

Belong Life

SPRING 2026



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BELONG
VILLAGES



Word from the team

Rebecca Woodcock, Belong Chief Operating Officer, introduces her first Belong Life with a special message to our community.

Firstly, I'd like to thank everyone for all the well wishes since taking up post, last year. It is a privilege to join the Belong Board after many years working in the villages in various roles and most recently, as Head of Operations. I pride myself on being the best Belong Champion I can be and I'm looking forward to playing my part in driving the organisation forward.

It was a very special start to the year as, January marked the return of our annual Belong Champion Awards the glittering gala celebrating the hard work and achievements of our colleagues and volunteers. We were pleased to receive so many heartwarming nominations and are equally grateful to our independent panel of judges for taking on the unenviable task of having to select the winners. It was a truly memorable night as can be seen in the centre pages.

Excitingly, Belong at Home Southport has launched, marking our Merseyside debut, and what's more, comes with our first home care 'hub'. Located in the heart of the town, it offers a warm welcome for drop in face-to-face chats, appointments, and access to the Belong Admiral Nurse service. It is the perfect opportunity for locals to get to know us ahead of Belong Birkdale's opening. For those interested, the team can also share more information about job and training opportunities, both for the home care service and for the village. Whatever the reason, pop in and say hello!

Sticking with Belong at Home, we can happily say that the Chester service has expanded outside of its city centre and fringes catchment, bringing more support to people in their homes in rural Cheshire.

Back in the villages, it has been 15 years since Belong Crewe opened its doors (believe it or not!) and it remains to be the town's only Outstanding CQC-rated care facility - a fantastic achievement and testament to the team there.

As always, the past few months have seen many joyful stories coming from throughout our community, featuring Mods, Tai Chi, and even the Armed Forces.

Don't forget, our villages have volunteering opportunities that might be suitable for relatives who wish to make a contribution; neighbours with time and skills to offer; or students looking for experience to help in their career. Anyone who'd like to support those in need of a little extra assistance is invited to find out more by visiting www.bit.ly/BelongVolunteers or by scanning the QR code, below.

**Rebecca Woodcock,
Belong Chief Operating Officer**



We are delighted that Belong has been listed as a Top 20 Mid-size Care Home Group by leading online review site Carehome.co.uk, with Belong Wigan also achieving a regional distinction.

Rather than being decided upon by a panel of judges, the rankings are based on verified customer reviews, with Belong achieving an average review score of 9.8 out of 10 from residents and their relatives across its eight villages in the North West for the past year.

In addition to the group award, Belong Wigan was also ranked in the Top 20 Care Homes in the North West list, achieving a perfect review score of 10 out of 10.

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 the daughter of a resident at Belong Wigan said: "Mum has been in Elm Household for three years this month, and we cannot fault anything or anyone at Belong. She is living with Alzheimers, and her care has been outstanding. The home is so warm and welcoming from the reception to the households. The support workers are amazing, with nothing being too much trouble. Mum is so happy and content here. She enjoys the activities and outings very much, and her mind is kept active. We cannot recommend Belong enough."



Belong Wigan

Belong Ranked in UK Top 20 Care Home Groups

Commenting on the results, Belong Chief Executive, Martin Rix, said: “Being recognised as one of the UK’s top care groups is a direct reflection of the passion and commitment our teams bring to work every day. What makes this award so special is that it is decided by people that we support and their relatives across all Belong villages.

“It’s particularly pleasing to see Belong Wigan listed in the top care settings in the North West after recently being recognised as one of the top five care homes in the UK in their inaugural Lottie awards, something the team are quite rightly incredibly proud of.”

“Mum has lived at Belong Wigan for three years this month, and we cannot fault anything or anyone at Belong. She is living with Alzheimers, and her care has been outstanding. The home is so warm and welcoming, from the reception to the households. The staff are amazing, with nothing being too much trouble for them. Mum is so happy and content here. She enjoys the activities and outings very much and her mind is kept active. We cannot recommend Belong enough.”

Daughter of a Belong Wigan resident

“My dad has been at Belong since 2022, and without doubt it was the best, albeit difficult, decision I have ever had to make with respect to his care. The staff on his household have been fantastic in every way, and they genuinely care about him. He is well known across the village, and all staff, including managers, take time to check in with him and make sure he is ok. Dad is encouraged to attend many social activities and his regular attendance at on-site gym sessions does wonders for his physical and mental well-being. I am kept advised of all aspects of his care, which is both reassuring and takes away a lot of pressure for me and my family.”

Son of a Belong Atherton resident



Belong Chester

A Customer's View

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

For this issue, we speak to **Bert Gittins**, 95, apartment tenant and resident raconteur at Belong Warrington.



“People say it’s just like a posh hotel, here. I think it’s much better than that because at a hotel it’s all strangers, whereas here it’s like living with your family. We play games like dominoes, and Scrabble, it’s good fun – that’s why it’s great to be here!” Bert begins by sharing his views of the village. Having moved in three years prior following the passing of wife Margaret, he is now a regular face in the village centre, popping in on weekdays to take advantage of the activities, catch up with friends, and often try something new.

Musical workshops and live entertainment are a favourite of the Boltonian, especially when local dementia-friendly duo, Music in Mind perform. “He gets up and sings with Al and Ian, and they have a bit of banter. He loves them and they love Bert,” Jane from the village’s Experience Day team shares. “He’s also a great help with new customers, taking the time to welcome them and help them settle. Today, he’s been playing Triominos (a variant of dominoes) with day care customers Alan and Bob. He’s patient and lovely, very pleasant and sociable, Bert remembers everyone’s name.”

Story machine

“Bert is our storyteller,” Jane continues. “He’s always coming out with little nuggets of info. For example, Garibaldi and Bourbon biscuits were named after people. I had no idea – it’s fascinating!”

Indeed, Bert is full of facts, wisdom, and anecdotes and has a penchant for sharing stories. Much material comes from having served during WWII as a regimental pay clerk based in Egypt, before going on to direct a wholesale ingredients business. The latter often saw him on the road visiting bakeries and cake shops, ‘before the supermarkets came in

and took everything over’, he recalls. Additionally, some of Bert’s fondest memories include continental caravanning with Margaret and make for many amusing tales.

Happy days

Outside village life, Bert enjoys meeting with a friend for thrice-weekly walks in nearby Stockton Heath, and he looks forward to summertime when he indulges his passion for golf along with Mike, a fellow Belong Warrington tenant, followed by a drink in the club after.

“Television is rubbish, so I like reading, especially novels, and history books,” Bert explains. “I’m reading one at the moment about the north of England. People up here are so different to those in the south. It can be a big discussion point amongst us all here.”

Finally, Bert was keen to divulge his thoughts on the Belong village model. He said: “My son visits Germany a lot and he tells me they’ve got places just like Belong over there. I think there should be more villages over here because the concept is wonderful. You can do the things you want, and there’s lots of people here to spend time with. Or, if you want to be on your own, that’s fine too. And the furnishings are exquisite, better than most people’s homes!”

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

Sweet Fifteen: Belong Toasts Decade-and-a-Half Supporting Crewe Community

Belong Crewe popped the champagne in celebration of 15 years supporting the community.

Live entertainment, bubbles, companionship, and a special guest visit from Mayor of Crewe, Cllr Sally Graham, marked the milestone occasion that is set to create conversation and memories for years to come.

Since Belong Crewe's opening in 2010, the village has built a reputation as a prominent hub in the area, thanks to its involvement in town events, fostering close relations with organisations, schools, and charities, and launching initiatives in support of the whole community.

In 2018, it introduced Silver Pride, celebrating the older LGBT+ community, in conjunction with sexual health charities, and Cheshire East Council. The event has since become an annual staple in its events calendar.

More recently, the launch of B's Cafe with support from Crewe Town Council sees the monthly dementia cafe offering complimentary coffee and conversation,



Pictured: Residents Dolores (L) and Margaret (R), with Belong Crewe team Aliesa and David.

with access to its Admiral Nurse service. The initiative offers an invaluable network for local people with loved one with a dementia diagnosis.

Speaking of the 15th birthday bonanza, Caroline Anthony, General Manager at

Belong Crewe, said: "It's been a truly fabulous celebration, full of laughter, fun, and compassion. Being a part of the community means everything to us, and we look forward to continuing to support everyone who comes through our doors. Here's to the next 15 years and beyond!"

Multi-sensory Machine Making for Modern Care

A multi-sensory machine designed to stimulate the senses is making many happy residents at Belong, all thanks to the generosity of the Crewe community over a six-month fundraising campaign in support of the village.

Residents benefit from stimuli for sight, sound, and touch through an interactive bubble column, colour controller, fibre optic tails, and projector for visual content.

Combined with hand massages, relaxing music and even animal visits, the high-tech forms part of the village's Namaste therapy, a person-centred care approach with the aim of promoting calm whilst reducing anxiety through sensory-rich experience. It is a common feature in leading care provision for older people, particularly those living with advanced dementia.

Village Nurse Manager, Jane Hughes, co-led the fundraiser. She shares more: "Namaste principles have been embedded in our approach for a number of years, complementing the more 'clinical' side of care. It's one of number of things we do for our customers to continue to have

human experiences, based on pleasure and emotion, in addition to meeting their physical needs."

Selected specially, the portable equipment supports residents limited to their bedrooms, for reasons such as health, and comes off the back of success of a dedicated Namaste room introduced at Belong Crewe two years ago.

Both have been possible thanks to the generosity of the village's customers, colleagues, and the wider community, through numerous fundraisers including sponsored bike rides in its in-house gym, Big Bingo Night, and the annual Belong Big Walk at Brereton Heath Country Park. Meanwhile, a sponsored bungee jump was led by David Bithell with the caretaker facing his fears all the way to 160ft, with support worker, Jess Murphy ultimately jumping for the good cause.

Sharon Bull, Practice Development Facilitator at Belong Crewe, adds: "We are ever so grateful to our community for their help and donations to make this happen. We are not-for-profit, and this allows us to focus on the best possible care for our customers and explore different things which genuinely enhance their lives.

"We are pleased to report we've had a fantastic initial response from residents, some of whom can't communicate verbally have especially enjoyed engaging, with their facial expressions speaking a thousand words."



Belong Crewe resident, Sheila Manning (seated) tries out the new Namaste machine (L-R) Sharon Bull (practice development facilitator), Sheila Manning (resident), Jane Hughes (village nurse manager) and David Bithell (caretaker)

Memory Lane...



Pictured: Mindel Rose

For this issue of *Belong Life*, we spoke to the family of *Belong Morris Feinmann* resident Mindel Rose about 103 years of memories, including working in Germany after the Second World War and as a volunteer judge for a youth court in Scotland.

Born in the Gorbals, Glasgow, in February 1923, Mindel was one of five siblings: two boys and three girls.

Mindel's daughter Belinda says that her mum was a bright child and a voracious reader despite her education being set back by hearing difficulties.

Post-war adventure

Following the war, Mindel felt a pull toward adventure and a desire to see the world beyond Glasgow. She moved to Kiel, in Northern Germany, to work in administration for a newspaper.

"This perfectly suited Mum's love of learning and education. She loved her time there and often says that it was when she was at her happiest," said Belinda.

While Mindel was in Germany, her future husband was making a very different journey in the opposite direction. A refugee from Warsaw, Poland, having lost his family in the Holocaust, Henry started a new life in the UK as one of the famous 'Windermere Children' in the Lake District.



He was on the final transportation from Buchenwald concentration camp to Theresienstadt when it was intercepted by Czech partisans and taken to Prague by the British Red Cross to join the transport to the UK. He later moved to Glasgow, where he met Mindel playing badminton at the Maccabi youth club.

Her husband's job as a ladies' knitwear buyer took him travelling all around the world, meaning Mindel had to be both a mother and father figure to their two daughters. His career also provided stock for her own clothing

shop that she managed.

Service and retirement

Mindel's sharp mind and love of research also led her to volunteer as a judge on a legal panel for a children's court in Scotland. It was a role that required empathy and diligence.

"She was very fair and open minded for the time," says Belinda.

After they both retired, the couple used to enjoy travelling extensively together, including going to Florida each year in winter. They were both very keen golfers, and Mindel got a 'hole in one' in her 80s.

Mindel's husband was later diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and with Belinda living in Manchester and her elder sister Sharon living in London, the decision was made for the couple to move from Glasgow to Barfield House, opposite *Belong Morris Feinmann*, in Didsbury. As Mindel's husband required increasing support, the couple moved to *Belong Morris Feinmann*.

"This provided reassurance and safety," Belinda explains. "The teams were very good at managing the different needs of both Mum and Dad."

In 2019, Henry sadly passed away. Mindel continues to live on Juniper household at the village.

Life at Belong

Despite living with the challenges of dementia Mindel remains physically active – she enjoys going to the park often and taking part in personalised exercise classes facilitated by the village's gym.

"She's always been an active, outdoors person, enjoying walking and golf," says Belinda. "The one thing she can still do is move about, and she gets a lot of enjoyment out of that."

In February, Mindel celebrated her 103rd birthday. **We wish her all the best!**



Around the world: Belong residents travel from the comfort of their home.

Care Residents Race Across the World Via Virtual Reality

From breathtaking Scottish Highlands to charming Cornish coastline, stunning Alpine lakes and far-flung Thai temples, older people at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme are fulfilling their wanderlust wish lists thanks to virtual reality (VR) technology facilitating trips of a lifetime.

Racking up air miles from the comfort of their home, the senior globetrotters – often purported to be technophobes – are instead embracing the opportunities on offer, taking themselves and their loved ones to dream destinations.

Meanwhile, academics at Keele University are researching the long-term effects of VR when used by those residing in care environments, measuring impact on participants' mental health, their views on life, and overall wellbeing.

So far, anecdotal results are encouraging as resident Dot Edwards says: "Fantastic! You don't think places like that exist!"

Emma Palin, Experience and Heritage Coordinator at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme, shares more detail: "We are always looking for ways for our customers to experience new things, and they've relished the chance

to visit new places. They come away with a buzz and are keen to share their adventures. Many have been 'travelling' with their spouses, children, and grandchildren. It's been wonderful to watch."

The technology is the brainchild of VAE Care, with co-founder Ben Malone taking on the role as tour guide, having captured the visits of impressive landscapes from around the globe to build and narrate the content. Backed by the National Lottery Community Fund, the project includes three other care operators in the area: Dougie Mac, Hilderstone Hall, and Katharine House.

Ben Malone, co-founder of VAE Care, said: "Virtual reality isn't just about the headset; it's about making meaningful experiences accessible to people who may no longer be able to travel independently. Seeing our participants' curiosity, joy at making connections with new surroundings, before reflecting on their adventures is incredibly powerful.

"Thanks to the National Lottery Community Fund, our work with Belong and Keele University is advancing research into the emotional response to VR, as well as the long-term benefits to wellbeing and making social connections in care environments."



Pictured: Belong colleagues celebrated their success at the annual Champion Awards.

SIMPLY THE BEST: Belong's Champions Revealed at Awards

As awards season gets underway with Oscars, BAFTAs, and Grammys making for many a headline, social care's top talent has joined the party with its own glittering celebration - the annual Champion Awards hosted by leading dementia specialist, Belong, has celebrated the best amongst its villages and community care teams.

Twelve accolades were handed out at

the sparkling ceremony to its colleagues and volunteers from across the North West and West Midlands for exceptional performances supporting older people to live active and fulfilling lives.

What's more, once again, its customers were front and centre of the initiative with their nominations determining the finalist shortlists, before a panel of independent judges determined

winners with the results revealed at Manchester Hall.

Customers also had their creative juices flowing as they set about designing handmade ceramic trophies as part of a special competition. With Belong Wigan resident, Brian Cherrington's submission emerging victorious, the awards were especially meaningful for winners (read more on page 11).





Judges' feedback lauded finalists, praising their dedication, passion and commitment, going 'above and beyond' for residents, as well as a person-centred approach to care, team spirit, and making 'real difference' in older people's lives. Speaking of the event, Belong's chief executive, Martin Rix, said: "Once again, our Belong Champion Awards have shone a spotlight on the incredible work happening day in, day out, across our villages and home care teams. It's especially important to us to have our customers at the heart of everything we do, and they've embraced the opportunity to thank our dedicated colleagues.

"It really is people who ultimately create culture and make our organisation such a great place to live and work. Congratulations to all our finalists and winners."

The ceremony came ahead of a busy year for Belong which is set to include the opening of its ninth care village, Belong Birkdale, and its corresponding home care service, Belong at Home Southport, bringing its award-winning dementia care to more people.

The Belong Champion Awards 2025 was made possible thanks to sponsors: Allmanhall, boxxe, Browne Jacobson, carehome.co.uk, GHM Care, Lorne Stewart Facilities, Manchester Evening News, SB Waste, Search, Triangle PR.

THIS YEARS BELONG CHAMPION WINNERS ARE:

1. **Newcomer of the Year:**
Alicia Nield-Spurrier, Belong Crewe
2. **Be Your Best Mentor of the Year:**
Elaine Cooke, Belong Wigan
3. **Leader Award:**
Emma Spurrier, Belong Crewe
4. **Team of the Year:**
Tetley Household, Belong Warrington
5. **Belinda Jones Dementia Champion of the Year:**
Jessica Murphy, Belong Crewe
6. **End-of-Life Care Award:**
Nicola Davies, Belong Wigan
7. **Care From the Heart Compassion Award:**
Laura Picton, Belong at Home Wigan
8. **Volunteer Award:**
Eileen Allman, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme (Josephine Mollison accepts the award) - see page 12 to read more about Eileen
9. **Respect for All Inclusion Award:**
Greenall Household, Belong Warrington
10. **Community Engagement Award:**
Experience Team, Belong Wigan
11. **Better Tomorrow Innovation Award:**
Emma Palin, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme
12. **Central Services Contribution Award:**
Suzanne Roberts, Central Services (Maha Hamer accepts the award)





Pictured: Belong Chester resident, Maggie Darby, enjoys Tai Chi tuition under Maria Yuen of Ji Siu Chi Chuan.

Belong Chester Residents take on the Art of Tai Chi

Yin and yang, walking sticks, and Chinese swords have all been welcomed to Chester with flowing movements, deep breathing, and mental focus as the city's older community residing at dementia specialist, Belong, get to grips with Tai Chi.

The Chinese martial art is being embraced by those aged 80 and upwards in their quest to try new things, with the moving meditation proving to be a big hit having been organised by the care village's dedicated experience team, with Maria Yuen of Ji Siu Tai Chi Chuan leading the Wu Style Tai Chi Chuan classes.

As part of the fun, residents and tenants have been enjoying tuition in balance and gentle flowing movements, with both standing and sitting options available for less-mobile participants.

The older participants have also enjoyed the opportunity to try using traditional Tai Chi weapons, such swords, alongside learning Cantonese greetings, discovering Chinese culture, and watching special demonstrations tying in with occasions such as Chinese New Year, and Dementia Awareness Week.

"Yoga and meditation came top of the list of the ideas our customers wanted to explore, so we enlisted Maria's expertise

to make it happen," explains Chloe Wynn, Belong Chester's Support Manager. "Tai Chi also complements our programme of group and one-to-one exercise with our in-house exercise specialist, enhancing their physical strength, balance and coordination, thereby maintaining their independence and helping to prevent falls – it's a win-win."

In addition, the benefits gained support cognitive function and overall wellbeing, with Tai Chi now a popular talking point throughout the City Road care village as customers welcome learning another skill as part of their vibrant programme of experiences and activities.

Chloe continues: "It's been fabulous having Maria leading the workshops. Her passion captivates our customers, and they always look forward to what she has to share with us next."

Maria Yuen, leader of Ji Siu Tai Chi Chuan, added: "It is always a pleasure to bring Tai Chi to the Belong community – it's such a welcoming and positive atmosphere in which to work. It is great for improving mobility and wellbeing, and the exercises are adapted specially to meet the differing ability of older people. I'm always impressed at how willing Belong's residents are willing to try new things; we have a laugh and smile."

BELONG'S GOT TALENT



Sketcher Brian Cherrington

“Unbelievable! I said, ‘Woah! Seriously, have I done it?’ I couldn’t believe it!” Belong Wigan’s Brian recalls the moment he heard it was his design that won this year’s trophy competition for the Belong Champion Awards. **“I’m quite competitive, I used to be a runner, you know.”**

Every year, Belong customers are invited to get creative and submit a design idea for the accolade, with the winning entry brought to life as ceramic trophies handed out to our award recipients.

For the awards in January, Brian’s idea brought together the organisation’s values carved onto a 3D heart. He continues: “I’ve always been artistic, doing a bit of painting – but I’m not a Van Gogh! I used to do it when I was younger. I like working with pencils too as you can rub it out if you make a mistake.”

Indeed, whilst Brian has always been a dab hand at drawing and doodling, he says it’s largely a hobby from his past.

At least, that was the case until he was inspired by Charlene Frodsham, the village’s experience coordinator, and the array of arts and crafts activities he can choose to get involved with. “Charlene encouraged me to do this type of thing. And I like drawing again, now,” he says, with a big smile on his face. “It’s made me happy.”

Charlene adds: “Brian loves attending the activities and being a part of everything that’s going on. He is so happy being here; he loves Belong!”



If you’d like to nominate someone for the next Belong’s Got Talent feature, we’d love to hear from you. Please speak to your village’s experience coordinator or email the editor at tracy.brookes@belong.org.uk

Belong unveil dementia-friendly training facility at Cheshire College

Belong has officially opened the Alexandra Suite, a dementia-friendly training facility at Cheshire College South and West at its Crewe campus.

Designed to mirror a real Belong household, the Alexandra Suite provides a highly realistic environment for Belong colleagues to develop practical skills, confidence, and person-centred approaches in care.

The suite includes a replica lounge, bathroom and bedroom with both a divan and profile bed, plus a manual hoist and stand aid to support people-handling training. Additional equipment allows learning around communication, sensory engagement, and a range of care scenarios.

The facility reflects the ongoing collaboration between Cheshire College and Belong, combining industry expertise with tailored training resources to raise standards across the sector.

Brendan Conlon, Learning and Development Manager at Belong Villages, said:

“This facility represents much more than a training space, it’s a shared commitment to raise the standard of dementia care.”

“This collaboration strengthens the bridge between education and employment, helping to grow a workforce



that is not only well-trained, but deeply connected to the values of high-quality care. As demand for skilled professionals continues to rise, partnerships like this are vital. Together, we’re investing in people, in innovation, and in a future where those living with dementia receive the exceptional support they deserve.”

The College continues to work closely with Belong, providing work experience opportunities, apprenticeships and T-Level placements for students.

For more information about training, courses, or development in Health and Social Care speak to your village Practice Development Facilitator, or the central Learning and Organisational Team.

Volunteer Profile: Eileen Allman



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



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

“I don’t feel I do anything special. I just like to help. Or I’ll see something that needs doing and I just get up and do it,” Eileen Allman, apartment tenant at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme, tells us.

Modest Eileen has in fact been volunteering her initiative, interpersonal skills, and infectious smile to village life for a number of years. Susan Hemmings from the village’s Experience Day Team, shares more: “Eileen’s very helpful with preparing activities and tidying up afterwards. She’s always willing to help and it’s a massive support having her alongside us.”

Green fingers

Village Front of House Manager, Tracey Boulton joins the conversation: “Many mornings, I’ll find Eileen in the garden with her gloves on; she really gets involved.”

Eileen tells us that she’d ‘never done any gardening before’ but thought she’d give it a go and ended up planting bulbs and roses! She was instrumental in updating the Belong Heritage Gallery’s garden, lending her newfound skills to help young

adults from The Prince’s Trust and Stoke-on-Trent College to add a vegetable patch, and a seaside, complete with a raised sandpit which often sees customers building sandcastles with their grandchildren.

Helpful hands

Tracey continues: “She’s just amazing. When new tenants move in, she’s there offering support, guiding them around the village and explaining how we do things.”

Eileen says: “A few of the tenants can’t walk far, or lift things. If they need any help, I’ll try and help them. I feel really proud to be helping people.”

We are pleased to say that Eileen’s efforts have been met with much recognition, earning her many nominations for this year’s Belong Champion Awards. Despite it being a tough category, judges were in agreement and she is the recipient of the Volunteer Award 2025 – come on, Eileen!

Living the Values

Belong aspires to redefine what's possible for the wellbeing of older people, integrating services, housing and community to operate a continually improving and innovative care model.

We give our customers and colleagues a genuine voice in how we go about it and we speak to colleagues who embody Belong's values in their day-to-day work.



This issue we catch up with Christine Thomas, Belong Atherton Bistro & Catering Manager, a village stalwart who, having been part of the team since day one, has seen it all.

The Bistro has built quite a reputation locally, why do you think this is?

We're round the corner from Atherton high street and from the off we've been well-received by the public. Traditional meals have always gone down well; pies are popular! We've had to add more tables because the lunchtime rush is crazy – I've never known it to be any different here. Many of our customers from outside of the village go on to move in so it's a nice way for them to get to know us.

Your parties are just as legendary, what motivates you to throw a soirée?

Seeing customers smile, get up and dance! They love to get dressed up and that's all the motivation I need. St. Paddy's night always goes down well each year. As do the garden parties. We've thrown 1920s-themed parties, barbecues, and all the big occasions, Christmas, New Year's Eve, Halloween. This year is the village's 15th birthday, so we are preparing something big!

And we hear you held a special Christmas get together?

We wanted to do something for our community customers, so we made sweet treats to sell at our Christmas village fayre to raise funds which we then used to put on a lunch for them, free of charge. It was a surprise for them and they loved it.

You won a Belong Champion Award a few years ago, tell us more.

I've implemented the International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) at the village and passed on the learnings to other Belong villages. It's a global framework to improve safety for people with difficulty swallowing, and I attended many



seminars and conferences to build my expertise before developing special menus for the Bistro featuring puréed meals. They're designed using moulds, so they look just like 'regular' meals and continue to be appetising for customers.

What has kept you at the village all these years?

We have a well-established team, here. I'd say about three-quarters of my team have been here for over a decade, and many from day one. I know many of our customers personally, and it's always been a lovely place to work.

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

I go on holiday a lot! Benidorm and Dublin are my favourite places – I used to live in Dublin, so it's close to my heart. Looking after my grandson, Roman, also takes up much of my time. I also enjoy watching rugby, darts, and cage fighting (the world champion is from round here and his mother taught my kids at school!).

Noticeboard

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

New beret marks 50 years of service for Jerry

Crewe veteran, Jerry Bradley's 50 years since joining the Royal Navy has been marked with a surprise ceremony featuring naval and British Army dignitaries awarding a special beret and cap badge in recognition of his service.

Joining the 68-year-old at his home, Belong Crewe, family, friends, and carers shared a 'This is Your Life'-style presentation of Jerry's life to-date full of happy childhood memories, life milestones, and anecdotes of his years of proud service to his country.

With his original beret lost decades prior, Belong Crewe carers enlisted the help of the Royal Navy to replace the item, meanwhile coordinating the surprise with the Brookhouse Drive village's former exercise specialist and fellow Forces veteran, Zoë Robson.

Speaking of his big day, Jerry said: "Receiving my beret again after all these years means more than words can say. I can't thank you all enough for organising this day for me."



Pictured: Belong Crewe's Jerry Bradley (seated) enjoys 50 years since joining the Royal Navy

Jessica Butler, Experience Coordinator at Belong Crewe, added: "The Navy is hugely important to Jerry and his life, and we've supported him to attend many functions over the years. We wanted to do

something special, and we couldn't be more grateful to Zoë, the Royal Navy, and British Army for their assistance in making it all happen. Congratulations, Jerry!"

World Book Day celebrations

Residents and colleagues at Belong Warrington had a wonderful time celebrating World Book Day across the village in March.

Household residents embraced the theme by decorating their homes based on their favourite books, bringing some much-loved stories to life.

Congratulations to Threlfall House, who won the prize for best dressed household with their fantastic Charlie and the Chocolate Factory theme - it truly looked magical.

Residents were also treated to Mad Hatter's tea parties, and together they watched Alice in Wonderland, in The Venue, - the perfect way to continue the celebrations.

Louise, from the Experience Day Team, also visited households delivering Alice-themed treats and handing out World Book Day activities, which were enjoyed throughout the village.



Belong Warrington Residents and Colleagues celebrate World Book Day in style.



Mod community rides out to make Tony's day

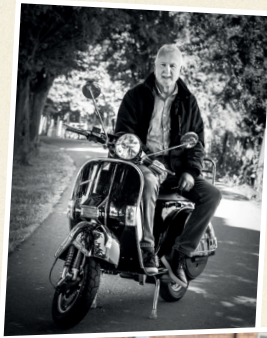
Local scooter enthusiasts came together to help Belong Macclesfield resident Tony Mannerings, who is living with dementia, roll back the years and reignite his lifelong passion for all things mod.

Originally from Dagenham, Tony is a lifelong scooter fan and veteran of the 60s mod scene in East London. When his family mentioned the idea of inviting other mods and scooter enthusiasts to his carers, they worked together to make it happen.

On the day, mods from Macclesfield Lambretta club jumped on their iconic scooters and made their way to the Kennedy Avenue village to meet Tony, give residents the chance to look at the scooters and complete several drive pasts.

Cheryl Davies, General Manager, at Belong Macclesfield, said: "Getting to know customers and going the extra mile to enhance their lives by celebrating who they are is a cornerstone of our approach, so when Tony's family suggested this, we saw a brilliant opportunity. It was a beautiful afternoon and seeing Tony's joy and excitement was heartwarming, and we are incredibly grateful to the Macclesfield Lambretta Club for this."

Commenting on the day, Tony's daughter Laura said: "Today was truly wonderful. Dad absolutely loved it. Seeing his face light up and his lovely smile and hearing him say 'wow' when the scooters arrived is a moment I'll never forget."



Pictured: (top) Tony on his own scooter (below) scooter enthusiasts visiting Tony Mannerings at Belong Macclesfield.

Belong Morris Feinmann Commemorates Holocaust Memorial Day

Belong Morris Feinmann has turned purple for Holocaust Memory Day (HMD) 2026 with a special service dedicated to the remembrance of Jews and others who suffered in the Holocaust under Nazi persecution.

True to this year's theme, 'Bridging Generations', the commemoration was led by Rabbi Perez and brought together the village's customers, their families, and the wider community of all ages, for prayers, conversation, and reflection.

Angela Lockett, experience and cultural coordinator at Belong Morris Feinmann, said: "Holocaust Memorial Day is one of the most important events in our calendar and the responsibility of remembrance really doesn't end with survivors. It is of the utmost importance that we continue to play our role in honouring the millions of people affected and preserve this legacy for generations to carry it forward."



Wigan's boomers mingle with gen alpha

Friendships across generations have been blossoming in Wigan as school pupils and residents at Belong Wigan have been enjoying regular meetups to spend quality time together, learn from one another, and reap all the benefits that companionship with those from a different era has to offer.

Each week a cohort of schoolchildren, aged between four to 11, pop over to the Millers Lane village to catch up with their older friends and share in an activity such as baking, arts and crafts, playing games, and singing together.

Stories, jokes, and even hand massages have been offered by the youngsters from Platt Bridge Primary School, much to the delight of residents. In turn, the

elders have relished the opportunity to impart their wisdom, share life experiences and support the children's confidence and social skills.

Speaking of the collaboration, Belong Wigan resident Pat Regan said: "I love the children coming in; it's wonderful to see their smiles, and to chat with them."

Brian Cherrington, also a resident, added: "It's just amazing. I love it!"

Charlene Frodsham, Experience Coordinator at Belong Wigan, said: "Thanks to our open-door policy, the community is a big part of our customers' lives. Since we began welcoming Platt Bridge Community School into our village, the response from our customers



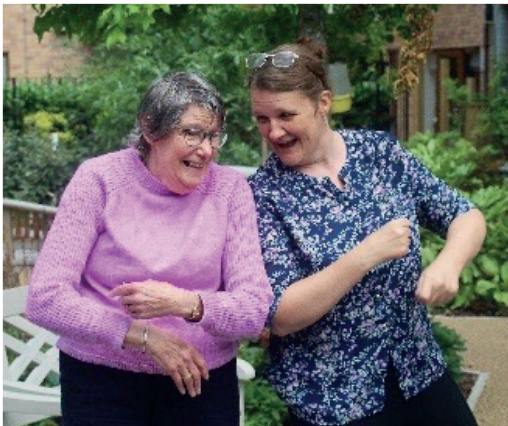
Pictured: Belong Wigan's Eileen Lyon enjoys a hand massage from her new friend.

has been truly moving. They eagerly await their arrival each week and seeing them come together fills the room with such warmth.

#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