

# Belong Life

SPRING 2025



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**BELONG**  
VILLAGES





# Word from the team

Chief Executive Officer Martin Rix shares news of recent achievements and explores the importance of being together.

We are pleased to begin this issue with the news that a number of our villages have been named amongst the country's best for retirement (see pages 8 & 9 for the full story), an accolade we're particularly proud of, as we are one of very few operators who offer both high quality independent living and 24-hour residential care under one roof.

Key to this is our emphasis on community, a theme which has been trending more broadly in recent media. It's now common to hear of people coming together for the greater good – whether it's building a neighbourhood choir, learning a language or other skill together, or raising funds for a good cause; they all serve as reminders of how rewarding it can be to give back.

We know this is something already taking place day in, day out, throughout Belong, and you can read just some of these goings on in this issue, from singing to enhancing physical health, playing zookeepers, and even learning a new method of print photography. However we do it, the most important thing is being together and not merely existing in siloes. This is of course, why Belong exists, and as you'll read, one of the key reasons so many choose to live in our villages.

In other news, congratulations to Belong Wigan for achieving a place in Carehome.co.uk's regional Top 20, cementing it as the town's top not-for-profit care operator. Further, the village has a perfect 10 out of 10 rating from customers, with over 130 reviews at the time of writing – a truly exceptional result.

We're also thrilled for Belong Crewe's Cavell Meakin, whose voluntary work saw her recognised with a win in the national finals of the Great British Care Awards. Her dedication and that of all our volunteers is something we hold dear.

Meanwhile, at Belong Atherton, the nursing team (and Practice Development Facilitator) have been recognised for their work supporting undergraduates entering the profession with the Chief Nurse's Award for Social Care from the Department of Health and Social Care (see page 5 for further details).

Indeed, there is much happy news to be shared and long may it continue throughout this spring and summer.

Martin Rix, CEO



# Belong Crowned Wigan's Top Not-for-Profit Care Operator

“Her carers ‘loved’ and cared for her with such dignity, they couldn’t do enough for her and us as a family. They went over and beyond what I could only hope for.”

**B**elong Wigan, rated ‘Outstanding’ by the Care Quality Commission, has attained 100% customer satisfaction review score on reviews site Carehome.co.uk, earning a coveted place in the North West’s Top 20 Care Homes 2025 ranking.

As a result, the award, based entirely on independent appraisals from customers and their families over the past year, distinguishes the Millers Lane care village as Wigan borough’s only not-for-profit care operator to achieve a place with a perfect score.

Customers leaving reviews are asked to rate all aspects of a care home’s offering, including its people, care and support, management, facilities, and overall value for money.

One recent five-star review from a wife of a resident said: “Great staff, all friendly and reliable. Really dedicated to their work and make my husband feel content. Belong is the best experience for residents and family.”

Another shared: “I had heard about Belong from a friend who recommended them. Mum has had a new lease of life, despite her dementia. She says, ‘You don’t need to worry about me love, I am being well looked after.’ This means the world [...] thank you to everyone for the care, kindness and respect you have shown to our mum.”

Commenting on the results, Gill Menguy, General Manager at Belong Wigan, said: “It is fantastic to receive such high praise from our customers. They are the experts in what they need to live life their way and to hear we are doing a top job in making this happen pays testimony to the hard work of our wonderful colleagues.”

“A convivial atmosphere is encouraged by the carers and Mum has made new friends and revived old connections since living at Belong Wigan, much to her benefit.”





# A Customer's View

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

This issue, we hear from **Lisa Bottomley**, whose father Ernie is a regular face and a popular personality at Belong Atherton's Experience Days.



Pictured: Ernie and Lisa - Belong Atherton

Thursdays and Fridays are 'Belong Atherton days' for Ernie, who, for the past two-and-half years has been enjoying everything on offer at the village when he visits for the day care service.

"He's a really sociable guy. He gravitates to everyone and anyone," Lisa tells us. "He has a strong connection with Kim and Danielle from the experience team and he's made so many friends here, it's brilliant."

## Good times

A big fan of the excursions Kim and the team arrange for customers, Ernie will usually be at the front of the queue ready to leave (especially for trips that involve the pub), and he also likes pottering about in the village gardens. The family often extend the day with a meal in The Bistro and take advantage of other amenities, such as using The Salon for a nail trim. Amongst the myriad of things to get involved with, there is one thing that is a particular favourite for Ernie, as Lisa explains:

"Dad loves the virtual bus driving. He used to be a bus driver, so gets the chance to do something he's passionate about. And if the weather's good, he'll be out in the garden playing football with the other customers."

## Wheels in motion

She continues: "We found out about Belong's day care service through a social worker who knew I needed support with getting back to work and sorted me out with a pack of information."

Dad has a mixed dementia diagnosis and at the time he was receiving home care from another company, but we weren't happy with it. So, I popped into the village and spoke with Kim who went through everything. I remember having a good feeling, a feeling of being very comfortable with it all."

Lisa shares with us the impact of the service and it appears the benefits are even more far-reaching than just for the family. "If Dad didn't come here, I wouldn't be able to work and study - I'm training to become a registered nurse, so I'd have to give that up."

"The service is a massive help. It puts my mind at rest knowing he's looked after so well. The staff are brilliant with him and they're also here for me as well with advice and emotional support, even a hug when I need one. Everyone is friendly and professional - I can't tell you how amazing they all are."

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



# Belong Atherton Recognised with Top Nursing Accolade

Pictured: Belong Atherton nursing team with their Chief Nurse for Social Care team award.

**C**are leader, Belong Atherton has been awarded the **Chief Nurse for Social Care Team Award for its outstanding contribution to social care, namely in its support of the development of students entering the profession.**

The Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) accolade recognises Belong's eight-strong nursing team in its collaboration with Greater Manchester universities, playing a key role in researching student allied health professionals' (AHPs) training within multidisciplinary care home environments.

Led by The University of Salford, 'Not the last resort: The longitudinal impact of interprofessional student training care home initiative' saw undergraduates including those in nursing, physiotherapy, psychotherapy and social work immerse themselves in hands-on training at the Mealhouse Lane care village for the project.

## Research leader

Belong's award-winning holistic approach to care was selected to facilitate the pilot version of the scheme, with a goal to explore alternatives for training health and social care professionals.

At present, students typically learn in isolation within their respective discipline. However, upon qualifying, it is common for them to go on to work as part of interprofessional teams.

Across all Belong villages, older people are supported through an ethos of viewing the 'whole person' and their needs, rather than focusing on a single aspect of care, one at a time. Through collaboration of in-house nurses, support workers, and exercise and rehabilitation specialists, expertise is pooled for the benefit of customers, including those living with dementia.

The students were able to combine this ethos with learnings from their studies, as well as have the chance to share the latest evidence-based nursing practice with colleagues and make their own recommendations.

## Resident benefits

In turn, Belong Atherton residents felt the scheme impacted positively on their physical and emotional wellbeing, citing the benefits of having a diverse range of professionals to meet their needs in their home; an improved feeling of social connectedness; and a sense of purpose through helping the students in their learning.

Jemma Sharratt, support manager and nurse at Belong Atherton, commented: "We are pleased to have mentored the students by taking their classroom learning and applying it to real-life experience. They embraced the opportunity and thrived whilst working here and equally, we learned a great deal from our newest colleagues to the profession."

Last year, the project made the finalist shortlist at the Nursing Times Awards for the Social Care Nursing Accolade.

Belong Atherton general manager and nurse, Nicola Johnstone, added: "With the political conversation around social care in the limelight, we are pleased to promote the fantastic opportunities to build careers in care environments for those working in various disciplines across health and social care."

Nursing in Belong involves working across the whole village, building relationships with customers in a way similar to a district nursing role.

We have a variety of nursing roles available. If you are interested in working for a not-for-profit organisation that truly cares, get in touch or apply online: <https://www.belong.org.uk/careers>





# Memory Lane...

**W**ith this year marking 115 years of the founding of The Guide Association, we spoke with three proud members from Belong Macclesfield, who provide a glimpse into the girl-power world of girl guiding.

## Vicky Ashby, Holly House resident

Originally named The Girl Guides Association, it is now affiliated with The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) and boasts 10 million members in 152 countries. "We learned how to be a useful young lady," Vicky says. "I joined as a young schoolgirl – it was just the thing you did back then, and parents were very keen for girls to join."

Vicky shares memories of getting a coach from her centre in Hatfield, Hertfordshire, all the way to the Peak District to enjoy camping and learning valuable outdoor skills, including how to erect tents and tie knots.

After leaving school, she joined the Rangers (Guides aged 14-18) and went on to become an assistant leader. "We met weekly and often worked with church groups, taking part in parades. We also visited hospitals and learned nursing skills and how to make beds."

During her 50-year membership, she passed the baton to her children who all became guides and scouts leaders. Vicky's guides legacy also lives on at the village, where she brings its lyric books to singing activities. "A lot of the other residents enjoy this as it brings back their own memories in the group and they sing along, too."

## Audrey Meecham, Maple court tenant

Audrey joined as a young girl in Northenden, south Manchester, where she was a dedicated guide up until age 18. She recalls fondly learning about nature, first aid and the drills: "We would march in patterns, which I thought was terribly clever. It was a great honour to be chosen as a flag bearer, so we all did our best in the hope of being selected."

"I also remember camping and staying up all night talking with others. One night, there were screams of laughter coming from a tent where a cow had poked its nose through the flaps!"

"I took the vows very seriously. They were quite religious back then and you had to dedicate yourself to the ethos, as well as make a vow to the monarch (King George VI, at the time). You promised to help other people and stick to good values."

Like many who join, the Guides prove to be the making of them, helping development through building courage, social skills and even a career. Audrey continues: "It was lovely to make friends, and it made me more outgoing. It opened up my world and gave me a large social circle."



Pictured (L-R): Vicky, Julia and Audrey.

"It eventually brought me into teaching as I had enjoyed working with the younger girls in the Brownies and decided it would be a good career for me."

## Julia Beeden, Beech House resident

Wherever her life has taken Julia, her dedication to the Guides has remained and in return, has taken her across the world.

Having joined as a child in her home village of Silsden, West Yorkshire, as an adult she worked as a leader in Southfields, London, whilst training as a teacher at Methodist Ladies' College. Upon returning to the north for work, she continued with guides groups across Lancashire, in Lancaster, Fleetwood, and Bilsborrow.

After gaining a camper's licence, she was able to take members camping, with highlights including sailing on Windermere and Coniston Water, and canal boating in the Lake District. Even more ambitious trips included Adelboden and Kandersteg in the Swiss Alps – though even bigger ventures were still to come.

In retirement, Julia continued to support the Guides indirectly, volunteering with charity Sailing for the Disabled, and through Trefoil Guild (a branch of girl guiding). The latter enjoyed a fortnight in India, visiting one of five WAGGGS centres, the Sangam World Centre in the city of Pune (previously Poona). A 30-hour train journey across the country (not for the faint-hearted) followed to see the palaces in Jaipur.

Julia says: "My favourite thing was working with the girls – it was very hard work, planning and running meetings, but watching them develop was very rewarding. I am very proud to have been a guide. I liked wearing the uniform as people knew what you were about; it was something people respected."

# Chester resident walking again extols benefits of personalised rehabilitation programme

**B**elong Chester apartment resident Tony Mulhearn is able to walk again unaided and has dispensed with pain relief medication thanks to a personalised exercise programme facilitated by the village's on-site gym. He says that he wants to share his story to help others facing similar challenges.

Tony, aged 80, was in constant pain, had no movement in his back and was unable to walk upstairs as a result of fused lower vertebrae, as well as knee instability caused by a motorcycle accident over 40 years ago.

Doctors told Tony that the only course of treatment was increasing amounts of pain relief medication, including morphine, leaving him feeling tired and confused.

## Progressive goals

When he moved to Belong Chester in October last year, he turned to the village's dedicated Exercise Specialist, Louise Warr, who is also an injury rehabilitation expert, for advice. After an initial consultation, the pair settled on a goal of Tony being able to walk without support by Christmas through a programme involving twice weekly one-to-one personalised training sessions, starting with basic exercises to improve core stability and strength.

All Belong village customers have access to a specialist gym, run by a qualified exercise specialist, experienced in working with older people. Everyone who moves into a Belong household is assessed by the exercise specialist and offered a free personalised exercise programme.

Despite setting out to achieve his aim of walking without sticks in eight weeks, Tony achieved this in just five.

They then set another goal for Tony: to be able to walk up steps so that he could deliver a reading at his local church, which he soon achieved. Around this time, Tony found that

he wasn't requiring as much pain medication, and he was able to gradually reduce the quantity of painkillers that he was taking until he was medication free. His mobility continued to improve, and he can now walk into Chester town centre and go shopping on his own, carrying bags rather than walking sticks.

## Life-changing results

Commenting on this transformation, he says: "I used to think of myself as a disabled old man. This has completely changed my view of myself. I have got my life back, and I'm able to do more of the things I want to do, including becoming a more active member of the church community and joining in activities and events at the village when I like."

Tony continues with his training programme and has progressed to building functional strength through more strenuous exercises, including press-ups and pull-ups, and incorporating weights. He says that he wants to share his story so that others are aware of the potentially life-changing benefits that personalised rehabilitation programmes can have for older people experiencing pain and a loss of mobility.

"This needs to be shared. Without Louise, I would still be in pain and unable to stand up on my own. She is a true professional and remembers where you finished in the previous session, so you don't waste any time. The privacy offered by one-to-one sessions means that you can engage fully without feeling self-conscious. People need to know about this," he says.

Louise added: "Many people who develop chronic pain and mobility issues think it is an irreversible part of getting older. Tony's case is testament to the potential of exercise to help people overcome seemingly insurmountable physical challenges and lead active and fulfilling lives when it is carefully planned and tailored to the individual's needs. It's very rewarding to see how far Tony has come in just a short space of time and the impact this has had on his life."



Pictured: Tony and Exercise Specialist Louise Warr in the gym at Belong Chester







# Belong Named in Britain's Best Retirement Villages

“Here, Mum has the activities, visits the bistro every day, and if things change, she has the option of living on the households. Most importantly, Mum was happy to choose to live here, and that was key for us.”

**E**xperts have named the country's best retirement villages and it's great news for Belong, with four of our villages: Chester, Macclesfield, Morris Feinmann and Newcastle-under-Lyme all landing a spot in the top 50, as compiled by researchers for the Daily Mail.

Whilst Belong is already well known for unrivalled round-the-clock residential and dementia care, the villages are also home to our apartment tenants who live independently, with some customers opting for a little extra support from the Belong at Home teams. Judges lauded each of the villages' amenities, including high-tech gym, salon and bistro, and for offering a wealth of opportunities to get involved in the arts, music workshops and intergenerational endeavours.

## Wellbeing matters

The selection coincided with the Associated Retirement Community Operators (ARCO) Wellbeing Week, highlighting the positive outcomes of living in integrated retirement communities (IRCs).

Every day we see and hear first-hand the experiences of our tenants and complementing this wealth of happy stories, academic research paints an equally positive picture of the benefits of living in IRCs, namely:

- Maintaining good health for longer
- Increased physical health, with a 75% increase in the amount of exercise undertaken
- Reduction in the number of falls
- Lower levels of loneliness and feeling isolated, including a 23% decrease in anxiety
- Higher life satisfaction and a greater sense of having a 'safety net'

## Community concept

In recent years, Belong has seen a marked increase in interest in living at the villages, specifically for having both retirement living apartments and residential care provision under one roof, along with village centre amenities that are also open to the local community.

Belong Chief Executive, Martin Rix, explains more: "There are two recurring themes we hear from customers as to why the concept of independent living within a wider care village appeals to them. One is that they have an eye on the future when either they or their partner may need support, so having the flexibility to adapt to changing needs and access home care, day services or even 24-hour respite care is key.

"Equally importantly, people want the vibrancy that a 24/7 site offers, and the fact that we welcome in the local community is a big part of this. Easy access to village facilities and activities really contributes to wellbeing, as does the ability to share these experiences with others and be part of a caring community."

To read the feature, scan the QR code or visit: <https://bit.ly/BestRetirementVillages>





# Macclesfield residents work out to music



Pictured: Belong Macclesfield Residents and Helen Fehily (right) enjoy a Singing for Health session.

**S**inging to promote health is the latest experience in the Belong Macclesfield community events programme which sees older people showing what they're made of at special vocal 'workouts' designed to engage the whole body, from strengthening vocals and language ability, to promoting posture, memory and cognitive skill.

Open to the Kennedy Avenue's residents and tenants, with an invitation extended to everyone living in the local area, the Singing for Health workshops comprise a range of vocal exercises that aid breathing, projection and the articulation of sound, whilst building upper body muscles.

The village enlisted trained opera singer and choir leader, Helen Fehily for the sessions which support its customers living with dementia, as well as other conditions, such as Parkinson's. Participants are challenged gently, for example, being divided into subgroups to sing 'rounds' simultaneously, which requires much concentration at the individual level but without any pressure to achieve accuracy.

With music activating different parts of the brain to speech, remarkable outcomes have been seen, including those with difficulty speaking or who are largely non-verbal performing songs from their past. Other benefits include maintaining speech and language, stress relief and the promotion of lung

function, along with the pleasure of companionship gained from the gatherings.

Anna Seaton, Experience Coordinator at Belong Macclesfield, explains more: "When people think of exercise, they often think of the gym, but Singing for Health is all about using the power of sound to promote wellbeing – like exercise but without knowing you're doing it."

"It goes further than a sing-along and ability isn't important, meaning anyone can participate. Our customers' families join us, as do people living locally, and everyone takes much joy from their work, knowing they've produced something special."

The choice of songs is partly participant-led, exploring rhythms and music from different genres and decades with favourite tunes from bygone eras, with musicals, theatre and popular culture also making for conversational topics and the chance to reminisce.

Helen Fehily adds: "Often people living with dementia can lose communication skills but singing gives them an outlet for their voice. The magic appears to happen when people are in a group situation, and you can see and hear the mood being lifted – it's very powerful. It's great if participants learn something but having fun and leaving with a spring in their step is the goal."

# Belong Wigan Goes on Safari with cockatiels and more



**B**elong Wigan has ventured on a 'mini safari', playing host for a special meet-and-greet afternoon for its customers to engage with animals from all over the world.

Australian bearded dragons, cockatiels, ferrets and tortoises joined the Millers Lane community, with Belong customers petting the creatures, finding out all about them, and in some cases, taking on the role of looking after them. The more daring amongst the residents and tenants braved the chance to hold cockroaches, hairless guinea pigs, even giant African millipedes.

Sheila Chappell, apartment tenant at Belong Wigan, said: "This year, I'm trying out new things and I loved the animals' visit; this has ticked a box for me. We even had our pictures taken holding them so we can prove to our family and friends that we did it!"

The session was arranged by the village's experience team as part of its vibrant programme of activities for its customers

and wider community, with Southport-based Home Safari Assisted Animal Therapy called upon to facilitate.

Participants benefitted from the chance to try something new, forge fresh friendships, and enjoy a sense of camaraderie by encouraging one another to touch, hold and wear the mixture of familiar and lesser-known creatures.

In addition, it proved to support the wellbeing of those living with dementia, as Charlene Frodsham, Experience Coordinator at Belong Wigan, explains: "Animal therapy provides the opportunity to socialise without the need to engage in conversation, so our customers with little or no verbal communication could join in, too. It gave them a sense of companionship whilst offering mental stimulation – they really got a lot out of it."

"What a wonderful afternoon our customers have had! The session was a hit, and everyone left with big smiles and happy hearts. We look forward to welcoming our new animal friends back soon."

# Special Newcastle memories exhibition opens for viewing

Pictured (L-R): Belong customers Mary Burndrett, Georgina Cliff (Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme Support Worker), John Yarwood, and Pauline Dawson provide a preview of the exhibition.

**T**reasured memories of Newcastle-under-Lyme's older community have been recreated for a special cyanotype photograph exhibition at the town's Belong Heritage Gallery on Lower Street, showcasing the artistic efforts of residents of the Belong care village who have been getting to grips learning a new skill.

Photography & Wellbeing: Staffordshire stars the customers along with their families and local schoolchildren, who have been supported to transform their family photo albums thanks to the tuition of visual artist, Ruby Nixon.

## Camera-less technique

Happy life moments from childhoods, weddings, and even wartime camaraderie have been brought to life using cyanotype photography, a camera-less technique involving laying an object on paper coated with a solution of iron salts before exposing it to ultraviolet (UV) light and washing with water. It is a common method for creating blueprints and technical drawings.

The result is a stunning 30-piece white and Prussian blue collection of images taking pride of place in the landmark heritage gallery, integrated within the main care village. The free exhibition is open to the public, alongside other exhibitions documenting the area's rich cultural history, including modern circus and the building's history as the town's only pottery, and more recently, Maxims nightclub.

Apartment tenants John Yarwood, said: "I really enjoyed the project. It was exciting to try something different and to see it all come together in the form of an exhibition is wonderful."

Facilitated by GRAIN Projects, an arts organisation specialising in socially engaged photography, the wider project brings together Staffordshire people and artists with the goal to both support and promote better health and wellbeing and inspire its participants and audience, culminating in a series of pop-up exhibitions across the county and a project magazine.

Emma Palin, Experience Coordinator at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme, said: "Our residents really enjoyed sharing their personal memories and reminiscing – they got a lot out of it."

## Learning new skills

"Discovering a new type of photography also proved a hit, learning about the process and ultimately, they gained a new skill and revelled in expressing their creativity. We invite everyone to pop in to see the fruits of their labour and meet with our residents to find out more."

The project is funded by The Community Foundation for Staffordshire, Staffordshire County Council, and Better Health Staffordshire.

Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme's pop-up exhibition, Photography & Wellbeing: Staffordshire, is open for viewing at the Belong Heritage Gallery, Lower Street, ST5 2RS.



# In The Spotlight: Laura Picton

**F**or this issue of *Belong Life*, we spoke to Belong at Home Wigan Community Support Worker Laura Picton, who made the switch from caring for children to older people.

Laura's career has revolved around, and been inspired by, caring for others, including her grandmother, as well as another family member. These experiences provided Laura with skills and understanding that are essential in her work.

Laura's journey with Belong at Home began nearly three years ago, after 15 years working at a children's nursery, including as deputy manager.

The decision to join Belong was driven by her caring nature and a desire for a change. After coming across the role and finding out about Belong at Home on social media, she applied for the position and was invited to attend an interview before being offered the position the same day.

"I have never looked back," says Laura. "I now consider Belong to be my family."

In her role as a community support worker, Laura travels to people living independently, in their own apartments at Belong Wigan, as well as in the wider community, providing assistance as needed.

While often working independently, she also participates in calls that require two colleagues, according to a person's care requirements – care packages encompass a wide range of support, including social visits, personal care, medication administration, welfare checks and undertaking domestic chores.

"The work is diverse. Each day brings new experiences," she says.



Laura with Belong at Home customer, Barbara Pugh

Just as at Belong villages, a cornerstone of Laura's approach is the commitment to person-centred care.

"This involves valuing and respecting people's choices and decisions and avoiding assumptions about how they wish to be treated. Upholding dignity and providing time and privacy are essential aspects. We go above and beyond for customers, and this is recognised and appreciated by families."

Among the many special memories Laura treasures, one highlight involves taking her own children to visit customers living with dementia at Christmas time and seeing the joy and happiness it brought them.

"I enjoy everything about my job," says Laura "It makes me happy to be a part of an amazing team who work together to ensure we put the customers' needs and interests at the heart of what we do, and it's rewarding to know that I can make a difference to people's lives and put a smile on their faces."

Head of Operations at Belong at Home, Andrew Shield, affirms Laura's dedication to her role: "Laura embodies Belong values through her commitment to excellence, empathy and compassion, making a significant impact on the lives of those she supports. She has a remarkable ability to connect with those around her, ensuring that each individual feels valued and cared for. Our customers consistently praise her for her attention to detail and the exceptional care she provides."

When she is not supporting customers, Laura enjoys spending quality time with family and watching rugby.

## Volunteer Profile: League of Jewish Women



Pictured:  
Hilary Ross

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

Ever since its opening, Belong Morris Feinmann customers have been enjoying the delights of the weekly Jewels at Coffee Time, led by charitable organisation, The League of Jewish Women. In fact, it was a legacy carried on from the original Morris Feinmann home and has been running since 2009. We spoke with Hilary Ross to find out more.

"I do a double act with another Hilary – Hilary Thomas. For our first session, we began by explaining The Two Ronnies were no longer available, so everyone got The Two Hilarys, instead. That got a good laugh! That's really what it's all about, coming together and enjoying a bit of light entertainment, great company, and we love to have a bit of banter."

Every Tuesday morning, one of nine from the League pops into the village to facilitate the hourly session which can include anything from short story readings and poetry, to songs, jokes and reminiscence. With former teachers, a retired judge, and an amateur actress amongst the team, there is a wealth of experience to draw from, always making for an interesting session.

Whilst sometimes content will be Jewish-related, more often than not, themes take inspiration from topical issues. Recent highlights include jokes from Christmas crackers, and singing selections from musicals *Oliver!*, *The King and I*, and *The Sound of Music*.

Our interviewee continues: "Everyone has their own style, and as you can imagine, 60 minutes can be a challenge to fill, so there's a lot of preparation that goes in and we welcome interaction from our audience. They're certainly keen to get involved with the conversation. We all get a lot out of it and after the sessions, I skip back to my car. It's so lovely to be with everyone each week."

We are equally highly appreciative of the League's efforts – we know the sessions are popular and that customers look forward to finding out what Tuesday mornings will bring. Thank you to our League for your contribution!



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



Pictured: Jo Buckley, Belong Warrington

**For this issue, we have a chat with Jo Buckley, Salon Manager at Belong Warrington, who gives us an insight into life at the village's hair hub.**

**Tell us, Jo, what does a typical day at the salon look like?**

We offer a full hairdressing service; we're really experienced and versatile, so whatever our clients want, we can do it. And of course, we can make recommendations if clients are after something a bit different.

It's usually me, and we also have June in for one day per week. We could see up to eight clients per day. The household team assists with escorting residents or sometimes I'll pick them up, so to speak. There's a mobile service available, too – we'll visit residents who find it difficult to leave their household, so everyone has the opportunity to look their best.

We also offer barber services for gentlemen. Our lovely tenant Edmund is amazing at crochet, and he whipped up a traditional barber's pole for us. I think our gents love to see it; it gives them a sense of familiarity.

Each day never runs as it should on paper, but this adds a bit of spice. It's fun, and it keeps us on our toes.

**What sort of service do you aim for?**

We aim to capture familiarity for our clients. They recognise the smells and sounds of the salon, many having enjoyed weekly hairdresser trips for years. So, the goal is to go into their world and continue that experience for them and give them something different to look forward to.

We start with a brew and choose music to play. Then we pamper them, make them feel special, especially if someone's having a difficult day.

**Tell us something people might not know?**

We are open to the public as well as those who live at the village – there can be a perception it's just for those here, which is understandable, but our doors are open to everyone. Appointments can be made by booking with reception.

We're also dementia friendly as we're fully trained in all aspects of supporting older people. Like all good hairdressers, we adapt to our clients and their needs.

Something we also hear a lot is that a number of salons in the area aren't accessible, that they have steps to their premises, which can make visits tricky for clients with reduced mobility or those using wheelchairs. We are on the first floor of the village but with a lift, everyone can reach us. And we have the spa and bistro in the same building, meaning clients can make a day of it.

**What's the best thing about your job?**

Everyone here says I've got the best job in the village, and they are right. I've been here for 10 years now, and every day is full of fun and giggles. It really is a lovely job and everyone at the village works together to make the experience for all the customers.



## A Day at the Duck Races

April 5th marked the annual Chester Duck Race, fundraising for The Countess Charity on behalf of Countess of Chester Hospital.

Belong Chester entered the competition with Blossom and Buzz, a duck decorated to celebrate being able to grow and bloom at Belong. The village also got into the spirit with a creative session, inviting young friends from The Nursery in Belong and families to design their own duck. On the big day, the village's Support Manager, Amie Adams, and Experience Coordinator, Charlotte Parton, showed our support by cheering on and spreading awareness about Belong Chester.

Charlotte said: "It was a lovely day meeting people in our community, as well as being part of this amazing event, bringing Chester together! We spent some time gifting What's On guides so everyone can get involved in the activities at our village - it was a pleasure to help raise funds for The Countess Charity."



Pictured: Amie Adams (Support Manager) and Charlotte Parton (Experience Coordinator) represent Belong at Chester Duck Race.

## "These People Are Saints" - Belong Macclesfield Gets the Thumbs Up from Nick Robinson

Receiving praise for colleagues is always a joy and Belong is especially pleased to hear some very kind words broadcast on national radio from co-host of BBC Radio 4's The Today Programme, Nick Robinson.

The journalist, perhaps best known for his work as political correspondent and editor for BBC News, has spoken openly on the podcast about his mother, Evelyn, moving into Belong Macclesfield last year.

Nick recently gave a shoutout to the Bistro and Catering team for their take on Mother's Day, offering a fine dining Sunday lunch to customers and their families which included a special congratulations to all the mothers. He said of the team: "I just thought, again, 'these people are saints'."

What's more, Nick was full of praise for the whole village team at the end of 2024, naming a Christmas visit as his 'moment of the year'. After watching a visiting pantomime and enjoying crafts together, he and his mother shared a special moment singing carols.



Screenshots credit to BBC Radio 4, The Today Podcast

He said: "All the panic and anxiety which is so common in people living with dementia was all gone, because of the wonderful and caring staff at Belong Macclesfield."

A big congratulations to the whole team!

A clip of the podcast can be viewed on Belong Macclesfield's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/BelongMacclesfield>

## Penguin Parade Brings Smiles on World Penguin Day

Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme celebrated World Penguin Day in April. The village was filled with laughter and delight as a very special (and adorably waddly) guest paid a visit.

Guided by Front of House Manager, Tracey Boulton, our charming feathered penguin friend made their way around the building, delivering penguin-themed goodies to residents and staff alike. It was a heartwarming surprise that turned an ordinary Friday into something truly magical. A huge thank you to Catherine (Practice Development Facilitator) and Tracey for orchestrating this unforgettable experience and spreading cheer one flipper at a time.



## Celebrating St. George's Day in Style!



Residents enjoy the St George's Day celebrations.

Belong Crewe residents proudly celebrated England's patron saint during a St George's Day celebration.

From the waving of flags to the clinking of teacups, the day was filled with all the things that make England special. Residents and staff came together to mark the occasion with good food, warm company, and a wonderful sense of community spirit.

A special thank you goes to our fantastic bistro team, whose delicious spread brought everyone together and made the day even more memorable. Here's to tradition, togetherness, and everything we love about England!



## Easter Bunny Brings Joyful Surprises

Easter time brought a delightful surprise as the Easter Bunny made a special visit to Belong Atherton household residents, delivering an array of tasty Easter treats.

The cheerful guest was met with smiles, laughter, and plenty of excitement as she hopped from room to room, spreading joy and sweet surprises. Residents were thrilled to receive the unexpected visit, creating a joyous atmosphere throughout the afternoon.

Moments like these highlight the importance of community spirit and the dedication of our teams and today, it came in the form of a furry friend with a basket full of happiness.



## A morning of music, memories, and magic

A truly lovely musical morning was enjoyed, filled with joy, laughter, and a whole lot of singing.

The Experience Day team at Belong Warrington, delivered a sing-along to remember, from classic tunes to heartfelt harmonies, the music filled the air, and so did the smiles. The atmosphere was nothing short of fabulous, and the joy on everyone's faces said it all. A big thank you to the Experience Day team for making it such a special start to the day!



Belong Warrington residents enjoy a musical morning.

## VE Day anniversary celebrated across Belong

On May 8th 1945, Britain and its Allies formally accepted Nazi Germany's unconditional surrender, bringing almost six years of war to an end. Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced on the radio at 3pm that the war on the continent was finally over, with a Victory for Europe.

80 years on, VE Day 2025 was celebrated at Belong with villages, Belong at Home customers, colleagues, friends and family, paying their respect to those who fought for our country and commemorating the happy occasion.

We've had street parties (both outdoors and indoors!) featuring bubbles and nibbles, some using authentic wartime recipes, as well as live entertainment, visits from local mayors, and an abundance of 1940s fashion and army apparel.

Many have enjoyed a trip down memory lane, sharing tales of wartime highs and lows and a number of villages created special displays featuring customers' personal photographs and paperwork from the era, whilst others invited local museums to share artefacts, fashion and household goods of the time.

A fantastic day, all round!





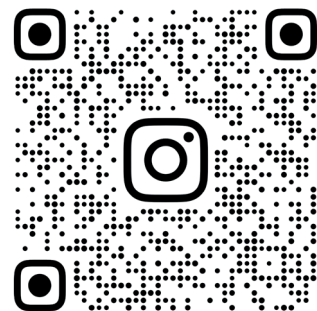
# #Join us

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!



BELONGVILLAGES