

Meeting of the Parliament

Thursday 21 March 2019

Session 5



For the full document download:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12012>

MEN'S SHEDS

Motion debated—[Christine Grahame].

Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

..... 28

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)

..... 30

Jenny Gilruth (Mid Fife and Glenrothes) (SNP)

..... 32

Iain Gray (East Lothian) (Lab)

..... 33

Bruce Crawford (Stirling) (SNP)

..... 35

Jeremy Balfour (Lothian) (Con)

..... 37

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)

38

Mark McDonald (Aberdeen Donside) (Ind)

..... 39

Liam McArthur (Orkney Islands) (LD)

..... 41

Elaine Smith (Central Scotland) (Lab)

..... 43

David Torrance (Kirkcaldy) (SNP)

..... 44

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

..... 46

The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government (Aileen Campbell)

..... 47

Men's Sheds

- [The Deputy Presiding Officer \(Linda Fabiani\):](#)

The next item of business is a members' business debate on motion S5M-15855, in the name of Christine Grahame, on men's sheds. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament recognises the important contribution that the Men's Sheds movement makes to people's wellbeing; notes that there are now sheds running or in development across the length and breadth of the country, including in Lauder, Galashiels, Peebles, Mayfield and Roslin; understands that the activities and groups vary from community to community but that, by and large, the sheds provide a meeting place for men to undertake activities in a friendly, supportive and social environment; believes that such groups can have a positive impact on men's mental health and wellbeing by providing supportive groups that offer an opportunity for them to feel more able to open up about anything bothering them as well as helping them build positive ties in their community, and hopes that more sheds can continue to be established.

- [Christine Grahame \(Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale\) \(SNP\):](#)

I thank all the members who signed my motion and who are taking part in the debate, and I thank those people who are now coming into the gallery, who have come from men's sheds across my constituency and other parts of the Borders, in Peebles, Galashiels, Lauder, Hawick and Eyemouth. In fact, the Borders has 10 per cent of all the men's sheds in Scotland and 19 per cent of Scotland's members.

Because of the explosion in the number of men's sheds, it might seem that it is a new phenomenon, but it is no such thing. The first recorded men's shed was in Tongala, Victoria, Australia in 1998, and the first men's shed in Scotland was established in Westhill, Aberdeenshire in 2013.

According to the very helpful Scottish Men's Sheds Association website, there are 106 open sheds in Scotland and 58 in development. They have 1,612 members, although that figure might have been surpassed even as I speak. While I am on the topic of the association's website, it is a great place to go for those who are interested in joining or starting a men's shed. I put that information on the record for our colleague Ken Hughes, the Parliament's assistant chief executive, who is retiring today. He might want to look at that website for something to do with his time.

The website provides a map of existing sheds in Scotland and it tells people how to start, from the moment the idea takes root in their head, through publicising locally and gathering support, setting up a steering group and developing a constitution to registering as a charity. It also tells people how to successfully access funding through what is called a "Dragon's Den" attitude. That process involves the so-called "So what?" tests: "So what if it's better than sitting in the pub of an afternoon drinking?", "So what if it's better than couch potatoing" —I made up that term—"in front of the afternoon telly?", and so on.

I am generalising, but we know that men are not so good at sharing their worries and concerns with others. Not everyone plays golf or is a member of a club, so the sheds have given men and women—Peebles and District Men's Shed, for example, does not bar women—but mostly men, a place to gather, make, chat, have a laugh and make plans for the shed, all of which is good for body and soul. The wife or partner might be glad of a wee break from them, too.

There are not problems with membership, but there are, of course, problems with money. Most of all, in my experience, there are problems with premises. That is the case in Lauder, where the men's shed temporarily has a room in the Lauder leisure centre, which is not really a permanent solution; it should begin its activities there in the next fortnight. The men's shed in Peebles has just secured the former ex-servicemen's club, and Hawick Men's Shed has secured a former mill at a peppercorn rent. Let us face it: unfortunately, in most of our rural towns and villages, there will be plenty of empty premises a-going.

The process takes time and effort, but I think that that is the making of a men's shed. The fight for facilities and funding pulls the men together from the start. The shed is theirs and of their making and their shaping. Because there is no predetermined, one-size-fits-all format, it is up to the members, and that is exactly how it should be. Those members have diverse skills, and the retired accountant and the retired joiner are equally useful. What they do is up to them. Galashiels Men's Shed has made 60 feeders for red squirrels and carried out furniture repairs for the Aberlour Child Care Trust.

The benefits to the members and the appetite for sheds is reflected in the numbers. Peebles and District Men's Shed, which is in its relative infancy, already has 78 members. The benefits to health and wellbeing of remaining active in mind and body cannot be overstated. The sheds are good for individuals and they are good for the public purse.

The name "shed" is so appropriate. My late father, with five children corralled in a small council house, took refuge and sanctuary in his small green wooden shed at the bottom of the garden. He kept all his tools there. It is where he made our sleds and bookcases, which are, to this day—and, I believe, forever—indestructible. They are not very functional, but they are indestructible.

More important, it was his shed. With the door open, he would sit admiring the growing vegetables, with the Sunday papers—he always had to read them before the rest of us—and his cup of tea, rain or shine, taking a moment away from the hurly-burly of his five children indoors. My late mother was happy to leave him to it. Domestic friction was reduced.

Men's sheds, though they are populated with many men, have much in common with that little green shed at the bottom of the garden. In some ways, they are a place of sanctuary, to make things; they are also a place to chat and sit idly, or perhaps to share concerns. Perhaps, they, too, reduce the potential for domestic friction—I am just saying.

On that note, to allay any rumours that, as a single woman of a certain age, I am frequenting men's sheds with romantic intent, I assure the gentlemen in the gallery and beyond that my interest is purely professional. [*Laughter.*]

- [The Deputy Presiding Officer:](#)

Thank you, Ms Grahame. I say to those in the gallery that, as much as you want to hiss, boo or clap, please do not. We would prefer it if you do not show appreciation or otherwise.

We have a shedload of people who want to speak—

Members: Aha!

- [The Deputy Presiding Officer:](#)

—so I will have to be very strict with the timings. Members can have no more than four minutes. I call Rachael Hamilton.

- [Rachael Hamilton \(Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire\) \(Con\):](#)

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in the debate, and I thank Christine Grahame for securing it. I welcome all those in the gallery, some of whom are familiar to me.

Men's sheds have been a real success story across Scotland. From humble beginnings—from only five back in 2013 to more than 170 today—they have become buzzing centres for craftsmanship, camaraderie and community cohesiveness. They not only fund themselves, but carry out tasks in the local community such as building flower and bird boxes, refurbishing old furniture and making garden furniture.

I was outside the men's shed in Coldstream on Monday. It was not open, but I was looking in the window at the lovely things that they are making and that I have my eye on.

I want to share a little bit about men's sheds in my constituency and the tremendous success story that they have become. I recently visited the fantastic Hawick Men's Shed, which welcomes all sorts of people. That is the main point about men's sheds—they are so welcoming and offer friendship.

As Christine Grahame said, 19 per cent of Scottish members of men's sheds live in the Borders. There are 10 men's sheds across the Borders, from Jedburgh in the west to Eyemouth in the east. Scottish Borders Council has recently appointed a men's sheds development officer, and councillors David Parker and John Greenwell were instrumental in securing funding from the council to help the men's sheds get off the ground.

The wonderful thing about the sheds is the positive change that they bring about to older members of society. Every shed is different in its make-up, but they all have the same aim: to eradicate social isolation—among men mainly—and give a purpose to people's lives.

I speak a lot about social isolation, which is a pressing issue in rural Scotland, especially among older people. It is fast becoming the biggest challenge facing older generations, and men's sheds go some way to alleviate it. According to Age Scotland, 94 per cent of members have made good friends through the shed movement. In rural areas, with the decline in rural pubs and lack of meeting places, men's sheds are fast becoming the main hub for socialising in some towns and villages.

Over the past couple of years, we have heard a lot in the media about the impact that social prescribing can have on mental and physical health. I hope that the national health service sees an opportunity in men's sheds, particularly given the positive impact that they have on mental health.

As Christine Grahame said, men's sheds are not just about men. Jedburgh men's shed has been opened up to the wider community, including women. I understand that there is a ladies day once a week. I have yet to attend, but I look forward to going, and I hope that the numbers will continue to grow. Moreover, there is an opportunity for adults with learning difficulties and physical disabilities—some come along with carers and help with current projects; others have brought fresh ideas and started new projects.

The achievement to date is phenomenal and the growth rate is amazing. We should be proud of what the gentlemen in the public gallery and others across Scotland are achieving. I hope that the movement continues to grow and to inspire the younger generations to carry on the good work that others have started.

13:01

- [Jenny Gilruth \(Mid Fife and Glenrothes\) \(SNP\):](#)

I congratulate my colleague Christine Grahame on securing this important members' business debate on men's sheds.

In July last year, I had the privilege of cutting the ribbon at the official opening of Glenrothes Men's Shed. It was on one of the strangely warm nights that we had last summer and, as I recall, it was right in the middle of the world cup, but more than 70 folk from different communities across the town gathered to mark the occasion. Glenrothes Men's Shed is on the site of an old scout hall, and the absolute transformation that has taken place there is simply remarkable. Advanced higher art pupils from Auchmuty high school helped to design the murals on the exterior of the shed walls, with the help of local artist Donna Forrester. July's event was a real community experience. As shed member John McElroy told me at the time,

"The purpose of Glenrothes Men's Shed is to be accessible primarily but not exclusively to men, 18 or over, providing a safe, friendly environment where they are able to socialise and work on meaningful hobbies and projects at their own pace in their own time."

Christine Grahame's motion specifically mentions the ability of men's sheds to improve mental health. Yesterday, with colleagues from across the chamber, I attended suicide prevention training provided by the Scottish Association for Mental Health. In Scotland, suicide remains the biggest killer of men aged 34 to 44. There are lots of reasons why that is the case, but men's sheds have a crucial role in tackling social isolation and loneliness. Men's sheds have grown in popularity in recent years because of the opportunity that they afford—particularly although not exclusively for the older generation—to socialise in a safe environment and, I think, to have a sense of purpose.

Earlier this week, I was delighted to visit the other shed in my constituency, which is in Kennoway. I am not daft enough to refer to it as a men's shed, because at least half of the attendees on Tuesday were women. In Kennoway, the shed is a community shed. It is also unique, in that it has the largest branch membership of any shed in the country. I hope that all members will agree that that is a pretty impressive feat for a small town in Fife with a population of just over 4,500.

I sat with a group of ladies who were involved in craft work and cross-stitch. I am sure that they will not mind me telling the chamber that their view was that the women do all the work at Kennoway shed—so the gender divide is alive and well in Kennoway. Despite that, they laughed and told me about the camaraderie of the shed and how it offers them the opportunity to learn new skills. One lady took me to task about a certain Nicola Sturgeon, and when I reminded her that Nicola Sturgeon is in fact my boss, she simply replied, "Yes, I know that."

Humphrey is one of the star attendees at the shed in Kennoway. He has been going since his wife passed away last year. Someone in the church recommended it to him and he now turns up every Tuesday and Friday to tend to his jigsaws. Every week, the team at the shed carefully lift Humphrey's jigsaw and store it away safely so that he can continue where he left off. He is provided with a hot water bottle to keep him warm and, as he sits making progress with his jigsaws, the great and the good of the shed arrive to discuss the issues of the day with him. Simply put, Humphrey is the laird of Kennoway Community Shed, and it was an honour to meet him this week.

It struck me that Kennoway's shed is about more than bricks and mortar. It is about the favour done for someone who needs their blinds taken down. It is about someone who will pay it forward the next week with some home baking. It is about volunteers working together to put up a new wall because the woodwork area was a little noisy.

There is a strong community bond throughout Kennoway shed, where everyone, irrespective of age and gender, has something to contribute to the greater good. I asked Bob McPhail, the founder of Kennoway shed, what he thought made it work. He told me:

“Every shed is unique in its own way; ours is mixed, some are just men only. Together, we are making a huge difference to people’s lives and making them feel part of something. Some pass on the skills that they have, others will just come for a chat and a cuppa and try and set the world to rights.”

Setting the world to rights is exactly what I did on Tuesday, with the help of some of Bob’s members, and although we did not quite sort out Brexit or agree on independence, it was a privilege to be in their company and to experience the inclusive community that they have helped to create in Kennoway.

13:05

- [Iain Gray \(East Lothian\) \(Lab\):](#)

I add my congratulations to Christine Grahame on securing this important debate.

The men’s shed movement is a little tongue in cheek—perhaps it should be, because, as Christine Grahame pointed out, it started in Australia, where irreverence about masculinity is pretty common. However, it also plays to the stereotypes of sheds and man caves, where men such as Christine Grahame’s father find somewhere to retreat from family life. Of course, the men’s shed movement is the opposite of those things. It is very serious in its intent and its purpose, and it is about the opposite of retreating—it is not about retreating at all, but about coming out into the world.

As a number of members have said, loneliness is one of the biggest problems that men, in particular, face. We know how toxic loneliness can be; it is considered by the health authorities to be the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day in terms of the damage that it does to people’s health. That is the serious issue that men’s sheds deal with by creating a network of friends for those who participate and by connecting them again with their communities—because all the men’s sheds work with their communities. We have seen the strength of that work in the men’s shed movement in East Lothian—indeed, all our towns in East Lothian have men’s sheds at different stages of development. Musselburgh has one, as do Dunbar, Tranent and North Berwick. In Prestonpans, the men’s shed is becoming a part of the Lighthouse central community hub, which is a very successful community development in the town. In Haddington, the shed members have been doing some very useful work, including producing furniture for Meadowpark school for children with additional support needs.

- [Maurice Corry \(West Scotland\) \(Con\):](#)

What efforts are the men’s sheds that Iain Gray is talking about, which are opening up throughout East Lothian, taking to encourage armed forces veterans to join them?

- [Iain Gray:](#)

I will answer the question to a degree by turning to the doyens of the men’s shed movement in East Lothian: the members of the Macmerry men’s shed. David Dickson and his redoubtable shedders in Macmerry claim to be the second men’s shed in Scotland, and it would be foolish to argue with them. The shed has 60 members, 35 of whom are active and a good many of whom are, indeed, veterans—a group that the men’s shed has reached out to. Macmerry men’s shed was started five years ago by Leslie Kidd—the founder of the movement in East Lothian—with just four men. They

started with nothing but they now have everything, including a power tool workshop, and they make lots of things—they made the name plate for my house, which is on my garden gate. However, I have been told that, since the last time I was at Macmerry men's shed, someone has donated a pool table, and I believe that productivity has taken a significant dive. Members do not have to take my word for it, because Macmerry men's shed, along with Age Scotland, made a tremendous short film, which tells their story and shows why the men's shed is so important to them. The film can be found on YouTube—there is a link to it on my Facebook page.

We are all here to praise the men's shed movement, but I say gently to the minister that the movement needs support. It has had support from Age Scotland. In East Lothian, Strive, the local third sector organisation, supports it, too. The Government could do more to support the movement.

The cabinet secretary is the exception that proves the rule—Government ministers are usually middle-aged men in suits. They should understand that they will soon become old gits in cargo shorts and they will need a men's shed to go to, so they should support the movement.

- [The Deputy Presiding Officer:](#)

I do not think that there is any way to segue from that to Bruce Crawford. [*Laughter.*]

13:10

- [Bruce Crawford \(Stirling\) \(SNP\):](#)

I have got my cargo shorts, and I am certainly an old git. From experience, I say to the members of the Borders men's shed that, if Christine Grahame is coming your way, run or get on your bike as fast as you can.

Most people need a sense of purpose or belonging in their lives, whether that is achieved through their family or work, supporting the local football team, volunteering, taking part in sport themselves or—dare I say it?—political activism. That sense of purpose can fuel us to get through the day and carries us on from one day to the next.

However, as we all know, as we get into our retirement years—

Members: Oh!

- [Bruce Crawford:](#)

I am not retiring—no chance—but we are all getting a bit older. I might get thrown out, but I am no retiring.

It can be a difficult phase in a person's life: a pair of hands and a mind that were once used productively every day are now looking for their next purpose. That change of direction can sometimes take a serious toll on the mental wellbeing of people in such a situation. It can also have a potentially serious impact on relationships in a household.

I would like to share a short story about a man I know. He is a man about my own age, who had gone through the transition from working life to retirement and, like many people in such circumstances, he had found it incredibly difficult to come to terms with no longer having the routine of the working day. I could say that his sense of purpose was lost—an issue that other members have mentioned. The situation was having a serious impact on the man: he was becoming more and more depressed

within himself and, at home, he barely spoke to his wife. It was a dangerous cycle in his mind of just existing in the world and no more.

Then, as luck would have it, the man fell ill and was admitted to hospital. Members might ask why I would describe such circumstances as lucky, but, in that short time in hospital, he was able to meet other men of his age on the ward. They had a good blether together and played cards and other games. By the time that he was discharged, he did not want to leave.

The impact of that male company on the man's overall wellbeing was profound. When he got home, he was a much happier man and his relationship with his wife greatly improved. The spark had reignited. Knowing what it was that had lifted his spirits, he signed up to his local men's shed. There, the man spends time with other men—and women—who are mostly around his age, using materials and tools to put their hands and minds to productive use. He has a renewed sense of belonging and has regained a sense of purpose.

I tell that story because it is what the men's shed movement is about at its core: a way for men to find a sense of purpose with other men and women who are in the same situation. We have talked a lot about mental health and how best to tackle mental health problems. The men's shed movement offers at least some answers to the problem by tackling the causes of mental ill health, particularly among men of retirement age.

Earlier this year, I was honoured to officially open the men's shed in Stirling. I would like to thank a remarkable man, Tipp Maher, for all the fantastic work that he has done in establishing the men's shed in Stirling. I am proud to say that I am now a member of the Stirling men's shed—I became one a few weeks ago, because of my great age. I am just preparing for when I am 80 or 90 and decide to slow down. The shed is situated in Creative Stirling's creative hub on King Street, and it is a brilliant space for socialising and for building, creating and fixing not just objects, but people. It has instilled a sense of purpose and belonging in its members. I hope that that brilliant organisation can reach out and have the same impact on many more men in the future.

13:14

- [Jeremy Balfour \(Lothian\) \(Con\):](#)

I, too, congratulate Christine Grahame on securing the debate. Men's sheds are vital in creating the socially connected society that we want and need. Men's shed are places—whether sheds or otherwise—where members can meet and pursue practical interests such as woodworking, refine their skills, play pool or simply put the world to rights.

Although men's sheds are largely based in a shed or other building, through them, people can also go on outings and meet other men and women. Men's sheds are whatever their members want them to be. In essence, their success is that they are not a top-down model; they are very much a model whereby people decide what would help and benefit them in their community.

Loneliness does not discriminate on the basis of economics or age. We were recently told that more than 100,000 older people in Scotland are suffering from loneliness right now. That could be because of retirement or because of a change in an individual's medical condition or physical health. I talked to one men's group in Edinburgh, who told me that, when they were getting going, they could not find many men to come along, so they encouraged the wives and partners of the men to send their men out.

In our society, it is still difficult for men—particularly older men—to talk about bereavement, loneliness or other issues that they would not want to discuss in the family. That is the importance of men’s sheds, which needs to be stressed: they provide meaningful community and real friendship.

In May 2017, Age Scotland produced a report that was based on a survey of members of multiple men’s sheds across Scotland. The survey found—overwhelmingly—that the men valued having banter with fellow shedders and people they could simply spend an afternoon or an evening with. They valued the individuals rather than the activity, because they felt needed and loved.

An example of a local shed here, in Lothian, is Mayfield men’s shed, whose members meet on Tuesday and Friday mornings. The shed is just one of the many that we are fortunate to have here, in Edinburgh and Lothian. Activities include refurbishing community benches and making and selling wooden chairs. They have been able to sell what they have made, adding further value to their work. Indeed, many shedders describe having a new lease of life because a local shed has helped them to embrace and enjoy that stage of their life.

I encourage every one of us to look into men’s sheds, whether for ourselves or for someone we know. They are a fantastic way of connecting with others in the community and might, for some, even be a lifeline to keep them going as the years progress.

- [The Deputy Presiding Officer:](#)

In view of the number of members who still wish to speak in the debate, I am content to accept a motion without notice, under rule 8.14.3, to extend the debate by up to 30 minutes. I invite Christine Grahame to move such a motion.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended by up to 30 minutes.—[Christine Grahame]

Motion agreed to.

13:19

- [Emma Harper \(South Scotland\) \(SNP\):](#)

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this debate to raise awareness of the work and value of men’s sheds, and I congratulate my colleague Christine Grahame on securing it. She aptly described what men’s sheds are all about. I, too, welcome the shedders to the public gallery this afternoon.

Men’s sheds respond to men’s need for camaraderie and provide opportunities for them to work together in a way that contributes meaning to their lives. There are endless benefits to those who attend, from health to educational benefits.

The Scottish Men’s Sheds Association says on its excellent website that the organisation

“will strive to lobby our MSP’s, Councillors and Scottish Councils to support our Scottish Men’s Sheds Movement both financially, in kind and in policy making.”

Today, I will focus on the funding aspect. It continues:

“This grass roots, community empowerment Men’s Sheds model is a new way of supporting the desired Scottish Government’s National Outcomes and the Community Empowerment and Engagement Asset Transfer Bill.”

I agree that men's sheds are one of the best ways for Scottish councils to save money, and they should allow buildings to be transferred to the community to be used as men's sheds.

The Scottish Government has recognised the efforts of the Scottish Men's Sheds Association, and it allocated start-up funding in September 2016. In addition to the funding from the Scottish Government, men's sheds have found a wide variety of potential funds. Age Scotland's small development grants can be used for men's sheds. The charity has up to 15 grants of £1,000 to award to men's sheds in Scotland.

The big bike revival in Scotland will give organisations tools to engage with the community and funding to repair old bikes, and it is looking for 100 organisations across Scotland to run a range of bike revival events, with grants of up to £1,000. Tesco's bags of help programme has already funded 780 projects in Scotland, sharing more than £4 million between them. The programme funds a huge variety of projects that bring benefits to communities.

The Royal Voluntary Service, with funding from the Asda Foundation, has given out grants worth more than £84,000 to 100 sheds over the past three years. Big Lottery Fund Scotland has a range of funding programmes that can support men's sheds and similar activities. The main fund that it advises men's sheds to apply for is awards for all Scotland, which can provide funding of between £500 and £10,000 for up to 12 months.

The men's sheds movement is a growing phenomenon and it is fantastic to see the work that everybody is doing. In my South Scotland region, the number of men's sheds in Dumfries and Galloway has grown steadily since Dalbeattie Men's Shed first opened its doors back in 2011. There are now six men's sheds in the local authority area, and I am pleased to hear that there are plans in place to develop more over the years to come.

Dalbeattie Men's Shed was named the best in the United Kingdom at the UK Men's Sheds Association's shed of the year awards in 2017. Last summer, Sir Billy Connolly popped into the shed when he was filming a new TV project. He was very interested in the Skeoch utility car replica that members of the shed were building.

I hope to visit the Rhins Men's Shed in Stoneykirk and Glenkens men's shed in Balmacellan in the near future. I was happy to speak at the open day of Dumfries men's shed in Noble Hill last summer.

Good health is based on many factors including people feeling good about themselves, being productive in and valuable to their community, connecting with friends and maintaining an active body and mind. Becoming a member of a men's shed gives men—and now women as well—a safe and busy environment without pressure. I encourage men around the country to attend men's sheds because of the education that they can receive on health matters, the friendships that they can build and, most important, the positive contribution to their mental health.

13:23

- [Mark McDonald \(Aberdeen Donside\) \(Ind\):](#)

I congratulate Christine Grahame on securing this debate and on opening it in her usual inimitable style. There are two men's sheds in my constituency. I will say a little bit about each of them, because their stories are somewhat different with regard to the progress that they have made.

Following the election in 2016—after going home, then dropping my kids off at school—I went straight to Dyce community centre, where Dyce men's shed was formally opening its workshop. It had been granted sole use of a room in the community centre to develop that. When Dyce men's

shed was formed in July 2014, it was initially allocated two rooms for social activities such as darts, pool and board games for its membership of eight to 10 local men, but the rooms were shared with other groups at different times of the day. After discussions with the local authority, it was allocated sole use of one room, in which it has established a workshop, which is mainly for woodwork.

Davie Walker, the secretary of Dyce men's shed, advises me that its membership has grown to approximately 30 people from Dyce and the surrounding communities. They meet three mornings a week with, usually, 18 to 20 individuals attending on at least two of the three mornings. Their activities have expanded and now include indoor bowls and a musical group. Those who partake in the workshop activities, although they generally make items for their own use, have occasionally made outdoor play equipment for local children's nurseries and planters for the local shops in the community.

The men's shed in Dyce is also about giving back to the community and being involved in community efforts. The strapline of the men's shed is "making friends", and Davie advises that the friendship formed among the members is particularly evident among those who have lost their partners. The point has been made about how retirement, the loss of partners, isolation and loneliness can impact on men, and about how men's sheds act as an antidote to that.

Bridge of Don and District Men's Shed is the other one in my constituency. It began two years ago, although it does not currently have premises. It has about 30 members, but it is struggling to offer activities on a regular basis as a consequence of that lack of premises. It has been gifted a storage unit by Jim Wright of Securastore, which is a business in Bucksburn in my constituency, but it is currently trying to secure £2,000 in order to move the unit, and it is seeking planning permission for it to be based behind the Alex Collie sports centre in Bridge of Don. Those at the men's shed have advised me that they have had a difficult journey to get things moving and that it could take up to four years to get the shed up and running properly.

One of the members of its board is a local general practitioner, who believes that consideration ought to be given to how national health service funds could support and fund the work of men's sheds. There is perhaps a case for some of the additional finance that is being directed towards mental health to be considered in relation to men's sheds. A report that Age Scotland highlights in its briefing to us shows that, for every £1 that is spent on men's sheds, there is a social return of about £9.

The potential for men's sheds to be viewed as a form of social prescribing should not be underestimated. They can encourage men to become more active or to remain active and they can tackle isolation and loneliness, bringing greater benefits as a result. I hope that that will be given greater consideration in relation to how finance is directed to support the work that men's sheds do and that, when local general practitioners are faced with individuals who are suffering from loneliness, isolation or stress, they will be enabled to see men's sheds as an option to address that, rather than following the traditional medical model.

13:27

- [Liam McArthur \(Orkney Islands\) \(LD\):](#)

I, too, congratulate Christine Grahame on securing this debate. Given her remarks, I suggest that the men's shed in the Borders investigates securing its premises with closed-circuit television cameras, if not checking the locks on the doors and windows. *[Laughter.]* I, too, wish Ken Hughes well as he

takes up Christine Grahame's encouragement to join a men's shed following his imminent retirement this evening.

Despite their growth in popularity and geographic reach over the years, men's sheds remain a largely unsung success story, and we should be doing more to shout about them from the rooftops. Before I offer some thoughts on the positive impact that Orkney Men's Shed in my constituency has had under the stewardship of Morgan H Marcus and an excellent committee, I am tempted to declare an interest. On each and every occasion that I have visited Orkney Men's Shed in Finstown, and when popping along to its stalls at various agricultural shows last summer, I seem to have come away with a raffle prize. Unlike those of recent EuroMillions lottery winners, my cumulative winnings are not yet life changing, but they have helped to break a losing streak in local charity raffles that went back many years.

It is no exaggeration to say that men's sheds have proved to be life changing. There is certainly tangible evidence, including in Orkney, that they can help to improve the quality of life for shedders, whether through reducing the risk of loneliness and isolation as Iain Gray, Jenny Gilruth and others have identified, or by helping individuals to enjoy better mental health. That was borne out by Age Scotland's survey of shedders in 2017. The overwhelming majority of respondents pointed to the same benefits that they got from their men's shed, with responses such as "more active", "made friends", "gained a sense of achievement", "feel more involved in the local community" and "learned new skills". That all adds up to physical and mental health improvements. That is something that we should be making more of a song and dance about. It demands greater recognition and should have greater value attached to it than seems to be the case at present.

As Mark McDonald reminded us, the Scottish Men's Sheds Association found that for every £1 spent on Westhill and District Men's Shed in Aberdeenshire, there was a return of more than £9 in health and social care and community learning outcomes. That cannot be atypical, yet we still hear about problems that men's sheds have, not least in securing premises.

Orkney Men's Shed is fortunate in that it now has a permanent home in Finstown thanks to the generosity of local fisherman Tam H Marcus. *[Interruption.]* However, that came only after lengthy and ultimately unsuccessful negotiations with the local council over another site. Such has been the growth in membership and demand since Orkney Men's Shed moved into its premises in 2017 that it is already looking at extending its building. As well as creating much-needed extra space, an extension would facilitate better disabled access.

Unfortunately, the local group will need to cover the full planning costs in addition to the cost of the work. Such fundraising pressure is relentless for voluntary organisations such as men's sheds. Thankfully, the Orkney public have responded with consistent generosity to appeals for donations and funding. In return, the shedders have provided support to local schools, charity shops, the guides and individuals in the community. However, as I said in Parliament earlier this month, and as Mark McDonald rightly said, there is a strong argument for looking at whether men's sheds should be able to bid for health and wider social care funding. That approach has been taken in Australia and it certainly seems to merit consideration here, too.

Meanwhile, Orkney Men's Shed goes from strength to strength: its membership is up to 140 and is growing at a rate of three or four a month. The shed is open two days a week and attendance at sessions averages about 35. It is making a real difference and there is ambition and appetite to do more.

All men's sheds are different, but they share an ability to foster friendships and enhance wellbeing. As Andy Swain of Orkney Men's Shed put it, for many local shedders,

"the Shed has improved their life ... and given them a sense of purpose".

For that alone, I offer my thanks to the men's shed movement. I wish all current and future shedders as well, as the shed movement, every success in the future.

13:31

- [Elaine Smith \(Central Scotland\) \(Lab\):](#)

Presiding Officer, I apologise to you and to Liam McArthur for my pill alarm going off during Mr McArthur's contribution.

I, too, thank Christine Grahame for lodging the motion and securing the debate on this interesting subject. I do not know whether Ken Hughes has already bought his cargo shorts; I suppose that we can ask him later, at his retiral do.

Men's sheds have been in Scotland for a relatively short time but, as we have heard from other members, they are already playing an important role in the lives of men in communities around the country. Like other members, I commend the work of men's sheds in the area that I represent. No two men's sheds are the same. In Grangemouth, men's and hens' groups meet at different times at the Jupiter urban wildlife centre. They are part of a wood recycling project, which makes planters, bird boxes, stools, spice racks and many more items out of recycled pallet wood.

Coatbridge men's shed was formed about six months ago, since when its members have met twice a week to play dominoes, do woodwork or gardening or simply socialise. However, recently, I was saddened to hear that the club's premises had been destroyed in a fire. Although the emergency services believe that the fire was accidental, the building's loss has been devastating for the shed's members. Local member Jim Gallagher said in the *Airdrie & Coatbridge Advertiser*:

"There are eight pensioners who have found refuge in this Men's Shed that's now been destroyed. If we don't keep meeting every week the club will fall apart and members will just go back to staring at four walls in their homes every day."

I very much hope that a suitable temporary meeting place can be found, and I wish the club luck in re-establishing its premises.

When men's sheds first began to be formed in Australia in the 1990s, a number of men's health issues that were not being addressed, and which are common among men in many western countries, were identified. One key societal issue was that men of all ages were not being encouraged to discuss their feelings and wellbeing. That point has already been mentioned today—it was well made by both Iain Gray and Jeremy Balfour. For a lot of men—particularly older and retired men—that has had a serious and detrimental effect on their physical and mental health. As Jenny Gilruth mentioned, men have been affected by a cultural expectation that they will not discuss their feelings or have consideration for their wellbeing. Countless men's lives have undoubtedly been lost to such a macho interpretation of how they should or should not act. I commend the positive role that men's sheds have played in addressing that issue. The positive effects of men's sheds are becoming ever more well known.

In a survey of members of the men's sheds in Australia in 2007, 99.5 per cent said that they felt better about themselves, 97 per cent said that they had a place where they felt that they belonged and 79 per cent felt that they got access to men's health information.

There are similar percentages in the briefing "Here at Home" that we have received from Age Scotland. Like Liam McArthur, I thought that it was interesting that, for every £1 spent on a men's shed, more than £9 has been returned in health, social care and community learning outcomes, which adds to Iain Gray's points about more Government support being needed.

I hope that men's sheds continue to grow all around the country so that more men in Scotland can benefit from the improvement to their health and wellbeing for years to come. I again congratulate Christine Grahame on securing the debate.

13:35

- [David Torrance \(Kirkcaldy\) \(SNP\):](#)

I thank Christine Grahame for securing the debate and allowing me the opportunity to talk about the positive impact of men's sheds on their members' health and wellbeing in general, but especially in Fife's communities.

Men's sheds are

"community spaces for members to connect, converse, and create".

They are open to all aged 18 and up, but the majority of shedders are pensioners. That is incredibly important, because one in five of the UK population is an older man aged over 65 years. According to the National Institute for Health Research, men's mortality rates are higher than those of women, and loneliness and social isolation, which are associated with poorer health outcomes, are highly common among older men.

Older men find it more difficult than women to make friends later in life and are less likely to join community-based social groups. Men's sheds help to tackle mental health issues and social isolation among men and the elderly population by granting members the chance to spend time outside the house to meet members of the local community and socialise with people who have similar interests.

Moreover, men's sheds help to boost the confidence and self-image of participants by engaging shedders in meaningful and productive work that gives them a sense of accomplishment about each and every craft that they work with. Age Scotland reports that 84 per cent of shedders have gained a sense of achievement as a result of projects in their shed that they have been involved in. It is obvious that the sheds play a vital and valued role in the lives of their members.

Fife is proud to be home to multiple men's sheds, including Kennoway Community Shed, which in 2018 was announced as being the largest men's shed in Scotland. My constituency is home to the Kirkcaldy and District Men's Shed, whose founders I had the pleasure of helping to get the shed set up and running and acquire the necessary funds. Last Monday, I had the opportunity to visit the shed, where I met members who showed me the quality and detail of wood pieces, paintings and other works that they had produced. I got to witness first hand the positive impact of the shed on my community through my conversations with those men and women.

It is with much sadness that I say that, last week, the Kirkcaldy and District Men's Shed was the victim of a robbery in which its equipment, tools and electric generators were stolen.

Currently, the shedders do not have the heat, equipment or electricity that they need to craft their masterpieces. Now, more than ever, that shed needs the support of the community—especially the business community—to help build it up again and replace the items that were stolen.

The impact of men's sheds reaches far beyond those who are helped to the rest of the community by promoting hospitality, citizenship and civic engagement and creating a more unified and engaged society. Men's sheds are not only workshops where members can work on projects, crafts or repairs; they are active community hubs in which members can showcase their handiwork, teach an old skill to a fellow shedder or learn a new one, socialise with old friends or meet new ones, gain confidence, boost their self-esteem, and improve both physical and mental health.

For those reasons, it is no wonder that 93 per cent of shedders report feeling at home in their local sheds. Men's sheds are homes that are built on a foundation of camaraderie and compassion, supported by a network of community and painted with a promise that members will live healthier, happier and more connected lives.

13:38

- [Finlay Carson \(Galloway and West Dumfries\) \(Con\):](#)

I thank Christine Grahame for bringing the debate to the chamber. I welcome the opportunity to speak on the topic of men's sheds, because I am very much a supporter of their creation and expansion across the country.

In my constituency of Galloway and West Dumfries, men's sheds operate in Dalbeattie, Balmaclellan and Stoneymuir. As others have mentioned, men's sheds are hugely beneficial in a number of ways to the communities we represent. As we have heard, social isolation is difficult to tackle anywhere in the country, but there are additional barriers to overcome in rural communities, where people often struggle to integrate into social situations, simply because the resources are not there to deliver activities that suit their needs.

However, having paid a visit to the award-winning men's shed in Dalbeattie last year—I am scheduled to go again this Easter—I have seen the hugely positive role that men's sheds can play in creating friendships and providing men with activities that result in the benefits that are derived from working on projects with an identifiable goal. That goal might involve learning a new skill, using existing skills to create something new or passing skills on to others. It is important that these community organisations know that their contribution to society is very much welcomed and that support will be there for them. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has provided £75,000 to the SMSA to provide practical support and guidance to existing and new sheds that have health and safety and organisational issues.

I know that the debate is largely about celebrating men's sheds. However, having listened closely to local organisations in recent weeks and to people in Dalbeattie, it is fair to say that some shedders have concerns about the potential for the SMSA to overly influence the future direction of men's sheds. We must never forget the reason why we have so many men's sheds and why they work so well at the moment, which is because they are self-sufficient and are completely run by the shedders themselves. They are unique, bespoke projects focusing on the priorities in their local communities. A few weeks ago, I raised those concerns in the chamber with Christina McKelvie. I hope that she remains committed to working closely with MSPs who, like me, have a shared interest in promoting and encouraging new men's sheds, and I welcome her positive responses to my questions.

As Christine Grahame has said, the last thing that the men's shed operation needs is a one-size-fits-all approach that is burdened by red tape. Although I have no doubt that all such interventions are well intended, shedders do not need potentially restrictive good practice obligations placed on them by the Scottish Government or anyone else, and they should not need to meet them in order to secure funding and support, whether that comes from the Government or other funding bodies. Although there is a recognition that support should be given to individual sheds to help with policies on areas such as insurance, health and safety and fire risks, they should not have to operate to a standard blueprint that is based on another shed in a completely different part of Scotland.

I welcome Glasgow Caledonian University's three-year project, funded by the Big Lottery, which is looking into the developmental challenges of men's sheds in Scotland and the health and wellbeing impacts of shed activities. However, it is concerning that the research involves analysis of only six sheds across Scotland out of the 170 that are in operation, and that the research appears to be looking at only the sheds that have been established successfully rather than including those that, for whatever reason, have not been successful. That is important, because we need to learn the lessons from those that have failed. Part of ensuring the success of new projects will involve being aware of mistakes that others have made. I hope that, over the next three years, the project's research will not be limited to a mere six successful sheds.

I thank men's shed organisations across the country and give them my full backing. However, I think that it is only right that we have an open and honest discussion about the future direction of the SMSA and ensure that we all work together to address the concerns that have been raised. Like other men's sheds, through being self-sufficient, the Dalbeattie Men's Shed has grown to more than 50 members, and we do not want to stifle that growth by adding additional red tape around funding. I very much look forward to my upcoming visit to the Dalbeattie Men's Shed, and I know that its members are taking a keen interest in today's debate.

Men's sheds have come a long way since they started 14 years ago. Indeed, as we have already heard, the concept has travelled across the world. I hope that we continue to build on their success, especially in rural communities, where they have been a great social and wellbeing focus point for many people.

13:43

- [The Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government \(Aileen Campbell\):](#)

This has been quite a debate, with images of Iain Gray, Bruce Crawford and Ken Hughes in cargo shorts fresh in our minds—perhaps for the benefit of us all, they should find a shed to hide in—as well as discussions of Christine Grahame's love life. I was not quite prepared for those topics.

I thank Christine Grahame for bringing the Scottish men's sheds movement to the attention of Parliament. As other members have done, I welcome the Borders shedders to the gallery.

It is important and right that we recognise the importance of the men's sheds initiative, which transcends health and wellbeing and provides many wider community benefits. Christine Grahame was right to point out that men's sheds are not new. The movement started in Australia, and has roots way back in the 1980s. They were originally set up to advise on and improve men's overall health. Some have since expanded their remit to include anyone, regardless of age or gender.

Here in Scotland, men's sheds were established a little later: by 2013, we had five pioneering sheds. Today their number is close to 170, which is a massive jump in a short space of time. That has, in no small part, been down to the hard work and generosity of the sheds themselves, and has been

helped by the expert support that is provided by the Scottish Men's Sheds Association, which the Scottish Government works closely with and funds. It has been lovely to hear about the growth of the movement, as it has been articulated through the wonderfully varied and diverse sheds in constituencies across Scotland. Rachael Hamilton pointed out that diversity in her remarks.

The men's sheds in Kennoway in Fife, Aberdeenshire, Orkney, Dumfries and Galloway, and Stirlingshire for example, are all doing very different things and responding to their local communities. I am, however, vexed to have heard about examples of problems from Elaine Smith and David Torrance.

Nonetheless, we know that men's sheds have proven positive effects on the physical and mental health of those who attend them. They also benefit their wider communities in the wide range of ways that we have heard about today, such as in building buddy benches for primary schools, making planters for hospitals, and providing the wider community with educational classes in operating tools or on craft projects.

However, men's sheds are not just workshops. They can also be places to practise printing, to try out arts and crafts and to play pool, cards or darts, or they can be simply places where people can drop in for a cuppie and a blether.

Like other members, I am a supporter of men's sheds. In December, I visited the mobile men's shed that is run by South Lanarkshire Council, while it was at Carluke. That innovative project involved the transformation of a council vehicle—I think that it was formerly a mobile library—into a mobile men's shed. It regularly visits communities throughout Lanarkshire. It brings the men's shed to the communities, and it encourages and inspires communities to start their own shed. It is a great example of partnership working to support communities, so I thank Christine Calder and Paul Creechan at South Lanarkshire Council for getting behind that innovative project.

Members have also acknowledged that men can be at risk of social isolation and loneliness, particularly during key life transitions such retirement or the loss of a partner. In our recently published "A Connected Scotland", which is the national strategy for tackling social isolation and building stronger social connections, we recognised the important role of men's sheds, where people—typically older men, but often younger men and women, too—meet regularly for company and camaraderie.

Men's sheds are a really good example of community-led projects that help to foster relationships and contribute to building resilient communities. The positive mental and physical health benefits are backed up by strong evidence, so we will continue to work with our partners to develop this important health intervention nationally, including providing support to the Scottish Men's Sheds Association.

Although I am responding on behalf of the Scottish Government and men's sheds technically fall within my portfolio, the truth is that many Government ministers could be standing here and responding to the debate, such is the reach and impact of men's sheds across many portfolio areas. That is why it is important that we take what they do seriously. The seriousness of what is delivered by men's sheds was pointed out by Iain Gray.

What evidence do we have here in Scotland to support the growth of men's sheds? Our evidence base is growing rapidly and corroborates the established international evidence on men's sheds. Men's sheds provide positive views of ageing and later life, as is referenced in the "The Shed Effect: Stories from Shedders in Scotland" study that was carried out by Age Scotland and funded by the

Scottish Government. That report highlights that 76 per cent of those who were surveyed agreed that their physical health improved as a result of being involved in a shed, and 79 per cent felt that their mental health had improved as a result of involvement in a shed.

Those benefits are also felt in the wider community, through savings to our health and social care systems. As Mark McDonald pointed out, research that was carried out in Westhill by the Scottish Men's Sheds Association highlighted that, for every £1 that was spent through Westhill Men's Shed, there was a return of £9.34 in health and social care and community learning outcomes. That is a social return on investment that no one can ignore.

Moving forward, we know that it is not just a case of supporting the growth of the movement and creating new sheds. We understand that, as sheds establish themselves, their needs can change and they need support with sustainability. The Scottish Government is working closely with individual sheds on issues including achieving sustainability, and we have fed into the three-year sheds for sustainable development project, which Finlay Carson spoke about and is led by Dr Danielle Kelly of Glasgow Caledonian University. That important study is exploring the health and wellbeing impacts of shed activities on users of sheds, and will identify the key development challenges that sheds face. That will enable the Scottish Government and our partners to remain ahead of those challenges, and it will inform us on how best to respond.

I emphasise to Finlay Carson that none of this is about attempting to provide a blueprint for how men's sheds should operate. We want to support the growth of men's sheds, while recognising that they are community-led and very diverse grass-roots initiatives. That is why we want to support their sustainability as well as we can.

- [Emma Harper:](#)

Does the minister acknowledge that the funding mechanisms in Scotland, through the Scottish Men's Sheds Association, are different from Ireland's and from the UK Men's Sheds Association?

- [Aileen Campbell:](#)

Absolutely. Men's sheds reach into many policy areas, which provides an incredible opportunity to explore different funding streams. We provide core funding of £75,000 to the Scottish Men's Sheds Association. We are the only Government in the world that provides strategic national support in that way. We therefore view our role in supporting men's sheds growth incredibly seriously.

I take on board the points about premises and finding premises, which have been well made. In fact, the men's shed in Biggar, which is in my constituency, is currently looking for a home, and I know how challenging that has been for it. Those points probably require us to work out how we can provide much more support to address the practical issues that men's sheds face and the funding issues that others have raised.

To conclude, I think that we all agree that men's sheds are brilliant things. They are safe places in the hearts of our communities throughout Scotland, from Shetland to the Borders, that bring people together and enable people to support each other through friendship and trust. They are simple but impactful, and they tackle serious issues that vex Government and society, including wellbeing, mental health and loneliness, to name but a few.

Getting behind the men's sheds movement is therefore in all our interests. That does not mean the Government alone; a partnership approach will be required. I am grateful for the support that the

Government receives from Age Scotland, the Scottish Men's Sheds Association and Glasgow Caledonian University, to name but a few organisations.

We can go further. I urge all our partners—local authorities, the third sector, the NHS and community workers—to get behind sheds so that we can all together play a role in developing and supporting that important initiative. Social prescribing is particularly important: with an ageing population, it is absolutely in all our interests. These simple projects help us to create the connected and resilient communities that contribute to the betterment and wellbeing of our country.

Many members have mentioned Ken Hughes. I acknowledge his role—not in cargo shorts—and his contribution to Parliament over a number of years, and wish him well in retirement. I hope that he finds a good shed near him when he retires.

- [The Deputy Presiding Officer:](#)

That concludes the debate. The meeting is now suspended until half past 2. If people in the gallery wish to show their appreciation, I am happy for them to do so. [*Applause.*]

13:53 Meeting suspended.