



Garry Ion

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Contact details:
garryion@gmail.com



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 All Nations Christian College, Hertfordshire, where I'm attending the CMS People in Mission Conference. After such a long time not meeting face to face, it is good to be with CMS family, and also starting to visit friends around the country. Thank you so much for continuing to support me as I make home, home again, helping family in Penrith and developing the programme at the Community Shed in Carlisle.

As you can see from photos, the shed continues to evolve and grow as we seek the Lord's direction, endeavouring to meet the needs of those who want to join in. Working together with Rev Chris Harwood, pioneer enabler with the Diocese of Carlisle, seconded to Restore Cumbria, we are now networking with mental health and social services in the area to provide a safe space for those who are struggling on the edges of society, especially those who struggle with isolation, depression and anxiety. It has been a highlight since I last wrote to forge links with the local psychiatric hospital, Carleton Clinic, who feel able to bring one or two of their in-patients to the shed to take part in our practical activities. To accommodate their need, we first offer one-to-one support outside of the usual busy groups, with a psychiatric nurse present. Initially focusing on a small task like recycling some old furniture, we go on to hopefully make a small project out of the reclaimed wood. These practical, therapeutic activities provide an effective means to refocus attention and start conversations. It is really encouraging to see how quickly these most vulnerable members respond. It is nice to get some very positive feedback from their support workers. One nurse remarked it was the first time they had seen the patient smile and feel interested in life. Our hope and prayer is that once patients are discharged, these first steps will lead to self-motivation to join regular meetings and feel part of a supportive group in the community. Please pray for the people we meet who feel on the edge of society, pray that they will want to keep attending shed activities so we build trust and deeper friendships.

Currently we have six groups meeting each week, plus one-to-one sessions in between. About 30 members regularly attend activities each week, now including one or two female members, hence the name change from "Men's Shed" to "Community Shed"! On Thursdays and Fridays, if time allows, either Chris or I don the pinny and make lunch for members. This intentionally creates an overlap between



Fixing our new sign at the Community Shed.

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



morning and afternoon sessions. During the lunchtimes we try to have deeper interactive conversations, getting to know more about one another, share and understand needs and common problems in the groups. Out of this, before sessions begin on Friday mornings, we hold a short Bible study and time of open prayer. It is again encouraging to see one or two members come to these meetings to share and ask for prayer.

From listening and getting to know older members, especially, we have seen the need to also offer practical IT support, by providing a computer and printer in the shed, with an internet connection. We navigate the World Wide Web

together to perhaps show people how to set up an email address and fill in online forms. The younger members “make fun” of “us oldies” who didn’t use computers at school, so it is nice to see interaction between the generations to share knowledge. This small service makes a huge difference to those feeling left behind by modern-day living and communication. Although we are not trying to take the place of social services, the relationships we are building, sharing life together, does encourage members to ask for help. This is especially important as we move on from the pandemic and endure current economic struggles.

In all we do, we hope the community feels they are not alone with their problems. As Christians we find peace in knowing Jesus. It is a privilege to share God’s love with members through everyday conversation.

Despite massive difficulties I encountered in Africa, I share with Carlisle friends about a peace and joy I witnessed in African church communities. Despite civil war or natural disasters, churches in South Sudan and Uganda would come together to support each other, pray and worship. Admittedly, enjoying the fellowship here at All Nations, I may be looking through “African-shaped” “rose-tinted spectacles”! But despite immense physical hardship there seemed a spiritual richness and vibrancy in the communities I served in Africa. I pray this will be realised in the Community Shed in Carlisle, too.

My African adventure began 27 years ago at All Nations. Here I was selected by Tearfund to undertake their Prepared to Serve Course. Here I was told where I was being sent. I remember rushing to the college library to check where in the world Uganda was located. A one-year placement became 25 years, and now full-circle, back home to Cumbria, it is incredible to be serving in the shed.

Once again, thank you for journeying with me.

God bless,

Garry Ion



Photos from top to bottom: Garry working one to one with a patient in the shed; Group fixing up garden furniture, sold to bring in funds for overheads; Chris preparing a BBQ lunch outside the shed; Garry at All Nations College for the CMS conference in July.



Going further with Church Mission Society

Africa Conference: Friday 7–Sunday 9 October – A weekend residential with opportunity to connect online. This year’s theme is Out of Africa: Learning together about mission. Book your place now at churchmissionsociety.org/ac2022

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