

COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER

Men's Sheds have been identified as a way for men to take part in positive health promoting behaviours and access support in an informal 'male friendly' environment. This is especially true for those less likely to access formal health services such as GPs or mental health services.

Research has also found that men are more likely to face illness, take part in risky behaviours, and have a lower life expectancy than women. In particular, men are more prone to poor mental health and higher suicide rates, heart disease and strokes. However, men are less likely to access formal healthcare due to a lack of 'male friendly' services, and common views that see men as strong and resilient, making them a hard to reach group for preventative healthcare. Men's Sheds have been identified as a potential alternative space for men to take part in positive health behaviours in an informal and relaxed environment. They provide opportunities for men to do practical and social activities that encourage social support and interaction with other men.

A study by Glasgow University found that Men's Sheds

- **Increase men's health seeking behaviour** (e.g. reading up on health issues, improving diet and exercise, and decreasing heavy alcohol use):
 - Through increased opportunities for men to talk to each other men about their experiences of illness.
 - Through visits from health workers delivering talks on physical and mental health issues.
 - Through an increased motivation to continue to be able to take part in practical shed activities that requires a level of mobility and energy.
- **Improving men's resilience and ability to deal with illness** (e.g. managing stress or discomfort)
 - Through taking part in practical shed activities that provide a distraction/escape from illness (i.e. pain, worry).
 - Through speaking to other men about their experiences of similar physical or mental illness or health concerns and seeing/hearing how they have coped.
- **Improving men's ability to deal with different forms of illness** (e.g. having less reliance on formal health visits and medications):
 - Through increased opportunities to take part in physical activity that improved mobility and strength.
 - From consistent support and encouragement from shed members both inside and outside of the shed to overcome physical and mental illness (i.e. home visits).
 - Through the sharing of experiences with other men who had recovered from or were managing similar illness and not feeling alone.

The study findings suggest that in providing opportunities for men to take part in practical and social activities, and access social support from other men, Men's Sheds can positively impact on the health behaviours of their members. Unlike other community based organisations, Sheds offer a space where men can access health information and advice from other members, and external health visitors, in their own 'male friendly' way. This is important for engaging with 'hard to reach' men who are less likely to access GPs and other formal health services.

In 2015 the Social Return on Investment (SROI) was calculated for Scotland's first Men's Shed – in Westhill, Aberdeenshire – covering a year. It found that for every pound invested, a social return of £9.80 (1:10) was realised. This level of return is almost unprecedented.

The impact on cost savings for the NHS are of a similar magnitude. The social and health improving benefits of Men's Sheds has been amply outlined above in the university study and this translates into fewer GP and hospital appointments as a result of these men taking better care of their health and remaining active longer.

A similar beneficial effect applies to mental health. There have been many studies done on loneliness particularly in rural communities due to isolation. Many men when they retire find they are unable to make new friends easily – they just do not have the same networking and social skills that one sees amongst women. Retired men also struggle to find a purpose. Their job has defined them for decades and when they retire they can suffer a bit of an identity crisis as a result. Shed's give men a purpose, a reason to get up in the morning, a goal to fulfil – and an identity. This helps combat loneliness and the mental health issues that go with it. Remaining active and involved in projects also help diminish the onset of dementia.

All those are valuable benefits to society in terms of the huge cost savings to NHS and Social Services that better health and mental health bring. But the Shed also brings another benefit to the Communities they serve. Part of the ethos of the shed is to use their skills to help their community.

Our own Shed have demonstrated this in a number of projects such as painting the railings around the war memorial, repairs and maintenance undertaken at the Community Care Centre, repair and replacement of community notice boards, supplying picnic tables to the village green, repairs to the Community Hall and many other similar projects which save scarce money and resources for the community and help make it a better place to live. Small repair jobs are also undertaken for folk in the community (for example shelves put up, fences mended, gates installed, mowers repaired, sharpened and similar odd jobs that folk cannot do for themselves and are too small to interest a tradesman).

Education is also an important part of the Shed's purpose. Those with skills are keen to pass them on to others wishing to learn (both within shed members and the community generally). There are also informative sessions when outside speakers are invited in to talk. Recent examples were a health talk on prostate problems and a talk on Scam Awareness (the latter was an open meeting and had good attendance from other members of the community).