that prioritise the wellbeing, safety and satisfaction of their residents.

Speaking of Belong's membership, chief executive Martin Rix said: "As a pioneer of innovative care settings in the UK, Belong is delighted to become a member of ARCO and receive Approved Operator Status for our independent living apartments, which are a crucial component of our care village model, seamlessly complementing the 24-hour care household living option and ensuring we offer a range of services to support people as their needs change.

"This prestigious recognition signals to the wider world that we adhere to the highest standards in housing provision, while benefiting from the collective expertise of our peers, as we continue to create vibrant communities, shaped by our customers. We look forward to working together to drive further advancements in integrated retirement communities for older people and raising awareness of the benefits amongst a wider audience."

A toast to a roaring decade: Belong Warrington celebrates 10th Birthday



Pictured Belong Warrington resident Dilys Wolfendale parties with experience support workers Jade Shield (left) and Louise Kelly

Belong Warrington has been partying like it's the 1920s with a Gatsby-themed celebration making its 10th birthday a night to remember.

The village pulled out all the stops, swivels and flicks with live entertainment from Danni B providing the perfect vintage party soundtrack whilst revellers enjoyed jazz age dancing, fabulous food and bubbles in abundance. Marking the special occasion, ladies embraced high flapper fashion featuring sequins, feathers and fringe dresses, whilst gentleman dressed to the nines, showcasing dapper suits, braces and fedoras.

Guests of honour, Councillor Mo Hussain, Deputy Mayor of Warrington, and Councillor Leah Hussain kicked off the gala with a toast and the presentation of gifts for ten stalwarts: the five customers and five colleagues living or working at the village from day one.

Speaking of the glittering festivities, Diane Wrench, apartment tenant, said: "It's been wonderful. We have a lovely singer, fantastic food, and everyone looks beautiful."

Maureen Jones, another apartment tenant, added: "We've all dressed up for the occasion; it's absolutely marvellous!"

Opening in 2014, Belong Warrington revolutionised living options for older people in the town – particularly for those living with dementia – offering a not-for-profit alternative approach to care with its pioneering 24-hour residential 'households' model and village living concept. With amenities and experiences open to the public, including bistro, specialist gym, and salon, it has become a destination hub for the wider community.

Over the years it has grown from strength to strength, subsequently launching a day care service, Experience Days, and community home care service, Belong at Home. Meanwhile, the village team has fostered close relationships with Warringtonians, businesses and schools, as well as attaining numerous industry awards, cementing a reputation as a leader in social care within the town.

Barry Devine, general manager at Belong Warrington, added: "We've had a brilliant time partying, remembering many joyful moments from over the years and doing what we do best: making our customers happy. Cheers to ten years and here's to another wonderful decade!"



A Customer's View: Lynn Bostock

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

For this issue, we pay tribute to **Lynn Bostock**, former resident of Holly Household and a stalwart of the Belong Macclesfield community long before her diagnosis of motor neurone disease gave her cause to move into the village. *We are sorry to say that Lynn sadly passed away shortly after we spoke to her for this column, but honoured that we had the privilege to support her at the village. The thoughts of the team at Belong Macclesfield and the wider Belong community are with her family at this difficult time.*



Catching a show: Lynn at Stoke-on-Trent theatre

Lynn, who lived in Macclesfield all her life, had long had connections to Belong - as well as to others in the community, known to many through the family-run garage, Shaw Street Garage, where she worked with her husband for a number of years.

She first experienced the care at Belong through her late mother-in-law, who came to live in an apartment at the village and was supported by Belong at Home until a decline in her health led her to move to Cedar Household. With an uncle and another friend also resident on the household, Lynn was a regular visitor and a familiar face around the village.

"The care team were exceptional, and I used to say that if I ever required support myself, Belong was the only place I would want to live," explained Lynn. "I can't recommend it enough to people."

Sadly, this time came sooner than she ever could have imagined when she was diagnosed with a form of motor neurone disease after beginning to show symptoms at the end of last year.

By June, her condition had deteriorated and Lynn came to Holly household for a week's respite. This made a huge difference, so much so, that after returning home and finding she missed having the support, she decided to move back to living at Belong Macclesfield permanently.

Red panda experience

The premature move led the team on Holly to work with Lynn to identify a number of goals they could support her to achieve.

"I'm keen to keep getting out and about for as long as possible, and I really appreciate the way the team have rallied to enable me to do this," she said.

First on the list was a red panda experience, which the team arranged, along with her husband, at the local Peak Wildlife Zoo. A lifelong animal lover, Lynn had a particular fondness for the small mammals, having long sponsored a red panda at Chester Zoo. Support manager Helen Marsden was there early to help get her ready for the special day.

"I bet there are not many support managers who would come in early for a customer, but everybody here is out to try and help you," reported Lynn. "It was a truly special day, from start to finish."

Living at Belong meant that Lynn regained some control of her life. "Ironically, it was actually more difficult to get out when I was living at home, even to the garden. I really appreciate small things, like being able to get to local shops," she explained. "I have got my independence back in a way."



Up close: The Red Panda Experience was a treasured moment for Lynn

Family time

At the village, Lynn received many visitors, enjoying spending time in the bistro or on the balcony. These included husband, David, and the couple's two sons, Matthew and Mark, along with their German Shepherd dog, Shadow. She will be sorely missed by all who knew her.

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

Regional awards success

With the awards season well underway, Belong was delighted to see colleagues across its villages recognised in a range of categories at the Great North West Care Awards, Great West Midlands Care Awards and the Wigan Borough Palliative and End-of-life Care Awards.

As well as the six winners profiled below, five colleagues were distinguished as follows:

Caroline Clifton, Admiral Nurse, Highly Commended for her **Contribution to Adult Social Care** at the Great West Midlands Care Awards

Steven Cartlich, Caretaker at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme, Highly Commended for the **Ancillary Award** at the Great West Midlands Care Awards

Lisa Armstrong, Recruitment Business Partner, Highly Commended for **The Three Rs Award** at the Great West Midlands Care Awards

Rebecca Clarke, Support Worker at Belong Chester, Highly Commended for **Newcomer of the Year** at the Great North West Care Awards

Belong Atherton Nurse Team, Highly Commended for **Care Home Team of the Year** at the Great North West Care Awards



Jamie Rogers, Care Team Leader at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme won the **Dementia Carer Award** at the Great West Midlands Care Awards



Laura Cooper, Community Support Worker at Belong at Home Warrington won the **Dignity in Care Award** at the Great North West Care Awards



Hannah Barrington-Parry, Village Nurse Manager at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme won the **Social Care Nurse Award**



Cavell Meakin, Volunteer at Belong Crewe won the **Unpaid Carer Award** at the Great North West Care Awards



Emma Palin, Experience and Heritage Co-ordinator at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme won the **Care Innovator Award**



Kim Calland, Experience Co-ordinator at Belong Atherton, won the **Most Innovative Staff Member Award** at the Wigan Borough Palliative and End-of-Life Care Awards

Memory Lane...

Charles Galasko lives at Barfield Apartments, adjacent to Belong Morris Feinmann, where he is very much part of the village community since his wife, Carol, who lives with Alzheimer's, moved there in 2022. During his distinguished career as a surgeon, he contributed to significant advancements in his specialist field and held many distinguished roles, including as a doctor to the 1988 GB Olympics team. Inspired by the Paris games, we spoke to him about these experiences.

Born in Johannesburg, Charles wanted to be a surgeon from a young age and to this end, he read medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand before his surgical training at Johannesburg General and The Non-European hospitals. Despite planning to become a general surgeon, his next job was in orthopaedics.

"I didn't want to do it initially, but it was fantastic, the amount I was taught," he says.

Contacts made while at university later helped secure him a role at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School, at Hammersmith Hospital, where he became a pioneer in nuclear medicine, focusing on breast cancer that had metastasised to bones – the hospital was one of the first to have a prototype gamma camera for conducting functional scans of the body.

Family life

Charles married Carol, a nurse and fellow South African, in 1967. They have two children: Gavin, who is a cardiologist, and Deborah, who lives in Israel, as well as three grandchildren.

After two years, they moved to Oxford, where Charles became the senior Orthopaedic Registrar at the Nuffield Orthopaedic Centre. They stayed there until 1973, when Charles returned to Hammersmith as its director of orthopaedic surgery.

Three years later, the family headed to Manchester, where Charles became the University of Manchester's Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery, as well as a Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon at the Royal Manchester Children's and Hope hospitals.

A keen rugby union fan, Charles came to support Sale Sharks, as well as his native Springboks team, and kept up his interest in photography, his main hobby.

In 1986, he was asked to go to the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh to look after the wrestlers, despite never watching wrestling before.

"I spent three days sitting at the side of the mat with the referee's umpires, who taught me how points were scored, etc.," he says.

This led to a series of sporting appointments.

Sporting career

Six months later, he became medical advisor to the British Amateur Wrestling Association, as well as Vice-Chairman of English Wrestling and chairman of the British Amateur Wrestling Association.



Charles Galasko, Belong Morris Feinmann

He was one of three doctors who looked after Team GB athletes at the 1988 Games in Seoul, South Korea.

"I can remember walking around the stadium at the opening ceremony with the athletes and medical staff. It was absolutely fantastic and a highlight of my life," he says.

Charles also worked as a medical commissioner at Manchester's 2002 Commonwealth Games.

After retiring from Manchester University in 2004, Charles' interest in sport and exercise medicine led him to become Chairman of the Intercollegiate Academic Board for Sport and Exercise Medicine and the first president of the Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine UK.

"I wanted to get sport and exercise medicine recognised as a medical speciality in its own right. If I did nothing when I retired, it would have been a waste," he says.

Career impact

His career has seen him hold numerous prestigious roles and led to significant advancements in particular fields of medicine.

A Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of England and Edinburgh, Charles served as Vice-President of the Royal College of Surgeons in England, as well as President of the British Orthopaedic Association and the International Orthopaedic Research Society. He has written nine books on orthopaedics and more than 450 other publications and given more than 900 lectures around the world.

"The research I did on skeletal metastasis changed the way in which it was treated," he adds.

Charles was Chairman of the working party on the Management of Patients with Head Injuries whose 1999 The Galasko Report led to major change in the treatment of these injuries, saving thousands of lives.



Belong has taken the title for Best Health and Wellness Service at this year's Health Investor Seniors Housing Awards, signifying its best-in-class performance for its revolutionary approach to supporting older people living with dementia.

The national accolade is in recognition of the provider's holistic approach to care, breaking the mould of the 'traditional care home' by promoting an active lifestyle for its residents, apartment tenants, day care and home care customers, with the goal of supporting them to live as independently as possible whilst enjoying later life.

Judges said: "Belong's approach to wellbeing is all about activity, connection and enjoyment – it is not just an add-on [but] feels like a natural part of life in their integrated villages." They also highlighted the success of its strategy, noting: "...Commitment starts at board level and permeates the entire organisation."

Experience Teams and Exercise Specialists work alongside care teams to provide a range of opportunities taking advantage of facilities in the care village, including a high tech gym for older people, an entertainment venue, bistro and lounges. As a not-for-profit care provider, Belong prioritises people and their wellbeing, investing in its environment, arts, music and intergenerational partnerships and community links to offer a rich programme of events and meaningful occupation.

Belong crowned best for health and wellness

Pictured: Belong Macclesfield residents and tenants celebrate Belong's award win.



Commenting on the win, Belong's chief executive, Martin Rix, said: "We are thrilled to be named winner of the sector's Best Health and Wellness award. Being for people, not profit means our customers and colleagues truly are at the heart of everything we do, and we get to see the remarkable outcomes of our approach to care across all our villages, every day."

Martin continues: "To receive such an accolade is a vote of confidence in our unique 'home for life' model and our strong platform to diversify into further locations around the UK and achieve our aim of bringing our industry-leading care to more people."



Pictured: Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme residents and tenants celebrate Belong's award win.



Getting better all the time... Customer Satisfaction Survey 2024

Thank you to all our customers that took part in this year's satisfaction survey. We're delighted that we saw an increase of 12.5% in the number of people who responded this year: 612 compared to 544 last year, which made it all the more meaningful that the percentage of customers who would recommend Belong rose to 96.4%, up from 95.5% last year and our highest score since 2018.

Areas where we showed improvements since last year included:

- Communication and responsiveness, following enhancements to our communication strategy and strengthened governance structures across the group.
- Access to the outdoors, following investment in outdoor spaces which contributed to an 11% increase in satisfaction in this area.
- Catering satisfaction was slightly up, helped by changes to our catering model, although there is more to do in this area and it will remain a key focus in the year ahead

What our customers like about Belong

- Belong universally lives up to its promise of giving customers a sense of belonging and security, underpinned by appreciation of how well the household model works in creating a homely, familiar environment
- Belong colleagues live the organisation's values and there is a unanimous sense that they are caring, compassionate, respectful and skilled
- The Bistro makes visits a great experience and we receive many comments about this

The percentage of customers who would recommend Belong:



Our top three scoring areas were also ones where we showed an increase in positive customer sentiment (agree or strongly agree) compared to last year or maintained the same level:

	2023/24	2022/23
Caring, compassionate and respectful team	97%	96%
Safety and security	97%	95%
Quality of care	95%	95%

Areas for improvement

Alongside the positives, we used your feedback to identify areas where there is still room for improvement, using these to identify priorities for the year ahead. While there is naturally variation according to location, some common themes that will form the basis of action plans are:

- **Household meals:** Catering model changes were introduced in June 2024, with the timing of the survey landing soon after their introduction; we therefore anticipate greater impact to be evident as we move into 2025. There is also a focus on reinvigorating our Marvellous Mealtimes strategy and ensuring this is being implemented consistently across Belong.
- **Bistro meals:** we will be reviewing our menus and looking to include more healthy options.
- **Meaningful engagement strategy** is being developed to enhance the quality and impact of activities, creating a more fulfilling and engaging experience for residents.
- Alongside this, we are **evaluating transport options to enable us to offer** more outings with greater frequency across our estate.
- **Agency reduction strategy:** we have made great progress in reducing vacancies and therefore agency usage over recent months and we will continue these efforts to reduce agency further in the year ahead.
- Re-evaluating the **Relatives Gateway** and working with the IT supplier to improve any portal access that we commission to ensure information is more clearly presented.
- **Procurement of new CRM/invoicing system** is underway and expected to be in place by the end of the financial year, which again should remove sources of frustration around this area.
- **Gym strategy:** we are reviewing how we operate gym appointments and group exercise to further increase opportunities for exercise and reduce missed appointments.

What our customers said about us

Perhaps, the most impactful aspect of the survey is all the feedback we receive, both by way of compliments and constructive criticism - with the latter evaluated to feed into our improvement plans. However, we finish this year's summary on a high, with a round-up of some of this year's most heartening quotes.

"Staff show astonishing levels of kindness and affection for residents."
- Belong Morris Feinmann relative

"Belong has been the best decision since having a stroke three years ago."
- Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme apartment tenant

"I want to say a big thank you because I have never experienced anything like this. My family think you are all amazing. You have made me feel supported in every way and I love coming here. I enjoy every minute of it."
- Belong Atherton Experience Day customer

"I am 90 years old, and I feel better now than I ever have!"
- Belong Atherton household resident

"I am very happy here and I wouldn't want to be anywhere else"
- Belong Wigan resident

"You are never left waiting, staff are always on hand to help, always with humour. They are fun to be around."
- Belong Macclesfield resident

"Everything, from the management to the carers, is exceptional."
- Belong Macclesfield relative

"I feel listened to, loved and understood"
- Household resident





Recalling memories through music

Pictured Dorothy and Margaret at Belong Crewe

The joys of music are playing an instrumental role in the lives of Cheshire's older community, with residents and tenants at Belong Crewe and Macclesfield reliving happy memories from special life moments thanks to fun-filled music workshops designed to promote wellbeing.

The interactive sessions comprise a mix of activities incorporating a range of percussion instruments to explore rhythms and sounds from different genres and decades, all whilst benefitting the health of participants, including those living with dementia.

Delivered by West End theatre-trained Vicky Thornton of Musical Moments, the fully inclusive sessions feature tambourines, bells and maracas, and even the chance to play a ukelele. A wide variety of songs are used to meet participants' taste in music, with favourite tunes from the '60s and '70s, classical, stage, television and film all popular requests making for conversational topics and the chance to reminisce.

Belong Crewe customer, Margaret, said: "The sessions bring so much happiness and Vicky's voice is beautiful – she really captivates us in the moment."

Anna Seaton, experience coordinator at Belong Macclesfield, explains why music therapy forms a key part of the villages' vibrant experiences programmes: "Music can help to unlock memories, foster feelings of connection and help our customers to regain their sense of identity."

Jessica Butler, experience coordinator at Belong Crewe, added: "This is particularly beneficial for our customers living with dementia, with even those with little or no verbal communication able to join in."

The group sessions provide the opportunity for companionship without the pressure of conversation or the need to pick up on social cues, with residents often participating by whistling to songs or dancing.

Vicky Thornton, Musical Moments franchisee for Cheshire and North Staffordshire, commented: "Music is an exceptionally powerful medium, particularly for evoking happy memories. Sometimes participants may not remember me from previous sessions, but people can recall the music."

"Everyone is very much encouraged to unleash their inner George Formby but often it's the smallest moments of engagement, like tapping their fingers or raising an eyebrow, that communicates how much people are enjoying themselves."



Sheila Walsh with Vicky Thornton, Belong Macclesfield.

Life-changing exercise



Pictured: Nicky Hayes Warrington and Exercise Specialist, Aaron Willcock

Inspired by National Fitness Day, we spoke with Belong Warrington Experience Days customer, Nicky Hayes, 84, to find out more about the village gym, exercise and rehabilitation service, and his love for all things fitness.

Explaining his motivation for fitness, Nicky told us it's threefold. He begins: "One of my daughters has just completed a diving course and I'd love to be fit enough to go underwater like her. But overall, using the gym really is helping me to be better for my family and to be here for them for longer. Also, I would like to get shut of this!" (It was at this point our interviewee pointed to his tummy.)

A regular face at the village for the past two-and-a-half years, the Liverpoolian visits on Mondays and Thursdays.

He continues: "It was my daughters, Helen and Nicola, who first told me about the village. They wanted me to be doing more things with my time and to find a group of friends. Truth be told, they are my world, along with granddaughter Olivia, and I feel they are pushing me to keep moving and it's helping to boost my enthusiasm when it comes to working out."

Witness the fitness

Also cheering Nicky on is the village's dedicated exercise specialist, Aaron Willcock, and the pair have struck up quite a partnership through their regular one-to-one sessions. "Aaron is a cracking fella," Nicky says. "I remember trying out the gym to see what I thought and after 45 minutes, I felt on top of the world."

All Belong villages hold regular group exercise sessions and customers can also opt for personal sessions with one of the in-house exercise specialists. This includes an assessment to build a bespoke training programme utilising the gym's state-of-the-art equipment especially for older people, including wheelchair users.

Nicky continues: "I love the lateral pull down machine and Aaron is over the moon with my performance on this. I think I'm doing really well for my age and he thinks so too. You couldn't get a better instructor than Aaron – he pushes me to do my best and he doesn't mind the old scouse chatter as I patter on about my day."

Life goals

Finally, we were keen to find out if Nicky found the time away from his beloved lateral pull ups to enjoy any other aspects of village life and he told us: "There isn't much I don't do when I'm here! I like to play dominoes and take care of the plants. It gets me out of the house and gives my wife some time to do some of the things she likes to do, too. I love all my friends here and I'm so happy I found Belong."

"I'm so pleased Nicky loves working with me as much as I love working with him! I'm amazed every week by his dedication and commitment. It's people like Nicky that make me love my job and the work I can do to help people in their everyday lives."

– Aaron Willcock, Exercise Specialist

In The Spotlight: Sam Thorley

This issue, we chat with Sam Thorley, Community Support Worker at Belong at Home Newcastle-under-Lyme for an insight into working life in our home care service.

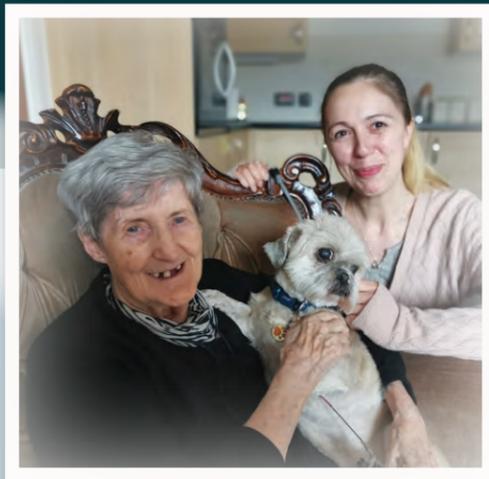
“Rewarding. That’s the word I’d use to describe my job. It certainly has its challenges (like any job, really) but it’s definitely rewarding, and the training we have means it really isn’t like anywhere else I’ve worked before,” Sam tells us.

Prior to joining Belong, Sam worked for a computer manufacturer in a post which saw her, quite literally, building gaming computers – not something she enjoyed. Having worked in care ‘on and off’ over the years, she confesses she knew she would always return to the profession.

Now, 18 months into her role as a community support worker, her time is split between supporting the village’s independent living apartment tenants and those living in homes in and around the Newcastle-under-Lyme area. She’s also busy making her mark and building her career, as she continues:

“I also help senior colleagues, as well as supporting Jane Furze, the team leader, and this is helping me to develop my skills. So, I get the best of both worlds, working with customers and being involved in the background work to make sure everything runs smoothly.”

Also driving her development, Sam has just begun her NVQ Level 3 diploma in Adult Care. “I’ve been with my assessor this morning receiving feedback for the first units I’ve submitted,” she says. “It should take about 12 months to complete it all, but they reckon I could be finished within eight.”



Pictured: Sam with Mary and George the dog

Expert care

Finding out a bit more about her duties, we ask what readers might not know about the Belong at Home service. Sam tells us: “I’d say the knowledge and assistance we can provide for families, especially when they don’t know what the right thing to do is.

“For example, one couple weren’t sure of the process to obtain an occupational therapist. I advised them to get the ball rolling as there is a long wait for referrals and it’s better to get in the queue now, so it’s ready when the time comes. It’s things like this that customers tell us is invaluable to them.”

Sam also shares that much of her work is extra to the ‘requirement on paper’, such as setting up a customer’s breakfast the night before so that it’s all ready for her colleagues who come in the next day, allowing them to spend more time together. She finishes: “We have a culture of looking out for one another and I don’t think I’ve got a bad word to say – I love coming to work every day.”



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



Pictured: Emma (right) celebrates Silver Rainbow Pride with resident Sheila

For this issue, we have a chat with Emma Spurrier, Team Senior at Belong Crewe who has recently returned to Britannia House after a few years in the Experience Team.

What do you get up to in your day-to-day work?

Much of my role is supporting residents to live as independently as possible, and additionally, I help less experienced colleagues by offering advice in situations where they need a bit of guidance. When it comes to food, for example, encouraging residents to help in the household kitchen by preparing meals with them and doing it together, we find they have more of an appetite and enjoy their food more.

If a resident isn’t keen on dining, there might be too much food on the plate, so offering one item might prove more successful as they have just the one thing to concentrate on. It’s things like this which come with experience and I’m always happy to exchange ideas.

Are you bringing your skills and expertise from the Experience Team to the household?

Yes! I really enjoy promoting activities and encourage everyone to join in, especially spontaneous moments. For example, it might be putting some music on, grabbing some dress-up items and having a boogie. Residents love silly moments and if the team is having fun then they feel like getting involved too.

What’s your biggest achievement?

For me, being able to put a smile on someone’s face really makes my day. I like the small wins, like if a resident recognises me. My goal is to make sure everyone on the household is happy by supporting everyone to make sure they have a lovely day.

I’m just a small part of the Britannia household. It really is a team effort, and I just make sure I do the best job that I can do and help my colleagues to do the same.

We’ve heard you’ve been involved setting up the village’s Namaste Room – tell us more.

Namaste care and its principles is something Belong is actively promoting. It’s a holistic approach with physical, sensory and emotional interactions designed to create a calm experience for the person.

We have a dedicated room we can use at any time (see page 15), and it is particularly beneficial when a customer is showing signs of distress or is agitated. Equally, we’ve designed namaste boxes to take to customers who are limited to their rooms so they can benefit as well. The outcomes have been huge – we find customers are more responsive and have put on weight as a result of feeling calmer in their home.

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

I’m really into street dancing and my three wonderful daughters have also caught the bug and if I’m not dancing, I’ll be chauffeuring the girls to a dance class. When we’ve hosted big events at the village, they’ve come in to perform for everyone. You might have to pop to the household if you want to catch me doing it!



Pictured: Marilyn (right) enjoying a brew with fellow tenant, Celia

Volunteer Profile: Marilyn Nicholson

The village’s experience coordinator, Charlene Frodsham, tells us more: “Marilyn helps us with everything and anything! I think helping others comes naturally to her and it’s lovely to see her thrive when she’s around others.”

Marilyn says: “Everyone is so nice, appreciative – one gentleman calls me his ‘guardian angel’! I’ve made good friends, and we try to be there for everyone. We all look after one another. All these years I’ve been here, there’s always been someone there for me and it means a lot when you’ve not got your family on your doorstep.

“Coming to the activities and helping gives me purpose. I can’t imagine being on my own all day – that would be awful. I love it here; I absolutely love it. Coming to Belong is the best thing I ever did. Now I’m going to start getting emotional!”

Charlene takes over: “It can be something as small as linking arms with someone when we go to the community centre. It’s lovely to see and we’re very grateful for Marilyn’s contribution to village life.”

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

More often than not it can be the smallest gestures than have the biggest impact. Marilyn Nicholson has been a tenant at Belong Wigan for the past six years and can usually be found lending a helping hand to the experience team.

From supporting customers to mark their bingo cards, making cups of tea or loading the dishwasher, Marilyn is happy to help. She’ll guide others to the toilet if they forget where it is, and we’re also told that customers even save their knitting nightmares for the next knit and natter session in the knowledge that Marilyn will work her magic to resolve the issue and get it back on track.

Noticeboard

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Pack up, let's fly away

Plane enthusiasts from Belong Atherton were spotted at Manchester Airport after embarking on a 50-mile round trip to their air travel haven to partake in the joy of plane-spotting, equipped with cameras, aircraft details and flight plans to make the most of the event which included a spot of lunch in the restaurant with a direct view of the runway.

Margaret Gould, Belong Atherton apartment tenant, shares more: "We had a lovely day at the airport. We enjoyed watching all the different planes coming in and going out and turned it into a game trying to guess what would come next. We also had a meal at the restaurant and reminisced about past holidays. It was a lot of fun and we were well looked after."



Pictured: Belong Atherton Experience Coordinator, Kim Calland (left), with village day-trippers

Chester's intergenerational community creates very own 'The Repair Shop'

For Chester's intergenerational community, what started off as a project fixing broken possessions has turned into its very own version of TV's 'The Repair Shop', featuring older care village residents and nursery children giving a renewed lease of life to their treasures whilst gaining craftsmanship skills and bonding over their newly discovered shared hobby.

The collaboration sees the 'grandfriends' in their 70s to 90s living at Belong Chester supporting Nursery in Belong children up to age five to use real tools at the repair workshops including drills, nails and screws, saws and sandpaper on an accessible workbench, specially designed to accommodate residents' wheelchairs. Their ambitions have also led to diversifying into upcycling goods for use within the village's integrated nursery, operated by national charity, Ready Generations.

For the workshop's most recent success, the village's visiting storyteller and author Richard O'Neill has led the upcycle of pallets to create a special chair and stool to inspire the older residents to become storytellers themselves by sharing a tale or two with the nursery children.

Grandfriend and Belong Chester resident, Bill, 83, said: "I enjoy fixing things, I always have. In school it used to be woodwork and metalwork but I'm not sure they teach it anymore. I like showing the children how to use the tools - someone needs to show them."



Pictured: Belong Chester and the Nursery in Belong with visiting storyteller, Richard O'Neill (left) and the much loved, late Iain Wheelton (right), along with children of the Nursery in Belong



Pictured: Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme resident Rita Butler begins the ceramics workshop.

Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme celebrates Heritage Open Week

Members of the public were invited to enjoy a range of heritage activities at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme as it staged a range of events at the Belong Heritage Gallery for the national Heritage Open Week.

Including local history film screenings, pottery workshops, walks and talks, the programme ran throughout the month and offered a range of ways for people to access the town's heritage, prompting much reminiscence and discussion, as well as creativity, exercise and enjoyment.

Community-funded therapy room changing lives at Belong Crewe



Pictured: Belong resident Sylvia Moss and Team Senior Carer Emma Spurrier.

A multi-sensory therapy room made possible by funds donated by local people and from community organisations is having a life-changing impact for people living with dementia at Belong Crewe.

The room uses a projector to create scenes of the night sky, tropical coral reefs and sunsets and transport residents to amazing environments from the comfort of one of its reclining armchairs.

It is designed in accordance with the principles of Namaste Dementia Care, an internationally recognised, person-centred approach to supporting people living with advanced dementia based around creating calming environments and multi-sensory activities.

Accordingly, 'rummage boxes' in the room contain fidget toys and items made from textured materials, such as wool, as well as creams for hand massages, to stimulate senses of touch, sight and smell. Bubble tubes, fibre-optic wires and an aromatherapy diffuser add to multi-sensory experiences, while listening to relaxing music.

The Namaste room has seen hugely positive effects for people living with dementia at Belong Crewe, with sessions documented so that support teams can chart the benefits. These include residents feeling more relaxed and showing increased appetite, reduced risk of falls and improved sleep.

The room was furnished through fundraising activities and funds from Cheshire College South & West for providing work placements for T-Level students.

Beside the Seaside: Belong Wigan Goes Coast to Coast

Seaside holiday memories of the past have become a thing of the present this summer, with customers of Belong Wigan enjoying trips to the coast to revel in welcome sunshine, see the sights, and spend quality time with friends whilst reminiscing about visits from yesteryear.

The adventurous excursions, organised by the dementia specialist's dedicated experiences team, have seen its residents and tenants touring some of the North West's postcard picture-perfect holiday favourites.

Fun-filled days at Blackpool featured strolls down the famous Golden Mile prom to see the Blackpool Tower and linger in the amusement arcades. Ringside seats were taken for thrills and belly laughs aplenty at the famous circus, after which came magical rides through the town to be dazzled by its legendary bright light illuminations.

For one attendee, the visit proved to be an extra special occasion. Elaine Jones, 82, apartment tenant at Belong Wigan said: "I loved it. I've never been to a circus before, and we were right on the front row - it was brilliant!"

In other outings, exploring the charming Merseyside town of Southport, buckets and spades made for the order of the day at the beach before exploring museums, galleries and Princes Park, the latter featuring live entertainment on show at Marine Lake. Days were made complete with fish and chips suppers on the pier. One of the trips was made possible by a generous donation from the family of late resident, Marjorie.

Charlene Frodsham, experience coordinator at Belong Wigan, shares more: "We've had so much fun touring some amazing sights with our customers, this summer. The sun has been shining, seagulls have been singing - as have our holidayers!"



Pictured: Belong Wigan residents and tenants enjoy Blackpool Tower

#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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