


# IRISH MEN'S SHEDS







SHOULDER TO SHOULDER, THE  
IRISH MEN'S SHED MOVEMENT  
IS IMPROVING THE HEALTH AND  
WELL-BEING OF MEN ACROSS  
IRELAND. ONE SHED AT A TIME.

**BUT THE FIRST QUESTION  
IS ALWAYS: WHAT ON  
EARTH IS A MEN'S SHED?**



It is often said that “Men don’t talk face to face; they talk shoulder to shoulder.”

**The Irish Men’s Shed Association** works on the premise that many men, particularly Irish men, come from a culture that emphasizes care for family, but not necessarily for their own health or well-being. Often, they do not ask for help and as a result can suffer from unchecked health decline, loneliness, and depression. In Ireland, this is compounded by a high unemployment rate and many men living in rural areas who can be quite isolated.


Based on the successful **Australian Men’s Shed movement**, the Irish Men’s Shed Association is a community-based, non-profit organization that creates spaces for men of all ages to gather in a safe, friendly environment where they can work on interesting projects. While the projects can vary from reassembling a vintage motorcycle to doing charity work for another organization in need, in the end it is about welcoming men from all walks of life to be productive, valued, and active in a collective space. Some simply come for a cup of coffee and conversation. Others come and bring projects from home that they want other men’s input on. There can be five or six projects happening simultaneously but in the end, the Men’s Shed movement is strengthening Irish communities by addressing underlying social, health, and educational issues faced by men today.

## WHEN IS A SHED NOT A SHED?

John Evoy, CEO at the Irish Men’s Sheds Association, explained it best, “If we called it a men’s health centre, men wouldn’t come. If we called it a men’s education program, men wouldn’t come. If we called it a men’s suicide prevention initiative, men wouldn’t come near it. But all of that happens here. It is never forced, it simply happens when men understand the resources that are available to them.” John took *Connect* magazine for a visit to the Corey Men’s Shed, which is an enormous work room in the VEC Adult Learning Centre in County Wexford. The space hums with activity and amidst the toolboxes, gears, and motorcycle grease we met over a dozen men that gather every Thursday to work, weld, repair, and drink endless cups of coffee and tea.

“Men’s Sheds aren’t always a physical shed, it’s more of a concept of coming together,” said John. “Most of the guys here tonight would not have come to this VEC Adult Learning Centre before the Shed was established in the work room. But once they are here, they learn about all the other opportunities that are available to them and they see other guys taking advantage of those opportunities. In fact, 76% of our guys have now gone back to school or taken courses.”

We asked John about the distinct focus on men, and whether that is ever perceived as exclusionary to women. “The Men’s Shed movement recognizes the role that women play in supporting the growth of the program. Egalitarianism of the genders underpins everything we do, even though we focus on men. The problems we deal with here are also shared by women,” said John, “but we’ve found that most women are much better at dealing and talking openly about their problems. These problems have an effect on the community. While we don’t promise to fix everything, we are doing our part to strengthen families by working with the men.”

A man with short brown hair and blue eyes is working in a workshop. He is wearing a grey t-shirt with a graphic design that includes the words "CALIFORNIA STATE" and "RED". He is holding a red power tool, possibly a sander or a drill, and is looking directly at the camera. The background shows a workshop environment with various tools and equipment.

"I had been working for ten years for the same construction company. My boss came to me one morning and said, 'I'm sorry, there's no more work for you.' Overnight it was all gone. ⚙️ You go home; you say to your wife 'I have no work to go to next week.' And immediately you both start thinking, 'What about the mortgage? What about the bills?' There are an awful lot of lads that have this same story around here. I came to Men's Sheds last year. ⚙️ I saw a mention of the place in the Gorey papers and I came in to see what it was all about. Now I come here and there are people to talk to. Other people are going through the same thing and you just don't feel so alone."

BRENDAN



"In Ireland we've gone from folks having a lot of money, to lads walking around the street with their heads down a bit. Things are bad, and they're bad for most families. It's hard for a man not to have a purpose. You see men come here for the first time and they change. It's a relaxed environment that is supportive. They gain their confidence back. ⚙️ We have men here who are married and men who are single, but they all have things on their mind that they worry about: family, bills, work, and health. When you've been active and busy and working all your life like me, and suddenly every conversation is about being out of work and what bills you have, that's hard. ⚙️ But then you come to the Shed and learn how to do things you've never done before, and you don't have to pay someone to learn them. That's amazing. I'm 52 years old and I left school when I was 8. The folks here at Men's Sheds encouraged me to take a class. ⚙️ I never thought I could do anything like this. But I took a college course in computers here last year and I loved it. I never dreamed I could take college courses, but here I am."

TOMMY





## HOW HAVE THE IRELAND FUNDS HELPED?



"People come to us and say they want to implement the model in their local area and the demand far outweighs what we've been able to do," said John.

"Funding from The Ireland Funds Promising Ireland Campaign is going to start up sheds in smaller towns across Ireland. At least five Men's Sheds will be established thanks to the help from The Ireland Funds."

Men's Sheds in Ireland are now established in 19 counties across Ireland and Northern Ireland. The positive effects on men and communities have been documented in Irish Government's Men's Health Policy of 2009 and the demand for more sheds is high. The Ireland Funds believe that positive things will continue to come from this innovative and simple program as men stand shoulder to shoulder across Ireland.

- **ALMOST 300,000 MEN ARE OUT OF WORK IN IRELAND TODAY**
  - **HALF OF THE JOBS FOR MEN AGE 18-25 IN IRELAND ARE GONE**
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- **76% OF THE MEN IN THE GOREY MEN'S SHED HAVE GONE BACK TO ADVANCE THEIR EDUCATION**
  - **FOR SOME MEN IN THE GOREY MEN'S SHED, THE NEED FOR MEDICATION HAS BEEN REDUCED OR ELIMINATED ALTOGETHER**