Supporting the Participation of Men with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities at Australian Community Men’s Sheds

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Men’s Sheds

Background

› National Male Health Policy (Department of Health and Ageing, 2010)

• Men with lifelong disabilities are a male sub-group experiencing added health and wellbeing disparities

• Transitional life stages (e.g. retirement) are “at risk” times

• Men’s Sheds are named as an exemplar environment to engage with socially isolated men - meaningful activities enhance health and wellbeing

• $3 Million for AMSA; further $1 Million for 2013/2014.
Background

What are the gendered issues facing older men with intellectual and developmental disabilities?

1) Between 64-65% of people employed in Australian supported (sheltered) employment settings (ADEs) are male,

2) Employment provides structure, social contacts, wages, and a masculine context to their life,

3) Loss of employment/retirement – a risk – majority of caregivers (paid and unpaid) are female so work represents sometimes the only significant form of male companionship for many older men,

4) Gender is a critical dynamic in retirement (Kim & Moen, 2002) – usually overlooked for men with disabilities.
Background

Men’s Sheds are community-based places for men to socialise and participate in meaningful occupation.

- Over 900 operational sheds in Australia, 70 in Ireland, 30 in NZ, 12 in UK, 1 in Canada and 1 in USA (Tinker’s Den) (Wilson & Cordier, 2013),

- Sheds provide a utility and social function; promotion of health and wellbeing a core philosophy (Cordier & Wilson, 2013),

- Occupational participation at sheds is primarily voluntary – Ideal locations for older men with intellectual and developmental disabilities?

- Sheds usually have open door policy, but men with cognitive disabilities are often not invited due to perceived need for support (Milligan et al., 2013)
Men’s Sheds

The Transition to Retirement (TTR) Project

- Three-year study: 6 months of support to 29 individuals (11 female, 18 male) to reduce their days at work and join a community/volunteer group of their choice,

- *Active Mentoring* – Active Support + Co-worker training (Wilson *et al*., 2010)

- Trained mentors to provide support to the person with a disability

- **Active Mentoring Outcomes:**
  1. Mentors give the person more opportunities for participation and/or social interaction,
  2. Mentors offer more support to the person (but only needed support), and
  3. Mentors provide more effective support that is more likely to result in the person starting or continuing to participate (Stancliffe *et al*., 2013).
9 men wanted to join their local Men’s Shed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disability program attendance</strong></td>
<td>n = 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F/T work at an ADE</td>
<td>3 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P/T work at an ADE</td>
<td>4 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day program only</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary disability diagnosis</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>5 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living arrangements</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>1 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group home</td>
<td>3 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostel</td>
<td>3 (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>2 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>47.2 - 67.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

› Collective Case Study about these 9 men:

› How can men with lifelong disabilities be supported to participate safely in such a vocationally skills-focused and masculine environment?

› What are the settings and variables that enable their social and functional participation as men?

› How can their participation be sustained over time?
## Men’s Sheds

### Shed Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shed</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Mentor</th>
<th>Days Open</th>
<th>Primary activity</th>
<th>Secondary activity</th>
<th>Paid coordinator</th>
<th>Meal provided</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Government funding</th>
<th>Person still going</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Social -shared meal</td>
<td>Bike repair</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Participant died</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woodwork</td>
<td>Leatherwork</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>$2</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Research consent form a barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Grounds maintenance</td>
<td>Fence/gate repairs</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Transport issue after 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Woodwork</td>
<td>Small motor repairs</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Monthly BBQ $3</td>
<td>$2</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Now attends 2 days per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woodwork</td>
<td>Furniture repairs</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>$2</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Major health problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woodwork</td>
<td>Furniture repairs</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Monthly BBQ</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Returned, now attends 2 days per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Woodwork</td>
<td>Making feral bird traps</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>$3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Now attends 2 days per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Social-shared meal</td>
<td>Table games/cards</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>$2</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Returned to F/T work, financial problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Woodwork</td>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Men’s Sheds

Men’s Perspectives of retirement

› Retirement was something for the future that was desirable if one was able to continue participating in some kind of meaningful activity:

“retirement would be good … as long as you keep yourself active”

“I want to do things, that’s all”
Men’s Sheds

Why join a Men’s Shed?

› At first, none of early participants even knew what a Men’s Shed was.
› Similar to many of the 29 participants, the type of group was based on a best-guess that matched personal interests with what was available and accessible.
› For example ………
› Paul (not his real name) – moderate ID and few communication skills.
› Mother reported that Paul used to spend time as a teenager with his late father who was a carpenter sawing wood and pulling nails.
› Mother liked the idea of a Men’s Shed – a re-connection with males and doing traditional male activities that were a part of Paul’s past.

› Thereafter – Men’s Sheds became a concrete example for other men to draw upon ……….
Men’s Sheds

SHED 1 - Martin

› Funded by local health authority – intake via intake officer
› Most men had psychiatric or acquired disabilities
› Activities were structured in half-hour blocks between all 3 mentors
› Mentors given specific activities at first:
   • Peeling vegetables for shared lunch,
   • Holding wheel steady of bike being repaired,
   • Hand-sanding wood,
   • 1:1 support to surf the internet

› Martin died and so progress to mentors creating new activities without researcher input didn’t have time to naturally occur
Men’s Sheds

SHED 4 - Jack

› Part-funded by community housing – part time coordinator
› Membership open to any local man – most were retired and had traditional blue-collar backgrounds
› Due to major OH&S incident woodwork had stopped – needed to find other activities
› Less need for structure and so examples given to mentors included:
  • Helping to make coffee for morning tea
  • Sweeping the floor
  • Sorting through boxes of donated tools and other items

• Main difficulty was demystifying Jack’s repetitive and socially unusual behaviours.
Men’s Sheds

SHED 4 - Jack

› Mentors discovered Jack liked painting – they encouraged and supported this interest

› Mentors: providing materials, supporting times to paint, verbal praise

› Mentors supported Jack to enter local art competition – Jack won first prize.

“They’re my mates … They look after people, they look after me, they talk to me … [they help me with] sanding and screwing things”
Men’s Sheds

SHED 9 - Gary

› Funded in NSW by ADHC – paid part-time coordinator
› Set within grounds of local shared community centre
› Mentor mostly provided social support plus structure and planning around the day and the day’s activities.
› Trained to use wood lathe – OH&S

“I’m hoping to be more confident [with woodworking], by myself and with [mentor], [he] will be the instructor, he will be watching over me and making sure I’m doing the right thing”
Men’s Sheds

SHED 9 - Gary

“.. it has given me more confidence with talking with other people. We can work while we are talking or doing something. They [the men] talk about having your rectum examined or getting a horn [erection], and we talked about the new thing Viagra … We talk about the kidneys, liver and things like that. I get on with all of them, if one is left out I have a talk with him and try and get involved, don’t be left out, get yourself a bit of confidence”
Men’s Sheds offer a potential resource to older men with a lifelong disability.

Members of Men’s Sheds are open to being trained as mentors to offer the right kind of support to include men with disabilities.

Men’s Sheds provide a male-specific context for men with disabilities to engage with as they transition to retirement.

Active Mentoring fosters inclusion, but the voluntary nature of participation counters the OH&S risks.

Need for male staff in any TTR program to underpin gendered contexts.

Participation in Men’s Sheds expands the capacity of the community and individual men – mentors and men with disabilities.

The gendered context of the TTR study aligns perfectly with national male health policy – need to engage more with mainstream health and social policy.
Conclusion – mentors’ comments

“… it’s generally centred around the meal and just good company and time together as men and initiated it was to be a sort of refuge time away from other people and other problems just men getting together and enjoying each other’s company”

I’ve learned a lot as well myself … I’ve learned quite a bit because I was John’s mentor. As I said it’s not just me, it’s everybody really helps him out anyway … I think if you put the whole shed down as being mentors”
Men’s Sheds

Jeff at the shed
References


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