

From Despair to Hope – A Shedder’s title for his journey of the past 18 months.

Colin (top left) with Charlotte Gal our People’s Health Trust project officer. Zooming.

In 2019 Colin Easterby was an active, retired resident of Hinderwell, near Staithes. He was restricted in his mobility, needing crutches or a wheelchair but with a car adapted with hand controls he had freedom to roam! He enjoyed singing with the Dalesmen Singers and had signed up to Ryedale Caring Together, Whitby U3A, Whitby 50+ group, Revival North Yorkshire’s Memory Lane lunches and latterly in 2019 Staithes Area Men’s Shed. He enjoyed rich friendships and good conversation. Life was stable and interesting. Then



In December 2019 Colin was taken to James Cook Hospital for emergency treatment which occupied Christmas and into 2020. Going home for recovery was problematic since his physical instability meant it would not be possible for his partner Barbara to deal with a fall, say. Colin was transferred to Whitby Hospital as a staging post to a more sustainable solution. After family consultation, a solution came in the form of entering a care home in Whitby. He moved in just 10 days before the first Covid-19 lockdown.

He had to self-isolate for two weeks (in his room) which was then extended by a further 3 months because he was required to shield. So began a new regime of continuous room isolation as the ongoing lockdowns added to his “sentence”. Meals in his room, restrictions on visitors (none becoming first “window” visits and ultimately half hour booked visits etc.), no social interaction with other care home residents.

Life seemed to be closing down – was the way Colin felt. His mood at times was very low. Entry to a care home had been something for consideration in the more distant future and facing facts now was not easy.

It was in May 2020 that Colin’s son arranged a Zoom call. This was a new experience for Colin. It fed the thought that if Colin was to meet with people again he needed to master the technology of virtual communication. Colin chatted with Graham on Messenger. With no Sheds happening in prospect, the idea of keeping in contact on Zoom was proposed – especially for those shut in. Age UK provided the Sheds with some mobile internet hubs and Colin received one.

Colin persevered. He had a goal and would not be beaten. He persevered and conquered and became one of the founding members of Whitby Sheds’ “Talking Sheds at the Kitchen Table”. Twice a week Zoom drop ins. Shedders from different Sheds met and made new friendships virtually. Getting on for 80, Colin met Phil from Littlebeck and Brian from Staithes of similar vintage. All had discovered their need to master technology to be in touch with friends and family.

The Zoom sessions were a lifesaver for not only Colin and others but for the Sheds themselves. Colin calls them his Zoom Family.

Colin is so grateful for people's support. He says it has been incredible and went a very long way to helping him survive mentally the challenges of the past two years.

Truly, it was a case of despair progressively turning into hope – Colin never gave up. Recent months have seen Colin managing to enjoy widened horizons with visits to Mulgrave Gardens, Danby Moors' Centre, a trip to Ravenscar, attending a Diamond Wedding celebration and looking forward to attending the Dalesmen's 50th anniversary celebration. Plus meals with others in the care home dining room, chatting and games like Scrabble.

Colin has been helped considerably by Mike Rhodes, a volunteer driver with Ryedale Caring Together serving Danby. Mike and Colin struck up a friendship as part of the Farmer's Breakfast events and that has continued with the trips out. All pieces of the jigsaw that have helped Colin change his outlook.

AND there are ripples of good coming from Colin's decision to be an overcomer in the technology stakes. A fellow care home resident had lost her father when she was 6 years old. He was a pilot officer crew member on a plane that went down in 1942. With the little information she had, Colin used his keyboard skills to research matters and now the resident is to apply for medals and badges to which she is entitled. Fabulous.

Marie Keen answers the challenge of the last blog, following in Shedder Colin's footsteps and say how Covid-19 interruption impacted everyday life. What was life like without a Shed for 15 months? She is in Zoom chat.

When Covid-19 emerged in UK as part of what became a global pandemic, nobody knew that much about it, how transmissible it really was, how to protect ourselves and protect others. Marie was in a vulnerable health category too so when lockdown came she followed the rules fully. Living in a Whitby housing complex there were people around but other than nods or waves she stayed in and away from people, including her family member and friends at the Whitby Shed and Slimming World.



Marie lives alone anyway and as a temporary imposition lockdown (or lock in) would not be too hard to bear. She already had shopping delivered to her and enjoys cooking (see her healthy bread pudding recipe at the end). As the seriousness of Covid-19 emerged and spread to all corners of the UK and elsewhere, Marie admits to being quite scared as numbers of cases and deaths rose rapidly. As time went on and lockdown stretched on, she began to feel isolated and lonely from contact other than by social media.

Her complex is fairly friendly and when she moved in nearly 9 years ago she joined in communal activities there like BBQs, birthday celebrations and events in the garden which she helped to maintain. It has been a good social environment and that is slowly returning.

Marie explained how the Shed entered her life and opened up unexpected and welcome opportunities for her. When she moved to Whitby it was to be her final move to a place she loved and where she would "end her days". That was not a morbid comment!

It was Shedder Dave Mawdesley who attended Sleights Area Shed in Littlebeck who drew Marie's attention to the concept of The Shed. Dave only agreed to come to Whitby to be near his daughter if there was a Shed to attend because he had gained so much from the Shed in Oldham. Dave enthused Marie and when Marie heard that a women's Shed might be on the way she kept alert to developments.

She saw the announcement of the She Shed in an article in the Whitby Gazette and was at the launch meeting for planning it. The Shed appealed to her because it reminded her of a night school for mixed crafts that she attended in her younger days. It was a mix of familiar and new skills plus giving and receiving help from others in the class.

It was the Shed that led Marie to sign up for a City & Guilds courses on embroidery centred on Durham. She did distance learning but attended Durham on a monthly basis to engage with others and her course tutor. She said that it allowed her to escape Whitby and her four walls. It widened her horizons. After two years the course closed but she found an online course – the School of Stitch Textiles in Lancashire – with international participants, including from Australia and USA. The Shed was the confidence driver to do the courses but it required Marie's determination.

The Shed led her to meet new people. She was “bowled over by how kind people were”. It becomes a family amongst a mixed bag of people (both men and women).

Marie welcomed the Talking Sheds at the Kitchen Table (TSATKT) sessions on Zoom started in October 2020. Shedders from different Sheds could meet each other (often for the first time). Marie introduced the idea of TSATKT cooking online. Marie felt the Zoom sessions helped hold the Sheds together even when closed for many months. The work of friendship building went on!

This is the account of a Shedder's carer. It reveals what a Shed can do for someone despite the memory slipping. It also reveals the impact on the carer *when they work closely with the Shed*. It is a delight to see a good degree of independence being sustained. Lisa Pollard writes about her mum and our Shedding colleague, Maggie:-

The Sheds couldn't have come at a better time for my mum. It entered her life at a time when she was more able to remember her day to day activity. It gave her a purpose, a sense of belonging to something other than her family, a home from home. It also gave her a desire to get stuck in and be helpful: lifting, carrying, watering the troops and tidying up after them.

Some mornings she would be gripped by apathy, and wouldn't want to leave the house but after a little encouragement she would attend and bring home a silly story or report of the banter and always a smile.

Lockdown proved to be a difficult time with her becoming a little more detached but the arrival of the Talking Sheds zoom sessions helped to pull mum out of those dips. Even when there was not much to report in terms of what she'd been getting up to she would love to hear the stories from familiar faces.



The community has benefitted us as a family also, providing a little respite each week and always very kindly on hand to help with transport to and from the Shed.

Thank you Staithes Shed and all concerned, you have changed all our lives for the better!"

Maggie is just one of quite a contingent of Shedders we've had over the years who are at various stages of forgetfulness but who are capable of looking after themselves and contributing to the buzz of a Shed. They make the atmosphere just as much as anybody else.

Shedder Rob Shilson's account of what good turns may turn into!

John is a retired farmer who lives in Goathland. He has lived there all his life and in later years made bee hives with his son. Sadly, John's son passed away and he is now planning to downsize and move to Whitby.

John had heard about the Whitby Shed and contacted Rob to see if they could use some of the wood that he was clearing out. Rob emptied out the car and headed for Goathland!

On offer was a large assortment of very good quality wood, Oak, Ash, Beech, Elm, Pine, you name it...it was probably there. This wood was surprisingly heavy and a car load was soon reached by weight as opposed to space.

More trips were planned, so same again next week. (and that has continued twice more!!).

On the second trip a full car load was achieved as this batch was obviously lighter. All went well until when closing the garage door it jammed and the handle mechanism sheared.

Rob said he could probably fix it but John had no tools to hand. "Don't worry", said John "you can do it when you call to collect more wood".

A great idea but by now the Whitby Shed wood store was bursting and realistically could not take any more. Rob doesn't live too far from Goathland so planned a good deed trip, after all John had been very generous with all the wood.

On Rob's third visit John seemed far more interested in discussing the Shed. He asked what equipment we had and what projects we were currently undertaking. He was also pleased to learn that the small table he had donated was already being refurbished. He said when he moves to Whitby he will call by and take a look.

It's an example of how connections are made and how (potential) new shedders are formed!

