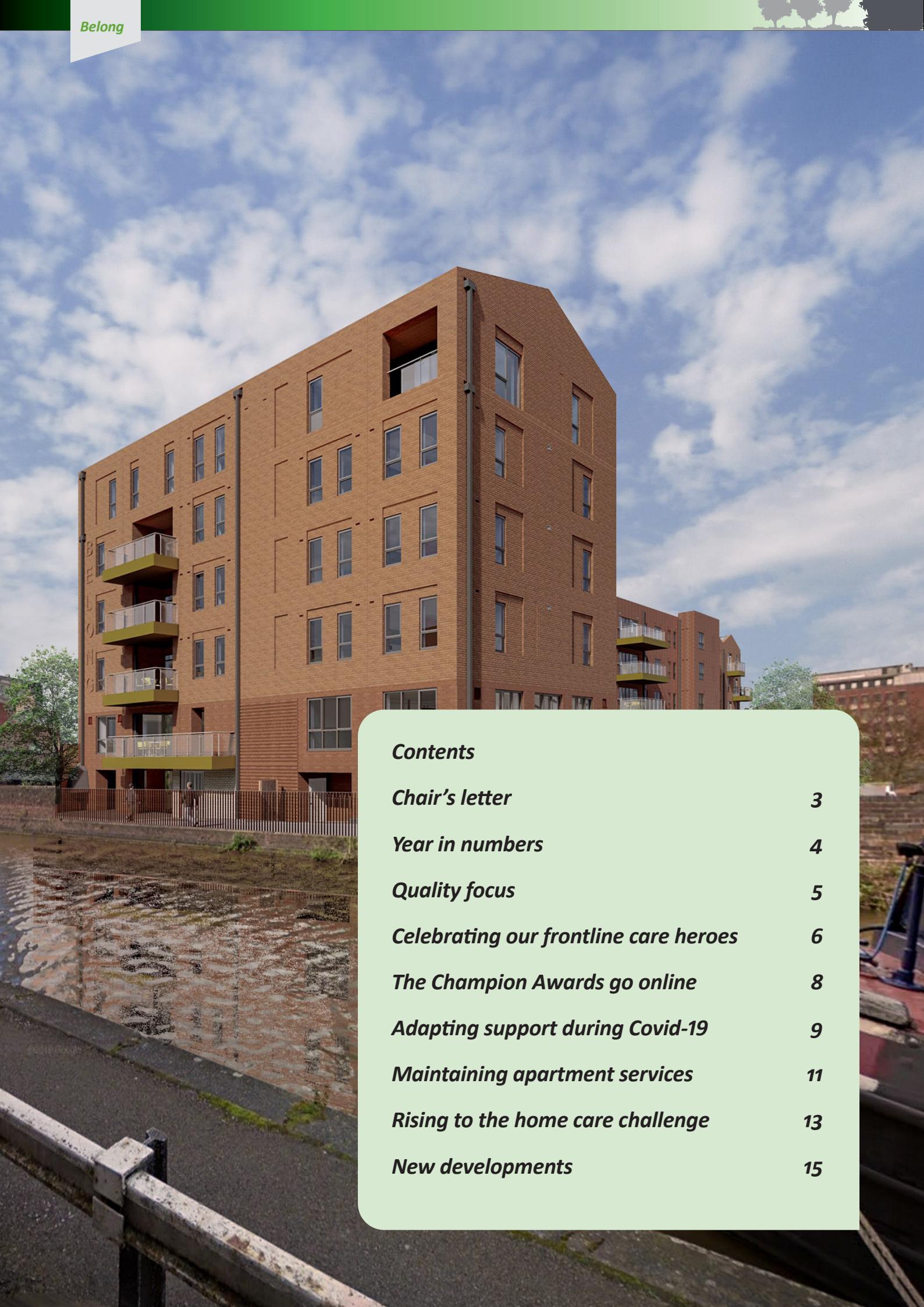





Belong

Social
Impact
2020-21





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Chair's letter



This has undoubtedly been a year like no other. Like so many organisations, Belong saw everything disrupted as it battled through a global pandemic: new policies were written for colleagues, new protocols established for visitors – and new initiatives were launched to find innovative ways of providing services and support to Belong's customers and those in the wider community.

The results were a triumph of resilience, resourcefulness and sheer ingenuity, as colleagues proved their determination and dedication to making sure life was the very best it could be for the customers we support.

Their success can be seen in the many positive social impacts achieved in spite of everything; and in the continuity of services, support and wellbeing that all our colleagues worked harder than ever to provide. For this, the Board is immensely grateful and inspired to see all that has been achieved.

We have also been overwhelmed by the incredible support and generosity of local people and businesses, who have given of their time and all manner of donations to the villages and Belong at Home teams. It has been a truly humbling and remarkable year.

Happily, we end it in a positive place – with Covid-19 vaccines, regular testing and robust infection prevention and control measures operating throughout our villages and services.

We were also delighted when Belong won the Social Care Covid Hero Team Award at the Great North West Care Awards 2021 for going “above and beyond” as an employer during the Covid-19 crisis.

It has been particularly heartening to welcome back visitors in greater numbers and see vibrancy return to our villages as we have re-opened the Bistros and other facilities and started to plan the first village-wide events in over a year.

As always, Belong's impact is ultimately about wellbeing and we hope this report gives some insight into the many positive indicators of wellbeing that have been achieved this year. The way in which colleagues have risen to the challenges and found new ways to support Belong's customers has been truly inspirational and gives every confidence for the future.

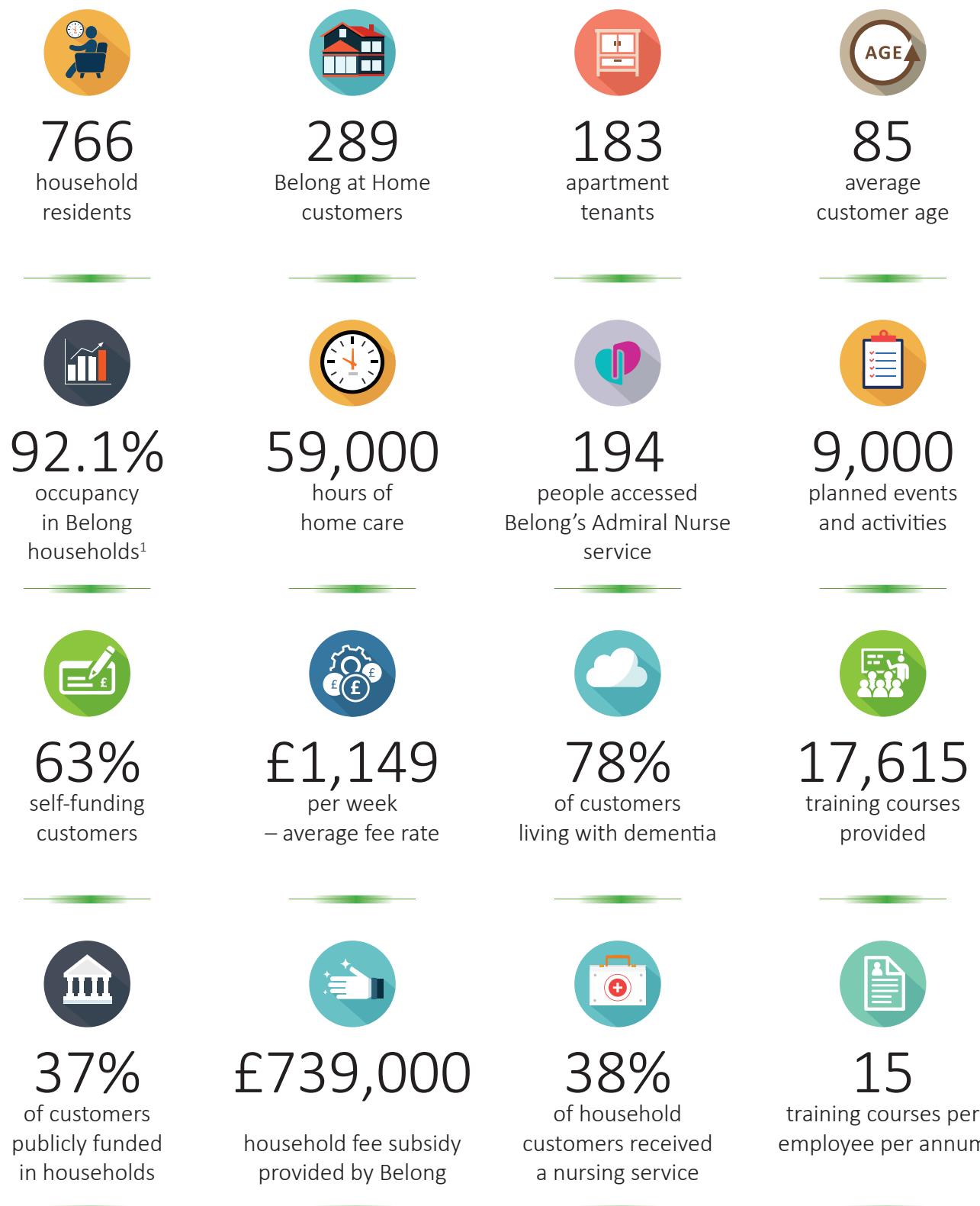
Nicola Brooks

Chair of the Board



Year in numbers

2020/21 was a year overshadowed by Covid-19, which disrupted services that would normally have seen local people make use of services and facilities, such as Belong's specialist day care and gym services, the Bistros, hair salon and therapy rooms. With the villages forced to close to the wider community, some services had to be suspended and there is therefore no data for Belong's Experience Day (specialist day care) service this year, nor for transactions in salons and Bistros.



¹ Excluding villages in the fill-up phase, which averaged 64.9% occupancy

Quality focus

Ensuring high quality care for the people we support is vital to Belong and we use a range of internal and external measures to monitor our services.

Care Quality Commission (CQC) ratings



The impact of Covid-19 meant that routine inspections were mostly suspended during this year. However, we were delighted that, following the disappointing 'Requires Improvement' rating received at Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme last year, the village was reinspected in March 2021, this time achieving an overall GOOD rating.

Inspected and rated

Outstanding



Inspected and rated

Good



This means that all Belong villages and Belong at Home services are rated GOOD or better by the Care Quality Commission, with 43% of villages rated OUTSTANDING.

CQC also carried out Covid-19 support calls during the year, and all Belong services contacted were found to have robust infection prevention and control practices in place, with no concerns raised.



Customer reviews

Belong continues to be highly rated by its customers.

The average rating on carehome.co.uk is 9.8 and similarly, our home care service, Belong at Home, is rated 9.8 on homecare.co.uk, based on independently verified reviews.

In 2021, Belong at Home was once again listed in the top 20 home care provider groups nationally and Belong Warrington was included in the North West Top 20 home care providers.

Operational performance

Belong continues to outperform its peers in the care sector, across a range of quality indicators.

	UK average 2019/20	Belong 2019/20	Belong 2020/21
Occupancy	87.4% ¹	97.8% ²	92.1%
Staff costs per resident per annum	£29,322 ¹	£32,237 ³	£36,763
Rota hours per resident	37.0 ⁴	41.8	44.8
Agency costs % of staff costs	9.9% ¹	6.6%	5.1%

¹ Knight Frank 2020 Care Homes Trading Performance Review (for 2019/20). ² Excludes Belong Morris Feinmann and Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme villages. ³ Higher staff costs reflect higher rates of pay and a higher staffing ratio, promoting better customer outcomes. ⁴ LaingBuisson Fair Price Toolkit 2015 for nursing dementia residents including carers, catering and housekeeping staff.



Celebrating our frontline care heroes

Fear, loss, isolation and face masks were just some of the factors which made working conditions over the past year some of the most onerous any of us can remember. In spite of all this, our people have risen to the challenges and demonstrated truly exceptional commitment and resilience.

Caring through Covid-19

Everyone played a vital role in keeping people safe and connected and we were overwhelmed by the very generous acts of community kindness shown towards our teams. We share a few tributes from our managers.



Word from Caroline Ray, General Manager, Belong Macclesfield

“ Those of us who have worked for many years in health and social care tend to think we have seen everything. There have been countless times when I have looked back and wondered how did we get through that? And usually the answer is: because we had good people - people prepared to dig deep and find the strength to carry on and keep giving when it seemed impossible.

Then Covid 19 happened; a whole new uncharted world of fear, anxiety, sadness, anger and loss.

And along with many others I wondered, how will we get through this? And the answer once again, is: good people; the best people.”



Chris Hughes, Chief Finance Officer for Belong:

“ The central services teams are very familiar with supporting the villages, Belong at Home and each other. In spite of all the challenges, their hard work, dedication and adaptability ensured that we provided this same support and more, and I would like to thank everyone for their efforts. It has been incredible to see people go above and beyond for our colleagues and customers. These collaborative and innovative approaches to situations are longstanding features of the way we work and will help us continue to overcome the challenges we face.”



Word from Carolyn Ball, General Manager, Belong Morris Feinmann:

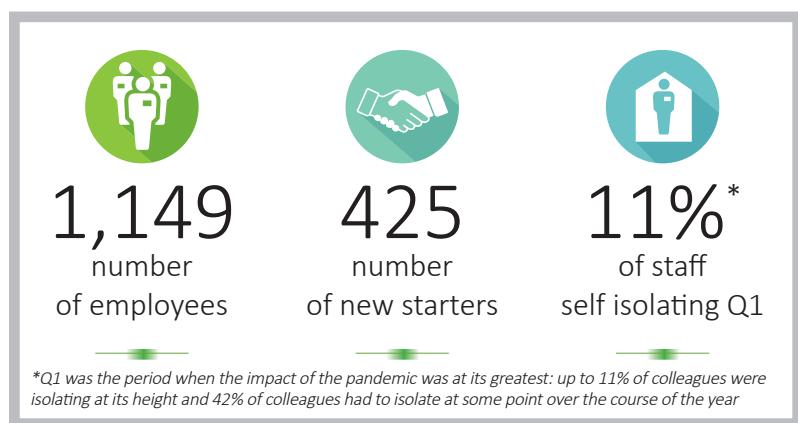
“ The effects of the Coronavirus have been felt far and wide in the care sector, but the unwavering dedication and spirit of the village team has been incredible. From mourning the loss of residents we consider as family to keeping a smile on customers' faces at the toughest of times, we have shown strength in the face of adversity and the sense of community is clear to see.”

Overcoming the people challenges

Amongst the challenges posed by Covid-19 was the impact of self-isolation exacerbating the resourcing challenges of ensuring villages remained fully recruited.

In spite of this backdrop, Belong was delighted to receive an incredible response to its Covid-19 recruitment drive, with over 100 new starters joining teams across the seven villages in the months immediately following the outbreak.

The HR team worked alongside Project Manager, Mel Saywell, around the clock, processing applications and conducting video call interviews to screen candidates. All full-time positions were filled as a result, with agency usage reducing by a third in Q1 and by 10% over the year as a whole.





CASE STUDY

Nimra Zubair

One recruit enrolled during the outbreak was Nimra Zubair, a Macclesfield student who found her education plans on hold due to Covid-19.

As many students received online tuition whilst locked down in their halls of residence, 18-year-old Nimra decided to defer starting her medical degree, choosing to become a support worker at Belong Macclesfield instead.

Nimra explains: “The plan was to go to university, but with everything going on, I thought, ‘Why not defer for now?’ and then I found out about the support worker vacancy.”

Though she didn’t hold any care qualifications, Nimra’s experience and work ethic made her the perfect candidate to train for ‘The Care Certificate’, as part of the role’s robust induction programme, to certify her competency in the knowledge, skills and behaviours expected for the high standards of the position.

She had discovered her passion for caring for others while volunteering for the village – something she had done weekly since the age of 16.

She explains: “I always wanted a role where I could help people, be of use to the world and make a positive difference. I’m really happy to be based on the ‘household’ I volunteered on too; I’ve missed the residents this past year, so to be reunited with them is a dream come true.”

Caroline Ray, General Manager at Belong Macclesfield, said: “We’re thrilled to have Nimra back with us; she’s a popular member of the team, whose dedication and hard work are exemplary.”

Belong retains IIP Gold Award

In summer 2020, Belong was awarded the prestigious Gold Investors in People accreditation for its investment in colleagues and handling of the pandemic.

The overall score increased from its previous assessment, confirming Belong’s place as one of the UK’s top employers and earning recognition for the positive impact of the organisation’s culture on outcomes achieved for residents during the Coronavirus crisis.



The assessor noted that: ***“Actions taken prior to Covid and the buy-in of employees to deliver the Covid-free Belong which we now see, confirms that high-quality communication and an empowering leadership style are bringing out the best in people.”***

During a comprehensive assessment period, which concluded in July, Belong demonstrated an exceptional performance for its leadership, colleague support, and drive to continuously improve. Colleagues across Belong’s seven villages, Belong at Home and central services were invited to complete a feedback survey, the results of which were combined with follow-up interviews and reviews of documentation to build a picture of the organisation.

In the inspiring final report, Investors in People judged Belong to have achieved the Gold standard, an accolade awarded only to around 16% of businesses.

Tracey Stakes, Chief Executive at Belong, commented on the achievement: ***“To have our customer-focused culture recognised in the midst of a pandemic is real testament to all our teams and the values that are enabling us to pull through these challenging times. We can confidently say that the Belong culture is alive and well.”***

Since the last review, accreditation requirements have been raised, meaning higher standards now have to be met to achieve the Investors in People Gold status. Belong outperformed its previous score, attaining the ‘Advanced’ level for all key performance indicators and the maximum ‘High Performer’ level in six areas, including adopting the values, collaborative working and encouraging innovation.



The Champion Awards go online



In autumn 2020, Belong recognised the outstanding achievements of its colleagues in its first ever virtual awards ceremony.

Live streams across all Belong villages brought together over 300 colleagues, customers, their families, and local communities, enabling them to cheer on the winners as they collected their accolades.

Prior to this, finalists from Belong's seven care villages, home care service, and support services had been assessed in online interviews with an independent judging panel to determine the winners.

The panel, comprising members of Belong's Non-executive Board and senior figures from partner organisations, were full of praise for those shortlisted, describing them as 'inspirational' and commended teams' support for one another and community engagement projects which 'reach positive outcomes for the benefit of all.'

Belong Champions 2020

#BelongChampions

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Belong Champions 2020

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Anthony Shufflebotham
Compassion Award

Anthony Shufflebotham
Compassion Award



Adapting support during Covid-19

Supporting household residents

With the requirements of 'bubbling' and 'shielding', life in a Belong village was somewhat altered at the height of the pandemic. However, colleagues worked tirelessly to adapt services and ensure life for residents continued to bring fulfilment and joy.

Word from Rebecca Woodcock, General Manager, Belong Atherton



“The last few months have been truly remarkable. At times, it has been difficult emotionally, including when supporting residents who are missing loved ones. However, this has come with the joy of rediscovering old ways of keeping in touch, as well as finding new ones: we've seen singing from balconies, postcards sent with love and conversations with grandchildren on FaceTime.”

We are learning skills and forging connections that will last well beyond the current situation.”

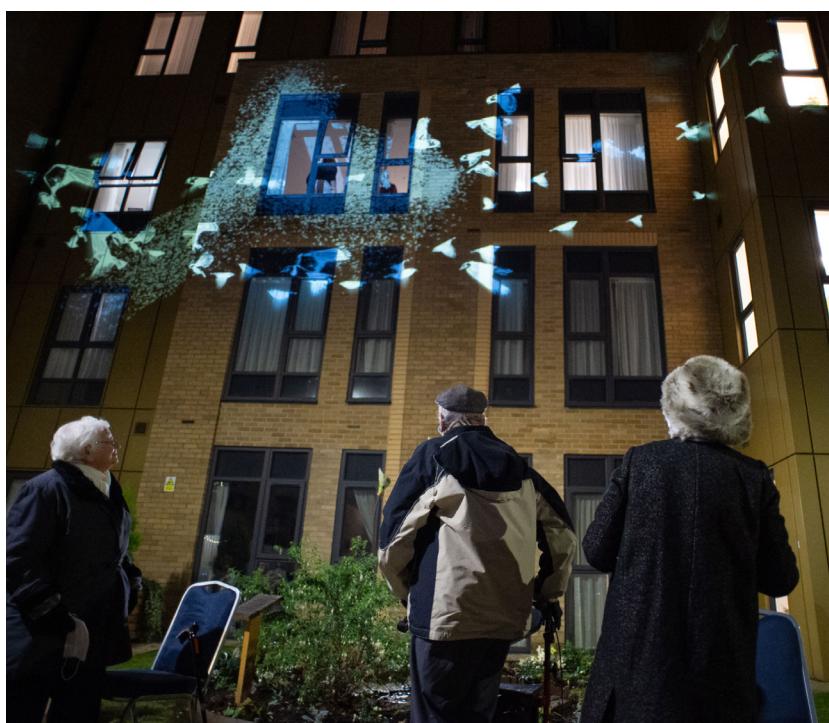
Village teams deployed all their creativity – and a fair bit of technology – to keep residents entertained and stimulated.

Residents learned to ask Alexa to play their favourite tunes; families joined in household celebrations using Facebook portals, daily updates were shared via the Relatives Gateways and a wide range of events migrated online, including live link-ins with schools, musicians, artists and specialist fitness instructors.

Meanwhile, residents of Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme enjoyed pottery classes, led by resident artist at British Ceramics Biennial (BCB), Joanne Mills, using a video-link. The best of the pottery creations will be exhibited in the Belong Heritage Gallery and, nationally, at the Biennial later this year.



Pictured: Belong Newcastle-under-Lyme Support Worker, Marie O'Brien and resident, Janet Frampton.



Mystery Bird comes to Morris Feinmann

Belong enjoyed considerable support through community projects which enabled live performances in the village gardens, including from the The Northern Chamber Orchestra and the travelling light show spectacle, *Mystery Bird*, courtesy of The Lowry.

Brought to life by Quays Culture and a collective of North West artists, the special art installation featured a giant birdcage filled with animated versions of local and endangered species crafted through a combination of paper art, projection, digital design and augmented reality.

To accompany the performance, Quays Culture also donated bird-themed activity packs for each resident, as well as supplies to encourage more birds to visit the village garden.



Keeping active

Residents had the opportunity to take part in the Road Worlds for Seniors cycling competition, with representatives from each village collectively clocking up over 2,500km (1,553 miles) in the global initiative for older people and those with dementia.

Amongst the thousands competing, Belong residents explored breath-taking landscapes while cycling, thanks to the event's organiser, Motitech, whose mobile bikes and screens make it possible to bring cycle equipment to residents in their households.

Exercise sessions were also run by fitness instructors on the households, with targeted routines to address falls prevention, as well as to maintain mobility, strength and balance.

Belong Wigan resident, Susan Winnard, who is registered deaf and 95% blind has been a true inspiration for the village by cycling the equivalent of two whole marathons, seeing her health rapidly improve. She commented: "I have loved every moment of this competition. Before joining Belong I had a bad fall, but after Ryan's encouragement in the gym and taking part in cycling every day, I feel a lot better and my knee and ankle don't hurt anymore."



Pictured: Belong Warrington resident, Tess, enjoys clocking up the miles



Warrington couple reunited



Ivy Thompson, resident at Belong Warrington, celebrated 50 years of marriage after being reunited with her husband following the easing of lockdown restrictions.

Frank Thompson visited his wife, Ivy, at the village exactly 50 years on from their wedding day in 1970, to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary together after four months of separation due to the national lockdown.



The happy couple were treated to a gold themed, socially distanced, outdoor celebration, featuring balloons, prosecco, and cake, where they looked back over half a century of fond memories. When asked about the secret to a long, happy marriage, Frank joked: "Always say yes to your wife!" before adding: "Sharing decisions and compromise always helps, but the secret is really caring and loving one another."

Commenting on Frank and Ivy's milestone celebration, Claire Bibby, General Manager at Belong Warrington, said: "We were so pleased to be able to welcome Frank back to the village in time to celebrate his and Ivy's golden wedding anniversary. It's been a challenging time for everyone and to be able to enjoy easing of lockdown restrictions with such a special occasion was particularly heart warming. Congratulations to Frank and Ivy."

**"Always
say yes
to your
wife..."**

Maintaining apartment services

With access to the village centre restricted at various points throughout the year, Belong worked hard to ensure apartment tenants were nonetheless supported.

Daily check-in calls were increased to twice per day and a take-away service was launched from the Belong Bistros, enabling tenants to enjoy freshly cooked meals, delivered to their door.

The organisation also worked with its catering suppliers to offer a grocery ordering service, to assist those who were shielding and unable to go shopping.

Resource packs containing a range of information sheets, puzzles and activity suggestions were distributed throughout the year. By late 2020, Tenant Support Bubbles were launched to provide the opportunity for people to meet and enjoy wellbeing-focused activities in a Covid-safe environment.

Exercise provision

With the gym closed, the 'Belong Active' YouTube channel was launched, dedicated to helping older people keep fit and healthy during lockdown.

Customers have embraced the free, online videos, (think Joe Wickes for older people!) and followed these to continue their exercise whilst isolating, through a range of standing, sitting and even bed-based routines. 'In person' support has also been facilitated through corridor exercise and in some cases one-to-one sessions.



Artistic inspiration

Belong worked to bring the arts to apartment tenants, working with Bluecoat, Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts, to run a project led by critically acclaimed artists working with small cohorts of apartment tenants over video-link.

The initiative was set up to help tackle lockdown isolation by providing

a vehicle for wellbeing and social interaction within the tenants' support bubbles. The range of artists involved created opportunities for tenants to turn their hand to different creative genres, including sound and clay workshops.

Artist Alan Dunn, for example, worked with participants to exercise the brain and ear muscles and unlock the

hidden narratives from noises derived from everyday life and create a 30-minute 'live' concert.

Meanwhile, sculptor Brigitte Jurack encouraged Belong tenants to gently improve dexterity by using their finger and arm muscles to roll, push, pinch and pull clay in the making of tablets, pots, plates and animals.

Speaking of her first sounds workshop, Mary Britcliffe (pictured), apartment tenant at Belong Crewe, said: "It's great to be involved in the project; it's given me something new to look forward to each week. I'm definitely having lots of fun and I'm really enjoying the tongue twisters!"



The project is funded by Arts Council England through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, and is the latest collaboration between Belong and Bluecoat. The organisations have worked together since 2019 as part of 'Where the Arts Belong', a wider three-year research partnership, which has already demonstrated a range of positive outcomes in engaging people with dementia through the arts, including enhanced cognitive capacity, improved mood and an increased sense of community.



Celia gains new lease of life

Once wheelchair-bound, Celia Ridyard is walking and socialising again after moving to Honeysuckle Court independent living apartments in Belong Wigan and embracing the village's activities programme, including following a personalised exercise programme.

A few years ago, Celia was left paralysed from the neck down as a result of an autoimmune disease but fought hard to regain her mobility. After six months' rehabilitation she was able to live independently, albeit unable to do everything that she had previously done.

At the outset of the Coronavirus pandemic, Celia's family, many of whom are key workers, were worried about the risk posed by Coronavirus and that she may become lonely as a result of being required to isolate. This and declining mobility were behind Celia's move to Belong.

Moving into an apartment there meant that Celia could retain her independence while having the peace of mind of 24-hour emergency support and a vibrant community on her doorstep.

While initially sad to leave her neighbours and friends behind, Celia gradually kindled a new social life at the village, as more interaction between people became possible, including the introduction of tenant support bubbles.

"Not only has her mobility improved significantly, she's much happier"

She has since developed friendships with other residents, with whom she enjoys attending activities, including bingo and arts and crafts. She also attends weekly keep fit classes, as well as one-to-one sessions with the village exercise instructor, with exercises tailored to improve balance and lower body strength.

This has had a significant impact on Celia's mobility. Previously, she would only leave home with a family member and insisted on using a wheelchair. She now goes by herself to activities up to five times a week with only the aid of a walking frame, and her support bubble meets each day at 2pm to walk around the outside of the village.

Celia's family say that the motivation to attend activities with new friends has got her walking again. "When she was at home, she had no reason to walk very far. Now she's got her friends to do everything with. As a result, the improvement in her confidence is amazing. Not only has her mobility improved significantly, she's much happier – it was definitely the right decision to make the move to Belong Wigan," says her granddaughter Katie.



Rising to the home care challenge

With fears of moving to a care home at an all-time high, the organisation saw increased demand for its home care service, Belong at Home, following the first national lockdown. Colleagues rallied to rise to the demand, while at the same time providing much needed reassurance and enhanced support to existing customers.

The use of electronic care records was introduced to provide a better platform for recording information and for communication, including with families through the software's Relatives Gateway.

Again, resource packs with information sheets, exercise sheets, puzzles and activities were created and distributed to customers, and a number of new art, exercise and support initiatives introduced.

Promoting wellbeing

Tapping into the arts, Belong piloted a second project, working with Bluecoat, Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts, to tackle isolation by involving community customers in arts sessions with acclaimed artists, delivered via video call. Workshops included music, drawing and dance.

Commenting on the impact of introducing art to people's everyday routines, artist and Bluecoat Project Facilitator, Tabitha Moses, said: "The initiative is proving very popular so far. Staff have told us the sessions are opening up conversations and lifting customers' spirits.

"As such, the workshops are enabling more stimulating interactions between all those involved and our hope is that the training and learning outcomes produced can be applied to enhance future social care and wellbeing visits. We are so pleased to be able to develop further meaningful creative services for those living with dementia."

Belong at Home Wigan Area Manager, Sophie Walls, added: "The project has presented the perfect opportunity to offer something more to our customers during this difficult time and we are thrilled to support them to enjoy such meaningful activities on a one-to-one basis.

"It is a great experience for our community support workers to see the benefits of using art for someone's wellbeing, and it's enabling us all to develop new skills that can be used for years to come – it's wonderful to see the smiles on our customers' faces."

Community response

Belong at Home has seen a tremendous response from the community throughout the pandemic, including donations of afternoon teas, protective equipment, pamper items – and lots of chocolate!



Pictured: Belong at Home Wigan Customer, Mary Cunliffe.



Focus on exercise

In addition to the arts, the Belong at Home team worked with Belong's fitness instructors to create personalised exercise routines for customers, providing these free of charge, along with resistance bands to assist with exercise designed to strengthen muscles.



*Pictured:
John Eardley, Macclesfield.*



*Pictured: Mary Cunliffe,
Wigan*



*Pictured:
Peter Adshead, Atherton*

Advice and support

Belong continued to provide specialist assistance for people with dementia and their families through its Admiral Nurse service, providing consultations over the phone to ensure family members and carers of customers were supported throughout the Coronavirus outbreak.

Recognising the potentially detrimental impact of measures (such as shielding) introduced to protect older people from COVID-19, Belong released a guide to help families and friends of people with dementia recognise and overcome some of the barriers created by isolation, face coverings and social distancing.

Jo Ball, Operations Manager for Belong at Home



“I'm overwhelmed by the positive and heart-warming stories, compliments and support that we have received during this challenging time. It is testament to the incredible kindness of our local communities and the dedication of our teams, who have continued to give 110% within their roles. As always, our customers have been at the heart of everything we do and between us, we have kept them safe and well. Seeing the efforts of everyone involved has been a truly humbling experience and proven that, together, we can get through anything.**”**

Customer Feedback

“A big thank you for your excellent, safe and reliable home care for mum. I don't know how we would have managed without it, with all of us in isolation. She is clearly very well cared for and happy.”

“We are all extremely grateful for everything you and your lovely staff have done for mum over the last year. It has been really heart-warming for us to watch her confidence return and see all the improvements in both her physical and mental well-being.”

New developments



Belong Chester



Construction resumed at Belong Chester, as Seddons was appointed main contractor after work paused last year.

Development work is now well underway, with

handover due before the end of 2021 and the opening scheduled for early 2022. Apartments were released for sale in March 2021, with more than a quarter of the 23 apartments reserved within the first month.



Belong Birkdale

Belong is close to finalising contracts with a new contractor for its Southport site, located on Oxford Road.

Belong Birkdale will be Belong's first seaside village when it opens in 2022.



Belong Wirral Waters

Belong successfully completed the purchase of land for this waterside care village within Peel Land and Property's (Peel L&P) Wirral Waters scheme, in a move that will enable building work to commence on the £20 million development.

Belong was granted planning permission for the site by Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council in 2019 and will go out to tender for a contractor in autumn 2021. The development is key to the shared vision of creating a dementia-friendly neighbourhood and, once complete, the village will provide a vital hub at the heart of the Wirral Waters project, with a range of inclusive spaces and facilities accessible to the local community.



This publication is available in large format on request.

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