



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 Penrith.

Sorry for the delay in writing this link letter. As you may know, 2023 was a difficult year losing both my parents: my mother in April and Dad at the end of October. Living with and caring for them since returning from Uganda nearly four years ago, together with my sister and her family, has been sometimes exhausting, but also very special. Thank you so much for the kind words of encouragement and sympathy especially around the Services of Thanksgiving. The Community Shed in Carlisle has also been a great support to me, though we have also had tough times over the past year with three members also dying.

God who is glad to carry our burdens, who gives strength needed to endure (Psalm 55), is at the heart of all we do in the shed. Building friendships breaks down barriers which leads to open and honest conversations. We don't have all the answers, but listening to one another, especially at our Friday morning fellowship, leads to focused prayer.

"Intercession is standing in the gap for others, bringing their needs and concerns before God, and trusting that He will intervene on their behalf." – George Müller

A highlight at the end of the year in the shed was the Christmas party and Bible readings by candlelight. This year featuring our "pallet wood mini Christmas trees", made by shed members to raise money to support running costs. It was nice to see members enjoying themselves at the gathering, especially those who struggle with social anxiety. I helped with catering, or more accurately I fried some chips to go with our takeaway pizzas! You might be reassured to know last year I was awarded a certificate in food hygiene, also portable appliance testing, first aid and safeguarding. I'm still to do my fire marshalling course, so let's hope the chip pan doesn't catch fire while juggling the supervision in the workshop! When the weather allows, cooking alfresco outside the shed door helps to keep a better an eye on proceedings. This multitasking is reminiscent of my days on Africa building sites, cooking porridge on makeshift "three stones and firewood" while supervising the builders.

Back in Cumbria, also in December, it was very encouraging to meet up and support a Ugandan choir touring the area. Linked in with some of the schools and street children's work I had previously been involved with in Kampala, it was nice to catch up and chat in Luganda. I think the Cumbrian congregation thought it



Christmas party in the Community Shed.

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



was Pentecost, me speaking in tongues with our African visitors! We were all moved by the testimony of one Ugandan choir member called Maria. Abandoned as a baby on the streets of Kampala, she was rescued by a local charity and grew up in an orphanage where she became a Christian. Despite her struggles, she completed her education with a bachelor's degree in law and now shares her faith, life experience and professional skills to serve the same Ugandan community and church. I hope to catch up again with these friends in Kampala over Easter.

Yes, you hear me right! After nearly four years, circumstances now allow me to have a break and accept an invitation to return to Uganda for a couple of weeks over Easter. I hope to stay at Namirembe Guesthouse, where I had my mobile office for many years. It will be nice to catch up with friends on the "Hill of Peace", knowing I had to cut short my goodbyes in March 2020 when covid took hold and lockdowns were first enforced.

Since my parents' passing, I have been asked if I will return to Africa on a more permanent basis. Typing this on a cold winter's night, it definitely sounds appealing. But seriously I feel the African communities I once served are doing an amazing work themselves with local professional, "champions" like Maria. And there are also CMS local partners like Sam Malish, his story featured in 2024 winter edition of the CMS Magazine. I dare to say, the tables have even turned, having appreciated the overseas skilled workforce propping up our very needy social and health care services. They have certainly supported my family over the last few years. Many of the same African workforce congregate in a church in Carlisle. The African worship and zeal I was missing, referred to in a previous letter, I have found in Carlisle, at a church where I have discovered one or two of my shed friends also now worship. Amazing!

As I reflect on the past few years and look to the next chapter, I would appreciate your prayers. It is reassuring to see God's hand and timing over the past few years as I returned to the UK to care for my parents and help establish the Community Shed. As a mission partner in Britain my budget has been met through your generous giving, thank you, and subsidised with surplus funds left over from my time in Africa. Those surplus funds are likely to be exhausted in the next few months, so to continue in service I will need to find ways of raising the shortfall in my budget. In God's will there is always a way! I ask for your prayers as I seek his will.

Thank you once again, for taking the time to read my news, and for faithful prayer and funds that enable me to support this needy mission at the Community Shed in Carlisle.

God Bless

Garry Ion



Photos from top to bottom: Garry cooking alfresco; Bible readings by candlelight at the Shed; Ugandan choir tour Cumbria.



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