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A Cross-cultural Study Exploring Structural Factors of Men's Sheds

Senior Honors Thesis

Western Michigan University

Kaitlyn McGrail

Abstract

The Men's Shed program was developed in Australia in 2006 with the explicit goal of establishing a place for men to socially interact and to help maintain their health and well-being. The Men's Shed program has grown tremendously and has continued their growth in many other countries. There is limited research conducted about the organizational and structural features of the Men's Shed program. There has been no research to date conducted cross-culturally on the program. The aim of this study is to conduct a descriptive, cross-cultural study on Men's Shed organizations and the characteristics of the Men's Shed participants. By understanding the characteristics of this program it may help for the development of a similar program to be implemented in the United States. We were able to determine the following about the Men's Shed characteristics: the programs are volunteer-based; there are many variations in the way they are operated; typically fees are charged but the amount varies widely; the main activities, programming, and benefits are relatively similar; and two-thirds of the men participating in the Men's Shed are still married.

Introduction

The Men's Shed program began in Australia in 2007. Since 2007 it has spread to many different countries including New Zealand, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. Men's Sheds offer a place for men to go and chat and continue to use their skills in an environment specifically made for men. Some of the programs offered by the Men's sheds include metal work, woodworking, computers, painting, automotive repair, and socialization. The reasoning to why Men's Sheds were created was because of the loss of the traditional backyard shed that many men traditionally had that was essential in various roles that these men had (Wilson, N. & Cordier, R 2013). The sheds were created to allow men to socially engage and feel like an active member of society in a program that was specifically designed just for them. Research has shown that men's health and well-being is worse than women (Wilson & Cordier, 2013). One of the visions for the Men's Shed program is to address the health and needs of men specifically (Wilson, N. & Cordier, R 2013). Not only is this program focused on men's health it is also focused on a wide variety of other issues that men may face as growing older. Having poor social supports is a risk factor for people and increase the development of illness and premature death at each stage of life (Ballinger, Talbot & Glenda , 2009). 59% of adults aged over 52 who report poor health say they feel lonely some of the time or often, compared to 21% who say they are in excellent health (cite). Men's Sheds are trying to combat some of these issues while still mainly focusing on creating an environment specifically devoted for men. It has been found that those lacking social connections is a comparable risk factor for early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and is worse for us than well-known risk factors such as obesity and physical inactivity (Campaign to End Loneliness, n.d.). Another major interest in the Men's Shed programs was the fact that older men have the highest completed suicide rate compared to any other age group

(American Association of Suicidology, 2009). This proved to be very interesting in the decision to research Men's Shed programs to see how they function and if these programs have anything to do with combating issues that many older men may be facing. The characteristics and structural factors were explored in this research to understand more about the inner workings of these Men's Sheds that have seemingly been growing at an exponential rate across many different countries.

Methods

The data was collected by using survey monkey, an online survey tool. The survey took approximately fifteen to twenty minutes. The data was collected over a three week period. Men's Sheds directors were surveyed from online public information regarding the Men's Shed program. Ireland, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom were chosen due to their program longevity and online availability of information. Upon starting research a proposal was sent to the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). The HSIRB deemed that approval was not needed considering that no information was identifiable based on the questions in the survey. The research was looking at a cross-cultural study of Men's Shed programs in the three countries. The survey had a 67% response rate, with twenty six out of thirty nine participants completing it.

Results

Quantitative and qualitative data were both collected and valuable information about the Men's Shed program was found. Of the three countries surveyed, thirty-eight percent of respondents were from New Zealand, thirty-five percent were from the United Kingdom, and twenty-seven percent were from Ireland. All of the Men's Sheds were in operation for varying

amounts. The length in operation ranged from two to seventy-two months. The mean for the length in operation was 25.6 months in operation. The majority of the sheds were volunteer based as their primary way of operating the Men's Shed and that ranged anywhere from one to forty-one volunteers at any given day. Eighty-eight percent of the Men's Shed did not have any salaried workers, eight percent had one salaried worker, and four percent of the Men's sheds had four salaried workers. Days in operation varied with each Men's shed but blank 34.6 % are open 2 days a week which was the majority of Men's sheds. In a close second blank 30.7% were open three days a week. The mean for days in operation was 2.98 days. The average number of hours open each day was 6 hours with blank 30.7% of Men's sheds being open. The mean for hours in operation was 4.5 hours per day. The average number of participants per week for each shed also varied widely among all of the Men's sheds. The number of participants ranged from four to sixty participants in any given week. The demographics of these participants were also interesting. The youngest age of participants in any given Men's sheds ranged anywhere from eighteen to sixty-two as being the youngest participant in that program. The oldest age of the participants in the Men's shed ranged from seventy to ninety-eight years old. The means of transportation was also studied, and the majority of participants were transported to the Men's shed was by driving which was 46% with a standard deviation of 1.04. The advertising techniques of these Men's Shed programs were varied with the majority at 36% using all techniques of advertising, with a standard deviation of 1.42. The techniques of advertising listed were word of mouth, online, and public media. The directors were asked to rank the top three activities offered in their men's shed that was most utilized. The number one activity ranked was woodshop/woodturning/metal work which was 34.6% of the sheds with a standard deviation of 1.64. The second highest ranked activity was upcycling/painting/ crafting with 31.5% and a

standard deviation of 1.86. The third highest ranked activity was socializing with 42.9% and a standard deviation of 1.84. Of all the Men's shed participants in all of the locations surveyed. 69% of them are still married, 20% are divorced and 11% are widowed. 84% of Men's shed require some fee for men to be able to participate. However, the amount varies across each Men's shed.

Conclusion

The results showed a variety of different characteristics that prior to this research was not understood about Men's Shed programs cross-culturally. From the data collected some of our major findings were that 69% of men who participate in this program are still married. This was a shock to the student investigators who predicted that the majority would have been divorced or widowed. The majority of sheds are operated strictly by volunteers and the majority of sheds also charge some sort of fee for all its members. However, many sheds stated that if someone was ineligible to pay that they would not be turned away from participating in the shed's activities. The types of activities that were rated as most utilized were relatively similar across the board. The majority of sheds utilize woodwork, crafts and socializing as their main benefits for their participants. The age of the participants varied widely among all the sheds. Some sheds had their youngest participant as eighteen years old other sheds had their youngest participant as sixty-two years old. The same variations applied to their oldest members as well. At the end of the survey the program directors were asked if they wanted to add any additional information and a few gave inspiring quotes of what they believed the Men's Shed program brings to their members.

“It is an opportunity for men to meet together to do and talk about things of mutual interest. It helps to tackle social isolation and has been used by other statutory bodies as a suitable place for men with mild mental health [depression, anxiety] issues and also issues of confidence to attend. We are able to offer a place for people with health and mobility limitations - through illness or disability - to come and engage with other men.”

What this program director spoke about is what the student investigators were hoping to see Men's Sheds accomplish. They have had tremendous success thus far in creating Men's sheds cross-culturally. After seeing how many sheds are organized and ran, the hope is that these types of sheds may one day be implemented in the United States. It is important to remember that men's health needs to be treated differently than women. This is especially important when dealing with men's mental health and isolation. Future implications dealing with the Men's shed program are hopefully looking into the details about the health benefits that some of these members of the program may be receiving. Since the majority of the sheds are ran solely by volunteers and the funding for all the sheds were from various places, it is believed that a program such as this would be feasible in the United States at some point. The Men's Shed program has helped bring joy to many men in these three countries and the student investigators look forward to seeing the growth of this program and how it will touch many of those in these communities.

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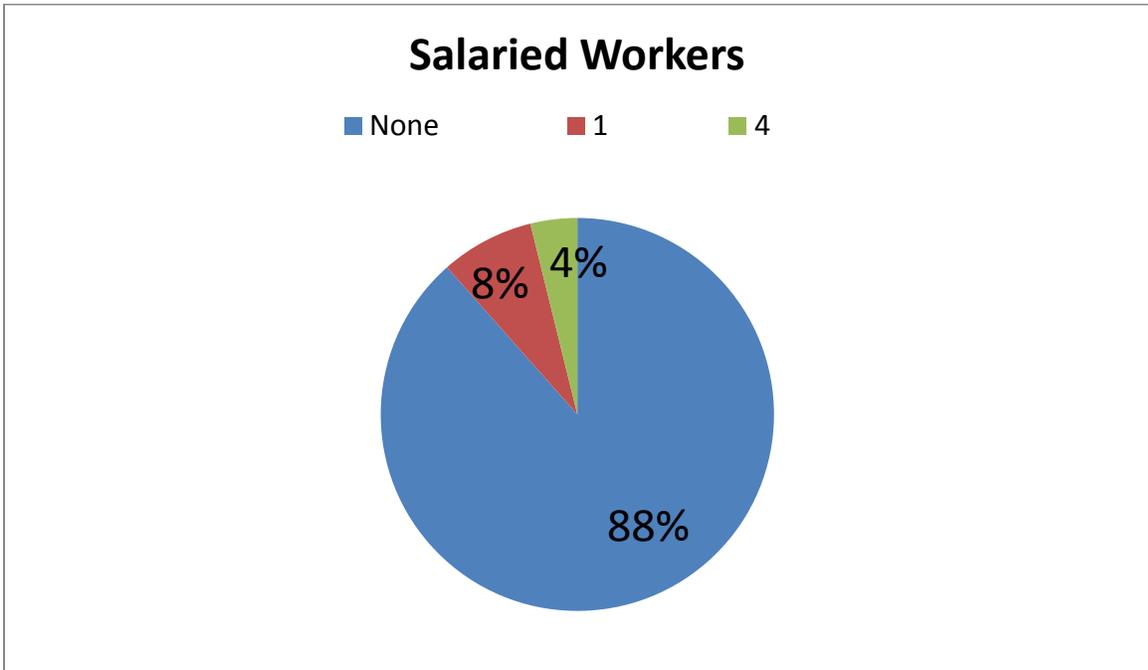
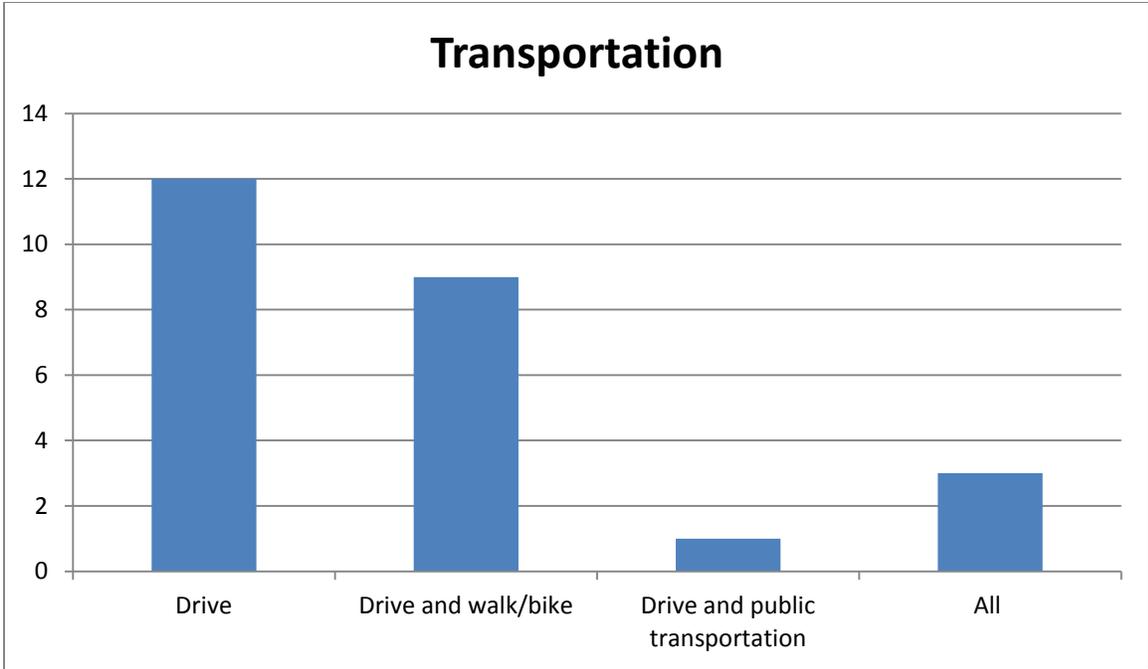
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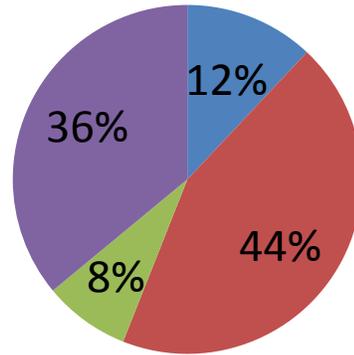
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Appendix A

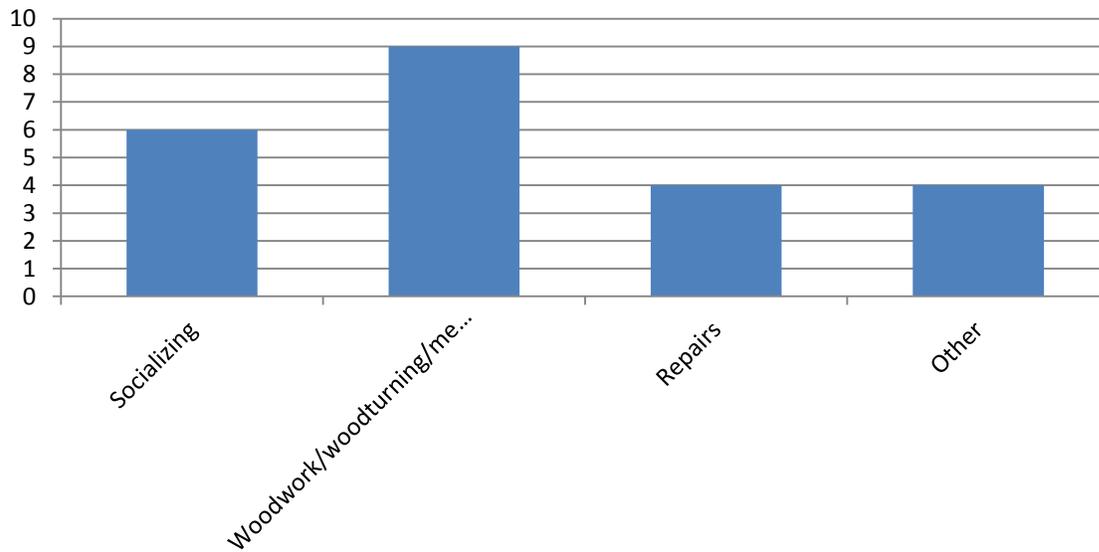


Advertising

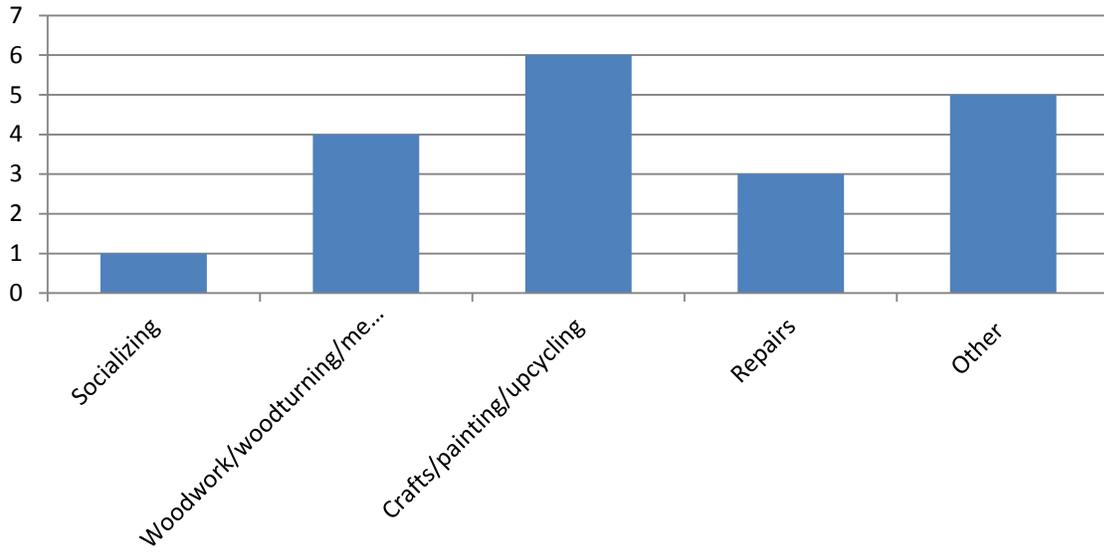
- Word of Mouth
- Public Media and Word of Mouth
- Online and Word of Mouth
- All



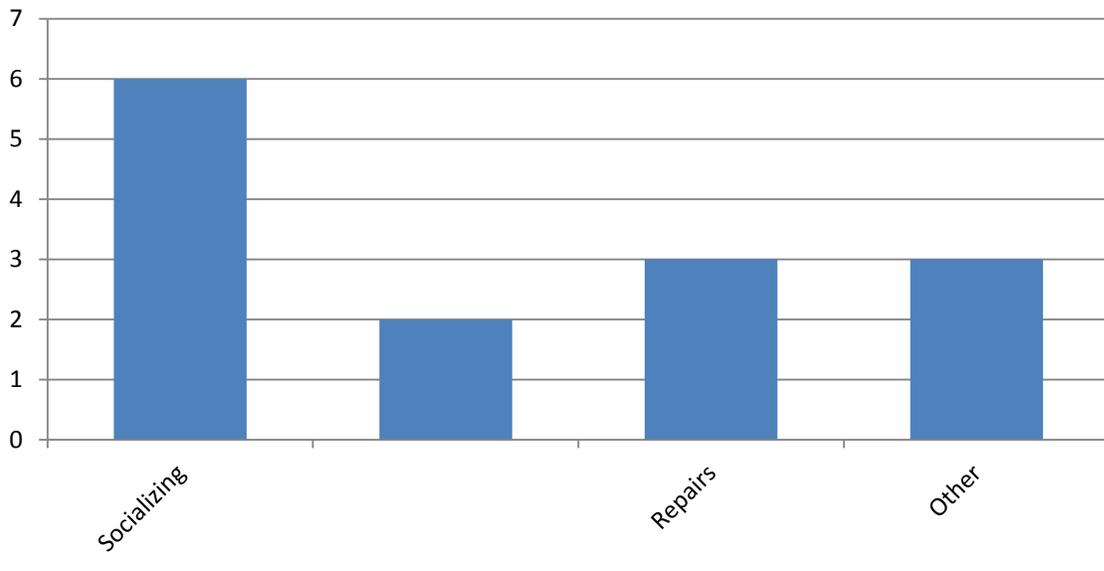
Activities Ranked #1



Activities Ranked #2

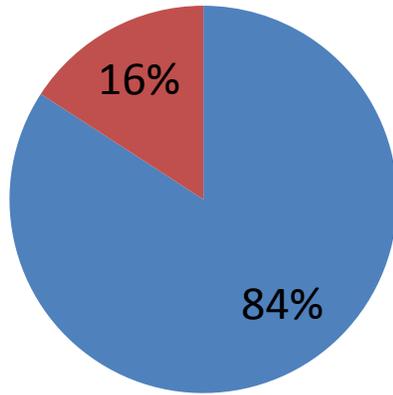


Activities Ranked #3



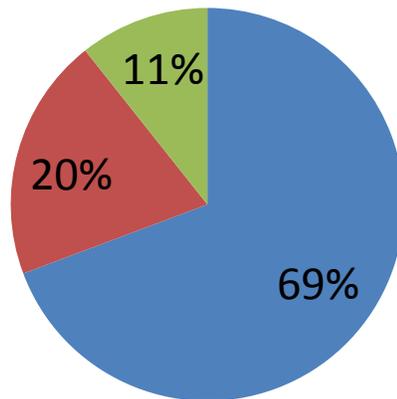
Fee

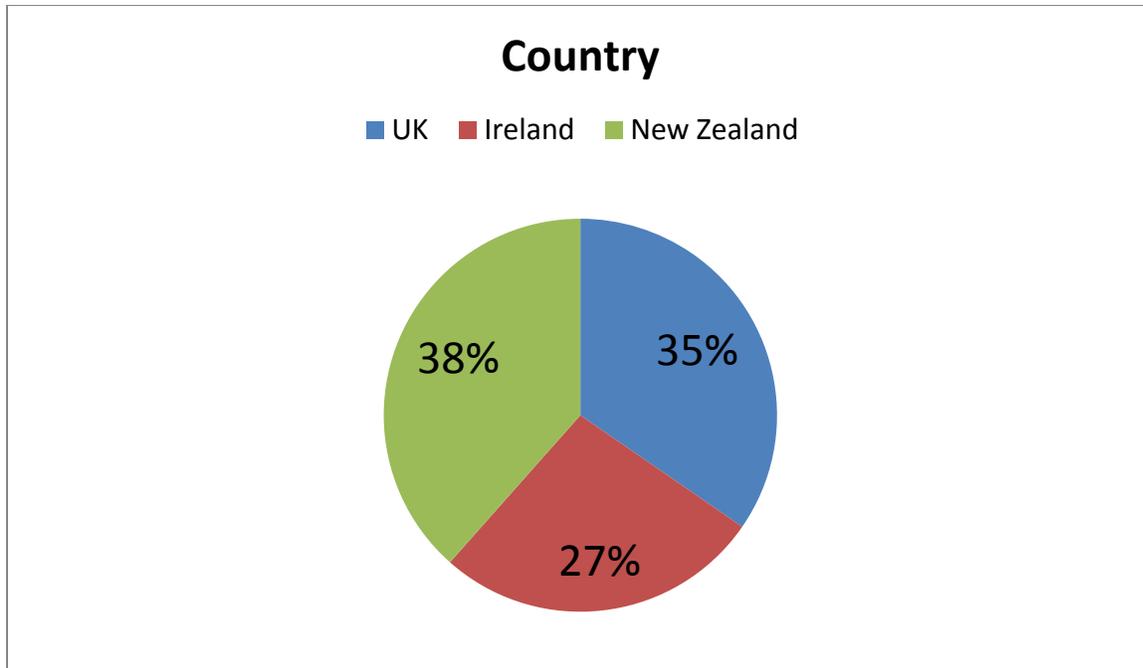
■ Yes ■ No



Marital Status

■ Married ■ Divorced ■ Widowed





Appendix B

*Western Michigan University
Men's Shed Study*



Dear Men's Shed Director,

We are students at Western Michigan University in the U.S. and are conducting research for our Honors Thesis. In 2013 we had the opportunity to visit several Men's Sheds in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Since Men's Sheds are not common in the United States we are interested in the characteristics of your

organization and participants. Our research project is titled "*A cross cultural study exploring the structural factors of Men's Sheds*".

We are excited that you offered to participate in our short survey to contribute to a broader knowledge and cross-cultural understanding of Men's Sheds.

Participants will receive results (de-identified) at the conclusion of the study if requested.

Thank you for your support with our project

Background

1. In what city and country is your Men's Shed located in?

_____City _____Country

2. How long has your Men's Shed been in operation?

____years ____ months

3. What marketing efforts are used to promote the Men's Shed program at your location? (check all that apply)

Newspaper

Community flyers

Radio

Online

Word of mouth

Other (Please specify) _____

4. Staffing:

How many salaried employees do you have? ____ salaried employees

How many volunteers do you have? _____ volunteers

5. How is your Men's Shed financed? Please explain.

6. How many days a week is your Men's Shed open?

_____ days per week

7. How many hours is the program available for participants each day?

_____ hours per day

8. Is there a fee required for participants? Yes No

9. If yes, how much is the fee?

10. On *average*, how many participants attend the program per week?

_____ participants per week

11. What types of activities does your Men Shed provide?

12. Please rank the top three activities that are most utilized at your site.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Participant Characteristics

12. What is the age range of your participants?

Years in age (youngest) _____ to (oldest) _____

13. Please *estimate* what percentage of your participants are married.

Married _____%

Never married _____%

Widowed _____%

Divorced _____%

14. Typically, how do the *majority* of your participants travel to the Shed?

Walk

- Bike
- Drive
- Public transportation (such as bus)

15. What would you describe as the most beneficial aspect including health related benefits that your Men's Shed offers participants?

Any additional comments: _____

**Thank you for your time! Please provide your name and address below
if you would like to receive a copy of the final report.**