

Scotland's Men's Shed Movement

Members' Business Debate

S5M-23991

February 2021

Introduction

Age Scotland welcomes the opportunity to brief MSPs ahead of the Members' Business Debate on Scotland's men's sheds movement.

The Scottish Men's Shed Association has played a crucial role in the development of the men's sheds movement in partnership with shed members, local communities, third sector interfaces, local authorities, and other partners.

Age Scotland has also supported the development of men's sheds by providing information, advice, resources, and support to assist groups. Age Scotland was a partner in the development of the first men's shed in Scotland in Westhill, Aberdeenshire in 2013. Allowing people to come together on their own terms is key to our community development work.

Men's Sheds

Men's sheds are a place where members can come together to work on range of activities, either individually or as a group, but also where people can pop in for a chat and a coffee, find information about local services and help their local community.

No two sheds are the same, and each shed will reflect the interest of those that use them. What all sheds do have in common though, is that friendships are formed.

Men's sheds in Scotland are an invaluable resource to communities. They contribute towards a more positive view of ageing, provide a safe space for men to talk about their health and wellbeing, and help to tackle social isolation and loneliness.

Throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in common with other groups, men's sheds have been unable to meet as they usually would. Shedders have had to find alternative means to keep connected and some sheds found innovative ways to help with the emergency response to COVID-19.

Key statistics

- There are 133 men's sheds in Scotland registered with the SMSA
- 56 men's sheds in development are registered with the SMSA

Age Scotland's research has found:

- 93% of shedders feel "at home" in their shed
- 94% of shedders had made friends in their shed
- 76% of shedders said their physical health had improved
- 79% of shedders said their mental health had improved

Several sheds were involved in producing PPE, including Kinross and District, Galashiels and Westhill. Others, such as Kennoway Community Shed and Inverclyde Shed, were helped to grow and/or distribute food for their communities.

Age Scotland's forthcoming *Multiplying the Shed Effect* film project – involving Cromarty Firth, Galashiels, Inverclyde and Moffat men's sheds – will document their experience of the pandemic, lessons learned and their plans for recovery.

Kinross and District Men's Shed

Although closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, Kinross and District Men's Shed supplied around 4,500 face visors to frontline NHS workers, carers and shop staff.

A production team of over 30 shedders worked from their own homes to make the visors, which were built by hand and 3D printers.

Improving Health and Wellbeing

Men involved in sheds report living healthier, happier and more connected lives. In 2017, Age Scotland surveyed shedders about what being involved in their shed has meant to them¹. The findings of this survey highlighted the positive impact of sheds on health and wellbeing:

- 93% of shedders felt “at home” in their shed
- 94% of shedders had made good friends in their shed
- 76% of shedders said their physical health had improved as a result of being involved in their shed
- 79% of shedders said their mental health had improved as a result of their involvement in their shed
- 82% of shedders have learned new skills since being involved in their shed
- 86% of shedders felt more involved in their local community as a result of their involvement in their shed

The role played by men's sheds in counteracting loneliness and social isolation was clear before the pandemic, and it is vital that sheds receive practical support to allow them to re-open their doors when possible.

¹ <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-scotland/documents/community-development/age-scotland-mens-sheds-health-and-well-being-survey.pdf>

The Challenges for Men's Sheds

As volunteer-led organisations, sheds can face a range of challenges.

One commonly reported difficulty is the acquisition of premises. Finding suitable premises in local areas that fit with a shed's needs, acquiring land or buildings from local authorities, and securing low rental costs and long-term lease agreements can all present a barrier to the development of a shed.

Financial sustainability was another challenge faced by some sheds even before COVID-19. Members may have to pay for start-up and running costs, such as rent and bills, themselves, or may not know where to apply for funding grants. Age Scotland is concerned that some sheds may struggle to re-open their doors due to funding pressures and the inability to fundraise in their usual methods.

While the emergency funding announced to date is welcome, we believe the Scottish Government and local authorities should commit to the continued encouragement and practical support of men's sheds in recognition of their contribution to making Scotland a happier and healthier place to live.

Men's sheds are effective in tackling loneliness and isolation in Scotland, and as such must be a key priority as part of the recovery from COVID-19. Age Scotland would like to see specific guidance for volunteer-led older people's groups and men's sheds in the route map out of the current lockdown.

We would urge MSPs to continue their support for men's sheds and recognise how sheds contribute to making Scotland a great place to grow older.

Stonehaven and District Men's Shed

Stonehaven and District Men's Shed was named Member Group of the Year at Age Scotland's national awards for 2020.

The shed was recognised for its work to tackle loneliness, increase social participation and work with charity Legs4Africa to create prosthetic limbs for amputees.

Want to find out more?

As Scotland's national charity supporting people over the age of 50, Age Scotland works to improve older people's lives and promote their rights and interests. We aim to help people love later life, whatever their circumstances. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older.

Our Policy, Communications and Campaigns team research, analyse and comment on a wide range of public policy issues affecting older people in Scotland. Our work is guided by the views and needs of older people themselves.

Further information

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