

the MEASURE *of* HAPPINESS

THE CONCEPT OF A MAN IN HIS SHED AT THE BOTTOM OF THE GARDEN IS A FAMILIAR ONE, BUT A MEN'S SHED? AND AN ASSOCIATION AT THAT. WE LOOKED INTO JUST WHAT IS SO SPECIAL, AND ESSENTIAL, ABOUT A MEN'S SHED.

Started in Australia around 2005, the Men's Shed Movement builds on the basic need to potter and be useful, and combines it with something rarely found in the individual tool shed – companionship. Traditional male places to socialise outside work in the past have been pubs and bookies, almost always with alcohol to lubricate the process. Which meant that once a man retired, his options for making friends without a partner or a drink were very limited, causing many social problems including alcoholism, depression and high rates of suicide.

Jason Schroeder, Executive Officer and co-founder of the Scottish Men's Shed Association explains, 'When anyone

feels outside society then they suffer, and retirement can be hell for a lot of men. The Men's Sheds are safe places where men can go and be useful, working alongside other men, and then sit down and socialise with each other. There are certain topics that men just won't speak about with women around, and are unlikely to bring up in a competitive workplace. Our hope is that men will have those healthy conversations in the non-threatening Men's Shed environment, and go on to make friends, and better health decisions as a result'.

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Westhill Men's Shed is a thriving example. Started as a conversation in Circles coffee shop between six people in 2011, the Men's Shed opened in 2013 as the first of its kind in Scotland. Nick Pilbeam, Secretary is rightly proud of what they have achieved since then. 'We have 180 members on the books and between 60 and 80 come every day we are open. We received funding from Age Scotland to build the workshop and from the National Lottery to buy tools. We were also lucky enough to be able to lease a former library building from the council, which seemed big at the time, but we are already outgrowing it.'



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Nick’s working life was in IT, and there are doctors, joiners and grandads, as well as a large number from the oil industry all working in the fully kitted out wood and metal workshops. They fundraise in three ways; by taking on projects from the local community, such as building an eco-greenhouse or props for the school play; holding quarterly sales in the shopping centre, and taking in repairs, many of which people just hand in at the door. They also run social events for members and families, as well as a She Shed, where women can learn DIY skills on a Monday evening. ‘It’s important to keep the space predominantly male, as men don’t easily join a club, and it often takes time to forge relationships’, says Nick.

From one shed in Scotland in 2013, to 155 and rising, that’s how fast this much-needed movement is growing.

IF YOU OR ANYONE YOU KNOW WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE, SEE SCOTTISHMSA.ORG.UK

