

# Improving Mental Wellbeing in Kent: Evaluation of the Kent Sheds project

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February 2017



Funded by



# Introduction

## The Mental Wellbeing Programme

In recent years, there has been a shift within public mental health policy and practice towards the prevention of mental illness, and the promotion of mental wellbeing. In line with this shift, Kent County Council Public Health commissioned a series of projects and services to tackle a range of issues and address broad cross-sections of the population. The Mental Wellbeing Programme in Kent was one of the first of its kind among local authorities to put prevention at its core, and was unusual in terms of both the level of investment, but also the scope and depth of its evaluation of the projects commissioned.

The Mental Wellbeing Programme had a number of overarching aims, located along a spectrum. Promoting positive mental wellbeing, or 'keeping people well' was at one end of this spectrum, reducing suicide rates at the other. Early intervention for emerging or low-level mental health problems was located in the middle.

To meet these objectives, projects were commissioned that varied in their approach, investment and scale, target populations and outcomes.

The Mental Wellbeing Programme began in late 2013 and finished in spring 2016. The evaluation was commissioned in November 2014, and looked at all data available since the programmes were implemented. The McPin Foundation carried out data collection from November 2014 – January 2016.

The Mental Wellbeing Programme consists of the following projects: Primary Care Link Workers; Kent Sheds; Mental Health First Aid; Six Ways to Wellbeing Campaign; Library Wellbeing Hubs; Creative Arts Partnerships; and Happier@Work Workplace Wellbeing Pilot. This report provides an overview of the findings from the McPin Foundation's evaluation of one of these projects – Kent Sheds.

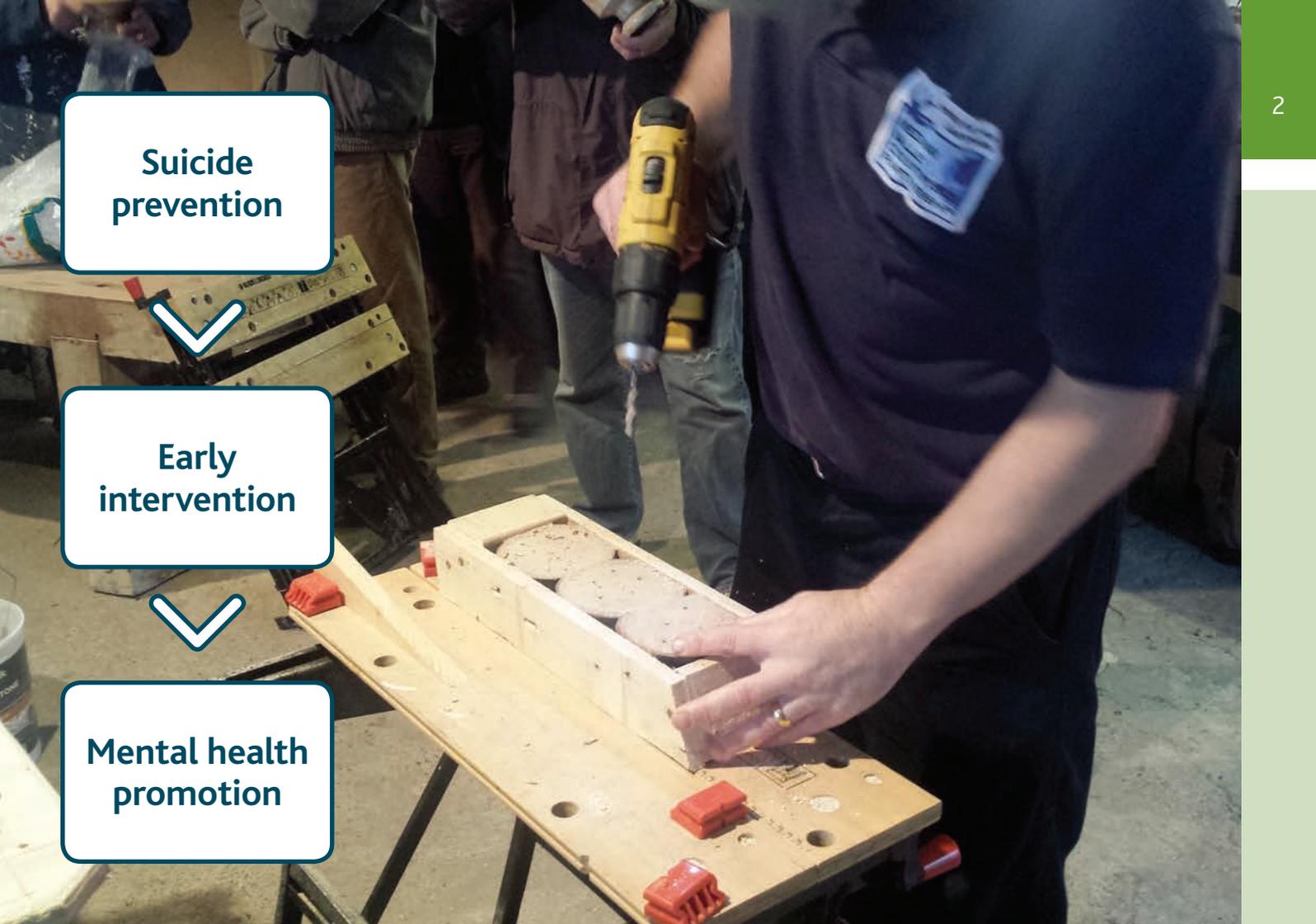
**Suicide prevention**



**Early intervention**



**Mental health promotion**



## Background

Kent Sheds is based on an international model known as 'Men's Sheds'. The idea behind the Men's Sheds movement is that men – especially those who are retired or middle-aged – are less likely to benefit from conventional approaches to improving mental wellbeing, e.g. counselling, or talking therapy. They are especially likely to be socially isolated, and at greater risk of suicide and experiencing poor mental health. Instead, they are more likely to thrive in informal spaces, in the company of their peers, and through engaging in practical activities, sharing and learning skills, and helping the community.

As part of its Mental Wellbeing Programme, Kent County Council Public Health provided funding to set up Sheds across the county. Importantly, the Sheds were not limited to men, but open to everyone, although in practice so-called 'Shedders' were more likely to be older men. The Kent Sheds project gave Shedders opportunities to socialise, engage in a wide range of practical activities such as gardening and carpentry, build their social and employment-related skills, and give back to their communities.

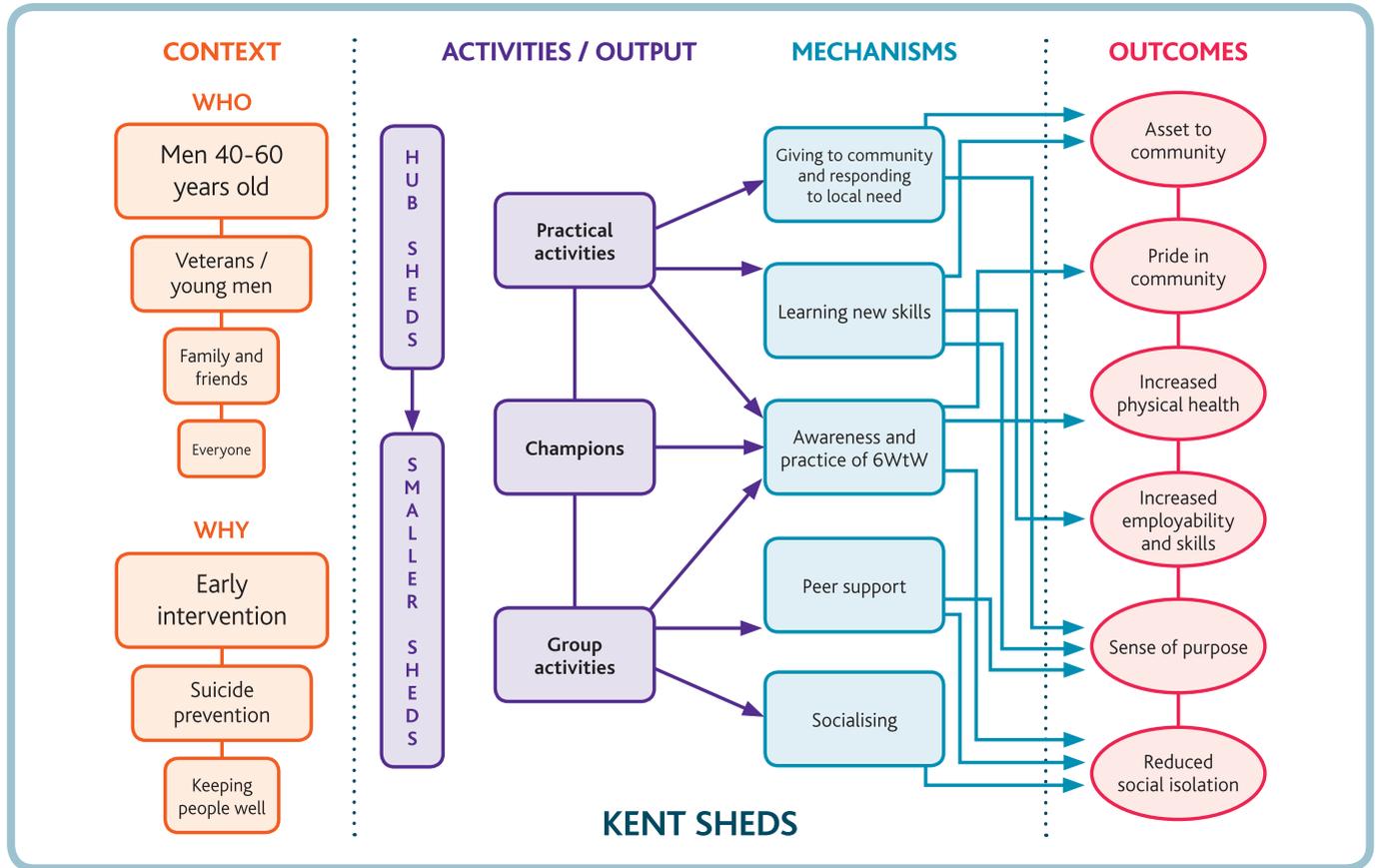


# Method

The McPin Foundation's approach to evaluating the Kent Sheds programme comprised a number of different strands and types of data. These were as follows:

- Theory of Change work (3 x interviews with project leads)
- Key Performance Indicator (KPI) data collected by the Kent Sheds, including quarterly number of Shedders and Sheds set up, from April 2014 until December 2015
- Four observations of Kent Sheds, as well as attendance at networking events
- Interviews with Shedders and Lead Shedders in 4 Kent Sheds
- Shedders' Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), collected approximately every three months by the individual Sheds
- Shedders' Survey, with 57 respondents (approx. one quarter of total number of Shedders)

# Theory of Change



## Findings

### Reach

### Who are Kent Sheds reaching?



**281 Shedders**



**74% male**



**66% not in paid employment**



**84% white**



**53% had attended the Shed for 6 months or longer**



**Average age: 45 years or older**

### Demographic make-up of Kent County population



**49% male**



**93% white**



**Average age: 41 years**

Although all Sheds were open to 'everybody', some Sheds worked a lot with particular groups or communities

This data is taken from our survey sample (N=57) as demographic data was not collected consistently across the project as a whole.

This is somewhat different from the demographics of Kent County population – and confirms that the Sheds are more likely to be used by older men, as well as people from minority ethnic groups:

- 49% Male
- 93% White
- 45% 45 years or older



### Practical activities

Through interviews and observations, we learnt that Shedders were most interested in learning or practicing skills, or in sharing or teaching these skills to others. Shedders emphasised that they felt comfortable learning and sharing skills in a relaxed environment, and commented that they were able to “have a go without any pressure”.

*“I think we try our hand at anything, really. So the woodwork – I’ve never really done that before. I’m giving it a go, as is everyone else. I’ll try anything, and that’s a good thing.”* Shedder

*“I want to teach other people if they don’t know how to knit and how to sew, that’s the type of thing I want to teach to all my friends.”* Shedder

In addition to wanting to share their skills with other Shedders, Shedders also took great pride in working together to benefit their local communities. This often took the form of community improvement projects such as gardening in public spaces. In one instance, a group of Shedders organised a fundraising initiative for relatives affected by a disaster in their country of origin, demonstrating that a ‘community’ could extend beyond Kent.

*“Selfless acts are the key to your wellbeing.”*  
Shedder

## Social aspects

Another key aspect of the Kent Sheds project was the way in which the Sheds gave their members opportunities to socialise. **Over half of respondents to the McPin Foundation's survey (N=57) cited social aspects as one of the things they liked most about the Shed.**

Through the interviews and observations, we identified two different kinds of 'socialising': 'structured', or 'active' socialising – i.e. talking and listening to others while at the Shed; and 'informal' socialising – simply being around other people. Active socialising: Shedders valued being given the opportunity to meet new people and engage in conversations. Some enjoyed socialising with "like-minded people", whether of the same age, gender or indeed interest groups, whereas others liked meeting people from different backgrounds.

*"I just love being here, amongst these people. They keep my spirits up, they really do."* Shedder

Informal socialising: Some Shedders liked being in a social environment, even when this did not involve active socialising. This 'informal', more passive socialising was very important for some Shedders, including some who were described by their peers as 'shy', or lacking confidence. They enjoyed being in the company of others, but did not necessarily want to talk a lot with other people.

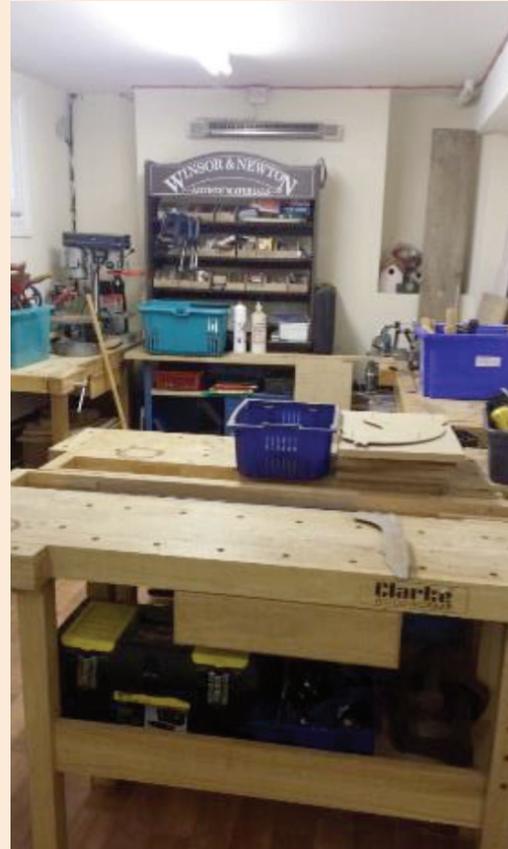
*"I've met a lot of people I didn't know before, because you have different people from different backgrounds.... It's nice to have something to do and then interact with other people."* Shedder

## Case study

John first started attending his local Shed after struggling with drug and alcohol issues. He felt that two of his main risks for returning to drugs and alcohol were anxiety, and also boredom. A keen gardener, John heard about his local Shed through a friend, and began attending in an effort to keep himself busy.

Since being a Shedder, John has worked on a number of projects, including improving community gardens. John has also tried his hand at woodworks, and claims that the atmosphere in the Shed makes him feel as though he is able to give anything a go without too much pressure.

John feels that his confidence has grown as a result of attending his local Shed, due to his sense of purpose and accomplishment in finishing his practical projects. In addition to this, he feels that the relaxed environment of the Shed has really helped to reduce his anxiety. He feels that he is able to give anything a go without feeling too much pressure. Most importantly, John remains sober and feels he is leading a fulfilled and happy life.



## Kent Sheds mean WEMWBS scores

	Mean WEMWBS score	Number of participants	Min	Max	National mean	Kent mean
Time 1	47.6	127	25	69	51.6	51.3
Time 2	48.4	54	20	67		
Time 3	50.8	16	28	67		

## Changes in WEMWBS scores between Time 1 and Time 2

	Mean WEMWBS score	Number of participants
Time 1	42.5	54
Time 2	48.5	54

## Impact

The impact data collected during the evaluation shows that the Kent Sheds had a very positive impact on Shedders' wellbeing. The McPin Foundation's survey (N=57) found that **91% of respondents felt that the Shed had improved their wellbeing**. In addition to this, average WEMWBS scores – which were taken approximately every three months<sup>1</sup> for all Shedders available at that time – showed an increase over time (see table below).

For the 54 people who completed WEMWBS at both Time 1 and Time 2, we conducted a T-test to find out whether the difference in scores was statistically significant. The table below shows that the mean WEMWBS score for this cohort at Time 1 was 42.5 and the mean WEMWBS score at Time 2 was 48.5. This difference of 6 WEMWBS points is considered meaningful by the scale's developers and is also statistically significant.

At an individual level, 85% of Shedders' WEMWBS scores (N=54) either improved or stayed the same between Time 1 and Time 2. Fifteen percent of individuals' WEMWBS scores decreased between Time 1 and Time 2.

### Increased employability and skills

Many Shedders felt able to build skills that they felt would help them find paid work in the future. As a direct result of the practical activities on offer in the Sheds, several Shedders found employment, for instance by working with community development organisations, or through selling the products they had made in the Shed.

*"My wife and son kept praising [what I had made] all the time, and I thought, I'll advertise it and see if I can sell it, see if I can start something. Who knows?..."* Shedder

1. We have only included three time points due to the sample size at later time points being too small. It is also important to note that the time between individual Shedders' WEMWBS measures varies; although scores were recorded approximately every 3 months by the Shed, the flexible nature of the Sheds meant that not all Shedders were available at each time-point.

## Increased social connections and reduced social isolation

A consequence of the social functions of the Sheds was that Shedders felt they had made valued social connections, which in turn went hand in hand with reduced social isolation. This was particularly important for older men who had retired.

*"I think it is more than the having something to do. I think it is a lot to do with feeling valued, being part of a team, and not feeling so isolated."*  
Shedder

## Sense of purpose and accomplishment

A combination of the practical activities as well as the social aspects of the Sheds often led to Shedders feeling a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Having somewhere to go on a regular basis helped Shedders to feel a sense of purpose in their lives. Shedders also spoke about a sense of accomplishment, mainly in relation to the physical skills they had learnt or artefacts they had crafted at the Shed.

*"When you're not working, when you're retired, meaningful time filling is not an easy thing. You can do routine, but it's not very meaningful. But when you want something that is a bit more enhanced you've got to be joining things, you've got to be with other people, you've got to be sharing your experience, you've got to be listening. And this is where the Sheds can be very important."* Lead Shedder

## Costs

On average, the Kent Sheds project cost an average of £4,575.11 per regular Shed, and £16,441.43 per larger ('hub') Shed. As more Sheds became funded, the amount of funding made available for both regular and hub Sheds was decreased. The Sheds were set up with grants payments from KCC, that were staggered to help the Sheds manage their finances, with the idea that they would eventually become sustainable and not require further funding over the long term. They were also supported to be able to fundraise if necessary and become financially viable where appropriate (e.g. where Sheddors were making craft items that could be sold to generate income for the Shed). For this reason, cost per Shedder is not reported on, as the Kent Sheds are continuing to operate and attract members, meaning that the cost per head is continually decreasing.

However, with a total spend of £249,431 and 281 Sheddors, the cost of increasing a Shedder's WEMWBS score by one point was £147.94, and the cost of increasing it by three points (the threshold for a meaningful increase in wellbeing) is £443.82. Given that Kent Sheds aims to target older men who may be experiencing low level mental health difficulties such as depression and anxiety, and who are less likely to seek conventional support such as talking therapies, the cost per head of going through the Sheds programme is compared with the cost of a six session course of Improving Accessing to Psychological Therapy (IAPT).

One source<sup>2</sup> indicates that six sessions of IAPT costs the NHS £630 per person. Based on these figures, Shed use leading to a meaningful increase in wellbeing amounts to a saving of £186.18 per head than an IAPT course.

2. [www.pssru.ac.uk/project-pages/unit-costs/](http://www.pssru.ac.uk/project-pages/unit-costs/) (page 45)

It is also worth noting that Sheddars were likely to share positive wellbeing messages based on the Six Ways to Wellbeing with other people. Based on responses from 54 Sheddars, 63% of whom said they shared wellbeing messages with at least one other person, we can

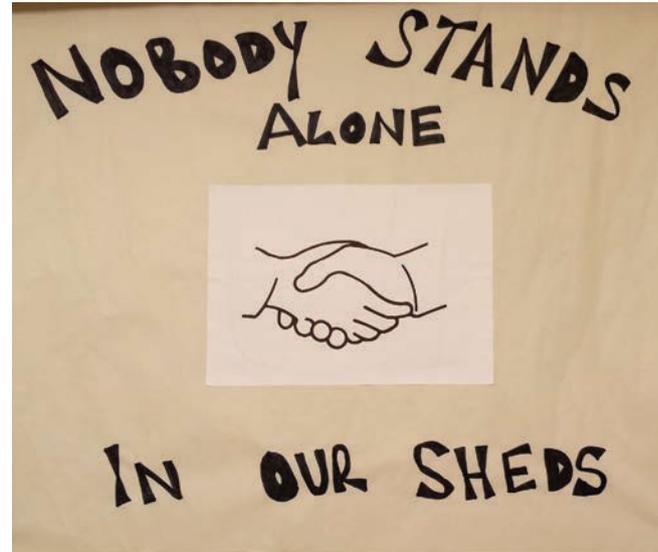
estimate that the total number of people reached as a result of the Shed project was at least 458 people. Thus it is worth highlighting that in addition to the number of people reached directly, a much larger number of people are likely to have benefitted from the project indirectly.



# Conclusions

The main conclusions from our evaluation of Kent Sheds are as follows:

- In line with the Kent Sheds aims, the Sheds particularly focused on the upskilling of Shedders, increasing employability, but also on reducing social isolation. The combination of the 'social' and 'practical' aspects of the Sheds often led to Shedders feeling a sense of purpose or accomplishment from taking part in Shed activities. These are not just short-term outcomes but enable Shedders to improve their wellbeing in the long term, through the honing of skills and creation of social networks.
- Attendance at the Sheds was found to have an impact on wellbeing. WEMWBS scores increased by 6 points from Time 1 to Time 2, which was both statistically significant as well as meaningful according to the curators of WEMWBS. Further to this, our survey indicated that 91% of Shedders agreed that the Shed had improved their wellbeing in some way.



## Recommendations

1. Sheds should continue to be supported to become more sustainable following seed funding – through partnership working, help with securing premises, and support with grant-writing. This will also support with extending Shed operations, enabling them to be open longer and attract a greater number of members.
2. Associated with this, an evaluation framework to monitor the impact of the Sheds in the long term could be developed. This should include ensuring that anonymous identifiers are provided to Shedders in order to be able to accurately monitor progress in wellbeing and other outcomes. Further to this, the evaluation framework should aim to include routine collection of demographic information in order to assess more accurately the reach of the Sheds.

# Next Steps

Kent County Council Public Health has continued to invest in the Kent Sheds Programme, with the positive evaluation findings a justification for this ongoing investment. To date there are 26 sheds funded; the aim is to fund a further 20 within the next year. In line with the evaluation recommendations, the Sheds will continue to be supported to become sustainable and generate income – through selling products, grant bids, charging for membership or negotiating pepper corn rents. It is hoped that strong partnership working and leadership roles for Shed 'Champions' will encourage sharing and support to ensure there is a long-term legacy.

In 2017, the provider of the Kent Sheds contract, national charity Groundwork, secured further external funding to support the development of new Sheds in both Kent and Medway





# About the McPin Foundation

The McPin Foundation is a specialist mental health research charity based in London but working across England. We exist to transform mental health research by placing lived experience at the heart of research activities and the research agenda.

Our work includes:

- Guidance and expert support on public and patient involvement in mental health research
- Collaborative research studies in partnership with organisations interested in user focused mental health research
- Campaign and policy work to raise the profile of mental health research and improve access to evidenced based information

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Charity number: 1117336.

Funded by



This evaluation has been commissioned and funded by Kent County Council.

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