

Social Impact Report 2024-25







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Front cover image:

In December 2024, the Sankofa Songsters intergenerational choir was invited to perform at Westminster Abbey for the Royal Carols Together at Christmas Concert. See page 18 for the full story.

Chair's Report



It is difficult, if not impossible, to sum up a year's worth of life-changing impacts for hundreds of people in a few words.

Instead, I will focus on three highlights which convey our direction of travel, the progress made this year and the phenomenal ways in which Belong touches people's lives.

An important strategic move for Belong in 2024 was the decision to become members of the Associated Retirement Community Operators. ARCO exists to uphold high standards in retirement living and ensure that members adhere to its exacting consumer code.

Belong's successful accreditation, following a rigorous assessment process, validates our commitment to achieving excellent outcomes for those living in our apartments and marks a significant milestone in our journey evolving beyond a care home operator to becoming a provider of a much wider range of high quality housing and care services.

There were two other prestigious external indicators of our success in moving along this journey. One was our win of the award for Excellence in Retirement Housing at the LaingBuisson Awards 2024 and the second was our recognition at the HealthInvestor Senior Housing Awards 2024 for Best Health and Wellbeing Service of the Year.

This latter award was particularly pleasing in focusing on the health and wellbeing outcomes we achieve for all those who live with us, whether in our households or apartments. It took into account the full range of approaches we employ, including, but not limited to, our use of the arts and music therapy, our specialist gym provision, the extent of community engagement and our integration of opportunities for intergenerational living.



On that note, our newest village, Belong Chester went from strength to strength as the year unfolded, with the team continuing to work with our partners and nursery operators, Ready Generations, to create a wide range of exciting opportunities for

our residents and apartment tenants. From arts projects to upcycling workshops and storytelling to prables, the opportunities to get involved in intergenerational activities are truly extensive, truly beneficial - and increasingly high profile.

Those tuning into the Royal Carols at Christmas Concert 2024 will have seen that resident members of the Sankofa Songsters intergenerational choir took to the stage at Westminster Abbey, leading concertgoers in a rendition of 'Away in a Manger'. It was just one of many magical moments throughout the year and an indicator of the wealth of opportunities our villages create through their community focused approach.

For me personally, it was a particularly poignant moment as I entered my final year as Chair and member of the Belong Board. It has been a real privilege to play a part in steering this wonderful organisation during my term in office, and in witnessing the many incredible ways in which it enriches people's lives.

I will very much miss being part of this fabulous community, but will continue to follow developments closely and look forward to reading of the organisation's future success as it prepares to open future sites in Birkdale and beyond.


Robert Armstrong
Chair of the Belong Board



Impact in action

Phil returns to Haydock 60 years on

Belong Warrington resident, Phil Warburton, spent a day at Haydock Park Racecourse, enjoying the excitement of each race and the anticipation awaiting bets to come in!

Accompanied by Experience Co-ordinator, Louise Kelly, the pair cheered on their horses before taking in the course's brass band and sharing Phil's favourite brandy tippie.

Louise said: "Everyone who knows Phil knows how much he loves his horse racing. He hasn't been able to attend for some time and a big part of our role is supporting residents to achieve their ambitions."

Inheriting his love of horses from his parents, a young Phil spent much of his teenage years grooming his favourite animal and eventually going on to own his own, Amber Sprite.

Due to health ailments, Phil hadn't been able to return to the landmark racecourse since 1963, settling instead for watching the races on TV.

Speaking of his experience, Phil said: "The racecourse was very much as I remember but it's a lot busier now! I'm grateful to Louise for making it all happen and although Lady Luck wasn't with us this time, it was a fantastic experience - I won just by being there."

Year in Numbers

The figures below give an idea of the scale of Belong's operations. However, the true measure of our impact is found in the difference we make to people's lives, a flavour of which is detailed in the pages which follow.

| | Belong 2023/24 | Belong 2024/25 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
|  Number of household residents ¹ | 835 | 849 |
|  Number of Belong at Home customers | 298 | 369 |
|  Number of hours of home care | 64,000 | 66,762 |
|  Number of apartment tenants | 208 | 227 |
|  Number of Experience Days provided | 4,160 | 4,603 |
|  Number of people who accessed Belong's Admiral Nurse service ² | 479 | 377 |
|  Number of community groups regularly accessing our villages | 125 | 138 |
|  Percentage of household customers living with dementia | 80% | 78% |
|  Percentage of customers receiving a nursing service | 39% | 39% |
|  Average household customer age | 85 | 86 |
|  Occupancy in Belong households ³ | 96.8% | 96.4% |
|  Average fee rate per week | £1,396 | £1,541 |
|  Percentage of self-funding customers | 63% | 65% |
|  Percentage of customers publicly funded in households | 37% | 35% |
|  Number of household residents subsidised ⁴ | 34 | 34 |
|  Number of new jobs created | 41 | 37 |
|  Total number of employees | 1,301 | 1,381 |

¹The number of residents fluctuates according to the length of stay; for example a lower number of respite customers may cause this figure to drop without adversely affecting occupancy.

²There was a temporary reduction in the availability of this valued service due to the need for a short-term redeployment of resources.

³Average UK Care Home occupancy in 2024 was 88.3% according to the Knight Frank Care Homes Trading Performance Review 2024.

⁴Refers to the number of people who were previously privately funded and are now publicly funded, either due to a change in health or financial circumstances, with Belong being committed to enabling residents to remain with the organisation where this occurs.

Quality Focus

Belong works to provide high quality care and we have robust operational structures in place to audit our services across a wide range of measures, aiming to drive continuous improvement in the way that we operate. The quality of our services is seen in a number of measures.

Care Quality Commission Ratings

- Three villages (Belong Atherton, Belong Crewe and Belong Wigan) are rated Outstanding.
- Belong Chester had its first inspection in March 2025, with the result subsequently published in May 2025; the village achieved a rating of GOOD, now one of four Belong villages with this rating.
- One village (Belong Warrington) was assessed as Requires Improvement in 2022 and while positive changes to address feedback have long been embedded by the new leadership team, we continue to await reinspection.
- One home care service (Belong at Home Crewe) is rated Outstanding, with all other home care services rated GOOD.

29% of inspected services rated
OUTSTANDING

64% of inspected services rated
GOOD

Customer reviews

Independently verified reviews on carehome.co.uk and homecare.co.uk continue to show resoundingly positive feedback on Belong's services. In 2024, Belong at Home was ranked in the Top 20 home care groups across the UK based on customer reviews, while Belong Wigan was listed in the Top 20 care homes in the North West, with a perfect 10 out of 10 rating.

9.9 Average review score
on carehome.co.uk

G H (Niece of Resident)
published on 2 May 2025

"My auntie moved into Belong March 24. The care team made her so very welcome and she loved her time here. 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. I would highly recommend Belong and all the staff as you'll be in safe hands if you come here!"

9.8 Average review score
on homecare.co.uk

Caroline P (Daughter of Client)
published on 29 May 2024

"The Belong at Home team are invaluable in assisting Mum to stay at home where she wants to stay. It gives us enormous peace of mind to know Mum is being well cared for at the times we are not with her. The support staff are fabulous with Mum and keep her happy, safe and entertained."

Our People



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE | Gold

Belong retained its accreditation as a 'Gold' level Investor in People using the IiP assessment scheme, signalling its commitment to reward, recognition and investment in its workforce. We continue to make progress in driving our employee value proposition.

In 2024/25, we maintained our commitment to paying all colleagues at the rate of the Real Living Wage or above, again increasing the minimum hourly rate in Belong by 5% to £12.60 per hour from April 2025. This applies to all colleagues regardless of age.

A key appointment was made during the year, with Mike Griffiths taking up post as Head of People to lead on recruitment, retention, employee relations and experience. Implementing a range of measures to drive the employee experience, progress was made over the year, with a 7.5% reduction in the staff turnover rate and a 23.8% reduction in agency usage. Improvements included strengthened onboarding processes including buddying and mentoring schemes, resulting in higher employee satisfaction.

Colleague survey results

The 2024 colleague survey showed significant increases in colleague engagement across a range of measures, including an increased response rate of 71% of colleagues, up from 50% in 2023. Particularly positive areas were:

Colleague survey result scores out of 5:

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| I know what is expected of me at work | I feel we look after our residents to a high standard | I feel I am given the right level of training to perform my role | I feel that I work as part of a good team where my colleagues and I support each other |
| 4.3 | 4.2 | 4.1 | 4.1 |

Training and development

In April 2024, Belong launched a new e-learning platform which had a significant impact in improving access to training, doubling the average number of training courses completed by each employee and improving skills and knowledge. Belong also won a number of awards for workforce development during the year. These included:

**Employer of the Year
in the Apprenticeship
Awards**

(Cheshire College
South & West 2025)

**Apprenticeship
Employer of the Year**
(DH Associates
Awards 2025)

**Outstanding Contribution
to the Development of
Apprenticeships**

(NSCG Pizza and
Prosecco Awards 2025)

Training and development

Number of colleagues promoted within the organisation:

49

Number of training courses completed:

37,687

Average number of training courses per person:

27

Champion Awards

Belong once again recognised the exceptional talent of its colleagues at its annual Champion Awards.

Held at the Queen's Hotel in Chester, guests were treated to a performance by the Sankofa Songsters intergenerational choir from neighbouring Belong Chester. Winners from across the organisation's villages and Belong at Home collected special handmade ceramic trophies designed by resident of Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme, Alma Worthington, as part of a creative competition. The winners were determined by a panel of independent judges, including industry experts and Belong customers.



Recognition for volunteers

Amongst the winners at the Champion Awards was Matthew Boardman, then aged 16, and named Volunteer of the Year for his contribution to village life during school holidays.

Over the summer, he helped to organise activities, excursions and other entertainment for customers, supporting residents to take part. He is one of a vast army of volunteers of all ages, who support the villages in a range of ways, including gardening, facilitating activities, serving in The Bistro and providing companionship to residents.



Carers invited to Royal Garden Party

Care Team Leaders, Laura Barsted and Caylie Jones of Belong Macclesfield, received invitations to the Royal Garden Party hosted by King Charles III and Queen Camilla in a mark of appreciation for their support of residents. The pair were selected to attend along with invitees from other charities and societies.

Speaking of her experience, Caylie said: "It was a great pleasure to be acknowledged for our hard work – a once in a lifetime opportunity!"



ARCO Membership

Summer 2024 marked a new milestone in Belong's journey as an operator of older people's housing as it joined ARCO, the Associated Retirement Community Operators, signifying the organisation's commitment to customers residing in our villages' independent living apartments.

What is ARCO?

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.

What is an IRC?

The term 'integrated retirement community' was coined by ARCO to signal apartment homes for older people, which are available for purchase, part purchase or rent, alongside the ability to enjoy independence and choice. This is accessed through integration with a range of lifestyle facilities, care services and the wider community.

"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."

Chief Executive, Martin Rix

Why membership matters?

Chief Executive, Martin Rix, said: "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 spokesperson for ARCO added: "A huge congratulations and very warm welcome to Belong who have joined ARCO as a Member, signifying their commitment to providing excellent operational standards with a focus on consumer protection within the Integrated Retirement Community Sector."

Our Awards

Belong was again recognised in a range of high-profile awards across the year, which are profiled throughout this publication. Some of these can be found below.



**LaingBuisson
Awards 2024
Excellence in
Retirement Housing**



**HealthInvestor
Awards 2024
Best Health &
Wellbeing Service
of the Year**



**Belong Wigan
was listed in the
Top 20 care homes
in the North West,
with a perfect
10 out of 10 rating**



**Great British Care
Awards 2024 National
Winner: *The Unpaid
Carers Award:*
Cavell Meakin,
Volunteer,
Belong Crewe**



**Great British Care
Awards 2024 North
West Winner:
The Care Home Team:
Nursing Team,
Belong Atherton**



**Great British Care
Awards 2024 West
Midlands Winner:
*The Social Care
Nurse Award:*
Hannah Barrington -
Parry, Village Nurse
Manager, Belong
Newcastle-under-Lyme**



**Great British Care
Awards 2024 West
Midlands Winner:
*The Care
Innovator Award:*
Emma Palin,
Experience
Coordinator, Belong
Newcastle-under-Lyme**



**Great British Care
Awards 2024 West
Midlands Winner:
Dementia Carer Award:
Jamie Rogers,
Support Worker,
Belong Newcastle-
under-Lyme**



**Wigan Borough
Palliative and End of
Life Care Awards 2024:
*Most Innovative Staff
Member 2024:*
Kim Calland,
Experience
Coordinator,
Belong Atherton**



**NAPA National
Activity Awards 2025
*The Margaret
Butterworth Award:
Activity Provider
of the Year Award:*
Charlene Frodsham,
Experience
Coordinator,
Belong Wigan**



**NAPA National
Activity Awards 2025
*The Physical
Activity Award:*
Jane Coburn,
Exercise Specialist,
Belong Crewe**



**Chief Nurse
Adult Social Care
Gold Award
Jemma Sharratt,
Village Nurse Manager,
Belong Atherton**

The Belong Difference

Belong's vision is to redefine what's possible for older people, creating an outstanding environment that integrates services, housing and community in a continually improving and innovative care model.

As a not-for-profit provider, it has been able to invest extensively in developing and honing its Belong village model, which brings together a number of vital aspects of care and housing to offer a unique proposition to those looking for support in later life. Some of the key aspects are detailed below.

Continuum of services

There are two options for those looking to move to a Belong village: either an apartment for those who are looking to live independently or a household for those who need 24-hour care, including nursing and dementia care.

There are also options for home care and specialist day care services, available both to apartment tenants and those living in the wider community. This continuum of care means Belong is able to support people as their needs change, suiting those with an eye on the future or couples who may have different care needs and appreciate the possibility to have these supported under one roof.



Household model

At the heart of Belong's approach is the way that care is organised around small households, where 24-hour care, including nursing and dementia support, is provided in extended family-sized settings of up to 12 people. This means that people live in a family-like environment, where they feel they belong and enjoy positive relationships with those around them.



Every household is 'blended' in supporting residents with a range of needs rather than segregating people based on physical conditions, i.e. we do not have separate dementia or nursing wings. Instead, we aim to match people based on their interests and personalities to assess where and with whom they will most feel at home. This approach helps in normalising life for people with dementia and ensuring that we do not need to move people if their needs change. Professionals comment on the positive atmosphere and reduced use of anti-psychotics to promote wellbeing.

As a pioneer of this model in the UK, Belong is a founding member of the International Consortium for the Household Model, along with Hammond Care in Australia and The Green House Project in the United States. Together, we collaborate to promote the benefits of this model and make it more widely available across the globe.

Vibrant community

All residents move freely throughout the village and enjoy access to a wider community in the village centre, making use of facilities such as a bistro, venue with licensed bar, hair salon, gym, creative studio and library. All village centres are open to the public and there is a bi-monthly *What's On* programme with a wide range of activities and entertainment in line with the interests of customers.



Dementia expertise

Belong villages are developed to best practice dementia design principles and all colleagues receive specialist dementia training. This is backed by input from dementia specialist Admiral Nurses, employed by Belong in partnership with the charity, Dementia UK. Belong offers this free dementia specialist support service to all Belong customers with a dementia diagnosis, as well as their family members and carers. Every village also runs a monthly B's Café memory clinic as a drop-in for dementia advice.



Specialist exercise and rehabilitation service

There is a hi-tech gym in every village, offering a specialist exercise service which is included within Belong's care fees. Technology includes screens to show favourite landscapes while residents are exercising and gaming technology to support targeted exercise routines, promoting healthy competition through league tables and high scores - all proven to encourage people to exercise for longer.



Residents have seen incredible results from their personalised rehabilitation programmes, from regaining the ability to walk or even to go home again. Belong's exercise service has been independently assessed by the National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine, achieving a level 2 for 'Emerging Practice'. This means that it provides each resident the opportunity to improve their quality of life through physical activity no matter what their physical or mental capacity. Built on the site of a grade 2 listed building, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme also incorporates a heritage gallery open to the public.



Supporting Changing Needs

Jim Brooks' mother Pat lived at Belong Warrington for almost two and half years, first in a Belong apartment, before later moving to a household. He shares his family's story:



Belong wasn't a new place to mum. She'd already been frequenting The Bistro there, using it as a prime spot to catch up with friends over lattes, tea and cake like she was in her own personal episode of Downton Abbey. She settled in like she'd lived there forever. Village life suited her, and the move brought much needed relief to my wife Jane and I. No more sleepless nights wondering if she was safe alone in her bungalow. It felt like our family had grown exponentially.

Belong at Home

Then, when she started needing a little more help in her apartment, we called in Belong's home care services. Belong's 24-hour emergency

response? Oh, she tested that alright! But the village team rose to the occasion every single time. They didn't just ensure she was physically okay; they also knew how to calm her nerves and make her feel safe by giving her the emotional support and reassurance she needed. It's like they had a sixth sense for what she needed – emotional first aid, if you will.

Changing needs

Mum spent two blissful years in her own apartment, but then we noticed things starting to change with her physical health and she didn't want to live alone any longer. It became clear it was time to move on from her own apartment. Mum was no stranger to the Threlfall Household – she'd pop in there often, socialising with residents and staff like it was her second home. So when the time came for 24-hour care, this made for a remarkably easy transition.

A life well-lived

Again, Belong outdid themselves. The support? Impeccable. The care? Unbeatable. The fun? Oh, there was plenty of that too! Mum, with her razor-sharp Scouse wit and wicked sense of humour, found endless joy in bantering and teasing the team. Even in her final days, she remained the charismatic, fierce force of nature we all knew and loved.

The difference Belong made to Mum, Jane and I and the rest of the family is something we'll always hold close. They ensured her last days were as good as they could be, and for that, we're forever grateful.



Exercise and Rehabilitation

While several care settings may feature gyms, Belong's commitment to employing a qualified exercise and rehabilitation instructor in every village is rare. Together with the state-of-the-art facilities, this expertise creates the opportunity to work with residents on a one-to-one basis and develop bespoke exercise programmes that achieve life-changing results.



Belong Chester apartment tenant, 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.

Previously, Tony, aged 80, lived in constant pain, had no movement in his back and was unable to climb stairs 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. When

he moved to Belong Chester in October last year, he asked the village's dedicated exercise specialist, Louise Warr, who is also an injury rehabilitation expert, if there was anything she could do to help improve his quality of life.

Goal-setting

After a chat, 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.

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.

"This needs to be shared"

Tony Mulhearn extols benefits of personalised rehabilitation programmes

Pain-free

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 and go shopping on his own, carrying bags rather than walking sticks. 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."*

Belong at Home

Belong continued to grow its home care operation, Belong at Home, through 2024/25, maintaining its no-agency policy and attracting and retaining high-calibre recruits to ensure a high quality service. This resulted in a number of accolades over the year.



Homecare.co.uk 2024 Awards

Belong at Home was listed in the Top 20 Home Care Groups for the seventh year running, with an average review score of 9.8, and its Warrington and Wigan branches were both listed in the North West Top 20. **Three Belong at Home services are rated 10 out of 10 by customers (Crewe, Warrington and Wigan).**



Great British Care Awards 2024

Belong at Home Warrington Community Support Worker, Laura Cooper, won the Dignity in Care Award in the North West regional finals of the Great British Care Awards 2024.



Service expansion



A new Belong at Home branch was established in Chester to enable us to offer home care services to apartment residents in this location, as well as to people in the local Chester community.

We expanded our Didsbury home care service, with the creation of a new team leader post and wider recruitment drive.

There was also the appointment of an Area Manager at Belong at Home Warrington, with Nicola Hewitt (*pictured left*) promoted to the post following a rigorous recruitment process. Previously Team Leader, Nicola has extensive experience in home care, and has successfully led a Belong at Home team, upholding high standards that set the service apart.



Customer Voice

A key part of Belong's vision is that we empower our customers to shape their communities. Over the past year, we strengthened the channels open to household residents, apartment tenants and relatives, launching new residents and tenants committees, as well as a combined village committee, in which relatives are also encouraged to participate.

Regular meetings are held for each group and feedback shared via minutes and village newsletters. Other mechanisms include suggestion boxes, feedback via cards and sign-in tablets, and of course the annual customer satisfaction survey.

Customer satisfaction survey

| RECOMMENDATION RATE | | 2024 saw an increase of 12.5% in the number of people who responded: 612 compared to 544 in 2023, which made it all the more meaningful that the percentage of customers who would recommend Belong rose to 96.4%, up from 95.5% in 2023 and our highest score since 2018. |
|---------------------|-------|--|
| 2023 | 95.5% | |
| 2024 | 96.4% | |

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 contributes to village vibrancy, making visits a great experience.

Golden Oldies: Belong Warrington Takes to the Air Waves



Radio's newest disc jockeys made their debut in Warrington as tenants of Belong Warrington teamed up with the town's community radio station, taking to the airwaves to delight audiences with a show recorded at their care village home.

Presenters, Andy Green and Brian Spooner gave their broadcast undergraduates a taste of their world, training them in all things radio, followed by interviews and the chance to put their skills to the test by introducing their favourite songs. Louise Kelly, experience coordinator at Belong Warrington, said: "Our customers enjoyed the opportunity to show off their radio patter and before we knew it, they'd taken over and it was more like 'Radio Belong'!"

Intergenerational Living

Since the launch of The Nursery in Belong, the benefits of intergenerational experiences have been starker than ever, both in Belong Chester and across all Belong villages.

Belong Chester

With a fully integrated children's nursery, operated by Belong's partner, Ready Generations, Belong Chester offers unrivalled opportunities for intergenerational experiences.



The Sankofa Songsters intergenerational choir rehearses at the village on a weekly basis. Led by musical director, Amanda Wrigley of Live the Beat, and with funding



from HealthBox, the choir performs at venues across the city, region - and even nationally! Its most high profile engagement was without doubt, its invitation to sing at the Royal Carols at Christmas Concert in Westminster Abbey in December 2024. Having made the train journey into the city, the 30-strong gang, including school children from Hoole Primary School, led an audience of thousands in a rendition of Away in a Manger.



The Repair shop

Another favourite at the village is its upcycling workshop which brings together young and old to repair broken items, while learning valuable craftsmanship.

'Grandfriends' support nursery children to use real tools, including drills, nails and screws, saws and sandpaper on an accessible workbench, specially designed to accommodate residents' wheelchairs.

From rejuvenating teddy bears to creating chairs out of pallets, the projects range in scale and ambition, but all are hugely rewarding for the

team. Belong Chester resident, Bill, 83, said: "I enjoy fixing things, I always have. I like showing the children how to use the tools – someone needs to show them."

Across Belong

Intergenerational opportunities are woven into life at all Belong villages, both through long-term partnerships with local schools, colleges and nurseries, as well as ad hoc opportunities that form part of village events programmes.



Belong Warrington enjoyed a visit from talented young dancers from the Manchester Chinese Academy of Dance.



Belong Atherton celebrated World Book Day with a tea party with friends from Parklee Community School.



Belong Morris Feinmann's Book Buddies Club meets for weekly reading sessions and comprises residents and pupils from neighbouring Moor Allerton Preparatory School.



Shared benefits

Older people enjoy a real sense of joy and purpose through experiences such as:

- Reading with children.
- Joining in taking them for a 'pram' along the canal.
- Being part of their team of 'educators'.
- Spontaneous interactions over lunch in The Bistro.
- Formal events in the nursery, creative studio or venue, e.g. choir, arts sessions and dance.

Children benefit from:

- Learning about the experiences of their 'grandfriends'.
- Empathy for the needs of others.
- Improved development of communication skills.
- Increased emotional intelligence.

Perspectives

"I like it, it makes me calmer. I like to read with them and it's really fun."

Year 5 pupil, Miles, of Moor Allerton Preparatory School

"I love the sessions because I like meeting people with children and spending time with the little ones – it's nice to borrow them for a little while."

Elaine Beckingham, Resident of Belong Macclesfield



Belong Crewe residents and tenants enjoy monthly visits from Pebble Book Primary School pupils.



In Belong Macclesfield, a weekly playgroup initiative is helping intergenerational relationships to flourish at the village.



Social care students from Winstanley College ran a series of activities at Belong Wigan, including frame making, clay work and mug decorating.

Animal Therapy

Creature comforts was once again a big theme in **Belong villages**, with a wide range of opportunities created to give residents the opportunity to interact with animals and experience the pleasure that comes from these relationships.

Belong Crewe welcomed Cheshire Mini Farm, playing host for a special meet-and-greet afternoon with animals from all over the world.

Swiss Valais blacknose sheep, Chinese Silkie chickens, and Pygmy goats joined the village community, as did miniature Shetland ponies, French Lop rabbits and hairless guinea pigs, with Belong customers petting the creatures, finding out all about them, and in some cases, taking on the role of looking after them. Belong Crewe customer, Margaret, said: *"It means a lot being with the animals. I can't wait to see them again."*

Snakes slithered into Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme, as part of a visit from Critterish Allsorts, who also brought chinchillas, tortoises and dragon lizards to join residents for some animal assisted therapy. Apartment tenant, Mary Burndrett, 84, said: *"I have always been an avid watcher of David Attenborough-type programmes. Because of the visit I have been able to touch the animals – I expected them to feel warm, but they weren't!"*

Belong Wigan ventured on a 'mini safari', encountering creatures including Australian bearded dragons, cockatiels, ferrets and tortoises. 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!"*

Participants benefited 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.



The Power of Music

When words and memory begin to fail, one language which never fails to connect people is that of music - which is why music is front and centre of life in Belong villages.

Trained music therapists work with residents at two of its care villages, and Belong partners with the national music charity Nordoff and Robbins to run both one-one-one and group music therapy sessions at Belong Warrington.


Beyond this, music is incorporated into daily life in the villages through a range of initiatives, from personalised playlists to musical work-outs and choir singing to concerts.



Vocal work-out

Belong Macclesfield's community events programme features 'Singing for Health' vocal 'workouts', designed to engage the whole body, from strengthening vocals and language ability, to promoting posture, memory and cognitive skill.

Musical inspiration takes many forms in Belong.
These include:

-  **Choir singing**
-  **Music making**
-  **Piano recitals**
-  **Musical entertainment**
-  **Sing-alongs**
-  **Exercise to music**
-  **One-on-one music therapy**
-  **Personalised playlists**

The workshops, run by trained opera singer and choir leader, Helen Fehily, comprise a range of vocal exercises that aid breathing, projection and the articulation of sound, whilst building upper body muscles.

They support customers living with dementia, Parkinson's and other health conditions, involving gentle challenges, such as singing 'rounds' simultaneously, which requires much concentration at the individual level but without any pressure to achieve accuracy.

Anna Seaton, Experience Co-ordinator 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.*"

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.



Nature and the Outdoors

We know that spending time outdoors is important to many of our customers and we continue to invest in ensuring our gardens and balconies are easily accessible to residents and are beautiful spaces where nature can be enjoyed.

Over the past year, both Newcastle-under-Lyme and Macclesfield received garden makeovers, and residents at all villages enjoy access to a range of beautiful outdoor spaces, often supported by extensive community volunteer involvement.

Dementia-friendly

Our dementia-friendly gardens provide space for residents to relax outdoors, indulge in a spot of gardening or enjoy garden entertainment and barbecues. In addition to the gardens, residents on upper floors have access to spacious balconies to ensure continuous, secure and independent access to the outdoors.



Beach themed raised beds are amongst the striking new features at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme's accessible gardens.



Blackpool was the destination for multiple visits during the course of the year, with Belong Wigan residents enjoying trips to the circus, arcades and the famous illuminations.

A change of scenery

Beyond our villages, our teams facilitate regular outings, with popular destinations including garden centres, theatres, shopping centres and seaside resorts.

Colleagues also undertake a range of outdoor challenges, often combining fundraising and team building. These have ranged from hiking in Snowdonia to cycling to Blackpool.

The Big Belong Walk saw over 40 colleagues scale beautiful Mam Tor in the heart of the Peak District.



The Future



Belong Birkdale

Belong continued to make progress with the build of a new coastal care village in Birkdale, due to open in spring 2026. It is also set to open a new branch of Belong at Home in Southport.

The care village will be home to over 100 people, with accommodation including six households with 24-hour care and nursing support, and 30 one and two bedroom independent living

apartments, which will be available to buy or rent. Belong Birkdale will also feature a village centre with a range of amenities, such as a bistro, gym, hair salon and library.

Thought leadership

Belong was cited as a 'trailblazer' by the Centre for Social Justice in its Lonely Nation report published in August 2024, with two recommendations made based on learnings from Belong's care and housing model.



Pictured (R to L): Martin Rix, Justin Russell, Michelle Dyson, Sue Egersdorff

Its intergenerational work attracted interest from policy makers, including a joint visit from the Director of DHSC and the Director General of the Department of Education, and a separate visit from the Chief Nurse for Adult Social Care. There was also extensive media coverage, including features in the Guardian, Times and Bloomberg City Press, and broadcasts on the BBC One Show, ITV This Morning and Deutsche Welle.

Belong also received a shout-out from broadcaster Nick Robinson on The Today Podcast, when he cited a visit to his mother at Belong Macclesfield as his 'moment of the year'.

Belong is a not-for-profit organisation with over thirty years' experience in providing outstanding care. As a not-for-profit, any surplus is reinvested into its award-winning services, people and facilities.

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