



Gerald: About me

"I'm 73. I was born in Barking & Dagenham, and my dad is from Hackney.

I love music.: Blondie, ACDC, the Rolling Stones. I also listen to a lot of Radio 2 and 4, which helps me win all the quizzes we do in Shed Life.

My dad was in the war. He died when I was only 17, and when my mum remarried I had a stepdad who was abusive and violent. We had lots of fights.

When I was young I had a bad accident which damaged my arm, and I developed mental health issues. I met my wife in a mental health drop-in.

I've always worked but I worked in bad conditions, like in a printers and manual jobs outside in bad weather, without proper warm clothes or health and safety. It caused me a lot of illness."

Barriers to Connection

Since my wife died, I've not been looking after myself as well. I haven't been cutting my hair, and I haven't been washing since the window broke in my bathroom - it's always too cold, and I can't raise my hands to wash properly because of my arthritis. Nothing's been adapted to help with this.

Because of how I look, people are surprised I'm not homeless. People are rude and avoid talking to me. And people have bullied me because of how I look.. The barber cutting my hair - he said he didn't want to use the good clippers on me!

I have **schizophrenia** and I've been hospitalised a few times. One time when I came out of hospital, back in the 80s I was living in a flat without central heating and not enough food. When I went to the doctors, he called an ambulance because I was malnourished.

I don't sleep well - I can be up for days in a row, listening to the radio or reading books and this affects how I am around other people.

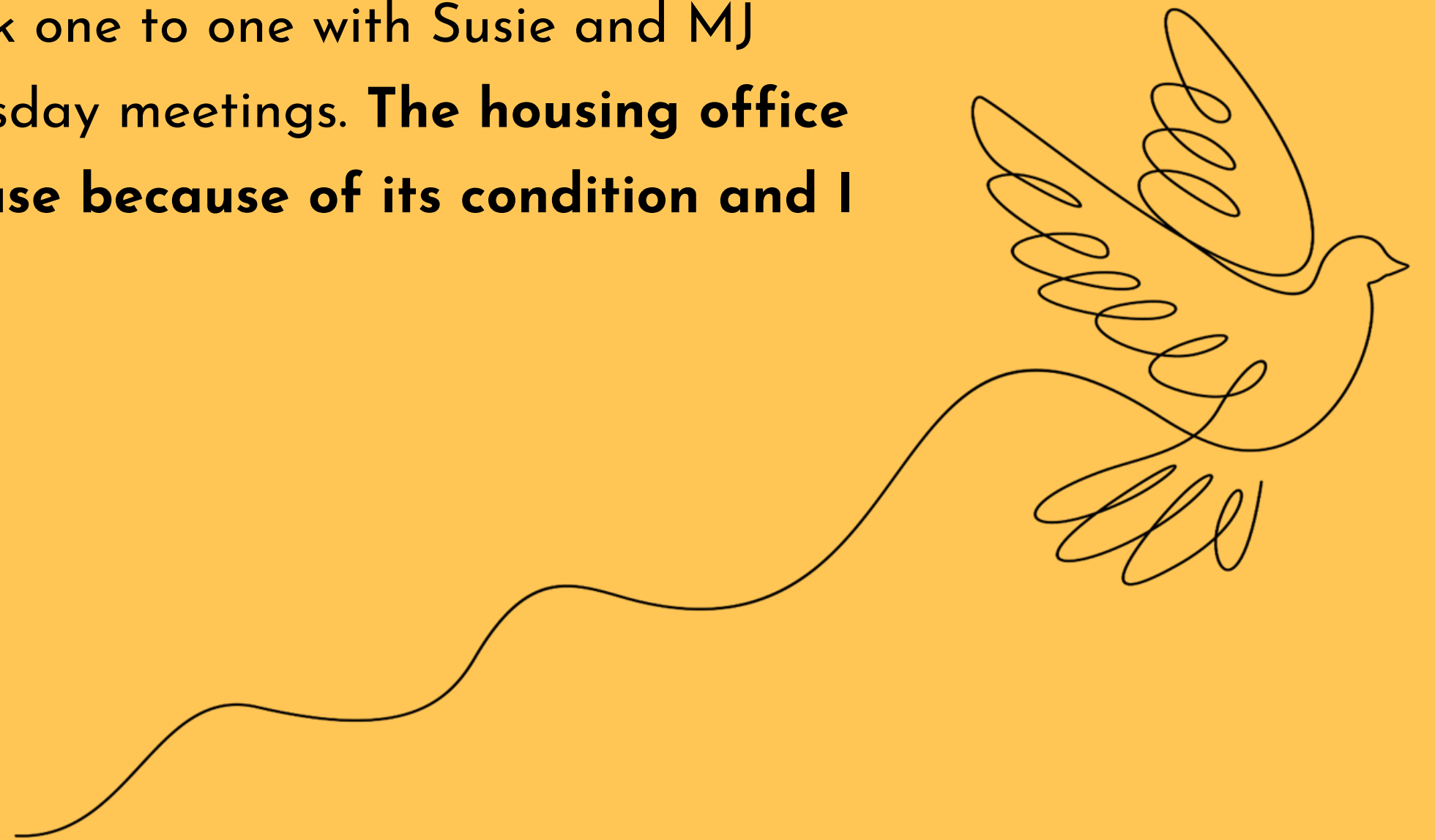


My hopes for Connect

I found Shed Life when it was being set up in 2018 and have been going to their events since then - I get on really well with Susie and talk her ear off all the time - I've only missed it three times in six years.

It was just before Christmas that I started to work one to one with Susie and MJ through Connect - so now it's not just the Wednesday meetings. **The housing office told me I was going to be evicted from my house because of its condition and I wanted help to stop that."**

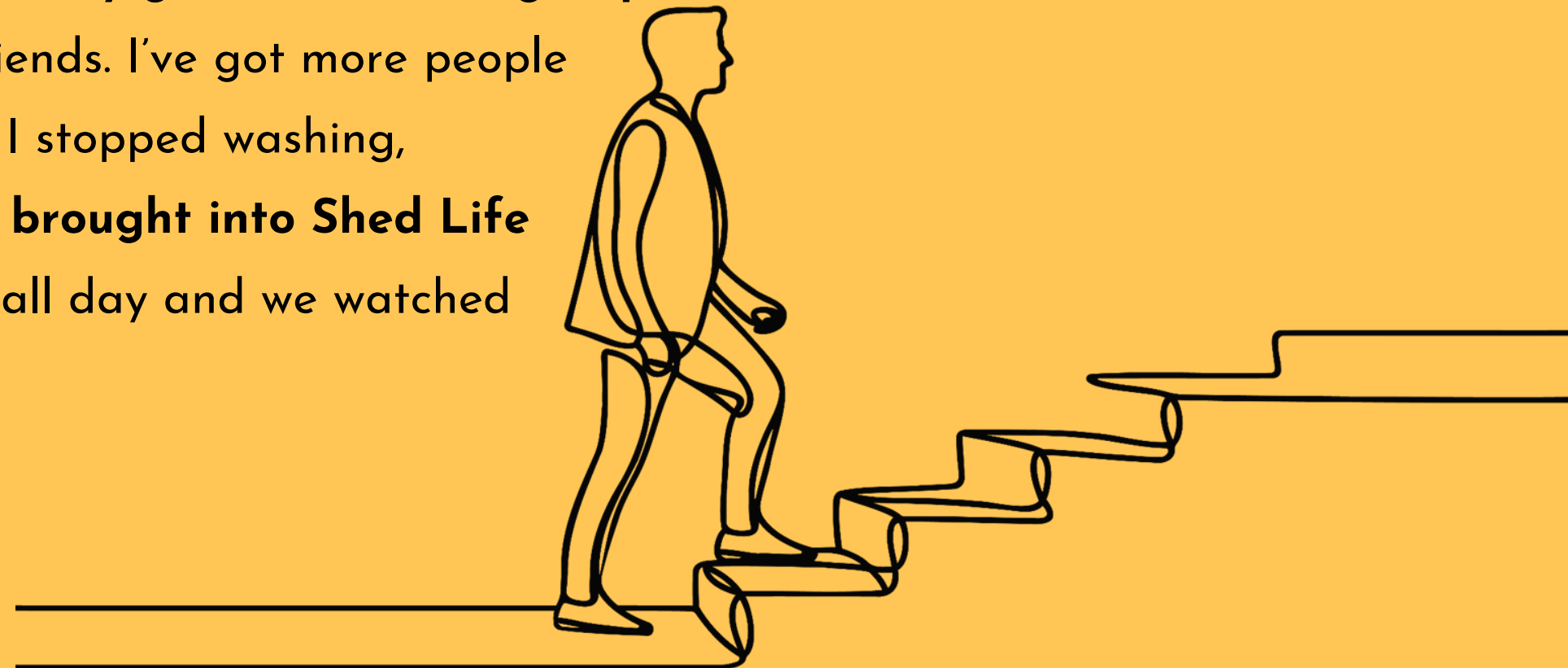
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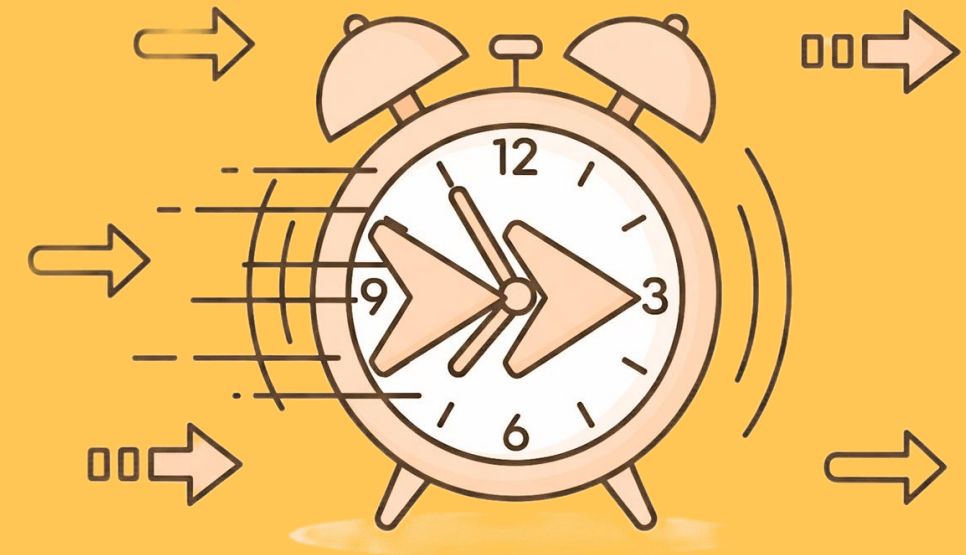
Some steps we've taken together

Because of the threat of eviction, Susie and MJ have been working with me to sort my house out. It needed a total refresh. MJ's dad owns the furniture store in Barking and they're donating some of the new furniture. Once the housing officer saw what they were doing for me, she was so moved that she held back on the eviction and said she'd come over in her spare time to help! **Susie explained to the housing woman that I was a founding member of the Shedlife group and that I helped them get the first survey done so we could build the Shed.** Back when they needed a survey, lots of men in suits came, and I said I'd be willing to donate £100 to help get it built. Apparently the next day they messaged Susie to say they'd be able to do it without the big costs, after hearing what I said.

Recently, **I've got another couple to join Shed Life and they're really grateful for the group.** One of the women sat outside library for 6 weeks with anxiety about joining. Now we've made friends. I've got more people to talk to now. My family stopped inviting me for Christmas when I stopped washing, but **I didn't spend Christmas on my own this year. The couple I brought into Shed Life invited me to their house on Christmas day.** I stayed with them all day and we watched five John Wayne Westerns."



10 months later....



Gerald



What happened next?

Gerald remains in his newly renovated flat, and is no longer at threat of eviction and having to move out of his neighbourhood.

For several months, Gerald was receiving support to improve his personal hygiene from other members of the Shed Life community. As of August 2025, working in partnership with the Independent Living Agency and Gerald's social worker, Gerald was set up with a Direct Payment, enabling him to pay for 11 hours per week of personal care, though **this need was delayed, and it's level reduced, thanks to ongoing mutual support provided by Shed Life group members.**

Gerald is still receiving support from a psychiatrist for his schizophrenia, though, in his last appointment, he was informed that he has is in stable condition with no acute mental health need. His consultant has remarked that **"it is clear that Gerald is receiving excellent support from his friends at the Shed Life project [and] remains independent in several respects, walking to the Thames Hub / Library most days, and purchasing bread rolls and cheese for his lunch".**



Gerald comfortable in his refreshed flat, alongside Susie



Gerald's newly installed accessible shower