



Garry Ion

Link Letter no. 56 | January 2023

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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,

Happy New Year from the Community Shed. Thank you for your continued support and prayers as I help to minister here in Carlisle and support family back in Penrith. I am grateful for communications and cards received since last I wrote and hope this link letter continues to encourage and provide a focus for prayer. Thank you again.

I am often asked what I miss about Africa. There are of course the friends from many different cultures and communities. And the beautiful scenery, wildlife, and equatorial climate. Even pesky mozzies trump de-icing my car and driving through freezing fog along the M6 to open the shed. But what I miss most is the spiritual richness and joy found in the African Church, especially in rural Africa. I know I say this from a privileged position – while living there I didn't have to worry about not being able to afford antimalaria medication, I had a reliable pickup, and respite to look forward to. But during some very difficult times of civil war and health crisis, I witnessed a depth of faith lived out in the local church which helped to overcome huge difficulties. This was worked out in powerful community prayer and worship. As mentioned in previous letters, I wished I could bottle this energy up and let it out in our church here!

Worlds apart, at the Community Shed, I meet friends who struggle in both physical and spiritual poverty. I'm no psychologist, but I see a spiritual desert contributing to depression, addiction and relationship struggles. Seasonal depression or SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) is a condition I've recently learned about from a friend in the shed. Yes, I miss the equatorial sunshine, but SAD is clearly more debilitating than the usual winter blues. One friend in the shed explains how he has no energy at this time of year, constantly finds it too much effort to get out of bed and engage with life. Add to this the cost of living worries, living by himself and a smart meter to keep him company, clocking up unaffordable energy units, and we begin to understand a "first world" epidemic of this condition called SAD! There is of course help out there, but he doesn't have the strength to seek it out. Thankfully he keeps coming along to the shed and realises he is not alone in his struggles.

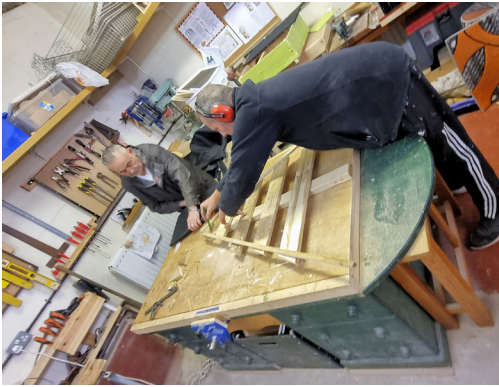
As Christians we know Jesus is the answer. The good news gives perspective and strength to endure, even to overcome SAD! I draw strength from my African friends' example, ultimately Jesus' example. I hope with



The view from my home in Penrith, December 2022 is up there with the best views in Africa. Thank you Lord!

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



my new friends in the shed we can begin to walk in a boldness of faith too, acknowledging that God lovingly leads us.

As we start this journey, we give thanks to Carlisle City Council, which has awarded us a Warm Hub grant. These funds will go a long way to help pay our energy bill this winter. In doing so we can keep the shed warm and inviting. I also give thanks for members of the shed who, despite their struggles, turned out in horrible weather on the runup to Christmas, to purposely keep busy making crafts and decorations to sell in the adjacent charity shop. This income has helped us pay for refreshments and craft sundries. In doing so we have all contributed to the sustainability of the shed.

Although most of our meetings revolve around shed activities, we have also started to gather at other times and places including a monthly Sunday lunch meeting at a nearby church hall. At our most recent gathering we decided to embrace our winter blues and do a spring clean, gathering up scrap wood at the shed to make a fire pit in a nearby garden. Safety protocols observed, in doing so, huddling together, we topped up our vitamin D levels, as low levels are apparently associated with SAD! It was lovely to simply enjoy each other's company and embrace fresh air!

Gatherings away from the shed give opportunities to invite friends and family. That said, we realise that some members may not have family and friends to invite, so a special invitation of encouragement goes to those who may otherwise feel out of place. As we continue to gather, I hope we introduce a spiritual rhythm of fellowship, sharing God's Word and prayer. We have already started to do this on a Friday morning at the shed.

We also hope to build further links with the local psychiatric hospital in Carlisle. Written about in previous link letters, one or two in-patients have from time to time joined us at the shed, with their carers, to take part in one-to-one activities. Out of this link has come the opportunity to help develop an outdoor space at the same psychiatric hospital. What is currently a rather depressing empty outdoor space (ironic, it being a psychiatric hospital) will hopefully be transformed, filled with wooden benches, bird tables and planters made by patients and other members of the shed. Watch this space!

Thank you so much for taking the time to read my news. Once again I invite you to keep on praying and supporting me through CMS.

God bless,

Garry



Photos from top to bottom: Scrap wood Christmas trees in the making in the shed; finished scrap wood Christmas trees; gathering around the fire pit on a cold December day in Carlisle; hospital space to fill with woodwork from the shed



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