

Men's Sheds put out the welcome

Men are generally in the minority in aged care. According to a report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, most residents (70 per cent in 2011) and aged care staff are female (AIHW 2012). After noticing a similar gender imbalance through her work at Alzheimer's Australia's Newcastle office, the Hunter Dementia and Memory Resource Centre, manager Sally O'Loughlin saw a need to offer men with dementia specific activities, assistance and support. In 2010, I was the Hunter Valley Men's Shed Cluster Co-ordinator, helping and supporting the Australian Men's Shed Association program in this part of NSW. Sally contacted me and we started to discuss ways of making sheds available to men with dementia and male carers of people with dementia living at home.

Stuart Torrance talks about the Every Bloke Needs A Shed program in NSW's Hunter region for Alzheimer's Australia NSW, which is giving men with early stage dementia a space to call their own

The result was the pilot project called Every Bloke Needs A Shed. This program was a collaborative effort between the Men's Sheds in the Hunter region, the Australian Men's Shed Association and Alzheimer's Australia NSW (project lead) and funded under the Community Builders program through the NSW Department of Family and Community Services. The program encouraged and supported men with early stage dementia or a mild cognitive impairment, and male carers, to access and participate in the activities available in their local Men's Shed. The two-year pilot program began in September 2011 with pilot funding ceasing

in September 2013.

An extensive mixed method evaluation of the project has now been completed by Dr Samantha Abbato and Associates, with a number of key recommendations being implemented. Future funding is being sought so that men who are currently experiencing social isolation and live with dementia who would like to participate in the Every Bloke Needs A Shed program can be supported to access a Shed in their local area, and that we as a community can better support men's health and dementia. We would like to continue to share and implement the key learnings and recommendations from the evaluation report, which has shown the success of the program for people living with dementia and their families.

About Men's Sheds

Sheds have been a place of solace for men for as long as anyone can remember. My grandfather had a shed; most of my friends have some sort of shed or hidey hole. Men, in essence, have two families: the one at home and the one at work where they can talk 'shoulder to shoulder' with other men. The Men's Sheds replicate that work environment, allowing for mateship, camaraderie and a sense of belonging. It's been noted that men with dementia – who might have spent most of their lives at work with mates – withdraw from that space and social network as their dementia progresses.

The Men's Shed program is regarded around Australia as one of the best ways to help men – especially older men – re-engage with their communities. Men's Sheds are community centres for men where they can

socialise, help their community and collaborate on projects, work on their hobbies, play cards or just relax. Most 'Shedders' are older, usually past retirement age, but still want to play an active role in a community.

It's known that meaningful and engaging activities are important for people with dementia. The best anecdotal evidence about the benefits of a Shed for men living with dementia comes from my own experience of knowing one man from a Hunter aged care facility. When I met him, the glassy look in his eyes said it all. He felt he was there to die. One day, he went along to the facility's Shed where they were holding a game of shuffleboard with the other residents. At first, he just wanted to watch, but the other men talked to him and encouraged him to play instead of sitting on the sidelines. He didn't do too well on his first try, but the others cheered him on for taking that first step. A few months later he was one of the best players, and instead of the lifelessness I saw when I first met him, he had a twinkle in his eye and a bounce in his step. He also got involved in day trips to other community Sheds and other outings. The quality of this man's life journey was enhanced by having this social contact and experience.

Getting it off the ground

The Every Bloke Needs A Shed program started with four Sheds – at Cessnock, Maitland, Salamander Bay and Singleton. As clients were located all across the Hunter, and not in the area where we had sheds that were willing partners for the program, we had a number of logistical problems: we needed more sheds and transport was a



Reg Specker, who is living with dementia, attends the Raymond Terrace Men's Shed twice a week with a carer as part of the 'Every Bloke' program. He's pictured here with one of his carers, Karen Adams. Picture: Ben Latimore

ome mat

problem. Expansion plans became a reality before the program actually started! We were very fortunate that each Shed we approached agreed to participate and be part of the program, allowing us to expand and include three more Sheds in the Hunter Valley – at Raymond Terrace, Elernmore Vale and Belmont. At the last count I think, unofficially, we are up to about 12.

Alzheimer's Australia NSW in collaboration with the Hunter Valley Men's Shed Cluster Group was able to promote the program to member Sheds and other sheds. Now that the program is up and running, each man who attends a Shed as part of the Every Bloke Needs A Shed program goes there to do as little or as much as they like. Some just go and watch the activities and work go on around them; others try to get involved in everything that's happening. There is no right or



Shedders from the Cessnock Men's Shed and Community Garden in NSW's Hunter Valley, which welcomes men with dementia or men who care for someone with dementia (above and next page)

wrong level of participation at a Men's Shed: it's just a place of belonging.

Educating men at the Sheds

Education about dementia is an important part of the program, and issues around memory and ageing are a high priority. We have found that men want

information about dementia, how to stay healthy and how to address their future needs should they develop dementia. This gives us a great starting point to help educate them, to identify their own risk factors, reduce their risk and give them the information they need. This understanding then makes it

easier for the men with dementia to integrate into the existing Shed communities. Some Sheds already have members with dementia and we are able to help them integrate even more. When we started the program we discovered a lot of stigma surrounding ageing and

What The Doctor Ordered

He felt inside he was still able to control his life,
'though he had a little difficulty since he lost his wife.
And his daughter lived in Queensland; and his son, —
away at sea.

'Well,' he thought, 'I always was my own best company.
Besides, there's one advantage that being single brings:
there's nobody to fuss me when I can't remember things.
I've got my books and telly, I'll get along okay.'
So he didn't feel dementia creeping on him day by day.

But his doctor saw it when the old man called in with the 'flu.
'I think I'll get the District Nurse to keep an eye on you.'

Of course the old man grumbled that he would be quite okay,
but still, the District Nurse called in to see him the next day.
She was young and bright and pretty and she even made
him smile

and he found that he could put away his troubles for a while.
So weeks went by 'til one day, when she came to visit, she
said, 'Get your coat and come with me. There's something you
should see.

I have to pick up Mister Hughes, he's three doors down from
you,
to take him to his Men's Shed and I'd like you to come too.'
He started to protest this but she gently took his arm
and smiled and said, 'Oh, please come. It won't do you any harm.'
What could he say but, 'Alright,' and he turned and locked
his door,
not knowing that this day would change his life for evermore.

For 'though some pessimistic thoughts were running through
his head,
they soon gave way to wonder as he walked into the Shed.

'Cause the men inside were just like him; he wasn't out of place.
To any keen observer he was just another face.
The District Nurse said, 'Look around, and I'll be back at ten,
that gives you time enough to get to know the other men.'
Then Mister Hughes said, 'Call me Frank. Let's get a cuppa tea,
then we can look around a bit. There's quite a lot to see.'
And as they sat and chatted while their cup of tea they drank,
he found he had a lot of things in common now with Frank.

Then as they wandered through the Shed and some men
stopped to chat,
he took an interest in their work and thought, 'I could do that.'
And no-one seemed to hurry, they all worked at their own pace,
yet the air of quiet endeavour brought a faint smile to his face.
The District Nurse returned at ten to take him home again
and though he left, his heart told him he'd much rather remain.
So when she dropped him at his gate he told her, with a smile,
'Next time you take me to the Shed, I'd like to stay a while.'

By Bob Sanders

Bob Sanders is a member of the Australian Bush Poets Association and an Alzheimer's Australia volunteer. He wrote this poem in 2012, after hearing about the Every Bloke Needs a Shed Program and its participants.

dementia, and that the Shedders' understanding of dementia was often based on the image of an ageing relative in a nursing home, apparently unable to do anything or be engaged with anyone. This image is a negative one. As a result, we focused our education around the journey of people with dementia, how the disease progresses and how a person can still be active and participate in day-to-day activities for quite some time in the early stages of the condition. One of the activities we suggest is making toys for children, but we also brainstorm other activities that can be undertaken by our participants within the Shed. These simple projects are important, as they give the men a sense of belonging and demonstrate being a useful contributor to a social group. At the same time, the projects are flexible and adaptable enough to suit a range of needs and can be stopped and started as required. Sorting donated materials, recycling and Shed clean-ups are other good activities that can be done at any time.

After the education sessions, we discuss how or what can be done to support men in the community as they face the road ahead, as well as how to support carers and family members. The training we offer to the existing Shed members before a participant's first visit helps them be more dementia aware and assists in empowering and setting them up with strategies for communicating and engaging with the men. We also



discuss and address work, health and safety issues when working with and around men with dementia, which is vital in the Shed environment.

Eventually, there will come a time when the context and environment of a Shed will no longer meet the needs of the person with dementia, so a planned exit strategy is required. Options will vary – the person may come back for visits to say 'g'day', come along to an expo, have a chat at the Shed open days, or be invited to a Shed barbecue. Even when a man with dementia has become frail, with the help and support of a carer we can keep them socially connected.

Alzheimer's Australia NSW stays connected with the Shedders involved in the program and is proactive in its approach to the ongoing support of Sheds within the program.

Getting involved

First steps first: go and see your local Shed and have a chat. The contact details for all registered Sheds can be found on the

Australian Men's Shed Association (AMSA) website at: www.mensshed.org. Remember though, the Sheds are there for Shedders and the Shedders are not there to care for, service, babysit or otherwise create programs for others. Mention the word mentoring and most Shedders will tell you they are not able to do that. Ask if they can be a mate to another bloke in need and they're happy to step up and help.

To be eligible to participate in the Every Bloke Needs A Shed program, the person must:

- Be male
- Have a cognitive impairment / or a diagnosis of dementia and be in the early stages of the disease, or be a male carer or a male family member of a person with dementia
- Be willing and able to become a Shed member (minimal fees apply)
- Require minimal supervision and support
- Independent in all activities of daily living
- Able to arrange their own transport to and from the Shed.

- Be able to join in and be part of social group. ■

A short film about the Every Bloke Needs A Shed program, called *Alzheimer's Australia and Men's Sheds: making a difference*, can be viewed at <http://bit.ly/198z6uS>

Research regarding the impact of Men's Sheds can also be found on the AMSA website at www.mensshed.org/research/.asp Professor Barry Golding and Professor John Macdonald, both patrons of AMSA, have done a lot of research on Sheds and their benefits.

Reference

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2012) *Residential aged care in Australia 2010-11: a statistical overview*. Aged care statistics series no 36, Cat no AGE 68. Canberra: AIHW.



■ Stuart Torrance is project co-ordinator for the Every Bloke Needs A Shed program and an Alzheimer's Australia project worker focusing on men's health. For information about the program, contact him at: stuart.torrance@alzheimers.org.au



Dementia

Enabling Environments

www.enablingenvironments.com.au





- Comprehensive dementia design information centre
- Room by room illustrations
- Free resources
- Audit tools
- 'Ask an expert' section

ALZHEIMER'S RESTRICTS AUSTRALIA ENABLES