

## Getting a group together

### <sup>1</sup>Getting a group together

In the six months to April 2015 new Sheds in the UK opened at the rate of more than two a week and in all community settings. On this basis it is very likely that there will be guys in your community who will want to join a Shed and that it is possible to resolve the issues involved in setting one up. What has to be created is The essence of a Shed is the relationship between a group of men who have practical interests. p.

### Which way to start?

Usually this process starts with someone seeing the potential and setting about it.

A Shed is a set of relationships between men with practical interests but when should the founder try to bring people together?

If the initiator calls people together when there is nothing but possibilities and a lot of work ahead, in particular looking for premises, is there a risk the group won't hold together while the various issues are tackled? It can be tempting for the initiator to try to get as much resolved as possible, perhaps with the help of a mate or two, before trying to recruit a larger group when there is more to offer.

We agree with the advice of the Australians which is to gather a group as soon as you are able to describe what shed can be and to engage as many as possible in the tasks before you. The difference will be that the Shed – the relationship between a group of men – is built in the sharing of the work and the inevitable trials and successes. There have been many examples here of groups gelling around the Shed idea and really enjoying being together and doing things long before they could find a physical base for themselves.

### Ways to promote.

In many cases, especially in smaller communities, the initiating person(s) will recruit via word of mouth from the people they know. Networking is about optimising your contacts and their contacts and getting the idea spoken about. The following have been used:-

**Tell local women** – men don't readily accept they have unmet needs whereas their womenfolk are not so inhibited.

They are also a bit more aware of the people in their community and a little more able to approach them.

**Use the letters page** of the local newspaper, responding to an article about older people or whatever.

**Get a notice in any club or organisation's newsletter** saying where you meet. Try especially for the Council of Voluntary Service locally as their newsletters go to all the voluntary organisations in an area who may then copy it to their members. You will get more cooperation from those with 'common cause' with you.

**Use Facebook/Twitter**, any reader may pass the idea on to the right person.

**Business card size flyers** are more likely to be kept, read and even passed around. Full colour double-sided can cost as little as 1p each. Hand these out in shopping malls, betting shops, folk clubs, barbers, pubs before midday, woodcraft fairs etc.

**Print bright yellow t-shirts with a slogan** 'Give us your men' on it and walk around town (Gosport)

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Jenn

**Speaking up at someone else's public meeting**, or better still on a local radio programme, phone-in will literally 'reach an audience'. (BBC regional radio audiences are mainly males 45+)

**Newspaper articles** reach large audiences. Go online for guides to writing press releases.

With all publicity you will need to be aware that some men will reject the idea instantly because they think it has to be for people with 'problems' and men generally don't like to recognise their needs. This 'I'm alright mate' attitude can be adopted by men even in very poor circumstances. The Shed's image can also be undermined by the press in particular who will want to portray a Shed as a project to 'combat loneliness' which would be enough to put any man off whereas many men may simply be looking for access to a workbench, some tools and maybe to learn from their peers. You don't need to be lonely to want to get out more, do more, fix something, make something, or even to rub shoulders with other guys. We are sociable people if it's on our own terms.

A public meeting is often called. If publicised through the means above these can attract a lot of people (e.g Earley a suburb of Reading had 39 men, Gosport 37) and from these the steering committee can be formed or endorsed. One successful meeting began not by talking to the guys but by prompting them to say what they miss about working. This engaged them, demonstrated their common needs and allowed the speaker to show how those needs can be met in a Shed.

### **Maintaining the interest**

Once a Steering Group has been formed there will be a range of issues to be worked on ( agreeing purposes, building alliances, looking for resources and venue, promotion etc) which can take from 3 to 15 months or more to resolve. During this time you will need to maintain the interest of people outside the working group. Activities have included finding out about other Sheds (by visiting, viewing videos, getting another Shedder to come by etc.) and getting to know each other through discussions, social activities, BBQ's etc;

Examples include the guys at Halesworth Shed who have been meeting every week for a year in the bistro when it is quiet on a Saturday morning whilst working on getting a premises. Sword Shed (Dublin) found that men would come back to discuss common issues - they called it philosophy - such as discussing topics like 'Life is hard' or 'Women'.

Website design: If you can't find anyone for free one Shed advertised on Student Gems, a site where students look for casual work, [www.studentgems.com](http://www.studentgems.com) which produced 23 keen youngsters within 3 days.

For some sample flyers [click here](#)

Engaging older men– experience from committee members

Chris Lee The Repair Shed Hemel Hempstead:

Our 'top 3' are University of Third Age, referrals through Job Centre and Facebook (local group).

Patrick Abrahams, Frome Shed:

- Word of mouth from existing members – engaging brothers, brothers-in-law, neighbours etc
- Get an article into the Local Free paper – Best is to visit the Journalist (They often gave “Surgeries” at local supermarkets, libraries etc. ) Ask them for advice on what kind of article would be best. I always invite local Journalists to our social functions – And meet with them more often than I need press articles.
- Posters in local Supermarkets, Libraries, and (importantly I think) local Council offices/noticeboards and GP Surgeries – On the basis that “If the Council is advertising this, it must be OK”
- We attend quite a few events such as World mental health day, Volunteer week, Dadfest, Fetes and fairs – We have a very low cost sign that features our logo (As detailed on the website, all newsletters and posters) This gives us visibility & prominence (and press coverage)
- Local Radio – Many local FM stations will readily embrace the Shed concept, as will BBC local radio.
- Have the groups and individuals who you carry out work for to write to the local paper saying how brilliant the Shed was ... (If you ask them, they will usually do it – and they often get published.)

From Roger Jones, the Older Men’s Network

- Posters in Pubs - especially Wetherspoons / Clubs / Barbers Shops / Sheltered Housing / Housing Associations / Garden Centres
- Promotions / Stall at Boot Sales / Classic Car and Bike Shows / Garden Centres / Flower Shows - Nationally we need to be at Chelsea and Tatton to promote and collect
- Try your local B&Q to do some demonstrations at weekends in their show area.. they re not called the BIG SHED for nothing..... also good link for collections
- Contact all the charities and self help groups in your area - Age UK / Age Concern / Carers Centre / Healthy Heart Groups / BHF / Arthritis Care etc etc - all have men who they don t or can't offer activity to due to lack of funds - you could fill that hole.....
- Look at activity for men with onset dementia - there is a great lack of opportunities for these men who would feel at home in a shed atmosphere with support = there should be funding to support this activity as well.....
- Work with local care homes in inviting them to bring along men who live there to be part of the shed - they may only come for the company and the conversation but would get a lot out of it.
- Work with your local sports clubs / football / rugby / cricket etc and use them as a way of reaching the men who attend - maybe get some fundraising as well....