



## **Evaluation of the Men in Sheds Pilot Programme Final Report**

**Commissioned by Age UK  
September 15<sup>th</sup> 2011 – April 30<sup>th</sup> 2012**

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## **Executive Summary:**

This report contains the results of an external independent evaluation of the Age UK 'Men in Sheds' Project carried out by a research team from Lancaster University between September 2011 and April 2012. The overall project involved the setting-up and running of three Sheds in total, located in Nottinghamshire, Greenwich and South Lakeland. The overall evaluation draws on the views and experiences of Shed members and Shed project staff through interviews, focus groups and observation. In total, 53 shed members, 2 carers and 5 staff members were involved in focus groups and/or interviews. We also analysed secondary data collected by Shed staff and gathered data to help construct 'Shed profile' of members. This was a retrospective and small scale evaluation. It raised a number of issues that were outwith the remit and resources of the evaluation, but which point to interesting areas for future research.

The findings of this evaluation suggest that:

- Men in Sheds appeals to many older men at a time in their lives when they are often encountering change (retirement, property downsizing, illness or bereavement). It offers an environment which can make the discussion of health and emotional issues more comfortable for older men and which may be familiar to some from their former occupations.
- Two broad categories of Shed experience emerged throughout the findings. Firstly, for some, Sheds present a pleasant and desirable hobby or activity; secondly, for others, particularly older men at risk of social isolation or emotional breakdown, they offer a vital support mechanism.
- The overall Shed project appears to achieve its aims of reducing isolation and contributing to the mental well-being of older men through social contact and meaningful activity. There is also some evidence to suggest changes in physical health and health awareness amongst Shed members, although these are sensitive and complex issues that require more detailed, longitudinal evaluation.
- The Sheds have had some limited success in reaching their specified target populations, e.g. older men from BME groups, those who are living alone and those with caring responsibilities. More focused targeting is required if these objectives are to be fully achieved.
- Where target populations have been reached, there is evidence to suggest that Sheds provide important access to social support for those experiencing loneliness and isolation or depression following challenging life events.
- The evaluation also suggests that some Shed members (particularly those with physical or cognitive impairments) find it more difficult to access the social environment of the Sheds. However, these men, and their carers / wives still appear to benefit from the workshop activity itself and the sense of achievement derived from it.
- There is some evidence of variations between Sheds in members' sense of the appropriateness of Sheds for men with physical or cognitive impairments.
- There are significant variations between the three Sheds in terms of the level of support that members require from the coordinator, and Shed members'

ability to work independently. This will impact on the costs and potential sustainability of the Sheds.

- The coordinator was identified as a vital factor in the success of all three Sheds but with differing levels of input. The coordinator role is thus integral to any consideration of the future management and sustainability of Shed projects. This has implications for future models of Sheds and the extent to which they can support older men with differing levels of ability and mobility. This is discussed in more detail in our recommendations.
- Though Shed members are willing to contribute towards Shed running costs through income generation and subscriptions, these contributions will not be sufficient to cover the costs of running the Sheds.
- Shed members have produced a number of goods for sale/resale, and have been involved in a range of community activities. They have also been involved in small-scale (but very successful) intergenerational working with schoolchildren. However, the income generated from these activities is unlikely to be sufficient to cover the running costs of Sheds as presently configured.
- Whilst a stated aim of the Shed projects is to provide information and signposting regarding welfare benefits and other services, those older men participating in the evaluation did not report high levels of use of this facility.

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## **1. Introduction**

This evaluation was commissioned by Age UK, a UK Voluntary Organisation that aims to influence decision-makers and improve standards and outcomes for people in later life. An important part of their work is the development of innovative initiatives designed to improve the quality of life for older people, particularly those from low-income groups. The Men in Sheds pilot programme is one such initiative. Originating in Australia in the 1990s, Shed programmes are a rapidly growing innovation in the UK. Sheds provide a space for older men to meet, socialise, learn new skills and take part in activities with other men. Most sheds are equipped with a range of workshop tools. In almost all cases, Sheds are tailored to their local context, rather than being standardised.

Shed programmes aim to improve men's physical, emotional, social and spiritual health and well-being. The role of a Shed in encouraging and engaging men in informal adult learning has also been demonstrated to be a key feature of Sheds. But Sheds can also provide health related information and 'signpost' men to relevant services. Hence, a Shed is a complex intervention, with broad aims to improve health and wellbeing including the alleviation of loneliness and social isolation.

### *1.1 Aims and objectives:*

The overall aim of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the Age UK 'Men in Sheds' pilot programme in engaging isolated and lonely older men on low incomes and enhancing their quality of life and wellbeing.

The evaluation sought to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the pilot programme at its three constituent project locations in terms of addressing the following three areas:

- Analysis and interpretation of all project-related quantitative and qualitative data collected by each Age UK site;
- Assess how effectively the pilots have delivered on their aims and objectives both individually and comparatively;
- Make recommendations from the results to facilitate the development of a sustainable and widely replicable model.

The three pilot Sheds had been operational for over a year before the evaluation commenced, hence this is a retrospective evaluation.

## **2. The Wider Context**

The number of lone-dwelling older men in the UK has now reached around one million for the first time. Research shows that for at least 400,000 of these older men, loneliness is a major issue (Age Concern, 2009). Social isolation, loneliness and stressful social ties are associated with elevated blood pressure, poor physical health and increased mortality, and mental ill-health including depression, suicide and dementia. They can contribute to a higher risk of disability, poor recovery from illness and early death. Illiffe et al (2007) go so far as to claim that the magnitude of health risk associated with social isolation is seen as comparable with that of cigarette smoking and other major risk factors. Studies have shown that not only do non-working older men have poorer health than their working counterparts (Shapiro et al 2008), but that the risk of social isolation is elevated in older men; those older people who live alone; and individuals with mood or cognitive problems (Illife et al, 2007). Social isolation and loneliness can thus be of particular concern for lone-dwelling older men who

may find greater difficulty in accessing effective social support, relative to older women. Yet, supportive social ties can be important for enhancing physical and mental health among older adults. Milligan et al's (2004, 2005) study of gardening activity amongst older people living in socio-economically deprived areas, for example, found that communal gardening on allotment sites created inclusionary spaces in which older people not only benefitted from the activity itself, but that the mutually supportive environment acted to combat social isolation and enhance older people's quality of life and emotional well being. Other researchers have also suggested that gender specific social groups can prove particularly beneficial in counteracting the effects of social isolation in older men. Gleib et al's (2011) study of gendered social group membership of older people in residential settings, for example, found a clear gender effect in which men participating in male-oriented social groups exhibited a significant reduction in depression and anxiety, and an increased sense of social identification with others. However while these studies point to the potential of gendered communal activity in supporting inclusion and improving well-being amongst older people, few such activities focused on older men currently exist. Yet older men not only find it harder to make friends late in life; but can find it off-putting to join community-based social groups that are often dominated by older women (Age Concern, 2009). Understanding what forms of communal activity are likely to successfully promote inclusion and wellbeing amongst older men is thus important if we are to improve the quality of life of the growing numbers of lone-dwelling older men.

This evaluation is thus concerned with older men from low income groups who experience loneliness and social isolation. It focuses on the effectiveness of workshop activity (Men in Sheds) in helping older men to engage in productive activity, retain existing skills and learn new ones in a communal setting.

### **3. Methods**

The evaluation focused on three pilot 'Men in Sheds' projects run by Age UK in Greenwich, Nottinghamshire and South Lakeland. The evaluation design involved a mixed method approach using formative evaluation methodology as the organizing framework. This included:

- Examination of data already captured by the pilot projects including monitoring forms, case studies and Shed diaries, as well as any additional pertinent data that the Shed managers and co-ordinators had gathered such as assessments, case studies and case notes;
- Observational interviews and focus groups with a purposive sample of older male participants in the Shed projects during site visits to assess the impact of the Shed on their sense of inclusion and wellbeing;
- Interviews with individual Shed co-ordinators to assess the operation and management of the Shed and their role in supporting and maintaining the projects;
- Telephone interviews with managers within individual projects;
- Attendance at regular project meetings (in person or via teleconferencing) to obtain information on current pilot projects.

#### *3.1 Data gathering process*

Following an examination of the data already captured by the three Shed projects, the research team undertook a pilot focus group with nine Shed members at the Kendal Shed to firstly, gain an understanding of how Sheds

operate; and secondly, identify some of the key issues for further exploration in the later interviews and focus groups.

A total of six further site visits were then conducted between October 2011 and the end of February 2012. During site visits the research team collected data through: face-to-face interviews with Shed members and Shed co-ordinators (in one instance the Shed co-ordinator and manager were the same person). Interviews with the Shed managers of the other two Sheds were undertaken via telephone. A total of three further focus groups were conducted (one per Shed) with Shed members (with between 6-9 participants in each focus group). All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded. In addition, we gathered observational data through video capture.

In conducting the evaluation it became clear that data related to each Shed profile (in terms of its membership) would help to give a clearer picture of the extent to which Sheds were meeting their stated objectives. As a result, we collected the following additional data on all members of each Shed:

- Age;
- Ethnicity (using standard census profiles);
- Previous employment (as proxy for socio-economic status);\*
- Whether the participant lived alone or with others;
- The level of support required by individual (on a scale of 1 to 3 from independent (i.e. low support needs) to high support needs);
- Whether support (if needed) was provided by the Shed co-ordinator; volunteer; family carer or other).

\* Employment was rated on the following scale:

- |                         |                   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. long-term unemployed | 4. admin/clerical |
| 2. manual unskilled     | 5. managerial     |
| 3. manual skilled       | 6. professional   |

NOTE: These Shed profiles were completed by the Shed co-ordinators hence it is important to note that the assessment of support needs etc. is based on their assessment and not that of the individual Shed members.

In total the evaluation gathered data from 60 participants as follows:

- Four focus groups with Shed members (one with six participants, the other three with nine participants each, plus one carer);
- 26 face-to-face interviews with Shed members (two with partners / carers); and
- Five interviews with Shed Managers and Coordinators (three face-to-face, two by telephone).

NOTE: In five instances Shed members participated in both a focus group and interview, hence the above figures equate to 65 participations but 60 actual participants.

During the pilot focus group and subsequent interviews Shed members were asked to reflect on their reasons for coming to the Shed; to describe their experiences of the Shed and the impact that it has on their lives; to discuss which aspects of the Shed they value most and least; whether attendance at the Shed has helped them think about or address aspects of their own health and wellbeing; and whether it has helped raise awareness of other services.

Shed managers and co-ordinators were asked to reflect upon the extent to which the Shed has met their initial expectations of the project; how they envisage its further development and sustainability; any tensions or difficulties the Shed projects present; and what they perceive to be the predominant impact of Sheds on individual Shed members.

The final focus groups presented 'case scenarios' gathered from the draft analysis and asked the Shed members to discuss the extent to which these scenarios reflected their views and experiences of the impact of the Sheds.

### *3.2 Analysis*

Due to time and cost constraints, interviews were not transcribed in full, rather the research team analysed the audio and video recorded data directly, using thematic framework analysis. The validity of this analysis was checked at regular team meetings, supplemented by a data analysis workshop that also included a member of the Age UK Men in Sheds team.

As noted above, the draft analysis of the interview data formed the basis of a presentation and audio recorded discussion with the focus groups. The focus group discussion and feedback hence served as further validation of our analysis.

All focus group transcripts were transcribed in full and analysed thematically using constant comparison methodology.

### *3.3 Quality of Life measure*

We examined the quality of life survey data gathered by the Shed co-ordinators/managers. However it has not been possible to use this data for the following reasons:

- Projects initially began collecting quality of life data using the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) then changed part-way through to using the Quality of Life in Later Life (QuiLL) survey. This means there is no continuous data against which to make a comparison of any change in the quality of life outcome and as the two surveys are very different, it is not possible to make any cross-comparison;
- The QuiLL surveys do not have dates or names/codes for completing participants, so no longitudinal comparison is possible; and
- There are insufficient numbers of completed WEMWBS surveys to make it possible to re-apply this survey for either a statistical or descriptive statistical comparison.

We discussed this issue with the Age UK research team at an early stage of the evaluation, who agreed with our assessment. Whilst this was disappointing, our evaluation still gathered data from around 55 Shed members through interviews and focus groups, with additional data from a further 5 Shed managers/co-ordinators. Together with the Shed profiles and documentary evidence from the individual Sheds, we are therefore confident that the data gathered is sufficient to provide a robust evaluation.

#### **4. Shed Profiles**

The three Sheds that participated in the pilot programme were chosen by Age UK following a call for expressions of interest to its constituency. At the heart of this call was a desire to develop projects that would meet the needs of lonely and socially isolated older men, particularly those living in less affluent social circumstances. Organisations interested in developing a Shed were asked to complete a detailed form in which they set out the core aims and objectives of their Shed project; their target group; whether the project would be located in an area of social deprivation or special need; and how the project planned to improve the health and/or well-being of its participants. The following describes the three locations selected for the Shed pilot:

- 1) Blidworth, Nottingham lies within the Newark and Sherwood district in the East Midlands. It is an ex-mining community in a rural area with high levels of unemployment. Around 38% of the population is economically inactive with 22% of the population either being retired or chronically ill or disabled (ONS, 2012). The population is predominantly white (99%) with around 14% of the population aged 65 years of age or older. The Shed is open for a morning and afternoon session 4 days per week, and accommodates a maximum of 6 Shed members per session. Shed members generally attend for 1 or 2 sessions per week.
- 2) Eltham lies within the London borough of Greenwich, which is situated in the south-east of the city. Greenwich is the 10<sup>th</sup> most deprived borough in London, and the ward of Eltham West is classified as an area of extreme deprivation (ONS, 2012). The borough has a high proportion (26%) of BME populations (mainly Black African) and an above average proportion of working age populations in receipt of out of work benefits (London's Poverty Profile, 2012). Around 11% of the population in Greenwich is 65 years of age or older, with pensioner households make up 19.7% of all households. The shed runs morning and afternoon sessions 4 days per week. The shed operates on a 'drop-in' basis, so numbers per session vary, but the shed can accommodate approximately 7 members at a maximum, 5 of whom would have access to bench space and working facilities.
- 3) Kendal lies in the South Lakeland district of Cumbria in the North West of England. Cumbria is the second least densely populated county in England. Approximately 24% of its population is aged 65+ (Cumbria Intelligence Observatory, 2012), a high proportion of whom live in the S. Lakes district. Though not one of the most deprived areas in the country, the life expectancy gap between richest and poorest males in Kendal (8.9 years) is the highest in Cumbria. Regionally, the BME population is low. At 5.1%, Kendal has the highest proportion of BME in the County (mainly Chinese and other Asian). The Shed runs morning and afternoon sessions 4 days per week and accommodates a maximum of 6 Shed members per session. Shed members generally attend for 1 or 2 sessions per week.

Each Shed has a Shed coordinator who is employed 4-5 days per week (4 in Nottinghamshire and Greenwich, 5 days in South Lakeland) to oversee the day to day running of the Shed and support its members. In Nottinghamshire and South Lakeland these coordinators are male and have considerable wood work / construction experience. The Greenwich coordinator has less woodworking /

construction experience and is female. In all cases the coordinators have previous experience of working in the voluntary sector.

#### *4.1 Core objectives:*

In expressing interest in participating in the project, the three sheds set out the following stated objectives:

##### Blidworth, Nottingham:

- i) To focus on older men living in ex-coal mining areas of Nottinghamshire where deprivation arising from widespread jobs losses resulting from colliery closures has been compounded by the rural nature of the area;
- ii) To reach older men for whom social isolation has been compounded by early loss of employment;
- iii) To target older men whose isolation is compounded due to their single status or who are, or have been, caring for a spouse, other relative or friend.
- iv) To recruit and work with 50-70 older men over the two years of the project.

##### Eltham, Greenwich:

- i) To focus on older men living in some of the most deprived wards in the urban borough of Greenwich, where life expectancy for men is the lowest in London;
- ii) To target older men from BME communities, some of whom have high risk factors for poor health;
- iii) To increase social engagement, social networks and opportunities to volunteer amongst older men;
- iv) To improve access to other services leading to empowerment and increased choice for older men;
- v) To recruit and work with 30-45 older men over the two years of the project.

##### Kendal, South Lakes:

- i) To focus on older men living in rural and social isolation in South Lakeland due to poverty, disability, mental health, lack of family networks or lack of transport;
- ii) To provide a new method for older men to access services in a manner that is approachable and informal;
- iii) To provide opportunities for older men to interact and share skills;
- iv) To recruit and work with 320 men over the two years of the project;
- v) To develop intergenerational working relationships with 112 younger volunteers as part of an initiative with the Crime and Disorder reduction partnership.

In line with Age UK, we will henceforth refer to the three Sheds as being located in Nottingham, Greenwich and S. Lakes.

#### *4.2 Costs*

In submitting expressions of interest, the three projects set out their projected running costs (£s) as follows:

**Fig 1: Projected running costs per shed**

Shed	Projected Costs Yr 1	Projected Costs Yr 2	Actual Costs Yr 1	Actual Costs Yr 2
Nottingham	36,569.00	50,289.00	36,569.00	n/a
Greenwich	36,569.00	50,289.00	36,569.00	n/a
S. Lakes	44,116.00	52,414.00	n/a	n/a

Note: We do not have full data on the actual running costs for Year 2 and for the Kendal project for year 1, hence these tables are incomplete.

**Fig. 2: Breakdown of budgeted costs (£) for Year 1 (2010-11)**

Shed	Staffing	Equipment & Materials	Utilities & Insurance	Office Costs	Travel & Volunteer Expenses	TOTAL
Nottingham	19,629	7,100	4,800	3,130	1,910	36,569
Greenwich	20,289	7,360	4,800	3,720	-	36,169
S.Lakes	20,089	7,360	4,800	2,470	1,850	36,569

#### 4.3 Characteristics of Shed members

At the outset, the expression of interest for each Shed indicated the number of older men it would target. As Figure 3 illustrates, both Nottingham and Greenwich recruited to target. South Lakes significantly over-estimated the number of older men the project could recruit, based on an assumption that the men would be recruited to participate for 12 week sessions only, at which time a new group of older men would be recruited. In reality it became clear that a) recruitment was initially more time consuming than had been anticipated; and b) once recruited, Shed members did not want to leave at the end of the 12 weeks period. This in fact is in keeping with the experience of the other two Sheds and recruitment to the South Lakes Shed is in line with this.

**Figure 3: Target v actual number of Shed members recruited**

	Nottingham	Greenwich	S. Lakes
TARGET	50-70	30-45	320
ACTUAL	50	37	48

##### 4.3.1 Age

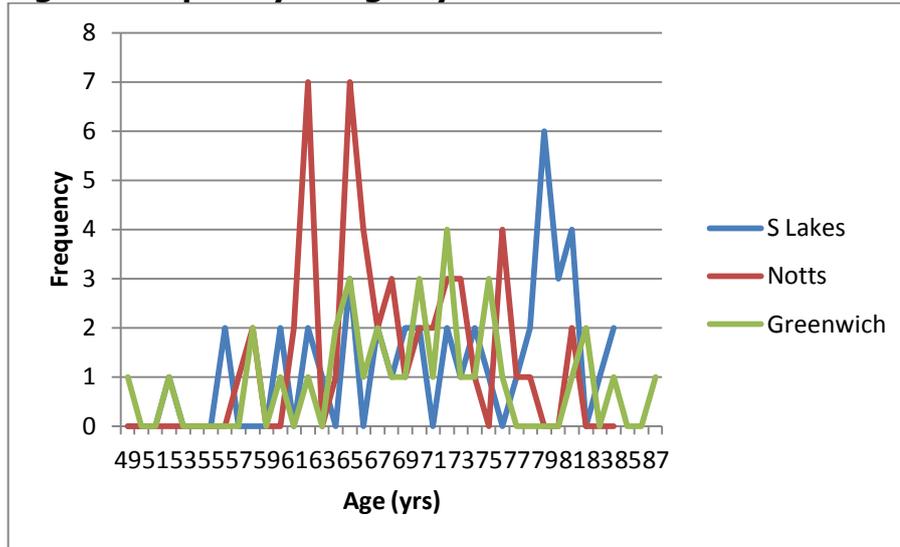
All three projects targeted older men (over 50 years of age). Figure 4 details the median age of Shed members by Shed. The South Lakes Shed has a significantly older median age than the other two Sheds, with nearly six years of difference between the median age of the Kendal and Nottingham Sheds.

**Fig 4: Median age by Shed**

Median Age by Shed (years)		
Nottingham	Greenwich	S. Lakes
68.0	69.5	73.8

The frequency of the actual age distribution across all three Sheds is illustrated in Figure 5, and ranges from 49 to 87 years of age. Greenwich demonstrates a relatively even distribution pattern across all age ranges, while Nottingham has a larger number of Shed members in their early sixties and South Lakes has a higher number of Shed members in their late seventies and early eighties.

**Fig. 5: Frequency of age by Shed**



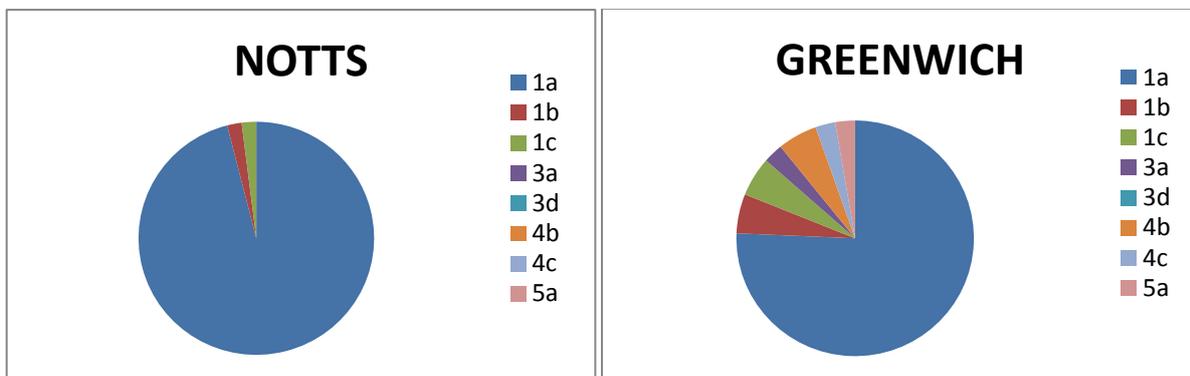
#### 4.3.2 Ethnicity

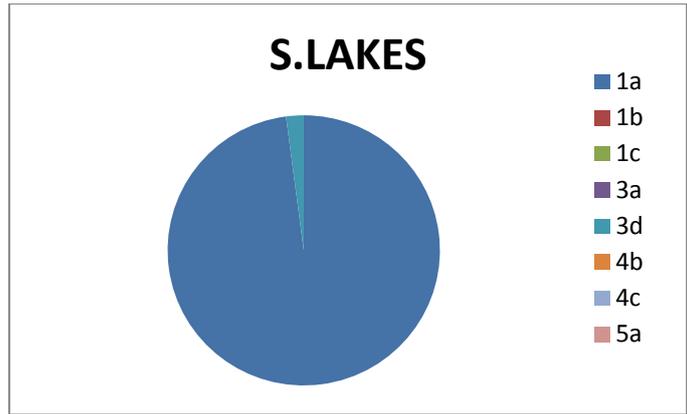
Given that a stated objective of the Greenwich shed was to reach older men from BME communities, we gathered data on the ethnic profile of Shed members using the following standard descriptors of ethnic origin as used by ONS and the Census.

1a	White British /Irish	3d	Other Asian
1b	White Irish	4b	African
1c	Other white	4c	Other Black
3a	Indian	5a	Chinese

As can be seen from Figure 6 below, the make-up of the Greenwich Shed illustrates the greatest ethnic diversity in its membership, with around 25% of its members coming from the BME community. This represents a fairly accurate proportion of the percentage of the BME population in Greenwich. The proportion of the BME population in both the South Lakes and Nottingham locations are significantly smaller overall, hence it is not unexpected that the membership of these Sheds is largely White British.

**Fig. 6: Breakdown of Shed members by ethnic origin**



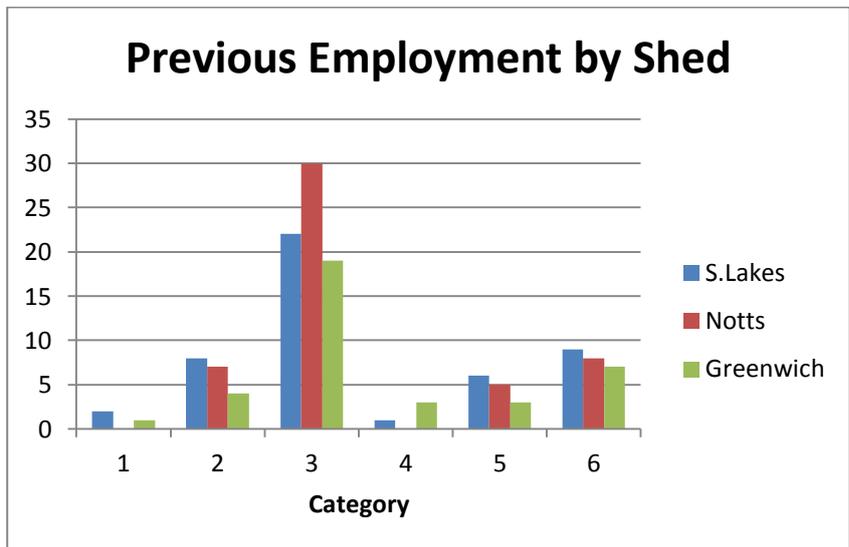


#### 4.3.3 Previous Employment

A key objective of all three Sheds was to target older men from deprived areas. In part this objective was met by the locations in which the three Sheds were situated, although perhaps less so in the case of the Kendal Shed. We sought to supplement this by gathering data on the previous employment of the Shed members which we used as a proxy for relative affluence in retirement – though it is acknowledged that this can only be viewed as an approximation. We used the following scale adapted from the Census scales:

- |                        |                    |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 Long term unemployed | 4 Admin / clerical |
| 2 Manual unskilled     | 5 Managerial       |
| 3 Manual skilled       | 6 Professional     |

**Fig. 7: Breakdown of Shed members' previous employment by Shed**



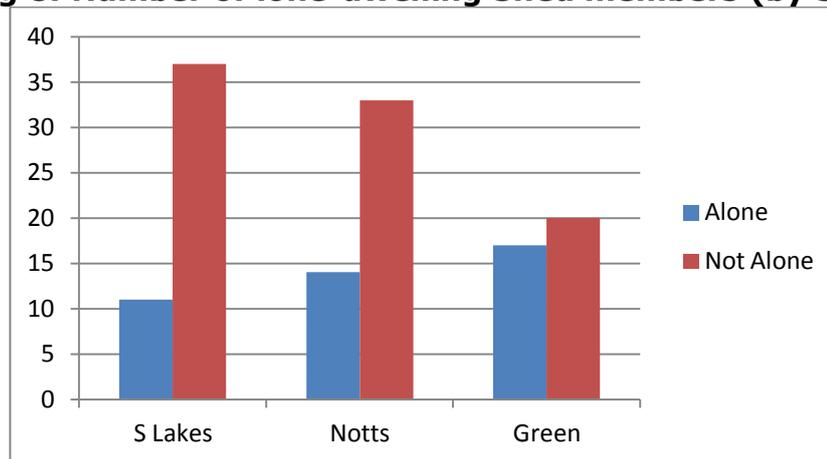
As evident from Figure 7, the overwhelming majority of Shed members across all three Sheds had previously been employed as manual skilled workers. We found a wide range of examples from boat-builder to engineers, mechanics, carpenters and other building tradesmen. However we also found a higher than anticipated number of Shed members that had previously worked in managerial

and professional positions, ranging from a former publisher to senior managers and teachers.

#### 4.3.4 Social Isolation

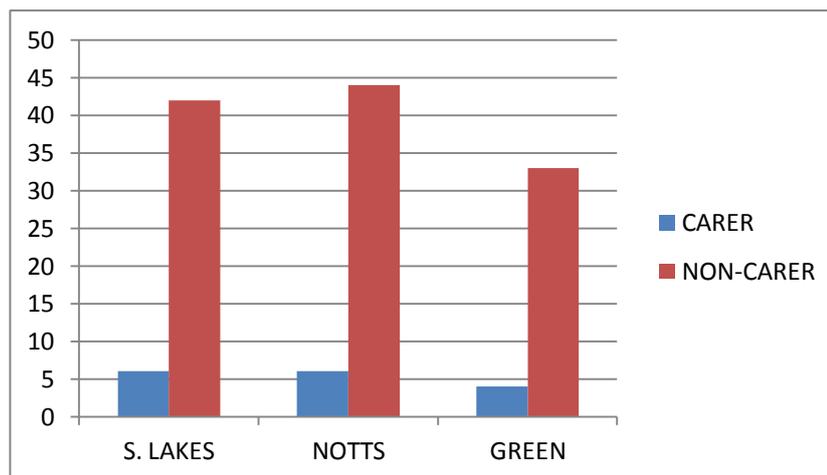
As a core remit of the projects was to engage lonely and socially isolated older men, we also gathered data on the numbers of older men who were either living alone or who were isolated as a consequence of undertaking a care-giving role for a spouse or other close family member.

**Fig 8: Number of lone-dwelling Shed members (by Shed)**



As can be seen from Figure 8, the majority of Shed members in both the South Lakes and Nottingham Sheds did not live alone each having fewer than 15 Shed members who were lone dwellers. The Greenwich Shed was more successful in reaching this target population with almost 50% of its membership living alone. As Figure 9 illustrates, the number of carers in each Shed was also fairly small.

**Figure 9: Number of 'carer' Shed members**



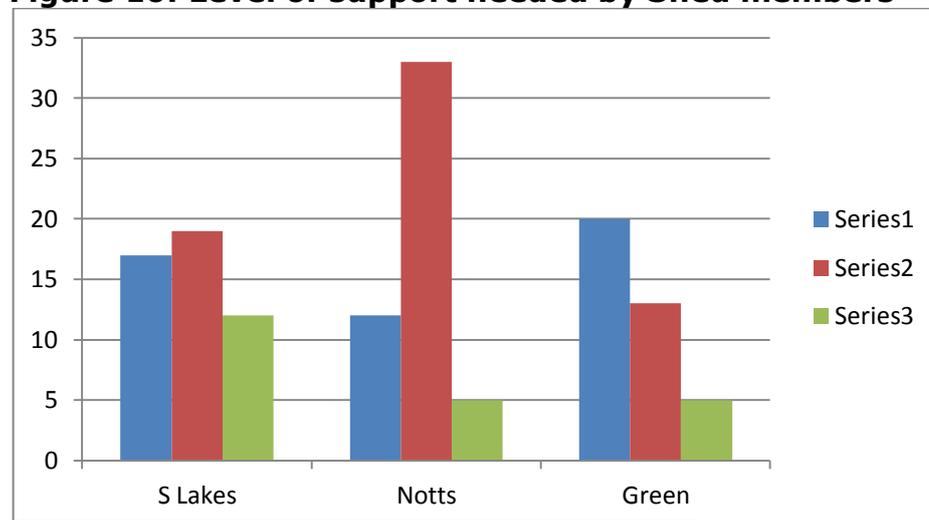
In considering levels of loneliness and social isolations, it is important to note that loneliness is not the sole preserve of those who live alone. Individuals who live alone may in fact have very good social networks. Conversely, individuals living with a partner, spouse or other family member can still feel lonely and isolated where they have poor social networks or where mobility or poor family

relationships may exist. A true measure of social isolation thus requires a more in-depth understanding of the individual's networks and relationships.

#### 4.3.5 Level of Support Required

Finally, as the financial budgets in section 4.2 illustrate, the single largest cost to the projects are those of salaries for the Shed co-ordinators. While these salaries are clearly an important consideration in relation to the sustainability of the projects, it is also important to understand the extent to which Shed members require the support either of a Shed co-ordinator, or of a trained volunteer. Levels of support indicated in Figure 10 below, are based on assessments against a scale of 1 to 3 (low to high support needs) made by the Shed co-ordinators as the key people with an overview of the abilities of their Shed members. Levels 1 and 2 could most likely be supported by a trained volunteer, Level 3 represents individuals with high level needs (often one-to-one) such as those with early stage dementia, poor mental health or mobility problems.

**Figure 10: Level of support needed by Shed members**



1 = low need for support, 2 = some occasional support needed; 3 = high need for support<sup>1</sup>

All three Sheds have members requiring occasional or high level support needs, though the South Lakes Shed has the highest number of individuals with high support needs. The Greenwich Shed has the most members with low level support needs, whilst the Nottingham Shed has a high number of those requiring occasional support. However, readers should take a note of caution here as this is based on co-ordinators' assessments and it is possible there may be some differences in interpretation between low and occasional support in this case.

## 5. Findings

The findings from the evaluation are structured around four broad areas:

- What attracts men to the Sheds and what retains their interest;
- The impact of Shed activity on health and well-being;
- Obstacles and challenges to achieving the aims and impact of Sheds; and

<sup>1</sup> Coordinators were asked to rate Shed members, 1,2 or 3 where 1 = 'able to work independently, 2 = requires limited or occasional support, and 3 = requires intensive one-to-one support.

- Sustainability.

Critically, however, our analysis suggests that there are rather different types of Shed-experience which might be defined by the level of actual need older men have for the service. That is, whilst it appears to present a pleasant and desirable activity for some, it offers a vital support mechanism for those older men at risk of social isolation or emotional breakdown which may otherwise be unmet by other statutory services. Evidence of these different kinds of Shed-experiences emerge throughout the findings.

In discussing our findings we refer firstly, to those issues applying across all Sheds and secondly, to issues that are Shed-specific.

All names used in quotations are pseudonyms.

### *5.1 Ways in: What brings men to the Sheds?*

How Shed members heard about the 'Men in Sheds' project in their area in the first place varied and to some degree reflected their social circumstances and health status. As illustrated in Figure 11, our analysis indicates a fairly evenly distribution between those who:

- responded to an advert / article in a newspaper about the project and self-initiated contact;
- were alerted to the Shed project and recommended to try it by a friend or neighbour;
- were alerted to the Shed project and recommended to try it by their wives, partners or other close family members;
- came to the Shed via referral from a health or social care organisation.

Each of these routes is thus of value in recruiting members to Shed projects. Whilst employing media / publicity has a considerable impact on membership rates, it is also worth noting the importance of personal recommendation by friends/family. Health and social care referrals, whilst important, relates more to those older men with greater support needs.

Those not living alone noted that time at the Shed provided spouses and partners with an important 'breathing space' from one another and an activity independent from their spouse/partner. Whilst many reflected that this had had a positive impact on their personal relationships that was valued by many, it also highlights the fact that only 32% of Shed members were lone-dwellers. The remaining 68% were either married or in long-term relationships.

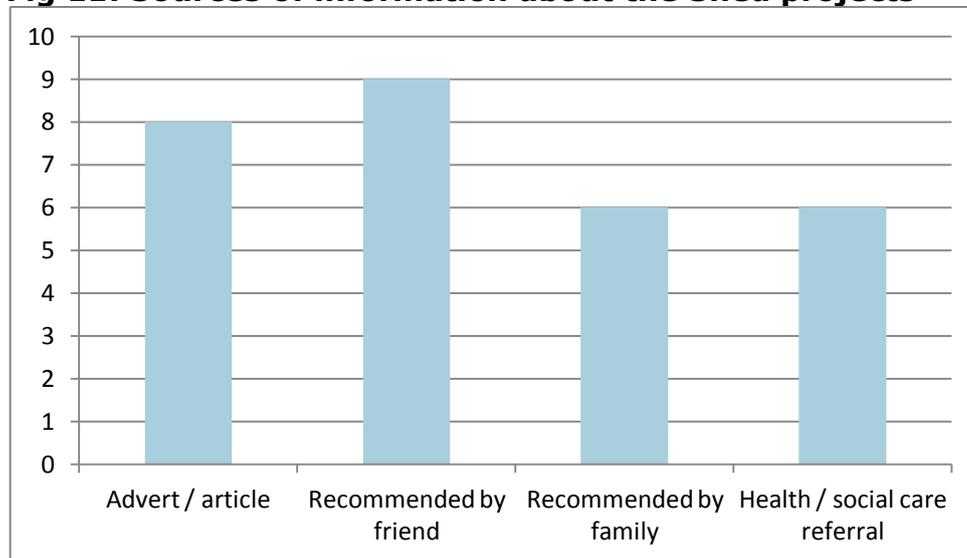
Those who came to the Shed via referral from a health or social care organisation were men for whom a specific need for activity and/ or social support had been identified:

*[The coordinator] phoned me. I think it was the hospital [following treatment for stroke] got in touch with [the coordinator] and she rang me. Vince, P4*

*It was through the [carers' association] ... they mentioned it and from that we went on. Margaret, wife of Ted, who has dementia.*

These are generally the Shed members for whom the Shed provides vital access to support. It is reasonable to assume that if they were not referred to the Shed they would require referral to support services elsewhere.

**Fig 11: Sources of information about the Shed projects**



### 5.2 Life-change and Shed participation

The appeal of Shed activity for many of the older men participating in the evaluation was also linked to a period of significant change in their lives, for example, following illness, bereavement, or due to life-changes brought about by retirement, such as loss of routine or property downsizing.

Some, especially those who had recently retired, noted the importance of finding activities to replace work in retirement, having a continued sense of job satisfaction and social contact that they had enjoyed whilst working. As one recently retired Shed member commented:

*Job satisfaction when you go home. That's the main thing. That's what you used to get when you was at work - if you made something.*

and

*Met the blokes. I thought to m'self, 'Well this is it. That's what you miss when you're at work.' - Or when you retire. It's the banter. Roy, P1*

Another noted:

*I thought yeah. It would break some time up. Keith (P15)*

For others, it was the aftermath of bereavement or illness that prompted them to seek further occupation and social contact. As Jim noted:

*My wife died, and I used to sit at home and look at the wallpaper, and I didn't feel like there was much more than that. And ... I had a bit of an illness and finished up with the social worker taking an interest in me. And she told me about Men in Sheds. ... And it got me out of the house. It got me to meet other people.*

The comment below also illustrates how property downsizing following retirement can also lead to a loss of workspace for DIY activities:

*We'd downsized from a four-bedroomed house to a one bedroom flat, so I lost me garage and what have you. Roy, P1*

### *5.3 Gender issues in the experience of Men in Sheds*

A core objective underlying all three Sheds was the need to provide a gendered space in which lonely or isolated older men could benefit from social interaction with other older men. Our analysis suggests that for older men it is the provision of an activity, often of a type that resonates with the male-based occupations or social activities that they engaged with during their working lives, that is important.

*I went to a boys' only school. I was in the Navy which was exclusively men then. I worked in the [production] industry since I left the Navy and that was mainly men. ...and I wonder if part of the reason I'm comfortable with blokes is cause I was most of the life I've been with blokes and I don't know if that's similar for other people or not. Jim*

and

*So it gives me a good break. Apart from like, I'm with other men as well. Yeah – it's really good. Keith, P11*

Indeed, for many Shed members the fact that Men in Sheds are specifically male-oriented spaces is the key to their attraction. Pointing to differences between the ways that men and women interact and socialise, some participants commented:

*Women, I think, are able to make spaces for themselves easier than men are, because you've got WIs and these sort of things. Women seem to be able to get themselves organised better than we men. Don, P24*

*My experience is men don't communicate as well as women and it's easier to communicate in an all-male group for many people, than it is in a mixed gender group. Roger, P22*

Such comments highlight a sense of male identity which many members felt Sheds provided. However, it is also noteworthy that many Shed members felt that their relationships with other Shed members were qualitatively different to those they experienced with other men when younger. In particular, they noted these relationships lacked the need to demonstrate the 'competitive edge' often present in their relationships with other men when younger. This is illustrated in this focus group excerpt:

**Bruce:** *By the time you are 70 you don't want to impress anybody. ... [Friendships with other men are] ... completely different. If you had been doing this 30 or 40 years ago I'd be trying to impress you with who I am. Now I don't give a hang.*

**Jim:** *There's no competition. There's no rat race. There's nothing to prove. And people come here in relaxed fashion doing that which they are able to do.*

Our analysis also indicated that as a predominantly male space, Sheds were seen to provide a setting in which some older men felt more comfortable talking freely about health or emotional matters than they would have done had women been present. Others maintained that the atmosphere in the Sheds would not suit women, particularly with regard to the roughness of banter, and language:

*And also, can I be honest? Sometimes the language when we're doing things gets a little bit blue. ...and someone said if you'd got ladies there you'd have to watch your Ps and Qs as well. So I don't think it'd work. Al, P13*

However, this view was by no means universal, with several Shed members indicating that they felt that providing women Shed members engaged with the concept, the Sheds would work just as well with women present:

*I've no objection about ladies coming, but when men are men, men use different language to ladies I suppose. ... It's not bad language all the time ... I don't really think they'd fit in, but they may do you see. The lady I know, she'd really muck in and have a go at anything ... So I mentioned it and the lads says 'Oh no. Oh no.' It's not really anti-women it's just the concept is- to spend a few hours you know. Malcolm, P12*

and

*But if women want to come along and use a hammer and saw, by all means - come along. Don, P24*

#### *5.4 Benefits: impact of Men in Sheds on health and wellbeing*

Our analysis suggests that participation in Shed activity can impact on the both the physical and mental well-being of Shed members. The evaluation suggests that this is derived from two distinct but interwoven features of the Shed experience - the combination of *social milieu* and the *impact of the work* itself.

##### 5.4.1 Physical health and well-being

*Men keep saying 'I feel fine' and then they drop dead! Bruce*

It is well known that men have poorer health-seeking behaviours than women (Barreto & Figueredo, 2009; White, 2011). One objective of the Shed projects was to thus to find ways to actively encourage older men to improve their health and wellbeing and their health seeking behaviours.

The primary mode through which Shed members perceived the Shed as impacting on their physical health was through the physical activity of Shed-work:

*And also it keeps you fit as well ... You're working and you're active, and that's good for health, I suppose. Malcolm, P12*

A number Shed-members noted that prior to coming to the Shed they were predominantly sedentary - several indicating that they had spent much time sitting in front of the television. Shed activity thus appears to have stimulated greater levels of physical activity:

*It has got me moving again. I'll tell you, I was getting a couch potato. I was sitting – I used to sit and watch telly and see what films were on and moan that they're being repeated. But now – I don't watch the telly much during the day. Al, P13*

Some Shed-members also maintained that the impact of Shed activity on their mental health and stress levels may also have had a subsequent impact on stress-associated symptoms such as hypertension. For example, one Shed member noted that the positive impact of the Shed on his emotional well-being and stress levels had resulted in the lowering of his blood pressure.

We should stress however, that these are self-reported health outcomes and we have no way of confirming them.

#### 5.4.2 Health awareness

Sheds can also impact on the physical health of older men by raising health awareness through discussions about men's health which may be formal and informal. Some Shed managers had organised visits to the Shed by those working in health promotion. Some Shed members noted that as a direct result of these visits they have taken a more health conscious approach to diet and health behaviour:

*Also another lady [came]. ...Last week she got me in there and she gave me a diet sheet of what I could eat 'cause I want to lose 4 stone ... And we've had a stroke thing come here. A lady talked about strokes. Cliff, P5*

However, while this formal approach can have positive results, it was also evident that much health awareness-raising in the Sheds occurs through informal health talk. Shed members were found to frequently share information about health and ailments providing reassurance and advice to one another as illustrated in this focus group excerpt:

**Harry:** *We can also compare what medicine we're taking. I've just done that today. Friend over there [points to Jim] has had heart operation that I might have to have.*

**Jim:** *But we're not morbid about [it] ... but it may be that I'm able to reassure my friend about my time in hospital, that I made a high success of it and so on.*

Jim also suggested that a fellow Shed member had in turn reassured him:

*Phil showed me an article today about dizziness which is my problem at the moment.*

These interactions may also perform an informal health promotion function through members encouraging each other to seek screening or treatment.

As noted above in section 5.3, some participants noted that they felt that it was easier to talk about men's health issues in the absence of women, and in the absence of younger men. As such the Sheds' membership of older men may provide an optimal environment for men to discuss health.

*I think age is a thing involved there too [regarding discussion of health issues] because we're not in an environment where there are young men around... We're in an environment where we're all over 60, so I mean we all know that we get issues of one kind or another so I think that makes it a little easier to talk about. Bob, FG.*

In general, most participants noted that they preferred this informal approach to health talk. Many suggested that formal attempts at health promotion within the Shed could fail to capture members' attention and may even alienate them.

While the evidence suggests that men are poorer at talking about health issues and emotions than women, Mike's comment below suggests that the workshop environment does make matters of health easier to broach:

*Us men are immortal! We never get ill! But the thing is we do get ill. We do have problems that we sometimes keep quiet, just muddle through. Whereas in the workshop environment you start to see these guys struggling with a bad shoulder, something else - and you can say, 'Have you had a test lately?' and it seems to click in their minds that 'Mmm, I ought to do that'. And that's what it's all about. Mike, P14*

Hence a more informal, 'health by stealth' approach to health promotion amongst older men may be more effective when dealing with health issues in Shed-type settings.

#### 5.4.3 Mental wellbeing and cognitive stimulation

Where Shed projects have been successful in recruiting to their core target group of lonely and isolated older men, the activity has provided vital support with some reporting a positive impact on their mental wellbeing. Cliff, for example, noted having felt depressed and isolated following his wife's death, and that coming to the Shed had helped him to cope with this difficult time in his life:

*Last year my partner died. And I didn't know what to do with myself all day. I was just walking around going to the shops. And then I see an advert saying that anyone with time on their hands come up here. ...So I come up and it's the best thing I ever done, come up here. It's well important to me. Otherwise I don't know what I would have done. ...It would be a disaster for me if this all fell through. Cliff, P5*

For others, it alleviates isolation through the provision of an important connection to other older men with whom they can socialise:

*It gives me somewhere to go. Keeps me busy. Keeps my mind off of that [health problems]. Because I've got nothing outside it, you know. So in that way it's a lifeline, you know. I come here I meet normal people, and I just feel better for it. Bob, (P4)*

Whilst this has clearly proven highly successful for these and other Shed members who have had similar experiences, it does raise a critical question about the impact on these particular Shed members should the Sheds prove unsustainable at the end of their term of funding. These questions need to be carefully and sensitively addressed.

For others, the social aspects of the Shed provided important mental stimulation that keep their minds active:

*What I did find though was I was losing words. Not dementia. You know the words that you normally use in a conversation. You think, now what was that word? You forget that word, you know. And it's coming back now because you're chatting and you're using it you know. Roy, P1*

Many Shed-members also indicated that it was not just the social stimulation, but the work itself that provided cognitive stimulation, noting that they enjoyed the problem solving challenges that arose from Shed-work. As one Shed member noted:

*You know, it's thinking. Thinking how to do things. ....Sometimes I'll wake up in the middle of the night and think, 'I know how to do that ...'*  
Keith, P11

The cognitive stimulation of Shed activity is particularly pertinent for one group of older men – those with early stage dementia. Though the numbers of Shed members with dementia was relatively small, these men and their wives, partners or carers noted that Shed membership offered a 'lifeline' where their dementia had severely limited access to previously enjoyed activities and achievements. For these men, the social interaction was limited due to their cognitive impairments so it was the work itself, (rather than the social engagement) that provided a much valued sense of self and personal accomplishment that had otherwise been diminished by their illness. This point was discussed by one of the Shed coordinators:

*There are several Shed members who experience memory loss, and dementia or Alzheimer's. ... The fact of being wanted, and of making a real contribution to something feels really important not just to the men, but also to their wives. ...Today, Peter and I worked on a small oak shelving unit, ... and literally five minutes after we put it out for sale, we watched it sold. We then worked on an oak aspidistra stand, which, on her return, Jan persuaded Peter to buy for her. Peter was visibly delighted at both events, and Jan was clearly just as pleased. One of the retail staff came in to thank Peter for his work, and the whole thing felt quite significant, in terms of the time Peter had spent in the shed, and as a counter to the frustration which he carries concerning his illness.*

This is also illustrated poignantly by Connie, wife of Doug who has dementia:

*It's so beneficial for me and for Doug, very much so. ... the benefit I can see it's given to Doug, because he's always been a hands-on man and a very proud man, this is the only way he can show what he is. (Voice breaking with some emotion).*

#### 5.4.4 Sense of purpose and self-worth

Shed members indicated that engaging with Shed activity often returned a sense of purpose, achievement and self-worth to their lives:

*Really the only thing I had control of before I did the sheds was the remote control for the telly. And that was the only thing I ever did, was sat and watched the box and turned to jelly. Mike, P14*

and

*It gives you worth. You've got something that you can do. You look forward to going to it. Mike, P14*

Shed members not only gained a sense of achievement and self-worth from the Shed activity itself, but also from the sale of items that they had made and being contracted by other community organisations and individuals to build items for the community (for example, wheelchair ramps, an extension to a community stage, and new wooden cross for a local church etc). Shed members in all three projects referred to a sense of value and contributing towards the project through these activities.

Shed members commented that through these activities they felt they were able to 'give something back' to Age UK in exchange for the support that the organisation had given either to them or a relative. Further, Greenwich Shed members noted that the sale of items they had made enabled them to donate some of their funds to other charitable organisations. Whilst on the one hand it might be argued that these funds should go toward maintaining the sustainability of the projects, on the other, it appears to be an important part of the attraction of Shed membership for many of these older men, who clearly do not wish to see themselves as being 'in need of support'. This is further reinforced by the fact that many Shed members see themselves as working 'volunteers' rather than recipients of a service:

*Because we're all here, we've come here basically as volunteers. Ken FG*

Members' perception of themselves as volunteers rather than service recipients is something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, those Shed members who defined themselves as volunteers clearly did not see themselves as being in need of help and/or support. Hence they were reluctant to discuss how Sheds might usefully signpost them to other services or benefits to which they may be entitled (see 5.4.5). Rather they viewed themselves as a group of older men with the skills to provide support to others (whether that be Age UK or members of the local community). This of course is important in contributing to their self-worth but also hinders any goal of using Sheds' to signpost older men to other services.

This sense of purpose and self-worth also extended to the opportunities Sheds offered for older men to both share their existing skills and learn new ones from each other. The Shed also offered a space for members to share their work experience and expertise in such diverse topics as architecture, administration, IT skills, and so on. This peer learning and sharing of knowledge reflects the experiences of other Sheds (Golding, 2005; Ballinger et al, 2009) in the Australian context, but also extends beyond activities taking place in the

workshop. Some for example, noted that they had acquired new skills that went beyond the actual workshop activity, e.g. first aid, public speaking etc. as a direct result of being a Shed member.

Hence for some, the Shed offered the opportunity to maintain handiwork skills that they had used in their professional and domestic lives. For others it provided an opportunity to acquire new skills from which they derived a sense of pride. Though Keith had limited prior experience of woodwork before joining the Shed, for example, he notes;

*I'm rubbish at woodwork. But I've got better since I've been there.*

When asked how it felt to finish a woodwork project, Keith replied,

*Brilliant. [describes what he made] and I showed it to the daughter in law, and she were over the moon with it. She said 'I'll keep this forever.' It were nice. Keith, P11*

Finally, as discussed above, the motivations and rewards of Shed use, defined in terms of 'volunteering' by Shed members, raises some interesting issues that we were unable to examine further in this evaluation. Was this Shed members' first experience of 'volunteering' for example? Has this lead Shed members to volunteer elsewhere? These are interesting areas for future research.

#### 5.4.5 Information and advice

As suggested above, although the provision of information and signposting to welfare benefits and other services is an important aim of the Shed projects, only a minority of those participating in the evaluation reported gaining such information from the Sheds. Although specifically asked about such signposting / information in the interviews and focus groups, only 3 out of 26 interviewees and 3 out of 33 focus group participants said that they had been signposted to information about other services or benefits from the Sheds. Two participants also said that they were aware of the presence of leaflets and posters and that they knew of others members who had received information about travel passes.

#### 5.5 The social milieu of Sheds:

Important aspects of the social milieu that contribute to Shed members' social inclusion and wellbeing and which encourages them to continue to participate include a sense of camaraderie or comradeship:

*It's the comradeship in this place, that I feel accepted and ... it's a sense of being part of a real community. Raymond, P2*

and

*It's a bit of – I don't know – comp – comradeship, is that what you'd call it? ... Instead of just sitting there by yourself, we're all in the same boat. Some different circumstances to your circumstances, but we all get on well. Keith, P11*

Social interactions in the Shed often take the form of banter and humour:

*And plus you meet other guys. You can talk, chat, laugh and have a muck about. It is serious in the Shed but you know, you can still have a bit of banter that goes on. Mike, P14*

This type of banter was also frequently observed in interactions between Shed-members in the focus groups and in our observations.

Whilst banter and humour are important, Shed members noted that the workshop activities provide a catalyst for this social interaction, and hence the activities themselves were a vital component of the social milieu:

*I think because someone's looking at a bench and working at a bench and there's a conversation going around, I think things come out unconsciously, verbally, ... that they wouldn't verbalise otherwise. The workshop activity, I think, is a vehicle for a conversation and integration.*  
Roger, P22

Hence, for some Shed members the workshop activities are a necessary *enabler* for men to interact socially in a way that they might otherwise find difficult or uncomfortable.

#### *5.6 Shed Activity:*

Our analysis indicates that whilst social factors are central to the Shed experience, social interaction alone is not enough to engage many of the Shed members. Most saw the actual workshop activities as being a vital element of their experience. Asked for example, whether a male-only social activity without the workshop activities would suffice, Shed members commented:

*I don't think it will work for so long if it's just sitting around having a cup of tea and talking about bingo and all of that. ... The fact that we are different in making things and building something towards other objectives is so unique, that the workshop is an essential part of this project.* Raymond, P2

and

*Need something to be useful. Just having a cup of tea and a chat is not necessarily judged by most blokes as useful.* David

Whilst we have already discussed how Sheds enable older men to recreate elements of their former working lives that contributed to their sense of self-worth and camaraderie, one important feature of Shed activities that distinguishes them from Shed members' former working lives is the absence of pressure to perform, produce or compete. As Gordon noted, pressure to produce or perform was something that most Shed members did not wish to reinstate from their working lives:

*The majority of people had busy working lives where there were targets and production lines – and they don't particularly want it in retirement.*  
Gordon, P28

This lack of pressure to produce items was important to all Shed members but particularly so for older men such as Jim who had had recent health problems, or those with higher support needs. It also facilitated the return of Shed members who had been ill, enabling them to return without feeling any pressure to actively participate. As Jim noted:

*It's the activity without any pressure. You do as much as you want to do. ... We all find our own level and we work or don't work. ... When I have been coming, if I don't feel up to it I don't do very much.*

In summing up this section, many members report an increased sense of well-being or contentment arising from the interaction of social aspects of the Shed and the work involved. Indeed during the focus group sessions, many participants struggled to identify which of social factors and the Shed-work itself were more important. Many Shed members noted that the Sheds reinstated the social contact, a sense of routine and sense of achievement that they had missed since retirement.

However, there appear to be differing levels of impact according to the extent to which Shed members need support. For some, Shed activity provides the 'icing on the cake' – an enjoyable and useful supplementary activity that provides a sense of camaraderie and contentment in an otherwise happy later life. For others, the Shed provides essential access to social contact and meaningful activity; a highly valued break from caring; and/or social support in dealing with illness, disability or following bereavement. As David sums up:

*I've been rather poorly. And when you're somewhat poorly your world narrows down to just staying alive and keeping well. Men in Sheds has provided me with a wider world. (David, S. Lakes FGs)*

## **6. Shed Members with extra support needs**

The evaluation found evidence that for people with physical and cognitive limitations the experience of being a Shed member is rather different to that of members who are more physically fit and mentally able. Further, these experiences can differ across the 'Sheds'. Older men with dementia in particular may have a limited ability to benefit from the social aspects of the Shed as they can find it difficult to keep up with and engage in the conversation or 'banter'. For example, one Shed member with dementia, noted on three separate occasions during his interview that he rarely interacted with other Shed-members. This reflection was reiterated by others with dementia, suggesting that they do not engage either with the social banter or informal health talk that other Shed members do.

However, it appears that while memory problems limit some older men's access to the social milieu and 'banter', they still gain significantly from actual Shed activity. While this may in some ways be seen as more akin to traditional occupational therapy, as indicated above, Shed members with dementia still reported a sense of achievement and increased sense of self in having participated in the making or renovation of an item of furniture of similar object. However, it is important to note that these men require almost one-to-one attention from the coordinator. As will be discussed later, there was some diversity of opinion amongst Shed members about how the needs of this group of men should be met.

## 7. Obstacles and challenges

Negative aspects of the Shed experience overtly identified by Shed-members were limited. Problems discussed in interviews or focus groups by Shed members were generally related to problems of space, and minor conflicts between members which had been resolved without major incident. Identified problems were generally not considered to be serious drawbacks. As one member put it, *'We're all happy bunnies, that's why we're here'* (Ken), implying that Shed members would 'vote with their feet' if there were aspects of the Sheds with which they were deeply unhappy.

### 7.1 Space

The issue of space differed between Sheds, depending on their location and facilities, but there was some suggestion that space restrictions limited the extent of activities and subsequent sense of achievement, which, as discussed appears to be an important component of the Shed experience. Limited space was frequently cited as a drawback in both the Greenwich and South Lakeland Sheds with 6 study participants citing it as a significant problem in each of these Sheds. Space limitations not only interfered with the ability to work, but also with the ability to store items for sale.

This issue was perhaps most salient in the Greenwich Shed which has the smallest workspace and which operates an 'open-door', 'drop-in' policy. The fact that they could 'drop-in' at any time appeared to be highly valued by many Shed members, particularly those who were socially isolated, but it can leave Shed-members unsure about whether or not there will be sufficient space for them to complete their workshop activities:

*It's a little bit of a, 'well am I going to be able to get on with anything today or is too many going to turn up and I'm not going to be able to do anything?' Quite like it when there's only two or three of them in there when I get in here. And I think, 'oh I can actually get a space on the bench today.' ... To be quite honest if that happened every week and I couldn't actually do anything I might tire of it. Then again I might not. Depends ... the social side of it is good. The amount of guys we've got here I think we've got too many. Reg, Greenwich, P6*

This challenge was reflected by the Shed coordinator;

*People do tend to 'drop in' which is really nice but I sometimes think 'Oh my God we're full to the rafters'. ... I really don't want to [discourage people from coming in]. I really don't want to because that's what it should all be about, that people feel comfortable. Or if they've got something to discuss.*

The South Lakes Shed members also had a small workspace, which they have attempted to rationalise through using the walls for hanging storage, using an outside container to store furniture, and by limiting numbers of Shed sessions for Shed members.

The Nottinghamshire Shed had fewer problems with space, as the Shed is located in a large warehouse. Here, the issue of space was raised by only one Shed member. The main issue for this Shed was its rural and isolated location, which made it difficult for some members to access by public transport, and for

recruiting new members. As the coordinator commented, *'You can't walk past and notice it'*.

As noted above, most of the negative points raised overtly by Shed members were not considered to be insurmountable, nor did they deter members from attending the Shed. However, our analysis of the data does suggest that there are some challenges in running Sheds successfully for their intended target group. In particular we identified issues of accessibility; acceptance of difference in ability and disability; and culture. In the following section we refer specifically to differences between the three Sheds.

### *7.2 Differing abilities*

As noted above, some men with cognitive limitations or dementia require one-to-one attention either from a support worker or from the Shed coordinator in order to participate in workshop activities safely and productively. However, in cases where the coordinator is absent there was evidence of some discomfort and anxiety from the more able Sheddors about looking after the needs of members with high level of support needs.

While some of the more able men were accepting of older men with a range of abilities and disabilities, others expressed concern about those needing additional support, in some instances framing their concern in terms of 'health and safety' issues.

*We had one chap whose mobility was very, very poor ... What worried me about having him wasn't the fact that he was here, it was the fact that if we had to get out in a hurry what would we do? You know perhaps we could either leave him there or carry him out because no way was he going to be able to get out. Gerry*

We also observed some tensions in how different ability groups contributed to and were helped by the Shed experience. Having picked up on these concerns amongst some Shed members during the interviews, we explored them more directly in subsequent focus groups.

Focus Group responses varied from Shed to Shed. In two of the Sheds - Nottingham and Greenwich - some (but not all) Shed members expressed concerns about the inclusion of people with high support needs or disabilities in the Shed projects:

*I think people should be... reasonably be fit and active to come here.. ...It's for reasonably fit people and reasonably mentally fit as well. That's my view. George*

However, whilst it is important to note that these views exist amongst Shed members, it is also important to note that they were not universal. Indeed, the focus groups revealed a good deal of dissension and disagreement on this matter:

*I'm very happy to say that I'm sure most of us would have no problem at all handling anybody with whatever kind of difficulty they've got...Paul,*

and

*That's what the [Shed's] about really. It's helping other people and not being particular and saying 'no you can't walk that straight line and you can't come.' It's to be there, not just for us to enjoy but helping other people out. Mike*

Interestingly, these views and concerns regarding Shed members with high support needs were not expressed by Shed members in the South Lakes Shed, who in the main felt that members with disabilities, either physical or cognitive, made a positive contribution to the Shed experience:

*I think it's also important to recognise that those that are in need have a relationship with people that are not in need. David*

The comments made by Doug who has dementia, illustrate that he valued coming into contact with people with a range of abilities:

*We've all got different potential from others. You can see people with higher potential than yourself, people with lower potential than yourself, you can gain from these different aspects I'm sure, well I can personally. Doug*

It is difficult to identify why members of the South Lakes Shed appear more accepting of those with high support needs, however, as Figures 5 and 10 illustrate, the membership of this Shed not only has an older age distribution, it also has a more even distribution of members with differing levels of support needs than the other two Sheds. Hence the overall Shed membership in South Lakes has fewer individuals with low support needs, so this may simply be an accepted and expected part of the membership. In addition, the support needs of those older men with cognitive and physical disabilities are largely 'absorbed' by the coordinator the South Lakes Shed. Although other Shed members contribute to this support, the responsibility is not the concern of other Shed members, leaving them free to enjoy their own Shed experience. However, this type of support requires a high level of input and presence from the coordinator, potentially making it more difficult for the Shed to run on an independent, 'volunteer' or 'member-run' basis.

## **8. Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups**

Comments from Shed members, coordinators and the data presented in Figure 6 illustrate that, in general, the Shed projects have not attracted as many members from BME groups as initially hoped. In part this is linked to the different population make-up of the three Shed locations as discussed above.

The highest diversity of ethnic group is in the Greenwich Shed. However, Shed members suggested that members from BME groups do not often attend as illustrated by this focus group excerpt:

**Gerry:** *We have had one or two ... ethnic and minority people but they don't seem to come very regularly or stay for a long period of time, and I don't think that's anything to do with - it's not the way we've treated them.*

**Bill:** *They get treated exactly the same as...*

**Gerry:** *...Same as anyone else. But none of them seem to have stayed for any great length of time.*

One of the Shed coordinators maintained that part of the difficulty was one of location, in that BME groups '*tend to prefer to stay within their own communities*', hence unless Sheds were set up within these localities, BME recruitment would remain difficult.

It was beyond the resources and remit of this evaluation to explore the reasons for non-attendance or withdrawal from the Sheds of men from BME backgrounds (or indeed other backgrounds. However, the systematic collection of this kind of data could provide useful data for further Age UK projects.

However, during Focus Group discussions, the suggestion of setting up Shed projects in localities which were more familiar to BME groups was met with resistance by some existing members, highlighting the difficulties of directing projects to diverse minority ethnic communities where numbers of a target population may be relatively small:

**Barry:** *You could set up different sheds in each different minority groups there are so many areas ... and you just couldn't afford to run all those amount of sheds.*

**Ken:** *If you're referring to different ethnic groups ..., they've lived in the community, they've worked in the community so I can't see any reason why they should feel any different from coming here if they're really interested in participating in this sort of project. So rather than go down the road of, 'is it based on your ethnic group?' I believe people are just not interested. Greenwich FG*

Similarly, Shed members from the Nottingham shed were concerned that specifically designating Sheds to BME areas could result in undesirable segregation:

**George:** *...by using that argument they're getting everything built in their area. I don't agree with that, I think we should welcome them [people from BME communities] and accept them when they do come.*

**Mike:** *All sorts of people should come to the shed whatever ethnic backgrounds they come from, whatever religions or whatever, if they're over 60 and they want to come and join the shed they are quite welcome. ... There is no restriction and there should not be, because if you start alienating..... Notts FG*

Shed-members in the South Lakes Shed felt that with no substantial BME communities within the area, ethnic diversity was so low that the question of Sheds targeted at BME communities would not be feasible.

## 9. Sustainability for Men in Sheds

Sustainability is clearly an issue of concern not only to funders but also to the Shed members and coordinators. Many Shed members expressed awareness and concern about the costs and sustainability of the Shed projects. Possible solutions to the cost of running Shed projects proposed by Shed members themselves included:

### 9.1 Membership / subscription fee

The introduction of a subscription fee has been agreed in principle by Shed members in the Nottinghamshire Shed. This was also discussed in Focus Groups with Shed members from the Greenwich and South Lakes Sheds. Core issues focused on the amount of this subscription fee and whether it should be voluntary or compulsory. Whilst some members indicated they would be willing to pay a fee, in the same way that they might pay for Gym membership or attendance at other hobbies or leisure activities, others were concerned that the a subscription fee, may exceed the resources of some Shed members, particularly those with high support needs, who may be most in 'need' of access to the Shed activity:

*I wouldn't want introducing a subscription making it difficult for others to come that couldn't afford it. David, S. Lakes FG*

It is also worth noting that the level of fees subscription suggested by Shed members was in the region of £1.00 - 2.00 per week. With a current Shed membership of 50 people this would generate a maximum figure of £2,600 - £5,200 per annum assuming all 50 members attended weekly across the whole year (an unlikely event). This equates to around approximately 7-14% of current running costs.

### 9.2 Income generation

Workshop activities can generate small amounts of income towards the running of the Sheds, although the extent to which this covers costs varies between sheds. One Nottinghamshire Shed member noted:

*I mean last year we sold over two grand's worth of stuff. Mike*

Shed members from the South Lakeland Shed noted that much of their work involved the renovating items for sale in the AgeUK shop, but that the Shed itself received no funding from the value added to this merchandise.

*But we find as we go along, particularly skilled people we can refurbish furniture out there and then we start to see that something that would have sold for £15 as it was sells for £40. And there's a tendency to want to have some recognition for the value added. ... What might be important to us later on is to see that we are making a reasonable contribution as time goes on that we can raise funds with our activities. ... Jim, P33*

However, it is clear that the money raised through sales will not meet the full costs of running the Sheds, and it is clear that not everyone who benefits from coming to the Shed is effective at making items that generate income. As one co-ordinator noted:

*There may be 6 people working in that workshop but only one or two are capable of making stuff that you can sell. The other 4, it's doing just as much good to them as to the 2 able men.... they love to come up and they love to sweep the floor and love to tidy up .. get involved in the conversations and they're probably getting more out of the project than the guys who can come up here and make stuff.*

Any attempt to increase productivity would bring with it an increasing pressure to produce but it is the very absence of this pressure that many Shed members valued.

While the Sheds have produced a number of goods for sale or resale, and have been involved in a range of community activities as well as being involved in small-scale but very successful intergenerational working with schoolchildren, the income generated from these activities is unlikely to be sufficient to cover the running costs of Sheds as presently configured.

### *9.3 Co-ordinator time and input*

The biggest proportion of Shed costs are those involved in employing the coordinator, hence sustainability relies on either raising income to pay the coordinator costs OR reducing coordinator time and input.

One possibility raised by the projects themselves (both staff and Shed members) is to train Shed members to become volunteers to take on at least some responsibility for the running of the Sheds. Indeed, one Shed coordinator commented:

*It's got to be the way to go [involving volunteers in the running of the Shed]. I was keen to, from the start to tell them all that this is their project and if it's going to move forward they're the people that are going to take it forward. Not me. And they have got a real sense of ownership of this place.*

This model is already being developed in the Nottingham Shed. However, our data suggest several notes of caution in taking this approach: Firstly, Shed members viewed the coordinators' experience and leaderships skills as central to the success and ethos of the Sheds.

*I think [the coordinator] is integral and vital to the shed, certainly as a personality. And as a role. ... Wouldn't be what it is had it not been for [the coordinator] and that has a lot to do with [the coordinator's] life experience and approach to getting things done. Roger, P22*

Secondly, there are leadership and health and safety functions that many 'volunteers would be less willing to take responsibility for:

*There are health and safety aspects to it there are supervisory aspects to it. ... There are things that [the coordinator] needs to do. Roger, P22*

However, this also varied across Sheds, with members in the Greenwich and Nottinghamshire Sheds believing that they could operate with a part-time coordinator. As one Shed member commented:

*Oh yeah. That would be fine. ... What you want is a number you can ring ... If there's a problem here I just ring [the coordinator] up and they'll either come round or tell me what to do. If you had a coordinator who had say 2 or 3 of them [Sheds] they could spend an hour here, an hour there and then they're on the end of the phone. Yeah, that would work.* Cliff, P22

However, this view was not echoed in the South Lakeland Shed where Shed members believed:

*[The Coordinator] is needed four days a week [every day the Shed is open]. ... you need a [coordinator] there. Not a [coordinator] travelling, floating.* Gordon, P28

and

*If [the Coordinator's] role was split I don't think there'd be the unifying influence that [he/she] creates. [The Coordinator] sees all the members, every couple of weeks. And has a lively eye for the welfare of those members. And without that single point of focus it would be difficult to do as good a job.* Roger, P22

The reason for this distinction may well reflect the greater number of Shed members with high support needs in the South Lakeland Shed. This view is also encapsulated by the following comment from one of the coordinators:

*The real issue then [with self-supporting, 'member-run' sheds] is that it is likely to fall by the wayside for the high-support needs people who come to the shed. 'Cause they wouldn't survive I don't think in a volunteer led sort of structure ... the very isolated, perhaps difficult-to-work-with clients, and importantly it's respite for their partners, the ones who have partners.*

Critical, of course, is the question of whether sufficient Shed members wish to take on this role. As already noted many Shed members value the lack of pressure when working in Sheds, and concerns were expressed about the pressure a volunteer role may bring.

## **10. Concluding comments**

Overall, our evaluation indicates that the Shed projects have been successful in achieving their key objectives. However, though it had a larger membership from BME communities than the other two Sheds, the Greenwich Shed did not recruit as many Shed members from BME communities as initially envisaged. This may be because the Shed was not located within the heart of the BME community, but further investigation would be required to confirm this. The South Lakes Shed did not recruit the target numbers it had initially envisaged, though this was less a failure of the project than an initial misconception that Sheds members would be content to move on after 12 weeks. Instead, the social support and stimulation of the activity provided meant that, once recruited, most Shed members wanted to continue to participate on a regular basis.

Though the evaluation was unable to assess the long-term effects of Shed activity on older men, Shed members clearly gained a sense of value and achievement through social interaction and meaningful activity. There is also

evidence to suggest that for many Shed members, participation in Shed activity can contribute to improvements in health awareness and mental well-being. Health awareness and health promotion occurs through both informal peer interaction and through more formal health based activities.

However, our evaluation also suggests that some Shed members (particularly those with physical or cognitive impairments) find it more difficult to access the social benefits the Sheds, rather the benefit for them is linked to the activity itself and the sense of achievement gained from that activity.

There also appear to be variations between Shed projects in how more able Shed members view the appropriateness of participation by those with physical or cognitive impairments.

The evaluation also suggests that the Sheds have found it more difficult to reach their specific target populations of isolated and lone-dwelling older men, and those with caring responsibilities, that initially envisaged. The former, by their very nature, will be a hard to reach group and may need more specific targeting measures (though as we note earlier, loneliness is not the sole preserve of those who live alone). However, there is evidence to suggest that where Sheds have been successful in recruiting those who are socially isolated or who are suffering from depression or other mental health conditions following significant traumatic life events such as illness or bereavement, Sheds have provided important access to a form of social support that meets the specific needs of older men.

It is perhaps worth noting at this point, that if all Shed members were drawn from those who were lonely and isolated, or who had high support needs, the atmosphere of the Shed would be very different. Generating a sense of group purpose and camaraderie that underpins the ethos of much of the Shed activity relies on a mix of older men with different levels of ability and needs.

Finally the evaluation found significant variations between Sheds in terms of the level of support that members require from the coordinator, and members' ability to work independently. The presence of a Shed coordinator was identified as key to the success of all three Sheds, but with differing levels of input. This has a significant impact on the costs and potential sustainability of the Sheds.

## **11. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **11.1 Sustainability of Men in Sheds**

The costs and sustainability of Men in Sheds are related to the model of operation adopted. If current funding levels are not sustainable, Sheds need to consider the adoption of different models of operating. Our data suggest three broad categories of older men who can benefit from engagement in the Shed projects:

1. Those 'in need' of support or respite due to mental health issues, disability or their caring role;
2. Those 'at risk' of needing care or support and for whom the Sheds provide a preventative function;
3. Those for whom Shed provide a welcome hobby or occupation in retirement – albeit a potentially health promoting one.

This presents three potentially different models of a Shed:

- 1) A model that incorporates a significant level of coordinator input and presence for those with high level support needs. This input is necessary to support members with high level support needs AND to ensure tolerance of their needs by other Shed members.

Running costs for this type of model will be higher due to the active presence of a co-ordinator, but which may be supported through the negotiation of contracted social care placements.

- 2) A 'member run' model which can run without a paid coordinator following initial set-up. This model would be unable to meet the more specific requirements of members with disabilities and high support needs.
- 3) A 'hub and spoke' model based on a core Shed (hub) with a paid co-ordinator supporting older men with high support needs paid for by contracted social care placements for 3-4 days per week, plus a number of outlying 'spoke' sheds that are run either by volunteers or members and whose membership comprises more able-bodied older men. The paid co-ordinator oversees 'at a distance', helps with organisational problems, paperwork and administration and visits for short periods (either weekly or less often for more established Sheds).

### **11.2 Membership**

Our evaluation indicates that if Age UK wishes to increase membership of older men from BME backgrounds to Sheds projects they may need to consider the targeted placement of Sheds within BME localities. However this evaluation draws on only limited numbers of Shed members from BME backgrounds. Age UK may wish to consult more widely with older men from BME backgrounds to ensure the location and activities of Sheds meet their needs.

Due to the short timescale and retrospective nature of this evaluation we were unable to access those older men who initially joined a Shed, but who then chose not to continue as a member. In developing future projects Age UK may wish to consider building-in a de-brief with 'leavers' to their general reporting mechanisms in order to gain a better understanding of what aspects of Shed

activity does not appeal to these older men and why some choose not to continue their membership.

### **11.3 Space and participation**

The three Sheds varied in size with Nottingham having the largest space followed by Kendal and Greenwich with the smallest space. Despite variations in the size of the Sheds, the optimum number of members a Shed was able to accommodate **per session** appears to be approximately the same: in the region of 6-7 people.

In part, the numbers of members a Shed can accommodate per session is dependent on the activity being undertaken. Where Shed members require the presence of a support worker the numbers of members a Shed can accommodate are reduced. Similarly, where Shed members are engaging in intergenerational activity, the numbers of actual members participating will be reduced.

Different forms of activity may also require more space than others (for example, repairing large pieces of furniture over build bird-boxes).

There was some evidence that where Sheds had additional social space (for drinking beverages etc), members would congregate for social interaction. However members stressed that, without the workshop activity, social space would not be attractive to them.

To cope with increasing numbers, it is suggested that session attendance be capped based on a ratio of space: activity: size (of overall membership). This will also set the number of sessions per week a member is able to attend.

### **11.4 Exit Strategy**

The overall project was supported by external, but time-limited, funding. Shed members highly value their participation in Shed activity, and for some it provides a valuable 'lifeline' that alleviates their social isolation or provides an important period of respite.

It is clear from the evaluation that the initial strategy of the Kendal Shed to recruit members on a 12 week cycle did not work as expected. Once recruited, many members were keen to stay and came regularly to the Shed. This experience was replicated in the other Sheds.

This raises an important, and wider, issue for Age Concern regarding the need to build in an exit strategy for projects developed on this kind of funding from the outset. This is particularly important for older men who fall within categories one and two of our model. Without some continuation or replacement activity, older men in these groups run the risk of once more becoming socially isolated.

### **11.5 Lessons for Future Evaluations?**

Finally, the evaluation team was asked to consider lessons learned and helpful pointers for future evaluation work by Age UK. We would make the following two main recommendations:

The best evaluations are those where measures of impact can be built in to the project at the outset rather than those undertaken retrospectively. Age UK should consider building this in as standard to all future projects that require evaluation. Early engagement with the independent evaluation team would be beneficial.

Impact measures (whether health, cost or quality of life etc) need to be gathered consistently throughout the course of a project being evaluated. Any measures gathered should include the date collected and a code to indicate the individual to whom this is attributable. Where this occurs across more than one location, it is critical that those collecting the data a) use the same measure; and b) are given training in data collection.

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