



Garry Ion

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Location: Cumbria, Britain



What I do: Supporting and connecting with people on the margins, especially men, through practical work in Community Shed groups.

Dear friends,

Greetings from The Community Shed here in Carlisle. As the nights draw in we have begun production of our 2024 Christmas tree decorations, made from recycled scrap wood. Each year we try to come up with a different design – selling them helps to raise funds for our shed refreshments and sundries including glue, screws and varnish. This small income provides a way for shed friends to contribute to the shed's sustainability. We don't take orders, I hasten to add, but instead sell what we manage to make when members feel able. In case you find yourself in one of the RESTORE charity shops in Penrith or Carlisle, do look out for these occasional crafts. And maybe these limited edition crafts will be the antiques of tomorrow!

Whether being productive in the shed, nattering over a coffee or enjoying a Garry's chicken burger special butty, we remain very busy. Unlike other Men's Shed projects, the Community Shed is open to both women and men who've usually been referred to us through social or mental health services and associated organisations and charities. We also increasingly welcome new members through probation services and their Rebuilding Lives programme.

What also sets us apart from most other sheds is our desire to care holistically for body, mind and spirit. Endeavouring to tread carefully and prayerfully, we share our faith through conversation and life experiences. The seasonal crafts are also a talking point about the Gospel message: the planter and the seed of faith sown that flourishes, the birdbox and God's love for his creation, and Christmas decorations and the coming of Emmanuel. Last year during our run up to Christmas we enjoyed fellowship in the shed using our Christmas tree decorations as a backdrop to Bible readings by candlelight. We hope to do the same again this year with the 2024 Christmas tree crafts. Video clips made in the shed are available to use in churches, please contact me for details garryion@gmail.com

Also, as winter approaches, we have started a new programme called Community Space. You may recall previous Warm Space initiatives across the country that came about due the cost-of-living crisis and isolation after lockdown. By request, our Community Space is an offshoot of this where we meet in the evenings, in a warm space adjoining the shed, for a more in-depth chat, cuppa and access to indoor games including table tennis, pool and darts. Now running for couple of weeks, it is nice to see several of the lads who have struggled previously with alcohol or drug addiction coming along. This is a problem which often increases at this time of year.



*Shed Chaplain, Rev Chris Harwood,
selecting Christmas tree design.*

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churchmissionsociety.org/ion

**With Jesus
With each other
To the edges**



As mentioned in previous letters, it has been nice to fellowship and see friends be transformed and grow in faith as we build friendship together. Two new members recently joined us on remand from prison. With a probation officer and tags secured to their ankles, we were initially concerned about their attendance. But both quickly settled, getting on very well with the rest of their groups. They are talented and creative; having gained these skills while inside prison, they now share carpentry skills with members of the shed.

One of these new members had become a Christian while in prison and has begun share a little of his testimony – from violent gang member, stabbed fighting for his life, and then presented with the gospel by a prison chaplain. This seed of faith has grown and his charisma in Jesus is clearly seen and heard in the shed. Last week he invited me and a few other members to a Men's Breakfast at Carlisle Cathedral where he has started fellowshiping. In the few months we have known him his tags – “shackles” – have been removed from his ankles, he no longer needs to be chaperoned by an officer and is now encouraging shed members, including me, to church activities.

In my last letter I mentioned I am struggling to raise my funds to sustain my mission partner role at the Community Shed. Thank you so much for your prayers and the many words of encouragement. Your prayers and gifts are incredibly important in helping me to serve here.

Since coming back from Africa, now four years ago, I have been managing to raise about half my annual budget through church and individual support. Thank you. The remainder of my budget shortfall has come from reserves leftover from my time in Africa. These reserves are quickly running out. Together with the RESTORE board we have applied to charitable trusts and other possible donors, but no definite commitment has been forthcoming. I won't give up! As I have shared in this and previous letters, God is doing amazing work in and through the shed, and I know if it is his will to see my post sustained this will happen. Please pray with me that God will provide to meet the gap in my funding.

If you are able to increase your regular giving or to give an additional gift this year, I would really appreciate you prayerfully considering it. You can give online at churchmissionsociety.org/ion, call 01865 787489 or complete the enclosed form if you have received this letter through the post. (For my supporting churches, if you are able to give a further gift, please contact churches@churchmissionsociety.org.) I understand this might not be possible – **please know that I greatly value your support**, and thank you for letting me share my challenge with you.

Thank you so much for your continued interest, encouragement and support,

God bless,

Garry Ion



Photos from top to bottom: Garry and a shed member making a wishing well planter; shed members tucking into Garry's chicken burger special; Garry and darts team at the new community space; shed members were invited to a men's breakfast at Carlisle Cathedral.



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