

BelongLife

WINTER 2022/23



Belong Celebrates Colleagues at Champion Awards

See pages 8 and 9

Belong strengthens leadership team with new appointments: see pages 2 – 3



Belong launches B's dementia cafés
Page 5



Belong Morris Feinmann marks Holocaust Memorial Day
Page 7



Residents named intergenerational champions
Page 10

Plus...

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





Word from the team

Belong Chief Executive Martin Rix celebrates Belong Champions, welcomes new faces, and provides an update of the latest news from across the organisation.

This issue, we have much to commend, perhaps most notably, the dedication of our colleagues has been recognised at the annual Belong Champion Awards. This year's ceremony was our first to be celebrated as an evening event, with ten awards for outstanding achievements. We are grateful to those in our independent external judging panel, also joined by some of our tenants, all of whom had to make some tough decisions to decide this year's winners.

Meanwhile, our village teams have been busy for the launch of B's Café, a regular drop-in support session for local communities, with the assistance of our Admiral Nurses. We're honoured to name the dementia café after Belinda Jones, Belong Dementia Trainer and friend, who sadly passed away in 2021.

More news includes a milestone for Where the Arts Belong, our arts project with contemporary arts centre, the Bluecoat. An arts activities guide, 'Little Golden Moments', has been released, featuring inspiring creative tasks designed to work for those living with dementia, having been piloted by both our village and Belong at Home customers, in conjunction with acclaimed artists.

At Belong Crewe, a new monthly intergenerational playgroup invites parents, guardians, and their little ones, to spend quality time with our customers. And Belong Morris Feinmann commemorated Holocaust Memorial Day with a visit from young 'creative activists' to share stories of experiences during the Holocaust and Second World War – very important work, indeed.

As our Belong family continues to grow, we are pleased to welcome many new faces, including Caroline Baker who joins us in the newly created role of Head of Dementia and Care Quality, tasked with building on all our work within the field. We also say hello to Maggie Wallace, appointed Head of People, as we say thank you and goodbye to former People Development Manager, Tim Kirk, for his hard work during his tenure.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to a very important message from non-executive Director, Ali Harrison, who became Belong's 'Speaking up Guardian' at the end of last year. Turn to page 16 for detail on how ensuring a transparent and open culture, where people feel able to contribute ideas and feedback, and to speak out when things aren't quite right, is the responsibility of everyone.

Enjoy the issue.

Martin Rix Belong Chief Executive

Belong strengthens leadership team with new appointments

New Business Manager for Belong at Home

Belong has promoted Andrew Shield to the role of Business Manager of its growing home care service, Belong at Home.

In the new position, Andrew will be responsible for leading the expansion of the award-winning home care service, which provides bespoke support packages, including expert dementia care, for people living independently, in a Belong village apartment or in the wider community.

Andrew has worked for Belong at Home since its inception over a decade ago, beginning his career as a Community Support Worker before progressing to become Area Manager of the organisation's Warrington and Didsbury services. During this time, the number of locations in which Belong at Home operates has increased with the opening of new Belong villages, most recently in Chester, with all home care services rated Good or Outstanding by the Care Quality Commission.

A particular focus of Andrew's role will be on recruitment as Belong at Home looks to continue to expand its services.

“We've spent the past 12 years building a service that people and their families trust. We now have a great foundation to enable us to support more people to retain their independence while living in their own home”



Andrew Shield

Belong appoints Head of Dementia and Care Quality

Belong has also named leading dementia expert, Caroline Baker, as head of dementia and care quality, a newly created role with a focus on driving the not-for-profit organisation's dementia strategy and advancing its track record for quality, as it prepares to expand into Merseyside with its Southport care village.

Belong's nationally and internationally acclaimed village model was developed to transform outcomes for people living with dementia, through its innovative approach to building design, living arrangements, services, training and ethos. It provides an Admiral Nurse service to support customers diagnosed with dementia and their families.

The synergy between this and Caroline's experience as a staunch advocate for people with dementia made her a natural appointment to Belong's senior team. Her career spans three decades, during which time she has been instrumental in championing change to traditional approaches to dementia care and in developing progressive dementia strategies. In 2014, she won the Lifetime Achievement Award at the National Dementia Care Awards.

She explains: "When I began my career as a Registered Mental Health Nurse, working in hospital wards, it was evident that this field of care desperately needed to change. Back then, it wasn't a good outlook for people living with dementia, so I decided to make it my mission to prove that it's possible for people to have an active and fulfilling life and continue contributing to society."

Caroline developed a number of dementia care models whilst working as director of dementia care at Barchester Healthcare and Four Seasons Health Care. Her work has been published in academic papers, and she is the author of an Amazon top-selling book "Developing Excellent Care for People Living with Dementia in Care Homes".

Speaking of the appointment, Belong Chief Executive, Martin Rix, said: "Caroline is a natural fit for Belong and

we are delighted to welcome her to the team. Her values, calibre and passion shine through and we believe she will help us remain at the forefront of providing quality services to our customers."

Caroline also holds a postgraduate diploma in geriatric medicine along with a master's degree (MSc) in management research. Earlier in her career, she worked as a clinical specialist in dementia care, provided training within the healthcare sector and social services, and was offered a prestigious scholarship award to represent nursing professionals at MGM University in Kerala, where she taught alongside medical consultants about dementia care.

Caroline added: "I am both delighted and excited to have joined Belong. Its model of care is really innovative and it is very apparent that colleagues are keen to further develop to ensure the best possible outcomes for all customers, whether they live in the village or the wider community."

“I decided to make it my mission to prove that it's possible for people to have an active and fulfilling life and continue contributing to society”

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 of Belong Life, we spoke to **Shirley Mollet**, experience day customer at Belong Warrington, and a big fan of all the facilities the village has to offer.



Having tip top talking skills are part and parcel of the job for hairdressers, and after interviewing Shirley, a former hairdresser, herself, we can confidently say that this is certainly the case!

Shirley tells us when she makes her twice-weekly visits to Belong Warrington, she loves nothing more than to have a gossip in the onsite salon. "We love 'talking shop' when I'm in the chair," says Shirley, speaking of her appointments with lead hairdresser, Jo Buckley. "Years ago, I used to have my own salon, also located here in Latchford, and I love remembering my hairdressing days. Jo also likes to be brought-up-to speed on my family, including my new grandson, Thomas."

Well-known locally, thanks to her styling talents, upbeat nature and love for talking to everyone and anyone, it was only a decade ago, when in her late '70s, Shirley

had to down her scissors and put her feet up. She continues: "I didn't want to give up work - I'd have kept going if I could have! Though, it's lovely to be able to have someone else pamper me."

Making friends

Shirley has been visiting the village every Tuesday and Wednesday for the past two years (with the exception of lockdowns), when either her daughter, Michelle, drops her off, or the Belong at Home team pop over to Stockton Heath to pick her up from her home, before taking her back at the end of the day.

She continues: "I like everything here! I'm very musical, so I really enjoy the singing sessions. We also like to visit the Bistro and I've made lots of new friends; each week I look forward to seeing Elsie, Joan and Pat, and catching-up on the latest news."

Village vibes

Shirley laughs, "I love coming to the village; it's a wonderful day out and we all have a good laugh. If it wasn't for the experience days, I'd be sat at home not doing anything. There's a good range of activities, so I'm never bored. It's a nice place for people who want to make friends - I'd give Belong ten out of ten."

Shirley's daughter, Michelle, adds: "Mum loves coming every week, especially to The Salon. Thanks Jo - you do an amazing job!"



Pictured: Jo Buckley (left) and Shirley Mollet in The Salon.

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

Belong launches dementia cafés to support local communities



New dementia cafés offering a warm and welcoming space for those living with dementia, and their loved ones, are opening across the North West and Midlands, providing a valuable support network for local people in the communities they serve.

Hosted by dementia specialist, Belong, B's Café is set to take place regularly at the not-for-profit organisation's eight care villages, giving guests the opportunity to enjoy a range of experiences while accessing support and forming new friendships at the sessions. The programme includes arts and crafts workshops, pet therapy, specialist exercise classes and visits from musical performers.

Also on-hand, Belong Admiral Nurses provide a specialist mental health nurse service available through the organisation's partnership with Dementia UK, offering advice and the confidence to help individuals and their loved ones manage a future living with dementia.

Bridget Lawler, Admiral Nurse at Belong, explains more about the new venture: "Dementia affects not only the person living with it, but also their family and friends, who are often their carers, too. We understand the challenges they can face, sometimes on their own, and that's why we've launched B's Café, to give a helping hand and a support network, which we know is vitally important to have."

The dementia cafés are open to everyone, including non-residents of Belong's care villages. Speaking of the inaugural gathering at Belong Crewe, one guest said: "My husband is living with dementia and he was fully engaged and he said how marvellous the afternoon was - to hear him say this aloud means so much to me."



Pictured: Belong Admiral Nurse, Bridget Lawler, with Belong Morris Feinmann resident, Theresa McGuigan.

Another Belong Admiral Nurse, Caroline Clifton, added: "B's café is named after our inspirational colleague, Belinda Jones, who is sadly no longer with us after losing a two-year battle with cancer. She helped shape our values, including being compassionate, and this extends outside our village to the wider community. Her legacy lives on and we know how much something like this would mean to her and her family."

B's Cafes take place regularly at Belong villages. For further information, including dates and times, contact: enquiries@belong.org.uk



Dementia-arts partnership launches creative tool to support care sector

An arts activities guide, designed specially for people living with dementia, has launched as part of a collaboration between Belong and Bluecoat, Liverpool's contemporary arts centre, offering an inspiring collection of creative pursuits.

'Little Golden Moments' brings together an array of one-to-one and group exercises in music and sound, storytelling, movement and dance, and working with clay. All have been devised by some of the country's most acclaimed creatives commissioned by Bluecoat, and piloted by Belong for the ongoing research partnership between the organisations.

For the past four years, the relationship, entitled Where the Arts Belong, has explored the use of arts in care environments with the artists taking-up 'arts residencies' in Belong's care villages, leading workshops for residents in their respective disciplines.

Now, all the activities have been packaged as Little Golden Moments, serving as an invaluable tool for loved ones, care providers and anyone supporting someone living with dementia. With the option to tailor tasks to participants' preferences and ability, the aim is to engage them in meaningful occupation, whilst inviting their input, such as favourite memories, personal interpretations or new ideas. The result is increased wellbeing, connection, and a sense of purpose for those involved.

Caroline Baker, head of dementia and care quality at Belong commented: "When your loved ones or those in your care live with dementia, it can

be difficult to keep them engaged with worthwhile activity. We're pleased that the Bluecoat's work with our customers to-date means we can offer this resource to carers everywhere. I'm sure many will recognise the small, special moments they have with those they care for and this will help to bring about more positive experiences."

Printed copies of Little Golden Moments are available at the Bluecoat, School Lane, Liverpool L1 3BX (while stocks last) or can be downloaded at the partnership's website: <http://belong.org.uk/bluecoat>

Memory Lane...

For this issue of Memory Lane, we hear the life story of Pauline Dawson, customer of Belong at Home Newcastle-under-Lyme, and a true 'Potteries girl' whose colourful career has seen her work with royalty and helped her find romance.

"Everyone's got a talent; mine's painting," Pauline begins. "It must come from my great grandmother – she was a painter, and extremely pleased when I told her I'd got a job as a paintress at the famous Spode, the birthplace of underglaze blue transfer printing that British pottery is known for.

"Before then, aged 15, I completed a scholarship at Newcastle Arts School. I vividly recall my teacher, Mr Clarkson, coming into the studio announcing 'The King has died!', later followed by, 'Long live the Queen!'. Of course, little did we know at the time that it would be 70 years before another king would reign."

Royal relations

And little did Pauline know that her relationship with royalty was about to become more personal, twice over. She continues: "At 15, I started work at Spode Copeland factory, known as the 'bob shop' because we had to pay two shillings (£0.10) for everything we painted to pay for an apprenticeship. Miss Trimble was in charge and as I was the youngest, she made me clean the floor every day and collect coal. One day, she asked me to work on a Sunday and I found out we'd be painting mugs for the Queen's Coronation."



Seven years later, in 1960, Spode was commissioned for another special project, this time for HRH Princess Margaret, designer of her own wedding teapot in blue and gold. It was up to Pauline and her colleagues to paint a 20-piece set and the Queen's sister visited to give her personal thanks.

Cupid Spode

Spode played a key role in Pauline's love life too, bringing her and future husband, Michael, together. "There used to be a social held at the factory on Tuesday nights," she says, "Michael was a clerk at the gas board and had been invited by my colleague. After we met, we started going to church together. One Christmas Eve, he presented a ring to me. I said: 'You'd better tell my Dad' and when we did, his response was 'no' – he didn't want me to get married!"

Instead, the couple courted whilst saving money to buy a house. Eventually, with her father's blessing, they married and welcomed the arrival of baby Phillip. Following the birth of second son, Julian, Pauline worked at retirement homes as a crafts instructor.

Sharing talents

Today, she continues her work at Spode Museum as a volunteer, giving talks whilst guests get the chance to see her plate painting in action. On a recent visit, Pauline was overjoyed to locate a Coronation mug from all those years ago. She finishes: "They were all given numbers and it's got mine on it, so I know it's one that I painted!"

Pictured: Top: Pauline (second from right) takes a break from work with colleagues. Lower left: Pauline with her Coronation mug. Lower right: Pauline at the Spode Museum, working on her latest project. Images kindly supplied by Spode Museum Trust.

Kath Holdway from Spode Museum Trust, said: "When we set-up the museum and visitor centre, we invited Pauline to be part of it. She's part of a bygone era and her stories have got to be shared with the world. It was a tough time for her, not dissimilar to a Victorian regime, though she tells us she 'loved every minute'. Today, she helps us preserve an important part of social history, the legacy of Spode, and for that, we are honoured."

Generations share stories to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day

Older and younger generations came together recently to share lesser-known personal stories of Manchester people's experiences during the Holocaust and the Second World War, ahead of Holocaust Memorial Day (January 27th).

Residents of Belong Morris Feinmann welcomed young adults working with Manchester Jewish Museum to enjoy a special preview of their work exploring ways to commemorate the Holocaust, employing this year's memorial day theme: ordinary people.

The visiting group of 'Creative Activists' offered an insight into their creative



Pictured: Manchester Jewish Museum.

outputs with the village's customers, including poetry, playwrighting, and textile manufacturing. In return, the guests had the chance to meet and greet residents, some of whom include Holocaust refugees and survivors, who shared an exhibition in their home's on-site synagogue documenting their own stories, whilst honouring the millions of Jews who suffered persecution in the hands of the Nazis.

Aged 16-30 and from a number of different faiths, the Creative Activists join the project from King David High School and The Manchester College, and have been working alongside Manchester artist, Becky Prestwich, putting together the public event, 'We Remember Them In Verbs', for Holocaust Memorial Day 2023.

Pictured: Manchester Jewish Museum members, Sally Hurst and Gemma Meek.

Angela Lockett, experience and cultural coordinator at Belong Morris Feinmann, said: "We're especially pleased to host our new friends. Our village foundations were borne out of the Jewish plight, and similar to Manchester Jewish Museum and the Creative Activists, we believe it's imperative to preserve history for future generations."

The museum project is funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund through Imperial War Museum's Second World War & Holocaust Partnership Programme (SWWHPP) which works with partners across the UK to share hidden or lesser-known stories related to the Holocaust or Second World War.

Generations come together for playgroup sessions

Members of the Crewe community are being invited to a new intergenerational playgroup designed to bring people together and promote relationships between all ages.

'Across the Generations' stay-and-play is aimed at parents, guardians, and their little ones, offering them the chance to spend some quality time with older people residing at Belong Crewe.

Launched early in 2023, the meet-ups have already seen children up to the age of five years (and their grown-ups) sharing in activities with Belong residents, including interactive storytelling, singing and making music, and arts and crafts. Many have embraced the simple pleasures of playing together with toys, enjoying snacks and getting to know one another.

One mum said: "I love this initiative so much and I'm going to take some of the craft ideas to do [at home] with my little boy! Keep up the great work everyone!" Another parent added: "What a great idea for all generations."



Pictured: Belong Crewe resident, Jeanne Barry (right), enjoys arts and crafts with a new little friend, accompanied by support worker, Donna (centre).

Leading the gathering, Jess Butler, experience coordinator at Belong Crewe, said: "Forging connections with the community is a big part of what we do, as well as supporting our residents, and they've loved spending time with our little guests – some of them don't have grandchildren and vice versa, and their interactions and conversations have been wonderful to see and hear."

The free monthly sessions have been made possible thanks to a partnership with St Andrew's Church. For more information or to book a place for the next session, contact Jess Butler on 01270 561200.

Belong Celebrates Colleagues at Champion Awards 2022



Dementia Champion of the Year:
Stacey Wright, Belong Crewe



Central Services Award:
The Property Team



Community Engagement Award:
Experience Day Team, Belong Crewe



Compassion Award:
Trulea Greensmith, Belong Crewe



End of Life Care Award:
Jemma Sharratt, Belong Atherton

Once again, Belong is pleased to recognise the outstanding achievements of our colleagues in their everyday work supporting older people to live an active and fulfilling later life.

On a chilly but exciting January evening, our teams from the villages, Belong at Home and Central Services gathered at the enchanting Peckforton Castle in Cheshire, for the Belong Champion Awards 2022. Together, we looked back at another eventful year, before sharing our successes with the announcements of the winners of the closely fought awards and finishing with a boogie on the dancefloor.

With over 300 nominations from across the not-for-profit organisation, the winners in 10 categories were determined by an independent judging panel, Dementia UK, the National Care Forum, Skills For Care, The Bluecoat, Ready Generations, and Total People, as well Belong customers, who conducted a series of interviews as part of the rigorous assessment process.

Summarising his first awards event, Belong's chief executive, Martin Rix, said: "We've had a fantastic evening celebrating our colleagues' hard work and success. Congratulations to all of our finalists and winners!"



Congratulations to all our finalists:

Newcomer Award: David Shimmin, Belong Chester

Mentor Award: Olivia Wilkinson, Belong Warrington and Lisa O'Brien, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme

Leader Award: Karon Wallace, Belong Wigan and Lisa Lewis, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme

Team of the Year Award: Nursing Team, Belong Atherton and Exercise Department, Central Services

Compassion Award: Christopher Jones, Belong Macclesfield and Katie Whalley, Belong Atherton

Innovation award: Belong Crewe Village Team and Brendan Conlon, Central Services

End-of-Life Care Award: Belong Macclesfield Nurse Team, Belong Wigan Nurse Team

Dementia Champion Award: Hannah Buller, Atherton and Josephine Mollison, Warrington

Central Services Award: Cath Bennion and the IT Support Team

Community Engagement Award: Angela Luckett, Belong Morris Feinmann and the Experience Days Team, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme



Innovation Award:
Kathryn Pimblett, Belong Wigan



Leader of the Year:
Andrew Shield, Belong at Home



Mentor of the Year:
Laura Rideout, Belong Atherton



Newcomer of the Year:
Siobhan Coleman, Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme & Harry Crawford, Central Services



Team of the Year:
Belong at Home Wigan

Champion Awards at Peckforton Castle



..... The Champion Awards was made possible thanks to our sponsors



Chester Residents Named Intergenerational Champions

Three residents at Belong Chester have been named 'Intergenerational Champions' by national charity Ready Generations for advocating the benefits of connections between younger and older people.

Following the village's opening last year, some of the first residents to move into the village are reporting how the pioneering project has enriched their lives and given them new purpose and meaning. In response, Ready Generations has recognised them as ambassadors for the mutual advantages of connections across generations.

Ready Generations founder, Sue Egersdorff, explains: "Intergenerational Champions are people who advocate for multi-generational experiences, particularly those whose lives have been enhanced personally."

Belong Chester apartment tenants Alan and his wife Diana, who lives with dementia, both received the accolade. Together they visit the nursery most days, often taking their pet budgie. Alan reports that the nursery has had a transformative effect on their well-being. "It has brought the joy back into our lives", he says. "Having the nursery children around reminds me of what it was like when our children were young."



Pictured: Alan and Diana.

“It has brought the joy back into our lives... Having the nursery children around reminds me of what it was like when our children were young.”



Pictured above: Belong Chester resident Bill Wall with Jacob, who attends the Nursery in Belong, reading together.

The other recipient of the Intergenerational Champion title, Bill, who lives in a household at Belong Chester, helps the children at lunchtimes and has formed firm friendships with a number of them, who enjoy him singing nursery rhymes.

In recognition of the difference the nursery children have made to Bill's life, he recently gifted a book to the nursery's library called 'People Need People', by poet Benjamin Zephaniah, about the importance of belonging and connecting with others. The book was specially selected by Bill's daughter Susan as she has seen the role that the nursery has played in him settling into his new home at Belong Chester.

Commenting on the impact for both children and residents, Sue said: "It's very encouraging that we are already seeing significant benefits so soon after opening. Our older friends have more time to spend interacting with children, so they are developing their language skills faster and gaining in confidence as a result. Residents say that they love having the children around. It brings vibrancy and joy to the village, as well as contributing to a sense of community. We enjoy each other's company and caring for one another."



Pictured: (L-R) Sophie and Sue, daughters of a Belong resident, with Lionel at The Nursery in Belong.

The Nursery in Belong Launches Intergenerational Stay and Play



The Nursery in Belong has launched weekly intergenerational 'Stay and Play' sessions for families.

'Living Lives Together' invites parents and grandparents and great-grandparents to bring babies and toddlers for a morning of shared multi-sensory learning experiences, involving play, storytelling and music, at the region's first fully integrated nursery within a care setting, which opened earlier this year.

The launch follows the location being distinguished as a Public Living Room: a venue that is open to the public to meet and relax, as designated by the Camerados movement. The international organisation seeks to bring people together to create support networks and bolster the resilience of individuals and communities during challenging times, guided by principles such as inclusion, having fun and embracing individuality.

Commenting on the new initiative, nursery manager, Ruth Sandbach, said: "The benefits of shared experiences for all ages, including improved physical and mental health, are recognised more and more."

"We know that membership of a strong community is something that people are increasingly missing in today's often isolated and digital society. 'Living Lives Together' will give children and adults the opportunity to build new relationships at the same time as strengthening community connections. We welcome everyone with young children and grandchildren to come along."



Anyone wishing to attend a session should book a place by calling 01244 445566 or emailing hello@nurseryinbelong.org.uk. Attendees are requested to pay a £2 fee to cover the cost of refreshments.

Living the Values

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



Alison Harrison

For this issue, we have a special contribution from Alison Harrison, Non-Executive Director on Belong's Board, who shares an update in her new role as Belong's Speaking Up Guardian on the importance of everyone – customers, colleagues and friends of Belong – sharing our 'We are honest' value.

Hello everyone

I joined the Belong Board almost eighteen months ago, in September 2021, and I've had the pleasure of meeting a number of you whilst on visits to all of our villages, at Pepper House, and also when attending our board meetings which have been held at Newcastle-under-Lyme, Didsbury, Warrington and Chester.

I wanted to introduce myself as Belong's 'Speaking Up Guardian' – taking over this role from my colleague Kate Baldwin. Kate has recently moved on from our board, having enjoyed six years working with colleagues here.

Honesty is one of Belong's fundamental values and it's absolutely vital that everyone in Belong feels confident, comfortable and able to speak openly about any concerns they have, especially if those concerns relate to serious incidents such as abuse or wrongdoing. We recognise that there can be times when things don't always go to plan and you might feel unfairly treated or are concerned that the best standards of care to support our customers are not being provided.

As an experienced board member across a number of organisations, including the NHS and a large national charity, I understand the importance of being able to speak up freely and so this article is to help remind everyone and anyone who needs to reach out for support, to do so.

Belong's colleagues will be familiar with the 'See Something, Say Something' leaflet and 'Speaking out at Work' policy. These form part of a framework which ensures colleagues are provided with regular opportunities to meet with one another and their line managers and raise any concerns.

There are also other avenues to explore to express any concerns they may have, including raising these with the immediate line manager, or a more senior manager when this is not possible. A dedicated email is also available to reach myself and Belong's Head of People, Maggie Wallace, in the strictest of confidence.

For our customers and their families, Belong continuously takes our lead from your feedback and what we can do better. If your concerns are serious, we implore you to speak up without hesitation, in the knowledge the information you provide will be handled sensitively and any necessary action will be taken as swiftly as is practical.

Together, we have a collective responsibility to uphold the value of honesty and I am grateful for your assistance in ensuring this lives in all aspects of what we do.

In the Spotlight: Isis Whitmore

For this issue of *Belong Life*, we spoke to Isis Whitmore, who was recently appointed Heritage Coordinator at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Stemming from sharing a name with an Egyptian goddess, Isis's longstanding interest in history, particularly local heritage, goes back to when she was a child. Originally from Bignall End, she would often visit museums and places of interest in the area, including the Brampton Museum in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Her interests led her to study history at A-level and at university. While studying at the University of Greenwich, Isis undertook a placement involving archiving, restoration work and conducting tours of New Tavern Fort as a member of the Thames Defence Heritage, as well as volunteering at Milton Chantry for English Heritage. She also gained her first experience of the care sector as a community carer, providing extra support for people living in a care setting. This continued when Isis went on to care for her grandparents, as well as during the coronavirus pandemic, when she was a part-time support worker.

"I always thought of myself as a caring person," she says. "I didn't need a job, but I liked being involved and making a difference. I was mostly brought up by my grandparents, who instilled in me the importance of community and looking out for other people."

As Heritage Coordinator at the Belong Heritage Gallery, which was created by restoring Newcastle's oldest building as part of the care village development, Isis will draw on her experiences to lead a programme of events and activities providing opportunities for people of all ages to engage with local heritage.

Commenting on taking on her new role, Isis said: "It's a dream come true to bring these things together. I'm very excited about promoting local history and heritage in an inclusive way while being in a supporting and caring role. I've enjoyed being able to have a positive impact on people's lives when working in the care sector previously."



She plans to use connections with local heritage organisations to develop heritage-based activities and events at the Belong Heritage Gallery.

When she's not pursuing her interests in history, including travelling to places of historic interest, Isis practises archery and enjoys knitting. She is also a keen baker.

Speaking about her new role, she said: "I'm unbelievably excited about the future and to be part of Belong. I've found my people, and I've found my place. I want to put the Belong Heritage Gallery on the map."

Volunteer profile

In this feature, we recognise the outstanding contributions of volunteers to the Belong community. This issue, we give our thanks to Cavell Meakin, a retired nurse who continues her passion caring for others at Belong Crewe.

"A big part of my role is simply spending time with customers, listening to them and offering companionship," Cavell tells us. "For example, I recall at my first session, a resident needed someone to let her know everything was okay. We had a cup of tea and a chat about life, growing up, and she recalled the names of her family, before falling asleep."

Caring for others is in Cavell's nature, having devoted her career to nursing. She explains that volunteering allows her to carry this on, whilst injecting some creativity. "Another resident was looking for something to do, so I showed her one of the activity boxes I'd created, and she enjoyed the

colouring in. I felt I'd brought a little joy to her day and I went home feeling I had made a difference."

It turns out that Cavell is also a keen knitter and before Christmas, delighted the village's customers with a delivery of handmade blankets for the households. More recently, she's teamed up with her husband to tidy up the gardens in preparation for the gardening club when the weather brightens up.

Back on the households, Cavell has already forged some close bonds with Ann and Gillian from Coronation and says colleagues have been 'lovely and very welcoming'. She continues: "I've always loved caring for people.



Volunteering at the village allows me to feel that I am helping, like I did in my nursing days, and that gives me joy. I love being with people, listening to their personal histories, and in turn, customers enjoy hearing some of my stories, too."

Everyone at Belong is very pleased to have you on-board, Cavell. The village team tells us how everyone looks forward to your weekly visits – thank you for joining the Belong family.

Warrington residents play zookeeper for the day

Members of **Belong Warrington** have been forging friendships with some special visitors after the zoo recently paid a visit for an animal therapy session, bringing the delights of the natural world to their home at Belong.

Residents welcomed the menagerie, with many daring to handle the exotic guests, including iguanas and an array of snakes. The session proved to be a hit, with

participants enjoying greeting guinea pigs, making mischief with meerkats and looking after tortoises, who helped some of their keepers to come out of their own shells.

Pictured: Belong Warrington Resident, Gwen Mason, with Support Worker, Callum Murphy.



Denis performs for Belong Atherton

Denis Ratcliffe enjoyed his debut performance at his home, **Belong Atherton**, entertaining fellow residents with festive favourites on his electric organ.

Customers and colleagues were joined by the organist's son, Christopher, to sing their hearts out to Jingle Bells, Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer and White Christmas, before giving their much-loved musician and friend an emotional applause to complete the evening's proceedings.



Pictured: Belong Atherton residents take their seats for Denis's performance.



Pictured (L-R): Mary Gibbon, Denis Ratcliffe, Lucille Furness.

Support worker takes the stepping-stone to becoming a nurse

An apprentice nurse is taking a less conventional pathway to achieve the career of her dreams, thanks to a new government-funded pilot offered by Belong affording her the chance to gain hands-on experience and earn whilst she learns.

Holly Goldsmith, 23, a Trainee Nursing Associate (TNA) at Belong Crewe, spends her working day looking after customers whilst under the mentorship of an experienced team of nurses. She made the change from her previous role as a dental nurse, earlier this year, joining as a support worker at the village in order to pursue her passion to care more closely for others. It was when the chance to train to become a nurse arose, Holly realised she already had the experience and qualifications to apply.

She explains in more detail: "Belong has a reputation as a fantastic employer and I initially joined as a support worker to care for others and to be part of an organisation that provides its colleagues with opportunities for growth. While undertaking the TNA course, I get extensive training, new skills and clinical knowledge and get to apply them on a daily basis, whilst earning a qualification that opens a pathway to becoming a Registered Nurse."



Pictured: Holly Goldsmith (left) and Belong Crewe resident Sheila Manning (right) enjoy a cup of tea in the village's on-site bistro.

Spring's around the corner

Belong Macclesfield residents showed off their creative talents at a recent art session by painting these lovely trees.

Spring feels just around the corner and painting the green leaves and other bright colours had everyone looking forward to it during a fun session with creations and chatter.



High in the Manchester sky

Belong Morris Feinmann customers reached the highest of heights to enjoy a slice of Mancunian history and views of the city with a trip to Castlefield Viaduct. Last year, the disused Grade-II listed, Victorian railway bridge in the oldest part of Manchester was transformed by the National Trust into a sky park, having been deserted after closing to rail traffic in 1969.

Cultural experience coordinator, Angela Lockett, said: "It was utterly fabulous! The sun shone and the volunteers there were amazing; the history and transformation was fascinating. Our customers loved it!"



Pictured: Belong Morris Feinmann customers at Castlefield Viaduct.

Work experience

Students from Blackfriars Academy have taken part in work experience at **Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme** recently.

They have enjoyed working with the caretaker, administration, bistro and housekeeping teams. It was a pleasure and a delight to welcome them and we'd like to take this opportunity to thank them all for their hard work.



Pictured: Students enjoyed working with colleagues at the village.



Crochet creations

Belong at Home Customer, Edmund Peace, who lives in the apartments at **Belong Warrington**, has been busy creating some beautiful blankets and soft toys.

Edmund loves crochet and recently created this beautiful mouse to Belong at Home Team Leader, Nicola Hewitt, who had previously admired his other creations. Angelica (as the mouse has been named) will now sit pride of place as a mascot for the Belong at Home office. Thank you Edmund for this very kind gesture.

Pictured: Edmund and Nicola with Angelica.



Book dedicated to Belong colleagues



A new book, 'Supporting People to Live Well with Dementia,' has been dedicated to **Belong Crewe** by the author whose father lived at the village. James McNicol was a popular and much-loved resident on Britannia household between 2018 and 2020, and his daughter, Sarah, has dedicated her book to the team. She says: "During those years, we had some of the best times together we'd had for many years. I'll always be grateful for everything everyone did for Dad and me."

Speaking of her relationship with James when she worked on Britannia household, Josephine Mollison, now Support Manager at Belong Warrington, said: "I have fond memories, including a visit to the pub after work for a pint and sausage roll on a warm summer's evening. The book has provided great comfort that we did the best for James and has provided the opportunity to reflect on the incredible journey we shared together."

A free excerpt of the book, including James's time at Belong can be read using the link or QR code: <https://bit.ly/BelongJamesBook>

Pictured: Josephine and James share a happy evening at the pub, along with support worker, Sue Robinson, who is also sadly no longer with us.





Your life, your pace, your way.

Become a Belong Champion



We have a number of exciting opportunities,
all with a range of attractive benefits you'd
expect from an award-winning employer.

Take a look and apply online:



www.belong.org.uk/jobs



Locations: Atherton, Chester, Crewe, Didsbury, Macclesfield, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Warrington, Wigan, (Birkdale opening 2024, register now).



Belong is a not-for-profit equal opportunities employer and encourages applicants from all sections of the community.

