



Belong Life

SUMMER 2023



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Word from the team

Sue Goldsmith, Belong Chief Operating Officer provides an update on the latest good news from across the organisation.

In a landmark moment for Belong, we have built bridges across continents, becoming co-founding members of the Household Model International Consortium, alongside other leading care providers in Australia and the USA. Together, we will advocate for the wider adoption of the household model by pooling our experience, skills, data and voice to promote the quality of life we see every day in our villages, as well as the practical benefits of the approach, such as the crucial role households play in infection prevention and management, as we saw throughout the pandemic.

Another recent highlight is the culmination of our latest collaboration with the Bluecoat and their artists, who have spent the best part of six months working at Belong Chester, bringing their arts specialisms to life with customers there. A local exhibition of the work can be enjoyed at the city's Grosvenor Museum and a symposium documenting the relationship and its research outcomes also takes place later this year. And speaking of Belong Chester, we can hardly believe July marked the village's first birthday.

Building on the awards success we saw in the last issue, we are pleased to congratulate our colleagues for more nominations and wins at prestigious industry awards, evidencing the fantastic contribution of our people whilst earning the organisation national recognition.

This summer has seen many a tombola spun, ice cream devoured and Pimm's toasted at our village summer fairs, inviting communities to enjoy the festivities, including Newcastle-under-Lyme's 850th anniversary for borough status, with the Belong Heritage Gallery playing a key role. Meanwhile, villages also marked Silver Pride, now a designated national pride event especially for the older LGBTQ+ community, perhaps taking inspiration from Belong Crewe's own annual celebrations since 2018.

I'm confident you'll take pleasure in the many happy stories from across the organisation, this summer.

Sue Goldsmith Belong Chief Operating Officer



Belong Chester celebrates one year since opening its doors

Happy 1st birthday, Belong Chester!

July 18th marked one year since Belong Chester opened its doors to become our eighth village and our first with an integrated children's nursery.

To celebrate, the village was transformed into an outdoor festival, complete with live music from vocalist, Lucky Locky, professional face painting, a candy corner, photobooth, games, and a big birthday cake.

The Nursery in Belong celebrated with a party for parents and residents, including a children's entertainer, party food and a bubble machine. The party ended with a graduation for the older children who leave in September to take their next step in life, starting at either pre-school or 'big school'.

Belong CEO, Martin Rix (pictured below with the nursery children), joined the party to present the young graduates with a high five and a party bag including a picture of them enjoying their time at the special nursery.

Ian Wheelton, a Belong Chester apartment tenant, said 'I will miss the children playing with the controls of my electric scooter. They have brought such love and laughter to the village, and I will miss their smiling faces. I know they will go on to do great things!'



New Chester exhibition showcases creative arts approach to dementia care

An arts research project exploring how creativity can promote the wellbeing of people living with dementia in Chester has been unveiled for public viewing.

Seen and Heard – Adventures in Arts and Dementia showcases the latest chapter in the collaboration between Belong Chester, and the Bluecoat, Liverpool's contemporary arts centre. Artists commissioned by the project, Brigitte Jurack, Mary Prestidge, Jonathan Raisin, Alan Dunn, Roger Hill and Tabitha Moses, have spent five months working with the village, as well as with children from The Nursery

in Belong. Now available for viewing, their activities in sculpture, dance, sound art, painting and drawing come to life through a fascinating exhibition at the Grosvenor Museum. Exhibits including ceramics, paintings, postcards and even tongue twisters are on display, alongside a film featuring interviews with the artists and participants, and a timeline of the wider Where the Arts Belong project.

In September, a symposium will bring together the project's findings, explore how it has helped those involved and discuss the wider implications for the use of arts in care environments.

Tabitha Moses, artist and project facilitator from the Bluecoat, said: "We are pleased to be showing Chester the fruits of our labour. We hope that the conversations that come out will go some way towards changing the perception of life with the condition and evidence the amazing impact arts engagement has, proving it is possible to live well with dementia."

Seen and Heard – Adventures in Art and Dementia is open for public viewing until 8 October 2023 at Grosvenor Museum, 27 Grosvenor Street, Chester, CH1 2DD.



Children's art installation unveiled at Belong Chester

Pictured: Children from Belgrave Primary School and Belong Chester Residents in front of the artwork

Year Two children from Belgrave Primary School were special guests at Belong Chester to see the unveiling of a marine-themed art installation, made from ceramics created by them.

Belgrave School was invited to create the colourful clay fish for the artwork in the village garden after pupil Naomi Shetty won a competition to design a card to welcome the residents of Belong Chester to the village when it opened last year.

The competition prize was for Naomi's class to take part in a ceramics workshop with acclaimed sculptor Brigitte Jurack, organised by Belong and charity Ready Generations, which runs the Nursery in Belong, located at Belong Chester.

There was more art created on the day as the children made a 'wishing wall' with messages of kindness for residents.

The idea was inspired by the centuries-old Japanese tradition of writing prayers or wishes on small wooden 'ema' plaques, which are often decorated with pictures and then hung at shrines. The most common wishes revolve around love, relationships, career success, academic achievement, health and prosperity.

Some of the messages read: "I hope to see you again soon", "I love Belong" and "You will always be my friend".

Commenting on the day and the impact on the children, Belgrave Primary School teacher Katie Buchanan said: "It was a wonderful opportunity to spend time with grandfriends in the local community. The children got a lot from our visit and are still talking about it."

Intergenerational connections are a central feature of life at Belong Chester. The care village is the region's first to

integrate a children's day nursery, and village and nursery teams working together to promote ground-breaking multi-generational approaches. There is growing evidence that these are changing the lives of both young and old for the better.



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 had a chat with **Eileen Thorniley, 81**, Tyldesley House resident at Belong Atherton, whose mantra is very much to always look on the bright side of life.

“I do love a giggle. Life would be terrible without it. And my life's good,” Eileen begins. She moved into one of the village's households last summer, though it wasn't the first time she'd lived at Belong Atherton, as she explains: “I came here two years ago following an operation for a couple of weeks' recuperation. I told my son on day one that I'd made my mind up that if I needed to move permanently, this would be the place. It's a home from home, like a hotel with benefits!”

Best of both worlds

Living on her own in nearby Leigh, indeed the time eventually came when Eileen needed somewhere with 24-hour care, when she was diagnosed with pulmonary fibrosis, a condition affecting the lungs. She tells us: “My son lives in London and he was coming up every week to see me at home and we knew we couldn't keep it up as his job was suffering. We needed a place where he knew I'd be safe, and I knew I'd be happy. Of course, I knew where I wanted to be and it's fantastic here. I had to leave my bungalow, but they can keep it. I don't care!”

During our interview in Eileen's room, we have a knock at the door. Dolly, another Tyldesley resident, has come to say hello. “She's brilliant,” Eileen tells us. “I've made lots of friends, which I didn't have when I was living on my own. We have a shared lounge where we meet for a natter and a brew. Some of us keep our doors open and only close them when we go to bed. It's a wonderful atmosphere.”

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



Pictured: Eileen shares a happy moment with Dolly.

Home from home

“Eileen continues: “My friends from Leigh come in and take me out to do things, or sometimes we stay and eat in the bistro, downstairs. I also enjoy group exercise sessions on Mondays and Fridays with Jonathan, the village's exercise specialist. And there's always activities going on. The other week, the venue was packed out when we had a singer perform for us.”

“I feel safe and looked after here. The rooms are nice, you can bring your own pictures and make it your own home. The staff are great, very patient and there's always someone to talk to. I love having a laugh and a bit of banter with everyone.”

“I do hope my story helps people to understand that they can make a wonderful home in a place like this. It's the best place to be.”

“ We needed a place where he knew I'd be safe, and I knew I'd be happy. Of course, I knew where I wanted to be and it's fantastic here. ”

Crewe's Betty commemorates 100th with rare second Royal message



Pictured: Betty marks 100 years with her two royal cards.

Marking a 100th birthday is a joyous event for all involved, and for Crewe's Betty Palmer, the occasion has proven to be extra special as she becomes one of a small number of people in receipt of royal well wishes from both King Charles III and Queen Camilla, as well as Elizabeth II.

Opening the congratulatory card surrounded by family, friends and Belong care village carers at her party, Betty said of reaching triple figures: “Your age is just a number but so lovely to receive such a very special card.”

It was in 2010 when Betty, along with husband, Eric, received their first message from the palace, this time from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II for their diamond wedding anniversary. Over one million messages were sent to mark birthdays and anniversaries during the late queen's reign¹, though it is thought that just a handful will be in possession of cards from two different monarchs.

Born in 1923 as Elizabeth Hughes, Betty has known five monarchs, twenty prime ministers and has witnessed enormous social and cultural change, perhaps the first, the prohibition of the sale of alcohol to under eighteens, coming into law just weeks after her birth.

Having grown up in Birkenhead Wirral, she met her future husband at a dance hall while on holiday with her friend in Wales in the late 1940s. After marrying in 1950, the couple resided in Liverpool where they welcomed the arrival of a baby girl, Sue, three years later. Betty worked as an auxiliary nurse in the city's Walton Centre, before they relocated to Cheshire.

In later life, Betty worked as a housekeeper into her 70s and continued supporting her family until Eric sadly passed away four years ago. Since then, she has continued to live

with her daughter and son-in-law semi independently, with the assistance of Belong at Home Crewe community carers. Earlier this summer, the dementia specialist helped her transition to a new home at Belong Crewe village on Brookhouse Drive.

Betty's attitude to work, resilience, and remaining active in later years may hold the secret to longevity, her daughter Sue Clark believes: “The Belong carers always ask how she can be so agile at her age. I think it might be to do with all those years spent on her feet, working and helping her immediate family.”

“Or, perhaps it's down to her daily tippie of brandy! She's had a wonderful life, with the support of her husband and we have many happy family memories, caravanning in Wales and enjoying cruises on the continent. She's a wonderful mum and I don't suppose many people get to have a mother at my age – we're lucky to have her.”

Jane Gabbert, area manager at Belong at Home Crewe, added: “We've known Betty and her family for a while now and to get to know them personally and be part of this chapter in their lives is wonderful. Many congratulations, Betty!”

¹British Royal Family. (2022). The first birthday cards from The King and The Queen Consort arrive in the post. (online). Last accessed 17 August 2023 at: <https://www.royal.uk/first-birthday-cards-king-and-queen-consort-arrive-post>



Over the 'Blue Moon'

Pictured: Jacob Epstein, Nigel Rothband, Geoffrey Rothband (front), Harry Rothband and Oliver Black

Belong Morris Feinmann has made headlines nationwide after resident and lifelong Manchester City fan Geoffrey Rothband (aged 102) was treated to a private viewing of all three trophies from the club's recent Treble winning season.

The club arranged for the UEFA Champions League, Premier League, and FA Cup trophies to be brought to him after finding out about one of their oldest supporters through his son, Nigel, who hosts weekly Manchester City podcast 'The Man City Show'. The story featured in both the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Express*, as well as regional and care titles.

Geoffrey, who has witnessed all of the Manchester City's top-flight wins in the past 100 years, was joined by his son, Nigel (aged 65), two grandchildren, Harry and Oliver, who are aged 28 and 31 respectively, and great grandson Jacob (aged 14), bringing together four generations of City fans for the occasion.

Other residents shared in the joy of the experience as the trophies were displayed for all to see in the village's Venue.

Commenting on the day, Geoffrey's son, Nigel, said: "My dad has been a City fan all his life, and all of us are City fans because of him, so he was incredibly excited about today and to see his face when the trophies were brought in was wonderful. I'm so grateful to the club for making his day and clearly those of so many other people here."

Belong Morris Feinmann General Manager, Carolyn Ball, added: "It's great when we can be involved in some of the best days of people's lives, even at the age of 102. Seeing the three trophies together is rare, and it's particularly special for our die-hard Manchester City fans. We're very grateful to Manchester City Football Club for this gesture and bringing the Belong community together, and I'd also like to thank the Rothband family for their part in making this happen."

Sadly, Geoffrey passed away two weeks after the trophies were brought to him. He is greatly missed by the team at Belong Morris Feinmann, and our thoughts are with his family at this difficult time. Rest in peace.



Behind the scenes with Norman Luft

Geoffrey wasn't the only Belong Morris Feinmann resident with a passion for Manchester City who was present at the trophies showcase. Also amongst them was Norman Luft, who lives on Olive household with his wife, Jackie, and was the club's doctor from 1976 to 2005.

Born in Crumpsall in 1936, Norman followed his father, who was a City fanatic, and started supporting the club when he was eight years old after the Second World War. He attended North Manchester Grammar School before studying medicine at the University of Manchester Medical School and later became a general practitioner at the nearby Brunswick Health Centre in Ardwick.

During this time, a chance acquaintance with the club's manager, Tony Book, resulted in him being offered a role as the club's first doctor. Tony used to take Norman's daughter to school because they lived around the corner from each other in Sale, but he didn't find this out until they met at a New Year's Eve party after befriending one of the team's players.

"He asked me if I would like to be the club's physician but said that he couldn't offer me a position without the chairman, Peter Swales', approval," says Norman. "The chairman later called me and told me to come to the Maine Road stadium. We got on well, and he said that they'd like to offer me the role, but they didn't have any money. Well, I wasn't interested in the money – this was my dream job."

Blue days

Norman wasn't just a doctor to the players, but everyone who worked for the club, including management, board members and cleaning staff. This meant that he got to know many people and struck up friendships with some of the biggest names in football over the years, in particular Billy McNeill, Alan Ball, Joe Corrigan, John Bell, Kevin Keegan and Mel Machin. In his nearly 30 years as club doctor, he worked with over 20 coaches and managers and says that he enjoyed every moment.

Pictured: Norman Luft

Perhaps the most famous incident of his career came in January 1996 when he played a role in saving the life of rising star Paul Lake after he was left unconscious following a clash of heads during a match against Leicester City. With speed of vital importance, Norman sprinted from the directors' box to help the physio move the player's tongue from blocking his airway, after which he was revived.

"My wife first heard about it on the news, and I had everyone calling me for comment," says Norman.

Belong Citizen

Norman moved to Belong Morris Feinmann with Jackie a couple of years ago after she was diagnosed with dementia. The two have been together since they were 17 and have two sons as well as a daughter.

Unfortunately, glaucoma has meant that Norman is partially blind and finds it difficult to watch football now, but he still enjoys listening to sports on the radio, including the recent season's victories.

Asked what he thought of the treble win, he said: "It was wonderful. What an amazing achievement."



Memory Lane...

For this issue of Memory Lane, we speak with John Woodhouse, Cedar House resident at Belong Macclesfield, who has seen the sights over 30 countries, from Asia to the Americas, and Europe to Oceania, and was, seemingly, an early pioneer of glamping.

"I was born in the jungle," John tells us, candidly. The son of a British Army officer, his family had been posted to Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, eight years before it would become modern day Malaysia. As a young boy, extensive travel was simply everyday life for John, as it was customary for his father to be reposted every few years, meaning the family moved around a lot, with Singapore, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia and the USA all counted as home at some point in his childhood.

Age 11, John and his parents returned to the UK, settling in Taunton, Somerset, where he enrolled in The Combined Cadets Force (CCF), a youth organisation operating in schools, with navy, army, air force and marine subdivisions.

Life goals

Later, more travels followed. John recalls: "Being in Kuwait, aged 17, sticks out in my mind. It was very hot and dry but fortunately for us, we had air conditioning in what was a huge apartment. We also had a beach on our doorstep and at the weekends, the family would jump in the car and head down the Gulf to the British Embassy area for a barbecue and a swim in the sea. It sounds a bit silly when I think about it, but this was our normality."

After completing education, working life commenced at British Petroleum, before moving to Macclesfield in 1979 to take up a role as a petrol station licensee. In 1998, he moved to Stockport, Greater Manchester, this time working for the Co-operative Group, initially taking calls from personal banking customers, before moving into the business side of operations until his retirement.

Travel adventures

Over the years, he enjoyed further travel, taking in more of Asia and the Middle East, Europe, parts of Africa, as well as the States, Mexico, and Caribbean. His favourite destinations include Thailand and a return to Malaysia. Speaking of his best trip, John says: "About 20 years ago, I took a tour of South Africa which included Kruger National Park and Robben Island (where Nelson Mandela spent the majority of his imprisonment). I remember seeing hippos floating under reeds, eating the vegetation and popping up for fresh air. It was wonderful."

In another vivid memory, John details arriving in Iran prior to the revolution, for which he was treated as a suspicious



John, age 8 (1963)

visitor. He says: "I was hurried into a holding room where I had to explain my passport was in my bag on the trolley. They gave me a stern warning: 'In future... keep your passport in your pocket.' I was only 16, so you can imagine how I was feeling!"

Thereafter, he was able to indulge in 'glamping' (glamorous camping), 'before that was even a thing,' he says, recalling big tents with showers and even a restaurant. John finishes: "I just like to see how everyone else lives their lives, local culture, different religions. We're all the same, really, just praying to different entities." Wise words from a truly worldly-wise gentleman!



John with parents, Muriel and Ron



John trying to cool off in Kuwait



John pictured recently at Belong Macclesfield



Pictured: Traci Herbert (left) and Rachel Smith (right) pay a visit to Belong at Home customer, Victoria Ashby.

A pair of Macclesfield sisters have found the perfect job that rewards them with fulfilling livelihoods whilst meeting the demands of their busy lifestyles: working alongside one another, caring for the town's older community.

Rachel Smith, 53, and Traci Herbert, 58, have found their vocation with Belong at Home, offering a helping hand supporting people to live independently in their homes. The Maxonians joined the home care service as part of its ongoing recruitment drive, as their personal circumstances necessitated a career move – both for very different reasons.

Safeguarding expert Rachel, then head of college student support services, sought a switch that aligned more closely with her emotional needs. She explains: "Dealing with complaints all day really took its toll; I needed a job that was more positive, where I could still have an impact on the lives of others."

It was after caring for her uncle in the final stages of his life, Rachel felt ready to embark on her new venture: "I'd known for a few years my next step would be in care. People are called to do it and I could wait forever and a day to be financially ready and it would never come."

Meanwhile, older sister Traci was battling to keep afloat the family pub within a hospitality sector up against increased costs and decreased patronage. Having heard of the flexibility that care afforded her sister, she drew upon her previous experience to re-enter the profession. Traci recalls: "I needed a supplementary income that would allow me to work around my business. Rachel

was really enthusiastic about Belong at Home and I've worked in care before, so it was the perfect opportunity.

"Growing up, we were always together; I took her everywhere. Our family's very close, so it's a joy to be able spend more time together and it's not uncommon for us to meet in Tesco's car park to share lunch and have a catch-up."

Working from the not-for-profit care operator's Upton Priory base, the team's work comprises visiting older people at home to assist with personal care, domestic tasks and arranging excursions, all whilst offering companionship and emotional support. Just six months into the job, Rachel has earned a newcomer award nomination at the Stars of Social Care Awards for Home Care.

Rachel continues: "I was thrilled to be shortlisted for a job that I love! I wasn't sure if I could apply without care experience, but as long as you're a people person, happy to look after others and make them comfortable, Belong at Home teaches you how to care for someone with dementia. The main things you need are confidence, approachability and empathy. My advice to anyone thinking about it is to just go for it."

Traci adds: "For me, the flexibility is perfect. I do around 25 hours per week which gives me time to complete all the pub admin in the day and then carry out care appointments in the evening or take full day shifts when it suits. We also get to spend more time with our parents; just recently, we celebrated mum's 80th after being able to swap some shifts around with the colleagues. It's been ideal for the whole family."

Living the Values

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



Pictured: Katie shares her big day with tenants Marilyn, Celia and Kath

For this issue, we caught up with Katie Gregson, receptionist at Belong Wigan, who has made many close relationships at her 'home from home'.

Tell us about your Belong career, so far.

I've been with Belong for about eight years. I started in the Belong at Home team, before moving to experience days. When the pandemic struck, activities continued but were limited in the early days and there were opportunities supporting the households and later, the reception. I really enjoyed being part of the front of house team and when a vacancy opened, I applied and got the job. That was two years ago and I'm still enjoying it.

Sounds like you enjoy Belong life, then?

Belong is a wonderful organisation to work for – I love working here. Each day is like visiting family as I'm very close with customers and colleagues. And, my nan, Celia, is an apartment tenant, and my mum is a support worker on one of the households, so we've three generations of our family here.

We've heard you like going the extra mile and you recently won an ACE colleague recognition award; tell us more!

I just like helping people. Many of our residents used to be tenants and I help out where I can. One customer needed support moving to a household and I volunteered to clear her apartment out for her. I also do online shopping

or grocery shopping for tenants; booking appointments, that sort of thing. It's nice to be a nice person and help others.

Is it true you invited tenants to your big day?

Ant and I were looking forward to getting married and we'd invited tenants to share our wedding with us. Then the pandemic struck, and we had to postpone. Two years ago, we were finally able to do it, though restrictions on guest numbers meant we had to change some plans, so we arranged for the ceremony to be streamed live in The Venue for tenants to watch within their support bubble. We even dropped off Prosecco and cake beforehand, meaning they could join in raising a glass. It was lovely to have them with us.

What do you get up to when you're not at the village?

I've a big family and we love to get away at the weekends – holidays, gigs, festivals, you name it, we're there! Next, we're off to a Haven holiday park in Essex, chosen by my daughter. And, I'm looking forward to a honeymoon in Turkey, next year.

In the Spotlight: Gaynor Warren

For this feature, we speak with Gaynor Warren, a new recruit to Belong at Home Crewe, whose tireless work supporting the pandemic's vaccination programme has earned her the highest civilian gallantry: the George Cross.

"It was really intense," Gaynor recalls of the peak of the Covid-19 vaccination programme, which she began volunteering for in February 2021. "We were working 12-hour shifts (with breaks) and seeing up to 2,000 people a day. One lady came in wearing her Sunday best and told me it was the first time she'd been out of the house in a year; it was just remarkable."

The unprecedented pressure Gaynor and colleagues across health and social care faced and their exceptional response to the pandemic, has not gone unnoticed. The Clap for Carers movement saw millions take to their doorsteps for a weekly gesture of appreciation for key workers.

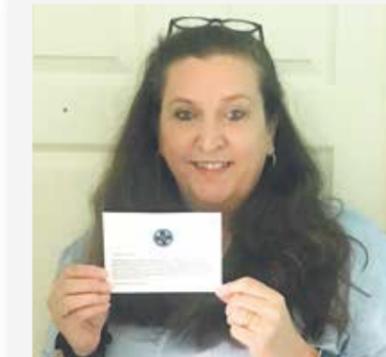
In 2021, Queen Elizabeth II awarded the NHS the George Cross in recognition of 73 years of dedicated service, including the courageous efforts of healthcare workers across the country battling Covid-19. Since its inception in 1940, the award, equivalent to the military Victoria Cross, has been bestowed just 416 times, including three collectively,

with the late monarch's award being the most recent.

Gaynor continues: "I came home and in the post was the pin badge. I thought, 'Wow!' It's lovely and a nice surprise, though to me, I was just doing my job and we were pleased to have so many people come forward. Every vaccination meant we were one step closer to normality, I'm pleased to have been a part of it."

Having been furloughed whilst working as a housekeeper for a hotel chain, Gaynor took the opportunity to volunteer as a vaccinator with St John Ambulance, bringing her previous nurse experience, as well as time spent looking after relatives living with cancer. She says: "I wanted to help and when I saw the job advert, I thought 'Yes, I can do that. I'm ready to go back to care.'"

As the vaccination programme began to wind down earlier this year, Gaynor looked for her next career step, choosing Belong at Home. She says: "I



Pictured: Gaynor, with the specially designed badge pin version of the George Cross, and message of congratulations from Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.

love my job! I didn't think I'd be able to do it all, but the training and support has been fantastic. I especially enjoy exploring the small things I can do to make customers' lives a little easier, and it's rewarding being with them and seeing their smiling faces when I visit. They're more thrilled with the George Cross than I am – they love chatting about it."

Gaynor's work ethic and performance has also been recognised by Belong customers and colleagues as she was one of April's ACE colleague recognition award winners. We are very pleased to have her in the Belong family and say, congratulations, Gaynor, for both of your award wins.



Volunteer profile

In this feature, we recognise the outstanding contributions of volunteers to the Belong community. Earlier this year, hospitality and leisure chain, Village Hotel, paid Belong Warrington a visit to spruce up the gardens, ready for a summer of barbecues, walking club sessions, and ice creams in the sunshine.

In May, Belong Warrington welcomed five staff from Village Hotel as part of their 'Be Green Day', celebrating International Day for Biological Diversity, helping out at local businesses and getting green fingered in the name of neighbourly spirit.

The volunteers lent their gardening, DIY and painting skills to spruce up the grounds for residents and apartment tenants to enjoy, whilst work at the village's entrance offers visitors a cheery welcome each time they visit.

Speaking of the volunteers' contribution, Louise Kelly, experience

coordinator at Belong Warrington, said: "We are really grateful to Village Hotel and their team who came to work on the gardens. Our lovely helpers were treated to a well-earned meal in the bistro afterwards, where they spent some time chatting with customers."

Thanks to the team's efforts (and a season of sunshine and rainstorms), the garden has flourished, with wildflowers adorning the flowerbeds attracting bees and butterflies, offering an attractive place to relax with friends. So far this summer, the village has hosted a community fair, barbecues

and the walking club continues to meet for regular trips, both around the gardens and outside the grounds.

Louise continues: "You can never underestimate the positive impact that nature has on wellbeing – even popping outside for five minutes has a wonderful effect. Customers love being outside, enjoying our beautiful gardens, so from one village to another: thank you, Village Hotel!"

To find out about volunteering opportunities with Belong, contact your local village, or email: jobs@belong.org.uk

Belong promotes LGBTQ+ awareness

As June 24th marked the UK's first national Silver Pride celebration of LGBTQ+ life and culture for the over 55s, Belong is leading the promotion of awareness and appreciation of the needs of older LGBTQ+ people living in care.

The dementia specialist is implementing the Skills for Care LGBTQ+ learning framework, equipping its teams with the knowledge, values and best practice to support its lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and other customers whose outlook and needs can differ from others who share their home. Additionally, the move helps Belong build on its inclusive culture empowering colleagues to be confident in who they are at their place of work.

Research has shown that whilst older people have understandable concerns making the transition to living in care environments, older LGBTQ+ people envisage their own distinct challenges, such as carers who lack communication tools to discuss gender identity or sexual orientation, even if they have favourable attitudes to the LGBTQ+ community¹

Caroline Baker, head of dementia and care quality at Belong, provides more detail: "We believe people should be able to live and work as they choose to present themselves as this makes for a diverse, respectful and cohesive society. We have a responsibility to all our customers and colleagues to engender this culture, and this new training serves as one of many ways we achieve this."

Belong has a history of supporting its customers, notably, accompanying them to Pride events, as well as other festivities. Since 2018, it has hosted its own Silver Pride, inviting the local community to join. The charitable organisation has also proactively developed relationships with LGBTQ+ sexual health charities and social groups for older people, providing networking opportunities for all its customers and colleagues.

"We believe people should be able to live and work as they choose to present themselves as this makes for a diverse, respectful and cohesive society."

For one person, Belong's approach to care has proven to be literally life changing. Samantha Wolsey, 68, moved into one of Belong Wigan's independent living apartments five years ago, presenting as 'Billy'. She quickly discerned the team's attitudes and the culture championed by Belong, she finally felt comfortable to share who she is with the world.



Pictured: Samantha Wolsey, Belong Wigan

Having grown up in a largely conservative Britain, prior to homosexuality being decriminalised in 1967, as a young boy, Samantha's father took her to a psychologist for conversion therapy treatment where she was tied to a bed with straps to administer electric shocks to her body. In adulthood and working as a builder, she continued to present as male, not quite finding the courage to present as she wanted to.

She recalls: "I would dress in clothes designed for women in private but never in public – the first time everyone saw the real me was at Belong Wigan. I was on the way to a fancy dress party and joined everyone in the garden for a pre-party drink. We were all laughing and joking about me wearing a dress and something in me felt ready to tell them, 'This is me'. So, I did."

Belong responded by proposing a celebratory party, bringing everyone together to commend Samantha's courage and share in her happy news. Charlene Frodsham, experience coordinator at Belong Wigan, said: "When she told us, we were surprised but everyone was keen to support. At her party, Samantha said with tears in her eyes, 'I didn't expect all this'. We couldn't be prouder of her and we hope her story inspires others to show the world who they are."

¹BAILEY et al. (2022). *Equal but different! Improving care for older LGBT+ adults*. Age and Ageing, Volume 51, Issue 6, June 2022. Article last accessed 19 June 2023 at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afac142>

Crewe's Silver Pride goes national



Silver Pride, the annual celebration of LGBTQ+ life and culture, especially for the over 55s, has returned to Crewe, with this year making for an extra special occasion as the first national pride awareness day for older people.

Guests from all over the town paid a visit to the village to revel in the colourful festivities, with mistress of ceremonies, Dame Dolly, leading the fun. Entertainment included a fashion parade competition, tombola and stalls, face painting, food and sweet treats, and body popping performances from young troupe, TGA Street Dance Crewe.

Meanwhile, sexual health charity, Body Positive North Wales & Cheshire, and Silver Rainbows social network, were on hand to provide advice, support and companionship, whilst attendees enjoyed the opportunity to meet Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, before making the most of a visiting ice cream van.

Jessica Butler, experience coordinator at Belong Crewe, said: "Our customers and visitors have had a wonderful day. It's really important to us that everyone can be themselves and express who they are, and we're especially pleased to see Silver Pride grow to become a much-anticipated annual event."

Silver Pride has been a regular staple in Belong Crewe's community events calendar since 2018. This year, the village was joined by other progressive care operators up and down the country after activity and engagement charity, National Activity Providers Association (NAPA), promoted the day to widen participation across the UK.

Pictured: Residents and the team at Belong Crewe celebrate Silver Pride.

Jessica continued: "We're thrilled that Silver Pride has become a nationwide event. Over 50 years since the first Pride marches in the US and UK, we finally have a day that reveres older LGBTQ+ people whilst bringing all ages together to share in the celebration. Talk about community spirit!"

The news follows Belong's announcement implementing the Skills for Care LGBTQ+ learning framework which will equip its teams with the knowledge, values and best practice to support its lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and other customers, whose needs can differ from others who share their home. Additionally, the move builds on the organisation's inclusive culture empowering colleagues to be confident in who they are at their place of work as it continues its recruitment drive.

"It's really important to us that everyone can be themselves and express who they are."

Belong Macclesfield's, Chris Jones, takes home national housing award



Pictured: Chris Jones with his award.

Perhaps one of the greatest unsung heroes in the care sector is the caretaker, working hard behind the scenes, taking on all essential maintenance demands, and actioning the odd jobs that make care environments a little bit nicer for everyone.

And for Belong Macclesfield's Chris Jones, his personal dedication and commitment earned him The Care Handyman of the Year Award at the Housing with Care Awards 2023.

An industry judging panel was full of praise as the outcome was revealed at a dazzling ceremony in London.

Notable examples of Chris's efforts include staying late and working extra on weekends, getting to know customers' families, and carrying tenants' shopping. Last year, he funded his own skydive to help raise funds for the village's Jubilee celebrations, raising over £1,000 alongside colleagues for a garden tea party. Chris said: "It was truly overwhelming to be announced as winner, and I couldn't have been prouder to represent Belong on a national stage. It was certainly a night to remember."

Caroline Ray, General Manager at Belong Macclesfield added: "Chris has natural empathy, respect and regard for everyone; his instinct to make things the best they can be makes him truly special. He's a such big part of our community – when he's on holiday, we all miss him. Congratulations on your award, Chris!"

Other finalists at the Housing with Care Awards were:

- Emma Palin, Experience Coordinator, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme – Activities Coordinator of the Year Award
- Belong Crewe Experience Team – The Tenant Co-production Award
- Nursery in Belong Chester – The Supported Housing Innovation Award



Pictured, left to right: Nicola Head, Front of House Manager Belong Macclesfield; Emma Palin, Experience Coordinator & Hannah Barrington-Parry, Nurse – Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme; Emma Spurrer, Jodie Challinor and Leanne Bone – Belong Crewe Experience team; Charlotte Parton, Experience Coordinator Belong Chester; Chris Jones, Caretaker Belong Macclesfield



Awards, awards, and more awards!

Celebrating the hard work, dedication and achievements of our colleagues is of great importance and all customers and their families are invited to put forward Belong colleagues for regular A.C.E. (Achievement, Caring, Extra mile) Awards, and of course, our annual Belong Champion Awards which commend exceptional performance from across the organisation. We are especially pleased when our people are recognised with industry awards, representing Belong on a regional and even a national stage. Read on for recent highlights of these fantastic achievements.

Belong Crewe win National Dementia Care Award

This summer, we had more happy news at the 13th National Dementia Care Awards, with colleagues travelling to Hampshire to enjoy a lunchtime event at the beautiful Winchester Cathedral.

Belong Crewe picked up the Outstanding Dignity and Respect in Dementia Care Award and general manager, Cheryl Davies, said: "It means the world to us to achieve recognition for the hard work our colleagues put in every day they come to work. Our customers and their loved ones really are like family to us and to receive such wonderful feedback from them is especially pleasing, as is this award win."

Also flying our flag, Belong Atherton represented for the Best Dementia Care Home award, whilst The Nursery in Belong Chester earned a finalist placing for Outstanding Dementia Care Innovation. Well done to all!

Earlier this year, Belong Crewe was crowned national winner of the Palliative Care/End of Life Award at the Great British Care Awards, having already earned the regional distinction. It is the only care provider in Cheshire to maintain both an Outstanding CQC

rating and Gold Standards Framework Platinum status for end-of-life-care provision. Belong also holds the Gold Investors in People accreditation as it continues to support the local workforce with on-the-job training opportunities for those interested in building a career in care.



Pictured: Belong Crewe Lead Senior Support Workers, Stacey Wright and Paige O'Neill, with the Outstanding Dignity and Respect in Dementia Care Award.

Wigan home carers win award for 'making wishes come true'



Community support workers at Belong at Home Wigan have been commended for exceeding the duties of their job, picking up The Above & Beyond Community Team accolade at this year's national Stars of Social Care – Home Care Awards.

Pictured, left to right: Belong at Home colleagues Rachel Smith and Karen Burgess (Macclesfield); Debra Moore and Sophie Walls (Wigan); Clare Sant and Jane Gabbert (Crewe).

After collecting their trophy from ITV This Morning presenter, Josie Gibson, the team were praised by the London ceremony's panel of judges, who summarised: "This team go above and beyond to promote independence and wellbeing with the people they support. They have an innovative approach to making wishes come true, from arranging dance shows and making ice cream sundaes! They have a culture of kindness for both each other and the people who draw on services, with one customer describing them as, 'guardian angels'."

Joining Belong at Home Wigan were more colleagues competing for accolades. Having begun her care career just last year, Belong at Home Macclesfield's Rachel Smith was nominated for The New to Care Award. Meanwhile, Belong at Home Crewe also contended to be named The Above & Beyond Community Team.

Belong at Home carers named country's best for sixth year running

Carers at Belong at Home have been recognised for their hard work and commitment looking after the older community, having been named in the top home care groups in the UK by leading online reviews website, homecare.co.uk, for the sixth year running.

Ranked first place in the country's Top 20 Large & Mid-size Home Care Groups 2023, the result based on feedback from client and family reviews also distinguishes the domiciliary care operator as the only not-for-profit service in the country to have won the award every year since 2018.

Supporting people throughout the North West and Midlands in their homes, as well as those residing in the Belong village apartments, to live independently, the dementia specialist has achieved a group score of 9.9 out of 10 for assisting with one-to-one personal care, housekeeping, food preparation, as well as running errands, helping with excursions and offering companionship.

One daughter of a client reviewed: "All the staff are caring, friendly and professional and have provided excellent support for Mum who has mixed dementia."

Another said: "They are very well trained and have proved to be totally dependable, flexible to our changing needs and always willing to go the extra mile."

The accolade comes as the organisation continues its recruitment drive, providing opportunities for support workers, as well as training roles for local people new to care. Its 'for people, not profit' strategic approach enables it to continuously reinvest in its team to provide award-winning care to customers. Belong at Home is one of the few community care operators to recompense colleagues for travel time between appointments, as well as for client visits.

Andrew Shield, business manager at Belong at Home, said: "This award marks another year of continued success, and we're delighted to receive such positive feedback from our clients and their loved ones. As we grow, we invite anyone interested in a fulfilling career helping others to get in touch and be part of our fantastic team."



Pictured: Belong Warrington team (L-R): Nicola Hewitt, Paula Patterson, Emma Gorton, Rachael Gray, Nicole Whittaker and Gill Lancaster.



Belong Macclesfield team (L-R): Inez Robert, Nicola Roberts, Nicola Hart, Karen Burgess, Traci Herbert, Rachel Smith, Alix Pool and Kathryn Keogh.



Pictured: Belong at Home Crewe team (L-R): Tina Wright, Gaynor Warren, Becky Walker, Stacey Singh, Donna Burrow, Jane Gabbert, Donna Woolrich, Kate Jones, Helen Pemberton, Clare Sant and Leanne Bone

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



Pictured: Household resident, Adrian Howell.



Pictured: Christine Dakin (right) with Jane Griffiths from ArtSpace Macclesfield.

Marking Macclesfield history

Macclesfield readers will be all too familiar with the Barnaby Festival, held almost every other year since the town was granted its Borough Charter in the 13th Century.

Many customers and colleagues have fond memories of the festival before it went quiet for a few years. It was reborn in 2010 as a celebration of contemporary arts and culture.

Belong Macclesfield customers contributed to this year's event with the help of Macclesfield Community ArtSpace. The local art group popped in to support the making of flags which took pride of place on their parade float. A fantastic project for all involved.

Summer fair

Belong Atherton customers, joined family, friends and members of the community for the village's annual summer fair, on Saturday 22 July.

Everyone enjoyed a fun-filled afternoon for all the family with food and gift stalls, prize tombola, raffles, entertainment, and a selection of food and drink on sale in The Bistro.

Customers and members of the community enjoy the fun of the fair.



Intergenerational Choir Hits High Note

An intergenerational choir at the Nursery in Belong Chester, has expanded to involve the local community after proving a hit with old and young alike.

Working alongside Belong's intergenerational practice lead, Sophie McKeon, the children and residents select the songs they wish to sing, including Edelweiss and Somewhere Over The Rainbow. They have also chosen to incorporate drumming sessions involving a large gathering drum and smaller hand drums.

Members of the local community are now getting involved, with resident Shirley Heaton attending with her daughter Tracey, and the father of Amanda, who leads the sessions, also starting to join in. Local pianist Pete Hardie, who volunteers at the village, has begun playing piano to accompany the singing residents, tenants and relatives. Thank you!



Pictured: Making music – older and younger members of the Sankofa Choir take part together.



Pictured: Shirley Mollet, Belong Warrington experience day customer, with her new friends Frankie and Ronnie from Stockton Heath Primary School.)

Belong Warrington turns chocolate factory

If there's one shared love that brings people of any and all ages together, it has to be chocolate!

Embracing an intergenerational experience with their primary school friends, residents at Belong Warrington have transformed their home into a Willy Wonka factory by becoming chocolatiers in the name of indulging their mutual affection for confection.

The golden ticket guests, aged between 5 and 11 from Stockton Heath Primary School, were invited for an afternoon and kindly donated ingredients for use, working alongside residents to whip up sweet treats.

Bents by bus!

Belong Warrington customers enjoyed a day trip to the garden centre with a twist: travelling in style on their own double decker bus!

Thanks to Andrew Campman, a friend of the village who loaned the bus, the group made the 20-mile round journey to Bents Garden and Home centre, where they spent the day appreciating summer plants before exploring the shop and indulging in a spot of lunch at the café.

Experience coordinator, Louise Kelly, said: "It was wonderful seeing our customers' faces light up as they reminisced about when they used to catch the bus. Thank you to the amazing Andrew for allowing us to use it – everyone had a marvellous day!"



Barbara Bell and Louise prepare for boarding



June Doxey admires the displays

Fun of the fair

Belong Crewe customers, colleagues, friends and family were joined by members of the local community recently, for an afternoon of fun at their annual summer fair.

There was a lively afternoon of entertainment, with craft stalls, prizes to be won, plus barbecue food and drinks. Everyone had an amazing time; well done team Crewe!



Pictured: Belong Crewe Apartment tenants, Doreen and Mary, take a selfie with their friend.

Wet 'n' wild

June marked The Wildlife Trust's annual 30 Days Wild challenge, encouraging the nation to do one 'wild' thing a day, every day, throughout the month.

Complementing nature-themed crafts, quizzes and gardening sessions, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme customers made a trip to Westport Lake, Stoke's largest expanse of water, where everyone enjoyed the fresh air and the chance to observe the wildlife. A lovely day out, shared with friends.



Pictured: Patricia Whitwick



Pictured: William Frost and support worker, Chelsea Simpson-Dono

We are sailing

Customers of Belong Wigan enjoyed setting sail on the Rose of Parbold, during a series of trips planned during June and July.

Everyone enjoyed a delightful day taking in the scenic views with a delicious afternoon tea on-board.



Pictured: Margaret (top left), Vera and Bill (top right) and Karen, Mary, Peter, Charlene, Robert and Beryl (lower L-R).



Need a little help?

As well as all the personal and medication support you would expect from an award-winning home care provider, your friendly **Belong at Home** team are on hand to assist with the seemingly little things in life, which can make a big difference:

Domestic calls

Companionship

Trips out

Shopping and appointments

Or, if you need some support but it's not listed, let us know as we can probably help.

Contact **Belong at Home:**
homecare@belong.org.uk and we'll be happy to discuss your needs further.

www.belongathome.org.uk



Your life, your pace, your way.