Men’s Sheds Qualitative Topline

Qualitative feedback session
June 2013
Contents

• Research Background
  – Revisiting objectives
  – Sample and methodology – where are we now?
• Hello from the field – sharing experiences
• Research context
  – Sample dynamics and shed diversity
• Journey to the shed
  – Why the shed? The experience of life change
• Impacts of the shed
  – 7 Key learnings
  – Unpacking the themes – what does the shed represent for members?
  – Range and description of impacts on wellbeing
  – Initial link of impacts to outcomes
Research background
Revisiting the research objectives

The qualitative phase informs the following objectives

• Determining to what degree Men’s Sheds:
  – Help men regain a sense of purpose in life;
  – Enhance self-esteem;
  – Decrease social isolation;
  – Facilitate friendship and companionship;
  – Provide an environment conducive to learning;
  – Improve physical health;
  – Increase awareness of depression and anxiety;
  – Reduce stigma of depression and anxiety;
  – Increase help-seeking for depression and anxiety; and
  – Increase help-seeking for other health issues.
### Qualitative Sample – What have we achieved?

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Provisional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups
Hello from the field
Different activities
Different facilities
Different organisation/structures
Different purposes/ emphases
Different size groups
Different processes and structure
All welcoming!
Research context
Sample dynamics – sheds and shedders are diverse

Sheds are diverse, with the model of the shed being defined by the community it is in and the members represented in it. Differences noted in terms of:

• Rural/ Regional (in smaller community) vs. Metro
  • E.g. in some rural communities, health issues less openly discussed; in more remote, smaller communities the shed plays a role in terms of entertainment; in smaller communities, smaller pool of potential members

• Established vs. newer sheds and size of shed
  • E.g. in terms of the range of activities offered and membership base

• Volunteer run vs. paid co-ordinator role
  • E.g. more formal vs. less formal addressing of health issues; limits on numbers

• Level of funding
  • Greater funding gives impetus and sometimes externally imposed deliverables

• “Own” premises vs. not
  • Shed as a group of men (no venue) – seen to inhibit activity or lend emphasis to socialising and “work” on site vs. shed as a venue/building only – results in individual usage/role vs. shed as a group of men in a building (most) = OPTIMAL

• Variety of activities vs. not

Although a shed may have an overall “character” (impacted on by size, organisation, funding, venue etc.), shedders within each shed are individuals with different skills, needs and goals (both within and outside of the shed environment)
Journey to the shed
A mans world

PURPOSE

My contribution

Work (job, volunteering), Growth, Learning

My relationships

Friends and family

My space

Interests, place, pursuits

Enabled by “health” (physical, mental, socio-economic etc.)
Life changes are diverse

It is often experience of significant life change, that brings men to the shed, and this change is diverse

Many shedders, joined the shed when looking for a “community” to join as a way to adapt to change (or multiple life changes):

- **Retirement or job loss** is one of the key life changes many shedders experience
  - “I was a project manager working 60 hours a week in the construction industry – I started at 7am and [would] get out at 6:30 at night. I have 4 kids and 12 grandchildren. We’re a pretty close family so weekends were allocated to the family. I had a few interests e.g. woodwork in my shed. And the last 10 years or so there was no relaxation time. It was fully focused on those three things [work, family commitments and hobby]. After retirement this big chunk of your life falls away and that’s your work. After that, I didn’t want to sit around ...” (VIC, Metro)

- Change in **family (divorce, loss of a spouse)** is another challenge that some shedders are adapting to

- **Health issues** are experienced by many shedders (age related conditions, disability etc.)

- There is lower level mention of the shed providing a community when re-entering it following a serving a prison sentence

- The shed is also a place to meet new people having relocated to a new area
Life change brings shifts in sense of place in the world

Before
- “Work”
- Recognition/ success
- Company of many others/ family
- Routine is defined
- Secure identity / role

After
- Free time and free agenda
- Goals defined by self/ open ended
- Company of few/ none
- Flexible or no routine
- Who am I now? Experience of loss
  - “When you cease work, you say in the morning, ‘What the hell am I going to do? What’s my purpose?’”; “past lives”

Change impacts on many areas of life e.g. identity, relationships, mood, routine
Joining the shed

Motivation for membership is sometimes based on activities offered and sometimes based on the social nature of the shed

• Joining requires a step of confidence and commitment that can be daunting for some
  – “You have to do it. You have to say to yourself, ‘Yes, I want to do this.’”
• Joining the shed is in some cases at individual discretion whereas in other cases there is a waiting list and application process
• For many, shed membership is a long term commitment (barring changes in circumstance such as illness or relocation)
  – There are however some men, who join to meet a specific personal goal, that once achieved, completes (ends) their shed membership
• It is the long term nature of the shed membership that is said to be so meaningful, and over time that the sheds main purpose is recognised to be largely related to more intangible benefits e.g. personal fulfilment through helping others etc.
  – “You have learnt something different ... guys that aren’t involved in it wouldn’t know what to expect. But after you have been there it’s not like you have got bells and whistles and all the rest of it. It’s just a subtle change” (WA, Regional)
The impacts of the shed
Impacts of the shed

- 7 Key Highlights
- Unpacking themes: What the shed represents
- Linking themes to impacts: Benefits of shed membership
- Unpacking benefits/impacts of shed membership
- Relationship of benefits to outcomes
The shed offers social connectedness
“Like a pub without the beer ...”

- For almost all men who participated in this study, social connectedness is the main benefit of shed membership.
- This results in many other benefits –
  - Being able to make new friends, feel connected to the community, share issues and get advice, get out of the house and have a regular appointment, care for and give out to others.
- Reference is made to “having a yarn”, “a cup of coffee and a chat” and to the enjoying the company of others, “have time for each other”.
- Many sheds do have social events (e.g. a weekly or monthly barbeque), however, the sense of social connectedness extends to time spent together whilst working as well as in a more purposeful social event.
- Some relationships develop into friendships outside of the shed, where others are more about a companionship/working relationship.
Many emphasise the importance of the shed being a place where all members are treated and valued equally – regardless of their background or ability.

This sense of respect and acceptance engenders participation and relationship, and encourages openness and sharing amongst members.

It also sets the shed up as a place of learning, as members experience their value independent of what skills or knowledge they bring to the shed.

Some refer to the shed as a place to be “normal”, and enjoy the support and to some degree accountability of others that is unpressured in nature.

The shed reserves judgement “A place where I can be myself ...”
For the most part, sheds are a place where men are able to discuss, “men’s business” and enjoy relating “shoulder to shoulder”

Many reference the freedom in being in a male environment in terms of the types of issues discussed and the nature of the socialisation

- This results in a different level of communication as well as an ability to discuss issues that may not be discussed outside of the shed environment – particularly interesting and meaningful with respect to health related issues (greater openness as issues are not worrying or burdensome for those in the shed)

- Being a mostly men’s organisation also has benefits for partner relationships outside of the shed – time apart and the creation of individual talking points are top-of-mind
There is a strong sense of ownership of each shed in most environments.

This results in a sense of passion and pride for the shed and its members, and a belief in what can be achieved by the shed.

There is a sense of autonomy in terms of where the shed is headed and how it can get there.

The sense of ownership translates into a greater sense of control for members (impacting self esteem).

This in turn results in a diverse model of sheds where each uniquely reflects its membership.

This is however not always the case where shed activities are more directed by the auspicing body.

Sheds remain diverse as a result of the men in the shed and also how the shed is funded and organised.

"The shed is ours ..."
• Members have different perceptions of themselves in different instances as “helpers” vs. “being helped”
  • i.e. shed membership is motivated by both the opportunity the shed provides to serve (within the shed or outside of it/ within the community), and the opportunity the shed provides to receive support, or to learn new skills etc.

• Membership of a shed is seen to be valued by the broader community, because of the role that sheds play in the community and value they add through making, fixing, serving

• That said however, even those who come to “give” something, openly appreciate what they receive back from the shed in terms of sense of purpose, connectedness etc. stating it is greater than what they had anticipated
  • “[The men’s shed slogan should be] ‘Help us help you’”
The shed creates routine activity

“Keeps me busy ...”

• The regular nature of shed meetings (for most at least weekly, but up to attendance several days a week) offers a clear benefit for members of the shed to create a routine that incorporates shed activity
  • This is particularly meaningful in a time of change that involves a loss of established routine or loss of established support mechanisms

• Many describe shed meetings/ activity as “something to look forward to” and even as “a reason to get up in the morning”, “a place to go”

• For many, this activity impacts positively on energy levels in general, helps to create a sense of “my place in the world”/ “my fit”, and helps to alleviate boredom and rekindle sense of worth and purpose where it has been diminished in any way
  • This has a ripple effect in terms of activities and relationships outside of the shed
The shed has undeniable health benefits

“Good for us ...”

- Most make a strong link between physical and mental health and claim that shed membership affects both positively.
- Although almost all agree that shed membership positively impacts mental health, this is not always openly articulated, and is instead reflected on via a range of associated benefits.
  - This is especially the case in more remotely located, rural sheds where members are from a smaller community.
- The shed offers a place of solidarity and an appropriate peer group.
  - It is through this that most mental health benefits are realised, “we mend each other.”
- Health issues (both physical and mental) are addressed in diverse formal and informal ways in the shed environment.
Unpacking themes

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<th>7 Key Insights</th>
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## Linking themes to benefits

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<td>Physical health</td>
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Impact of the shed on mental health

• Mental health seen to be improved as a result of:
  – New relationships with associated benefits (ability to share, receive, give etc.)
  – Fun, less boredom
  – New levels of confidence that comes from acceptance of others and achievement of projects
  – Increased physical (and emotional) energy that comes from active participation
  – Routine involvement in the group/regular commitments that mimic work commitments (a reason to get up and get out)
  – Increased sense of purpose through achievement of personal goals (related to task completion or relationship, giving to others)
  – Greater perspective on life issues through sharing with others
  – Spin offs (ripple effect) that better mood, enhanced confidence has on relationships and activities outside of the shed
  – Reported improvement in mood, feeling “happier” or less depressed
  – Stronger connection to the community through relationships, community service and community recognition (status of shed membership)
  – Improved physical health which is also impacted on by membership of the shed
Outcomes of shed membership
Benefits translate into positive health outcomes

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Thank you

Paul Flood | Senior Research Consultant | UltraFeedback
Sharon Blair | Consultant | UltraFeedback

t +61(0)3 9819 2086 | m +61(0)468 855 130 | f +61(0)3 9819 2838

e paul.flood@ultrafeedback.com | sharon.blair@ultrafeedback.com

w www.ultrafeedback.com

a 2 Domville Avenue, Hawthorn 3122 Victoria Australia