

Formal intergenerational mentoring at Australian Men's Sheds: a targeted survey about mentees, mentors, programmes and quality

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What is known about this topic

- Significant gender disparities in health and education exist in Australia; intergenerational mentoring programmes have arisen as one way to address these disparities.
- Men's Sheds is a grassroots phenomenon which is starting to embrace intergenerational mentoring in Australia.
- A range of factors are associated with a successful intergenerational mentoring programme, including having: (i) a skilled co-ordinator; (ii) an achievable project; (iii) incremental and noticeable weekly achievements; (iv) informal socialisation; and (v) an environment that focussed on individual and group strengths.

What this paper adds

- Meaningful activities, the mentors' approach and safe environments were rated by respondents as important influences on the effectiveness of intergenerational mentoring programmes.
- Screening mentors, providing mentor training and evaluation of programmes were associated with a higher rating against the AYMN quality benchmarks.
- Future research needs to explore outcomes and processes of mentoring programmes.

Abstract

Intergenerational mentoring enables a purposeful exchange of skills and knowledge to enhance individual and social outcomes for sub-groups at risk of health and social disparities. Male intergenerational mentoring may be an approach to help address these disparities in young men. Over 1000 Men's Sheds operate in Australia with 39% providing some form of mentoring mainly to youth. Yet, little is known about the variables intrinsic to creating and running quality programmes. This study aimed to identify the characteristics of formal intergenerational mentoring programmes, review their quality against the Australian Youth Mentoring Network (AYMN) quality benchmarks, and identify the factors that predict quality in these programmes. All known Australian Men's Sheds were invited to participate in an online cross-sectional survey. Forty sheds with formal mentor programmes completed the survey for a total of 387 mentees (mean = 9.7 mentees/programme), the majority being male. The majority of mentor programme facilitators were unpaid male volunteers aged 61 years and older, and programmes were unfunded. Promoting social and emotional well-being of the mentees was the primary focus in more than half of the programmes, and working on a shared construction project was the most common activity. Respondents rated the three most important factors that influenced programme effectiveness as being: (i) meaningful activities; (ii) mentors' approach; and (iii) a safe environment. Univariate analyses revealed that mentoring programmes that had a system in place for screening mentors, trained mentors and evaluated the programme were most likely to rate highly against the AYMN quality benchmarks.

Keywords: intergenerational mentoring, Men's Sheds, mentees, mentors, social inclusion, youth mentoring

Introduction

In response to a growing recognition of the importance of gender disparities in health and education, the Australian government developed the *National Male Health Policy* (DHA 2010). Following this, a report titled *Men fare worse than women in education, health and crime* (ABS 2012) identified the extent of these disparities. For example, teenage girls have greater school participation and retention rates than teenage boys, in

particular boys from lower socioeconomic areas (ABS 2012). Data related to risky behaviour and adverse health outcomes also point to higher incidence in young men of conditions such as acquired brain injury (AIHW 2007) and spinal cord injury (Norton 2010), with even greater prevalence in young men from remote areas. Furthermore, being the perpetrator or victim of assault and rates of incarceration are all greater in young Australian men than in young women (AIC 2011).

A range of national and community initiatives aim to counter these disparities during the transition to adulthood; male intergenerational mentoring programmes are a significant initiative targeted in both policy and practice. Australian Men's Sheds are a recent grassroots community phenomenon where mainly older men get together at a community shed to socialise and/or work on a range of construction projects (Wilson & Cordier 2013). Many sheds are starting to embrace male intergenerational mentoring as one part of their suite of activities that aim to promote better health and social outcomes for men and boys (Cordier & Wilson 2014a). Mentoring reflects attributes of social inclusion that include opportunities for people to learn, work, be engaged and have a voice within their communities (Australian Social Inclusion Board 2012). Despite this promising grassroots activity, we know very little about formal intergenerational mentoring at Men's Sheds. This cross-sectional survey is the first ever study to describe in detail the characteristics of such programmes and to provide a summary of the factors associated with quality intergenerational mentoring programmes at Australian Men's Sheds.

Intergenerational mentoring

In contemporary western society, young people can be left out of their communities and struggle with successful transition to adulthood due to a range of factors including sociocultural changes, different family structures, technology and increased urbanisation (Hatton-Yeo 2000). Intergenerational mentoring is one type of community programme designed to address some of the outcomes from these, and other, counter-productive factors. The aim of intergenerational youth mentoring is to enable a purposeful exchange of skills and knowledge to enhance individual and social outcomes (Hatton-Yeo & Osakho 2009). The mentor–mentee dyad, or partnership, is structured, so the mentee experiences some form of positive development and well-being from the mentoring relationship. International research reveals that intergenerational mentors can

have an important positive influence on lifelong health and social outcomes (Beier *et al.* 2000). For example, a US study with 4882 respondents to the *National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health* showed that mentoring relationships during adolescence were positively associated with prospective benefits in psychological well-being, educational and employment outcomes, and physical health (DuBois & Silverthorn 2005). That is, the positive impact of mentoring on health and well-being was both broad and multi-faceted.

Systematic reviews and meta-analyses have reported a range of benefits including academic, health and well-being, as well as reduced delinquency and problematic behaviour (DuBois *et al.* 2002, 2011, Grossman & Bulle 2006). Despite the positives, better outcomes are not guaranteed. In fact, follow-up data from the US have shown only a small effect size with progressive mentee benefits being linked with the strength, dynamics and duration of the interactions within the mentor–mentee dyad (Rhodes & DuBois 2008). In addition, pre–post data from a UK programme based on cultural heritage did show significant outcomes using measures of self-esteem and well-being (Phillips *et al.* 2008). To yield effective outcomes, intergenerational mentoring programmes need to be developed from a theoretical base and use best-practice frameworks. That is, without careful planning, grassroots enthusiasm for creating mentoring programmes to help local disadvantaged youth may yield limited, even counter-productive, outcomes for mentees, mentors and the community group.

Intergenerational mentoring programmes – the Australian context

Youth mentoring in Australia is characterised by a diverse range of grassroots programmes aimed at supporting young people's social, personal, educational and career development in community and school settings (MacCallum & Beltman 2003, AYMN 2013). The 2013 National Survey of programmes, registered with Australian Youth Mentoring Network (AYMN), indicated that 6802 young people were being mentored through 79 registered programmes, which had a further 1100 young people on waitlists (AYMN 2013). The diversity of programmes, often aligned with government policy and with short-term funding, has challenged the development of evaluation frameworks to examine mentoring outcomes and programme effectiveness (Broadbent & Papadopoulou 2009). Consequently, the majority of Australian research on mentoring consists of small-scale evaluations (e.g. Berry Street 2008), evaluation reports prepared for government (e.g. Wilczynski *et al.* 2004)

and case studies focusing mainly on the identification of the factors that support and hinder programme development and implementation (e.g. MacCallum & Beltman 1999, 2003, Broadbent & Papadopoulos 2009, MacCallum *et al.* 2010). While Australian community Men's Sheds are known to engage in intergenerational mentoring programmes, research about and evaluation of these grassroots mentoring programmes is even more limited.

Men's Sheds and intergenerational mentoring programmes

Men's Sheds are a unique community phenomenon where mainly older retired men get together and typically work on a range of individual and community projects based around woodwork, metalwork and other trade-type activities (Wilson & Cordier 2013). According to the Australian Men's Shed Association (AMSA), there are approximately 1000 registered Men's Sheds in Australia (AMSA 2014). In addition to the activity-based spaces that Men's Sheds provide and the reported benefits of engagement in such meaningful activities (Ormsby *et al.* 2010), the value of sheds to the social, health, learning and spiritual well-being of men is likewise being discussed in the literature. For example, Cordier and Wilson (2014a) discussed the social and community benefit of men's sheds, Ballinger *et al.* (2009) reported on the enhanced subjective sense of well-being from shed participation, Golding (2011) highlighted the value of sheds in facilitating adult learning and Moylan *et al.* (2015) reflected on the potential for Men's Sheds to offer spiritual support. In addition, recent research points to the positive role that participation in Men's Sheds offers to some marginalised male sub-groups such as men living with a long-term disability (Hansji *et al.* 2015), mental health problems (Culph *et al.* 2015) and Aboriginal men (McNeil *et al.* 2012).

Recent data from an international survey about Men's Sheds identified that 39.2% ($n = 127$) of Australian sheds and 23.7% ($n = 14$) of international sheds offer some form of mentoring (Cordier & Wilson 2014b). While a range of sub-groups were being mentored, such as men with long-term disabilities, the most frequent group of mentees were youth, highlighting intergenerational mentoring as an important function for some Men's Sheds. Beyond the 2012 International Men's Shed Survey (IMSS) data, there remain significant gaps in the research literature about *formal* intergenerational mentoring programmes at Men's Sheds. That is, structured mentoring where a mentor provides targeted support and guidance to a mentee to assist them to achieve their goals (Hartley 2004).

A qualitative study by Wilson *et al.* (2013) investigated older mentors' experiences of participating in a Men's Shed who shared construction project with teenage boys (14–16 years) at risk of social exclusion in Sydney, Australia. Pre- and post-programme interviews with male mentors illustrated not only the role of mentors as a valuable community resource but also the positive impact of being a mentor had on individual retired men who derived a sense of satisfaction from giving back to younger generations. Collectively referred to by Wilson *et al.* (2013) as a *values-led reconnection*, over the course of the programme the mentor–mentee dyad fostered male-to-male valuing, mutual respect based on trust, the experience of tradition and the handing down of valid and valued life experiences. These findings gave an insight into how the intergenerational mentoring programme fostered the construct *connectedness* between mentors and mentees (Whitlock 2007). Connectedness is based on five areas: (i) trust; (ii) caring and respect; (iii) recognition of worth by others and institutions; (iv) increased social capital and community belonging, continuous interaction with one's environment; and (v) cohesive identity. The positive effects of connectedness can counter the problems often associated with a troubled transition to adulthood (e.g. Beier *et al.* 2000).

Findings from a post-programme focus group with mentors and the male programme facilitator also revealed a range of programme characteristics that lead to a successful intergenerational mentoring programme. These programmes included having: (i) a skilled co-ordinator; (ii) an achievable project; (iii) incremental and noticeable weekly achievements; (iv) informal socialisation; and (v) an environment that focussed on individual and group strengths (Wilson *et al.* 2013). In a sequel paper, male mentees reported a tangible sense of community service from making something for their community and that this gave them a sense of personal pride (Wilson *et al.* 2014). Furthermore, the mentees commented that the shed-based learning environment was positive, and that their perceptions of older men had altered as a result of engaging in social interactions during the programme (Wilson *et al.* 2014). The only other known literature about formal mentoring at Men's Sheds is a case study of older men with long-term disabilities being mentored at Men's Sheds using a mentor training approach called Active Mentoring (Wilson *et al.* 2015). The mentor–mentee dyad in this study was also based around participation in shared meaningful activities and social interactions. These preliminary research findings provide a good starting point and suggest a range of positive initiatives and perceived

beneficial experiences about Men's Sheds mentoring programmes. To summarise, there are individual and community benefits to changing perceptions about older men towards seeing men who attend Men's Sheds as a valuable community resource. The sheer number of sheds operating in Australia today suggests there are many older men who want to give back to the next generation and support young people through the transition to adulthood. However, we still know little about the finer detail of Men's Sheds intergenerational mentoring programmes and, in particular, the factors related to the quality of these programmes. Such community programmes have the potential to offer an array of vital health and social benefits to both mentors and mentees across the whole of Australia and thus benefit society at large.

Aims

With the rapid growth of Men's Sheds, it is time to explore the characteristics of formal intergenerational programmes that operate at Men's Sheds in more depth. To gain a richer insight into these variables and to inform future research and practice, a targeted cross-sectional survey regarding formal intergenerational mentoring at Men's Sheds was designed. Our aims were: (i) to provide a snapshot of the characteristics of formal intergenerational mentoring programmes at Australian Men's Sheds; (ii) to conduct a mentoring programme audit using the AYMN benchmarks; and (iii) to identify the programme characteristics associated with quality as measured against the AYMN quality benchmarks.

Methods

Ethics approval for this study was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Western Sydney (Approval ID: H10728). The cross-sectional 2014 Men's Shed Intergenerational Mentoring Survey (MSIMS) was conceptualised and developed based on the 2012 IMSS (Cordier & Wilson 2014a,b) and through consultations with the AYMN, AMSA and two Australian Men's Shed intergenerational programme co-ordinators in NSW and Victoria. The penultimate version of the MSIMS was categorised into five sections: (i) background about the shed; (ii) content and structure of mentoring programme; (iii) detail about mentors; (iv) detail about mentees; and (v) programme planning, evaluation and review. The fifth section of the MSIMS also included the AYMN audit tool (AYMN 2012); a 11-item dichotomous (yes/no) tool referred to hereafter as the mentoring quality benchmarks (MQB) which

assesses the quality of a mentoring programme against national benchmarks, with higher scores indicating greater quality. The AYMN audit tool was developed by key stakeholders in the Australian youth mentoring sector and while it has not been tested for reliability and validity and is not used for accreditation purposes – there is no mentor programme accreditation in Australia – it is the only Australian-specific self-assessment tool available to youth mentoring programmes to assess their programme. Pilot testing of the MSIMS using SurveyMonkey® was undertaken by the team of researchers; minor modifications to the logic and flow of the final version of the MSIMS were made to aid clarity and ease of use. A copy of the MSIMS is available on request from the corresponding author.

Data collection

Self-selected convenience sampling was used. Using the SurveyMonkey® (SurveyMonkey Incorporated 2014) data collection forum, in July 2014, the MSIMS was first sent via email to all of the known Australian sheds ($n = 127$) that indicated that their Men's Shed have either a formal or informal mentoring programme as reported in the 2012 IMSS (Cordier & Wilson 2014b). One month later, the survey was sent electronically to all other Australian sheds listed on the AMSA website to identify any mentoring programmes in previously existing or newly established Men's Sheds. The survey closed in September 2014.

Incorporated within the MSIMS was a screening item on 'whether the shed had or planned to run a formal intergenerational mentoring programme in 2013/2014'. For the purpose of the survey, formal intergenerational mentoring adopted the definition of Hartley (2004) that states: *formal* intergenerational mentoring encompasses: (i) mutually beneficial relationships that involve a more experienced person (mentor) helping a less experienced person (mentee) to identify and achieve their goals; (ii) structured and trusting relationships that bring young people together with older caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement; (iii) a relationship and a process that is different to informal mentoring, which naturally occurs in families and communities as children and young people grow; and (iv) relationships that are not replacements for a parent, a counsellor or a teacher. Respondents who replied 'yes' to the screener question were invited to complete the rest of the MSIMS. Completion of the MSIMS was deemed as consent to participate. Follow-up phone calls were made to all incomplete surveys to ensure missing data were limited. If they

answered no to the screener, respondents were invited to answer a question about any barriers that might prevent them from running a formal mentoring programme.

Data analysis

All MSIMS data were analysed using IBM SPSS version 22 (IBM Corp 2011) and descriptive statistics were calculated for mentor, mentee and programme characteristics. Inferential statistics (Pearson χ^2 and Fisher's exact tests) were used to examine associations between categorical variables including programmes within the different categories of remoteness as defined by the Australian Standard Geographical Classification Remoteness Areas (ASGC-RA). The RSGC-RA classification system is based on the road distance to the nearest urban centre and has five remoteness categories: Major City, Inner regional, Outer regional, Remote and Very remote. Due to the low number of sheds in Very Remote areas, this category was collapsed into Remote to form a new category called Remote Australia. Univariate regression analysis was conducted to identify if any mentoring programme characteristics were associated with mentoring benchmark standards as measured by the AYMN audit tool (AYMN 2012). Answers to open-ended questions were summarised and categorised (Visser *et al.* 2000).

Results

In the 2014 survey examined here, we received 131 responses from Men's Sheds; 85 sheds (64.9%) indicated that they do not have a formal mentoring programme and 46 Men's Sheds (35.4%) indicated that they run a *formal* intergenerational mentoring programme. We were interested in checking how many of the 127 Australian Men's Sheds reported that they have a *formal or informal* mentoring programme in the

2012 IMSS survey. Of those 127 sheds, 13 (10.2%) reported that they have a *formal* mentoring programme.

Of the 85 sheds that did not have a formal mentoring programme, 30 (35.3%) indicated that they are not interested in running a formal mentoring programme. The remaining 55 (64.6%) of the sheds that were interested in setting up a formal mentoring programme indicated that the most important barriers that prevented them from running a formal mentoring programme were: (i) not having the human resources ($n = 19$; 34.6%); (ii) not having the physical space ($n = 12$; 21.8%); (iii) not having the experience ($n = 10$; 18.2%); (iv) regulations such as work, health and safety ($n = 7$; 12.7%); and (v) the shed requiring further development ($n = 7$; 12.7%). There were six incomplete surveys that were removed as the surveys only included data on the first variable. The remaining 40 Men's Sheds were identified as having a single formal mentoring programme and were included in the analyses. Figure 1 provides an illustration of the survey responses.

Description of mentees, mentors and mentoring programmes

Mentees

Respondents were asked about the mentees who participated in their programmes. The 40 mentoring programmes served a total of 387 mentees (mean = 9.7/programme). Mentees included both men ($n = 330$; 85.3%) and women ($n = 57$; 14.7%). Many programmes ($n = 22$; 55%) had formal inclusion criteria; stated criteria included being Aboriginal and at risk, having a learning disability, being disengaged from school and having at-risk behaviours (e.g. substance abuse, self-harm). Of note was that only three programmes (7.5%) had a mentee waiting list with a total of 19 potential mentees on those lists. When asked to specify if programmes targeted certain men-

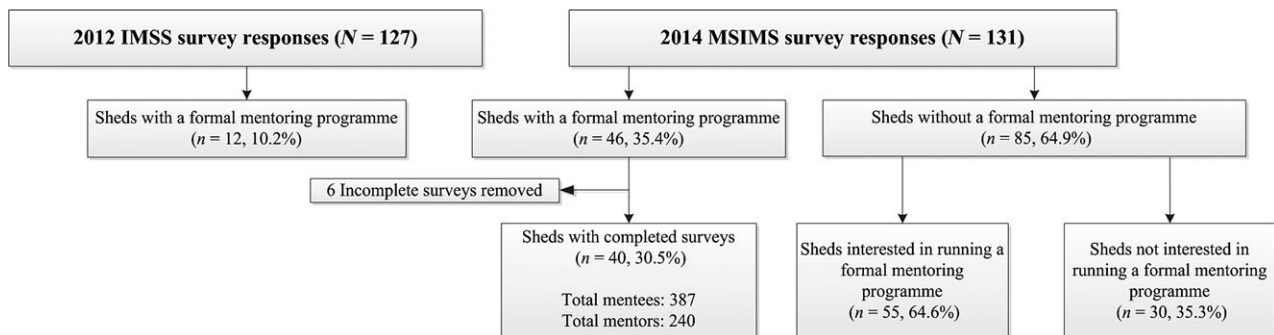


Figure 1 Flow chart of survey responses.

tees, a range of responses were stated, with the most common being mentees: (i) having difficulty reaching their full potential ($n = 24$; 60.0%); (ii) at risk of leaving school early ($n = 23$; 57.5%); (iii) not living with their fathers ($n = 12$; 30.0%); (iv) looking for an apprentice-type of relationship ($n = 10$; 25.0%); and (v) involved in the juvenile justice system ($n = 8$; 8.0%). Table 1 provides a descriptive summary of mentee age ranges by gender.

Facilitators and mentors

Facilitators. All mentoring programmes had a facilitator, with the majority being unpaid Men's Shed members (23; 57.5%), compared with 17 (42.5%) being paid facilitators external to Men's Sheds such as social and youth workers. Respondents were asked to select the main skill set of the programme facilitator where more than one response was possible; the most frequent skills were teaching ($n = 19$) and trade/technical ($n = 19$) skills. Most programme facilitators were over 61 years of age ($n = 27$; 67.5%) with the remainder evenly distributed between younger age ranges (20–60 years).

Mentors. In total, there were 240 mentors within the 40 programmes with a mean of 6 mentors per programme. The age ranges of mentors are listed in Table 1. Many programmes screened mentors ($n = 22$; 55%) prior to the programme with a range of screening activities including: (i) police clearance, (ii) working with children check and (iii) suitability based on teaching abilities and trade/technical skills. Half of the sheds provided mentor training ($n = 20$; 50%), with the most frequent primary topic for training being: (i) working with young people ($n = 8$; 40%), (ii) trade/technical skills ($n = 5$; 25%) and (iii) code of conduct ($n = 4$; 20%).

Intergenerational mentor programmes

Compared with major cities, there were fewer programmes in the more remote areas of Australia. The majority of programmes were unfunded ($n = 28$; 70%), with those that were funded receiving the money from a range of sources, including governments and community organisations. As shown in Table 1, the primary purpose of most programmes involved supporting the social and emotional well-being of mentees ($n = 23$; 57.5%), and having a construction project was the most frequently run primary activity ($n = 29$; 72.5%). The format of programmes was evenly distributed among one-to-one, group and team mentoring with the larger group mentoring the

least common ($n = 3$; 7.5%). Further details on mentoring programme characteristics including programme duration in average hours and days per week can be accessed from Table 1.

Relative importance of factors associated with effectiveness of programmes

Respondents were asked to subjectively rate mentor programme factors that influenced the effectiveness of their programme on a 7-point rating scale from most important (scored as 1) to least important (scored as 7). Figure 2 illustrates the ratings given to the most important programme factors. The most important factors were *meaningful activities* and *mentors' approach* followed by a *safe environment*; the factors with the lowest ratings of importance were *developing new vocational skills* and *informal social opportunities*.

Inferential analyses

Univariate analysis of intergenerational mentor programme quality

Participants were asked to rate their programme against the 11-item AYMN audit tool with a yes/no response. Table 2 contains a descriptive summary of all 11 items with scores and percentages for yes/no responses. The 11 items were collapsed into three new categorical variables to explore associations between programme quality as measured by the AYMN quality benchmarks and other categorical survey variables. The new categories for programme quality were: (i) meeting fewer than six mentoring quality standards; (ii) meeting between six and eight mentoring quality standards; and (iii) meeting more than eight mentoring quality standards. The classification was based on achieving a relatively even distribution across the three categories and for practical reasons. Most programmes would meet up to five criteria just by being a formal organised programme with some protocols; hence 5 was used as the first cut-off score. However, to capture the mentoring programmes with 'developing quality' (6–8) and those programmes with 'high quality' (9–10), the additional two categories were created to enable further analysis.

Table 3 provides a summary of the factors considered together with the significance of the association. Importantly, there was no significant association between regionality and programme quality (Fisher's exact test, $P = 0.54$). For most other variables, there was a significant association ($P < 0.05$) indicating that: (i) investing money into a mentoring programme to pay for a facilitator and/or mentor train-

Table 1 Mentoring programme characteristics across the 40 shedsMentees ($N = 387$; mean number of mentees/programme = 9.7; male $n = 330$; female $n = 57$)

Gender and age ranges	Male, n (%)	Female, n (%)
Younger than 9 years	0 (0)	4 (7)
9–11 years	56 (17)	7 (12.3)
12–14 years	66 (20)	13 (22.8)
15–17 years	150 (45.5)	27 (47.4)
18–24 years	30 (9.1)	0 (0)
25 years and older	28 (8.5)	6 (10.5)

Mentors ($N = 240$; mean number of mentors per programme = 6.0; all men)

Age ranges of mentors	n (%)
20–30 years	13 (5.4)
31–40 years	7 (2.9)
41–50 years	9 (3.8)
51–60 years	20 (8.3)
61–70 years	134 (55.8)
71–80 years	51 (21.3)
81 years and older	6 (2.5)

Mentoring programmes ($N = 40$)

Primary purpose	n (%)
Improve social and emotional well-being	23 (57.5)
Develop identity, culture and faith	1 (2.5)
Promote youth justice and crime prevention	3 (7.5)
Provide education and training opportunities for future employment	13 (32.5)
Primary activity	n (%)
Shared construction project	29 (72.5)
Trade skills (e.g. carpentry, gardening)	7 (17.5)
Education (e.g. literacy, numeracy)	2 (5.0)
Health promotion	2 (5.0)
Format*	n (%)
One-to-one: one mentor matched with one young person	17 (42.5)
Group: one mentor matched with up to four young people	14 (35.0)
Larger group: one mentor matched with more than four young people	3 (7.5)
Team: two or more mentors matched with one or more mentee	14 (35.0)
Regionality	n (%)
Major city	18 (45.0)
Inner regional	9 (22.5)
Outer regional	9 (22.5)
Remote Australia	4 (10.0)
Facilitator skills*	n (%)
Teaching	19 (47.5)
Trade/technical	19 (47.5)
Manager/co-ordinator	8 (20.0)
Counselling	5 (12.5)
Youth work	4 (10.0)
Health	2 (5.0)
Social work	4 (10.0)
Source of funding	n (%)
No funding	28 (70.0)
Government	5 (12.5)
Non-government	4 (10.0)
Multiple sources	3 (7.5)
Programme duration	Mean (SD)
Total programme hours	29.5 (34.9)
Average number of days per week	1.2 (0.7)
Average number of hours per day	2.3 (1.2)

*Multiple response options.

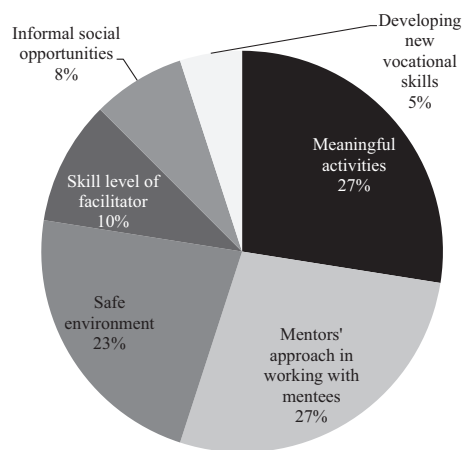


Figure 2 Ratings of most important factors that influence effectiveness of the mentoring programmes. *Note:* Sample size = 40.

Table 2 Mentoring programme audit

AYMN mentoring quality benchmarks	Yes <i>n</i> (%)	No <i>n</i> (%)
Does your mentoring programme have a clearly defined purpose?	30 (75)	10 (25)
Is there regular contact between mentor and mentee during the programme?	36 (90)	4 (10)
Is your mentoring programme part of an established mentoring organisation?	14 (35)	26 (65)
Do your mentors have mentoring skills that match your mentoring programme?	34 (85)	6 (15)
Are the mentors given clear information about their role in the programme?	36 (90)	4 (10)
Does your programme support ethnic and cultural diversity?	38 (95)	2 (5)
Does your programme have adequate ongoing financial and in-kind resources?	22 (55)	18 (45)
Does your programme have formal administrative and programme procedures?	18 (45)	22 (55)
Does your programme have clear eligibility criteria for mentees to be included in the programme?	20 (50)	20 (50)
Do stakeholders provide input into the programme planning?	20 (50)	20 (50)
Do you have formal policies that deal with risk management and confidentiality?	30 (75)	10 (25)

AYMN, Australian Youth Mentoring Network.

ing and materials, and (ii) training mentors were each associated with a higher rating against the AYMN quality benchmarks. While evaluating the programme was not significant ($P = 0.072$), there was a non-significant trend towards programme evaluation and higher ratings against the AYMN quality bench-

marks. Interestingly, there was a significant association between having female mentees and a higher rating against the AYMN quality benchmarks (Fisher's exact test, $P = 0.030$). This finding was not accounted for by programmes conducting greater levels of mentor screening and training.

Factors associated with higher ratings against AYMN quality benchmark ratings

Simple linear regression was used to determine mentoring programme characteristics associated with a higher rating on the AYMN quality benchmark total score (dependent variable). A higher score indicates higher quality (i.e. more benchmarks met). The data were screened for violation of assumptions prior to the analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell 2007). There were no missing data and all assumptions of linearity, normality, independence and homogeneity of variance were met. Following convention, $P < 0.05$ was taken to indicate a statistically significant association. Table 4 displays the unstandardised regression coefficients (B) and standard errors (SE), the standardised regression coefficients ($Beta$), and R , R^2 and adjusted R^2 after entry of each factor.

Univariate, linear regression revealed six significant factors to be associated with mentoring programmes meeting AYMN MQB. Three factors were related to procedural issues of recruitment of mentees and mentors, and three were related to the characteristics of the mentoring programme. The procedural issues included: (i) having a screening process in place for recruiting mentors, (ii) ensuring that the mentors undergo training prior to rolling out the mentoring programme and (iii) having predetermined criteria for including mentees into the mentoring programme. Mentoring programmes that: (i) were funded, (ii) had a predetermined purpose and (iii) underwent evaluation or a review process were more likely to meet AYMN MQB.

Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first study to describe in any kind of detail the characteristics and factors associated with the quality of intergenerational mentoring programmes at Australian community Men's Sheds. This study demonstrates that the broad range of health, social and community activities at Men's Sheds extend well beyond any stereotype of older retired men only getting together to work on construction activities in an informal social setting. That is, some Men's Sheds are connecting with younger generations in their communities in quite formal ways through a range of targeted and structured

Table 3 Characteristics of mentoring programmes that meet AYMN mentoring quality benchmarks (MQB)

	Meeting <6 MQB <i>n</i> (%) <i>N</i> = 14	Meeting 6-8 MQB <i>n</i> (%) <i>N</i> = 12	Meeting >8 MQB <i>n</i> (%) <i>N</i> = 14	Total	Fisher's exact χ^2	<i>P</i>	Pearson χ^2 (df)	<i>P</i>
Funded								
Yes	5 (33.3)	1 (6.7)	9 (60.0)	15 (37.5)	8.61	0.015	8.66 (2)	0.013
No	9 (36.0)	11 (44.0)	5 (20.0)	25 (62.5)				
Regionality								
Major city	6 (33.3)	7 (38.9)	5 (27.8)	18 (45)	4.49	0.67	5.00 (6)	0.544
Inner regional	4 (44.4)	3 (33.3)	2 (22.2)	9 (22.5)				
Outer regional	3 (33.3)	2 (22.2)	4 (44.4)	9 (22.5)				
Remote Australia	1 (25.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (75.0)	4 (4)				
Facilitators role								
Unpaid shed co-ordinator	9 (39.1)	10 (43.5)	4 (17.4)	23 (57.5)	8.09	0.015	8.34 (2)	0.015
Paid co-ordinator	5 (29.4)	2 (11.8)	10 (58.8)	17 (42.5)				
Funding								
No funding	9 (36.0)	11 (44.0)	5 (20.0)	25 (62.5)	11.98	0.021	14.15 (6)	0.028
Programme co-ordinator/facilitator	1 (25.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (75.0)	4 (10)				
Mentor training and preparation	3 (60.0)	1 (20.0)	1 (20.0)	5 (12.5)				
Materials	1 (16.7)	0 (0.0)	5 (83.3)	6 (15)				
Mentor training								
No	9 (45.0)	9 (45.0)	2 (10.0)	20 (50)	11.31	0.004	11.29 (2)	0.004
Yes	5 (25.0)	3 (15.0)	12 (60.0)	20 (50)				
Female mentees								
No	11 (42.3)	10 (38.5)	5 (19.2)	26 (65)	7.57	0.030	8.18 (2)	0.017
Yes	3 (21.4)	2 (14.3)	9 (64.3)	14 (35)				
Programme evaluated								
No evaluation	8 (53.3)	5 (33.3)	2 (13.3)	15 (37.5)	11.01	0.072	12.28 (6)	0.056
Programme mid-point	1 (16.7)	4 (66.7)	1 (16.7)	6 (15)				
After programme	3 (33.3)	1 (11.1)	5 (55.6)	9 (22.5)				
Multiple times	2 (20.0)	2 (20.0)	6 (60.0)	10 (25.5)				

AYMN, Australian Youth Mentoring Network.

intergenerational mentoring activities. Moreover, many Men's Sheds reported a desire to become involved in such programmes with a range of mainly surmountable factors listed as current barriers. Importantly, this study has highlighted three main factors where characteristics of Men's Shed programmes are associated with higher ratings against the AYMN quality benchmarks: screening of mentors, mentor training and programme evaluation. Furthermore, the novel finding that so many of the intergenerational mentoring programmes targeted young women warrants further investigation.

Funding is an ongoing issue for mentoring programmes in Australia and these results confirm that some of the main barriers to running a formal intergenerational mentoring programme at a Men's Shed are linked with a lack of resources. Although mentors may be in a volunteering capacity, programme co-ordinators, activity and training materials, training and

evaluation usually need funding presenting sheds with the same dilemma that other registered mentoring programmes typically face. That is, 46% of all registered Australian intergenerational mentoring programmes in 2013 indicated that they would lose their primary funding source by the end of 2014 (AYMN 2013). Given that funding is a barrier, this represents a major issue for governments and service providers including Men's Sheds. While qualitative research illustrates the potential of older men to be used as a valuable and skilled community resource (e.g. Wilson *et al.* 2013), this potential needs to be backed by adequate government and philanthropic funding.

While certain programme characteristics are associated with quality indicators (e.g. DuBois *et al.* 2011), the presence of these characteristics is still not a guarantee of better outcomes. To date very little, if any, published outcomes data exist on intergenerational

Table 4 Univariate linear regression model: factors associated with mentoring programmes meeting AYMN mentoring quality benchmarks

Factor	Unstandardised coefficients			Standardised coefficients			95% Confidence interval for B			
	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower bound	Upper bound
Mentors undergo a screening process	0.54	0.29	0.27	2.43	0.62	0.53	3.91	<0.001	1.17	3.69
Mentors undergo training	0.44	0.19	0.18	2.00	0.65	0.44	3.04	0.004	0.67	3.33
Mentees need to meet predetermined criteria to be included in the programme	0.36	0.13	0.11	1.62	0.68	0.35	2.36	0.023	0.23	3.01
Mentoring programme was funded	0.30	0.09	0.07	1.41	0.72	0.30	1.96	0.057	0.04	2.87
Mentoring programme has a predetermined purpose	0.32	0.10	0.08	1.66	0.80	0.32	2.08	0.044	0.04	3.28
Mentoring programme was evaluated/reviewed	0.45	0.20	0.18	2.10	0.67	0.45	3.12	0.003	0.74	3.47

The explanatory variables (e.g. Mentors undergo a screening process) were all coded as Yes = 1 and No = 0. AYMN, Australian Youth Mentoring Network.

mentoring programmes in Men’s Sheds. There is an urgent need for research that works towards identifying effective practice models that ‘fit’ within the Men’s Sheds community ethos and capacities (Cordier & Wilson 2014b) and that achieve positive outcomes for mentees and mentors. However, such intergenerational mentoring programmes should not be structured to replace the primary role of Men’s Sheds as a community location for mainly older men to interact socially and work on a range of shared projects. Nevertheless, older men have shown a willingness to connect with younger generations, and mentoring theory suggests that it is these connections that are integral to positive mentee outcomes (Rhodes & DuBois 2008).

Programmes that screened mentors were most significantly associated with meeting the AYMN quality benchmarks. Such screening often involved a police clearance and a working with children check. Interestingly, mentor suitability based on having trade and technical skills was also frequently mentioned. Other Men’s Shed studies have not unequivocally stated that mentors *have* to have such skills, but having a core group possessing these skills was identified in previous studies as integral to keeping a construction project on track and ensuring that there is a tangible product at the end of the programme (Wilson *et al.* 2013). Our results confirm that meaningful activities in the form of mainly shared construction projects are central to an intergenerational programme at community Men’s Sheds and thus having at least one person with technical trade skills – matched to the programme’s primary activity – seems vital.

When considering the five areas, Whitlock (2007) identified as being part of the conceptualisation of connectedness – (i) trust; (ii) caring and respect; (iii) recognition of worth by others and institutions; (iv) increased social capital and community belonging, continuous interaction with one’s environment; and (v) cohesive identity – mentoring through shared activities and social inclusion appears to have the potential to meet many of these criteria. While *meaningful activities* and the *mentors’ approach* were not significantly associated with meeting the AYMN quality benchmarks, they were subjectively rated by respondents as the most important factors for a programme’s success and, as such, are important results. For example, in previous qualitative research, male teenage mentees spoke about the personal reward and sense of community service associated with a tangible end-product, such as a completed piece of constructed woodwork (e.g. a wooden park bench) (Wilson *et al.* 2014).

Our study found that vulnerable adolescents and young adults are being mentored at Men’s Sheds

with the purposes of improving their social and emotional well-being and to provide educational opportunities for future employment. The importance of having such community initiatives for adolescence – at a time when many are vulnerable and at risk of developing mental health problems – cannot be overstated. Perhaps, the most surprising finding was the number of programmes that involve primary school children and female mentees. The transition to adulthood literature illustrates a litany of social and educational difficulties faced by boys and young men (e.g. ABS 2012) as a reason for male mentoring programmes. Examples of older men mentoring younger girls are almost unheard of within the literature. Indeed, Rhodes (2005) reports that the major issues needing to be uncovered concerning gender within mentoring remain, surprisingly, largely untouched. As such, it is heartening to know that girls are not being excluded from Men's Sheds programmes and that young girls, their parents/guardian and schools have not placed any unhelpful gendered stereotypes as a barrier to participation. Likewise, it is encouraging to know that mentor screening does not deter older men from formal mentoring with younger girls through shared construction activities. As previous research has noted, older male mentors see themselves as a potential community resource through mentoring at Men's Sheds (Wilson *et al.* 2013) and this resource should not be exclusive to young boys in need of support through mentoring.

Limitations

This study is subject to a number of limitations. As with all descriptive surveys, it is not possible to provide fine-grained detail about the phenomena under investigation. Second, because our survey was cross-sectional, we have no evidence for causal relationships and can only report associations. Third, we have no outcome data, so the relationship between the AYMN quality benchmarks and outcomes for mentees and mentors is unknown. Fourth, as this survey was only targeted at Men's Sheds that run *formal intergenerational mentoring programmes*, we did not attempt to achieve a representative sample and we have no information on non-responders. As such, findings cannot be generalised to all Men's Sheds in Australia. Finally, the survey responses are those of the facilitators co-ordinating the mentoring programme which means that there may be some bias in their responses. Nevertheless, they are best positioned to provide accurate responses regarding the intergenerational mentoring programmes. Moreover, the fairly even spread of quality ratings against the AYMN

quality benchmarks suggests that the facilitators were reliable in their ratings of the programmes.

Directions for future research

The funding conundrum highlighted previously illustrates the urgent need to conduct empirical studies with rigorous research designs that examine the effectiveness of intergenerational mentoring programmes longitudinally to support future funding requests. Future research should also explore the relationship between funding and the health and social benefits of conducting intergenerational mentoring programmes at Men's Sheds. Other than small qualitative studies, there is an almost total absence of in-depth qualitative and longer term outcomes data about mentees leading to an understanding of the types of *processes* central to the mentor–mentee dyad that foster mentee potential. However, as Rhodes and DuBois (2008) point out, longer term follow-up data collection in the US has only shown a small effect size and so it is perhaps prudent for research designs to ensure that quantitative outcome data are aligned with descriptive and qualitative data which will uncover the processes *over time* which appear to influence better futures for mentees (Brady & O'Regan 2009). Finally, the reliability and validity of the AYMN benchmarking tool should be subjected to rigorous assessment to ensure greater confidence in future programme evaluation.

Conclusions

These are quite exciting results as they point to the relative high-quality intergenerational mentoring programmes conducted at Men's Sheds. These programmes have the potential capacity to form one part of a wider suite of early intervention strategies for many children – male and female – with social, emotional, learning and behavioural difficulties. The central function of Men's Sheds as places for meaningful activity, and social inclusion make them an ideal location for the investment of mentor programme funds to enhance the lives of younger and older Australians. While alignment to the AYMN quality benchmarks is not a guarantee of an effective programme, in the absence of any alternative tool, this paper demonstrates that many formal intergenerational mentoring programmes at Australian Men's Sheds are aligned with good practices. The absence of secure long-term funding and the need for research on the outcomes and processes of such programmes are an urgent priority before the momentum of these grassroots programmes is lost.

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Conflicts of interest

No conflicts of interest are declared.

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