

# Extracts from Professor Golding's Presentation at Ministry of Social Welfare on Monday 25 July to Mens Shed delegates from all over NZ

## Why bother about older men?

Men comprise 50% of the population but a small proportion of older, formal & adult education learners.

Men not in the workforce comprise a large & growing proportion of all men, most withdrawn early or retired.

Men's health & wellbeing statistics are concerning.

Men's withdrawal from the labour force below retirement age imposes adverse economic & social impacts on men, families (and cost to governments).

Single men without community connections and who did not benefit from school are most vulnerable, benefit least from formal training - but benefit most from informal community involvement with other men

## What does the literature say?

One third of adult men are not in work. (Lattimore 2007)

Half of Australians in poor health are out of the labour force. (AMP 2009)

Lower level vocational education & training is ineffective in returning most people to work. (NCVER)

Men are missing (or excluded) from much adult and community education. (McGivney 1999a, 1999b, 2004)

Health, wellbeing employment and grand/fatherhood are important to men & can be enhanced by learning.

Men need a *third place*-other than work & home - to socialize and keep sharing their knowledge & skills.

## Some limitations

Deliberate selection of sites where men are less likely to be in work.

Men *not* in work and *not* learning formally and *not* involved as participants in community organisations are difficult to select, compare, ethically study or involve in research.

*We can only assume that some partnered, retired men with savings are doing OK (but most other men might be doing it very hard).*

## What does our research show?

Men want to stay fit, active & well & re-create lives.

Men enjoy regular, social contact with other men outside of work & home.

Men have many skills - to make & do things, mentor others & give back to the community.

Men need to learn to 'duck & weave' with unexpected 'curved balls' that life often throws up.

Lifewide and lifelong learning are valuable.

Not having a non-work identity, health or wellbeing, social or community networks can be difficult, often isolating, debilitating or depressing (for men & women).

Community organisations can & do make a positive difference to men's lives, health & wellbeing.

### **Age-related:**

older; want social outings on set days;

get access to men's health info; meet new friends, get out of the house;

*in past five years:*

1/4 a major health crisis or new disability,

1/5 depression; want to learn *through* organisation;

4/5 grandfathers.

### **Men's special interest:**

participate when they want to;

learning difficult before because of skills; benefit from/enjoy other men.

## **Men involved in community organisations who *are retired***

More likely to be married, fathers & grandfathers, completed more school.

*In the past five years:*

1/4 major health crisis.

Only 1/3 interested in more learning,

1/6 'maybe'.

Enjoy women, but appreciate & benefit from regular exposure to men's company.

Identify age & health as main reasons not to learn.

## **Unemployed men involved in community organizations**

### **Combination of debilitating circumstances** (apart from unemployment)

½ married or with partner;  
2/3 access to a car;  
1/5 relied on others to get to the organization;  
½ on pension;

*in past five years:*

much less 'satisfied with life generally',  
1/4 depression, financial crisis, significant loss in their lives;  
difficulties with business or job, a new impairment or disability;  
separation from partner or a major health crisis ...

### **But benefit most from community involvement & social inclusion:**

get access to men's health info;  
feel better about themselves;  
feel happier at home;  
sense that literacy skills, confidence, social & organization, skills have improved;  
*perceive the organisation:* as a place to meet friends, get out of the house, learn new skills, keep themselves healthy.

## **'Off the shelf' education & training are typically or increasingly...**

Formal & accredited (curriculum, assessment)

Vocationally & youth-oriented (for paid work)

Based around people as clients or consumers

Meritocratic & hierarchical

Privatized & user pays

Delivered independent of context

ICT and literacy dependent.

*Many of these approaches are totally inappropriate for older & unemployed men.*

## **Informal lifewide & lifelong education, in all Australian states is,...**

in its public form, missing, not accessible to, not used by or inappropriate for many men, particularly by older, unemployed, rural & Indigenous men

mainly accessible informally via a rich array of diverse, community-based organisations dependent on volunteers.

the *only* option for many men.

*'Is the role of community to mop up the ill effects of the market, while the costs of this are borne by individuals rather than the state?'*(Levitas 2000)

## Productive ageing requires learning to adjust to changes in:

Strength, mobility, wellbeing & health

Life beyond work

Income & retirement

Affiliation with members of older age groups

Social, civic & family roles & responsibilities

Personal & family relationships

Living arrangements

Re-creation & many other changes ....

*These are typically not built into existing adult education programs or services for men.*

## Why *active co-participation* in community settings works for most men?

Local, regular opportunities for doing & making things, hands-on, socially, beyond work & home, sometimes with other men & maybe outside.

Organisations that develop & extend previous interests, networks, knowledge & skills.

Making men feel responsible, useful & valued.

Keeping men learning, happy & well.

Not being patronized or taught - as clients, customers or students, with a deficit.

### **Where can this make a difference?**

Everywhere there are men.

Particularly for older men beyond work.

Where the emphasis is on the value to men's wellbeing and learning - without foregrounding or naming either.

Where a series of events have 'knocked the stuffing' out of people, family & community.

For all men who have limited contact with other men (alone or underfoot; beyond work;

damaged by changes in work, life, relationships, substance abuse or climate;

not mobile or with a disability;

in aged care; with war service; rural or outer suburban; migrant or refugee, 'working class', with dementia, depressed, ...).

## What can we learn from all this?

Wellbeing, learning and social inclusion are desirable to view and provide holistically, socially and enjoyably, including for men.

Much service provision remains silently gendered (men & women *both* matter).

Health & wellbeing data suggest it is critical to help adults to learn to change, be socially included and stay well with age.

Learning is critically important for wellbeing & vice versa: ACE & VET as configured are not *accessible to* or *the* answer for most men, particularly for most older men.

## Last words ....

*"It has been a great benefit to me, and if it hadn't been I would have died if it wasn't for the companionship."* (NSA interviewee, 92, Alstonville Adventist Shed)

*"I went through a black stage a few months back ... the bowls means a lot to me. ... It's my time out."* (NSA interviewee, 62, widow & carer of widowed 87 year old father in law)

*'Beyond formal, compulsory schooling, we need education to learn to play our different roles with ease and understanding. Attaining technical skills tends to most valued, because it has to do with making a living -learning & earning -but more than ever we know this is not enough. We are not merely producers & consumers. We are citizens, with family & personal lives'.*

Adame Ouane, Director UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning (Confintea VI 2009, 6th International Adult Learning Conference)