

The Shed Effect

Stories from shedders in Scotland



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Gala Men's Shed Tea Break
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The Jed Shed Tea Break

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Introduction

By Jo Cowan

Age Scotland is the largest charity in Scotland dedicated to enabling everyone to make the most of later life. Our vision is of a Scotland where everyone can love later life, and it's been our privilege over the past 4 years to have been able to offer community development support to men's sheds as they have set up and spread across Scotland.

Visiting a men's shed in full flow, listening to shedders' speaking about their shed, and hearing about its place in their lives, you can't fail to recognise the positive impact that sheds are having. There's a "buzz" and a "vibe" about a shed, and you can see, and hear, that people feel good being there. The craic, banter, leg-pulling, laughter, camaraderie and storytelling are all very much in evidence.

Something about sheds is a bit mischievous too - men having fun, doing things they want to do, on their own terms, in an environment that suits them, where they can relax, just be men. Something about even saying "men's sheds" makes you smile.

You sense a warm, infectious, positive energy, an enthusiastic atmosphere and a "can-do", practical and productive spirit in men's sheds. You notice a communal confidence that's growing out of people being part of something, contributing, being proud of it, feeling it's worthwhile, and having a sense of purpose.

It's the Shed Effect – and we love it!

At this early, but fast moving stage of men's sheds development, Age Scotland felt it was important to document and celebrate the successful impact of sheds across Scotland and to promote the "Shed Effect" to help sheds to continue to grow.

Several Scottish men's sheds are coming of age around the same time. They've navigated the "thinking-of-starting-a-shed" phase, and built up (often literally!) their sheds and shed communities. Scotland now has a growing body of shedders who are experiencing what it feels like to be part of their own shed, rather than hearing and reading about the success of sheds in other communities or other countries.

These pioneer shedders are now the experts on men's sheds. They can speak with insight and passion about what they are getting out of their sheds and why. If we want to know the impact sheds are having, we need to listen to their experiences.

A shedder questionnaire started our research of the what: gathering evidence on the main differences shedders feel being involved in a shed makes. To gain a more in-depth understanding of these benefits, Age Scotland set out to take this research further by asking shedders to share their individual stories, experiences and observations, drawing out their thoughts and opinions on why sheds work for them.

Personal stories, told in people's own words, can be a particularly powerful and persuasive way of promoting the benefits of sheds to:

- other men and other communities: encouraging involvement in men's sheds
- the general public and communities: raising awareness and gathering support
- funders and policy makers: giving a better understanding of men's sheds' importance, and of why they should continue to value and support them.

Our methodology

We developed a set of interview topics and questions which would enable sheds and shedders in Scotland to discuss and record their personal experiences of being involved in sheds and the positive impact it has had on their lives.

Conversations were informal and semi-structured to draw out personal stories, rather than limiting shedders' responses by asking set questions. We wanted an in-depth understanding of the importance of the men's shed in the context of that individual's life.

All contributors were given clear, written information about why Age Scotland was undertaking the research, who would be involved in the conversation, what taking part would mean and what would happen to the material afterwards.

Conversations were recorded and transcribed to give participants an opportunity to edit their stories, to enable the whole team to hear them in the shedders' own words, and to maintain the integrity of the material for further uses in promoting sheds.

To recruit contributors, our Men's Sheds Community Development Officers, Tim Green and Ian McVicar, approached sheds at a similar stage of development: established for at least a year, in premises, a growing member-base, known to be active and benefiting members. Sheds were of varying size, type and location to give a cross Scotland snapshot.

We anticipated gathering around 10 stories from a couple of sheds in the East and in the West of Scotland, and holding 2 focus groups. However, due to the willingness of sheds and individual shedders to participate, we gathered stories and experiences from:

- 8 men's sheds, recording 30 individual conversations with shedders
- 2 conversations with shed supporters
- 5 informal tea-break focus groups.

The conversations have generated a rich resource of shedders' experiences to draw on as evidence for the positive impact sheds have had in individual lives.

We are hugely grateful to everyone who agreed to take part, and in particular for:

- the willingness of sheds and shedders to participate and contribute.
- the warmth of the welcome received.
- the great atmosphere in the sheds: the fun and the laughs.
- the honesty and openness with which personal experiences and feelings were shared, and the willingness to share this further to benefit men's sheds.

Observations and key themes emerging from the conversations

What was particularly striking was

- the pride, passion and positivity people displayed in talking about their shed, and the affection and care they showed for their fellow shedders.
- how keenly observant people are of the benefits they are experiencing, and the insight they have into what others are getting out of attending the shed.
- how the same place, people and activities can offer such rich and diverse benefits for individual shedders.
- how strongly common themes emerged across sheds, despite there being great differences between the types of sheds.

Listening to the voices of over 30 shedders over the past 6 months, strong recurring themes emerged. Here are a few that stood out:

- The high value placed on banter, fun, leg-pulling, craic, camaraderie, friendship and story-telling, and on spending time with like-minded, interested and interesting folk
- A men's shed as a place/environment that allows men to do what they want to do, and be who/how they want to be, without imposing expectations or obligations. There's an inherent democracy, equality and inclusion in sheds and people generally "get on", recognising and accepting their differences.
- How important it is to some men to be able to do something practical, productive, useful, creative, problem-solving, and how much they also admire this in their peers.
- Men's sheds as places of almost endless opportunity, aspiration, inspiration, and sharing of learning and skills – but where things need to develop organically, in tune with the shed's capacity and with shedders' own wishes, preferences and interests.
- Men's sheds as an antidote to retirement, illness and other life changes.
- A strong awareness of the dangers of being solitary and inactive and the perils of the lure of daytime TV or the pub. The need to get out, do something and be with folk.
- Having a missionary zeal to spread the word about sheds and champion their benefits, wanting people to "Come and See", but being aware that not everyone will "get it" or want it.

While the emphasis of our research was on positive personal outcomes, we inevitably also learned from shedders about other impacts too, both positive and negative, including some concerns about the future. These views will be used sensitively and anonymously to give feedback where appropriate and to inform our future work with men's sheds.

Chapter 1 – Meet the shedders

To help us understand more about sheds, how they operate and the difference they make to later life, we started by asking shedders to tell us about their lives, and how and why they got involved in their shed.

I'm a retired welder. Before I retired I was a welder for 51 years, mainly down in Dundee docks but I travelled to various other places in England, Ireland working away fae home. I still do a wee bit for the trade union. I'm a Secretary of the North East Engineering and Construction Union which used to be the Boiler Makers' Union. I've got four children. I'm not gonna start counting the grandchildren and great grandchildren because I lose count, but I've got a big family.

Pat McCluskey, Carse of Gowrie & District Men's Shed

I'm a joiner, or I was a joiner, so that's how I ended up coming here to the shed. Because I used to do a lot of stuff in my own shed at home, like making little toys and houses and things like that. And I thought, "Well, if I come here I can maybe help some of the other guys", so this is what I've been doing all the time.

John Ross, Gala Men's Shed

I'm 72 years old. I'm a single man although I've been married. I have two grown up sons and a grand-daughter. I live in Ballachulish, I've been living there for something like 40 years, maybe. I used to be a soldier and I was at the Army Mountain Training Centre, where I used to teach mountaineering and climbing and other things like that: outdoor pursuits. I'm now a retired mountain guide, and I am a member of the Fort William Branch of the Royal British Legion Scotland and I am the Welfare and Befriending Officer there. In terms of the men's shed, I have no real skills: it's not like I'm into joinery or motorbikes. I just like being there and doing things as and when I'm needed.

Bruce James, Fort William Men's Shed

I served my time as a plasterer for five years, and then I went away to the army for fifteen years. I came out o' the army, I got a job wi' Halliburtons, American company, and was with them for 28 years until I retired. I went to Boston, Massachusetts for 6 years, and there I did odd jobs. When I came back from America, I got to hear about the men's shed, and I thought, "Sounds good to me", because I've worked all my days, worked for 50 years, so I just sorta thought I'd better keep going! So I came down here, had a look around, and thought, "Mmmh - this is good".

Mike Fairweather, Carse of Gowrie & District Men's Shed

My own background...I've always been a DIY type of guy, and I've always done stuff on my own, and I relish the idea of picking something up that was for the dump... "Yep, I can do something with that. I can definitely do something with this. I can make it into that. I can do whatever, especially if it costs next to nothing." I think it was my father who gave me that inspiration because he came from a make do and mend type of family. I don't come from a trade, but I think if I was to start all over again I would really like to have worked in wood.

Trevor Gallon, The Jed Shed

I worked most of my life in the NHS and then, on retirement, or shortly before retirement, we bought a barn – steading as they call them in Scotland – with a view to converting it to a home for retirement. And we're in the process of doing that as we speak. We've been at it now for, a bit too long my wife would tell you, about 5 or 6 years. So, we are getting there now: it's not too far away from being completed and "live-able in-able". But, part of that scenario, of course, means that I'm spending an awful lot of time working in that barn, on my own, all day, most days of the week. And this is one of the reasons I joined the shed. Having worked in the NHS, in clinical engineering all my life, you know, you're working with a group of guys, and you're laughing and joking, and there's banter going on all the day. And you miss it when you're on your own.

Rod Hanmer, The Jed Shed

I came to Hawick, I got a job with Bantel for six month. They gave us some stuff to take to Jedburgh to LS Starretts. I went there on the Friday, I started work there on the Monday, and I was there for 38 years. It was a tool manufacturers, they're a distribution point and they make bandsaws. So I was in the bandsaws section. I took early retirement on the 30th November, 3 year ago. Then I was sitting around the house, semi-comatose...It was boring, you could say lonely if you can be lonely when you're married. Then my daughter heard about it and she tellt the wife aboot the men's shed. I phoned, I think it was George, but I couldnae get him. Then, last December, I came in and the door was open and George was here. I was living in Hawick but I had no friends in Hawick. I had been working in Jedburgh for 38 year. I'm in the shed near every day.

Tam Dagg, Hawick Men's Shed

I had a major heart operation about 9 years ago, I got a valve replaced. So I did abseils, zip-wires, things like that to try and put back. Anything that's for funding, I'll do, you know. But the men's shed to me, gives me something back.

I've always been interested in electronics: that was part of my job. I worked for an electrical company. I've always been interested in that. When I left school, I wanted to be an electrician, but, quite honestly, I was a numpty. I didnae have the qualifications. But I've always used my hands in some sort of form or other, and this helps me.

I was very ill for a year after the heart operation. It took me a year to climb back to where I was. At that time I was, I think, 18 months away from my official retirement date. And I was brought up in an era where you worked 'til you retired, and that was it. I took it quite ill that I couldnae go back and finish my time. So, between my mind and my body, I was down for about a year. Looking back it's probably depression but I didn't take it as depression. I just thought that it was pretty unfair that I couldnae finish off my working life as such.

I don't know what the attraction was but, when I read about the men's shed I thought, "I think it'd be good...just might be good", you know. But fae day one I was, "Yes! This is it. This is what I want".

I'm the door-opener, by the way. I'm local. So, I get in, get the door open, get the heating on, get the kettle boiled. My wife comes and picks me up about half past twelve, which is mutual agreed wi' for her and I. Gives her time to do her thing, comes back, picks me up, then we get wir lunch.

Jack Ferguson, Hamilton Men's Shed

I've lived in Galashiels for 49 years now. Married. I've got two girls. I've got one grand-daughter, just born. I do a lot of football training for youngsters but, at the moment I've had a lot of issues with my health – I've got bad asthma and that - so, I've had to kick that up in the air just now. I just picked up a leaflet one day, "Mmm. shed? Mmm. That'll be guys goin' to everybody's sheds every week. I'm going to go to this meeting". Ma Grandad, he used to be great wi' his hands, you know, I learned a wee bit from my Grandad and I thought, "Ken, I might try something, and I'll come doon see if I can do anything". I work for Scottish Borders Council. I'm a cleaner at a school in Scottish Borders. But I come here at 11 o'clock. I go away at half-past 1, and then I dae paperwork. It's guid to get a' o' the banter wi' people. Saves being stuck in the hoose watching TV in the morning.

Paul Bertram, Gala Men's Shed

There's a wealth of knowledge in the shed. You see when they all start speaking – What they've aw' done and aw' the things everybody knows in here.

You don't realise, see when you retire, you think that's it, I'm done and dusted. But aw that knowledge that you built up over the years and there's a lot o' knowledge here, and it just sometimes comes out. You know, you're maybe working away and, "Wait a minute, try this, dae it that way".

Think how many people here have been made redundant, or just retired, how many years' experience there is. Look at in here, just itself, 240 years' experience in here, fae all walks of life.

Hamilton Men's Shed Tea Break

Chapter 2: Getting involved

Shedders told us about their initial involvement in sheds, and what motivated them to find out about sheds, visit sheds and get involved. Some shedders were encouraged by wives and partners or wider family and friends, or their local GP or voluntary organisation; others heard about sheds from publicity leaflets or their local newspapers. Shedders had many different reasons for getting involved initially.

Basically, I just went into BVOPS and was asking about their lunch club and we just got on chatting and I said, "You know the thing that I would really like to do is something connected with men's sheds. I've been reading about these things, about men's sheds. They're happening in Australia. They are all over. I would like to do that and I think it would work in the Borders."...We started in small premises. We got donations, put offers out for donations of tools and equipment and were inundated by the local people who came to our support.

Trevor Gallon, The Jed Shed

I was five years out of retirement and, because I had become a 24/7 carer for my wife who has Alzheimer's, I'd lost my work contacts. I was purely focussed here, and didn't move far from here. Then my wife went into residential care, and so I'm here on my own. Although I'd lived in the town 31 years I knew very few people, because work had kept me moving, and then caring for my wife had kept me trapped in here, I hadn't got a lot of social contacts. And it was, fortunately, at that time there was a little flyer in the town saying, "Is anybody interested in a men's shed?" There were five of us met in a pub and we decided, "Let's give it a birl"... The Rotary Club had looked for things to do, they'd heard about men's sheds, and they weren't sure whether it was a goer or not, so they put this advert up. The five of us sat round this table, and there's a lady from the NHS saying, "We might have some money to help you, if you want to do that".

Geoff Allison, Dalbeattie Men's Shed

I was getting depressed because I was in the hoose masel. I was getting depressed and I was worrying about this and worrying about that, you know. I kept going backwards and forrit to the doctor and then she says, "Well, look. There's a phone number. It's called the men's shed". So I phoned that up and he says, "Well, come down and have a look." So I came down, had a look, had a cup of tea and I've never been away.

Anon

It's often the case that men get referred to the shed by their wives. "My husband just sits at home all day. I was wondering if I could bring him along to the shed to let him see what you do?" Needless to say, we always invite them along and it's surprising the amount of men that have been introduced to the shed by their wives.

Roy Garland, Carse of Gowrie & District Men's Shed

A've hud wee strokes an stuff so had tae leave work twae years early. A wuz a bit doon coz a'd hoped tae gun intae ma retiral at least a couple o' years mair thun the usual 65 years. A dinnae like it at a. A absolutely hate it. A wuz gaun doon, doon and further doon. Sittin' in the hoose daen' nithin. Twiddlin ma' thooms. No being able tae dae onyhin ma sel, A could dae lots o stuff afore and for somebody like ma'sel, a jist couldnae dae it.

Efter a couple o' years A heard aboot this plice. The men's shed. A didnae think A really kent what they wur. However, somebody telt aes. A sid Ad gie it a try. So A went along afore A went off ma heid. A wuz right doon in the doldrums. A felt as if a wuz jist a waste o time'n A'd be better-off away oot the road. An' f for me tae come oot and say a thing like that jist isnae ma thing. A like huvin' fun an' a laugh, a guid blether an a chuckle wae other eejits like ma'sel. Efter tway or three weeks, A stertit feeling better, cumin back tae the Joe that ma wife kent. A'd went along tae see how A wud dae and ma gander wuz absolutely flastit. It braut aes right oot o' the doldrums. Efter quite a wee bit o' time, A wuz back tae ma auld sel agin, lafin', jokin' and banter. An tryin' tae huv the guid enjoyable times that A hud afore. Aye'ts probably saved ma life, or it least ma sanity, or baith, cos a wuz feelin' giue doon and although a'v got a fantastic wife, shae's a grand lass, a wuz still gaun doon and doon and doon agin til A came tae the shed.

The fact that A wuz able tae work wi ma hands and heid. If, or when, A need help tae dae onythin or needit advice, it wuz there. John is an absolute wizard wi' wud an' ae's aye there if ye need ony help or advice atah. Foo' o' a' the experience an' the knowledge needit tae gee a' o' the lads, the thing they want tae dae. Plus ae's awfae guid wae aes patience and cun sense when ye need advice. Jist ask an' ae'll stop what ae's daein an' gie ee a hand. The lads ur really great an' a. Oo a' help yin anither. Oo've got banter gaun a' the time ye ken and that lifts oor spirits nae end. Or a' freends the gither.

Joe Scott, Gala Men's Shed

Before getting involved in the Fort William Men's Shed most of my interest was getting out on the hills, hillwalking, and I still do – but more so then. Getting out and about. My Legion work was taking up quite a bit of my time, but, on the other hand, I used to go for days and days thinking, "What am I going to do today?" and it was getting to the point where I said, "I need to be doing something". So the men's shed has opened up all kinds of possibilities for me.

Outside of my Legion work, everything else I was doing, I was doing on my own. As an old soldier I'm used to being in with other people of all sorts. Some people I like a lot, some people maybe I don't like so much – but I'm used to being in with a group of people – and the trouble was, all those few activities I was engaging in were on my own and I didn't think that was good for me, and certainly found it a bit boring to be quite honest.

The only other alternative, it would appear, is the pub. Now, I'm not against the pub. I go there fairly regularly anyway, but I didn't want to make it my life's ambition to be seen every day of the week in a pub.

So when this idea came along, I thought it was a great idea. I still do. It's social interaction, you're talking to other people, you're getting to know other people, and you're in a crowd, and you get on with most of them, not all the time, but that's life isn't it? You are with other people and you're interacting with other people, and they're helping you, and you're helping them.

Bruce James, Fort William Men's Shed

Well, I have to be honest and say I hadn't a clue what a men's shed was. The late George Brown spoke to me one day about it at the Senior Citizens' Lunch. And, he says, "I'm thinking about starting a men's shed". And I said, "What's a men's shed?" He explained what it was and how it operated, and what its principles were, and everything else. And he said, "I'd like you to give me a hand to get it started. So, you know, "mug" written across the brow, and I said, "Yeah. Certainly, I'll do that wi' you, George".

I thought, Hawick is a town which has an ageing population and, without being sexist, I think there's a lot of men, widowers particularly, find it quite a lonely life. And, when I heard about it, did a bit of research, found out how it worked, and what its aims and objects were, if you like, I thought, "Yeah. This could be a great thing in the town". And it has proved to be.

Derick Tait, Hawick Men's Shed

Chapter 3: What happens in a shed?

No two sheds are exactly alike so we asked shedders to tell us about their own shed and their activities. Shedders described a wide variety of activities taking place in the shed, and explained how the sheds are evolving to meet growing interests. Their experiences highlight just how much time, skills energy and commitment shedders put into supporting their shed, and the many contributions that people make to their shed.

Basically, it's a facility for a group of men, to meet and do whatever really they feel comfortable doing. There are no rules, regulations, other than normal safety kind of things. There's no expectation of what you need to do. You don't need to do anything you don't want to do, really. I wouldn't ask anybody, or say to anybody, "Look, you need to go and do this." We only do volunteers. Like, for instance, that ramp that we built, it was only two or three of us that did that. But I would never go to somebody and say, "Right you need to come and give us a hand". But everybody in our shed is quite happy to. If they don't know how to do it, they're quite happy just to carry things.

Norrie Mason, Hamilton Men's Shed

I know the Men's Shed Association use this 'Shoulder to Shoulder' watchword. It's true. Men in the workshop will stand side by side and they'll be taught by somebody next to them who'll go, "How about trying it this way?" "I'll do that little bit for you. You do this bit." Quite often to be side by side with somebody, learning what it's all about or to be shown by somebody who's made one before and they're passing on a skill to you. Then, to me, that makes you feel a lot better. It gives you confidence. It gives you abilities that you maybe never had before. You're pushing past your own barriers a little bit. You're going for things that are slightly outside of the box.

It's not the first time that some of our boys have been two thirds of their way through a project and said, "Nah, it's just not doing it for me. I've lost interest in it. It's something that I really wanted to do but it's just not working for me". It's also not the first time that one of the other guys in the workshop's gone, "Hang on, I think I could maybe use that with what I'm doing. I'll pick that up and see where I can take it".

It's sometimes a finish that is in the eyes of the beholder. They can see something that other people can't, you know. They look sometimes at a piece of wood and they'll go, "I'm going to make that into whatever, you know. I'm going to make a little truck out of it. I'm going to make a little planter for my garden". And the rest of the boys'll be going, "Oh yeah, yes, sounds good. I like the plan of it. I'd like to see it when it all comes together".

Trevor Gallon, The Jed Shed

The first thing A din wuz a patio chair that needed stripped doon, tain tae bits, cleaned an' sandit, ye ken, and then A rebuilt it. A din that then A stained it. A'hm no bad at makin wee boxes, trinket boxes and other stuff and A enjoy daen it. A enjoy workin wi wud. What um A daen at the meenit? Oh aye, I'm makin a wee stand fur when am working wae a cordless drill. It's handy tae huv something tae put the tool in, so ee cun keep it oot the wiy and ee jist lift it up and off the stand, no a cluttered work area instead o leaving it lying aboot aw ower the plice creating hazards and its easier tae work if it's tidy, less dangerous, it disnae fa on the flair.

So that's what A'm daen the now. A wud say it makes us feel guid when av din sumthin wae wud especial. It's that guid tae handle and ye cun see the beauty in the patterns o' the grain. It gies ye satisfaction when ye've din it, when what ye've made is feenished. If I get a bit frustrated on the journey A jist ask for help.

Joe Scott, Gala Men's Shed

Probably my biggest project was dog agility equipment. We had a request from a client to make some dog agility equipment: this was jumps, and toys for dogs, presumably. They had these set-ups where you've got training for dogs where they would run along planks, and up and down little steps, and through tunnels. And we made jumps – so they go along and hop over all these jumps, then there are toys for them to play with, you know, plastic bottles hanging on wooden racks that they can bash with their feet or chew. I don't know quite what they do with them, but these are toys, apparently that the dogs play with. And that was probably my biggest project. And, then I'll chip in and help one of our members with the planters for the main street here in Jed, and just sort of make myself tentatively useful if I can.

Rod Hanmer, The Jed Shed

Mostly, I've been trying to build a doll's house, and I've been doing other little jobs that come up. Likes of, wi' Christmas, somebody wanted stars, reindeer, a bell cut oot, just draw them oot and cut them oot. They've been doing lots of things with the community. Two part-time upholsterers, they redid the cinema for the Camera Club. They had cinema seats, and they redid that. And there was a fellow came in, three weeks ago, you know the supports for the back o' the bed, the headboard, he wanted the slots on them lengthened, so we just got the machine oot, did that.

Tam Dagg, Hawick Men's Shed

I think o' things and I lie in bed at night and think o' things. "What'll I do tomorrow?" So, I think o' things, and I come down and dae them...Started a project maybe at the beginning of the year. I havenae finished it yet. I cut oot this tree trunk, eight inches wide and I sawed it through by hand, and then I drilled five holes in it, by hand, and it's gonna be a wine rack once it's finished. I've got to keep on the move. And I think that's the main thing for people my age, you know, or round about my age. If they've nothing to do, get yourself down here and keep movin'.

Mike Fairweather, Carse of Gowrie & District Men's Shed

...Somebody comes in and says, "I was a welder. I used to love welding". Where the hell are we going to put welding gear? If we can accommodate somebody, then we will do. One of the good things is, we're not in competition with other sheds. So, if someone comes in and says, "I like doing welding". "Well, what about getting in touch with Dalbeattie Men's Shed, because they've got the space, and they would take you." Maybe a longer haul to Dalbeattie – but meeting people's needs.

Roy Rodger, Dumfries Men's Shed

I think you can share anxieties. If you've got a wee problem that you're working on, you maybe mention it and find out everybody's in the same boat, got the same problem, and then the problem's solved maybe.

Fort William Men's Shed Tea Break

We switch the lights off and back on at 11 o'clock every day, and it's tea time. So we sit down at 11 o'clock every Tuesday and Thursday, and talk. Sometimes it's rubbish, you know, sometimes the American election, you know. We try not to do politics and religion, but it's something like that. We've a lot of English people, like me, so there's a fair bit of banter. But, in those talks, certainly, we thrash out anything that's bothering us.

And, as officers, as Secretary, I think it's our job to drive the shed to know what it wants, and so part of the discussion, quite regularly is, "So where are we going now?" You know, we've just got this grant in, or we're just signing that grant off, or we've earned this money. Our last coffee morning we had, we earned £750. Plenty of money. What are we going to spend the money on, you know, and what are we going to do, what do you want to do next? And, has anyone got anything they want to do? And, one guy brought along some leatherwork that he did, and it's fantastic! A few of us said, "Oh, I'd like to have a go at that." So, yes, right, once we've got this metalcraft established, and working, we can now start getting hold of some leatherwork stuff, and we'll do that.

So, as people come along, and as people have an interest, you know, we say, "So, what would you like to do?"

Geoff Allison, Dalbeattie Men's Shed

I think it's important to get them in, just to see what we are. I mean, we're no a business: we're no operating in opposition to the joiners in the town, to the builders in the town, or whatever. It's a hobby to come along here and, you know, if you want to make a table and it takes you three years to make a table, who cares, as long as you're happy doing it? That's what it's about. It's no about coming in and running a business or anything like that: it's coming in, being able to relax in a pleasant atmosphere.

Derick Tait, Hawick Men's Shed

I like makin' things. I like the people that come. I've got into a routine now - Tuesdays and Thursdays is part of that routine. And, although, as I've said, I'm anti-being part of anything, I've always been very, very independent, it's okay because you're with people your own age, and we've all got the same interests. We all recognise that we need to do something, and we've still got the ability to do it. And, I think, when you've got that, it's a shame not to use it.

David Logan, Hamilton Men's Shed

Chapter 4: What makes the shed work?

We were interested in finding out from shedders what makes a successful shed. Shedders explained about the ethos and purpose of sheds. Several contributors highlighted the committee structures, praising the work of their office bearers and committee members. Shedders also discussed the importance of shared decision making and shedders' feelings of ownership of what happens in their shed.

It's all down, I think, to the dynamics of the shed. I don't think it would work if you went in with a preconceived notion of, "This has got to be done, that's got to be done". You need to go in and say, "Right guys, this is what is available. If you want to use tools, you'll be allowed to use tools. If you don't want to use tools, there is no pressure. You're perfectly free to come in for half an hour, have a cup of tea, eat a biscuit and go home again. There are no time-limits."

The thing in a shed should be that the place is open at a specific time, so people know it's open. They can turn up, as and when they want, and leave when they want. There's no expectations or demands on them when they're there. Anything that contributes is welcome – but, like all organisations, you've got people who contribute more than others. We've had people who come just to eat a piece, drink a cup of tea and go home again. There's others who are heavily involved in the shed.

Our Treasurer is always making little things...not always so little! A couple of other guys, like myself, can have a chat, "What about doin' maintenance work, helping out?" We'll fix doors for instance, various things for Hamilton Accies – "The door is rotten, can you repair it? We don't want to buy new doors." We've put it together. So, we've been involved in that kind of thing. We get a great sense of satisfaction doing that kind of thing.

Norrie Mason, Hamilton Men's Shed

You can come when you want to come, you know. There's no pressure on anybody to come all the time if you've got a day when you don't feel like it, or you've got something else on. Making it more formal would take a lot away from it. I think the informal thing, a lot of the time, is what the guys like. That older member is in most days. He just pops in for a cup of tea and a chat with some of the guys he knows and then just goes away again, or sometimes he'll pop upstairs and just hang about for an hour.

David Waterton, The Jed Shed

There is no pressure. As I say, if we take three month tae dae something, so what? There's nae timescales. I mean we've all come fae environments where we're under pressure to do this, this and this. Not now.

Jack Ferguson, Hamilton Men's Shed

We're guys plootering about in a shed, but we're just doing it somewhere larger scale. That's what it's about. We're doing 'men things'. We all have CTAS - Compulsive Tool Acquisition Syndrome!

Geoff Allison, Dalbeattie Men's Shed

We make decisions as a whole...If somebody's wanting something, say they're wanting maybe a bird feeder. We'll say, "Right, Gala Day Centre's wanting a birdhouse". "Okay." "No Problem." We take it as a whole, we take it as a group meeting sort of thing. It's working together as a group. No just an individual says "Oh, we'll dae this, we'll dae that." It doesnae happen here, everything's decided by committee. We have quarterly meetings. Anything that's going on we'll decide "We'll build that." "We'll make that." "It's nae a problem." Everybody's got their ain views, and they get taken into account.

Paul Bertram, Gala Men's Shed

Women talk together, as groups, and go for coffee, and go to a café two and three at a time. Men'll no do that. But they'll come here. We've got some guys that'll come in and have a cup of coffee and no do anything. Which is good. They're getting the benefit of it: it's somewhere to go. I think there's a lack of that, you know. It's all right saying, "Oh, they're doing this in the community. They're doing this, that and the next thing". But this is what the men want to do themselves. And it's a different thing being led, than being pushed. It's two different ways of looking at it. The men here just do what they want to do.

John Ross, Gala Men's Shed

The fact that you can come and go. There's no hard and fast rules. You don't have to be here every week, or anything like that. It's just the fact that you could come here, there was guys you could talk to, you could have a chat tae, like a natter, a blether, get involved in something. Some of the guys make a lot of stuff. I don't so much make the things, but I like to gie somebody a hand tae dae things: holding them, and helping out and, if I can help them, I just dae it together.

There's always something going on. You can always put your tuppence worth in. Sometimes your tellt, "Don't be so stupid!" Aye, but ye take it aw in good part: it's aw good, the guys are aw good. I've landed lucky wi' a nice bunch o' guys.

Well, it definitely gives me an interest. And I know that, when I was younger, I didn't have the money for people to come in and fit kitchens for me, or bathrooms, or anything like that. I done it all myself – sometimes it was good, sometimes it wisnae so good. But I had tae dae it. If I wanted it, I had tae dae it myself, right. And, if you're doing that type o' work, it'd have been great to have somebody say, "Look, I'll show you a better way o' daen' that. I'll show you an easier way o' daen'" or whatever. Or, "Try this. Or try that." Here you can dae that, you've got that. Norrie's very knowledgeable. He's great to fall back on. He knows about all the different tools and stuff like that: he's really good. And, you're learning as you go along, for nobody knows it all. You start wi' a job and you think, "Don't know how I'm going to do that." Somebody'll say, "I know what we can dae, dae it this way, or dae it that way". And you learn that way.

Gavin Anderson, Hamilton Men's Shed

I says, "Whenever onybody approaches us, we discuss them, discuss wi' the members, and if they want to help, they help, and, if they dinnae, that's as far as it goes." It's got to be, aw the time, because it's their men's shed, it's no our men's shed, it's their men's shed. Everybody that's involved has a say whatever happens.

Wilson George, Hawick Men's Shed

In the past where I've had a phone call to say, "Would the men in the shed be prepared to do such and such?" And I said, "Well it's not up to us, I'll ask them". So I go and ask them. I have had a couple of instances over the years, "Would the men in the men's shed do things like clear the weeds off the footpath at such and such?" Well, no, it's not a service the men's shed are involved in. It's an activity for the men themselves and, if they want to do that as volunteers then, right, fine, but it's not a service in that sense. But everything is referred back to them. They take complete control.

Nigel Sargent, Volunteer Centre Borders

Westhill gave us a good description about one time they had a guy come in and said, "I don't go out. I'm lonely. I don't have any great trades. I don't have any hobbies". So, they sat and spoke to him and discovered he used to be a big Bridge player. So, now Westhill has a Bridge Club and that's where it started from. And, if somebody came in and said the same thing, we'd try it here. We've still got spaces within days or evenings for other organisations or groups.

I enjoy showing people around about the place. It's ours. It's our shed. Every man likes a shed. So, it feels good. Any of the guys do it. They all do it: somebody meets them and they'll bring guys in. You get people sitting out there looking around sort of thing, and one of the guys will walk down and have a chat with them and bring them in for a cup of tea. Rainy days, we get women coming in. You know, a lassie who's taken the kids to school, or playgroup, or something like that, got time to spare and they're drooned standing oot there – and we'll bring them in and give them a cup of coffee.

Roy Rodger, Dumfries Men's Shed

Shedders have kind of developed a concern for the other members. If they don't see each other, you know, if someone hasn't been for a few weeks, they say, "Has anybody seen him? What's going on?"

Christine Clarke, Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway

We have a practice in our shed of looking out for members who don't attend as often as normal. We usually advise the others of planned and enforced absences, but if a member doesn't turn up on his usual cycle we normally have someone get in contact with him to see if all is well or if we can help.

Geoff Allison, Dalbeattie Men's Shed

Chapter 5: The benefits of sheds: learning, passing on skills and taking on new roles

Shedders discussed what they get out of being involved in sheds. Many shedders commented on the importance of sheds as a place of learning, a place to experiment and try out new activities, use new equipment, a place to exchange skills and knowledge. As well as making or repairing things, many shedders have taken on a variety of committee, fundraising and organisational roles within their shed. Shedders discussed with us the pleasure learning has given them, the pride and sense of achievement they have gained, and the positive impact on their confidence, and health and well-being.

You can learn new skills here. You don't have to be young to learn a new skill. People over 65, why not learn a new skill? Learn how to make hanging baskets. I've just watched them on the machines, wood working and that. Because I was never involved in that, I was just ship building, on rigs, ship repairs and oil refineries. The woodwork side of it is different for me and I enjoy watching it.

Pat McCluskey, Carse of Gowrie & District Men's Shed

At first I just sat there and talked maist o' the time. Because, in a way, I wasnae a joinery person. I was never taught it at school at all, in my life. And I just sat there and just listened tae people. Then certain ither people started comin', and I could see they kent what they were talking about, so I could try to find out an interest I could get which was the walking sticks. And I just sat there and just sterted piddling about wi' bits o' wood, trying to make things oot o' it and ended up making handles for walking sticks. And that's a' I've done really here...I feel proud of myself. Because I've done it. Because I've never been actually taught how tae dae something like that. But, I've done it myself. And I've got more confidence that way. But I'd like tae dae a helluva lot mair o' stuff.

Neil McDougall, Gala Men's Shed

One of the lads from the school, he makes straight for where I am because he's wanting to learn how to do motorbike mechanics – so I'm teaching him. It's great. I love it. It's just me passing on my knowledge, and experience, and working, and things. I mean, to be a mechanic, it's a skill in its own, but you've got to think about what you're doing. And, if that bit breaks down, and there's another bit opposite, why did that bit break down? - instead of what they do nowadays, "Oh, it's broken. Put another bit in". When I done it, if that bit broke down, you'd say, "Why did it break down? Could it be something tae dae with this bit?" And that's how I learned the mechanics. Whereas, noo-adays, as I say, they're like, "Broken: put another bit in." And it might go again in the next 3 or 4 months because something is causing it to break down. I feel good passing on what I know. I feel chuffed about it actually.

Anon

Well A wuz a trainer, A wuz a first aid trainer in volunteer work and as a worker. A yis tae teach folk fae colleges, school, brickies and joiners. A've yaised ma skills here, afae minor, mind. Minor, bit it aw helps and it keeps ma hand in as weel.

Joe Scott, Gala Men's Shed

I've learned how to use a couple of machines I never knew before, you know, the big bandsaws, things like that. When I worked with Halliburtons, I used to use big syringe grinders, in the welding shop. I'd never used a bandsaw, so that was a good thing... I feel good about it because I can do things, you know, that I couldn't do before, 'cause I didn't know how to use it.

Mike Fairweather, Carse of Gowrie & District Men's Shed

To me, when I make things out of wood, to me wood's a living thing, you know. Even when it's cut down and it's made into something, it's still living. It's not a dead thing. I don't think I could work with metal because you get nothing back from it. I'm 73 now – so I've been working a long time, and it's always been with wood. My father had a joiner's business, and my grandfather had the business before that, so it just goes on and on. My brother was a joiner, and my two nephews, they're joiners.

I get a lot from helping the guys, just seeing them develop, you know, like when they're making something, all of a sudden there's a kinda look on their face and you can see they're enjoying this, and getting a lot from it. And I think that's the way it should be. I enjoy it, you know, and it's never any bother anybody coming to me and asking me to do anything, because I think, "Och, well, they're wanting to learn", you know. So, I help them that way. I will say to them, "If you have an idea, just put it down on paper, draw something. It doesn't need to be a masterpiece of a drawing, but it gives you an idea of what you want to do." And from then on, it kinda grows. I don't know what it is about making something: when you make something, something happens – but, what it is, I don't know. I can't put a name to it. But, it's good like that.

John Ross, Gala Men's Shed

When we first started the shed we had people who came forward and said, "I've worked in wood but I'd like to work in metal. We had people who said, "I've never picked up tools before, I've always been computer orientated, I've always been office based, I've been a painter". And, of course, what was quite important when you start the shed is that you look for this skills exchange. At that particular point in time, half a dozen people are sitting there going "I could learn a lot from this guy. He was a painter. I've never done any painting. That would be quite good." Or "I could teach you something about wood if you teach me how to go on about the metal". You've got all this type of thing happening...

When we first started up we had one or two people come forward and they would openly admit, "Look, I've never picked up tools for a long, long time. I've never constructed this. I've never done that". And something that we like to try and do is to say, "Look, how about making a birdbox?" "Ok, I don't really have a garden." It doesn't matter whether you've got a garden or not. A birdbox is an excellent place to start. The RSPB put out a birdbox construction with one long piece of wood, and with this one long piece of wood, you measure it, you saw it, you drill holes in it, you screw it together. You then construct this birdbox by the way of the diagram. And at the end of the day you look at it and go "I've done that. That's great."

But what you've done more than anything else is you've learned all of those disciplines that you need to move on to your next project. So your next project might be a small table. You need to measure it. Well, you've already done that. You need to drill it. Well, you've done that. You need to construct it, screw it together. Well, you've already done that. So it's just repeat, repeat, repeat of everything and then you move on to other projects from there. We've got guys that started doing birdboxes that are now making fiddles. That's not an easy thing to do. But the people who started making birdboxes did that with the help of somebody who can show them how to go on. The principles are very much the same.

Trevor Gallon, The Jed Shed

But I think that's part of the jigsaw, everybody's got different levels of skills. There's always something that one of us can pass on to others. It's brilliant: absolutely brilliant.

Jack Ferguson, Hamilton Men's Shed

I am the Chair of the Carse of Gowrie & District Men's Shed committee. I see my main role is to talk to people, both members and visitors. As I can no longer see well, I cannot work with the tools but I can help people to use them. I also try to make sure the place is running smoothly and that everybody is happy. We now have 100 members; 25-30 is the optimal daily attendance as this avoids overcrowding and queuing for machinery.

Roy Garland, Carse of Gowrie & District Men's Shed

When the shed was first opened in Langlee Community Centre, they wanted to form a committee. Nigel says, "Well, why don't you be Chairman?", and I've done it ever since. It was a challenge for me because I've never been on a committee or nothing like that. It feels great to be involved in something that I wouldnae have put my name forward. I would never, ever do a speech. But when the shed opened I had to dae a speech. I thought "Ye ken, I cannae dae this, I cannae dae this speech". And I drummed myself intae it the night before. "Right I've got tae dae this." And I did it.

Paul Bertram, Gala Men's Shed

At school, I liked woodwork so I've always done stuff about the house, but nothing to what I've been making here. I make a lot of things like vases, dried-flower vases. I've made quite a number of clocks. So, you just get a bit of wood, and shape it, and buy the clock insert and put that in.

It's good. You're using man's tools, you're cutting things, you know. There's danger attached to it! And, it's great when you give these away, and people go, "Oh, that's amazin'!" Everybody likes a wee bit praise now and then. I like makin' things.

I like the people that come. I've got into a routine now. Tuesdays and Thursdays is part of that routine. And, although, as I've said, I'm anti-being part of anything, I've always been very, very independent, it's okay because you're with people your own age, and we've all got the same interests. We all recognise that we need to do something, and we've still got the ability to do it. And, I think, when you've got that, it's a shame not to use it.

David Logan, Hamilton Men's Shed

It's an excellent environment. We've got lads that'll come in here and they'll say, "Hi", and away they'll go and dae their thing. They'll turn out a thing, and you'll look at it and go, "Jesus Christ. That's a brilliant idea! How do you come away wi' that?" "Oh, it's just a wee thing". So I would go awa' and look on the web and say, "How can we make that better? We could put lights on that. We could get them to work better wi' solar panels". "Where could we get them, Jake?" "Oh, I'll show you this website." And, then, the guys with the fretsaws will make clocks. "Aye, but it's getting the clock perts..." "I'll get you the clock parts. £1.39 each." "Whaurr do you get them?"... I like to show people what technology can do for them.

Jake Reid, Carse of Gowrie Men's Shed

It's a good shed. It's well looked after, that's the good thing...Well, I've painted the men's toilets and stuff and started comin' on a Friday when there's naebody gan' about and just daen odd bits and pieces like sweepin' the floor and stuff like that for them.

...I think it belongs to everybody. It doesnae just belong to one person, like. Ken, if they want something, it's always brought to the committee and they say yes or no. There's no very often they say no. Maist things are always talked about. On a Friday we have a wee discussion and make sure everybody's all right, and, if they have any problems, they can talk to anybody else. And, if they want to talk to somebody privately, they can come in here and, naebody will come in and bother them.

We had a barbeque and I ran the bottle stall on it, I've never done anything like that in my life. I quite enjoyed it. I'd never been to things like that before. Well, when I worked a farm, I never left the farm, like, I was always there. It's a new experience for me, ken, actually socialising with people, 'cause I dinnae drink, so I dinnae go to pubs or owt like that. I've never been on a committee in my life! I quite enjoy being on the committee and doing things. It was me and another member that organised the barbeque and stuff. I went roon' about the shops askin' for donations. A local company gave us a brand new barbeque for the job. I would never have asked for anything. I dinnae really ken what makes you dae it for here. It's just daen' it for helpin' people, I think. Aye giving something back. I was brought up that anybody that needed help, you helped them.

John (Jake) Crocket, Dumfries Men's Shed

Chapter 6: The benefits of sheds – social, health and wellbeing

Shedders told us what they most get out of being involved in the shed and the difference it has made to their lives. Almost every contributor highlighted the companionship and friendships they had made through their involvement in sheds. Many shedders spoke of the pleasure and renewed sense of purpose being involved in the shed brought them and credited their shed with improvements in their physical and mental health.

Well, I look forward to it, and I like to be busy. Some people come in and they just hae a cup o' tea, and come and blether to you. I just love it because it's a practical thing. I worked most of my time on bonus, so, when I come in here, I like to get stuck in. I find it keeps me younger. As I say, I'm waiting on a new hip, but I dinna feel like an old man. This is something that I like doin'. As I say, I do dae things in the house, but like this is totally different. This is like meh work. Like I say, I'm daen' practical things, I'm making things. You're maybe helping making bitties for the lathes through there. And I'm learning, I'm learning a' the time, so it's good. As I say, things that you've never done and, if you're no sure, you can go and ask. It's a braw place to come, braw bunch o' boys.

John Anderson, Carse of Gowrie & District Men's Shed

I'm Chairman of the Hawick Men's Shed. I've been for the last year. I've just been re-elected this year, so I'm still going strong. I worked in Johnston's Cashmere for 35-30 year. I retired from there. I was the shop steward and convener in the place – so that's where my background with negotiating and stuff like that wi folk comes from. I love coming in on the likes of a Monday morning. There's a list, and you'll get somebody's phoned in, and you've got to gang and collect tools or whatever fro' their shed. And I just phone them up and go up and collect them. And I gang up and speak to the folk and see how they're getting on, and anything they want, or anything like that. "No, you can take all this stuff." And we gae away with boxes. It's just a' fabulous. I think it's great. Ken, they're donating that. So everything's done and dusted. I do it 'cause I enjoy it! Cause my wife, she says, "What days are you at the Men's Shed?" I says, "I'm Mondays and Thursdays, that's guaranteed". I hae to ging in on a Monday, because I hae to check what's going on, and I work away fae there. But I'm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday now, ken, whenever I pass, I just come in. I dinna make anything, I just see what they're daen, and see everybody's quite happy, keep everybody right. 'Cause they just ask me if they're wanting owt. I say, "Right. I'll see what I can dae."

Wilson George, Hawick Men's Shed

I like the three o' clock when I come in for a cuppa tea. I enjoy that you get a craic with the guys and you get a laugh.

Pat McCluskey, Carse of Gowrie & District Men's Shed

The main benefit? Keep your mind active. Keep thinking, keep thinking about things. Keep your mind going. That's the main thing.

Mike Fairweather, Carse of Gowrie & District Men's Shed

The benefit, I say, it's getting together, socialising with other people, learning new things. I've learned new things here, a lot of new things I wouldn't have attempted to do anything if I didnae come here. I'd be stuck in the house.

Paul Bertram, Gala Men's Shed

I was in the darkest place ever and, if you've ever spoke to anybody in that place, I never thought I would be there and I was in that place, sitting in the house. For somebody that's worked twelve hours a day, focussed on people, talking to people, encouraging people, making people into managers and, all of a sudden no wantin' to be daen' any o' that. The shed has the feel-good factor, know what I mean? It's about working together. And I'm used to that. I'm used to doin' that in the work anyway, getting people to do that, used to helping. Since coming to the shed I'm up decorating the house again. I always liked to do things around the house: anything that needed done, I'll go and do it. I'm back to my normal self. If something isn't right, I like to make it nice. I've still got underlying health issues going on, that I'm needing to work on at the moment. So, I need to get through them – and then we'll be fine. They guys in the shed have been brilliant, every single one of them. I don't know what my long-term future is. I don't know where. Do I want to go back into work again? I've had offers but, I'm not ready yet. This is the best place to be the now to get me back on my feet, and I would recommend it.

Eddie O'Donnell, Hamilton Men's Shed

We do a lot of recycling stuff. If somebody gives us a pair of speakers, we'll build an amplifier to use the speakers. So things like that. And right now, I've got a wee kit: it's a short-wave fm/am receiver which will probably take maybe a couple of month to build, but I'll have built it at the end of the couple of month....As I say, it gives me something back. I know this sounds very selfish – I've been giving for a long time but I think this gives me something back. It gives me the company of other men with sort-of like-minded stuff. Aye, I say, I feel at home, I feel part ae belonging. I get a couple of hours every week away from the wife! Which is also true, I mean, I love my wife to bits, but I get time to myself here, and she gets daen' her ain thing.

Jack Ferguson, Hamilton Men's Shed

I've made a lot of friends: some good friends, actually. And we have a good laugh, a good blether. We have rows. Although there are arguments, even rows, and you know, proper fallings out but, generally speaking, the atmosphere is good. You know, a lot of leg-pulling and hilarity and that kind of stuff. I suppose it's a kind of a bunch of blokes together kind-of-thing, in the same pickle! You know, us blokes rub along together. I think relationships between women and women are different to men and men, somehow. It's interesting, I looked at a website for one of the other sheds the other day, and one of the things they said was, "We do this, we do that, we do the other – but we don't talk about our personal lives". And that is quite striking to me. I thought. "Yeah. Why not? If you were a woman, you would", but men tend not to, don't they? They tend to button up. I think we ought to be talking to one another.

David Ford, Fort William Men's Shed

As I say, I really value the camaraderie and the fun and banter with the guys, and that's made quite a bit of difference...I mean, all my working life, that's how we've operated. There's always been a group of people. And, because we were involved in R & D (Research and Development), you were actually doing things that in some respects hadn't been done before. So these ideas would be bashed about a little bit. I took early retirement to do this barn, and wouldn't have taken early retirement had it not been for this barn. And, now that's drawing to a close, I still need a reason to get up in the morning, shall we say. I feel it's very important. I mean, we spend a lot of time working, don't we, and it just becomes a way of life.

Rod Hanmer, The Jed Shed

I enjoy it, yeah I feel good. It gets me out the house, out of the four walls. It's good for guys to come along as well, to meet other guys in here, older ones. Some are old, some are young. Get young ones in as well. It's important to get you out the house, to meet people, tae dae stuff for yourself, and help you tae dae stuff: get your mind occupied.

Peter McCourt, Gala Men's Shed

I've been a volunteer for forty years, involved in nearly everything. The reason I come to the man's shed is because, for a wee change, I get something back, rather than giving it out. I get something back. So this is why I'm here.

Every day I come here, we get a laugh. If it's some stupid mistake we make...and, that's another thing – none of us are geniuses. We make mistakes and say, "Aye. I made that. I made that. Follow that. So what?"

It used to be a standing joke in there, "What are you building?" "Neutron bomb. But you don't press that big red button." That's it! It's absolutely fabulous, the fact that you can relate to other guys. As I say, we're no all fit by any shape or form, but it's keeping wir minds fit which I think is the most important thing.

Jack Ferguson, Hamilton Men's Shed

Gives me a break fae medical things. Break fae the humdrum o' life. The usual, you know. I lived a varied life. I mean, I got oot and aboot and I seen the world and I've got my ain observations. What do I get out o' being here? Camaraderie. Mucking in. A better feeling in life when you're meeting up wi' fowk.

Jake Reid, Carse of Gowrie & District Men's Shed

Keeps the fingers movin'. And a lot less borin' than watching TV.

Tam Dagg, Hawick Men's Shed

Even somebody that's a bit nervous, you know, if they can get in that door, that's fine. And they'll find it sort of grows on you. It kinda creeps over you: it's like ivy. It is though – because I think that's the way men are. They need something. They need a focus in life. Most of them, it's here – that's the focus. You know, you can see how interested they are in doing everything.

“This is ours”. I mean, everybody thinks it’s “ours” – which is great. It’s a “belonging” to something. Maybe it’s because a lot of things have changed. I think we all need something to belong to, you know, be part of. And, when you’re part of something, you get something back as well as giving something, you know. That way, to me, it’s good.

John Ross, Gala Men’s Shed

The day we done that ramp out there was great, because it was a sunny day, it was nice. Good weather, we were aw workin’ the gither. A bit of banter. You just feel you’ve achieved something: you’ve done something, something worthwhile, you know. Just for your own confidence, never mind anything else. I think it’s definitely part of your self-confidence. Just to get you oot and aboot and involving in things makes a difference. I’ve always believed that you’ve got to keep learning. When you stop learning...And I found, when I first retired for two or three years, I was definitely missing work. But, I realised it wasn’t the actual work, it was the people I missed. Just the company, the day-to-day contact wi’ people, and hearing what they’d got to say. And, “Oh, did you see that last night on the telly”, or discuss this and discuss that: just the general patter. I missed that.

Gavin Anderson, Hamilton Men’s Shed

Shedder A: You feel younger, back in your working days sorta thing – wi’ speaking to other men instead of sitting at home saying, “I’m old”, and you’ve an interest in life.

Shedder B: You’ve something to get up in the morning for. I mean, I don’t say I don’t get up and do nothing: there’s always something to be done, but this is different. It’s kinda like going back to work, in a sense.

Shedder C: But not with quite the same commitment.

Shedder D: Not got product limits to meet and whatnot.

Conversation at the Fort William Men’s Shed Tea Break

This place doesnae take any prisoners! If we’re sitting here playing dominoes, or something like that, and somebody’s got a problem, they’re just as easy get the mickey taken out of them as not – but not in a vicious way. And guys will sit and talk about what their problems are, or their difficulties, and other fellas sitting there can help them. It’s easier for men if they’re doing something, rather than face to face across the table, whereas women can seem to be able to do that a lot easier.

And the same for the workshop: guys will chat away in there and, you don’t realise it, but you’re sitting talking about things that quite possibly you wouldn’t have come out with before. So it helps like that. And, as I said before, we do get guys coming in here just because they are lonely. We’re closing over Christmas into New Year, but J’s actually going to come in on a Friday for guys that want to – and we know that there are guys that will do, because, if you are on your own, Christmas and New Year can be a lonely time as well, you know. So, if one of the committee wants to open the place, that’s fine.

Roy Rodger, Dumfries Men’s Shed

Chapter 7: The benefits of sheds - the community

As well as the benefits for shedders, the sheds are having a positive impact on their wider local community. Shedders speaking to us were modest about their achievements in this regard but already there are numerous examples of sheds and shedders breathing new life into community buildings and spaces, assisting other voluntary and community groups, and promoting meaningful connections between the generations.

Well, it benefits the community in the sense that we're a' coming from a' the different bitties, and you're telling people about it, and making you feel better – so hopefully it rubs off on some of it. As I say, I must bore some people going on about it. I dinna know if everybody feels that way but, as I say, if I make something, and somebody buys it, the money's going to the Shed.

John Anderson, Carse of Gowrie & District Men's Shed

Our shed is in Moffat Memorial Centre Hall in Noble Hill Park. It was built by private donation from a local business-man in 1950. He donated the money to do it, and it got built through the council. There used to be a snooker table in here, and it was used for elderly men in the area, which is what it was built for, and then it gradually discontinued to the stage where the council shut it. And then, a few years later, a school's group took it over for a couple of years and they then moved to a place called Georgetown Hall and they gave it up and it lay derelict for just over 2 years, until we just happened to notice it and decided that this would probably be a great idea.

We were one of the lucky sheds, in that we got in the region of £16,000 handed to us right at the very start from the Choose Life Fund and the Day Opportunities Fund through the NHS. Well, we needed it. We had to get the roof fixed. You can see there was a leak over there. There's another one this side we had to get sorted. The place had to be repainted and checked over.

We've got a good relationship now with the Lord Lieutenant of the county who's an honorary member and I e-mail her sometimes and we have a chat. I'd never have done that in my life before, you know. It benefits the wider community here – people especially within the Noble Hill area, are delighted with it because the park's getting more use, this building is getting more use and we invited the local populus, if they wanted, to come for our Open Day or just to drop in – and some of them do, just for a cup of tea and a chat. So, it's good.

Roy Rodger, Dumfries Men's Shed

They get asked to do all sorts of things. The birdboxes have developed into some quite fancy birdboxes now. They made some that they then took to bits, took them up to the primary school, showed the children how to put them together again and the children did it and they've done the same with the centre for dementia. So they're working quite closely with other community groups and they enjoy making things and then showing others how to put them back together again.

Nigel Sargent, Volunteer Centre Borders

We get a lot of stuff, like worktops, and we cut them up into chopping boards. Anything that's wood, we can use it. And when you're recycling stuff, it gives you a wee bit of a kick. You know you're doing something for the community that way. They've got a dump up here, and you should see the stuff that's going in there. It's tremendous. It should never happen. They're not organised enough to separate all that stuff out. I suppose it's down to money again. And, you can't get the stuff out of the tip. If it goes into the tip that's it gone. But you can ask somebody if you happen to be up there and somebody say has a table [they are throwing out]. You can say to them, "Can I get that table?" And, we do!

John Ross, Gala Men's Shed

Like I say, I just get the pleasure of making things. I made a trough, a low one for the shops in the High Street for plants. And then she said, "How much is it?" She said to me, "You name the price", and I said, "£60". "Yeah, fine." That's £60 just like that to help our shed. It was lovely. And I said, "I'll get the paint and paint it the same colour as your shop if you want." And she said, "Oh, I've already got the paint here." So she gave me the paint. I painted it for her. Same colour as the shop front. They loved it. The flowers in the summer – it was great. I've made something for outside in the community. I've got orders. I've got a list in my shed as long as me arm. People down in Liverpool want some. All me relatives want some.

Jimmy Riley, The Jed Shed

We did some work with the nursery school which is close by, it's a pre school nursery. We did some planters and birdboxes, a bird table and we refurbished their Wendy House. We took the Wendy House and made it into a little ice cream shack. So that was a little bit different too. And in return they came to the workshop. The teacher brought the little fellas to the workshop and there was about 6 or 7 of them came round, all with their high viz jackets on, and we gave them a little guided tour of the workshop and they absolutely loved it. Our guys were in the workshop at the time. We instantly downed tools. We had them sitting at the bench, we had them sitting hammering nails in. It was incredible. They're only four and half years old you know and they're hammering little nails in with little Tomy hammers. It was good fun and the guys really enjoyed it. Again it was a little bit of our men giving back to the local community.

Trevor Gallon, The Jed Shed

It's early days in some respects but we are now getting more and more people from various bodies looking for us to do things for them, give us some work in order that they can pay us, as opposed to paying exorbitant sums of money, to keep us going – so, thereby killing two birds with one stone. So, our reputation, shall we say, is spreading. So much so that several local GPs have been saying that they back the men's shed one hundred percent because of that. It must be taking a bit of a weight off some doctors' shoulders.

Bruce James, Fort William Men's Shed

Chapter 8: Final thoughts and comments from shedders

It's life after retirement and you've got to watch because retirement can be a downer, you know. And it puts a lot of people down: "Oh, I don't know what to do with myself". And others, if they've got a hobby, can cope with it. So, I think that the doctors and that should pay more attention to that side o' it. And they wouldn't have so many people going to the surgeries, you know, for little this and that, because they're only going there for a chat.

John Ross, Gala Men's Shed

It's looking forward to things, and what you could do with it. It gives you a new lease of life, because, I'm 70 this year, 70 next month, and you start to think to yourself, "Is that it?" But I think that that's the way a lot of shedders do think when they come here – That's it. So this instils a bit more of a – not a belief – but a purpose for them. Some of them come in here and get involved specifically because it gives them something to do. To get involved. If they weren't getting involved, they'd just be sitting at home. Sometimes they just come in here and sit and read my newspapers!

Roy Rodger, Dumfries Men's Shed

They've got a smile on their face. They've got a purpose. The thing is the work-purpose, getting up in the morning. I never see anybody really late. And, if they're late, they'll say to somebody, "I've got business, I'll be doon there at that time." And, they're no held to account, but you can see them taking pride in what they're doing and the people respecting the people that's running it. So, you get the respect as well. So you get respect, the people, and the care, "Oh sorry, gosh, I was late there." And they don't need to be, they can come in and oot there whenever they want.

Eddie O'Donnell, Hamilton Men's Shed

Generally, people light up on you when you say, "Men's Shed" and, you know, if we can be an organisation that does that to people, and we feel happy within ourselves, and if we're having that sort of impact...

Geoff Allison, Dalbeattie Men's Shed

Why do I enjoy going to the shed? Companionship. It's something to do. Somewhere to go. We see what we've achieved. I've enjoyed it. Yeah, and you go home feeling quite good. And, then, you may be on the phone to somebody and you tell them what all you did that day.

Fort William Men's Shed Tea Break

And the last word goes to Joe Scott from Gala Men's Shed, speaking to us throughout in beautiful Lallans

I love wood. I always loved wood. Ever since I was a wee laddie I always loved wood and the shed gave me a chance tae fulfil the "space" really that I had in my heid for what I wanted. I always wanted to work wi' wood - and now I've got it. And if I was to pass away the morn, I'd pass away quite happy. A good wife, super family and now I can work in wood until I'm content.

A shedder's story – Alan Knott from Dalbeattie Men's Shed

I'm an ex-serviceman, and when I left the army in '95 I became a caravan park warden. I and my wife were managers of the site. In 2009, we left that and leased a caravan park business for 7 years, retiring last year. I'm now 69.

I've always been interested in, and had a go at, whatever craft was on the go at the time. I made macramé, pin and thread pictures when they were all the rage. I've made things with Tiffany glass too. I've always been crafty. I was interested in woodwork at school and when I was at the caravan parks, I was always making things – birdboxes, owl boxes. I really enjoy that kind of thing.

When we gave up the caravan park and were facing retirement, we were looking for something to occupy our time. We've done puppy-walking for guide dogs for many years – but I needed something else too. We had that thought, "We're retired now. What do we do?" That fear of being on the couch watching Jeremy Kyle on TV all the time. I had all these hobbies – and joked with my wife when we were house hunting that I was looking for a 3-bedroom workshop.

I had heard about the men's shed and thought it was a good idea, and then there was a bit about the Dalbeattie Shed in the local paper giving a couple of numbers to ring. I knew one of the men, so rang him and went along to the shed for a look around. It met all my expectations and beyond – I was amazed by the machinery. The workshop environment and the variety of tools available were major attractions for me. The men's shed provides all that. I go two mornings a week now.

My first impressions were that I was amazed at the friendliness of everyone there and their welcoming attitude – and also by all the machines. It's a great, social, working environment where ideas get tossed around at the coffee break, and people pass on the benefit of their knowledge. We swap ideas. I'm used to using a scroll-saw and I've been able to help folk set that up. Someone else was able to show me how to use the table-saw, how you make cribbage scoreboards using the drill press with the guard up to stop and get the holes right.

I taught myself leathercraft at home, they asked me to take some bits along to show them, and now the shed is looking to get some equipment so that I can pass on what I am able to do.

We all work away on our own projects but, when there's something needed for the community, we stop what we are doing and all get into that, working as a team. It's giving something back to the community and we get enjoyment out of that.

What I've got out of it mostly is that it has made it easier for me to keep active and follow my hobbies and interests. When I was working away on my own, I would meet the odd person who was like-minded – but we're all together at the men's shed. You get a lot of others like you wanting to make things. The shed is there for all to come and use. There's no fees, so anyone can get involved. It's a great outlook for anybody. I hadn't done wood-turning for 50 years: the memories it brought back.

You see people enjoy making something, and then getting pleasure out of giving it to someone. It's satisfying. You get the opportunity to try new things. We've just got the equipment for cold-metalcraft. We have framing equipment. Before, I would probably have a go and do an okay job but if I have a go now with the right kit and people sharing their knowledge, I'll make a good job of it.

The community gets benefits too. Our nearest picture framer is quite far away – but people can get it done locally here for a donation. We refurbished a trailer for the Dalbeattie Star Football Club, and the shed refurbished the Christmas street lanterns last year and replaced some of the coloured foils this year.

Some of the lads found old Blackpool Illumination figures which used to be on the island at the Duck Pond on Civic Days and they refurbished the cat for the last Civic Day, re-fibreglassing it, and one of us, a retired electrician, wired it up with LED lights.

My wife is happy that I go there on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and my grandchild is already buried in jigsaws at 5 months old. I've made lots of Christmas ornaments for my daughter.

What's important about the men's shed? Well, there will be a lot of people who are doing things on their own, with nobody to talk to, nobody to share their ideas. At the men's shed, it's all there for the asking. At the caravan park, I had a workshop, a big scroll saw and I made birdboxes and I'm stick-making now – working on a couple of sticks. But it's about meeting up with like-minded folk twice a week, sharing other interests, talking about life and families. Some of us are ex-servicemen and can talk about our army days. The men's shed is a very worthwhile thing: every town should have one.

A men's shed needs a good driving force or figurehead. It's set up like a proper business with regular meetings, and there always needs to be a forward plan. We're always thinking what new way to go. Following up new interests, like the leatherwork.

We all do our own little projects but then I'll go to someone who is working on a lathe and share what I know, and I'll go to someone else and say, "I don't know how to use this router". And they will show me.

It's keeping me active. It's two hours when I'm chattering away to people and my mind's alert. That's good for your health.

Chapter 8: Closing Remarks

By Tim Green and Ian McVicar

As Community Development Officers with Age Scotland, over the past two years we have had the pleasure of working with men's sheds in Scotland. We have witnessed first hand the enormous contribution men's sheds are making to men's lives, to promoting positive views of ageing and enhancing later life in Scotland.

This booklet provides a snapshot of where men's sheds are today from the point of view of shedders. It comprises personal testimonies from shedders about their experiences of being involved in a men's shed. The voices of these pioneering shedders have brought to life the magic of sheds, and the "shed effect".

Men's sheds are a grassroots movement galvanising a rich and diverse range of skills, capabilities, experience and motivations to meet shedders own needs. They do this through companionship, learning, recapturing the highlights of working life, and making an active contribution to family and community.

It is vital that men's sheds are spaces created by shedders in their own image and to suit their needs. Where this need has been met, the number of sheds and shedders is growing and making an impact on boosting men's health and well-being, whilst tackling loneliness and social isolation.

These stories, in the shedders' own words, powerfully make the case for the continued support of policymakers, funders and stakeholders in sustaining this asset-based, local voluntary model for the long term future.

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