

# BelongLife

WINTER 2021



**Belong takes title for Best Care Provision: see pages 2 and 3**

**HealthInvestor Seniors Housing Awards 2021**  
**WINNER**  
Best care provision

**In person with Belong's Chief Executive, Tracey Stakes: see pages 8 and 9**



Belong appoints new chief executive  
Page 5



Benches installed in tribute to Belinda Jones  
Page 7



Chester community invited to art workshops  
Page 10

## Plus...

- A customer's view
- Memory lane
- Living the values
- In the spotlight
- Village news and more!





## Training success

Belong has been awarded The Workforce Development Award at the North West regional The Great British Care Awards 2021.

The award acknowledges the importance of the role of workforce development within care, recognising incredible enthusiasm and determination in identifying training and development needs of care staff. This award is for all of our Practice Development Facilitators (PDFs), who look after learning and development across Belong villages and Belong at Home community care services.

The team will go forward to compete in the national finals, next year.



*Pictured (L-R): The Belong Practice Development Team, Bridget Lawler (Atherton); Rachael Gray (Belong at Home); Sharon Bull (Crewe); Julie Burton (Lead PDF); and Steve Walls (comedian and host for the ceremony).*



## Word from the team

This issue, Chris Hughes, Chief Finance Officer, looks ahead to a new year and a new era in Belong.

Firstly, it is with sadness we share the news that Tracey Stakes, Belong Chief Executive, has announced her intention to retire and will leave us in January 2022. As she embarks on the next stage of her life, Tracey prepares to relocate down south to be near her parents and family, while looking to dedicate more time to voluntary roles.

In a final interview with *Belong Life* (see pages 8 & 9), Tracey looks back on almost 25 years as a member of the executive team, as we bid farewell to a person who leaves behind a legacy of radical vision, steady leadership and a graceful warmth, who will be very much missed.

Hand in hand with this, as we prepare for the next stage in Belong's journey, we are pleased to announce that Martin Rix has been appointed as Tracey's successor. We look forward to welcoming him in April of next year, when Martin joins us from Norfolk-based Norse Care; you can read about his background and experience, as well as the transitional arrangements on page 5.

In other news, Belong has taken the title for Best Care Provision at this year's HealthInvestor Seniors Housing Awards and we're pleased to share more success from the regional Great British Care Awards, where our Practice Development Team, responsible for looking after our colleague's training, learning and development, took home the North West regional Workforce Development Award.

It has been a delight to see Covid-safe events and performances staged across our villages, with singers and orchestras bringing music to our ears, and even acrobatic performers entertaining residents and tenants. And with Christmas, Chanukah and the New Year upon us, our villages are awash with the joy of seasonal festivities – visit our Facebook and Twitter pages for more stories and pictures of celebration.

For now, I hope you enjoy the final *Belong Life* of the year and we look forward to seeing all our Belong families in 2022.

**Chris Hughes**  
Chief Finance Officer

## Belong Named Best for Care Provision at HealthInvestor Awards

Belong has taken the title for **Best Care Provision** at this year's HealthInvestor Seniors Housing Awards.

The national award is recognition of Belong's innovative approach to care, including its pioneering village model and adoption of technology to improve outcomes for apartment tenants, as well as its response to the coronavirus pandemic and commitment to sustainable growth.

Commenting on the win, Belong's Chief Executive, Tracey Stakes, said: "Judging was based on all aspects of our organisation, from leadership and training and development opportunities to growth and potential for future expansion. To receive such an accolade is therefore a vote of confidence in our unique model and our strong platform to diversify into further locations around the UK and achieve our aim of providing

increasing numbers of people with access to our industry-leading care."

Belong adapted its apartment services in a number of ways during the pandemic, from increasing the frequency of its daily check-in calls, to providing socially distanced activities, resource packs, takeaway services, grocery deliveries and digital services, including the launch of the Belong Active YouTube channel, with exercise videos for older people recorded by the villages' specialist fitness instructor (Joe Wickes style).

Technology was also key to updating residents' families and friends about the well-being of their loved ones during multiple lockdowns, with the roll-out of electronic care records (Person-Centred Software) to apartment tenants enabling wellbeing notes and Covid



*Pictured: Chief Executive, Tracey Stakes (centre) and Communications Manager, Maha Hamer, accept the award on behalf of Belong.*



status to be logged following daily check-in calls. Regular communication played a vital role in ensuring tenants felt informed, both about the ever-changing Government guidance and about the status of services within Belong villages.

“ Belong stood out as giving a glimpse of the future. The focus on creating inclusive vibrant communities, drawing on international learning was excellent. Its impressive small households and best practice dementia design enhances relationships between residents, relatives and staff and it's wonderful to see that it has worked with the University of Salford to evaluate the impact of its model, providing concrete evidence for it claims. ”

“ Residents live in a family-like environment of belonging, involvement and positive relationships. This type of environment proved extremely positive during the Covid-19 pandemic from an infection prevention and control point of view. Plans to introduce intergenerational aspects to the environment are being developed with key stakeholders. Specialist training to work in these environments is also key, along with innovative technological applications. ”

“ Belong has received considerable external validation for the quality of its care services. It is committed to training and to internal development and promotion and the trainee nurse role, vital elements for a progressive care organisation. Its innovation into inter-generational communities is market-leading and the results will provide great insight for the future of the care sector in the UK. All-in-all, this is the winner in this category – well done. ”

# A Customer's View

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



*Pictured: Lorraine and her pet cat in their apartment at Belong Wigan.*

**For this issue of Belong Life, we spoke to Lorraine Harrison, apartment tenant at Belong Wigan.**

**At 50, Lorraine may seem an unusually young member of the village community; she originally came to us for support with the debilitating effects of cancer. Ten years later, she's still proud to call Belong home and plays an active part in village life.**

Lorraine moved to Belong Wigan a decade ago, initially moving into Elm Household. She was living with breast cancer, which had spread to her spine, so she couldn't walk unaided and her previous care provider was unable to meet her needs.

After having a tour of the village, Lorraine instantly asked if she could live there and moving in couldn't have been better for her. "I received so much support," she tells us. "And the experience coordinator made sure I was taking part in activities so that I could get to know the other residents. In fact, they all ended up adopting me as if I was their granddaughter. It was exactly what I needed during such a tough time."

**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)**

Over time, Lorraine said it was easy to feel like she was simply cohabiting with others rather than living in a care facility. "It's not like a traditional care home," she said. "You don't find residents parked in front of the TV all day. They're always doing things, chatting away, having fun. Everyone interacts – it's a lovely atmosphere."

## A new home

After four years, Lorraine's condition improved, giving her more mobility. Offered an apartment, she became more independent while retaining support. Staff visit mornings and evenings, and she has a 'help' pendant for emergencies. She's also welcomed a couple of cats to her home, Toby and Timmy.

One highlight for Lorraine has been a trip to Wembley with her mum for the Rugby League Final – a treat organised by the Belong team to celebrate her increased mobility. Lorraine and her mum enjoyed a meal out, and Lorraine even had her picture taken with the former international rugby league player, Andy Gregory.

At Belong, Lorraine makes sure she has time to develop her arts and crafts skills. She's not bad at flower arranging either. Now and again, she loves to lose herself in a film, and she enjoys dining at the Bistro – Friday chippy night being her favourite.

"I have complete independence to do what I like when I like," said Lorraine. "Recently, my mum moved in with me for a bit after my brother died because she needed the company. Really, everyone looks out for each other here."

"I've made great friends, including my neighbour, Christine. She's blind but still lives independently. She's amazing. But then, most people are around here. The staff don't treat you like you're on your last legs. It's about enjoying yourself, and they'll make sure that happens."

# Belong appoints new Chief Executive

Martin Rix has been appointed as Belong's new Chief Executive, following the announcement of Tracey Stakes' intention to retire early in 2022.

Martin joins from Norfolk-based Norse Care, where he is Chief Operating Officer, with responsibility for services in 36 care homes and housing with care schemes.

## Extensive experience

He brings experience of leading specialist dementia and nursing settings and managing operations supporting around 1,600 residents and tenants and a similar number of employees.

He also brings extensive experience of development projects and property consultancy, as a Chartered Surveyor and Civil Engineering graduate.

Chair of Belong's Board, Nicola Brooks, said: "After concluding a rigorous recruitment process, we're delighted to announce Martin's appointment as Chief Executive and look forward to welcoming him to our executive team."

"We have every confidence that, in Martin, we have found someone with the leadership skills and integrity to take the organisation forward into a new era of growth. He shares our values, our passion for high quality care and our



ambition to innovate, making him ideally placed to lead Belong as we look to establish new services and sustain our pioneering contribution to the sector."

## A notable year

With Belong's first intergenerational care village approaching completion in Chester, Belong Birkdale under construction and a third care village due to start on site as part of the Wirral Waters regeneration project, 2022 is set to be a busy year for the not-for-profit organisation.

Martin will take up the Chief Executive post in April 2022, with Belong's Chief Operating Officer, Stacey McCann, and its Chief Finance Officer, Chris Hughes, jointly providing interim cover for the Chief Executive post from 1 January 2022.

Nicola Brooks added: "We are grateful to Stacey and Chris for their readiness to act up and cover the CEO role in the months leading up to Martin's start date and we are confident that the transitional arrangements will ensure continuity until then. We look forward to working with the new Senior Management Team next spring."

# International cycling competition creates a buzz

**A**partment tenants and residents at Belong Wigan have been going for gold by travelling the world on their bikes – all from the comfort of their care village.

With the help of the village fitness instructor, participants have worked hard to cycle their personal bests in this year's Road Worlds for Seniors, an annual competition for older people and those living with dementia.

Belong Wigan tenants managed to clock up an impressive 204km (127 miles) between them – about the equivalent of travelling from the village to the National Cycling Centre in Manchester and back again, three times over.



*David*



*Bill*



*Gordon*

*Pictured with their certificates of achievement are Belong Wigan residents, David (bottom left), Bill (top right) and Gordon (bottom right).*

# Memory Lane...

**C**oming face-to-face with mountain lions, accidentally encroaching on a secret US spy base and regular trips to the fabulous Las Vegas – Belong at Home Newcastle-under-Lyme customers Sheila, 80, and Don Hurst, 85, have plenty of memories to share. But, getting together in the first place wasn't all that easy.

The couple first met as teenagers whilst growing up in their small village near Stoke-on-Trent. They became friends and although Don was romantically attracted to Sheila – and she to him – he felt that she was too young at the time for a relationship.

In adulthood, the pair built their own lives, separate from one another: Don trained as an engineer, before moving to London to join the army. Later, he married and had a daughter, and built a career as a policeman. Meanwhile, Sheila remained and worked in sales and retail management – possibly due to her self-professed gift of the gab. She also fell in love, married, and had four daughters.

## Meant to be

Though they had gone their separate ways, both often thought about one another and wondered how their lives had worked out. Eventually, Don's curiosity got the better of him, and he set about trying to find his lost love. Armed with a few personal details and determination, he did some digging at St Catherine's House and managed to yield an address; his next steps came as a surprise for Sheila.

One day after returning home from taking the children to school, Sheila found Don standing waiting for her at the garden gate. Having reunited as friends, the pair would meet for a drink when Don regularly came up north to visit his mother.



Eventually, after their respective marriages broke down, Sheila and Don finally came together and went on to enjoy 20 years of happy marriage, as they lived their new life together to the fullest. Holidays have been a high priority – especially their annual adventures in Las Vegas. They'd often hire a car and head out into the Nevada desert to see where they'd end up, before using maps to find their way back again. On one of their more memorable days out they managed to meet – and made a quick escape – from a pride of mountain lions. Another time, they bumped into guards with rifles who told them in no uncertain terms to 'go back' after possibly discovering the then-secret, highly classified, Area 51.

## Life at Belong

Today, the couple live independently in an apartment at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme and have been receiving support from the Belong at Home service for the past four years. Each week, area manager, Tomas Zahorka, provides detail of who they can expect for each of their three daily visits to help with cleaning, food preparation and other domestic tasks.

"Whenever they arrive, the kettle goes straight on," says Sheila. "It's like a friend visiting. They're very helpful and very relaxed – a lovely team."

The couple are fans of traditional Big Band jazz, which is perhaps of no surprise, since Don once played clarinet and saxophone and they have plenty of friends at the village to share their musical passion with. Right now, though, they're looking forward to a visit from an addition to their family: a new great-granddaughter.

*Pictured (left): Younger Don and Sheila and (above) both together sharing happy times.*



## Village News

# A tribute to Belinda

**E**arlier this year, Belong Dementia Trainer and Coach, Belinda Jones, was sadly and prematurely taken from us after several months of battling cancer. Up until her illness, Belinda had dedicated her life to supporting others, driven by her passion for supporting people with dementia and what can only be described as true love for those entrusted to her care.

Whilst her memory will always stay with us, she will also continue to live on at Belong Crewe and Belong Wigan, thanks to a generous donation from Belinda's family of a bench for each of the villages for customers and colleagues to enjoy for years to come.

On a sunny September day, on what would have been Belinda's 54th birthday, her family joined some of the Belong Wigan team and residents for the installation ceremony.

Each of the benches is inscribed with a giraffe (Belinda was very fond of them) and an invitation to 'Come and sit with me for a while', welcoming visitors to join Belinda for some peace and quiet.

Speaking of the ceremony, Tanya Guy, Front of House Manager at Belong Wigan, said: "The team feels very honoured to have one of Belinda's benches taking pride of place the middle of the village gardens".



*Pictured: Belinda's Dad and Son (front) with Tanya Guy, Front of House Manager; Lana McCaw, Support Manager; Angela McEwan, Bistro and Catering Manager (back L-R).*



*Belong Wigan Residents, Bill, Sue and Sylvia, pictured with Belinda's Dad and Son.*

**"Belinda was full of life and character and we paid tribute to her by sharing our memories. Some included how she brought positivity and warmth to her work and everyone felt that Belinda was a good friend; also, she was passionate about her job role and about everyone she worked with."**



*Pictured: The bench, in memory of Belinda. The plaque includes a picture of a giraffe, which Belinda loved, and the words 'In loving memory of Belinda Jones, Dementia Trainer and Coach, Come and sit with me for a while.'*

**"Belinda was very well-liked and would often visit Belong Wigan and enjoy a 'proper good' poached eggs on toast, as she would say. It was very special to come together to remember her – it was a lovely day."**



# In person with Tracey Stakes

Pictured: Tracey at Belong Birkdale's topping out event in 2020

**A**s one of the co-founders of Belong, its Chief Executive, Tracey Stakes, played an instrumental role in translating the organisation's vision to revolutionise dementia care into reality – not least by ensuring it was able to fund its remarkable transformation from being an operator of traditional care homes to running vibrant, multi-million pound community villages.

Ahead of her retirement early in 2022, *Belong Life* catches up with Tracey to look back on an incredible quarter century with the organisation.

## What have been the highlights of your time with Belong?

I'm incredibly proud of the Belong village model and the quality outcomes we've been able to provide for people, especially those living with dementia. It's been a phenomenal journey to go from a blank sheet of paper to seeing villages come to life as caring communities and home to hundreds of people.

Every year, we host visits from other organisations wanting to learn from our model, and most would love to be able to implement many of our approaches, but are held back by old buildings and systems.

Funding state-of-the-art villages is not straightforward and I'm pleased that I've been able to contribute to Belong's ability to re-engineer what we do by ensuring the strong finances were in place to enable our transformation programme and ongoing development.

Building partnerships with developers and other organisations has also been vital in enabling us to replicate and evolve the village model. For example, the partnership with the Feinmann Trust has enabled us to develop Belong Morris Feinmann for the Jewish community and the relationships with Medicx and Peel Holdings have been key for Birkdale and Wirral Waters respectively.



Innovation is really important to me and the one constant during my time with Belong has been change: as an organisation and also at an individual level, we are always evolving and developing, and it's certainly that feature which has kept me here for so long.

Personally, it's been hugely rewarding over the years that my experience quickly expanded far beyond the scope of finance. By their nature, new developments involve often complex property, land and legal issues, from moving footpaths (Belong Macclesfield and therefore the whole Belong project could never have got underway without this) through proving alleged electric cables didn't

exist (at the Crewe site) to removing the Greenall's Bacardi barrel and pipeline (in Warrington).

As money is needed for the vast majority of new initiatives, working in finance involves developing some level of expertise in a range of fields, including HR and marketing, and that has certainly kept things interesting.

## What have been the biggest challenges?

It's fair to say that these recent years have presented a huge amount of crisis and issues management to work through. The delays to the build programmes of the newest villages have been frustrating, but we're pleased that the launch is now in sight for Belong Chester and Birkdale is also very close to being back on site.

Without doubt though, the experience of navigating the pandemic has been the toughest of my career and incredibly harrowing at times. It's undoubtedly taken its toll on everyone in the care sector and presented unprecedented challenges.

My colleagues in Belong have inspired me daily with their response to events, which goes beyond resilience to sheer love and commitment to residents' wellbeing.

Throughout this experience, what we've held onto has been the need to balance the risks of Covid-19 with people's overall wellbeing, which has hopefully ensured our residents have continued to enjoy quality of life in Belong.



Tracey at the official opening of Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme in November 2018

Certainly, I'm proud of the fact that the past year has not just been about Covid-19. We have continued to keep our focus on quality, building our operations team with the addition of new managers, introducing new audits, launching a new dementia skills programme, increasing our HR capacity with the addition of two recruitment officers and providing three times more one-to-one support to residents than in the previous year.

And I have to say, it's pleasing to be going out with the distinction of having been named Best for Care Provision at the recent HealthInvestor Senior Housing Awards and having retained our Investor in People Award, in spite of being assessed in the midst of a pandemic!

## What will your legacy be?

It's great to see every village and home care service in Belong rated Good or Outstanding, and it's our people who are at the heart of this.

The biggest pull for me in being at Belong has been the truly inspirational people who work here and whom I'm proud to call colleagues.

As a Senior Management Team, one of the priorities for us early in my tenure as Chief Executive, was to ensure we remunerated people above the Real Living Wage. I'm pleased that we're pushing this further from 1 January 2022, with another increase of at least 4.3%, and bringing forward the pay award which is normally due on 1 April.

While we'd always like to be able to do more, it's positive that Belong has been able to recover occupancy quickly post-Covid and has been able to pass the benefits of this on to our workforce.

Without doubt, the greatest legacy I could hope to leave would be in seeing our people continue to thrive and take Belong forward into a new, successful era, building on its past achievements.



Tracey with former Deputy Chief Executive, Tracy Paine, at the Laing Buisson Awards in 2019



Tracey is pictured with colleagues at the foundation stone event which marked Belong Macclesfield's launch, marking a UK first as a village

**1989**

Tracey qualified as a Chartered Accountant with Price Waterhouse, then volunteered with the Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) for three years, teaching and carrying out consultancy work in Tanzania.

**2000**

Following the success of early pilots of the household model, Tracey worked closely with Belong's then Chief Executive Nick Dykes and Operations Director Tracy Paine to develop the Belong brand and village concept.

**2006**

Belong Macclesfield launched, marking a UK first as a village setting designed around the needs of the very frail, 85+ population and in particular with the aim of providing a revolutionary setting for people with dementia.

**2017**

Succeeding Nick Dykes as Belong's Chief Executive, Tracey led the next evolution in Belong village design, creating new opportunities for inclusion and diversity through new partnerships. Helping to secure £1.8million in Heritage Lottery Funding, Tracey was instrumental in developing the partnership with specialist developer, Prime, to provide the vehicle for the restoration of a grade II listed, 17th century building and its integration as a heritage gallery within Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme. Meanwhile, in Didsbury, Belong founded its first faith-based village for the Jewish community.

**2020**

Working with the Senior Management team, Tracey steered Belong's Covid-19 response through the fast-changing context of the pandemic, while at the same time continuing to drive Belong's development programme and strategy.

**1992**

She returned to the UK to take up post as Finance Manager for a charitable housing association.

**1997**

Tracey joined Belong [then CLS Care Services] as Finance Director, bringing with her a strong track record in third sector finance. Her tenure in the role was marked by assertion of the financial stability and stewardship needed to enable the launch of the organisation's ambitious transformation strategy.

**2009**

The next Belong village opened in Wigan and by 2014, three more vibrant communities were established in Crewe, Atherton and Warrington. Belong at Home and Experience Days were also launched to augment village accommodation and support with outreach services for people in the wider community.

**2012**

Tracey was invited to chair the National Care Forum's Finance Forum, a role she continued to carry out for the next five years.

**2018**

Tracey played a key role in launching Belong's first retail charity bond, which closed early due to high demand from investors and raised £35 million to help fund future village communities and enable Belong to provide its services to more people.

8

9

# Chester community invited to arts workshops

**M**embers of the public are being invited to get their creative juices flowing in a series of art workshops for those living with dementia, and their loved ones.

The Meet and Make Art project is a collaboration between dementia care specialists, Belong, and Bluecoat, Liverpool's centre for contemporary arts. Starting in November at the Grosvenor Museum, participants will be afforded the opportunity to get up-close with artefacts, rich in Cheshire's history, from the museum's collections.

Artists commissioned by Bluecoat have received extensive dementia awareness training in preparation for leading participants in the use of drawing, sculpture, music and dance, helping them to bring to life their personal stories and life experiences through art. The museum's experts will also be on hand to advise on Cheshire's natural and social history, archaeology, fashion and fine art, which will be used as a source of inspiration for the workshops.

The project serves as a precursor to the Bluecoat artists taking up their art 'residencies' at Belong Chester when the highly-anticipated new care village opens on City Road, early next year.

In 2019, a successful pilot saw the artists taking up residency at Belong Crewe, engaging customers in a bespoke six-month arts programme. Academics recognised the wellbeing benefits from the initiative, which included high engagement, enhanced cognitive capacity and an increased sense of community amongst participants.

Stacey McCann, chief operating officer for Belong, commented: "We've already seen the benefits of using arts in our care villages to improve the lives of older people and those living with dementia. The outcomes of the upcoming workshops will influence the artists' residencies at our Belong Chester care village when it opens in 2022, so we're looking forward to seeing the results."

Tabitha Moses, project facilitator for Bluecoat, added: "The Meet and Make Art project is unique in that it has been designed for both the person living with dementia and a loved one to enjoy equally, no matter their ability.

It's about using art to explore creativity, as well as making connections with others. Places are free but limited, so we advise those interested to get in touch as soon as possible."

Participants will be able to enjoy the fortnightly sessions until spring 2022. For more information and to reserve one of the limited spaces, please contact Tabitha Moses, project facilitator, by calling 07706 147277 or email [tabitha.m@thebluecoat.org.uk](mailto:tabitha.m@thebluecoat.org.uk)



*Pictured: residents at Belong Crewe taking part in a Bluecoat art session pre-pandemic*



## Patrick Butler appointed to lead pioneering Belong Chester

**Belong has appointed Patrick Butler as the general manager of Belong Chester to head up the team when the village and its nursery open their doors on City Road, in spring 2022.**



Patrick, who lives in Nantwich, brings with him more than 30 years' care experience, including leading numerous care facilities across the region. Most recently, he held a number of senior positions with Bupa Care Services, overseeing multi-site environments with nursing, dementia and residential care provision, as well as taking up a regional director role and building positive relationships with stakeholders including local authorities, NHS clinical commissioning groups and the general public.

Speaking of his appointment, Patrick said: "I'm thrilled to be leading the new Belong Chester care village. I'm passionate about care for all ages and, having previously worked in the city, I'm pleased to be back and looking forward to setting the highest care standards from day one. Our goal is to build what will become the premier dementia care service in West Cheshire."

Patrick's experience in childcare will also lend itself well to the post, with Belong Chester set to become the organisation's first care village with an on-site nursery, and the first of its kind in the North West. In the 1990s, he ran two successful nurseries in nearby Shropshire – both of which are still operating today. The Nursery in Belong will provide a high-quality care environment for up to 25 children from birth to five years, offering shared learning experiences for children and the village's residents, as well as a blueprint for intergenerational practice.

Stacey McCann, chief operating officer at Belong, said: "We're delighted to welcome Patrick to the team. He is incredibly passionate about care and his empathy and engaging manner have enabled him to foster strong relationships as he's earned his reputation as a care leader in the region. We know he is keen to make Belong Chester a happy place to live and work when we open in spring 2022."



# Living the Values

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

**J**ane initially joined the Belong group back in 2008, in the days when it still owned its more traditional CLS care homes, working at one of its locations in Winsford for a number of years before resolving to pursue a nursing degree. She returned to Belong as a nurse in 2019, and describes how she has been supported to grow her career and the fulfilment earned from nursing in a care environment.

## Can you tell us about your background?

When I joined CLS as a care assistant, I'd just completed a degree in Psychology and Criminology and didn't know where I wanted my career to go. Luckily, I fell in love with care straight away and so I stayed and worked toward becoming a senior care assistant then, later, care team leader.

In 2015, I applied to do a degree in nursing. It felt like a natural progression from caring, and I was keen to learn more. I remained working part-time, and on one of my placements I popped into Belong Warrington to shadow a nurse there. When I qualified, I worked in hospitals for 18 months before returning to care.

## What does your job involve?

I came back into care because I missed the closeness and the relationships I was able to build with customers. The hospital was great, but you're helping people get better and then you never see them again. When looking after those in social care environments, you work with people to support their physical health needs, as well as their social and psychological wellbeing, on a longer-term



basis and so you develop relationships with them. That's what I enjoy the most.

Day-to-day, I lead my nurse team, coaching and training them so they can develop their own careers. There is also quite a bit of networking with GPs and nurse practitioners, so there's lots of opportunity to learn new skills as well.

## What would you say the most important parts are?

I love the village set-up of Belong and I wouldn't have worked anywhere else. It feels like a 'home from home', a real community.

My job, and nursing, in particular, has given me the opportunity to progress. My current role gives me the autonomy to influence and implement my own ideas, such as different ways of working – and I really appreciate that.

## And what are the most rewarding aspects of your role?

It's incredibly fulfilling and rewarding. To be able to work with and help people thrive independently, in a compassionate setting is a lovely way to spend your career. Anyone thinking of a nursing career or a job in care should definitely give it a try. Leave all those preconceptions behind – what you'll find is a completely different world to one you'd imagine.

## In the Spotlight: Emma Gorton

**F**or this issue of Belong Life, we spoke to Emma Gorton, Belong at Home Community Support Worker at Belong Didsbury and Altrincham, who shares a very personal career journey story with us.

For many, experiencing the loss of a loved one can have a profound effect on our outlook on life. For Emma Gorton, 42, it was the passing of her mother following months caring for her that caused her to embark on a new direction, dedicating her working life to caring for others in Didsbury and Altrincham, as a Belong at Home community support worker.

Amid an enjoyable career as office manager for a family-run business, Emma received the devastating news that her mother had been diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. Taking a break from work, she spent the precious time left looking after her mum's needs, from managing medication and domestic tasks, to emotional support, before her mum sadly passed away.

Whilst coming to terms with her bereavement, Emma struggled to decide how to move forward with working life. She provides more detail: "It was a difficult time and I was at one of life's crossroads: I knew I didn't want to go back to the office and I'd really enjoyed being there for mum; the district nurses said I'd done a great job and caring just came naturally to me."

Still unsure about her next step, it was a chance conversation that influenced the path of Emma's career. She continues: "I was talking with a friend about my experience and she said Belong at Home had vacancies. With my background and no care qualifications, I didn't think I'd be in with a shout but she advised that professional experience isn't necessary and that they train colleagues who share their values.

"I thought, 'If I can look after people like my mum, then I'm on to a winner' and so I decided to go for it."

Joining the Belong at Home team as a community support worker, Emma now spends around 20 hours each week visiting older people in their homes in and around south Manchester. She initially trained on-the-job for The Care Certificate, designed for those who are new to care, as part of a comprehensive induction programme. Since then, she has gone on to achieve levels 2 and 3 NVQ in Health and Social Care, allowing her to progress to a senior position.



Emma Gorton, of Belong at Home pictured with Customer, Stephen.

Reflecting on her career change, she says: "It didn't take me long to realise I'd made the right decision. Belong at Home really cares about its team – they're flexible with my childcare, the training is exceptional and they even pay for your time when travelling between customers, not just the time you spend caring for them and not all domiciliary care employers offer this.

"People often call us 'carers', but I prefer 'support worker' as you're supporting adults, sometimes at the start of their dementia journey, to live and enjoy their lives as independently as possible. It might be accompanying them to the shops or having a chat over tea and biscuits, these small everyday moments mean the world to them, which makes my job very rewarding."

## Volunteer profile

In this feature, we recognise the outstanding contributions of volunteers to the Belong community. This issue, we give our thanks to Roland Horrocks, who, for the past eight years, has been leading coffee mornings at Belong Atherton.



If you pop along to one of the village's coffee mornings, you may notice a special sign which reads: 'Welcome to Roland's award-winning coffee morning'. That's because, in 2014, Roland's contribution was recognised when he was named 'Volunteer of the Year' at Belong's colleague awards.

After being nominated by his peers, the judging panel commended Roland's work but also noted his gratitude for the positive effect volunteering at the village had on his life. He tells us more: "I'd retired from my teaching assistant job, supporting those with learning disabilities. However, without work and having people around me, I'd started suffering from depression

and so I set about looking for volunteering opportunities where I could continue helping others.

"Initially, I started off assisting with the coffee sessions – I didn't have any professional barista experience, but I do drink a lot of coffee myself, so that certainly helped!"

Every Monday and Thursday, Roland arrives early to set everything up before being joined by residents and apartment tenants for their favourite hot drink and a friendly catch-up. Allan Barnes, Ena Household resident, shares his thanks for the host: "Roland has a brilliant sense of humour

and is always laughing; he is such fun to be around and nothing is ever too much trouble for him."

The mornings continue to be as popular as ever, perhaps likely due to Roland's positive outlook and compassion. He continues, "Volunteering gives me companionship and structure in my life. It's not just about pouring drinks; I feel it's my duty to be as fun-loving as possible. If you can make someone smile, then you make their day."

We couldn't agree more, Roland – we're so pleased volunteering with us has supported your wellbeing and everyone at Belong values the contribution you make.

# Noticeboard

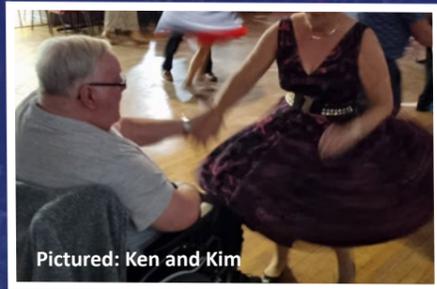
For further details on these stories and more, from across our villages, follow us on Facebook or Twitter, or visit our news page on our website at: [www.belong.org.uk/news](http://www.belong.org.uk/news)

## Rock 'n' Roll

Since moving into **Belong Atherton**, Ken Tunstall's goal was to return to the dance floor.

After working with Fitness Instructor, Jonathan Perrins, in the village's specialist gym, we were delighted to be able to support Ken to attend a social event at his favourite John Alker Club in Flixton.

Ken was accompanied by Experience Co-ordinator, Kim Calland, who said: "Seeing Ken in his element with all his friends with a smile from ear to ear and dancing was very heart-warming."



Pictured: Ken and Kim

## Thank you, Len

Len Rose, co-treasurer of Club Thursday at **Belong Morris Feinmann**, has announced that he is retiring from the cultural society group, hosted at the village.



Throughout his tenure, Len has held the important responsibility of finding and engaging speakers to entertain members of the club, which was founded in Sale over 30 years ago, to provide local Jewish senior citizens the chance to meet and discuss a range of topical issues. Len joined as an assistant treasurer in 1989, before taking up the full role a year later. Back in the 1990s, he also enjoyed a stint as the club's chairman for five years.

Speaking earlier this year in a Belong Life interview, Len said: "It's a very rewarding job, especially when members say Thursday afternoon is the best one of the week".

Angela Lockett, Experience & Cultural Coordinator at **Belong Morris Feinmann**, commented: "On behalf of everyone at the village, we'd like to say a big 'thank you' to Len for all his hard work over the years. We've thoroughly enjoyed the speakers, which couldn't have been possible without him and we all wish him the very best as he retires gracefully at 95!"



Also, on a festive December morning customers enjoyed a visit from the very talented choir at Atherton St. George's Primary School. The children sang amazingly well and the performance was enjoyed by all. Thank you to the children and team for organising this wonderful event.

## Armistice Day

**Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme** took part in a number of activities for Armistice Day.



In preparation, residents and tenants made their own handmade clay poppies to decorate the village; each poppy representing a local soldier who gave their life fighting for their country.

Later in the week they enjoyed a live music performance from ukulelist, Charlie Churchill, and on Remembrance Sunday, customers joined colleagues in The Venue to watch the commemorations in London, on the big screen.

Customers observed quiet moments of reflection during the two minutes' silence.

## Outdoor fun

**Belong Wigan** Residents have been busy helping to plant bulbs and plants in our raised bedding areas in the village garden.

They then enjoyed hot chocolates, kindly made by the Bistro team.



## David finds himself at Belong Wigan

**Belong Wigan** Experience Day customer, David, had a lovely surprise during a recent visit to the village: his younger self! Despite popping in every Tuesday and Friday for the past three years (with the exception of during the Covid peak), only recently did he pay attention to a black and white picture on the wall and he couldn't believe it when he spotted himself, pictured in his youth.

Born in 1941, he grew up in Whelley, close to Wigan town centre where the picture was taken. David said: "I joined the Navy in 1960 and served for 12 years – I was probably on leave doing a bit of shopping. I was a single man and had lots of time on my hands."

The picture depicts life on Standishgate in Wigan, close to where the street meets Market Place, with the shop in the background next to the entrance of the Makinson shopping arcade, which dates from the 1880s. Today, the shop is home to Halifax Bank.



## Christmas Craft Workshop

Customers at **Belong Crewe** have enjoyed getting into the festive spirit with a number of festive craft sessions and elf workshops in the lead up to Christmas.

Customers have enjoyed making homemade decorations to display around the village whilst listening to a variety of Christmas tunes. Elf workshops provided fun and laughter, with fancy dress, a variety of stalls and cakes, fun games, Christmas Eve



'knick-knack' stall, spin the wheel, prize tombola and more! Bistro teams served fresh turkey and stuffing baps, luxurious hot chocolates and mulled wine.



## Christmas crafts

Maple Court apartment tenants have been taking part in Christmas craft sessions to create decorations for display at **Belong Macclesfield**.

They have been using materials of various colours, shapes and textures to create these unique Christmas decorations just in time for the festive season. This activity was accompanied by music by Frank Sinatra, setting the scene for a relaxing afternoon.



## Mocktails afternoon

Customers recently enjoyed a fun mocktails afternoon at **Belong Warrington**.

It may not have been sunny outside, but it was bright and cheerful in The Venue. Residents and tenants raised a glass amongst friends.

# Magnificent care in a magnificent setting

OPENING  
SPRING  
2022



Belong Chester, our state-of-the-art care village will provide high-specification accommodation and world-leading specialist dementia and nursing support, all within a vibrant community setting, located in the heart of the city.

## Our services:

-  **Specialist dementia and nursing care** for changing needs within small-scale households of up to 12 people creating a homely setting.
-  **Modern apartments** enabling people to live independently with support available if required.
-  **Community outreach services** include bespoke home care and specialist day care services

-  **Vibrant village centre** with facilities including bistro, salon, function room, plus a specialist exercise studio to achieve personalised health outcomes
-  **Intergenerational nursery** offers shared learning experiences and opportunities for children, families and older people.

Call to register your interest and to find out more.

 **01244 470 570**  [enquiries@belong.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@belong.org.uk)  
 [www.belong.org.uk](http://www.belong.org.uk)

Belong Chester | Sandstone Apartments, 36 City Road, Chester, Cheshire CH1 3AD



Your life, your pace, your way.