

The original Men's Shed was started up by Kelle Myers in August 2016. The original group consisted of five or six men doing little bits of gardening and bike maintenance or working with a group from hoot, an arts based mental health charity.

By the winter of 2016 most of the men were just meeting for a cuppa and a chat for an hour or so on Friday mornings. Kelle decided that the sheds needed a new direction and set me on in January 2017 to see how we could develop the sheds. This was not going to be easy as I found out, quite quickly, that quite a few of the guys were turning up because they liked Kelle, I couldn't compete on that level! So most of the group left leaving me with just one member, John!

The first thing I decided to do was offer as many different projects as possible, So I emptied a lot of the sheds that were full of old car tyres? Then set about building different sheds for different projects. I then read the aims of what the original sheds had been set up as which seemed to be based on men with mental health issues, so I phoned different organisations to tell them what the sheds were doing now. I was soon inundated with men from all walks of life that , for whatever reason, were finding life difficult.

I asked the lads what they wanted from the project and they told me, so armed with their wishes we about building a woodworking room, upholstery room, bike maintenance, gardening, art, computer room. These rooms are now full of people enjoying different pursuits, they don't have to stay in the same shed all day they can spend as much or as little time as they wish. They can also sit in an old converted train carriage which we have, just to sit and chat and play computer games or watch TV and have a cuppa.

I have a background in psychology and soon found that lots of the lads were coming into my office just to chat to me about their lives and problems. So I then quickly adopted an open door policy where the lads can come and chat about anything they are finding difficult in their lives. This led me to make contacts with other charities and the local authorities to help the lads with benefits and housing problems.

I started to find things quite difficult to keep going at one stage as there was only me to run things and we were then open three days a week. Then by accident help came in the form of Santa Claus? Bob Morse, who looks like (and really is) Santa joined me to help me run the sheds. Bob had volunteered to work as a furniture restorer but took a wrong turning and ended up helping me with admin! Soon everything started to take shape, Bob has taken over the management side of the sheds but he is much more than this he is a driving force and so committed to what we are trying to do that with his help the whole project is flourishing beyond my expectations.

Because most of our members (though not all) have addiction or mental health problems they have lived in isolation for many years our aim is to get the lads to be part of their community again. With this in mind we found that lots of the lads had problems with reading and writing so we have now teamed up with another charity to help them gain qualifications up to City and Guilds level.

Most of the lads now regard the sheds as their little family, its a place of safety and companionship, but this was put in danger when we were told that The Yorkshire Children's Centre which had been the charity that had been backing us felt that we no longer fitted their ethos and were no longer going to back us. This is not to say that they haven't been more than helpful because they couldn't have done anymore to help us keep going. Bob And I chatted for a long time, well at least 30 seconds, and decided to that we would start up our own charity and keep the sheds open.

We are now in the process of turning what was once a small men's shed project into a charity called Platform 1 (which is our address next to the train station). We still run the charity on the Men's sheds ethos of getting men out of isolation. But what started as a few guys drinking tea and coffee has now turned into a project of over one hundred men and growing, we have had thirty new members start just this month. We are now trying to sort out funding as we think we will be up to two hundred members within a few months so there is a great need for what we are doing. We want to be an all inclusive project and welcome working with other charities. We don't care what the man's past is, we are more concerned with how we can change their future. We believe that 'If you give a man a voice he will soon learn to shout'.

So we are very, very, busy and soon hope to open five days a week, but running the sheds is a little like the middle east situation, for every solution, there's another problem?!

PS: John is still a loyal and important member of our little group of sheds

So if anyone would like to join us or thinks they may be able to help us please contact either myself or Bob Morse at gez.walsh@yccuk.org.uk or phone us on 01484 421143