



# 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.



**Discovering creative ways** to share the hope of Jesus with people unconnected to church

Dear friends,

I'm sorry for the delay in sending this letter. By now, I was hoping to have some definite news about the future of the Community Shed here in Carlisle. Restore, the charity which manages the Shed, announced in the spring that the lease on the warehouse building which includes the Shed won't be renewed after October 2025. As I write, discussions about the Shed's future are still ongoing. In the meantime, the Shed has identified a few suitable vacant buildings close to the current venue and has shared cost estimates for these with Restore and the diocese. It's important to note that the Community Shed is not an independent charity; it currently relies on Restore and the diocese.

So, I'm in a reflective mood! I give thanks that the Community Shed has become a vital outreach project in the heart of Carlisle. It's a privilege to share skills and experience in supporting the pioneer chaplaincy and to see the mission thrive. Our objective is to offer a safe and inviting workshop space for those dealing with marginalisation and isolation in the community. We focus on building self-confidence, creating friendships and teaching new skills as we share God's love.

I admit getting the space ready has required a lot of preparation and behind-the-scenes admin. This, plus the upkeep of the workshops, requires commitment, which we now share with some of the Shed members. Thankfully, there is respect for the space and we have only had a handful of minor injuries since we opened.

The crafts we create are mostly made from recycled wood, and we encourage our members to take them home with them. We also sell a few extra crafts in the Restore charity shops. This helps cover costs for supplies like glue, screws and varnish. Occasionally, we upcycle and repurpose furniture, with donations coming from the Restore charity shops and the warehouse next door. This collaboration between the charity shops, warehouse, and Community Shed has, in my opinion, worked very well. I would even say it serves as an excellent model for modern Christian outreach and community development!

Clearly the workshop environment attracts men, but not exclusively. The practical activities serve as great icebreakers, helping to develop trust and friendships around the workbench and into the "bait cabin" – a Cumbrian term for the refreshment area, which doubles up as our church! What distinguishes us from



Summer 2025 outside the Shed, showing off our hand-crafted planters

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To the edges**



secular groups is our holistic approach – we are looking to care for the whole person. With this in mind, and wanting to point people to Jesus, we have the occasional impromptu Bible study and prayer time, sharing fellowship, joys and struggles.

Over the last five years, we have built valuable connections with local churches, social services, mental health services and even probation services. These have all referred individuals to the Community Shed, trusting that there is a real benefit to being part of our community. This collaboration has allowed us to reach some of the most vulnerable members of society, often at a pivotal time in their lives.

Despite its success, we now have a looming October deadline. We must stop accepting new referrals until we are sure of our next step, if indeed we have one! And our existing Shed friends, who know about the planned closure, are prepared. With less than three months to go, and all the dismantling to be done, I too am feeling somewhat anxious!

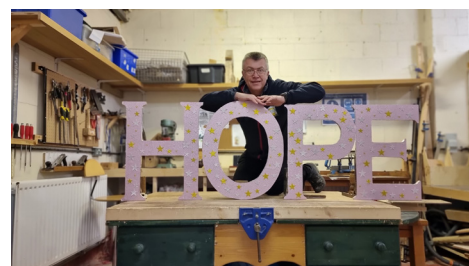
So, let's look at the positive news! We continue to see mental and spiritual healing. A highlight since last I wrote was David's confirmation. David is a member of the Shed who was first introduced to us through probation services. His example has piqued the interest of others in the Shed. Alongside these friends, I give thanks for members who persevere, despite severe mental and physical health problems, and faithfully continue to struggle to the Shed though still battling with addiction, mental health issues and isolation. Another Shed friend recently developed gangrene in his fingers due to long-term lifestyle struggles outside the Shed. Despite helping him to A&E and building bridges with his family and social services, it remains an uphill battle. Notwithstanding, he shows up at the Shed most days, where he enjoys the company. Please pray for him and two younger members, both in their early 20s, who have recently gone back into full-time rehab. One of these young men was baptised last year, and the other, who struggled with low self-worth, had begun to discover his creative gifts in the workshop, making boxes for his family. My hope and prayer is that the Community Shed will be here for them when they are ready to return!

To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Although we live in uncertain times, both in and outside the Shed, we keep our eyes fixed on Abba Father, who has our interests at heart. We are the apple of his eye and we really matter to him. I pray that more friends in the Shed will come to know this truth, which was ultimately expressed on the cross.

Finally, thank you for reading this letter. It hasn't been an easy one to write at this juncture! Thank you for your wonderful support and faithful prayers. Hoping there will be positive news in the next letter! But in any case, God's will be done!

God bless,

Garry



**Photos from top to bottom:** Upstairs space at the Community Shed; HOPE sign made by Shed members for a local church; a young member of the Shed making boxes for his family after discovering his talent in the Shed



## Discovering creative ways to share the hope of Jesus

**It's so encouraging to hear stories** from other CMS partners sharing the hope of Jesus with people not yet connected to churches. In England, Fiona is pioneering creative ways of connecting with people who aren't in church. And Andy's story about prisoners in Brazil finding Jesus is incredible. Read more and get inspired by more stories of hope at [churchmissionsociety.org/bringhope](http://churchmissionsociety.org/bringhope)

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