

A SHED FOR LIFE

The Men's Sheds movement tackles health issues and promotes an active lifestyle. **Chris Jenkins** finds out how your company can help.



The image of the middle-aged man glued to a sofa watching the TV is something of a comedy cliché, but for older men, particularly if they are retired or widowed, an inactive lifestyle can become a serious social and health issue.

The Men's Sheds movement originated in Australia in 1998, the aim being to promote social interaction, reduce isolation, and improve the health and well-being of older men. There are now approaching a thousand Sheds in Australia, and the movement is catching on all over the world.

A Men's Shed is essentially a larger version of the typical garden shed, housed perhaps in a community centre, an empty office or an outbuilding, but based on a network of members sharing tools and resources they need to work on projects of their own choosing at their own pace, and in a safe, friendly and inclusive venue. The essence of a Shed is not a building, which some don't have, but the network of relationships between the members.

Make and mend

Men's Sheds are places of skill-sharing and informal learning, of individual pursuits and community projects, of purpose, achievement and social interaction, places of leisure where men come together to work. Although Men's Sheds mostly attract older men, some include men of any age, women and young people.

A Shed's activities usually involve making or mending in

wood (e.g. carpentry, joinery, turning, carving, whittling, marquetry, furniture renovation), metalworking (milling, sheet metal, welding, etc.) bike repair, gardening, electronics, tool renovation, boat renovation, model engineering (model railways, planes) and even car maintenance. Reclamation, reuse and restoration will feature strongly.

The UK and Ireland are strongly involved in the movement, with 217 Sheds in existence, and 87 in development. Local events such as the recent Meet the South Mercia Sheddors encourage more men to join Sheds and to participate in setting up further Sheds. They are also a great opportunity for local businesses and associations to get involved.

The day's events saw attendees from nearly 20 Men's Sheds, established or being formed in the Beds, Bucks, Herts, Northants, Oxford, Cambridge and Warwick area. The event in Milton Keynes was jointly sponsored by UK

Men's Sheds Association, Awards for All, Milton Keynes Community Foundation, Royal Volunteer Service and Triton Precision Tools.

An example of way Men's Sheds can work with local groups is in Hemel Hempstead at the The Repair Shed, which has initially focused on making household and garden items for sale from reclaimed pallets and organising community repair days. The Repair Shed is a project of Community Action Dacorum, hosted by Sunnyside Rural Trust at their Hemel Food Garden.

Subjects of talks at the Milton Keynes event included Shed organisers sharing their experiences and organisational issues, discussion of the health and well-being agenda, and the need for mobilising support and development.

As the Men's Shed movement is a charitable association relying on voluntary help, support and donations from local businesses are crucial to the development of the Sheds; B&Q in Skelmersdale,

for instance, recently donated two tons of end-of-line wood flooring tiles, and Draper Tools has donated chisels, spanner sets, saws and more to Eastleigh Southern Parishes Men's Shed.

One day you might appreciate the support and facilities of your local Men's Shed, so get in touch with your local organisation if your company can offer tools, materials, consumables, facilities or any form of support to what is a very worthwhile and rewarding movement.

www.menssheds.org.uk



Men's Sheds like this one in Camden offer a hands-on solution to social isolation