



Report for MENZSHED New Zealand

Researching the health and wellbeing impact of Men's Sheds on their members in New Zealand

A research study by Emeritus Professor Edwina Pio ONZM

Funded by The Selwyn Foundation

9 June 2025



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Front/back cover photos courtesy of the Hibiscus Men's Shed

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Foreword by Denise Cosgrove, Chief Executive, The Selwyn Foundation

The Selwyn Foundation was delighted to support Emeritus Professor Edwina Pio's new research into the health and wellbeing impact of Men's Sheds on their members in New Zealand. This study provides important Aotearoa-specific evidence of the benefits that Men's Sheds offer and highlights how we, as a nation, can strengthen public health, social and ageing strategies by investing in proven, community-based interventions that genuinely improve men's health and wellbeing.



Too often, men's health does not receive the attention it deserves. Retired males, in particular, are among the least likely to engage with the health system, yet the statistics show they experience poorer health outcomes than women – suicide rates among men are nearly three times higher, with men over the age of 65 significantly affected.

Men's Sheds offer a grassroots, community-based solution to these challenges. As this study shows, they provide a lifeline – a place of camaraderie, shared purpose, social connection and life-long learning. For many men, the Shed is more than just a workshop – it's a place where they can regain a sense of identity, purpose and belonging. The peer support and companionship they find there not only improve their own mental wellbeing but can also have positive ripple effects for their families/whānau and wider communities.

Beyond friendship, purpose and connection, Sheds are increasingly taking a proactive role in health promotion. Men's Health Expos hosted by Sheds around the country have seen significant numbers of health checks completed; in some cases, life-threatening conditions have been identified which have needed urgent attention, with lives potentially saved as a result. That's why, in addition to supporting this new research, The Selwyn Foundation is proud to partner with MENZSHED New Zealand to bring more such events to Men's Sheds across the country as part of our commitment to promoting wellbeing through interventions that are community-based and tailored to the real needs and lives of older people.

Improving men's health requires a gender-sensitive, holistic approach, and Men's Sheds can play a vital role in this. With greater support from public and private sectors and private individuals alike – through access to land, buildings and sustainable funding – they could reach more men and so deliver even greater wellbeing benefits.

As a champion of initiatives that enable older New Zealanders to age with dignity and respect in their own communities, The Selwyn Foundation commends this research to all those seeking to improve the lives of vulnerable older people, and of older men especially. We hope that it encourages a renewed focus on supporting the Men's Shed movement, so that many more men can experience the life-changing benefits of being part of this close-knit community.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Denise Cosgrove', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Denise Cosgrove

6 June 2025

Executive Summary

This research investigates the significant role that Men's Sheds play in enhancing the health and wellbeing of older men (primarily 65+) across Aotearoa New Zealand. As the country faces a rapidly ageing population and a growing need for inclusive, age-friendly spaces, this report evaluates how Men's Sheds provide a critical community-based intervention that alleviates loneliness, supports mental and physical health, and fosters social inclusion and lifelong learning.

Context and purpose

Men's health and wellbeing often receive insufficient attention in public health strategies. This issue is compounded by the challenges older men face post-retirement, such as loneliness, depression, and loss of purpose. Men's Sheds offer a unique, male-friendly environment for shared activities, skills exchange, and peer support. MENZSHED New Zealand, a registered charity, supports over 130 Sheds nationwide. This study, modelled on a UK framework, aims to provide New Zealand-specific evidence of the Sheds' impact on members' wellbeing and inform social and health policy.

Methodology

The research used a mixed-methods approach conducted between November 2024 and March 2025. It included:

- Surveys (n=68) from four Sheds.
- Focus groups (n=38 participants) in Boomer Shed Manurewa, Kerikeri, Masterton, and Te Awamutu.
- Interviews with Shed managers and committee members.

Quantitative data employed the UCLA three-item loneliness scale, comparing pre- and post-membership experiences. Qualitative data explored motivations for joining, activities undertaken, and perceived benefits.

Key Findings

Loneliness and Mental Health:

- A significant reduction in loneliness was reported after joining a Shed.
- Before joining, 29 men scored high on loneliness (score ≥ 5); after joining, only 8 did.
- Qualitative feedback confirmed Sheds as vital for social connection and mental resilience.

Reasons for Joining and Staying:

- Men cited bereavement, retirement, and a desire for companionship as motivators.
- Many described the Shed as "a reason to get up in the morning" and a source of friendship and routine.

Activities and Skills:

- Activities included woodworking, metalworking, cooking, community projects, and mentorship.
- Sheds also functioned as informal repair shops and hosted intergenerational and school-linked programs.

Health and Wellbeing:

- Participants reported improved emotional and physical health.
- Men felt a sense of belonging and purpose, with many describing the Shed as “a second family.”

Managerial Role:

- Effective leadership was key to Shed success.
- Managers often worked unpaid and played a central role in member engagement and community outreach.
- Paid managerial positions are recommended for sustainability.

Future Opportunities:

- Future Sheds could evolve to incorporate new technologies (e.g. 3D printing) and more diverse memberships.
- Some Sheds are already engaging migrants and refugees, suggesting a path for broader inclusion.

Recommendations

1. **Increase Funding:** Sustainable financial support is essential for operations, including paid managers.
2. **Promote Diversity:** Encourage participation from underrepresented groups (e.g. Māori, Pasifika, white-collar retirees).
3. **Policy Integration:** Incorporate Men’s Sheds into national health, social, and ageing strategies as proven community-based interventions.
4. **Support Research Expansion:** Broader research across more Sheds will further validate the Sheds’ societal and economic value.

Conclusion

Men’s Sheds are a quiet yet powerful force for good in New Zealand society. They mitigate loneliness, foster community, and improve health outcomes for older men. This research clearly demonstrates the transformative impact of these spaces, underlining their importance in creating a healthier, more connected and age-friendly Aotearoa.

1. Introduction and Context

1.1 Globally people are living longer and the longevity effect presents opportunities for a fulfilling later life.¹ When individuals retire, there may be a fair amount of disruption in their lives² as there is need to (re)calibrate and (re)construct one's time, money, relationships and wellbeing.³ Does this longevity revolution mean a more meaningful and healthy life with enhanced opportunities? Or does this mean that the life course after 65+ years descends into depression, loneliness, alcoholism, malnutrition, social isolation and health degeneration?⁴ Or is this a time for the creation of new configurations in how spaces and places are created which demonstrate ongoing wellbeing and productive activities?

1.2 Generally, males seem to be less likely to be involved in behaviours that facilitate their health and wellbeing, often due to a lack of male-oriented strategies regarding health in communicating with men.⁵ Men's health has often been neglected by national and global organisations, with many key health outcomes poorer for men than women, under-utilisation of primary care services and a lower life expectancy compared to women.⁶

1.3 Men's Sheds are part of the preventive measures for male-specific interventions.⁷ Men's Sheds are community-based organisations which offer men, generally 65+ the opportunity to engage in various constructive activities such as the development of new interests and friendships in workshop type spaces for meaningful and supportive social interaction, in an all-male social support network with shared community projects.⁸ Within a Shed structure, they provide men an opportunity for lifelong learning, advice, sharing of skills, knowledge transference among peers, camaraderie, emotional support, the possibilities of intergenerational mentoring, transformation of health and wellbeing and community engagement.⁹ Activities in the Men's Shed may include metalwork, carpentry, gardening, art, health screening and outings.¹⁰

¹ Withnall, 2023

² Anstiss, 2016

³ Pio, 2024, Pio, 2025

⁴ O'Donnell & Richardson 2020

⁵ Albrecht, Foetttinger & Bammann, 2021

⁶ Baker, 2018; Moore, 2015; Whitley, 2018

⁷ Filder, Cass, Wallner & Owen, 2010; Perry, 2024; Sunderland, 2013

⁸ Filder, Cass, Wallner & Owen, 2010; Heinz, 2024; Xiao, H., et al. 2024

⁹ Golding, 2023; Kelly & Steiner, 2021.

¹⁰ Golding & Foley, 2021

1.4 Men are not a monolithic group, and their identities are complex with differing masculinity scripts.¹¹ Ageing well can be variable based on sociodemographic aspects and diverse dimensions such as a mix of ages, ethnicities, geographical locations, faith, education and health conditions.¹² Improving men’s health with gender sensitivity in how health is delivered and designed through a whole-system approach, can contribute to better population health and financial savings for health systems and the economy.¹³

1.5 MENZSHED New Zealand Inc is a registered charity (CC49919) that exists primarily for the mutual benefit, success, and support of member Sheds and to facilitate public access to those Sheds.¹⁴ As of March 2025, there are 136 Sheds open across New Zealand.¹⁵ The MENZSHED NZ website notes that a Men’s Shed “brings men together in one community space to share their skills, have a laugh, and work on practical tasks individually (personal projects) or as a group (for the Shed or community)... Men’s Sheds are an ideal place for health professionals to gain access to men who may otherwise not take as much care of themselves as they could, and many Sheds invite them to give informational talks and basic health checks at the Shed in the men’s own environment where they feel the informality makes for a more relaxed atmosphere”.¹⁶ For example, one of the Sheds clearly states “In the community. For the community.” This Shed further goes on to state “Where men can be men, doing stuff shoulder to shoulder, creating, inventing, yarning, sharing & learning in the name of men’s health and wellbeing.”¹⁷



Te Awamutu Community Menz Shed

¹¹ Hayes & Williamson, 2007; MacKenzie, Roger, & Urquhart, 2017.

¹² Baker, 2018

¹³ Baker, 2018; Gross et al., 2016; Wilson, 2013

¹⁴ <https://menzShed.org.nz/>

¹⁵ MenzShed, 2025a

¹⁶ <https://menzShed.org.nz/about-us/what-is-a-Shed/>; MenzShed NZ, 2025b

¹⁷ Business card of Coordinator/Manager John Bush from Masterton MenzShed

1.6 Life expectancy at birth for men is 80 years and for women 83.5 years in New Zealand.¹⁸ The number of people aged 65+ living in New Zealand is likely to hit 1 million by 2028, with about 80 people a day increasing in the 65+ year category. Population projections show that while there are currently about 16.6% of the population aged 65+, this number will continue to increase over the next 50 years.¹⁹ The number of older people aged 85+ is also expected to increase substantially from 1.8% in 2023 to 4.7% by 2048²⁰. The number of people in these older ages could reach 1.3 million around 2040, and 1.5 million by the 2050s.²¹ Older people may be prone to loneliness, depression, grief over the passing of loved ones, chronic illness and suicide.²²

1.7 Regarding suicide, in the 2023/4 financial year, there were 15.9 per 100,000 males suspected of self-inflicted death as compared to 6.4 per 100,000 females.²³ It is worth noting that between 1996 and 2016, the rate for rural suicides decreased, but also of note is that individuals between 80-84 have the highest suicide rates.²⁴ Factors which decreased suicide included good relationships and secure housing, whereas those that increased the risk of suicide included bereavement and isolation.²⁵ A draft suicide prevention action plan for 2025-2029²⁶ proposes some critical actions informed by research, evidence and available data and they include the importance of strengthening focus on prevention and early intervention. This plan notes that males have approximately 2.5 times higher rates of suicide than females and in rural communities, the rates of suicide are approximately 40% higher for males than those living in urban areas. Suicide prevention is a key area where the Sheds serve as supports for prevention and postvention or support after suicide. Additionally, the Sheds based on their support to older men, also prevent suicide callouts which take a toll on paramedics and other community members.²⁷

¹⁸ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/topics/life-expectancy>

¹⁹ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/one-million-people-aged-65-by-2028/>

²⁰ <https://www.ehinz.ac.nz/indicators/population-vulnerability/age-profile/>

²¹ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/one-million-people-aged-65-by-2028/>

²² <https://www.ncoa.org/article/suicide-and-older-adults-what-you-should-know/>

²³ <https://www.tewhatauora.govt.nz/for-health-professionals/data-and-statistics/suicide/data-web-tool#:~:text=In%20the%202023%2F24%20financial%20year%2C%20the%20rate%20of%20suspected,was%206.4%20per%20100%2C000%20females.>

²⁴ <https://mentalhealth.org.nz/suicide-prevention/statistics-on-suicide-in-new-zealand>

²⁵ <https://www.parliament.nz/media/9014/suicide-in-nz-snapshot-march-2022.pdf>

²⁶ <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/2024-09/Suicide%20Prevention%20Action%20Plan%20Consultation.v2.pdf>

²⁷ <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/suicide-callouts-taking-toll-on-paramedics-university-of-otago-researcher-finds/AW46PUFD2BHWLHCKEH5PSEA5DI/>

- 1.8 The Ministry for Social Development (MSD) website has information for seniors/Ko ngā Kaumātua and the various services available, such as pensions, SuperGold card, older workers employment action plan although this is for those 50+, older people experiencing vulnerability and multiple disadvantage.²⁸ The Office for Seniors Te Tari Kaumātua works to improve the lives of older people across New Zealand so that they feel valued and able to participate²⁹ as laid out in The Better later life strategy - He Oranga Kaumātua 2019 to 2034.³⁰
- 1.9 This report seeks to provide evidence to illustrate the health and wellbeing benefits of Men's Sheds in New Zealand. The overarching research question is: What is the impact of a Men's Shed on the health and wellbeing of its members in Aotearoa New Zealand? This research, through recent evidence, illuminates how Men's Sheds in Aotearoa New Zealand connect with older men to provide health and wellbeing. The report braids a significant contemporary strand to enrich research on age-friendly places and spaces with positive ageing.
- 1.10 There are numerous definitions of the nebulous and multifaceted term wellbeing, though there is no international consensus on a definition.³¹ Wellbeing, a positive noun with positive attributions, encompasses aspects such as thriving, flourishing, wellness, happiness, purpose and meaning in life, wisdom, resilience, positive physical and mental health, positive emotions and moods.³² Hence, this construct of wellbeing cannot be captured through a single dimension, though it broadly involves dimensions linked to economic, emotional, physical and spiritual facets.³³
- 1.11 This research addresses the who, how, what, why, when and where of the mechanisms and delivery of multiple processes in Men's Sheds and how they impact the health and wellbeing of individuals who are members of a Men's Shed. This research, in urban and rural locations of Aotearoa New Zealand, explores the potential and pathways for inclusive environments, reduction of loneliness and isolation while optimising health and wellbeing outcomes. The aim is to emphasise the importance of incorporating the benefits of Men's Sheds as part of the suite of social and health policies to navigate life after 65+, the challenges associated with role transition and the need to navigate wellbeing.

²⁸ <https://www.msd.govt.nz/what-we-can-do/seniorcitizens/index.html>

²⁹ <https://www.officeforseniors.govt.nz/>

³⁰ <https://www.officeforseniors.govt.nz/better-later-life-strategy>

³¹ Bautista et al., 2023

³² Golding, 2023 Simons, & Baldwin, 2021

³³ Bautista et al., 2023

- 1.12 In tune with the funder's request, this report has been modelled on the UK report by Louise Starks titled 'Researching the value and impact of Men's Sheds on their members'.³⁴

2. Research Design and Participant Profile

- 2.1 This research consisted of a survey, interviews with board/committee members from Men's Sheds and focus groups with men who are members of Men's Sheds. Men's Sheds were contacted requesting their help to engage in this research. The researcher worked through the MENZSHED NZ Chairman and his contacts with various Sheds. The survey was sent out to six Sheds, out of which four responded with completed surveys. The total number of surveys completed was 68. Five committee/board members participated in this research. Focus groups were conducted in four Sheds across New Zealand. In total, 38 members participated in the focus groups. The four managers were also part of the research with some contributing as part of the focus group, or meeting separately to share their insights on the Shed. The qualitative research took approximately 22 hours. No names are mentioned regarding the focus groups and committee/board members' responses. All survey responses were anonymised. The research was carried out from November 2024 to March 2025. Permission of the Shed members was sought to take the photographs which are included in this report.
- 2.2 The overarching research question was: What is the impact of a Men's Shed on the health and wellbeing of its members in New Zealand?

³⁴ Starks, 2023



Members of Masterton Men's Shed (with Emeritus Professor Pio)

2.3 The interview and focus group guide consisted of the following questions:

- a. Why did you decide to join the Shed? (Think about what you were thinking and feeling at the time and what attracted you to become a member of the Shed.)
- b. What types of things have you done since becoming a member (e.g. woodwork or metal work or mending things)? What have you made?
- c. How do you feel you have benefited from being a part of your Shed? (Think of friends you have made, a sense of companionship, being part of a community, and developing a new hobby.)
- d. How has being a member of the Shed impacted your health?
- e. What makes the Shed successful?
- f. How can the Shed be improved?

2.4 The four Sheds that participated in the focus groups were the Boomer Shed Manurewa³⁵, Kerikeri Mens Shed³⁶, Masterton (formerly Henley) Mens Shed³⁷ and Te Awamutu Community Shed³⁸.

2.5 The survey consisted of three questions on loneliness to understand the men's perspectives on how the Shed had impacted them. The questions utilised were from the Stark Report³⁹ which was based on the University of California Los Angeles three-item loneliness scale. The questions related to Before and After joining the Shed:

³⁵ <https://menzShed.org.nz/manurewa/>

³⁶ <https://menzShed.org.nz/kerikeri/>

³⁷ <https://henleymenzShed.kiwi.nz/>

³⁸ <https://menzShed.org.nz/te-awamutu/>

³⁹ Starks, 2023

- a. How often did you feel you lacked companionship?
- b. How often did you feel left out of things?
- c. How often did you feel isolated from others?

Responses were recorded as Never/Hardly ever, Sometimes and Often. The responses were scored from 1 (Never/Hardly ever), 2 (Some of the time) or 3 (Often).

2.6 The ethnicity of most men (99.5%) who took part in this research was New Zealand European/Kiwi/New Zealander. The age range was 64 to 97 years, with the majority being between 70 and 80+ years. Most of the men were married/in a relationship/lived with children (about 80%) while a few lived alone.

2.7 The work history of the men: pre-retirement consisted of a range of jobs/sectors. These included valuer, truck driver, horticultural work, project manager in construction, forces- avionics, fertilizer works, journalist, loss adjuster, fencing, service and parts manager, marketing director, adult educator, training consultant, overseer, grocer, floor layer, farmer, plumber, landscape gardener, funeral director, electrician, panel beater, marine engineer, cabinet maker, IT, school teacher, bricklayer, global Fortune 500 consultant, counsellor, sheep and beef farmer, butcher, scientist, probation service and orchardist.

2.8 The normal attendance at their Men's Shed for the majority of men consisted of three times a week, with some attending daily and others once a week or once a fortnight.

2.9 The majority of men had been with the Shed for 1-5 years, closely followed by those who had been members for 6-10 years.

2.10 This research has focused on just four Sheds for both the qualitative and quantitative information. However, it is important to note that there are 100+ Sheds across New Zealand and 4,000+ members. Further research into the benefits of Men's Sheds and the resources that can be provided to them by the Government and other organisations and agencies would yield wonderful benefits for the men, their families, society and the nation.



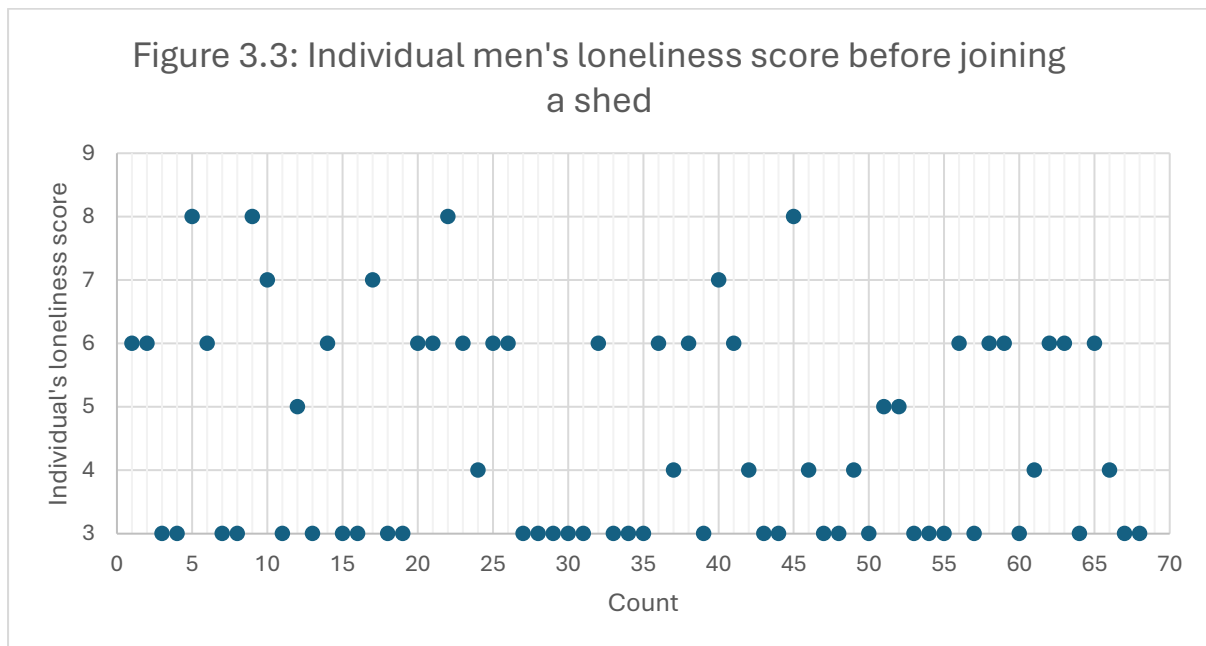
Te Awamutu Community Menz Shed (focus group interview with Emeritus Professor Pio)

3. Key Findings

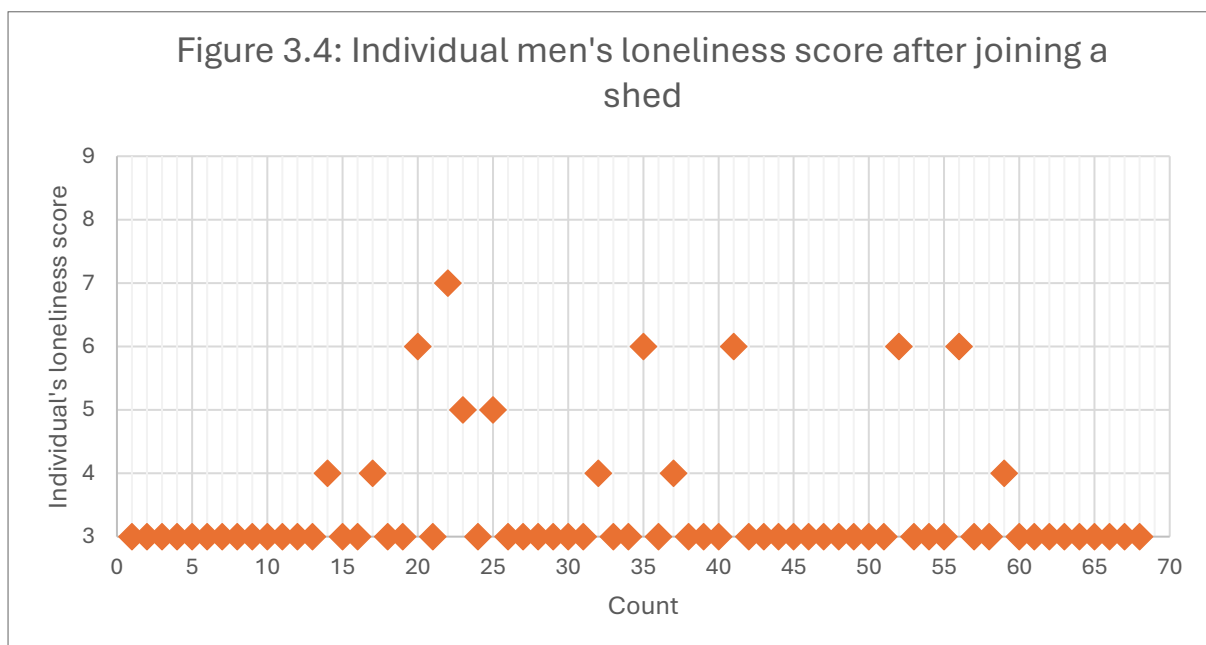
3.1 This report provides both quantitative and qualitative findings.

3.2 The quantitative findings can be viewed in the charts and table below. A total of 68 men responded to the survey.

3.3 Individual men's loneliness scores BEFORE joining a Shed



3.4 Individual men's loneliness scores AFTER joining a Shed



3.5 Figures 3.3 and 3.4 present information on loneliness before and after joining the Shed. However, since the men scored themselves, there is room for positive/negative perspectives and this must be considered when interpreting the charts. Yet, these changes in loneliness were clearly in evidence during the Shed visits, and this is reinforced by the qualitative findings. The loneliness score before and after joining the Shed based on total scores is displayed in Table 3.6. A low score indicates less loneliness, and a high score indicates more loneliness.

Table 3.6 Loneliness scores

BEFORE	SCORE	AFTER
0	9 (<i>maximum</i>)	0
4	8	0
3	7	1
19	6	5
3	5	2
17	4	5
32	3 (<i>minimum</i>)	55

3.6 The table and charts indicate the individual men's loneliness scores before and after joining the Shed. 29 men scored 5 and higher before joining the Shed. Whereas only 8 scored 5 and higher after joining the Shed. 4 men rated themselves 8 before joining and no men rated themselves 8 after joining the Shed. 49 men were on 4 and 3 before joining the Shed, and 60 men were on 4 and 3 after joining the Shed. The survey findings clearly point towards decreased loneliness after joining the Shed.

3.7 The qualitative findings generated from the interviews and focus groups are presented in three clusters:

- why people decided to join a Shed and why they stay
- activities and skills learned while in the Shed
- the benefits of being a Shed member.

These findings are presented through men's quotes (*italicised*), to provide an authentic flavour of how the men experience the Sheds.



Hibiscus Men's Shed

3.8 Key findings on why people decided to join a Shed and why they stay

Several of the men find that after retirement, or if a loved one passes away, there is a lot of loneliness in this time of life and, through Men's Sheds or in community groups, they find a sense of companionship through other people which helps their mental health. Their wellbeing improves, it gives them a sense of value and homeliness, a purpose and opportunities for giving back to the community. This quote exemplifies the role of Sheds: *"The Men's Shed helps them establish themselves with a shared group of people who are very positive minded...they have seen the downside, and they want to uplift other people and get them to the point where they are at themselves – so sharing success."*

- To have a reason to get up in the morning
- To meet other people and socialise
- To contribute to a sense of community
- To have a bit of banter and a chat about all kinds of things.

3.8.1 To have a reason to get up in the morning

"Being part of the Shed gives me a reason to get up in the morning...I avoid loneliness."

"My wife sent me here – there is a fine print line in the marriage certificate – obey her."

"We are happier, there is companionship...likeminded people, you can ask anyone anything."

"A sense of purpose of a different kind when coming to the Shed...I wasn't conscious that I was lonely, but when I arrived, I discovered there was fraternity and security and it's a lovely group of men."

"It's a lot cheaper than spending your time in the pub."

“And I joined because I don’t want to be like some people who watch TV and do puzzles but then can hardly walk and they start having alcohol in the evening and then it becomes earlier and then it’s in the afternoon...and I did not want to be like that, so I came along to the Shed.”

3.8.2 To meet other people and socialise

“One of the main reasons is for companionship and finding a space where people have similar interests, the same objectives, the same hobbies, same crafts, finding people that have those same passions and to seek companionship.”

“We join for morning tea and scones!”

“We are very lucky to have this place. My way of relaxing is I’m either mucking about here or I’m mucking about in my own Shed. I don’t sit and watch telly, I don’t like it. By coming here, I keep myself going.”

“Listening to each other, having empathy and being with someone who is consistently there...listening and being able to share about various situations is a big drawcard for the men...self-esteem, mental health.”

“Keeping the brain active...camaraderie...enjoy being here.”

“Because we are here there is no underfoot syndrome at home.”

3.8.3 To contribute to a sense of community

“We help the community...it’s the people that make the Shed successful – its members.”

“At the pub I could meet people, but here we do it without the medium of alcohol...it’s clear that we do not want alcohol in the Shed, except for Christmas parties... and that is the consensus...we have a very good reputation in the community, and we don’t want to spoil it or risk it.”

“There is no one here that would not help if someone had a bad accident or something like that. Everybody here would be concerned because they’re all concerned people. And if somebody here has a house which burns down – we will be around to help, and we would support them. This is a very, very supportive community and I’m very thankful to be part of it. It’s good to give back to your community and help build it. And everybody here gives to the community, and they know about it, they feel it in their hearts, and you know...”

“People in the community have got to know about the Men’s Shed and its pretty much community driven...people come here and say can you fix this? And if the community says they need something, it’s done – we are community driven.”

3.8.4 To have a bit of banter and chat about all kinds of things

“I’m a real fan of this place...just the banter between the guys and the work we do and learning new skills that I did not have before...”

“There is a stereotype out there that men do not talk but when we are together as men, you realise a lot of people are in the same health situation as you and that encourages people to talk. I have no qualms personally to share about myself with some of the men here with whom I am quite close.”

“We come for the company, and we are all mature and there are no politics and bickering and strategizing with competition. We explore options and are user driven and the manager welcomes people and shows them around and I enjoy the camaraderie, and the men’s talk. You can sit around and when we are shoulder to shoulder in the Shed, we learn...for example kids on bikes programme...this is the best place to be.”

3.9 Key findings on activities and skills learned while in the Shed

Activities include holiday programmes for children, garden tool maintenance, woodwork, metal work, growing food for the food bank, vouchers, apparel with the Shed logo for sale, organising events, writing memoirs, safety, health and wellbeing and serving as a repair shop. A Shed might focus on personal projects and community projects. Community projects can include a sensory mural for blind and low vision tamariki which has been a labour of love by one Shed with nearly two years of dedicated work; a bike hub; gorgeous planter boxes for a local kindergarten and balance bikes. Pecuniary gain is not the purpose of the Shed. Health, wellbeing and user-driven activities are often the driving forces.

- Learning woodwork and metal work
- Learning cooking
- Repair shop activities
- School/community programmes
- Socialising outside the Shed.

3.9.1 Learning woodworking and metal work

A 90+ man makes toy wooden cars and wooden ducks on wheels. Other men are involved in turning wood bowls, replacing a 100-year-old church steeple, making walking sticks, benches for the outdoors, signs for walkways, computer and phone help, repairing chairs, tables, doors, Christmas reindeers, pens and more.

“We all have experience and our wealth of knowledge when combined means that we can be creative and do things differently and the place is really fairly comfortable and easy going...it doesn’t matter whether it’s a work issue or a medical issue...for some it’s friendship and chopping boards...we use a lot of recycled wood.”

“I think all of us get fascinated by the variety of things that other people are doing, things that are well outside our normal scope. I mean, like a carving. You know, that's something that for me was something quite different to what I'm used to because I'm used to dealing with precision as for example with metal working. The artistic side of it is something that I've always admired and always wanted to do. And, if you see somebody doing something that looks dangerous or wrong you tell them to stop without freaking them out.”



Te Awamutu Community Menz Shed

3.9.2 Learning cooking

And the manager has organised cooking classes *“He brought in chefs to teach us, so if our wife passes on before us, we are not just living on toast, egg and baked beans!”*

One man said *“We must run cooking classes as quite a few men are running solo as they have lost their partners or wives. And they have no idea how to boil an egg...I can teach them though I am not a chef, how to do a little roast with some steamed veggies and a decent gravy and a pot of soup for winter days... and some men do not know how to boil a jug!”*

3.9.3 Repair shop activities

“My dad gave me the gift of the gab. My mother gave me varicose veins, the mechanical industry gave me health problems, and the Shed helps me to learn new things and to try out different project designs. A lady came in with a little wee piece of paper with two lines on it said I want a dog kennel for two dogs. Oh, I've looked at 50 dog kennels and none of them are suitable. This is what I want. So, you sit down with her, and you sketch what you think she wants. And then in this case, I took it home, drew it up and I said the doors are not big enough. And you know, we ended up building it and it's just being able to visualise it.”

“We deal with the money aspect in a more relaxed manner and from my point of view, if I tell you this may cost \$200 and I charge you \$140, then I'm good. If I tell you \$140 and then try and charge you \$200 then it's bad business. Yeah, it's being able to deal with the public to make them relaxed and you're relaxed.”

“The number of chairs that we build because people are doing this - rocking them backwards - and they break them, it's just unbelievable, you know. We tend to look after elderly ladies. We tend to be cautious of their budgets. There's no one else that can repair the chairs... builders won't do these little jobs any longer. They're too busy. Tradesmen are much the same. So, we are just the sort of outlet now for those sorts of people. And we don't begrudge them. We welcome them with open arms, good advertising.”

Another man said: *We are pretty well known for what we do...we make things for sale, repair things and fix things and most of them are things that commercially you cannot fix and would go to a landfill...and we generally always know that one of the men in the Shed can fix it...we put our heads together and talk about it even though we do have some ridiculous requests coming in. For example, a woman who came in with plastic clothes hangers and wanted us to make wooden ones...we said the time it took us to do that and the cost of materials...well it's better that you buy them from a shop.”*

“We're living in a society where costs have risen very steeply and in a short time, and so the people that are left behind often are the elderly and they have requirements but no

money or not a lot of money. And the requirements often seem quite sentimental too. So they bring an item along. We look at the price of the timber for which they must pay, but what goes on in terms of man hours and experience is not counted and I'm very happy about that. People are here because it's, you know, giving back to your society."



Kerikeri Men's Shed (with Emeritus Professor Pio)

3.9.4 School/community programmes

In one case, a man joined the Shed because he was teaching a dyslexic young boy (about 11-13 years) about measurements and, in the process, how to gain self-esteem – and underprivileged kids are supported. *"Getting him to measure things was something I concentrated on – and I would say as a standing joke if you wanted to be a dressmaker then its centimetres, but if it is a builder then it is in millimetres...when he went back to the classroom and they were doing linear measurement he took a real active part in that because he knew what it was all about...this gives me a great sense of satisfaction...you have to have patience and repeat things numerous times."*

"We have school programmes, and the kids learn to make puzzles, mini cars, musical instruments, trolley carts, rafts and mirror periscopes...an absolute joy to see the children enjoying themselves...teamwork and learning in the process."

The Shed gets several donated goods, but they also make new ones. A man said: *"Every day is fascinating"* and gave the following example *"the other day I was sitting having lunch and a grandmother and a mum came in with a little child who must have been about 18 months or thereabouts. And the grandma was going to buy him a present and he was looking at all the trucks and stuff and he's out playing with the wooden cars, and the mom and grandma are deciding which one he wanted. It was just so lovely watching and listening to what the mum and grandma were doing with this little guy...so the community can also come in here to pick up a gift"*

“When I came along, there were a lot of people doing rather technical stuff and they're pushing the material out hugely, buzzing away, you know, I might come along and think what can I do next. But one thing that amuses me is the fact that it's the little old lady phenomenon. And some little dear turns up with some trifling piece of work, and you do it. And they're absolutely over the moon with that kindness... a lady came along, and she had a statue of some angel, and the wings had fallen off and I repaired it and she was totally delighted.”

3.9.5 Socialising outside the Shed

“We have a group that goes out every Thursday for dinner and I really enjoy that – it's a nice little group and any of the men can join for dinner and each one pays for what they order.”

The Thursday dinner started when *“one man's wife died, and he was alone, and so a group of the men decided let's get together and we have been doing this for some time...we are now connoisseurs of the local and a bit further afield food places.”*

3.10 Key findings on the benefits of being a Shed member

There are men in wheelchairs, those with various health issues but through it all there is a sense of banter and the knowledge that everyone is treated well. There is no pressure to do something – one can just come by for a cuppa and a chat. Hence a smoko (morning tea) break can last from ten minutes to the end of the day. No projects are taken if there are timelines as the men are free to come and go as they feel. Companionship, mental health, a project, adventure, brain-stimulation, challenge, community, camaraderie, men friends. As one man put it beautifully: *“Community within the Shed and community with others outside the Shed.”*

- A sense of belonging
- Increased wellbeing and health
- Sharing learnings
- Learning new things.

3.10.1 A sense of belonging

The Shed provides purpose as expressed by many of the men: *“Everybody, irrespective of their physical ability, movement or mental capacity, they still need a purpose in life, otherwise you vegetate and rot.”*

“If you don't have an interest in something you curl up and die within a few months.”

Another example was provided about a man who has not been too well, but who is able to come to the Shed: *“That means a lot for him that he's still able to come, and that also means a lot for his wife that she's able to get respite, to know that he's here. That he's in a safe place, you know.”*

“I stay on because of them – they are here, it is associating with them...I think the psyche of these guys is different and they are more down to earth and more relaxed and friendly. The guys come first, and the community comes second, and the projects are third.”

“We are happier, there is companionship...like-minded people, you can ask anyone anything.”

The men stay on in the Shed *“because of the manager who is paid, but the pay is quarter of the work he actually does, he is always there for us, he solves our conflicts if they happen in his own quiet, listening, careful way.”*

3.10.2 Increased wellbeing and health

“I came home from the doctor, and he told me I had a prostate problem. I said what's my prostate...and I was worried...but at the Shed there is a support group, and my anxiety level went from way up to way down. Here I was reassured...that's why I come here and it's great for me.”

“From my perspective, it gave me an opportunity to also share my life with my new friends in the Shed. It also gave me the opportunity, the first time ever to speak about a very serious health condition, which I have and that has provided some relief in some ways, because I was suddenly sharing it rather than keeping it in with myself.”

“My wife started to tell me that I was forgetting things, and she said you will soon be one dimensional and she was right so I thought I will have to do something about it, so I came along and joined...I have learnt new things...it's important for you mentally, you actually do things. And my wife's brother sits at home and with his feet up and watches television and does a bit of sudoku but now he struggles to even walk to the door and that's a terrible position to be in, but he allowed himself to go there. I take a different attitude. Both my parents died when they were in their 90s and they were active people and so I changed my attitude...and these guys here are fabulous.”

“Listening to each other, having empathy and being with someone who is consistently there...listening and being able to share about various situations is a big drawcard for the men...self-esteem, mental health.”

“Creating new bonds, we have something to look forward to each day.”

“And it's not unusual for a man to say quietly on the side, if it wasn't for the Shed, I might not be here!”

“Each person is different...after coming to the Shed my doctor has reduced my blood pressure medication.”

“And it’s a self-discipline thing to be at the Shed and it keeps us mentally and physically active and I just could not see myself sitting and watching TV.”

“And it’s almost a profile of us as a group, we are self-starters...and if you don’t do something you just degenerate and go downhill. And most of us have got that idea that we want to do something, not go downhill...we create something, and we have a challenge.”

“We do have health checkups, and we stay out of trouble, and we have had St John’s coming here to talk about using the defibrillator and I am now confident to use it...and the health trust came along and checked our blood pressure.”

For example, on March 1st, 2025, a Men’s Health Expo was organised in Masterton. The health expo flyer states: “No appointment required – free event for every man – your chance for a free consultation with health professionals from: arthritis, prostate, heart, ears, lumps and bumps, blood pressure, surgical, nutrition, diabetes, stroke all in one place – just a quick blood pressure check could save your life!”

“We can talk about our health problems with other men in a language that we understand.”

“We had a few retired doctors, and they initiated the health aspect that we now do on a regular basis. Initially it was talks, and now we have an expo. And one of the best was when an orthopaedic surgeon showed how a knee replacement is done with the works of sawing and hammering and surgery on this artificial leg – it was a well-attended session.”

Many at the Shed said: *“I think a phone call is always nice, you know, to ask other people how they are. If they’re not here and we’ve got a board up there about who has not been here for a while, you know, so it jogs your memory, things like that, which is a good idea, I think.”*

And another man who had been in hospital for three weeks said: *“I had several phone calls from the guys and that was very nice, in fact more calls from the guys than from my family.”*



Masterton Men's Shed Men's Health Expo poster

3.10.3 Sharing learnings

"I've always dabbled with woodwork. I've got lots of tools and no room to do anything, so actually for me it's great. I haven't got a home Shed to work in, but I have different abilities, so that's what I'm looking forward to and the variety with the engineering shop as well as being able to learn other skills. I really look forward to this and there are people here who are prepared to teach and some of the jobs have a real team approach."

"I am doing writing which I was encouraged to do, and each volume shows some improvement – I am self-taught, when you make mistakes you learn, somewhere along the line I must have done something right."

"We have a pizza oven which we built and it's under a tree canopy with benches...guys can go there for a cuppa and a chat...and we have this writing group where the men can come and write their memoirs and then we make it into a book and gift it to the family."

3.10.4 Learning new things

Some of the men said: *"When I retired, I promised my wife that I was not going to be a pain in her domain and that I would find something else to do...I came to the Shed and said I was useless with tools and may not be able to do anything and so I just come here to make a nuisance of myself...I poke around here and there and wind the conversation up...but it's all jovial."*

One of the important aspects of the convivial atmosphere is that *“No-one is treated as a nuisance irrespective of the context...you can chat about things and try out new things with the guidance of those who are mentors/supervisors and who know the tools and also are particular about health and safety... the atmosphere here is pretty relaxed...and better to be here than cleaning windows at home!”*

Here *“I can do my own projects but also community projects.”*

Sometimes a man joins a Shed because he might be a woodturner, but *“I learned a lot about other machines, and I have enjoyed learning things. I tap somebody on the shoulder if I want advice, and I enjoy it. I come here for a cup of tea and to meet people and to better my skills. I am shy, but I meet people here.”*



Members of the Boomer Shed (Manurewa), with Emeritus Professor Pio

4. Conclusions

4.1 Research

This research is the most recent one on Men's Sheds in New Zealand. It adds value to prior NZ research and existing research done in countries like Australia, Canada, Ireland and the UK, but more specifically to the New Zealand context. Future research can expand the sample size for both the quantitative and qualitative components. Additionally, longitudinal data would be useful to view trends which would be of interest to policymakers and potential funders.

4.2 Wives/Family

The family members, in particular wives, were very supportive of their men spending time in the Shed. This addressed the underfoot syndrome as well as gave space for the couple, both of whom were likely to be in retirement. As one man eloquently expressed the situation: *"And the wives are supportive but over Christmas when the Shed is closed, the wives often ask when is the Shed opening again? The sooner you get from under my feet the better and that's a common thing...they know where we can be found...and they don't complain when we come here a lot."*

Additionally, if the men are at the Shed, having a pint over lunch and then increasing that to more and more is less likely to happen. And the men tend to go back home in a good frame of mind rather than being drunk grumpy and/or depressed.

4.3 Managers / Leaders

All the four Sheds in this research had managers who served as the hub. In some cases, the managers were paid, often a very small amount compared to the hours and expertise with which they served the Shed, and at some Sheds the role was voluntary. The quotes below from the men epitomise the trust that the men put in their managers:

"Our manager is great, and he works long hours and our ship points the way he takes us...it's a hell of a balancing act, because we want rat traps out of the door and we need funds...we focus on the morning tea as an important part of the day...the guys come in here, sit and talk."

"There are five key people and the rest of us are like bees all running around or buzzing around the outside around them...they keep everything on an even keel..."

"The manager keeps the conversations open, and people feel safe, and the manager's door is always open, and she keeps in touch with all of us...and if she sees something expanding into a conflict, she steps in for the benefit of everyone."

Characteristics of the managers included inclusivity, trust, openness, availability and leadership. It would certainly be useful to have a paid manager in every Shed, as that seems to keep the Shed in good order and encourages the men to be at the Shed more frequently. The manager also facilitates contact with local businesses, schools and the community and develops good interpersonal relationships. Men's Sheds are a social good and policymakers can consider how they can ensure that every Shed has a manager who is recompensed appropriately for their time and expertise.

4.4 Future proofing

In thinking about the future one man said: *"We have to future proof ourselves. Maybe there will be dust free environments with 3D printing with the new wave of men who join."* Another said that the Red Cross has started sending them some refugee men: *"Two Pakistani men came but they could not understand English, and we have to be careful for health and safety, though one of them is a welder...they are now learning English and will come back and visit us again...also we are likely to get some refugees from the Congo..."*

"We have a good reputation in the community and over the years have collaborated with more than 170 clubs/organisations/groups whether it be in the health, education, building or other sectors... it is important to reiterate that we do not compete with local businesses...for example the men can make coffins/caskets for themselves but not for others as this town has a coffin maker and that is his business."

"We must have greater computer literacy."

All the Sheds were concerned about the future, particularly as no-one was getting any younger and hence health and mobility were uppermost in their minds. They saw the need for changing many of the ways things were done in the Shed and felt that perhaps in the future 'making sawdust' might be reduced and replaced by lasers, computers and new technologies. Maybe in the future more Sheds would have a demographic mix of individuals based on the growing overseas-born population and changing demographic of New Zealand.

4.5 Diverse membership

Some said that the Shed *"does not have white collar workers and those who are Māori and Polynesian and we have to make the organisation more attractive."*

This is an area for further work as some Sheds are small and having more members may not be viable. On the other hand, many Sheds consist primarily of the majority population (New Zealand Europeans/Pakeha) and the dynamics would change if the membership became more diverse. However, some Sheds already welcome migrants/refugees and this may be the way of the future.

4.6 Shed virtues

Overall, the men extolled the virtues of the Shed and said *“this is an invaluable organisation, it provides older men with understanding in all areas such as social, medical, mental and physical.”*

Every Shed praised the benefits of being a member in the Shed. Many Sheddies felt that the Shed was their family, especially if they lived alone. The men praised the Shed for what it gave to them in terms of learnings, camaraderie, humour, friendships, cooking classes, discussions on any topic, reduced anxiety and the chance to stay active and engaged with other men.

4.7 The word retirement

One man did not like the word retirement and said: *“If you look it up in the English Dictionary, it says that to go into retirement is to go into seclusion. Oh, I hate it when somebody says to me, I'm gonna retire. I never agree with them. I say you're re-allocating your time to the next important thing.”*

Many of the men in the Sheds thought of themselves as active and engaged and were happy with the freedom it gave them to come and go when they pleased, but also to be part of a caring group of men. Undoubtedly, this caring and family feeling developed over time. Some of the men who were 85+ found some aspects in the Shed a bit problematic such as climbing stairs or operating some machines, but there was always some of the Sheddies who would provide wrap around care, comfort and safety for them.

4.8 Significant contributions

This research underscores the contribution of older men to the nation, done in their own quiet, assertive and capable way. Overall, the Sheds make significant contributions to the health and wellbeing of older men. Community engagement with schools, other older people and holiday programmes is a win-win situation, with men giving back to the community in myriad ways.

4.9 Health and wellbeing

Being in the Shed seems to be a panacea for depression, malnutrition, possible suicide and loneliness, serving as a space for connection and camaraderie. Based on the better health and wellbeing of these men, hospital beds are less likely to be used resulting in savings for the health and social sector. Moreover, the evidence-based loneliness results spotlight the importance of Sheds in providing older men solace, camaraderie, friendships and opportunities to share their joys and sorrows with a decrease in loneliness. As a core part of older men's lives, Sheds are crucial to maintaining the health and wellbeing of this group of hard-to-reach older people.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Funding

“Funding – more money would be great. Space. Many projects come in, but we might not have the right resources to complete them...we are restricted with space...we get offered machines, but we don’t have the space to fit them in.”

Funding was one of the biggest issues for all the Sheds. It would be incumbent on policy makers to ensure that Sheds have some minimum funding in order that the country can reap the benefits of the Sheds such as greater wellbeing in terms of happiness rather than depression, and thoughts of suicide being banished. Undoubtedly, this would mean less of a burden on the health system and social services. A proactive approach would be ideal as the Sheds are well positioned to further enhance the health and wellbeing of older men.

5.2 Land and buildings

All the Sheds had issues with land, space and funding, as expressed by the quotes below.

“Looking for our own land.”

“We need more space.”

“We need more funding.”

Current and future planners may wish to allocate land for Sheds to reap the benefits that accrue to older men by being a Shed member.

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A woman of peace and prayer, a scholar of colour, and a passionately engaged educator, she brings grace, gratitude, courage and thoughtfulness to governance and stakeholder engagement. She currently chairs the ethics committee at the University of Auckland, is Deputy Chair of the Fire & Emergency Local advisory group Auckland, is on the Ethnic Communities Development Panel. She was co-chair of the Seniors Demographic Advisory Panel, Auckland Council. She travels to universities (e.g. Boston - USA, Cambridge & Oxford - UK, Turku – Finland, Vienna - Austria) around the world (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, UK, USA) to share her experience and expertise in the domains of diversity and inclusion. She is available for strategic advising, crafting policy, implementing programs, teaching, research, editing, thesis examination and speaking engagements in the broad diversity and inclusion spaces such as ageing, ethnicity, faith, migration, pedagogy, management, refugees, religious-spiritual domains.

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About The Selwyn Foundation

The Selwyn Foundation is a registered charity which champions initiatives that enable respectful ageing for vulnerable older people and is the owner/operator of Auckland's historic Selwyn Village, which opened in 1954 as a social housing community for older people. Having divested 50% of its retirement village holdings in 2022, the Foundation has returned to its core purpose and, in its new capacity as a funder and co-investor, partners with others to deliver social impact at scale for those seniors who need it most.

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