

**MEN'S  
SHEDS  
OF WA**



**Curtin University**

# **WHAT MAKES A THRIVING SHED?**

**Men's Sheds of WA Study Final Report**

**November 2023**

**Make tomorrow better**

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### The suggested reference is:

Peter McEvoy, James Clarke, & Kirsten Holmes (2023). What Makes a Thriving Shed? Men's Sheds of WA Study Final Report. Curtin University.

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### Acknowledgement of Country

We wish to acknowledge the Aboriginal people of the many traditional lands and language groups of Western Australia. We acknowledge the wisdom of Aboriginal Elders both past and present and pay our respect to the Aboriginal communities of today.

### Acknowledgements

The research team gratefully acknowledges James Wild, Jaxon Ashley, and Rebecca Talbot from Men's Sheds in WA for all their assistance and support throughout this project. The core research team at Curtin University included Peter McEvoy, Kirsten Holmes, Brendan Smith, Briana Guerrini, Vivien Chiu, and James Clarke. The team also acknowledges the expertise provided by Professor Alex Haslam and Dr Leah Sharman from the University of Queensland. We thank Deane Palmer from the Karrinyup Men's Shed for providing many of the photos. We also gratefully acknowledge Bev Flockart for her generosity in sharing information and photos of Jim, and for allowing us to feature his valued contributions to his community in this report.

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## Foreword

It has been a privilege to spend time with the Men's Sheds of WA and to learn so much about this incredible movement. Everyone we have met is involved for the right reasons – to connect, support, learn, share their knowledge and skills, and care for other members and their communities.

We are grateful to James Wild (CEO, Men's Sheds of WA), Jaxon Ashley (Senior Project Officer), and Rebecca (Bec) Talbot (Regional Health Coordinator) for trusting us to lead the Thriving Sheds Project. James and Jaxon approached us back in 2021 wanting the answer to a simple question – *What Makes a Thriving Shed?* We were impressed that the Men's Shed leadership were so keen to ensure that all members across the 180+ Western Australian Sheds are supported to thrive. It is important for readers to know that although James, Jaxon and Bec guided us to ensure the measures we used would yield valuable information, they were genuinely interested in hearing members' perspectives and believed that allowing the Curtin team full independence was the best way to ensure this was the case.

The **Thriving Shed Project** team planned quantitative surveys so that we could gather information from as many members as possible, and qualitative interviews to provide a rich and detailed understanding

from members' and leaders' perspectives. Our surveys were long (sorry about that!), but allowed us to measure many aspects of Shed life. Our team was impressed that around 85% of people who started our surveys completed them, which reflects a determination from the membership to ensure their voice is heard for the betterment of the movement. We thank every single member who completed a survey and spoke with the team. This report presents our best attempt to represent your voices.

Our findings clearly demonstrate the positive impacts members are having on each other and their communities. We hope this report is of great interest and a source of pride to the members of Men's Sheds of WA. Our findings reflect their dedication to the movement and to the social and emotional wellbeing of their communities. These are their outcomes – borne out from the commitment and contributions of past and present leaders and members.

We hope you find it an enjoyable and informative read, but, most importantly, we hope it helps all members and Sheds to continue to thrive well into the future.

**Keep up the outstanding work.**



**Professor Peter McEvoy**

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**Professor Kirsten Holmes**

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## A Word from the Chief Executive Officer

Men's Sheds have become a vital component of thriving communities worldwide. They are increasingly recognised for their ability to foster camaraderie, promote skills development, and as important contributors to the local community ecosystem. Walk into your local Shed and you will typically see a hive of activity; men working on benches for schools, playgrounds for local governments, repair work for local people and anything else that is beneficial for their community.

Men's Sheds themselves have become an indicator of a thriving and healthy community. On the ground, we see the impact of Sheds; they offer health and wellbeing support and a sense of purpose, belonging and community that men both value and need. We have seen firsthand that Sheds have saved the lives of many men.

The success and sustainability of Men's Sheds can vary widely, and it is essential to understand the factors that underpin thriving Sheds. This report explores the elements that make a Men's Shed thrive and why this knowledge is crucial for various stakeholders, including community members, policymakers, and funders. By understanding what makes a thriving Men's Shed, we can not only enrich the lives of the men who participate but also strengthen the social fabric of our communities, ensuring that these spaces remain pillars of support, skill development, and friendship for generations to come. This report will have multiple benefits, including:

**New Shed Success:** As Men's Sheds continue to expand, particularly in regions where they are just gaining traction, knowing the factors that will help them thrive is critical. This knowledge can guide new Shed organisers in creating a space that is beneficial for the participants and meets community need.

**Growth and Sustainability for Existing Sheds:** Understanding the key factors for success is essential to ensure a Shed's longevity. As an example, this report highlights that a Shed is less likely to thrive in isolation. They need to be connected to



and working with local people and local government to reflect and respond to the specific needs of their communities.

**Informing Government Support:** This report should eliminate any question of whether external funders and/or local, state, and federal government should support a Men's Shed or Men's Sheds. This report uncovers the hidden value of Sheds and poses the more relevant question of: *How can we best support our local Shed?* This will be a tool to provide assurance that funding Sheds in the right way will lead to an increase in community capital and an uplift in wellbeing benefits for the men in their local community.

**The Wider Community Sector:** We hope that the findings of this report will extend beyond Men's Sheds, Community Sheds and Women's Sheds. The broader mutual-aid sector should also recognise the similarities with their organisations and see relevance in the report's findings.

**Men's Sheds of WA:** This report will guide Men's Shed of WA as the peak body in WA to provide governance and supports that will further increase the positive impacts of Sheds into the future. We will share this report widely with other State, National and International organisations that support the Men's Sheds movement.

We are very grateful to the team at Curtin University; Professor Peter McEvoy, Professor Kirsten Holmes, Brendan Smith, Briana Guerrini, Dr Vivien Chiu, and Dr James Clark. Their work on this project will be widely used for years to come and will have an immeasurable impact on the Men's Sheds movement.

**James Wild**

Chief Executive Officer

Men's Sheds of Western Australia

# Executive Summary

## Are Men's Shed Members Thriving?

- Men's Shed members are generally thriving with:
  - ✓ High wellbeing, health-related quality of life, and meaning in life
  - ✓ Low loneliness, social anxiety, and depression
- A proportion of members experience health and wellbeing challenges
- Men's Sheds are an important source of social support, life-long learning and enjoyment
- Men's Sheds have many positive impacts on members and the whole community

## Methods

- The **Thriving Shed Project** conducted three surveys over 15 months with over 330 members, in addition to interviews with 14 shed leaders. Some members also wore devices (actigraphs) for over one week to measure their physical activity.
- The surveys and interviews enjoyed good representation from urban and regional sheds.
- The surveys asked shed leaders and members about a range of factors, including member diversity, the joining process, level of shed involvement, shed-related factors, leadership, shed activities, interpersonal factors, governance, partnerships, benefits of the sheds, presence of meaning in life, alcohol use, physical activity, social networks, engagement in valued activities, and psychological safety within the sheds.

## What Makes a Thriving Shed?

- This project identified 8 factors that promote thriving sheds
  1. Mateship
  2. Team psychological safety
  3. Shed factors
  4. Strong partnerships
  5. Good & supported leadership
  6. Good governance
  7. Diverse membership
  8. Diverse activities

## How To Use This Report

- **Members** can use this report to:
  - ✓ Demonstrate the benefits of Men's Sheds to the membership and community, recruit new members, advocate for funding and resources from local government and other funders, and guide their local policies and practices.
- **The Men's Shed Organisation of WA** can use this report to:
  - ✓ Guide policies and practices that will help sheds to thrive, and advocate for local and state-based funding to facilitate growth.
- **The community sector** more broadly may wish to apply the findings to their own organisations.

## “Flock’s Story”:

### How Merredin’s Jim Flockart embodied the principles of a Thriving Shed

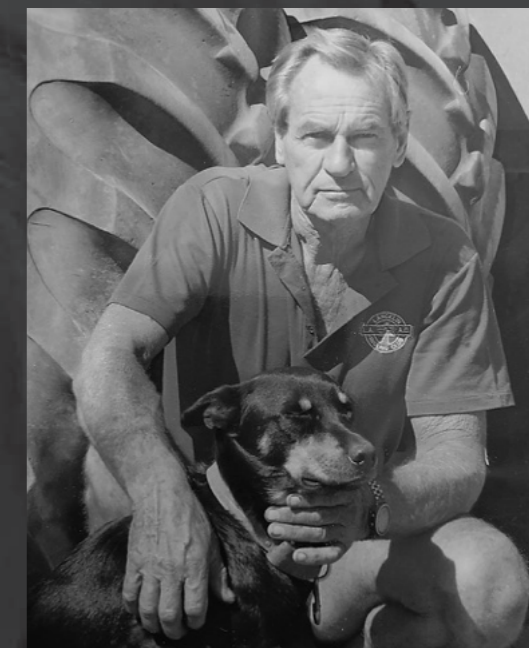
In his wife Bev’s words, James Hamilton Flockart (1931-2023) “...was certainly a pretty special bloke as a husband and best mate, also father and grandfather”. **Jim was a leader in the Merredin Men’s Shed who embodied key principles we present in our model of what creates a thriving Shed.**

“Flock”, as he was affectionately known by his mates, was described by Cobber Rogers in his eulogy as a selfless contributor to the community at large and “a legend”. By all accounts, Jim was an active member of his local community his whole life, whether it be serving as President of Burracoppin Football Club during the “sweet” premiership win of 1981, serving on sports club committees, his membership of the Apex Service Clubs of WA, Malaysia and Singapore, as President of the Eastern Districts Zone of the WA Farmer’s Federation, or as a board member on the Federal Government’s Wheat Export Authority representing both WA and South Australia. The list of Jim’s community engagements is seemingly endless, as reflected by him being granted life memberships to 5 community organisations.

Jim was born in Merredin and grew up on the family farm at ‘Bringa’, 25 kms south of Merredin. Life on the farm in the 1930s was tough – there were always jobs to do and the kids needed to juggle school and farm responsibilities. These formative experiences no doubt contributed to Jim’s strong sense of responsibility and duty to his family and community.

Jim enjoyed a range of life’s pleasures – wildflowers, socialising, sport, farming, and family. He was also a prankster who enjoyed a laugh. He was devoted to Bev for close to 62 years of marriage, and had two children and six grandchildren.

**The Men’s Shed movement in WA benefited greatly from a long association with this “special bloke”.**



In 2010, at the age of 79, Jim moved from the farm into town (proclaiming “I’m a farmer till I die”) but had not retired from contributing to his community. He decided to set up the Men’s Shed in Merredin, becoming the inaugural Chairman. In 2017, Merredin hosted the WA State Men’s Shed Conference in their local Cummin’s Theatre (picture at bottom of page), which by all reports was a huge success.

In his eulogy for Jim, Richie Griffiths summed up Jim as someone who “enjoyed meeting and mixing with a wide variety of people from many different walks of life, nationalities, and creeds. He has always been accepting of everyone as they are and, as a consequence, made some wonderful friendships. Jim has always been a leader, and a clear and progressive thinker, but ready to learn from people with experience and expertise in other areas.” A particularly interesting anecdote was that Jim enjoyed meeting Italian prisoners of war brought to Australia who worked and lived at Bringa in 1945. Jim enjoyed learning about their backgrounds and even learnt to speak fluent Italian. His inherent interest in and acceptance of people with diverse backgrounds was present from an early age.

Jim passed away in 2023 at the age of 92. A life very well lived. At the end of this report, we will learn about how Jim supported the Merredin Community Men’s Shed to thrive, as just one example of the many outstanding leaders and members who contribute to the movement across Western Australia every day.

## What makes a thriving shed?

What makes a thriving Shed? This was the question we set out to answer from this project, but before we can answer this question we need to know what is a thriving Shed? The **Thriving Shed Project** considered a thriving Shed as one in which the members are thriving with high wellbeing and health-related quality of life, and low loneliness. To achieve these outcomes, members need to engage with their Shed in meaningful ways, so we needed to understand what factors can help to optimise member engagement in ways that translate into positive outcomes.

The simple answer to what makes a thriving Shed is, whatever the membership wants it to be! Members have provided us with a wealth of information about what a thriving Shed means to them, which has allowed us to identify common factors that

promote a thriving Shed. These broad principles may apply across all Sheds, but there may also be differences that reflect the local context. It is important to acknowledge that all Sheds are different, and should be different, to reflect their local membership and their community.

The **Thriving Shed Model** identifies **8 key factors** found to be associated with thriving Sheds. It is important to understand that these factors are inter-dependent and do not operate in isolation. This report will first summarise our findings on members' wellbeing and will then describe how factors in the **Thriving Shed Model** can support members to continue to thrive into the future. Individual Sheds are invited to use this report to support their members in a way that works for them.



## The Thriving Shed Project: Methods

The Thriving Shed Project surveyed Men's Shed members on three separate occasions.

- 1. Wave 1 Survey:**  
April 8th to 22nd July 2022
- 2. Wave 2 Survey:** November 20th 2022 to January 31st 2023
- 3. Wave 3 Survey:**  
June 27th to July 31st 2023

All three surveys assessed general wellbeing, health-related quality of life, and loneliness.

The **Wave 1** survey also included a range of questions relating to the structure, governance, and functioning of the Sheds, in addition to factors such as team psychological safety (how safe and supported members feel), engagement in Sheds (frequency and duration of attendance, diversity of activities), social networks (within and outside of the Sheds), behavioural activation (engagement in meaningful activities), physical activity, alcohol use, and perceived meaning in life.

During the Wave 1 survey period some members also wore devices called actigraphs for over a week. These devices tracked physical activity so that we could identify whether 'Shed days' were

associated with higher rates of physical activity.

Fourteen Shed leaders also met with our team for in-depth interviews to understand what makes a successful Shed with respect to resources, networks, and accessibility.

The **Wave 2** survey focused on the social aspects of the Sheds and included measures on leadership, support within the Sheds, social identification with the Sheds, and social connections within the Sheds.

The **Wave 3** survey aimed to learn from members the specific behaviours and actions they have observed that (1) represent good leadership and governance, (2) helps members to feel included in their Sheds, (3) help to foster strong connections and relationships within the Shed but also with other organisations, and (4) help to increase the diversity of activities within their Shed.

The project team is grateful to the membership for all the information they provided for this project. We are pleased to provide an overview of our key findings, outcomes, and recommendations in this final report.



# Are Shedders Thriving?

Our first aim was to assess the wellbeing of the members of WA's Men's Sheds (Shedders).

We wanted to know:

- How high are members' levels of wellbeing?
- How high are members' health-related quality of life?
- How lonely are members?

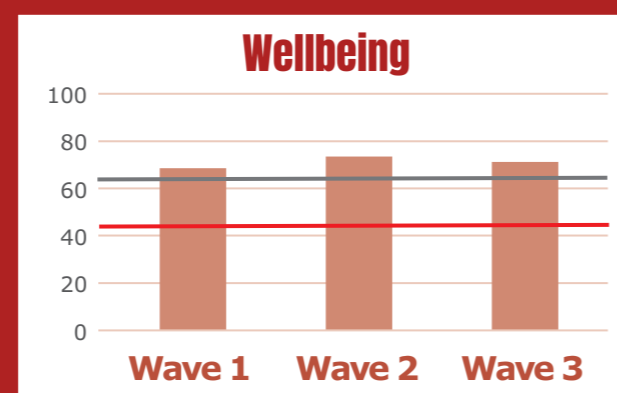
These questions were answered by tracking three wellbeing outcomes across the three waves of the survey. The measures used to assess these outcomes were:

- **World Health Organization's Wellbeing Index (WHO-5):** This 5-item measure assesses the degree to which people feel cheerful and in good spirits, calm and relaxed, active and vigorous, fresh and rested, and that their days are filled with things of interest.
- **Health-Related Quality of Life (EQ-5D-5L):** This 5-item quality of life measure assesses difficulties with mobility, self-care, usual activities, pain/discomfort, and anxiety/depression.
- **UCLA Loneliness Scale (UCLA-4):** This 4-item measure assesses subjective feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

## Wellbeing

The Men's Shed members who participated in the survey had, on average, consistently high levels of wellbeing that were above general population scores and were well above those indicative of major depression (i.e., scores below 50). At Waves 1, 2, and 3, the proportions of members with scores below 50 were 13.8%, 8.3%, and 13.3%, indicating they might be at risk for poor mental health outcomes.

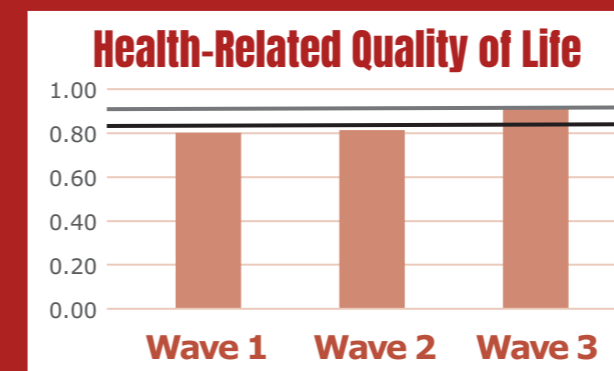
**Figure 1.** Wellbeing scores of Men's Shed members over the three waves of data collection. *The brown bars are the Men's Sheds of WA average wellbeing scores. The grey line is the general population average, and the red line represents scores below which depression may be present.*



## Health-Related Quality of Life

Men's Shed members consistently reported high average levels of health-related quality of life that were similar to general population samples of men aged 65-74 and 75+ years<sup>1</sup>.

**Figure 2.** Health-related quality of life scores of Men's Shed members over the three waves of data collection. *The brown bars are the Men's Sheds of WA average quality of life scores, which are similar to general population averages for men aged 65-74 (grey line) and 75+ (black line).*

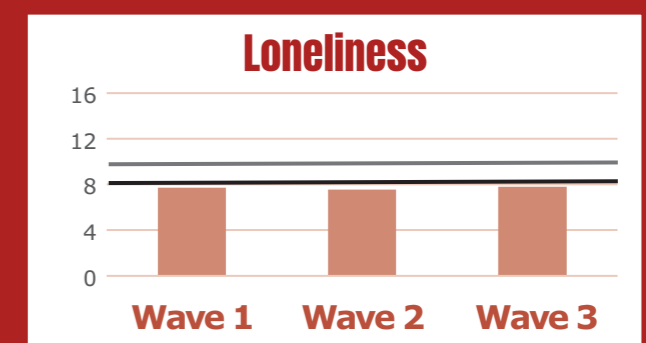


## Loneliness

Men's Shed members consistently reported low average levels of loneliness. These scores were slightly below general community averages, which range from 8.1 (60-69 year-olds) to 9.2 (20-29 year-olds<sup>2</sup>). Two-thirds (67%) of members reported feeling lonely 'hardly every' or

'never', with 19% 'occasionally' feeling lonely, 9.6% feeling lonely 'some of the time', and 3.2% feeling lonely 'often/always.'

**Figure 3.** Loneliness scores of Men's Shed members over the three waves of data collection. *The brown bars are the Men's Sheds of WA average loneliness scores, which are slightly lower than the general population averages for men aged 20-29 (grey line) and 60-65 (black line).*



Social anxiety (i.e., a fear of negative evaluation from others) and depression were measured in Waves 2 and 3 of the survey. The measures used to assess these outcomes were:

- **Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS-6):** This 6-item measure assesses the degree to which people experience anxiety within social interactions because they fear that others will judge them negatively.



# The Thriving Shed Model

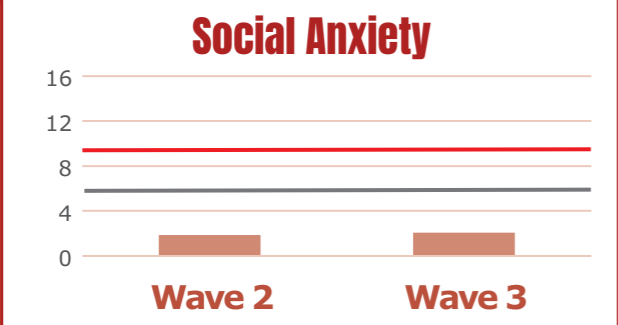
**55% of Shed members reported that their shed had mental health activities (e.g., mental health first aid training, guest speakers, workshops, the Listening Shed Initiative, mentoring, collaborations with external mental health organisations, Wellbeing and Health Officer)**

- **Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9):** This 9-item measure assesses the degree to which people experience symptoms of a major depressive episode.

### Social Anxiety

Men's Shed members consistently reported low levels of social anxiety across Waves 2 and 3, which were well below than general population average. Scores of 7 or more are likely to indicate problematic levels of social anxiety, and 6.0% and 4.7% of members scored above 7 at Waves 2 and 3, respectively.

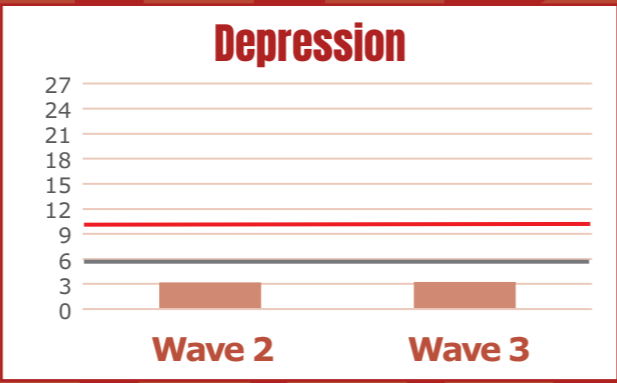
**Figure 4.** Social anxiety scores of Men's Shed members over two waves of data collection. *The brown bars are the Men's Sheds of WA social anxiety average scores, which are lower than the general population average (grey line) and well below problematic levels of social anxiety (red line).*



### Depression

Men's Shed members consistently reported low levels of depression across Waves 2 and 3, which were lower than general population average. Scores of 10 or more are likely to indicate problematic levels of depression, and 7.2% and 6.0% of members scored above 7 at Waves 2 and 3, respectively.

**Figure 5.** Depression scores of Men's Shed members over two waves of data collection. *The brown bars are the Men's Sheds of WA average depression scores, which are lower than the general population average (grey line) and well below problematic levels of depression symptoms (red line).*



### Summary of Wellbeing Outcomes

The wellbeing measures indicate that, on average, Men's Shed members are thriving. Members have high levels of wellbeing and health-related quality of life, and low loneliness, social anxiety, and depression symptoms. Members also reported that their life has meaning and a clear and satisfying sense of purpose. Some members (around 5-7%) who responded to the surveys are experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing, so it is important to consider how these members can be supported to thrive.

The remainder of this report will describe how factors in the **Thriving Shed Model** illustrated on the next page are associated with better mental health and wellbeing for Men's Shed members.





## What Did 'The Thriving Shed Project' Discover?

- The most common answer to 'What is the most important reason for being a Men's Shed member?' was mateship, followed by activities of the Shed, supporting others, and contributing to the community.
- Having a larger network of close friends within the Shed is associated with more frequent attendance, longer membership, higher wellbeing, lower loneliness, and lower depression.
- Higher Shed involvement is associated with higher meaning in life – they reported that their life has meaning and they have a clear and satisfying sense of purpose.
- Stronger social connections within the Shed are associated with higher levels of support giving and receiving between members and lower loneliness.
- Lower loneliness is associated with higher wellbeing and health-related quality of life.
- Members who see their Shed membership as a core part of who they are (i.e., part of their social identity) are more likely to report having stronger social connections within the Shed and giving and receiving more support.
- Involvement in a larger number of activities within the shed is associated with a stronger social identification with the shed.
- Members with higher social anxiety tend to identify less with their Shed.
- The most common method of finding out about the Shed is from existing friends.
- Only around 6% of sheds report being at membership capacity.

## What Does This Mean for a Thriving Shed?

- The quality of social relationships is paramount to all Men's Shed members, but particularly those who live alone and have a small social network outside of the Shed.
- Members appreciate leaders and other members showing interest in them and listening to them.
- Existing friendship networks are an important source of new members, but attempts should be made to identify and engage isolated members of the community who could benefit.
- Members should be encouraged to be involved in as many activities as desired to build their social connections within the Shed.
- Most established members reported no difficulties in joining their Shed, but new members and those who are socially anxious may need additional support.
- Higher levels of support when welcoming new members may increase engagement and retention, such as formal introductions to other members, showing members around the Shed, taking the time to explain how the Shed and machinery work, including them within the group activities and discussions, and assigning a 'buddy' as a contact person for additional support as required.



## What Did 'The Thriving Shed Project' Discover?

- Team psychological safety means:
  - ✓ If you make a mistake, it is not held against you by other shed members.
  - ✓ Shed members accept people's differences.
  - ✓ It is easy to ask shed members for help.
  - ✓ Shed members feel able to bring up problems and tough issues.
  - ✓ It is safe to take risks in the shed (e.g., by trying something new).
  - ✓ No-one in the shed deliberately acts in a way that undermines others.
  - ✓ When working with other shed members, members' unique skills and talents are utilised.
- Higher team psychological safety is associated with more frequent Shed attendance, engagement with more Shed activities, more close Men's Shed friends, higher meaning in life, higher wellbeing, higher health-related quality of life, and lower loneliness.
- Leaders play a key role in ensuring team psychological safety within the Sheds, but all members take responsibility for creating a positive atmosphere.
- Members with greater access to health and wellbeing information have happier Sheds.
- Many Sheds have a designated Wellbeing and Health Officer

## What Does This Mean for a Thriving Shed?

- **Leaders and members** of thriving sheds promote a psychologically safe environment by:
  - ✓ Encouraging members to learn and try new activities.
  - ✓ Expecting and accepting mistakes as part of learning.
  - ✓ Encouraging help-seeking and providing positive and encouraging feedback.
  - ✓ Ensuring friendly and welcome banter does not turn into perceived bullying.
  - ✓ Ensuring differences between members are respected and appreciated.
  - ✓ Encouraging members to raise difficult issues with leaders and/or members in safe and supportive ways.
  - ✓ Encouraging all members to contribute their unique skills and talents to the Shed.
- Sheds need policies around respectful behaviour and strategies for conflict resolution.
- Shed members who feel valued and supported by other members will be more highly engaged in Shed activities. One way some Sheds provide pastoral care is to monitor Shed members' attendance and to nominate a Shed buddy to contact them if they do not attend after a period of time. Each shed should consult with the membership to identify ways their shed can provide support.
- Thriving Sheds make use of the Wellbeing and Health Officer Program.



# Shed Factors



**Shed Factors include their location, size, functionality.**

## What Did 'The Thriving Shed Project' Discover?

- Members report that the size of their shed was one of the most important constraints on activities (e.g., limited workspace) and growing the membership. Other factors included whether the space is shared with other organisations, which then limits the times and days they can open. Storage space is also at a premium and often constrains the diversity of activities that can be offered.
- Most sheds are owned by the Council/Shire (39%) or privately (16%), with some being co-located with other agencies (23%). Some were owned by Men's Sheds (22%).
- On average, sheds open an average of 4 days/week over for a total of 23.2 hours.
- Most members (92%) reported that their shed continued to operate throughout COVID either the whole time or with some interruptions.



## What Does This Mean for a Thriving Shed?

- Thriving Sheds have facilities that can accommodate a range of diverse activities, including workshop spaces, storage, and spaces that can accommodate presentations, meal-sharing, and social connections.
- Improving Shed space and facilities through fundraising can facilitate membership growth and enable a greater diversity of activities to be offered by the Shed, which will more adequately meet the needs of the membership and broader community.
- Sheds may achieve this through close and supportive relationships with their local councils. Many sheds undertake fund-raising activities that can support their Shed's activities or the community.



# Strong Partnerships



## What Did 'The Thriving Shed Project' Discover?

- Many sheds report enjoying strong partnerships with their local Council, other sheds, as well as other community organisations such as Rotary.
- 60% of members report being involved in other community organisations (e.g., Rotary, sports clubs, social clubs), which were highly diverse.
- Strong relationships with local councils are critical, as councils often lease land and buildings, and offer grants for capital works on the original building, extensions, and for equipment.
- Other community organisations (e.g., Rotary) sometimes play a major role in establishing the Shed.
- Some sheds report supporting other sheds (e.g., attending their open days).

## What Does This Mean for a Thriving Shed?

- Sheds need to form close and supportive relationships with their local councils to ensure there is sufficient space to accommodate new members.
- Sheds may need to advocate to councils or other non-government funders for resources to increase the membership and diversity of activities within Men's Sheds. This report demonstrates the clear benefits to the community of supporting sheds to grow and thrive.
- Where the skills do not already exist, Shed members may need to be supported to approach local Councils and other potential funders (e.g., philanthropy, community organisations, grant funders), and complete competitive grant applications.
- Members should be encouraged to introduce Men's Sheds to other people in their networks so that they can benefit from membership, but also so that the Sheds can benefit from larger membership and networks.





## What Did 'The Thriving Shed Project' Discover?

- Men's Sheds rely on a dedicated group of volunteer leaders.
- Shed leaders are very aware of their pastoral role in facilitating emotional and social support for members.
- Positive, consultative, and inclusive leadership styles are associated with higher psychological safety (i.e., feeling able to make mistakes and raise problems without the risk of bullying or rejection), more close friendships within the sheds, and greater social identification with the sheds (i.e., feeling that membership is an important part of one's identity).
- Shed leaders have many roles:
  - ✓ Model the values of the Shed and promote a cohesive network.
  - ✓ Primary liaison with external groups, other sheds, the general public, the Council and other stakeholders and report back to the Shed.
  - ✓ Seek and lead community projects.
  - ✓ Promote the shed.
  - ✓ Actively seek new members.
  - ✓ Source funding for shed activities and ensure financial viability.
  - ✓ Plan and organise activities (e.g., talks) on technical and wellbeing matters and encourage participation.
  - ✓ Provide emotional and practical support to members when required.
  - ✓ Mentor new members.
  - ✓ Ensure safe practices.
  - ✓ Keep the membership informed of activities and opportunities.
  - ✓ Shed governance.

## What Does This Mean for a Thriving Shed? - Members' Support Roles

**Members** of thriving Sheds support their leadership by:

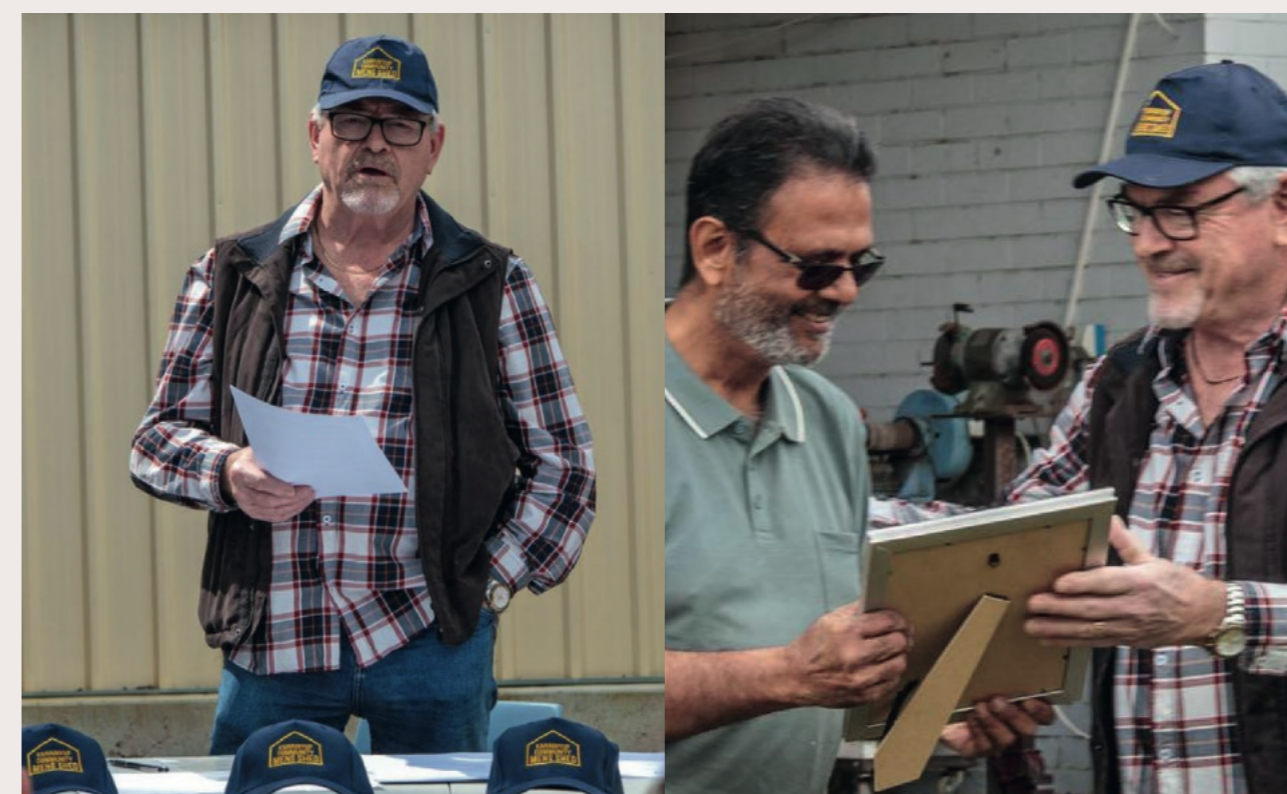
- Recognising that their leaders voluntarily dedicate their time for the betterment of Sheds and their members.
- Expressing appreciation to the Shed leaders for their contributions.
- Recognising that Shed leadership imposes a range of operational and interpersonal responsibilities that require substantial time and emotional commitments.
- Offering to help with Shed activities and lighten the load for the leaders and other members.
- Behaving respectfully towards leaders and other members at all times, thereby minimising conflict and the need for leaders to mediate.
- Complying with all Shed policies and procedures.
- Recognising that the more you put into your Shed, the more you get out of your Shed.

## What Does This Mean for a Thriving Shed? - Leaders' Roles

**Leaders** of thriving Sheds:

- Are well supported by their members and by the Men's Shed of WA Organisation.
- Model organisational values in the way they treat members and 'set the tone' for respectful social interactions.
- Are actively involved and approachable.
- Create a sense of cohesion.
- Support diverse activities that are interesting and useful to the group.
- Encourage members to use their unique talents and skills in the Shed.
- Welcome new members with a cup of tea or coffee and a chat.
- Listen, support members, and advocate for change when required.
- Support member diversity and inclusion, particularly people with accessibility issues (e.g., disabilities).
- Help to resolve interpersonal disputes and complaints to the benefit of all.

- Welcome differences of opinion.
- Are aware of the signs and symptoms of emotional problems.
- Support members who are struggling emotionally and/or with circumstances.
- Support members to learn in a psychologically safe environment, particularly when mistakes are made.
- Prioritise social aspects of the shed.
- Monitor attendance and contact members who have been absent.
- Express appreciation for members' contributions to the Shed.
- Encourage open communication and seek feedback from the membership about how the shed is functioning.
- Ensure members are aware of opportunities for involvement, including on leadership committees to share decision-making and the workload.
- Encourage a fun and enjoyable experience for members.





## What Did 'The Thriving Shed Project' Discover?

- Over 80% of members reported that they were somewhat to very satisfied with their Shed's governance (i.e., how you use a good set of policies and procedures).
- Members who felt they had a say in the running, activities, and governance of their Sheds reported that their Shed was happier.
- Finding committee members among the membership is challenging for many Sheds.
- Administrative and operational responsibilities are often carried by a small proportion of the membership.
- Succession planning is a challenge, particularly in small communities with a limited pool of people willing to serve in leadership roles.
- Governance tasks include:
  - ✓ Maintain shed records
  - ✓ Project management
  - ✓ Plan work rosters
  - ✓ Maximise income potential
  - ✓ Schedule and chair meetings
  - ✓ Prepare meeting minutes
  - ✓ Develop policies and procedures and ensure they are followed
  - ✓ Manage accommodation arrangements and funding
  - ✓ Co-ordinate member supports (e.g., transportation)
  - ✓ Ensure safety and first aid protocols are in place.

## What Does This Mean for a Thriving Shed?

- Governance in thriving sheds involves the membership in shared decision-making, but members need to be willing to engage and contribute.
- Sheds benefit from clear policies about behaviours that demonstrate respectful and consultative leadership.
- Sheds benefit from policies around respectful behaviour and strategies for conflict resolution amongst members.
- Strategies for increasing the proportion of the membership willing to volunteer time for leadership roles are required.
- All members should consider how they can contribute to the governance of their Shed, and they should be encouraged to do so.
- Relatively flat governance structures that share smaller roles amongst more members might increase the attractiveness of leadership positions, ease burden on individuals, and facilitate shared decision-making.



## What Did 'The Thriving Shed Project' Discover?

- Men's Shed members reported that inclusiveness is an important value within their Shed.
- The most common profile of a Men's Shed member is a married male around 70 years of age. However, in the Thriving Shed's survey members' ages ranged from 22 to 92 years, many members were single, and there was diversity in professions (past/present).
- A small proportion of survey participants self-identified as being culturally and linguistically diverse (4.8%), having a disability (9.3%), being ex-service personnel (15.9%), or a woman (2.1%). No survey participants identified as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or from the LGBTQIA+ community.
- Nonetheless, 41% of participants said their Shed had Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, 54% reported having culturally and linguistically diverse members, 97% reported having members with disabilities, 21% reported having LGBTQIA+ members, and 33% reported having female members. These figures indicate that most members are aware of high levels of diversity within their Sheds.
- Italian (23%) was the most common language spoken sheds after English (100%), followed by Afrikaans (15%), Spanish (9%), and Greek (8%).
- Some members may prefer to maintain a 'men only' space so that the shed can focus exclusively on male members' interests, and members can socially engage with male peers.
- Some members expressed interest in attracting some younger members.

## What Does This Mean for a Thriving Shed?

- Member diversity in sheds can offer many benefits:
  - ✓ Membership growth
  - ✓ New skills and activities
  - ✓ New ideas
  - ✓ Breaking down of stereotypes and increasing social cohesion through greater understanding and appreciation of diversity (e.g., age, gender, sexuality, culture)
  - ✓ Opportunities for mentorship (e.g., older members mentoring younger members)
  - ✓ Benefits of membership are available to a broader cross-section of the community
- The level of inclusiveness is best determined at the local level by the membership of each Shed after weighing up the potential benefits and costs of increasing membership diversity. Some Sheds may elect to allocate particular days, times or spaces for greater inclusiveness, or might invite particular groups within the community to engage in specific training activities. Others will elect to remain a 'men only' space.





## What Did 'The Thriving Shed Project' Discover?

- Men's Sheds members engage in a diverse array of activities and make a substantial positive contribution to their communities.
- The most common activities offered within Sheds are woodwork (96%), repairs for the local community (90%), metal work (88%), projects requested by the council or community (83%), and social activities (75%).
- Shed activities are only limited by the membership's skills and interests.
- Most Shed members report that their shed engages in fund-raising activities (95%), many are involved in charity work (36%), and around half reported involvement in mental health activities (55%).
- A minority of Shed members (23%) report that their Shed had activities specifically for physical activity. However, using an objective measure (Actigraphs) we found that simply attending a shed was associated with 999 extra steps, 34 additional minutes of light physical activity, and

6 more breaks in sedentary behaviour compared to non-shed days. Based on self-reported data, 54% of members engaged in a high level of physical activity, with 22% and 24% engaging in moderate and low levels of physical activity, respectively.

- Most Sheds provide an array of training programs and produce products for the community and for fund-raising.
- 91% of members report that their Shed does community work at least 3-6 times/year, such as creating benches for schools, public spaces, and hospitals.
- Members who engage in a larger number of activities within their shed experience higher wellbeing, lower loneliness, longer membership, more frequent attendance, and a stronger social identity as a Men's Shed member.
- Engaging in a larger number of activities within the shed is particularly important for the wellbeing of people with a smaller close social network outside of the Shed.
- Some members requested more physical activities (e.g., strengthening exercises).

## What Does This Mean for a Thriving Shed?

- Engaging in shed activities is a major contributor to wellbeing outcomes.
- Sheds should strive to maximise the breadth of activities offered where possible.
- Members with skills and talents not yet used within the Shed should be encouraged to lead new activities within the shed.
- More diverse activities are likely to attract more members and lead to more positive impacts on social networks and wellbeing.

- Members may wish to use their networks to introduce new skills into their shed.
- Social activities are highly valued by the membership and need to be as much of a priority as other activities.
- Different members benefit from different aspects of Shed activities. Members benefit from the social aspects and from developing technical skills, so sheds need to cater for this diversity.
- Sheds may need to inform the public about the diversity of activities available across different Sheds to encourage membership.



# The Thriving Shed Project: Conclusions



## The Thriving Shed Project: Conclusions

Members of Men's Sheds are thriving in WA – they have high levels of wellbeing and benefit from the close social connections, meaningful engagement in Shed activities, and contributing to their communities.

The Thriving Shed Model outlines **8 key factors** that help Sheds to thrive.

- 1. Mateship:** Fostering strong and supportive social bonds between members.
- 2. Team psychological safety:** Creating a space free from criticism, harnessing members unique strengths, encouraging feedback, and helping members feel individually valued.
- 3. Shed factors:** Adequate space and resources for members.
- 4. Strong partnerships:** Connections with government and non-government community organisations to assist with Shed activities and development.
- 5. Good and supported leadership:** Supportive and supported leaders who model organisational values, are open and welcoming, and lead with an emphasis on the social aspects of Shed membership.
- 6. Good governance:** Clear and transparent communication, established policies, and shared decision-making.
- 7. Diverse membership:** Attracting members from varying backgrounds, ages, and skills to enhance Shed capabilities and grow membership.
- 8. Diverse activities:** Offering multiple activities for members to engage with to meet varying interests and needs.

Each Shed has its own identity that reflects the needs and desires of its membership. Shed members are in the best position to know how their Shed can continue to flourish well into the future. The recommendations in this report reflect members' perspectives on their experiences within the Sheds and can therefore be used to guide policies and procedures at the organisational and individual Shed levels.

There is clear evidence that social isolation and loneliness are associated with poor physical and mental health outcomes, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, dementia, depression, anxiety, and higher suicide rates – particularly for older adults. **The findings in this report indicate that the Men's Shed movement should therefore be strongly supported by local councils and funding bodies to engage and benefit as many community members as possible.**

In his roles as inaugural Chairman, Committee Member, and as Treasurer, Jim Flockart, who you met earlier in this report, embodied the 8 factors in the Thriving Shed Model. On the next page, there are some specific examples of how Jim facilitated these factors within the Merredin Shed.

It is important to note that, although Jim was a unique and special bloke, every Men's Shed in WA has leaders and members who make invaluable contributions to their Sheds every day. Jim's story is but one example of the substantial contributions made across the organisation.



# “Flock’s Story” - Part 2: What did Jim do?

## How Merredin’s Jim Flockart embodied the principles of a Thriving Shed

### Mateship

If anyone wanted to become a member, he welcomed them and inevitably worked out what made them “tick”, so he knew how that new member could be absorbed into the Shed life.

### Team Psychological Safety

Jim never discriminated against anyone either because of colour, creed, social status, educational background, wealth, or qualifications. He always enjoyed meeting and talking to visitors.

### Shed Factors

As a team player and progressive thinker, he gathered a committee behind him who were also progressive thinkers and keen to achieve a purpose built shed for men in Merredin.

### Strong Partnerships

The need to raise a portion of the money as their contribution to build a new shed led to Jim and his committee being involved with community organisations that would give a donation for their services.

### Good Leadership

At all times the leaders were seen as accountable, transparent and as acting with integrity in the interests of the Shed. Jim was not only a natural leader and team man, but he was also a diplomat.

### Good Governance

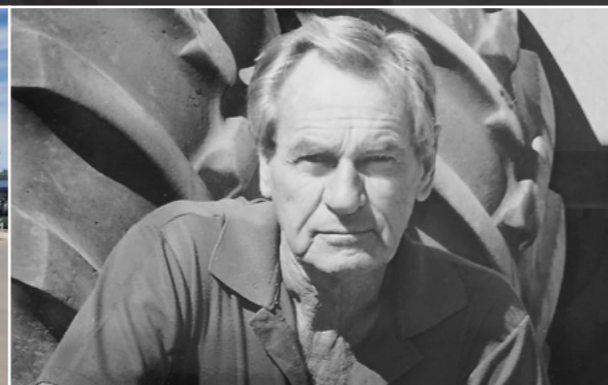
Jim was an experienced chairman and never dominated meetings but managed to draw out each committee member’s opinions or suggestions.

### Diverse Membership

Jim encouraged men to share their ideas, gifts, and talents with others and he did it all unselfishly and voluntarily.

### Diverse Activities

Members provided the diversity of activities, ranging from restoration of vintage farm machinery, making nesting boxes for native birds, making toys or furniture, and in Jim’s case, restoring small engines.





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