OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE WA MEN’S SHED 2013 SEMINAR

BY
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MONDAY, 14 OCTOBER 2013
Mr John McDougall, Chairman, WA Men’s Shed Association

Delegates - All

I am very pleased to be here today to officially open the 2013 WA Men’s Shed Seminar.

That WA Men’s Shed Association meets a community need is demonstrated by the rapid spread of Men’s Sheds throughout Australia over the last 2 decades. When my predecessor, Dr Ken Michael AC, opened the Beverley Men’s Shed in May 2010, he observed that there were then just over 400 Men’s Sheds in Australia. There are now over 800, so in just 3 years the numbers have doubled.

In Western Australia there are over 5,000 members and over 125 sheds either operating or planned. Membership can range from 6-10 in a small rural town to well over 100 in a large shed. In the course of my regional tours I have ensured that, wherever there is a Men’s Shed, we pay it a visit.

Some small sheds may only open one day per week, while large ones operate five or six days per week.

Their common aim is the provision of a safe, friendly environment where men are able to work on projects at their own pace, in their own time, in the company of other men, share skills, swap ideas, solve problems or just discuss life in general.
If you looked in, you might see men restoring furniture, perhaps repairing bicycles for a local school, maybe making rocking horses, or fixing lawn mowers, or making kids cubby houses for a local charity. The sheds are particularly popular with older men, as a way of establishing friendships, and engaging in purposeful activities, but you will also see a few younger men working with older men, learning new skills, learning something about life, and losing the sense of social isolation that even young men – especially FIFO’s – may feel.

As Mark Twain once said, “When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant, I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in 7 years”.

Young men eventually begin to realise they can learn a great deal from older, and more experienced men – though sometimes it takes time and patience, on the part of both!

Men’s Sheds have a very positive impact on the health (both mental and physical), of members. Humans are social animals. It is well established that loneliness, having no-one to talk to, can lead to depression, illness, even suicide.

This seminar will provide much food for thought and no doubt prompt debate an discussion.
Neil McIntyre will give some valuable tips about men’s health. Kevin Mo and Alice Gummery are looking at “Positive Ageing” later today.

Sheds have become a focal point for health promotion. Beyond Blue, Cancer Council, Prostrate Cancer Foundation, Regional Men’s Health, Alzheimer’s Australia, Carers WA and the Continence Foundation have provided information to a number of sheds.

Peter Kenyon will talk about the important role that men’s sheds can play in community development. Other speakers will discuss different but very relevant issues.

WAMSA now has a Promotions and Development Officer, Bill Johnstone, who spreads the Men’s Shed story to many groups such as – local government, Rotarians, Apex, Lions, Soroptimists, Aged Care Centres.

Local Governments across the State are increasingly seeking information about Men’s Sheds and many give support to the establishment of a Men’s Shed in their community. A presentation at the Local Government Managers’ Association Conference is planned.

As our population ages – it is forecast that by 2050 25% of Australians will be 65 or older – Men’s Sheds will have an increasingly important role to play.

The Sheds provide an environment in which men, who are notoriously reluctant to discuss health issues, can do so.
The President of one shed reported: “We have had a positive outcome on two or three events in the last year, where we have heard of men prepared to "End it all". A couple of us intervened and got them to the Shed, and they now are recovered from depression and make a positive contribution to the Community at large”.

From another shed: “After morning tea where there was conversation about all manner of things, one member asked the other how he was going. He replied that he thought his piles were playing up and had been for some time. The other said it could be serious and urged him to see a doctor. He was found to have bowel cancer; it was successfully treated. Had he just let it drift on, he would have died.”

These are just two of many illustrations of the value of Men’s Sheds.

It is very pleasing that several Aboriginal Men’s Sheds have been established or are being planned.

AMSA believes that Men’s Sheds should be open to all men, but recognise that some Sheds may wish to restrict their membership to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander men, for cultural reasons.
And the Department of Veteran’s Affairs has suggested a working party to look at the possibility of men’s sheds playing a role in supporting returning veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Representatives from the Fremantle, Bicton, Rockingham and Mosman Park sheds, and the Women Working with Wood organisation, which operates from the Stirling shed, plus WAMSA are involved in developing and implementing a pilot project for veterans and ex-service men and women.

In the WA Men’s Shed newsletter of May last year, under the heading, *Wanted*, in the classified advertisements, someone had wistfully written, simply, “*My youth back*”. Well, Men’s Sheds can’t do *that*, I’m afraid. If they could, there would certainly be an explosion in membership. Wouldn’t it be great if we could start out life at say 80 and work back to 18, with all of the experience, skill and life lessons that have been learned in those years? But what Men’s Sheds can, and in fact do, is to provide companionship, understanding and support, and the pleasure that comes from those simple but important things.

And on that note it is with pleasure that I officially declare open this 2013 Seminar. Thank you.