



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,

Thank you for your prayerful support as I continue to serve in the Community Shed. To mark Mental Health Awareness week in May, we closed the workshop for a day to take in the bracing sea air of Silloth, on the west Cumbrian coast. An hour's bus journey from Carlisle, we enjoyed the change of scenery, banter and fish and chips along its breezy seafront. It certainly helped to blow away the cobwebs, or should I say sawdust coming from the woodwork.

Shed members, of which there are about 30 regulars now, come from very different walks of lives, and a wide age range, from late teens to early eighties. Mental health struggles with a feeling of loneliness and isolation are what connect them most. It is nice to see how members get along, offering each other practical support, encouragement and advice.

In recent months we have welcomed new friends to the shed who've had extremely difficult times, referred to us from social and mental health services after self-harm and attempted suicide. You may be thinking a workshop with potentially dangerous machinery is the last place to invite such vulnerable friends? But so far, with safeguarding in place, we haven't had any problems. In fact it's very encouraging to get the feedback from these new friends, seeing them return each week. Although not suited to everyone, the busyness and creativity of the workshop, with the kettle always on the boil, provides a relaxed atmosphere, which for some has been a stepping stone back into work, providing independence and self-confidence. We still predominantly cater for men, but over the last few months have welcomed a few more women to the shed. A key part of the shed's success comes from our links with referral organisations such as the local council, charities and churches. They direct people who they think will most benefit from our setting.

There is of course a lot of behind the scenes work to do in running and maintaining a safe shed and thankfully I share this responsibility with Rev Chris Harwood, pioneer vicar seconded to us by the Diocese of Carlisle. Working with our umbrella charity called Restore, also linked with the Diocese of Carlisle, we have policy and safety procedure to keep up to date, management strategy and maintenance programme to administer. This can be somewhat tedious, I admit, but essential.



Tom and Dave, the oldest and youngest members of the shed, are great pals.

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



Despite what twenty-first century pressures bring to our community, both for members and in its safe running, please pray we remain focused on God's will and direction so that we have time to welcome, build friendships and care for one another, in his name. This surely is what sets us apart from the world! At the Friday morning fellowship, we invite members to share in Bible study discussion and open prayer, praying for one another. I find this time most encouraging as we journey together, sharing in one another's joys and struggles with Abba Father. Being self-absorbed is a condition and cycle linked to mental health

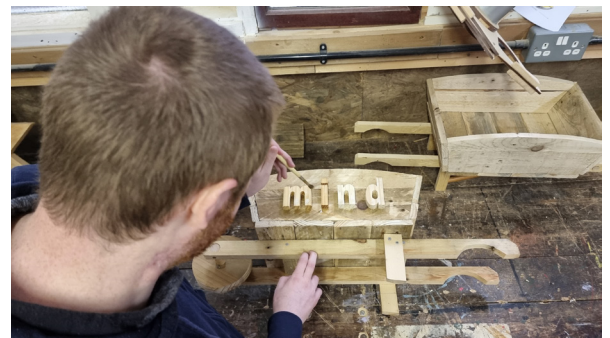
struggles. Sharing in one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2) and God's love (Psalm 43:5) are vital if we are to begin to heal.

As mentioned in my previous link letter, over Easter I visited my former home in Uganda. Primarily a holiday, it was also a chance to catch up with Amari Uganda Street Children's work. Thanks to them, I was able to catch up with some ex-street children, now young adults, who are now settled in the community. You may recall Kenneth who I mentioned in a few of my link letters in 2019–2020. While supporting Amari, back then, we had tried to help him reunite with his family in southwest Uganda. But sadly, it didn't work out. His family wouldn't have him back and he kept returning to the dangerous Kampala streets, getting into more and more trouble. You may also recall in 2020 Amari found Kenneth a placement with a metalwork company who were willing to train him to weld and fabricate metal doors and windows. Sadly, that apprenticeship fell through when the business closed during lockdown. Kenneth being Kenneth once again found himself on the street. Defiantly a survivor, I caught up with him at Easter, when we tracked him down at his "video library" business located in the heart of notorious slums called Kosovo. As the picture shows, Kenneth and his business are thriving. And the slogan on JB's red t-shirt sums up our visit, "Jesus loves this hot mess!" It was very good to learn Kenneth has twice been to see his parents in southwest Uganda and relations between them are much better.

Also covered in my previous link letter, together with CMS and the Restore charity, we are continuing to look at possible ways to fund and sustain my post at the Community Shed. Although no definite news yet, thank you for your words of encouragement, prayers and continued support. I hope to attend the CMS conference in July at All Nations Christian College. Please pray for this gathering and the work of CMS throughout the world.

With many thanks,

Garry Ion



Photos from top to bottom: Community shed group outing to Silloth; celebrating Dave's 83rd birthday at the shed; new shed member making a planter for the Mind charity; at Kenneth's video library (Kenneth to the right of Garry and JB on the left with Jesus t-shirt).



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