

# Australian Mens Shed Association

“Men don’t talk face to face they talk shoulder to  
shoulder”



March, 2009

Senate Select Committee on Men's Health

Department of the Senate

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Australia

## National Men's Health Policy

### “The Men's Shed”

At the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Mens Shed Conference in Manly during September 2007 Professor Barry Golding, Men’s Shed researcher from the University of Ballarat, stated in his key note address that “*Men don’t talk face to face they talk shoulder to shoulder*”. This drew unanimous mutterings of approval from all 350 delegates and the quote became the Australian Men’s Shed Associations unofficial motto.

Professor Golding’s quote articulated the sentiment amongst men that they require a different environment to women in which to talk out their problems and issues with fellow men. In essence men feel comfortable to talk about such issues while working with their “mates” even if it is a mate that that have only just met. This environment is emulated in over 300 men’s sheds around Australia.

The concept of a Men’s Shed has been ongoing now for over 15 years with over 300 facilities of this type now in existence. Men’s Sheds have achieved proven results in bringing their communities together to provide men a place of belonging where they can work on worthwhile community projects and participate in youth mentoring programs. The Australian Men's Shed Association (AMSA) views Men's Shed facilities as a health preventative measure by providing a place of belonging for men where they can comfortably talk on issues surrounding men’s health they also provide an ideal platform from which to launch future men’s health initiatives.

Although AMSA has only recently been established, the organisation has over 300 sheds as members representing an estimated 30,000 individuals. The Mens’ Shed concept was an Australian initiative from very humble beginnings; the idea has now spread internationally with a number of sheds being operated by health authorities in Ireland, England and New Zealand with other interested groups in North American and Japan.

The Irish National Men's Health Policy makes specific comment on the progress and attributes of the Australian Men's Shed concept:

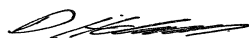
*“Men's Sheds' organisations in southern Australia are another good example of community-based health promotion targeting men. Since the mid-1990s, 192 of these organisations have been established, engaging mostly with older men who are no longer working in paid employment and who have proved difficult to engage in conventional health education and training initiatives. Through the provision of 'mateship' and a sense of belonging through positive and therapeutic informal activities, 'Men's Sheds' achieve outcomes of positive health, happiness and well-being for those men who participate, as well as for their partners, families and communities”.*

Over the past 3 years and through the development of men's shed projects funded through the varying departments, we have developed policies and procedures for men's sheds to be self managed and self sufficient with minimal set up expense. Learning from the lessons from all shed projects around the nation AMSA aims at sharing this information freely between communities wishing to establish such a facility to the benefit of men's health as well as encouraging social inclusion within the community. Through the Association we endeavour to provide assistance and support to those who manage Men's Sheds via an assemblage of Regional clusters and State branches of the Association.

The working committee of the Australian Men's Shed Association has consisted of a dedicated group of volunteer Men and Women from around Australia along with a few professional paid shed coordinators working towards a common goal, to freely share information between sheds to minimise expenses and making sheds available to all men around Australia. The Australian Men's Shed Association is the Peak body representing Men's Sheds and the only such organisation that has a democratic system for the election of the Directors. The Association is currently auspiced by Catholic Care Newcastle and has been strongly supported collaboratively by Uniting Care North Sydney.

In a time of potentially increasing unemployment and with an agenda focusing on Mens' Health the Australian Men's Shed Association welcomes the announcement of the New National Men's Health Policy and formally offers our full support.

The following submission is made on behalf of the Members of the Australian Men's Shed Association as a contribution towards a National Men's Health Policy. The context of our submission is from our own experiences submitted by members' (see attachments) as requested through the National Newsletter for the purpose of submission, documentation from professional research as well as vital information gathered from field trips working with men in sheds.



David Helmers  
Executive Officer  
Australian Men's Shed Association

## **History of Men's Sheds and the Australian Mens Shed Association**

The idea of a men's shed is relatively recent with the longest established sheds having been in existence for around 15 years. In 2007 there were an estimated 192 Sheds nation wide whilst there are approximately 352 sheds operational or under development in 2009. The concept of men sharing camaraderie in a comfortable environment with a common theme has been around for much longer. However, the Shed concept is a broader approach to an old idea.

There's nothing new about men gathering together in their own space to talk, share skills, swap ideas, solve problems or just discuss life in general – it's been happening since the beginning of time. There's nothing new either about men spending time in their backyard shed – an acknowledged Aussie pastime and almost a basic requirement for domestic existence.

What is new is that men, particularly retired/unemployed men, are combining these two activities in a communal space simply called a "Men's Shed". What is also new is how strongly men have embraced this new identity – being a member of a Men's Shed is likened to belonging to an exclusive club. Men's Sheds as such, are no longer looked upon as an Australian phenomenon, In the last 12 months AMSA has assisted in the establishment of Mens Sheds in New Zealand Ireland and England.

In the past decade a wide range of Community-based Men's Sheds has sprung up - each with its own unique identity and purpose. Activities within Sheds are many and various, from mentoring young people to woodwork, metal work, small motors, restoration of old cars, boatbuilding, portable Sheds taken to Alzheimer facilities or mobile Sheds for remote country areas. The membership is similarly diverse. Men from all backgrounds, ethnic and social mixes can enjoy a Men's Shed bringing their unique cultural characteristics to enliven the activities..

The common theme in all Sheds is about men retaining self esteem, feeling useful, contributing again to their communities and having a meaningful purpose in life.. Learning or sharing skills, making friends, networking and availing themselves of health support information programmes and opportunities is a commonality gained within the Shed environment. In the 2007 Shed Survey conducted by Centacare Newcastle the question was asked "What are the main operations/activities of your facility?" 77.4% answered Men's Health and companionship rather than the prompted answer the question sought being activities like woodwork metal work etc.

Communities are keen to provide activity, identity and meaning for vast numbers of older, unemployed, job-redundant, 'downsized', isolated, depressed and happily retired, active, creative, enthusiastic men. Men's Sheds are fast being recognised as vital, viable places to fulfil these needs and provide relaxed, happy creative and safe spaces for men to enjoy on a regular basis.

At the Manly National conference, the concept of forming the Australian Men's Shed Association was put forward with a view to assessing concept support and to promote the draft terms of reference, eg the aim of freely sharing information and assistance to sheds and communities wishing to start a shed and maintaining viability. This sharing of information has reduced the amount of time and money spent that was once required to establish a shed, by eliminating the need to reinvent the wheel each time. Sheds that have been established for over 5 years took 2-3 years to establish, whereas those sheds that have evolved in the past 2 years have

only generally taken 2-6 months to establish. This has been one of the most immediate and cost effective impacts AMSA has had upon the Shedding community. Currently the Association is formalising partnerships with other specific men's health organisations to broaden the availability of sheds as a preventative health measure. Men in sheds have a very determined view that stems from their own experience "if a little more was spent on sheds, sheds would save the government that amount ten fold in health services". While the accuracy of this statement is arguable, the point is acknowledged and supported in a variety of articles addressing the need to increase men's' health issues and the related cost to the taxpayer.

### **"Men in sheds"**

The lives of men, who are generally happier, healthier and achieve a more fulfilling life, have involvement in some form of meaningful activity. This can range from fulfilment within their ability to work, provide support and raise a family through to their social activities. What happens though when a part of these primal requirements ceases to exist?

Ages for members of the shed range broadly from as young as 7-9 years (involved in mentoring programs) through to elderly aged care residents aged 100 plus, and include both Male and Female participants. The target group or the classic "Shedder" is aged between 45-65 and is recently retired or unemployed. This is also the highest risk areas of men suffering from physiological health issues and at the highest risk of suicide.

The average shed in accordance to the 2007 Centacare Survey contained approximately 27.3 Male Members, 2.5 Female Members and 6.2 Youths participating in shed mentoring programs. These numbers seem to have risen dramatically since the 2007 survey. Some of the surveyed sheds who had 35-40 members in 2007 are now reporting 100-120 members regularly attending the shed. Men in sheds are referred to as "Members" of their shed rather than volunteers and although both terms are relevant, most sheds are independent incorporated bodies or are subcommittees of an incorporated organisation under State Legislation, therefore adding relevance to the term "Member". But most sheds work predominantly for the benefit of their communities.

Most shedders see themselves as having a strong sense of belonging and ownership of their shed making them a "Member" but they devote most of their time to worthwhile community projects which then categorises them as "Volunteers". Services provided by some sheds are recognised by Centrelink as an approved volunteering activity and provide a form of income to offset costs.

### **"The Young Shedder"**

Youth mentoring programs are popular activities within men's sheds and often with the mentor and the mentored both experiencing positive benefits from the programs. Mentoring programs can range from informal arrangements between individuals through to complex arrangements with third party youth welfare organisations. Quite often arrangements for mentoring programs are between local high schools and technical education providers.

Mentoring program content can be very diverse as many sheds have developed very successful programs by providing mentoring to High Risk or socially disadvantaged Youth. Such programs provide career skills learning but more importantly “life skills” awareness. Youth mentoring in a shed environment is supported by males who themselves have real life experience and have a “*been there - done that*” base of knowledge to draw upon. Youth participants quickly establish a respect for their mentors and have been known to form close bonds with their new positive male role models.

Other more formal programs are utilised to provide mentoring support to youth pursuing a trade vocation wishing to gain valuable hands on experience from mentors who have a lifetime of knowledge to pass on. Men taking part in Mentoring programs in sheds also are provided with a sense of worth within the community, Mentoring is not just seen as an opportunity to tell younger folk how life was, it is an appreciation of their experience and skills and an opportunity to provide meaningful assistance to a new generation. This again highlights the ability of a shed facility to provide meaningful purpose through active participation to members.

#### **“The Retired Shedder”**

In the sporting world money and research has been dedicated to preparing our elite sportsman for life after their sporting careers have ended. This preparation assists them to lead a meaningful life after sport, reducing their tendency to have their lives affected by substance abuse, gambling and other such afflictions, but what about the common man? What about life after their working career? To date little or no funds have been spent to provide support to find meaningful purpose in life after their working career has ended.

Men’s Sheds are viewed as a preventative health measure and have provided an avenue of support for men retiring from the workforce. In the male domain, employment not only provides a place of meaningful purpose and financial rewards, the workplace is quite often their social network and their lives revolve around their family and their work. Once in retirement men can often feel socially isolated leading to boredom and depression and loss of determination to continue fulfilment in life. Many individual statements are available from men who have been involved in sheds and the improvement such involvement has had upon their lives and their health, but to date research into this effect of men’s sheds in relation to men’s health has not been undertaken. Accordingly, a study should be conducted to produce this relevance.

#### **“The Aged Care Shedder”**

A large number of Sheds exist within aged care facilities “Uniting Care North Sydney” pioneered the concept with the development of the “Lane Cove Men’s Shed” located in the basement of an Aged Care facility. This has been followed by a number of shed developments by Uniting Care Ageing within New South Wales. Traditionally in aged care, focus for the provision of activities has been female orientated due to the majority of residents being female as well as the majority of staff working within the aged care sector. Both demographics are changing - men are living longer and the need of care and support and male nurses in aged care are becoming more common. Men in aged care are known to isolate themselves and are reluctant to participate in the traditional activities provided, nor do they wish to communicate a great deal with other male residents. This isolation has reduced male residents to developing a “waiting to die” attitude with little motivation to continue an existence.

The establishment of Men's Shed facilities in Aged Care has provided meaningful recreation for male residents, encouraging communication and giving them a place of belonging and meaning. Youth mentoring programs have been conducted in some Aged Care sheds with outstanding results, with residents and participating youth both benefiting from the processes of learning, teaching and communicating.

Aged Care facilities that have established a men's shed have also witnessed a marked increase in visitations to male residents from male family members. The shed has provided a less hostile and hospital like, sterile environment for sons to visit their fathers. The following is an actual quote by a visitor "*Dad and I always talked in his shed. The shed here is replicating that environment where we can comfortably talk while we tinker around*". Although most aged care sheds have been established by the aged care provider both financially and structurally, most have harnessed the community shed concept where the shedders manage the operations of their shed giving them a strong sense of ownership. Such sheds require little or no supervision (pending on the physical capabilities of the participants) and have become self managed and self sufficient, thereby lessening the ongoing support required by the provider.

Shed activity trials have also been conducted with dementia patients in aged care. These sheds have provided a "safe" shed for male patients where they can handle familiar items. Through this therapy, residents have shown a reduction in aggressive behaviour and have increased communication.

A future growth area for men's sheds has been in the development of sheds within "self care of over 55 retirement developments".. This is where commercial developers have taken a "value adding" approach to sheds. Sheds are becoming a component of these developments as an equal priority to swimming pools, common rooms, tennis courts and golf courses.

#### **"The Out of Work Shedder"**

In a time of increasing unemployment due to the world wide economic crisis, much of the male population is facing unexpected unemployment and retrenchment or are simply forced into early retirement. Men finding themselves in this situation are at risk of many factors that contribute to declining psychological and physical health. To many of the male workforce, employment is not just a means to provide the fundamental family needs but it plays a key role in their social interaction and self esteem.

Premature unemployment initiates a series of devastating effects upon an individual's life. Under the current guidelines anyone unemployed and requiring financial assistance must be registered with Centrelink and are placed on the New Start allowance scheme. This system places all persons – regardless of age -experience or sex, into the one system. Men in sheds often tell of their experiences within this system that they find cumbersome and demoralising to the extreme. The system requires all registered persons to actively seek employment by partaking in job seeking training sessions or to partake in volunteer work duties.

Within the shed environment, men have a strong sense of belonging and meaningful vocation; this replicates the environment of the workplace as many men have stated "*the shed is my reason for getting out of bed each day*".

## **Sheds and Physiological Health**

Despite the reasons for attending a shed, involvement in such programs has an effect on the physiological health of participants. The sense of meaningful belonging, a purpose and camaraderie all contribute to the wellbeing of men, but most importantly a shed provides a comfortable environment for men to talk openly about personal, and sometimes private, issues in life including their health issues.

Many sheds also endeavour to engage in specific physiological health projects, again providing the fundamentals of shed operations as respite to patients and carers alike. More often however, sheds can provide preventative measures minimising the physiological effects of social isolation.

Beyondblue recently conducted training sessions for shed facilitators giving them a better understanding of male depression, its impact on blokes and the community more broadly, what signs to keep an eye out for, and most importantly it showed some basic tools and approaches we can all use to give someone a helping hand when they're struggling a bit. This project is now being offered to sheds on a broad basis through the development of a specific Men's Shed training package.

Through the provision of a comfortable place of conversation men are more likely to discuss personal issues in a shed environment, Many sheds and individual shedders have reported instances of having identified members at High Risk of Suicide and have been fortunate to have been able to implement appropriate actions. Through the involvement of organisation such as Beyondblue and Lifeline the Australian Men's Shed Association is aiming at developing further training and referral systems, The need for this is highlighted more so in rural areas where the statistics of male suicide are far higher and community sheds have already played a significant role in suicide reduction.

## **Mens Sheds and Mens Health**

The role men's sheds play in relation to men's health is one of prevention and delivery. This is the role sheds play as a social determinate but sheds also play a large role as a platform of delivery for men's health initiatives. Already sheds are preventing depression through social isolation and being a place where men can openly discuss personal issues, but sheds are now involved, through cross referral programs, with professionals from other organisations.

Currently through an agreement between the New South Wales Men's Shed Association and the Royal Institute of General Practitioners they are working in partnership on the M5 Project. Within this partnership Men's Sheds are being utilised for the delivery of the project. Through the exiting communication network of the Australian Men's Shed Association representatives from the Royal Institute of General Practitioners will be able to talk directly to men in the community, open days with General Practitioners are planed to be held within men's sheds, again the shed provides a comfortable environment for men to discuss issues surrounding their health rather than a clinic or other public venues.

Commonly Men's Sheds also provide guest speaker days and quite often this is focused on men's health issues with health professionals, Again men tend to open their discussion more freely in the shed environment.

Also often reported within sheds is the peer effect of the members, this can range from peer pressure to quit smoking through to a member complaining of an ailment and another member providing comment to "See a doctor". Quite often this has resulted in the men actually being forced by his peers to actually go to the doctor to eliminate the pestering inquires or if persistent the shed members have made the appointment and transported the complainant to the local GP. This highlights the strength of the comradeship amongst the shedders and the concern for each others welfare.

Some sheds have a nominated welfare officer who monitors members attendances and discreetly inquires when one of the men have been absent or is showing signs of distress and takes appropriate action.

### **Research finding on Mens Sheds**

Golding, B, Brown, M, Foley, A, and Harvey, J, of Ballarat University conducted nationwide research into the role of men's sheds during 2006 and uncovered the following major themes:

- Community based men's sheds are providing critically important informal learning opportunities programs and spaces for men, particularly for older men facing issues associated with change including aging, health, retirement, isolation, unemployment, disability and separation.
- Men's sheds in community contexts provide positive and therapeutic informal activities and experiences for men, characterised by a high level of commitment, engagement and ownership.
- The diverse shed organisations and the spaces and programs that they provide are heavily reliant on volunteers, but are particularly successful with older men because they provide the freedom to informally and socially engage groups in hands-on, practical activity with other men.
- While the proportion of men anticipating future paid work through shed-based activity is relatively small, these spaces and programs result in significant and positive health, happiness and wellbeing outcomes for men who participate, as well as for their families and communities.
- Sheds attract groups of older males that have proved very difficult to engage through conventional health, wellbeing, employment and training initiatives. They are successful precisely because they avoid foregrounding these aims but informally provide considerable benefits in a safe, social and familiar workplace environment, where men have the freedom to attend and take control of the sheds and their lives, typically during a period of difficult and significant change. There are many examples where men attend sheds as a Centrelink requirement but continue attending "their" shed because of the
- The intensity of the engagement observed in men's sheds is not dissimilar to the intensity many women report in studies based in neighbourhood house and community-centre type settings used mainly by women since the 1980s.
- Despite these significant and diverse benefits, because they are grassroots, relatively new and poorly understood by most funding bodies, sheds in community contexts struggle to cope with the initial costs and complexities associated with establishing a safe working environment and to get ongoing funding to assist with supervision of participants.



## Summary

Men require a different environment to women in which to talk out their problems and issues with fellow men. Men feel more comfortable talking about such issues while working with their “mates”.

In the past decade a wide range of Community-based Men’s Sheds has sprung up each with its own unique identity and purpose. Activities within Sheds are many and various and the membership is similarly diverse. Men from all backgrounds, ethnic and social mixes enjoy a Men’s Shed bringing their unique cultural characteristics to enliven the activities.

As identified in the 2007 AMSA shed survey, the common theme in all Sheds is about men retaining self esteem, feeling useful, contributing again to their communities and having a meaningful purpose in life. Learning or sharing skills, making friends, networking and availing themselves of health support information programmes and opportunities.

The Australian Men's Shed Association (AMSA) was set up by the Independent Community Men's Sheds to be their official Peak Body representative Association, with affiliation Associations in New South Wales, Victoria Tasmania Queensland and Western Australia creating a democratic system for the election of the Officials.

AMSA has developed a nationwide structure of State Associations and Regional Cluster Groups and through this network provides assistance and support to those who manage Men's Sheds. At present the work of these groups is limited because of lack of funding.

The role of AMSA is vital for the stability and cohesion of the broader SHED community by providing;

- a coordinated and universal approach to establishment procedures; operational procedures and viability opportunities.
- Grant opportunities can be synchronised by the “single approach” method for SHEDS seeking funding assistance, thereby providing a standard approach while removing the demand from the domestic environment.
- Promotion of the men’s health message through the several area cluster groups that now exist, a key feature of the men’s shed movement.
- A cascade effect for consistent and dependable communication between the individual SHED; the relevant cluster group and each State association.
- Assistance in resolving problems arising with government and non government agencies for SHED related matters.
- A vehicle for the pursuance of a single insurance cover for public liability and equipment.
- A national web-site that would encompass information and communication for SHEDS at a national and world wide level.

AMSA does not charge fees to Sheds or Funding Authorities for providing start-up information and assistance, existing solely to help Men's Sheds.

Learning from all shed projects around the nation over the past 3 years AMSA has developed policies and procedures for Men’s Sheds to be self managed and self sufficient with minimal set up expense for State and Federal Governments. This information is being freely shared between communities wishing to establish such a

facility to the benefit of men's health as well as encouraging social inclusion within the community.

Shed members have a very determined view that stems from their own experience "*if a little more was spent on sheds, they would save the government that amount ten fold in health services*". While the accuracy of this statement is arguable, the point is acknowledged and supported in a variety of articles addressing the need to increase men's' health issues and the related cost to the taxpayer.

Youth mentoring programs are popular activities within Men's Sheds and often with the mentor and the mentored both experiencing positive benefits from the programs. Mentoring programs range from arrangements between individuals, youth welfare organisations, local high schools and technical education providers and even High Risk or socially disadvantaged children. Such programs provide career skills learning but more importantly "life skills" awareness from males who themselves have real life experience and have a "*been there - done that*" base of knowledge to draw upon.

Men's Sheds are viewed as a preventative health measure and have provided an avenue of support for men retiring from the workforce. Once in retirement men can often feel socially isolated leading to boredom and depression and loss of determination to continue fulfilment in life. Many individual statements are available from men regarding the improvement involvement in Sheds has had upon their lives and their health, but to date research into this effect of men's sheds in relation to men's health has not been undertaken. A study is strongly recommended to investigate this factor.

Many Sheds exist within aged care facilities. Traditionally in aged care activities have been female orientated due to the majority of residents and staff being female. However, men are living longer and the need of care and support and male nurses in aged care are becoming more common. Men in aged care are known to isolate themselves and are reluctant to participate in the traditional activities provided. Establishing Men's Sheds in Aged Care has provided meaningful recreation for male residents, encouraging communication and giving them a place of belonging and meaning.

Involvement in Sheds has an effect on the physiological health of participants. The sense of meaningful belonging, a purpose and camaraderie all contribute to the wellbeing of men, but most importantly a shed provides a comfortable environment for men to talk openly about personal, and sometimes private, issues in life including their health issues.

"Beyondblue" recently conducted training sessions for shed facilitators giving them a better understanding of male depression, its impact, what signs to keep an eye out for, and most importantly it explained some basic tools and approaches to give someone a helping hand when they're struggling. This project is now being offered to all sheds through the development of a specific Men's Shed training package.

Men's Sheds role in relation to men's health is one of prevention and delivery but sheds are also a platform of delivery for men's health initiatives. Sheds are now involved, through cross referral programs, with professionals from other organisations. Currently through an agreement between the New South Wales Men's Shed Association and the Royal Institute of General Practitioners they are working in partnership on the M5 Project with Men's Sheds being utilised for the delivery of the

project. Representatives will be able to talk directly to men in the community, open days with GP's are planned to be held within men's sheds, as the shed provides a more comfortable environment for men to discuss issues surrounding their health rather than a clinic or other public venues.

In his latest report Professor Golding summarises a major problem. *"Despite these significant and diverse benefits, because they are grassroots, relatively new and poorly understood by most funding bodies, sheds in community contexts struggle to cope with the initial costs and complexities associated with establishing a safe working environment and to get ongoing funding to assist with supervision of participants."*

Currently AMSA is funded from a rollover of funding by Jenny Macklin, Minister for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs for the Lake Macquarie Shed Project auspiced by Centacare Newcastle. The scope of this project was expanded to allow assist in the development of the Australian Men's Shed Association to benefit men's health as well as encouraging social inclusion within the community. The current funding expires in 2009 and without further funding the association's development shall be impaired, faltering the economical development of new sheds and leaving the existing communication network frayed.

Men's in sheds often discuss how sports bodies fund the education of professional elite athletes on "Life after the career has ended" but currently little effort is made to prepare men for "life after their career".

### **Acknowledgments**

*Professor Barry Golding, University of Ballarat NCVET Survey  
Department of Health and Ageing / Summary of Mens Health Issues  
Centacare Newcastle, 2007 Mens Shed Survey  
Roger Greenan, The Shed at Windale  
Ted Donnell, Lane Cover Mens Shed*

*Our special appreciation to those AMSA members who submitted letters titled "letters from the Shed" that provided much of the information for this submission, the quality of submissions was high and only a particular few that gave a broad insight to the diversity of a men's shed were selected as supporting attachments, acknowledged are the composers of these letters.*

*Tom Darby, Coordinator Berry Men's Shed  
Keith Bettany; RN, B App Sc (Developmental Disabilities)  
Barry Pearson Chairperson, The Hackham West Shed  
Roger Greenan, The Shed @ Windale  
Alpine Health  
And a special thanks to "Harry"*

## Attachments “Shed Stories”

The following attachments are a selection of submissions made by Australian Men's Sheds from the below request made in the Australian Men's Shed Association Newsletter for the purpose of preparing this submission

*On 25th November the Minister for Health and Ageing Nicola Roxon announced the appointment of Ambassadors for the New National Men's Health Policy.*

*We know the role that our Sheds play in contributing to the wellbeing of men within our communities and I have often heard Shedders saying “if the Government would only spend more on developing Sheds we would save them millions in health care”. Well now it seems the Government is looking out for projects just like ours.*

*After reading the documents released on this Policy it is clear that Men's Sheds tick all the boxes in relation to Men's Health and Social Inclusion. One of the appointed Ambassadors is Professor John Macdonald from the University of Western Sydney and it was very pleasing that he visited the AMSA office on Dec 2nd with his colleague Anthony Brown to discuss these issues and the role of Men's Sheds .*

*Professor Macdonald is involved with an indigenous Men's Shed and was very enthusiastic about the growth and development of the Men's Shed movement and AMSA, and is very passionate about the importance of Sheds and the role they play in providing a place of belonging and purpose to men of all ages. He feels strongly that Sheds play a vital role in preventative health, just by providing a place to go and socialise with other men and this, especially in retirement, can improve a man's health and add years to his life.*

*This is something we have all known and been saying for years. So where to from here? After the meeting the message that Professor Macdonald and Anthony Brown asked AMSA to convey to the members in the strongest way was **“Participate”**.*

## **WHAT CAN YOU DO ?**

### **Provide examples where men's lives improved because of attending a Shed.**

*Practically every Shed has seen members who have been depressed because of illnesses (physical and mental), bereavement, loneliness etc. and yet have overcome these problems with help from other Shed members. It was suggested that these examples be collected together and presented to Minister Roxon and the Ambassadors for the National Men's Health policy.*

*All Sheds and Shedders are therefore requested to write down these good news stories and send it (or them) to AMSA so that we can present them all as a collection. They can be as long or short as you want, but please remember (for privacy) change the names of the individuals concerned.*

### **Explain the activities of your Shed.**

*Men's Sheds have an extremely wide range of activities and, even within our own organisation, people have a very restricted idea of what other Sheds do and how*

*they do it. All Sheds are therefore asked to write a brief note on their Shed - how and why it got started - who helped - number of members and current activities. It would also be useful to include other projects that you cannot do because of funding.*

*We want to provide the evidence to the Ambassadors so they will realize the benefits and contribution that nearly 300 Men's Sheds are providing and that we can and do make a difference to the health of many men.*

*This could result in new funding opportunities for existing Sheds and especially for new Sheds. More importantly it will raise your Shed's profile within the community, attracting socially isolated men to visit a Shed and, hopefully, improve their well being.*

*I know all of us have campaigned long and hard for the benefit of our own Sheds. This, however, is our first opportunity to campaign together for all of our mutual benefit.*

*Please send your stories and covering letters by the end of January so they can be forwarded to the Minister.*

## **Stories from Berry Men's Shed**

As members of the Berry Men's Shed work principally on community projects the Shed is better known for its visible product than its 'personal' stories. The community can see the cabinets built for the Museum or cupboards for the Primary School and can readily recognise them as contributing to their community. However a more worthy long term benefit is the personal experience gained by members that enables them to live a more productive, personally satisfying and healthy life. I have written these 'stories from the Berry Men's Shed' as anecdotal accounts of some member's experiences. They have been and are significant in the life of the Shed and to their families

These stories hopefully will bring a more balanced understanding of the contribution the Berry Men' Shed makes to it's community.

**Names have been changed but each story has been approved by the person concerned for inclusion in this submission.**

### **Gus**

Within a month of the Shed's opening a contact with the Regional Mental Health Unit resulted in a visit from a counselor who introduced us to Gus. We were informed that he was a 'non-communicant'. During that first visit he contributed not a word to any conversation. We wondered if we would ever see him again but the following week he arrived by himself, spent the day with us and joined in the full activities of the Shed. I telephoned the counselor that evening to ask if he had sent the same person because the Gus of that day wouldn't stop talking. He had talked freely and volubly with anyone who would listen about his past and the day's news. It was a day of almost continuous talk. The counselor's analysis, "You've simply taken the cork out of the bottle".

Gus is still with us, a regular attendee, one of our most enthusiastic members, attending almost every public function organized by the Shed since we opened and volunteering for our 'Kids in the Shed' program during the school vacations. Have we solved his personal and mental health problems? No, but we believe his life has a new purpose. Gus is our expert with the broom and vacuum cleaner and is so diligent with this task that often it's difficult to find the components of your current projects as they are constantly being rearranged by Gus to maintain you bench free of dust and shavings. As an active member of the RSL he has promoted with veterans the benefit of attending a Men's Shed as part of a healing process.

Gus has recently been diagnosed as 'bipolar' and has kept us informed of his treatment. His family is most appreciative of his attendance at the Shed, as are we!

### **Keith**

Keith had been a truck driver all his life and shortly after retirement had a major operation that set him on the path toward what his family called a 'mental breakdown'. He is a large man with a loud voice and can at times present as an overwhelming personality. Having worked throughout his life at a job that required little personal interaction he had difficulty describing what he wanted to do or in asking for help and as his practical skills were limited to pliers and fencing wire Keith presented considerable challenges for those organizing work in a fully mechanized wood workshop. We soon found the best solution was to set him to work with

whoever had the patience to supervise his tasks. After two years of learning and relearning Keith is now the Shed's principal chair repair person and table "reconditioner". It has not been easy and there have been times of exasperation and raised voices but Keith is our most regular attendee and at times he is even surprising himself with the quality of his work.

He has also nominated himself as an official greeter for visitors and is the first to spring forward, to give a personal valedictory on the benefits of joining our Shed. We hold a Health Hour bimonthly at which a guest speaker delivers an address. This is followed by a luncheon and as it is open to the general public there can be one hundred people attending. Members take it in turns to move a vote of thanks to the guest speaker and Keith managed this, including an unsolicited version of his personal valedictory. He has moved through difficult stages to learn a new skill not related to working with his hands, conversation.

His family is highly appreciative of his attending the Shed!

## Sam

Sam, who is probably in his middle 60's, admitted he had come for that first visit on his father's insistence, to 'look us out'! When we explained what we were about he couldn't see how he could manage to join as he "couldn't stay any longer than an hour". He explained that he suffered from schizophrenia and so would 'probably just come in the morning'. We thought that as he had done Dad's bidding and looked us out we may not see him again. The following week he came after morning tea and at a time when many of the members were involved in trying to mount a large saw on its custom built bench. Sam is a retired metal fitter and within minutes he had a spanner in his hand and was lying on his back beneath the saw. He stayed for a little over an hour and apologized for having to leave.

During the following weeks he came at irregular intervals but when he did come his 'hour' grew longer. He wouldn't join the blokes at morning tea, preferring to sit by himself on a bench outside the Shed. Then surprisingly one day he brought his lunch and joined us in the lunch room, but sat on a chair by the refrigerator and declined invitations to join the others at the table. He said little more than "good morning, thanks and goodbye" and we were never conscious of him following the discussions around the table. One lunch time the conversation turned to working conditions in industry and Sam made a comment about his days at the steel works. He now joins in conversations with those sitting about him.

It was obvious that he preferred to work alone on a project he could call his own. Several months ago he offered to work with one of our more difficult members on a project that had not progressed over many days. Watching Sam and his 'mate' work, talking constantly, with Sam taking the mentor's roll was one of those revealing moments when you realise what a Shed can offer. Sam's father has been his primary carer for many years but now that Dad is frail and in poor health their roles may need to reverse, with Sam being the carer. His involvement in the Shed couldn't have come at a better time for them both.

## Families

There are many more individual stories that could be written about the 38 regulars who attend the Berry Men's Shed. Most would not be about battles with mental illness or a personality disorder and most likely would be about finding something

useful and purposeful to do in retirement. Those most appreciative of the Shed's existence are the families of its members. Many men confide, some grumpily, that they have been 'committed' to the Shed by their wife or partner. The most common statement from family members is, "Thank you."

## **Friends**

Some of our members came to the Shed not on the insistence or persuasion of their family but through friends offering support. In two instances, appreciating that their friends needed help Harry and Cam visited the Shed then joined as members later persuaded their friend to join to keep them 'company'. Having busy and satisfying lives themselves, once their friends were happily installed as a regular Shed member, they departed. We have had many referrals similar to this where the assessment of need was not made by a professional but by an acquaintance or friend who hoped that the Shed might help alleviate the loneliness or particular mental disorder of that person.

## **A Canadian intern experience**

We are fortunate to have as an active member Dr Alison Wicks, Director of the Australasian Occupational Science Centre at Wollongong University. Alison in 2008 organized an internship for two Masters Study students from University of Western Ontario, Canada, that involved Jessica Malpage and Karen Martin attending the Shed for six week to work with members. The attached Photo Essay was published in the Journal of Occupational Science (the official journal of the International Society of Occupational Scientists) Volume 15, October 2008.

**Tom Darby**  
**Coordinator**  
**Berry Men's Shed**

30 January 2008



## **STORIES FROM THE SHED**

### **The Rabbit Trap**

An informal meeting was held at a residential aged care facility for carers and people with early stage dementia. About 20 people attended, and, after admiring the sensory garden, the group asked me to open the 'fold away shed', which I duly did.

Like bees to honey, like metal filings to a magnet, it drew the men – and one woman. The rest of the women were still admiring the fountain and sensory plants in the garden, not far off.

I opened the shed and, as its hinges made a tuneful squeak, a gecko dropped down and ran off.

The opening of one section revealed the back of a shadow board, which in turn opened up on its hinges to reveal two large shelved areas, backed with old galvanized iron and loaded with old tools and bits and pieces. The second section was then opened, which was the same as the previous one, and you could hear the men gasp as they pondered over some of the articles on display.

The lone woman took hold of an old rusty rabbit trap from one of the shelves and exclaimed "what's the use of having a rabbit trap in a shed?". I explained that it was all about reminiscing, connecting with the past and having something tangible to talk about. The articles in this shed were to evoke memories, feelings and discussions of bygone days.

Just as I had finished this explanation, an elderly man who had walked slowly to where we were, spotted the rabbit trap held by this lady, pointed to it and said "this takes me right back to when I was twelve years old on the farm in the Mallee."

For the next ten minutes he entertained the group by recalling a bygone era while describing some of his adventures, smiling all the time while looking at the trap.

I couldn't have planned it better. A question had led to some theory from me, followed, almost on cue, by a practical demonstration on how effective these older tools and articles are in bringing warm memories flooding back to the mind of the elderly.

The woman nodded and handed me the rabbit trap in reverent silence. Now she knew why there was a rabbit trap and so many other seemingly 'odd' articles in this shed.

### **Where's The Nail Punch?**

One of many examples of what can happen was related to me by a diversional therapist working in a South Australian residential aged care facility. She couldn't wait for the planned shed to be installed in the high care facility.

She purchased from a hardware shop seven flat pack, pre-drilled, pre-cut wooden toolboxes. She set up the men who had dementia in the day room, and, with some assistance, they assembled the toolboxes using screwdrivers and hammers. One man with dementia who hadn't spoken for two years exclaimed, "*It's not good enough*". After the staff member picked herself up off the floor, she asked, "*What do you mean?*" He replied, "*these nails and screws all need to be counter sunk, now where's the nail punch?*"

When the focus is turned from what you've lost to what you still have, and men with dementia are enabled to use their existing abilities, miracles can happen. These things are 'hard wired' into us and it only takes, in this instance, permission for a man to use some tools he had once used way back, to improve his quality of life.

In her book *Using Activities for Behaviour Intervention*, Carly Hellen states:

***"Work is a source of a meaningful quality of life. Residents with dementia all were viable, active citizens in their homes, jobs, and community. The challenge is to take the tasks that they at one time were engaged in easily, ... and successfully adapt or modify them for a continued sense of purposeful participation."***

### **No Shed But We Have A Car**

In another residential aged care facility, a man with dementia who hadn't spoken for two years but just grunted to communicate, suddenly started putting two to three words together, but only outside and only around the old car the facility had just purchased for the men to 'tinker' with. "Flat tyre, check oil, flat battery, clean windscreen" were some words that he came out with and surprised the staff significantly. The trigger for this man's changed behaviour was the purchase of an old car that was accessible to residents to sit in, to wash and to tinker with.

### **It's The Piston Rings**

Some common unmet needs that lead to increased agitation, health and behavioural problems in institutional and home settings include:

- discomfort
- sitting all day
- no activity
- need for love and belonging not being met
- lack of social contact
- want to be of help but not allowed to
- limited stimulation (Professor Jiska Cohen-Mansfield, Alzheimers Australia Conference, Sydney, 2005).

An example of this is a man with alcohol-related dementia who was a mechanic during his working life and now had no program of activities to fill his day. He had become a bit of a problem to the staff caring for him and were finding it difficult to cope with his behaviours of concern.

Staff were encouraged to provide meaningful activities based on the man's past skill as a mechanic. For example, he might enjoy sorting bolts, sorting out a socket set or looking through some car manuals.

However, the staff gave him 100 socks to sort and were surprised that he had difficulty in completing the task. I needed to explain to the staff member what a socket set was and how it bore no resemblance at all to sorting socks, which he had never done in his life before.

On visiting this man, I took along my Holden workshop manual and asked if he knew why my car, a Camira, would be blowing smoke from the exhaust. After enquiring why on earth had I bought a Camira, he took the manual, turned to the relevant page and started explaining the functions of various piston rings in detail. He then asked if it blew smoke while idling or accelerating. He was able to give me some advice on possible causes of the problem and the probable cost of repairs, and then offered to take a look at the car as he had 'a little spare time on his hands'.

His bedroom was bare, with just one photo of him with his daughters on the wall, which was obviously taken in his shed. In the photo, the background of corrugated iron, tools on shadow boards and a suitably messy workbench spoke volumes about this man's previous lifestyle and his current unmet needs.

Once suitable activities were introduced, his behaviours subsided, as he was given 'permission' to partake in well-entrenched skills and abilities relevant to him.

The often-expressed argument that providing person-specific activities is not possible due to time and staffing pressures loses its credibility when compared to the time saved by reducing agitation and aggression caused by boredom and limited stimulation.

Henry Brodaty says in his book 'Managing Alzheimer's Disease in Primary Care':

*"Pre prescribed formulas of activities reduce the person with dementia to a disease and ignore the unique individual life history that shapes his or her thoughts, feelings and behaviours. When devising an activity program or trying to overcome a problem behaviour, an understanding of the person behind the disease will enrich the solution and enhance the probability of success".*

Managing AD in Primary Care, (1999), Henry Brodaty

## **The Respite Shed**

In Adelaide, an aged care service provider in conjunction with the local council offers a respite service for men with dementia still living at home. They built a shed.

The coordinator wished he had a video camera when these men first attended the shed two years ago. They were hunched over, wouldn't give eye contact, lacked self-esteem, hardly talked and appeared to be depressed. To see them now you wouldn't think they were the same men: the positive change speaks volumes for the benefits of a shed as a safe, familiar environment for men with dementia. Now he can't shut them up, they are great mates, have so much fun together in the shed, their self-

esteem has gone through the roof, and now and again they may choose to do a bit of work, but that is of secondary importance.

The only time they change is when their wives come and pick them up at the end of the day, pointing out their husband's shirt is untucked or that they have some sawdust on their face. It's not only a respite service to these men's wives *but also to these men.*

Research evidence that supports the link between activity and health is spread across a very broad range of periodicals and professional journals extending back some 30 years or more. (Journal of Dementia Care, Vol 13 No 4 July/August 2005 Pg 26).

LaTrobe University's School of Occupational Therapy have recently written up their research findings on older people's need for activity and companionship.

Three major themes emerged, the first related to the importance of companionship between staff and clients of the adult day groups (ADG). In SA these are often referred to as Day Care Centres, or in the case above, 'the shed'. The second theme revealed how participants valued keeping occupied in activities not achievable at home. The third theme identified how home was experienced as a place where time passed slowly and there were insufficient things to do. The final paragraph sums it up nicely:

*'this study asserts that companionship and purposeful occupations outside of home are highly valued by older people, and the ADGs play an important role in this context.'* (Australasian Journal on Ageing, Vol 24 No 3 September 2005 pgs 134-140)

This is not dissimilar to findings by Golding, B, Brown, M, Foley, A, and Harvey, J, of Ballarat University. They conducted nationwide research into the role of men's sheds during 2006 and uncovered the following major themes:

- ✧ Community based men's sheds are providing critically important informal learning opportunities programs and spaces for men, particularly for older men facing issues associated with change including aging, health, retirement, isolation, unemployment, disability and separation.
- ✧ Men's sheds in community contexts provide positive and therapeutic informal activities and experiences for men, characterised by a high level of commitment, engagement and ownership.
- ✧ The diverse shed organisations and the spaces and programs that they provide are heavily reliant on volunteers, but are particularly successful with older men because they provide the freedom to informally and socially engage groups in hands-on, practical activity with other men.
- ✧ While the proportion of men anticipating future paid work through shed-based activity is relatively small, these spaces and programs result in significant and positive health, happiness and wellbeing outcomes for men who participate, as well as for their families and communities.
- ✧ Sheds attract groups of older males that have proved very difficult to engage through conventional health, wellbeing, employment and training initiatives. They are successful precisely because they avoid foregrounding these aims but informally provide considerable benefits in a safe, social and familiar workshop

environment, where men have the freedom to attend and take control of the sheds and their lives, typically during a period of difficult and significant change.

- ✧ The intensity of the engagement observed in men's sheds is not dissimilar to the intensity many women report in studies based in neighbourhood house and community-centre type settings used mainly by women since the 1980s.
- ✧ Despite these significant and diverse benefits, because they are grassroots, relatively new and poorly understood by most funding bodies, sheds in community contexts struggle to cope with the initial costs and complexities associated with establishing a safe working environment and to get ongoing funding to assist with supervision of participants.

### **We Want In**

One of the men with dementia who has been a participant in a community shed for men with dementia was admitted to a residential aged care facility to give his wife two weeks of respite.

While in respite, the shed was a highlight in his conversations with other men, so much so that when the shed coordinator came to pick him up from the facility to attend the shed for the day, two men without dementia asked "how can we get in?"

Activities that are meaningful in environments that people are used to is so important. For these two men, the shed would have provided a much needed break from the routines, monotony and boredom found in some residential aged care facilities. This is an area we have been slow to address for men, despite the volumes of literature on this by authors such as Earl, Earl and Von Mering; M. Thomson; K. Bettany and, more recently, B. Golding et al.

- ✧ In summary, research shows that community based men's sheds are providing critically important informal learning opportunities programs and spaces for men, particularly for older men facing issues associated with change including aging, health, retirement, isolation, unemployment, disability and separation. Golding et al

### **Where's The Tree?**

A community shed participant who has dementia, went outside, came back in and asked the coordinator "where's the tree gone?" Together they had a look outside and the coordinator reassured the man that the tree had been chopped down. With quite a bit of insight, he added "why do you ask that, do you want to go to the toilet?" The reply was affirmative, to which the shed coordinator indicated he needed to go also, so together they entered an adjoining building where each ones bladder was relieved.

The shed coordinator told me that there was never a tree outside the community shed, but that the man probably had a tree outside his own shed in the backyard where he relieved himself on occasions rather than walking up to the house, taking his shoes off, etc.

## **That's it!**

The wife of one of the men who had dementia and attended the community shed for respite once a week became upset and angry over something she perceived occurred at the shed. 'That was it, he wouldn't be going any more'. After numerous meetings with counselling staff, she was insistent in her decision and extremely angry.

However, three weeks later she rang the counsellor to ask if he could once again attend the shed. He was missing his mates, the work and most of all, the fun that he had in the community shed, so much so that every day he would be waiting on the front veranda to be picked up. His wife swallowed her pride and saw things in perspective, and he is now attending the shed, as previously.

## **The Shed, A Life Saver**

At every shed conference I have attended there has been at least one man who gets up and shares his story, which is similar to the one that follows.

During the 1st National Men's Shed Conference held at Lakes Entrance, Victoria, in November 2005, a shed participant stood up and shared his story with the audience. He stated that his wife knew that, due to the progression of the cancer within her, her time on this earth was very limited. She knew her husband wouldn't cope with the losing her and asked her GP to keep an eye on him.

Some weeks after her death, the GP made a home visit to her husband, who hadn't been out of bed much since her death, he couldn't see the point. The GP prescribed some antidepressants that he commenced to take. This improved his state slightly, he was now motivated to get out of bed, but then just sat all day in the lounge room looking at the four walls around him, and occasionally looking at the bottle of tablets and considering ending it all.

When the GP next visited him, this was revealed, and the GP suggested giving the local Men's Shed a try. With nothing to lose he went along not knowing what to expect. He was welcomed openly and joined in the banter with the other men in attendance.

At the conference, this man said that if it wasn't for the Men's Shed, he wouldn't be alive now. What's more, the only time he is depressed now is on the weekends, when the shed is shut.

He added that he thought this depression stuff was for wimps, until he suffered from it himself. It is real and can be treated pharmacologically and in conjunction with psychosocial interventions.

## **Back Yard Sheds vs. Community Men's Sheds**

During 2006, Associate Professor Barry Golding headed up ground-breaking, world-first research, along with his research team based at Ballarat University and a reference committee of experts in the field, looking at whether community men's sheds were beneficial, and if so, in what ways. This involved 100 extensive questionnaires and visits to 24 community men's sheds, in five states across Australia.

I met with him in July 2006, at the completion of the research. He shared the key findings of the research with me (which are due to be published soon) and

commented that he had made another discovery. He found that community men's sheds were different in a number of ways to men's backyard sheds.

- Backyard sheds can be seen in a negative light, as some men escape their responsibly in the household by going to the shed. Men in community sheds take up responsibility for their mates and the community as they meet week after week, and these sheds are seen as something that is definitely positive.
- Some men in backyard sheds can be seen as self-centred, involved in hobbies, building or doing something for themselves. Men in community sheds, when they do work, often work on projects to benefit and aid others, not necessarily for themselves. Community focused projects can be anything from mending toys for the local child care centre, building a skate park ramp for the youth of the area, to making aids for the elderly citizens' club.
- Other men go to their backyard shed to be by themselves. Men in community sheds come to meet with other men.
- The backyard shed can be seen as a 'masculine place' where products are made with machinery and tools of varying complexity. Men in community sheds also make things, but the focus is not on this but on the mateship that occurs. The community shed can be a rare place where men will drop their guard and share intimate concerns such as health worries, family problems, his feelings, etc, with other men. Many men find the shed a safe environment in which to do this, and reap great benefits when others connect him to broader and specific community health agencies, while sharing the benefits they have enjoyed through such agencies.

Author: Keith Bettany; RN, B App Sc (Developmental Disabilities)

## **THE HACKHAM WEST SHED (ADELAIDE, SA)**

Our SHED opened in 1995 with a handful of volunteers, and with little equipment as you would expect. We relied heavily then, and today, on grants, and the support from our Community. Our local Council has always been an invaluable supporter of our group. We have always generated income from activities, and programs, run initially by a handful of Volunteers who worked from a single workshop.

Today we have 20 or so Volunteers, who manage our wood, metal, welding, painting and assembly workshops. There is also an admin area looked after by lady Volunteers.

While we are reasonably well equipped, we are currently upgrading our workshops to ensure compliance with OH&S issues. There is always a need to continually upgrade tools and equipment.

In the past our activities have included Work for the Dole programs, woodworking classes for disadvantaged Secondary School youth, and the repair of bicycles, toys and furniture etc.

We are still running our woodworking classes for groups of disadvantaged teenage youths, and simple art and craft sessions for younger Primary School children. We continue to make and repair toys and furniture for various Community groups and individuals. We are currently discussing the introduction of additional woodworking sessions for an adult group of disadvantaged members in our local area.

There is no doubt that one of our most important functions is to support each other as Volunteers. Some Volunteers have been attending for as many as 10 years. All agree that the Shed is an important part of their well being.

Barry Pearson, Chair





(Incorporated within the rules of the Windale Community Group Inc.)

### **PATRONS OF THE SHED**

*Jill Hall MP, Federal Member for Shortland*

*Matthew Morris MP, State Member for Charlestown*

*Councillor Greg Piper, MP & Mayor, City of Lake Macquarie Council.*

## **BACKGROUND**

The Shed @ Windale provides a valuable community place where people can enjoy social interaction and young people can receive mentoring and training from skilled retired or unemployed persons. It provides a place of expertise in woodworking, small engines and metal fabrication and is considered to be a lead shed in the areas shed community and is used extensively as the model to base similar operations.

A variety of programs have been introduced for mature age men who have accumulated a broad variety of skills to become involved in the mentoring system with a view to achieving positive, measurable outcomes - improved participation; discipline and comprehension; application of previous learning; advanced learning and real career opportunities. A key focus is for young people to have an opportunity to develop trade skills, to improve social, literacy and numeracy skills and to enhance their chances of securing employment or accessing further education and training.

Mentoring is usually conducted on a one-on-one basis while in the presence of a guardian and generally involves the refurbishment of furniture by, and for, youth domiciled in hostel type accommodation. All activities are conducted by skilled retired or unemployed persons who give their valuable time to assist the broader community with all persons mentoring youth being qualified under a TAFE mentoring training program.

## **BRIEF CASE STUDIES**

### **Mentors**

There are numerous examples demonstrating how the existence of the Shed has provided a safety net for both mature and adolescent participants. For instance, two mature members had become redundant with one suffering with apathy, typically spending most of his unemployed time shopping, caring for the garden and lawn and watching TV with the other suffering some form of depression and not being very active. The first member visited the Shed to donate some tools he no longer required and has now become one of the Shed's key personnel willingly volunteering his time to benefit others. The second member was referred to the Shed by Centrelink as a special needs case with a view to regaining self esteem and the ability to feel needed. He is

now under stable medical management and a regular attendee of the Shed, providing expertise in metal work and the broader Shed environment. In addition, there are several members who, though initially referred by Centrelink, continue with a 100% Shed attendance after their Centrelink commitment expires.

### **Mentored**

There have been several successes with the youth attending the Shed. As previously mentioned, we mentor a small number of socially disadvantaged youth on a weekly basis from the age of twelve and upwards, who are in a very fragile emotional situation and under 24/7 supervision. These youth live in separate accommodation around the region and are in need of constant attention. A recent success story occurred when one of the youths, who has been with us for about two years and had a very short concentration span, was able to achieve foster care with a family who reside on a small farm. He is now working unsupervised at times at his new home and is starting to become more socially involved.

A number of other youths who were considered in danger of falling through the educational cracks have moved into further education/training as a direct result of regular attendance to the Shed.

### **SUMMARY**

Depression and mental illness can be made worse by isolation in society and the lack of close friends. Contact with men who can share their problems and exchange information often provides the platform required for recovery and self confidence. Men shouldn't be ashamed to admit when they are down and cannot cope because often the problems are large and need to be shared. The SHED community can be a regular point of contact to help those suffering in these circumstances – just by being there.

Roger Greenan

## **Alpine Health**

Rob was a drifter, a traveller who went from place to place, and a man who tended to isolated himself from the rest of the world.

Originally from Kalgoorlie, after a failed marriage and divorce, he often felt depressed and worried about life.

“At times I was so distressed and nervous that I couldn’t think straight and in those darker moments I sometimes thought of doing myself in,” Rob admitted. “When I started to think about ending everything, I knew I needed to do something and find a place of my own,” he said.

Three years ago Rob caught a bus to Mount Beauty and since then he has not looked back.

He joined and become an active member of the Alpine Health Mount Beauty men’s shed.

“I came to the men’s shed to get my mind out of the darkness and to occupy myself,” he said.

“I am not saying it saved my life but it sure was timely.”

Rob explained that the practical jobs he does with other men at the men’s shed gives him something to focus on.

“We do lots of community projects together where we share our skills and knowledge, and this has helped me to develop strong friendships, he said.

One of the men’s shed projects has been the restoration of old bikes for vulnerable youth.

Some of the jobs Rob loves doing now are restoring old cars and furniture and caring for an elderly friend and neighbour.

He is a volunteer driver for community transport offering isolated residents opportunities to access services in Albury and Wodonga.

Still a drifter by nature Rob is not sure whether he will stay in Mount Beauty but for now he and his dog are quite content.

There are many in the community that certainly hope that he stays

**My SHED is important to me because.....**

I am a retrenched senior who is now 63 years old. I have been coming to our SHED in the southern suburbs of Adelaide since I was laid off from the Motor Industry in 2000. I have found the SHED, and my involvement with like-minded Volunteers to be essential to my well-being. It puts routine into my week, and ensures that I get out of bed to attend 2 days a week. I enjoy my continuing relationship with people of my own age, and when I am home, I have interesting things to talk about with my wife and family.

I see this as vital, and believe my health would suffer in the long term if this type of activity was not available to me. Our SHED is also assisting our local community in a number of important ways.

Regards Harry