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they change lives.  
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## The Cowes Men's Shed

We are members of the UKMSA (UK Men's Sheds Association) and our Shed has the longest opening hours of any on the Isle of Wight; Monday to Friday, 10am-3pm. We offer free membership to everyone aged 18+, so that no one in our community is excluded. Despite the name, at present women currently form 27% of our total membership, which as of December 2022 stood at 131. Currently we see up to ten people attending our Shed on any one day, more if we hold an event.

The Shed opened on 14 May 2018; a community project brought to you by Storeroom2010 furniture reuse charity and supported by various local and national funders. The Shed has a carpentry workshop, which is very well equipped, exterior horticulture area with raised beds, two polytunnels, a covered decking area with seating, a picnic bench, red squirrel and bird feeding stations. Over the years we have received many kind donations of items such as chop saws, pillar drills, a table router, lathes and more for the carpentry workshop, also some shrubs and plants for the horticulture areas from our members. We have purchased larger equipment with monies from various funders who were happy to help.

Men in Sheds is a great concept and there is a national organisation (UKMSA) which offers us support in making Cowes into the best Shed ever! The negative impact of loneliness and social isolation on mental and physical health are well documented. Surveys from Mental Health Charities have found millions of people feel lonely on a daily basis. Men typically find it more difficult to build social connections and rarely share personal concerns or worries. Sheds are about meeting like-minded people and possibly having someone to share your worries with too. Men are more likely to talk about their troubles when working shoulder to shoulder with others.

Men's Sheds (or Sheds) are similar to garden sheds – a place to pursue practical interests at leisure, to practice skills and enjoy making and mending. The difference is that garden sheds and their activities are often solitary in nature, while Men's Sheds are the opposite. They're about social connections and friendship building, sharing skills and knowledge, and of course, a lot of laughter. Sheds are whatever the members (or Shedders as they are called) want them to be. Whatever the activity, the essence of a Shed is not a building, but the connections and relationships between its members.

Sheds can also mean having fun again, sharing skills and knowledge, gaining a renewed sense of purpose (often lost when people retire) and belonging. Typical activities in Sheds vary greatly, but at Cowes Men's Shed we offer carpentry and horticulture activities all year round. People can try out new activities or rediscover old hobbies, utilise their skills and share learning, enjoy the company of others and maybe become more active too. There is parking locally, and the Cowes Park and Ride Bus Stop is just a two minute walk along the road; so easy access for everyone.

In a recent anonymous member survey we asked 'What do you think are the main benefits you gain from visiting the Shed?'



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Responses included:- "Happiness". "Feeling useful". "Feeling like I matter". "Feeling important". "Feeling human". "Feeling less lonely". "Feeling fitter". "Meeting people". "Laughter".

94% of respondents said that they felt happier since joining the Shed, 63% felt fitter, 88% felt their health and well-being have improved.

The comments our 'Shedders' have made in our confidential surveys about how the Shed has changed their lives for the better, are really heart-warming: -

- Open all week, daytime hours. This place is perfect.
- (Member's daughter) He's a changed man. He really enjoys coming here. He's also able to pass his knowledge on. It's like he's found his purpose again.
- My wife says she hasn't seen me this excited about something for years. She says this place has been a godsend.
- It's like going to work but without all the aggravation. Only nice people. The Shed has worked wonders for my wife's mental health, we're turning into our old selves again.
- I finished work and it was like 'well, what am I supposed to do now – just stay at home and watch telly?' Finishing work was like having a stone tied to you and being thrown into water. But I really have got purpose again now.
- This place has saved me – more than you could know.

Predominantly, this community project addresses the issues of isolation and loneliness. It helps prevent people from succumbing to boredom or depression through lack of social interaction. For those who are unemployed it helps with confidence building. There are over 800,000 chronically lonely people in the country and their situation impacts on their health. Nationally the ageing percentage of our population who are over 65 is growing and with this growth are health and depression issues from retirees who feel they have lost their personal identity and purpose. 27% of people on the Isle of Wight are older than 65 and one in six households on the Isle of Wight is occupied by a person aged 65 or older, living alone.

According to the Royal College of General Practitioners, "loneliness poses a greater risk to health than diabetes".

The Shed Project's objective is to provide a comfortable, safe place where people who need company can go to combat feelings of isolation and depression and can meet others, socialise, practice hobbies, they can make things and drink tea together! 'Shedders' are often retired, but anyone aged 18+ is welcomed. We have seen unemployed people gain confidence and be able to establish new routines and social skills, which have helped in securing paid work. Retired people have a wealth of knowledge they can pass onto the younger generation, helping them in many ways – and vice versa.

Our Shed Project is an innovative response to the many issues mentioned within this document. We find that other Men in Sheds Projects on the Island are not really fulfilling the original concept of being there for people when they need company. We are providing somewhere people can go to make a positive difference by working on projects for other charities and good causes. We are open 5 days a week, 50 weeks a year and enable people to dabble in carpentry and horticulture projects as they wish. 'Shedders' participating may want to help upcycle, repair furniture or assist with horticultural projects where items could be sold to raise funds for the Shed, but this is not compulsory, we never expect our members to take on a project not of their own choosing. Some members choose to make bird boxes and garden trugs all out of wood scraps and bits of old pallets for Storeroom to sell to support the Shed, along with plants grown in the gardens and polytunnels.

We believe Storeroom2010's Cowes Men's Shed will continue to gain in popularity, providing companionship and company for people of all ages over 18, but especially to retired people who suffer



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from loneliness and isolation, the client target group we are advertising to attract. Over the next ten years, it is expected that the number of 65 to 79 year olds will increase by nearly 17%, while the over 85s will increase by 40%.

Many of this group are lonely or bored, some suffering with mental health issues which could be helped by getting out, meeting people and taking on projects for community good causes. The UKMSA, believe older people, especially men, can benefit from the company, conversation, creativity and connections that a Shed environment can provide. It is said that Sheds are playing a particularly important part in meeting the needs of older people – particularly older men, who often feel that traditional services targeted at older people are not right for them. The creative, productive nature of Sheds provides an activity around which people can form bonds and networks, which go on to benefit them outside of the Shed itself.

Engaging people in our gardens has had a noticeably therapeutic effect. Many members do not have access to a garden and are too frightened to travel to any public green spaces. Introducing them to the Shed, allowing them to enjoy the sunshine, the bird song and other wildlife is a breath of fresh air that has a positive effect on their physical and mental health. Inspiring people to participate in community projects in the workshop fosters a sense of togetherness and giving something back to their community. It really is about building up the confidence and self-worth of people who have faced a series of hardships during this ongoing period of Covid-19. We are helping people who may be feeling totally alone, seeing that they are happy and have what they need; letting our community know that there are people who care about their health and well-being.

Please do call me, or our project leader Adam, if you would like any further information about our work, or if you, a friend or relative wishes to visit The Cowes Men's Shed; please telephone the Shed during our opening hours on 01983 209734.

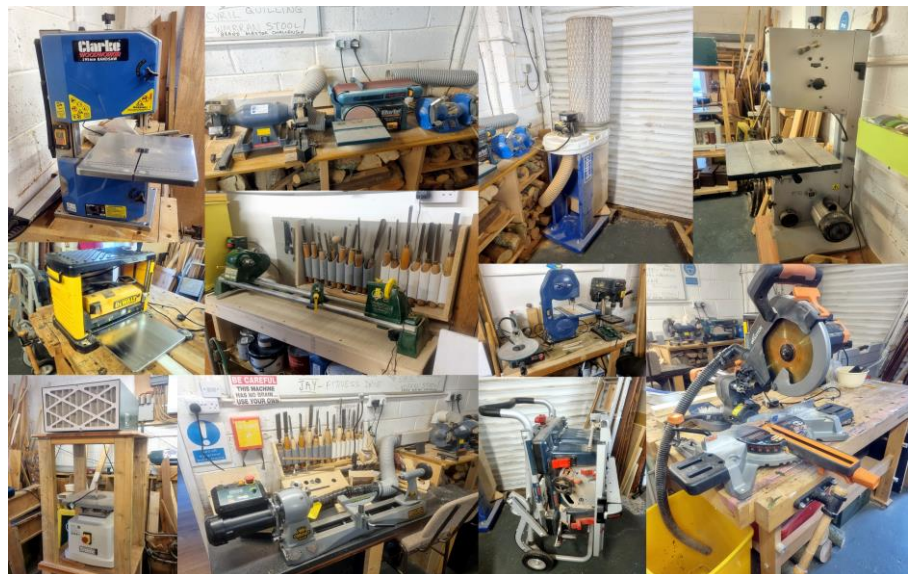
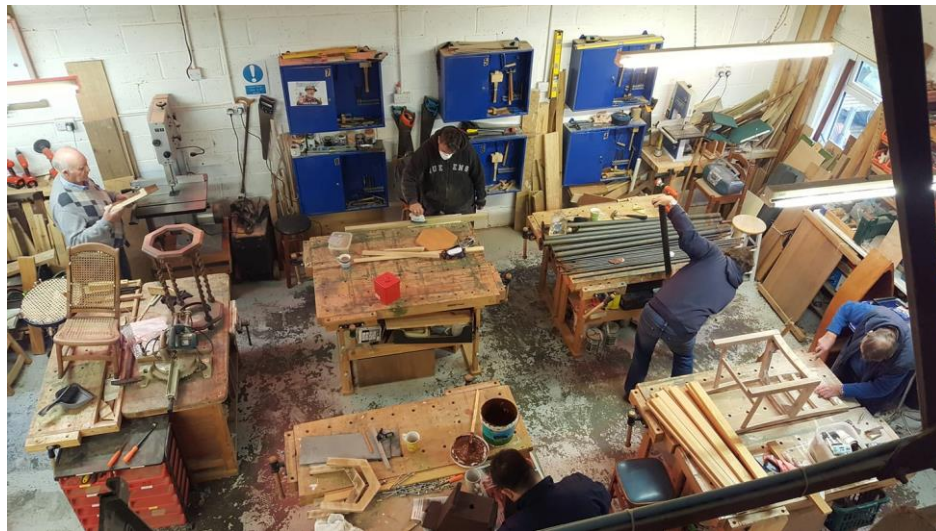
**March 2023**

**Nick Miller**  
**CEO**  
**Storeroom2010**



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