

# Belong Life

AUTUMN/WINTER 2023



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## Word from the team

**This issue, chief executive Martin Rix introduces a new era for the Belong brand, along with happy news of achievements, village activity, and upcoming developments to look forward to.**

Welcome to the new look and feel Belong! We hope you like it and that it will help us project the innovative and forward-looking focus of the organisation through a fresh, modern identity. You may have started to notice the new designs on banners and posters around the villages, as well as online, and hopefully you've spotted our Social Impact Report for 2022/23. This gives a good account of the past year and is well worth a read if you haven't already. Copies are on display in the literature stands or can be requested from reception.

In November, we marked the official opening of Belong Chester, with the local MP, Samantha Dixon, joining us to officiate at the ceremony, which was attended by the village community, along with special guests. By this time next year, we'll be looking forward to welcoming our first customers at Belong Birkdale – keep an eye out for updates from 2024.

We have enjoyed a busy season on the awards front. We were absolutely thrilled to win the Innovation in Care Award at the prestigious LaingBuisson Awards, in part for our intergenerational care village, Belong Chester. We also achieved a finalist placement for Excellence in Residential Care. Meanwhile, our teams achieved no fewer than 16 finalist shortlistings at regional Great British Care Awards heats, with three taking home winner trophies.

Congratulations also go to Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme and Belong Warrington for achieving the platinum Gold Standards Framework accreditation for high quality approach to end-of-life care – the first time for our Staffordshire village to be assessed for this.

Over at Belong Warrington, we welcome Barry Devine to the team as General Manager. He joins from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) with extensive provider-side experience prior to this and I'm sure will prove an asset to the village and wider team.

In other news, we marked World Alzheimer's Day and the National Day of Arts in Care Homes and were delighted to see so many customers and colleagues take part in the On Your Bike inter-village challenge for a bit of friendly competition for Falls Prevention Awareness Week.

I'd also like to thank everyone who has contributed to our annual Customer Satisfaction Survey – your views are invaluable in helping to shape the future of the organisation and we are poring over the positive and constructive feedback and will provide details of the results in due course.

For now, grab your favourite hot drink and enjoy the read.

**Martin Rix Belong Chief Executive**



*Pictured: Barry Devine*

## New Manager for Belong Warrington

**A former Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspector, with over 23 years' experience of adult social care, Barry Devine, has been appointed General Manager of Belong Warrington.**

As an inspector for the health and social care regulator, Barry was responsible for assessing providers' compliance with standards, as well as using his background and CQC operational experience to inform policy making and help design and deliver training for inspection managers on its implementation.

He also brings over 15 years' experience in roles supporting autistic people and people with a learning disability to live independent and fulfilled lives, including building and training teams of support workers to provide high-quality support for people living in their own homes.

Speaking of his appointment, Barry said: "I love being around people and working within teams, and I'm really looking forward to working alongside the great team at Belong Warrington. My passion is learning alongside people, using the skills and knowledge I have gained to help ensure our teams are as effective in ensuring people have positive outcomes that are meaningful to them. This includes ensuring that teams are made up of motivated people with the passion, skills and resources to provide the best possible care and support.

"I have had the privilege of supporting and being taught by many amazing people. From working with them, I've learned that true person-centred practice comes from the recognition that all people are unique and valuable. Not only the people we are supporting, but colleagues too – I believe a person's needs are best met by people whose own needs are met. These will be the principles that guide everything I do at Belong Warrington."

Belong's Chief Executive Officer, Martin Rix, added: "We were very impressed by Barry's CV and his passion for care, as well as his participatory approach to leading and inspiring others. He also has extensive knowledge of regulation and standards, and this, combined with his personal qualities, will help to ensure that care at Belong Warrington is always of a very high quality. He is a great fit for our Belong team and we are extremely pleased to have him on board."

## Belong Wins National Award for Innovation



*Pictured: (From left): Belong Head of Marketing and Communications Maha Hamer, Belong Chester General Manager Patrick Butler, Belong Chief Operating Officer Sue Goldsmith, Belong Chief Executive Officer Martin Rix.*

**Belong has been recognised for its pioneering approach to care at the prestigious LaingBuisson Awards, which celebrate the industry's finest examples of best practice and excellence.**

Belong won the Innovation in Care Award, in part for the opening of the North-West's first intergenerational care village, Belong Chester, which incorporates a fully integrated research nursery, the Nursery in Belong, operated by national charity Ready Generations.

Some of the first residents to move into the village, including those living with dementia, are exhibiting improvements in physical and mental well-being and reporting how the nursery has enriched their lives and given them new purpose and meaning. Ready Generations works with a number of research universities to investigate these benefits.

The judges commented: "Belong's visionary approach is yielding tangible results addressing notoriously difficult challenges, such as reducing isolation and loneliness and having a positive impact on residents with dementia through interaction with children and through community networks more broadly."

Commenting on the award win, Belong Chief Executive, Martin Rix, said: "We're delighted to receive recognition at such prestigious national awards, not simply for pioneering groundbreaking models of care, but for demonstrating the positive impact these are having on people's lives. Congratulations to the team at Belong Chester for what they have achieved in their first year."

Ready Generations co-founder Sue Egersdorff added: "We are incredibly pleased to be recognised for demonstrating the benefits of multi-generational relationships for both young and old, as well as contributing to the pool of knowledge on best practice in this growing area at these and other prestigious professional awards."

At Belong Chester, an intergenerational practice lead works with village and nursery teams to support the planning, coordination and evaluation of a range of intergenerational opportunities, including weekly stay-and-play sessions, a multi-generational choir, storytelling, poetry and dance workshops.



*Pictured: The Belong team collect their award.*

**Read more awards news on pages 10 - 11.**

## 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 spoke to **Celia Burgess**, who lives in Wigan with her husband **John**, and together they receive support from Belong at Home.



Pictured: Celia and John Burgess

**“We were married 55 years ago in September, and they brought us flowers and a cake and arranged for us to go to the Park Hotel for dinner. We were treated like the King and Queen.”**

Celia and John have developed close connections with Belong at Home colleagues who support them.

“We look forward to them coming each day. With our only family living in Birmingham, sometimes they are the only other people we see. They're like family,” says Celia, and she lists their names. “John calls them ‘our girls’, but we can't forget about Adam, who is brilliant. Each one of them is an angel. They are so kind and caring. For example, they will offer to get John's newspaper if the weather is bad, and they brought us more water during the heat-wave last year.”

The support from Belong at Home is meaning that Celia and John can continue enjoy life to the full and remain independent.

“Dementia has left us stuck. I'm not sure that we could live here on our own,” Celia adds. “We don't know what we would do without them.”

Their experience with Belong begins two years ago, when John was diagnosed with dementia and was no longer able to drive. With Celia also having impaired mobility and using a wheelchair, the couple's son Mark, who lives in Birmingham, suggested that they might benefit from support with daily tasks from Belong at Home.

“I can't stand up for long periods of time, so cooking can be a challenge, and John's medical issues require him to take medication and attend appointments,” says Celia. “Now, I phone the bistro at Belong Wigan each morning, and they tell me the menu for the day. I order what we would like, and they bring us lovely freshly cooked meals. They will do the shopping for us. It's not just the help getting John to appointments that's important – we might forget them, and they remind us, as well as about changes in medication, which is really reassuring.”

It is more than just the essentials for life with which Belong at Home helps them.

“We go out every Tuesday, to places like the garden centre, Pennington Flash nature reserve, to see the wildlife and enjoy a walk, and the local community centre. If it's raining, we'll have what we call a ‘musical afternoon’, where we put music on and watch musicals. It creates a lovely atmosphere.”

“John has recently lost weight, and Christine has helped him buy new clothes that he feels comfortable in. I struggle with managing my wardrobe, and together we swap clothes between seasons.”

Celia says that they particularly enjoy going out for meals, and Belong at Home has helped the couple celebrate recent wedding anniversaries:

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



## Community camaraderie flourishes in David's garden

Pictured: David (back row, left) and Belong Wigan friends



The garden before the transformation



Fruits of labour: the garden makeover

**L**ooking out for others and helping those in need is the mantra of a group of kind-hearted Wiganers who made it their mission to support a friend in need, offering a little TLC to his garden after finding out he was struggling to maintain it on his own.

Wigan born and bred, David Ratcliffe has been part of the gardening club at the Belong care village in Platt Bridge for the past few years, just one of the activities he participates in as part of the ‘Experience Days’ day care service he also attends. It was when the group paid a visit to the local garden centre, he confided in his friends that his own back yard was becoming a little tricky to keep on top of.

Charlene Frodsham, experience coordinator at Belong Wigan, provides more detail: “We were enjoying our day trip when David mentioned how his gardening was becoming a challenge for him. Everyone felt compelled to help and we said, ‘Do you know what? Let's go and sort it’ – and that's what we did!”

Thanks to the enthusiasm and hard work of the club, David's garden has been tidied and transformed to create the perfect home for flowers, whilst attracting birds, insects, and wildlife. Together, the group took advantage of the recent unseasonably warm weather by weeding, trimming hedges and sweeping, before planting hardy plants to survive the coming months, ready for their companion to enjoy next springtime.

David said of his friends: “It meant a lot to me for my Belong friends to come round and help, as I find it difficult to manage on my own. Since then, I've been able to enjoy sitting outside and I can keep on top of it. I'm very grateful for their support.”

## Mod community pulls together to fulfil Jimmy's dream

Pictured: Wigan Scooter Club visits Belong

**F**or Jimmy Reynolds, the dream of a lifetime came true over the weekend as the Mod received the welcome surprise of two dozen fellow Mods, along with their iconic scooters, on his doorstep.



Pictured: Jimmy gives a thumbs up from his sidecar.

The 70-year-old resident of Belong Atherton is currently in receipt of palliative care at the village and had shared his ambitions to rekindle his passion with his carers, who put the wheels in motion to make happiness happen for their customer.

As a result of their efforts, kind-hearted Mods from Wigan Scooter Club and Bolton Two Hats Scooter Club jumped on their scooters and made their way to the Mealhouse Lane village to meet their new friend, take him for a ride around the local area and enjoy the chance to ‘talk shop’ and share their stories.

Speaking of the experience, Jimmy said: “When I saw what my carers had done, I was both shocked and overwhelmed. This was a great thing, and I am grateful to all that gave up their time to do this for me.”



Modernists, commonly known as Mods, are baby boomers who made their mark frequenting jazz clubs, donning fine Italian suits whilst their trademark Lambretta and Vespa scooters were parked outside. Today, the subculture continues with a more casual approach to fashion, with Parkas and Harrington jackets and boots key wardrobe staples, with scooters enduring the key part of the lifestyle.

Kim Calland, experience coordinator at Belong Atherton and Jemma Sharratt, village nurse manager, explain more about how the plan came together: “A big part of our role is supporting our customers to do the things they want to do, so we sat down with our wonderful Jimmy to find out more.

“Straightaway, we hatched a plan to make his wishes happen, reaching out to my former university lecturer, Dean McShane – also a Mod – who put a shout out to his community to visit Jimmy and the response was overwhelming, we couldn't believe it when so many of them braved the rain and turned up on our doorstep. We can't thank them enough for their generosity.”

Following the happy event, tweeting on social media platform, X, Dean McShane said: “A huge thank you to the amazing people from the scooter clubs and Belong who gave Jimmy a dream day! He went out in the side car and was given full Mod 5-star treatment. Faith in humanity restored, up the Mods!”

# Memory Lane...

**F**or this issue of Memory Lane, we share a heartwarming story of a reunion of friends at Belong Warrington. Diane Wrench and Pat Waywell have had the surprise of a lifetime, meeting again at the village, 40 years after seeing each other last.

Our story begins on Cliftonville Road in the Woolston area of Warrington, just a 10-minute drive from the care village. Two young girls, Pat and Diane, were thick as thieves as they grew up together on the street, devising games and spending hours bouncing balls off walls and the road kerbs. They also recall going to Sunday School together, as well as taking piano lessons. "I didn't get too far with this," Pat remembers, whilst Diane adds: "I didn't either!"

The pair had forged a close friendship, with Diane's mother sometimes caring for Pat, and the families shared holidays caravanning in Wales. As teenagers, Pat met William, or Billy, as he likes to be known, and they began courting. One of Billy's friends had been hosting a party and Diane had introduced the couple, playing a successful role as Cupid.

## Wedding belles

After months of courting, Billy took to one knee and popped the big question. "Of course, I knew straightaway who would be my bridesmaid," Pat says. Diane responds by sharing: "Well, I was very happy to accept as I had a hand in setting the couple up!"

The happy couple married at Christ Church in nearby Padgate before making their way to the reception at the famous Carter's Café located on the town centre's Bridge Street, followed by a honeymoon in Blackpool. The special day even caught the attention of local news, with the newlyweds appearing in the Warrington Guardian newspaper. Pat continues: "We had music and dancing, of course, though much of it was spent chatting with Diane, like we always do!"

In the subsequent years as life progressed, Pat and Billy welcomed their children into the world before emigrating to Australia to build their life down under. Meanwhile, Diane stayed close to home and dedicated her career to supporting the pupils of Woolston Church of England Primary School, working as a teaching assistant for 30 years.

## Together again

It was around this time last year Pat visited Belong Warrington to enjoy her first Experience Day, as the village's Experience Co-ordinator, Louise Kelly, recalls: "We were sharing the news of Pat's forthcoming arrival with our customers, so they could be ready to give her a warm welcome, and Diane remembered she once knew a Pat from Woolston. And that's when she realised, it



Newlyweds, Pat and Billy, pictured with Diane (far right), best man, James, and bridesmaid, Olive



Diane and Pat enjoy a brew and a catch-up at the village

was indeed 'her' Pat. The day she came, it was a big surprise – it was wonderful to watch!"

Billy has since accompanied Pat for her village visits, where they flick through the photo album with Diane and share happy memories.

## Volunteer champion

Diane has been one of the apartment tenants since the village opened and has spent much of her time volunteering with the Experience Team, with her help recognised at the Belong Champion Awards 2020, where she took home the Volunteer Award.

Her work also means more opportunities to spend time with Pat each time she visits, and we're told their favourite pastime is meeting in the morning for a cup of tea and the chance to put the world to rights.



# Gisela raises a glass of whisky to 100th year

Pictured: Gisela Feldman with her card from the King and Queen

**A** member of the Jewish community has celebrated her centenary, marking her 100th birthday with a toast of her favourite tippie whilst enjoying a party surrounded by friends and family.

Gisela Feldman shared her big day with fellow tenants, residents, and the team at Belong Morris Feinmann care village, Didsbury, south Manchester, where she resides. Her special party featured gifts and birthday cake, alongside her congratulatory card from their Majesties, King Charles and Queen Camilla.

Speaking of the secret to a happy life, Gisela Feldman candidly said: "A drop of whisky every night!"

Along with younger sister, Sonja, Gisela has dedicated her life to Holocaust education and both sisters were awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) in the 2020 New Years Honours list.

The pair fled Nazi persecution in 1939, along with 900 Jews, travelling via sea to Cuba on a journey now coined the 'Voyage of the Damned.' The ship was denied entry to the country and later, the USA, forcing it back to Europe where some of the refugees were rehomed throughout the continent. Others less fortunate lost their lives, along with the sisters' father and 30 of their relatives.

Last year, Gisela and Sonja's stories were documented alongside portraits prominently displayed in Belong Morris Feinmann's synagogue. The special exhibition shares the experiences of five Holocaust refugees and a survivor living at the care village, honouring them and the millions who suffered persecution at the hands of the Nazis in World War II.

Belong's Experience and Cultural Co-ordinator, Angela Luckett, said: "Gisela is a very special lady with an incredible life story and it was a delight to bring her family, including those all the way from America, and her friends together in the village to celebrate her big day. She is an inspiration to all of us, with her readiness to share her personal experiences and commitment to keeping alive the memory of those lost in the Second World War."



Gisela (right), with sister Sonja Sternberg, receive their BEMs from The Lord Lieutenant of Greater Manchester (pictured in 2020)

# All Aboard for Morris Minors

Pictured: Belong Morris Feinmann resident Mindel Rose (left) with Mary Valley and her daughter Meave at a Morris Minors event.

**B**elong Morris Feinmann has launched a new series of its popular weekly intergenerational stay-and-play sessions, dubbed 'Morris Minors', with everyone welcome to attend.

'Morris Minors' invites parents and grandparents and great-grandparents to bring babies and toddlers aged 0-18 months for a morning of shared multi-sensory learning experiences, involving play, storytelling and music.

Angela Luckett, Experience Coordinator at Belong Morris Feinmann, explains the rationale behind the sessions: "It is such a beautiful group, enabling all generations to mix together and natural interaction between everyone involved, with nursery rhymes playing and soft toys scattered around. The benefits of shared experiences for all ages, including improvements in physical and mental health and learning and development, are increasingly recognised. It's all about friendship, tranquillity and welcoming people in, and I encourage any parents with small children in the area to come along."



Parent Anna Patel, who attends the sessions with her 14-month old daughter, Violet, also said: "Violet is at an age where everything she experiences and each new person she meets adds so much to her learning. The residents can't help but offer her cheery smiles – they enjoy so much fun together. It's a wonderful, safe environment, with benefits for all ages, which also offers parents something a bit different whilst enjoying a coffee and cake."

Morris Minors sessions take place on Wednesdays at 11am. If you would like to attend, contact Belong Morris Feinmann on 0161 804 4200 to book your place.



## Belong Chester's Grand Opening!

*Pictured (L to R): Belong Chester General Manager, Patrick Butler, Ready Generation co-founder Sue Egersdorff, the Lord Mayor of Chester, Sheila Little, Belong CEO, Martin Rix, and Chair of the Belong Board, Robert Armstrong.*

**I**n November, Samantha Dixon MBE MP for City of Chester received a warm welcome at Belong Chester, where she unveiled a commemorative plaque to mark the official opening of the village.

Celebrations commenced with apartment tenant and town crier, Ian, announcing proceedings, before guests enjoyed a heartening performance from Sankofa Songsters, the village's own intergenerational choir, comprising customers and our young friends from The Nursery in Belong, led by charity operator, Ready Generations.

Since welcoming our first customers last year, the village is now firmly established in the heart of the city; a bustling go-to destination for the community. Customers have enjoyed a special range of intergenerational opportunities created by our friends at the nursery, from reading and dining partners to prambles and outings in the city, gardening, singing and storytelling, dancing, painting and a huge range of artistic pursuits.

Here's to many more happy years, Belong Chester!

**We continue to support new customers to move into the households and in turn, recruit and train new colleagues to provide world-leading specialist dementia care. Email [enquiries@belong.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@belong.org.uk) for more information.**



*The Lord Mayor of Chester, Cllr Sheila Little, toured the village and The Nursery in Belong and met with residents, children and colleagues.*



### Timeline of Belong Chester

#### 2017

**June** - Planning permission is granted by Cheshire West and Chester Council

#### 2018

**December** - Contractors are selected, and work commences

#### 2021

**June** - Topping out ceremony takes place with Robert Mee DL, the High Sheriff of Cheshire

**July** - Plans for the nursery are approved

**November** - Meet and Make Art workshops begin at the Grosvenor Museum in conjunction with arts centre, the Bluecoat

#### 2022

**January** - The Nursery in Belong joins academic research project, Born4Life

**April** - Ready Generations launches Ribbons of Love project across the organisation to mark Global Intergenerational Week

**June** - Local school pupil, Naomi Shetty, wins welcome card design competition, earning an artist-led clay workshop for her class

**July** - Village doors open, and first customers move in

**November** - The nursery launches Living Lives Together stay and play sessions for families

#### 2023

**February** - Artists commissioned by the Bluecoat begin five-month artist residencies workshop programme with customers

**March** - The Nursery in Belong wins the International Award at the Generations Working Together Excellence Awards

**June** - An exhibition of customers' work with the Bluecoat, Seen and Heard - Adventures in Arts and Dementia, launches at the Grosvenor Museum

**July** - Naomi and school friends visit for the installation ceremony of their clay work

**July** - The village celebrates its first birthday with a festival-themed party

**November** - Belong Chester is officially opened by Samantha Dixon MBE, MP for City of Chester

# Belong Colleagues Recognised at Great British Care Awards



Pictured: Belong GBCAs North-West finalists

**Belong colleagues have been celebrating being recognised for excellence in their fields at the Great British Care Awards, securing a fantastic 16 nominations and three wins at the 2023 regional finals.**

The finalists were selected amidst tough competition for their exceptional work and their positive impact on customers' lives. Following a rigorous assessment process, including an interview with a panel of independent judges, our trio of regional winners were chosen and will now go on to represent Belong at the national finals in spring 2024, featuring celebrity guest, TV's Rylan Clark.

Speaking of Belong's success, Rebecca Woodcock, Belong Head of Operations, said: "Our colleagues work exceptionally hard, continuously striving to apply skills and knowledge to improve standards of care, as well as being standard-bearers for Belong's model and values. All the finalist placings and wins are well-deserved recognition of this, and we hope our teams enjoyed their special evening letting their hair down – congratulations to all!"

## Winner: Nicola Johnstone, Belong Atherton

Recently promoted to General Manager, Nicola took home the Supported Living Manager Award, with judges commenting: "Nicola and her team embody genuine dedication to inclusive and blended living. They strive to make the community a lifelong home where everyone feels not just included but truly part of a unified whole. Their innovative initiatives transcend expectations, going above and beyond to enrich and enhance the community experience."



Pictured: Nicola Johnstone with her award

With over 20 years' nursing experience in the health and social care sector, Nicola is passionate about delivering an inclusive and vibrant service, in particular raising standards of end-of-life care. She was instrumental in Belong Atherton achieving Gold Standards Framework Platinum status for end-of-life care and also collaborates with local hospitals, hospices and other healthcare providers to help implement best practice in palliative care.

## Winner: Roksana Drzewicka, Belong at Home Newcastle-Under-Lyme

Community care worker, Roksana, embarked on her new career in care in spring this year has already made a big impact, being crowned Newcomer of the Year in the West Midlands heat.

Naturally compassionate, she made the decision to switch from office work after being inspired by the rewarding nature of caring for her grandmother, who lived with dementia, as well as her voluntary work at a local food bank. Since joining the team in April, Roksana has received nothing but excellent feedback from customers and colleagues, the latter describing her as: "a great team player, who, in a short space of time, has proven her value to the care sector".

The judges said: "Roksana only joined the care sector in April, and the judges were incredibly impressed by her passion for the role and her ability to put her clients first. She gave excellent examples of the support she had given. Social care is lucky to have her!"



Pictured: Roksana Drzewicka, with her award

## Winner: Pauline Stringer, Belong Warrington

Volunteer Pauline received the Unpaid Carer Award for her work at the village where her father also resides. She can often be found in the onsite bistro, having invited residents to enjoy a spot of tea and a chat. Pauline also supports the team with activities and actively encourages other residents to join in to ensure that their lives are enriched. Colleagues say that she is 'part of the family', brings a smile to everyone's face and is a champion of Belong's values.



Pictured: Pauline Stringer

The judges praised: "Pauline's unwavering commitment to her father, a resident with advanced dementia, extends to the entire community. Her inclusive, tenacious advocacy not only enhances her father's life but also serves as an inspiration to fellow caregivers, making her a deserving award recipient."

Speaking of her experience, Pauline said: "I didn't expect to be nominated, never mind win the award! I was overwhelmed and very emotional and appreciative to be considered. It was an honour to be in the company of so many inspirational carers – everyone looked amazing, was friendly and clearly passionate about their work."

# Belong achieves gold standard for end-of-life care



## Belong has earned the Quality Hallmark Award for demonstrating best practice in end of life and palliative care for its customers, following Gold Standards Framework (GSF) assessments at its Warrington and Newcastle-under-Lyme villages.

Assessors from the national organisation responsible for training and quality standards in the sector praised the not-for-profit group's 'village living' model as conducive to high care standards and helping to promote the independence of residents as much as possible. Activities provision, focus on exercise and falls prevention awareness, and relationships with external bodies, such as music therapy charity, Nordoff and Robbins, were amongst the examples of strengths highlighted.

With reference to end-of-life care, the final reports commended 'clearly dedicated staff' who work alongside families to support the dying process, using person-centred advanced planning to ensure compassionate, dignity-enhancing care. Family communication and Belong's in-house Admiral Nurse were also cited as key indicators in the appraisal which summarised: 'whole team support for residents and families at

end of life, from housekeeping team to reception and all care staff.'

The evaluations also took into account family testimonials, including one wife of a resident, who said of the carers: "They don't just care for the residents, they do actually love them ... [we are] very appreciative of all the support offered to us. When things are not good, they are always there."

Speaking of the accolades, Sue Goldsmith, Belong's chief operating officer, said: "Dealing with the subject of death is often still taboo, but we recognise how imperative it is that we support customers to experience a good death. This starts with being able to open channels of communication, both with residents and their families, to prepare well for end of life. Providing exceptional care that meets people's preferences is never more important than at this difficult time.

"We are therefore pleased to be accredited with two sets of top scores for the GSF Quality Hallmark Award, which serve as testament to the hard work and dedication of our teams who have perhaps one of the most challenging but rewarding of jobs."

## In The Spotlight: Paige O'Neill

**T**his issue, we chat with Paige O'Neill, Lead Senior Support Worker at Belong Crewe, whose colleagues recognised her potential and have helped her realise her career ambitions by giving her the confidence to achieve them.

Paige's motivation for a career in care came from the sad loss of her mother, whose experience at another care operator fell short of expectations. "It wasn't good, to say the least," Paige begins. "I remember thinking, 'I could do better,' though I didn't have much confidence in my abilities."

Since joining Belong six years ago, however, she has flourished, thanks to the encouragement and belief of her senior colleagues. "They provided the assurance I needed by creating a plan to grow my knowledge and skills, based on the potential they could see," Paige continues. "They brought out things in me I already knew were there."

Equipped with a newly found confidence to develop of her own accord, earlier this year, Paige was promoted again. "Our registered CQC support manager, Caroline Anthony, informed me of a senior opportunity and shared details of the role. I asked, 'Could I do all that?' and she said, 'You already do!' It turns out, I'd self-taught many of the advanced duties without even realising!"

Now, Paige leads support workers' day-to-day work across the village's six households, whilst upskilling them in new abilities, such as administering medication, and in turn gaining her the nickname, 'The Med Queen,' from her peers.

Sharing her favourite thing about her job, Paige concludes:



## Volunteer Profile: David Peake

*Pictured: David, with his mother, Patricia*

Markets event (with General Manager, Rebecca Woodcock, ending up on the naughty list!).

Since then, David pops in regularly, with his support fitting around his job as a tree consultant. He can be found helping the Experience Day team with trips to the café and other local excursions. Recently, he got his fingers dirty helping with the Belong Atherton in Bloom project.

He continues: "When Mum moved into Belong, it was an awakening – for both of us. Belong's approach to care should be the standard; it really is leading the sector and people are happy here and that's how it should be."

"I enjoy being able to put a smile on someone's face when I come in. Mum never lost her sense of humour and whilst everyone's experience of dementia is different, if you can get someone to laugh, you know you've done something worthwhile."

Belong Atherton's Experience Coordinator, Kim Calland, said: "David is a great addition to the village. He's made such a wonderful impact on customers by showing them how much he cares. His sense of humour and jokes have made him popular with everyone and we're really pleased to have him as a part of the Belong Atherton community."

Keen to contribute to village life and 'put back in whatever I can', his first foray was dressing up as Santa for the Christmas



*Pictured: Paige O'Neill (right) accepts Belong Crewe's 2023 National Dementia Care Award with colleague Stacey Wright*

"I love making customers' days better; I'd happily spend all my time with them if I could. Today is mainly desk work but I'm meeting a customer for lunch in The Bistro. Making them happy, supporting them and their families, building relationships – this is what I enjoy most."

As an indication of just how far Paige has come, she was recently a member of the Belong Crewe team interviewed for a 2023 National Dementia Care Award after the village was shortlisted for Outstanding Dignity and Respect in Dementia Care. They clearly impressed the judges as they went on to win the accolade. Paige (right) pictured here accepting the trophy with colleague Stacey Wright.



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

**For this issue, we have a chat with Steve Cartlich, Caretaker at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme, recently distinguished finalist for Ancillary Worker of the Year at this year's West Midlands regional Great British Care Awards.**

**What does a typical working day look like for you?**

It's my job to fix and install things around the village – whatever needs doing. Whether it's putting up a picture on the wall in a customer's room or mending a loose handrail in a corridor, I'm there.

Everywhere I go, I hear, 'Steve! Steve! Steve!' coming at me from all directions, usually followed by a request and always with a smiling face. I guess I'm the 'go-to guy' for everything.

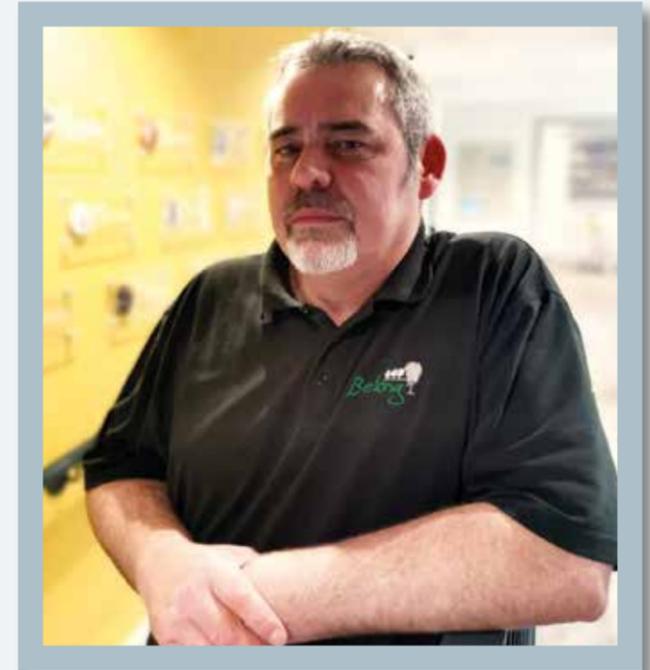
**What are the highlights of your job?**

I love my job, though I also enjoy getting stuck in with other activities that you might say wouldn't normally be part of the caretaker's duties. For example, you'll often find me driving the minibus when the experience team take customers on trips out, and at the weekends, I volunteer in the village gardens.

A couple of years ago, a few colleagues and I travelled to Wales to climb Snowdon in the name of raising funds for an interactive projector for customers. And, if you've been to our Christmas Fair and paid Santa a visit, let's just say I have an influence on who is on the naughty and nice lists.

**Are there any challenges (other than scaling mountains!)?**

Working in care is completely different to what I've



*Steve Cartlich, Caretaker at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme*

been used to. After leaving school (a few years ago, now!) I was in the Royal Navy, followed by a career in construction.

Whereas the contrast with what I'm doing now is huge, I enjoy being part of a different environment, whilst being able to use my skills and learn new ones, such as putting the dementia training into practice. I've worked here for five years now and it's still as great as day one.

**We've heard you've been involved with work experience students. Tell us more.**

The village supports young people with additional learning needs from Blackfriars Academy and Newfriars College. I save up small jobs they can assist with and when they visit, I teach them how to do what's required.

For example, basic DIY, things like putting picture frames up. It's great passing skills on, as most of them have never used tools before, so they learn something new. I really look forward to it each week.

**And finally, what do you get up to in your spare time?**

I enjoy a bit of peace and quiet, so when I can, you'll find me carp and pike fishing – you can sit with your thoughts for hours on end – pure bliss!

# Noticeboard

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

## Accordion surprise

Warrington is alive with the sound of the music, much to the delight of older people residing at Belong, and particularly for one accordion enthusiast, whose retirement from playing the instrument inspired a surprise visit from an entertainer to assist in keeping the village singing and dancing.



Harry and Robert with his accordion.

Avid performer Harry Holroy regularly showcases his talents by hosting concerts for fellow residents at their home. But owing to his instrument's weight (around 15lbs or just under 7 kilos) becoming too heavy to perch on his lap, the 95-year-old has had to give up one of his favourite pastimes.

The musical talents of Robert Burton filled the entertainment venue, which saw residents singing along and clapping, whilst others enjoyed the merriment by taking to the dancefloor. Later, personal meet and greets followed, with the guest of honour relishing the chance to share his happy memories of his passion.

## Grass roots sponsorship

This year, **Belong at Home (Wigan)** have sponsored a local grass roots football team in Wigan. U10s Panthers and Lions Hindley Juniors FC.

We look forward to arranging some football matches for our customers to watch!



Pictured: The team in their Belong at Home kits.

## An evening at the theatre

Customers from **Belong Wigan** enjoyed another of their regular trips to take in a show, this time at Liverpool's Empire Theatre for the third UK tour of *The Bodyguard*, based on the 1992 film of the same name.

The group shared the excitement of hearing favourite tunes, including Queen of the Night, One Moment in Time and I Will Always Love You. Experience Coordinator, Charlene Frodsham, said: "Our customers had an amazing time; lots of fun and laughter was had by all."

## Pauline makes Newcastle history

History is being made in **Newcastle-under-Lyme** as Pauline Dawson becomes the first woman to be admitted to the Staffordshire town's Burgesses, resulting in a break with centuries-old tradition as the town marks its 850th year of borough status.

In celebration, the 86-year-old's home, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme, is hosting a special popup exhibition within its integrated Heritage Gallery, documenting the Burgesses history, with exhibits including photographs, certificates and maps from bygone eras, a reproduction of its common seal, and items of clothing worn by its members.



Newcastle's Mayor - Councillor Simon White admitting Pauline Dawson to the Newcastle Burgesses

Speaking of her accomplishment, Pauline Dawson said: "Ever since my dad first told me the story of the Burgesses, it's been important to me and my life. Becoming a Burgess means the legacy can carry on through my own family, and I'm very excited and looking forward to loved ones coming from all over the country for my initiation - it will be a memorable occasion for all of us."



The group outside the Liverpool's Empire Theatre.

## Atherton in bloom

Community spirit has flourished in **Atherton** as locals lend their green fingers in support of a garden transformation at Belong Atherton, working alongside its customers to build an ecosystem for everyone to enjoy.

Thanks to the help and hard work of customers and volunteers, the village grounds have welcomed the addition of a greenhouse, vegetable troughs and raised planters, together creating the perfect home for flowers, whilst attracting birds, insects, and wildlife. The benefits of a new kitchen garden have already been realised with herbs being used in cooking, such as coriander adding a kick to carrot soup.

The project has been made possible thanks to funding from Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership, as well as generous donations from residents, apartment tenants, and their families. Work commenced earlier this year before gaining momentum when the village welcomed more volunteers to mark The Big Help Out, as part of His Majesty The King's coronation celebrations in May.



Pictured: Bill and Kim belong Atherton

## Bridget's Palace dream

November 14th marked a momentous occasion as His Majesty King Charles III enjoyed his 75th birthday with a meeting with Belong's Bridget Lawler. Our Admiral Nurse was invited to the Buckingham Palace event celebrating the contribution of nurses and midwives from the internationally educated workforce.

Bridget, hailing from South Africa, delivered a happy birthday card designed by the children from the Nursery in Belong at **Belong Chester**. She said: "My heart was racing. The King shook my hand and said: 'I'm glad they gave you the day off!' He was a real gentleman, very humble and kind, and made time for as many people as possible.

"I have always been a royalist - as a child, I cut out news stories and pictures of the Royal Family and kept them in a book. The evening felt like a fairy tale in the 48th year of my nursing career. I remember starting my career with the matron standing in front of us all, telling us: 'Nursing is much more than carrying bedpans and wiping brows. It can take you to places you could never think of.' - How true are those words?!"

Congratulations, Bridget, from everyone at Belong - we are thrilled you got to enjoy an evening at the palace.



## Cuddly creatures take over Belong Macclesfield

**Belong Macclesfield** has been busy looking after some furry friends with local company, **Inspiring Animal Therapy**, paying the village a visit to meet their herd of guinea pigs, colonies of rabbits and chinchillas, nest of mice, a dog, and Spike, the lizard.

Anna Seaton, Experience Coordinator, commented: "Our customers loved spending time with the visitors and the session conjured many joyful memories of pets they once owned, and they delighted in sharing these personal stories with the group. Everybody left with smiles on their faces."

Pictured: Brenda Ridgeway and Bill Ryall, both with Anna Provar, owner of Inspiring Animal Therapy.

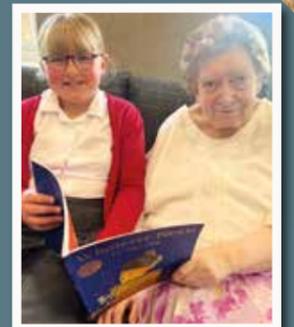


## Back to School for 79-year-old Violet

As students return to their studies for the start of another school year, joining them is 79-year-old Violet as she proves that age really is just a number by embarking on her own challenge to achieve her dream: learning to read again.

What's more, in a heartening tale of generations coming together, her ambitions are being supported by new friend, Charlotte, 10, who was inspired to help when she met Violet whilst on a school trip to her home, in Belong Crewe.

Now, she volunteers her own time for weekly one-to-one sessions, where Charlotte and Violet spend time reading together. Speaking of her motivation, Charlotte said: "I wanted to make Violet happy as she told me she really wants to be able to read a newspaper again."



Pictured: Charlotte and Violet belong Crewe

# B's Café



**BELONG** ...at your nearest Belong Village  
VILLAGES

A place where families,  
friends and carers of people living  
with dementia can come together with  
their loved ones over a lovely cup  
of tea or coffee and cake!



Here to help the person with dementia  
remain part of a community in which  
they feel a sense of belonging.



**AdmiralNurses**  
Helping families face dementia

*A free service in partnership with Dementia UK.*