

Appreciative Aging & Men's Sheds

What Is Appreciative Aging?

Appreciative Aging is a strengths-based way of understanding later life. Rather than focusing on decline, needs, or costs, it emphasizes: Accumulated **wisdom, skills, and experience**; Capacity for **contribution, purpose, and leadership**; Ongoing ability to build relationships and strengthen communities

Core idea: Aging is not a problem to manage—it is a resource to mobilize.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Appreciative Inquiry is a change approach that focuses on what works and what gives life to people and communities.

The 4-D Cycle: **Discover:** What is working well? What strengths exist? **Dream:** What might be possible if these strengths were fully valued? **Design:** How do we intentionally build systems that support this future? **Destiny (or Deliver):** How do we sustain action and learning?

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

ABCD starts with what a community *has*, not what it lacks.

Key ABCD principles: Everyone has gifts; Relationships build communities; Associations (informal groups) are key drivers of change; Institutions should support, not replace, community action

Where Men's Sheds Fit

Men's Sheds bring Appreciative Aging and ABCD together by: Valuing older men as **contributors**; Creating peer-led spaces of belonging and purpose; Mobilizing skills for community benefit; Partnering with nonprofits, municipalities, and institutions

From Deficit Thinking to Appreciative Aging

Deficit-Based Lens	Appreciative Aging Lens
Older adults as service users	Older adults as community assets
Focus on decline and dependency	Focus on strengths and contribution
Programs designed <i>for</i>	Initiatives designed <i>with</i>
Isolation as an individual issue	Connection as community infrastructure

How Appreciative Aging Reduces Ageism

Appreciative Aging: Challenges stereotypes about capacity and relevance; Makes contributions visible; Expands who is seen as a leader or problem-solver; Shifts language, policies, and practices

Reflect: Where do you see deficit-based assumptions about aging in your organization or community?

Reflection Worksheet: Appreciative Aging & ABCD

Part 1: Discover – Recognizing Strengths

1. Think of an older person (including yourself) who has made a meaningful contribution.
 - What skills, knowledge, or qualities did they bring?
 - What conditions made this possible?
 2. What strengths do older people in your community commonly have that are underused?
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Part 2: Dream – Imagining What’s Possible

3. Imagine a community that fully values aging and experience.
 - What roles do older people play?
 - What looks or feels different?
 4. If ageism were no longer a barrier, what new possibilities would emerge?
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Part 3: Design – Applying ABCD

5. Choose one community area (e.g., health, environment, arts, youth, housing).
 - What assets do older people bring to this area?
 - What associations or groups already exist?
 6. How could these assets be intentionally mobilized for community benefit?
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Part 4: Destiny – Personal and Organizational Action

7. One small change I can make to support appreciative aging:
 - In language:
 - In program design:
 - In partnerships:
8. One idea I want to explore further after today:

Men's Sheds Case Studies Mapped to the 4-D Cycle

Case Study 1: Community Repair & Accessibility Project

Context: A Men's Shed partners with a local housing nonprofit to build ramps and repair mobility aids.

Discover: - Members bring carpentry, problem-solving, and project management skills - Strong peer relationships already exist

Dream: - Older men as trusted community builders - People aging at home safely and with dignity

Design: - Informal project teams - Clear but flexible partnership roles - Shed members lead the work

Destiny: - Ongoing referral relationship with the nonprofit - Increased confidence, purpose, and visibility of Shed members

Case Study 2: Environmental Stewardship Partnership

Context: A Shed collaborates with a municipality on trail maintenance and environmental projects.

Discover: - Deep local knowledge - Time availability and commitment - Pride in place

Dream: - Older men as environmental stewards and mentors - Intergenerational learning opportunities

Design: - Project-based volunteering - Municipal support for tools and materials - Shed-led planning

Destiny: - Sustained volunteer engagement - Stronger relationships between citizens and local government

Case Study 3: Skills Sharing & Social Connection

Context: A Shed partners with a community centre to offer skills workshops.

Discover: - Members skilled in woodworking, mechanics, arts, and life skills - Desire to teach and connect

Dream: - Learning spaces rooted in lived experience - Reduced isolation across age groups

Design: - Peer-led workshops - Low-barrier participation - Emphasis on storytelling and relationship

Destiny: - Expanded community networks - Increased sense of purpose and belonging

Closing Reflection: Men's Sheds show what happens when communities: - Start with strengths - Build relationships - Invite contribution

Key questions: How might appreciative aging reshape the way your community understands—and engages—older people? What other programs demonstrate models of appreciative aging?