



Men's Sheds make a significant contribution to the quality of life of men in their communities. Behind each shed are volunteer leaders/co-ordinators who give a significant amount of time to the running of each shed. Maintaining their level of commitment creates challenges for the sustainability of the Shed in the community. In discussions with the volunteer leaders, we have identified the amount of time, knowledge and skills required to sustain the sheds and raise the question as to how to sustain that capacity.

'Research Question: To identify and quantify the administrative /organisational support needs of Men's Sheds, referring specifically to the five Men's Sheds in North Tipperary.'

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1. Introduction

The purpose of the report is to examine the Sustainability of the Men's sheds initiative by focusing on the experience of five Men's Sheds in North Tipperary and the experience of volunteers working with the sheds that are supported by North Tipperary Development Company (NTDC). The task was to identify and quantify the administrative and organisational support needs of the sheds through discussions with the leaders/facilitators of the sheds themselves and conversations were carried out with five people who are connected to the Men's sheds that are currently supported by NTDC between March and May 2024. In addition, a Focus group with the same participants was held in July to review the findings before submission.

The report begins with a review of the literature on the Men's Shed movement in Ireland and other countries. The literature explores the progress of the movement and the experiences of the people who participated in leading and working with Men's sheds.

2. History of Men's Shed Movement

The Men's Shed movement began in Australia in the 1990's where 'The backyard shed is part of the Australian culture and regarded as a 'bloke's' space. But what about the men who don't have a shed? That's where the idea of a community shed emerged and it became the basis of the Australian Men's Shed Movement' (Golding 2015) The idea was that it would be a simple place where men could meet and connect and 'Even after the first Men's Sheds in 1998, several communities publicly and deliberately kept it simple by not naming their Shed or organisation as being just for men, even if that is what it effectively was. (Golding, 2015) The movement came to Ireland in 2009 when the first shed was set up in Knockanrawley, Tipperary Town. At present there are more Sheds in Ireland per head of population in Ireland (450 sheds) than in Australia. (Carragher, Golding, and Foley 2022)

3. Role of the Sheds in Ireland.

The founder of the Irish Mens Sheds association John Evoy speaks of the vision of a Men's Shed as something '... for guys who have a bit of time and a few skills to create something great for their community, and be able to have some fun and make new connections at the same time... Our view is that men don't talk face to face, they talk shoulder to shoulder.' (Evoy nd) The main attribute that men's sheds organisations have in common, is that they are: '... typically located in a shed or workshop-

type space in a community setting and become a focus for regular and systematic, hands-on activity by groups deliberately and mainly comprising men. (Goulding et al 2007: 13) The role of the shed as a 'social space' where men can gather and work on 'regular' and 'hands-on' activities is considered to be key to a successful shed. The existence of a permanent space for the Shed is critical to the success of the sheds. Securing a premises at a reasonable cost is complex too and the cost of rent is quite challenging for the committee and will be an ongoing issue. 'While they differ widely in size, governance and financial structures, activities typically involve woodwork and various other hands-on pursuits as well as the social connection aspect critically important for wellbeing'. (Carragher, Golding, and Foley, 2022: e4358) This social connection is seen as key to the success of the Mens sheds project and a critical reason why men continue to attend and participate. The evidence suggests that in this way in particular Men's sheds make a contribution to overall mental well-being for participants. (Carragher, Golding and Foley 2022, McGrath 2022)

In the context of community development, men, and specifically those of a certain age, traditionally have been identified as a HTR ('Hard to reach') cohort (Mc Grath et al. 2022) when it comes to issues of socialisation and health promotion. Gender is also seen as a key contextual factor influencing the successful transition for people into retirement. Upon entering retirement, men transition from structured opportunities for meaningful activity and socialisation with work colleagues to the relative absence of the responsibilities and routine of employment (Culph et al., 2015). For older men, this transition can give rise to the loss of daily routines, boredom, loneliness, role change and low self-esteem, increasing their risk of poor mental health (Santini et al., 2020) (Carragher, Golding, and Foley, 2022: 358).

The shed therefore has become part of the focus of public policy in health and in more recent times the sheds are seen as having a role in health promotion (McGrath et al 2022, Kelly, et al 2021), in addressing education needs, (Golding 2011, Carragher and Golding 2015) in addressing Spiritual and Biopsychosocial issues, (Moylean et al. 2013) as well as the 'positive role of men's sheds in fostering social inclusion and wellbeing.' (Power 201x) Speaking at the announcement of funding for the IMSA in 2023 Minister Humphreys (Department of Rural and Community Development) said: "The emergence of our Men's Sheds has been a hugely positive development for communities right across Ireland. They help tackle isolation and provide a safe, comfortable and welcoming environment where men of all ages can come together to socialise, share skills and work on meaningful projects' and Minister of State Joe O'Brien said: "I recognise and acknowledge the positive role of Men's Sheds in the context of social inclusion all over the country and welcome this funding to assist them as they continue that work. I have met with many Men's Sheds in my role in the Department of Rural and Community Development and their contribution to their communities is second to none.' (DRCD)

Key to the process which makes the sheds successful, is the existence of the physical 'shed', which is a permanent location that creates a sense of ownership. It is a place where men belong, a safe space to enable them to be themselves. In an ideal world a 'Successful Men's Sheds .. in a suitable location, [provides] .. a wide range of activities over extended opening hours, [enjoys] ... strong local support and .. a skilled co-ordinator who enabled its smooth operation (Milligan *et al.* 2014) The shed becomes a place of 'situated learning' (Lave and Wenger 1991) where people learn through the relationships between each other while connecting prior knowledge with authentic, informal, and often unintended contextual learning.

The impact of the shed in the wider community is identified in the experience of the females in the 'shedders' lives, According to Carragher, Golding and Foley (2022) the Shed provided a sense of liberation for women in their daily routines, giving them greater freedom to select daily leisure activities, safe in the knowledge that 'Shedders look out for each other', 'They perceived the Men's Sheds as a healing space for vulnerable older men. Women were more content knowing that older men were engaged in activities they could relate to and had other men to talk to and to look out for them. In the words of one woman, 'It gave me my father back', (Carragher, Golding, and Foley 2022: e4361) so that the Shed contributes not only to the wellbeing of the participants but also to the people in their social circle and in particular their families. As one participant noted that now that '... he started the Shed and he just loves it, and I just think it's great for him, I really do'. Carragher, Golding, and Foley, (2022: e4360)

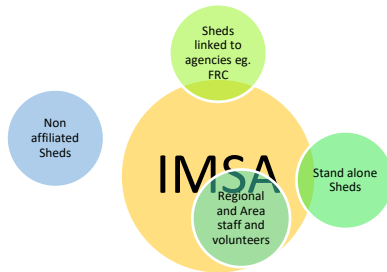
4. Role of Irish Mens Sheds Association (IMSA)

There are 450 mens sheds in Ireland and most are affiliated to the Irish Mens Sheds Association which was set up in 2011. The organisation represents Men's sheds throughout all of Ireland and the Irish Men's Sheds Association is the vehicle through which funding, primarily coming from the Department of Rural and Community Development through POBAL is channelled to the individual sheds.

The individual sheds may become members of the IMSA which takes the view that '.. sheds are independent and self-autonomous,..' (IMSA Website). The organisation is run by a Board of Directors who are recruited in a 'variety of ways', 'A certain number of seats are set aside for representatives from the sheds themselves, elected on a province-by-province basis. ... In addition to their legal responsibilities and oversight role, the board of the IMSA is deeply engaged with sheds at local,

regional and national level,..’ (IMSA Website) Current board members have been involved with sheds across the island of Ireland.

Figure 1: IMSA structure



Currently the IMSA supervises the Sheds for Life Programme (10 weeks) (Irish Men's Sheds Association) developed by the Irish Men's Sheds Association in 2016 in collaboration with policymakers and a range of health promotion organisations. The programme involves ‘..informal and interactive delivery, removal of costs barriers, trust building, the use of a comprehensive

health check and non-typical health related components to engage men, and tailoring the SFL programme to each Shed to provide a sense of autonomy and control for Shedders.’ (McGrath et al 2022). The project has been run out in 22 sheds to date and the results of this project have been very positive as it adapts the content to the needs of the shedders themselves. In 2019 the Irish Men's Sheds Association was also one of 12 organisations designated as Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) champions by the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment. Power and (RTE Report). McGrath et al (2022) have advised a word of caution in this 'health by stealth' (Power RTE) approach where ‘.. research has highlighted this informal space as an integral element to the inherent health promoting qualities of Sheds, and that efforts to provide pathways for Shedders to access support should not compromise the integrity of Sheds as peer run spaces, as to do so may be damaging to Shedders wellbeing and Shed ethos [3, 31, 41].’ The role therefore raises some potential tensions between the expectations and needs of the members of the sheds and the shed as a conduit for policy initiatives which in turn will have funding implications.

5. Sheds in Tipperary

In the following sections the report sets out the details of the Sheds in Tipperary and profiles those Sheds that participated in the project. Based on the discussions with the leadership in these sheds the report has identified two key areas which are of concern in ensuring the long term Sustainability of the Mens' Sheds in Tipperary which focus on access to secure funding and sustaining the volunteer effort required to run a successful shed.

At present (2023 figures) there are 16 mens sheds in Tipperary, 11 Sheds are based in South Tipperary, of which 3 are attached to a Family Resource Centre (FRC); Glengoole, Tipperary and Cashel. Sheds with an affiliation to an FRC have access to the administrative support of the centres and will also have funding channelled to them through the FRC themselves. The remaining 13 are what are identified as ‘stand alone’ Men’s sheds which may have access to the support of IMSA but are autonomous and individually responsible for their own operation and sustainability. Those attached to an

Tipperary - 16 Sheds

Moycarkey Borris Little	
Silvermines	
Clonmel	
Mullinahone	
Clogheen	
Cahir	
Thurles	
Borrisokane	
Carrick on Suir	
Ballagh	
Glengoole	
Nenagh	
Cashel	
Fethard	
Tipperary	
Newcastle	
Total	16

organisation/project such as the FRC are perceived as having access to administrative, funding and project worker experience which is not as readily accessible to the ‘stand alone’ sheds to date. *‘So you know from that point of view like you kind of need to be*

known and you need to have established relationships, whereas these are FRC’s do have that already and they know exactly who to ring and you know, so it bypasses an awful lot of that. (2)

a. Profile of the Participating Shed’s (Membership)

There are 5 mens sheds being supported by NTDC at present, the focus of this report is on the five sheds located within the North Tipperary section of NTDC which are Moycarkey Borris Littleton (MBL), Silvermines, Thurles, Nenagh and Borrisokane. Each of the Sheds is based in their own community and each has an elected Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. In each of the sheds the membership profile mirrors the results of other research. Participants were mostly over 65 years (77.3%), retired (88.6%) with limited educational attainment (77%). (McGrath, Murphy and Richardson 2022). This is an important consideration in understanding the sustainability challenge for sheds.

In the experience of these Tipperary sheds the initial catalyst for the set-up of the shed came from; St. Vincent de Paul Projects (Thurles and Nenagh) while the initiative for MBL and Silvermines came from a person within the community and Borrisokane is an initiative of NTDC. Each shed elects its own officers who are responsible for the Shed. Of the people who participated in this discussion two are Secretaries, two were previous officers and one was a founder (female) of the Men’s Shed.

Ethnicity (Multiple Choice)	
<i>White Irish</i>	380 (99.2%)
<i>Other</i>	3 (0.8%)
Education (Multiple Choice)	
<i>Primary Only</i>	92 (24.9%)
<i>Some/completed secondary</i>	199(52.1%)
<i>Some/completed grad level</i>	78 (20.4%)
<i>Some/completed postgrad</i>	10 (2.6%)
Marital Status (Multiple Choice)	
<i>Married/cohabiting/in a relationship</i>	284 (74.2%)
<i>Widowed</i>	36 (9.4%)
<i>Separated/Divorced/Single</i>	63 (16.4%)
Living Situation (Multiple Choice)	
<i>Lives alone</i>	68 (17.8%)
<i>Lives with others</i>	314(82.2%)

Figure 2: Demographic profile of Mens Sheds in Ireland Source: McGrath et al 2022

ii. Thurles

Thurles Men’s Shed was set up in 2014 through the initiative of two women who were part of the St. Vincent de Paul association. After a number of location moves it now has its own ‘shed’ through a long term lease. It currently has 20 members, the Shed is open three days per week from 10-1pm. and is considered to be a very open Shed. There are plans to move towards having the shed open 5 days per week to make it more available to members in the short term. The participants in the shed have been involved in a variety of projects over the year and in particular have focused on skills-based activities since its foundation. The Shed has a nominal membership charge which is considered helpful in securing the commitment of members.

i. MBL (Moycarkey Borris Littleton)

The shed was established in 2019 on the initiative of Bernie Lonergan with support from some GAA retirees. The shed was located in the GAA clubhouse and now has its own long-term lease of the old dressing rooms as its own shed in Littleton. There are 15 members and at the moment there is no charge for membership, and we will need to have a kitty system and also the issue of including others.

The focus of the activities of this shed has been on education and they have had a particular interest in history-based activities linking to the history of the local area and also the archaeological landscape of the area. ‘The profile of members includes some new members who are younger and because of the

iii. Silvermines Mens Shed

This Shed was established in 2017 through the initiative of the local community leaders and in the early years of its establishment struggled for a permanent venue and is now located in its own 'shed' at the back of the parish hall in Silvermines village which was completed in 2020. *There were people interested in the building element. 'if we weren't doing something in the shed no one would turn up' (4).* The Shed currently has 21 paid up members, who are charged 20 euro per year. The shed activities are anchored in woodworking and the shed has all the tools that it needs for the task. They have engaged with the same trainer over a number of years. The shed is currently planning for a cookery course and yoga (3) for 2024, and in the past has completed a course on smart phones and a defibrillator course. The shedders meet one night a week 6.30 to 8 for woodwork and then we have a cuppa. In addition, the group participates in an outing every year which often focus on historical venues and some of the membership fee is used to support this initiative.

iv. Borrisokane Mens

The current Borrisokane Shed was set up in 2021, there was an earlier version of the shed which concluded earlier. The shed has '10 permanent members and another 10 that come in to participate in the courses that we organise.' The shed is also *'..recruiting new members on a fairly regular basis.'* (4) The shed has done computer classes and the plan for the next one is to do one on income tax. You learn skills for scanning etc which helps. The shed is located now in the Parish community centre and the shedders built a small workshop at the back, where the group does woodcarving on a Thursday night. In addition, the group has run computer classes with the ETB which includes women. The shedders meet two nights per week, they have a class on one night and woodcarving on the second. *'the shed is going nearly the whole year round.. we are making seats for the community garden.. we are making a play seat for the Library in Roscrea.'* (4) which they got into this activity through personal networks. They also have a heritage mapping project where the group are creating a map which will *'..marking in all the business etc. on one side and on the other side what the town looked like in the last century'* (4) Their space is shared with a number of different groups as well as the Men's Shed and the shed pays a fixed 20 per hour and pays the parish 1,600 per year to cover all costs. This limits the risk to the shed as the community is responsible for the maintenance and insurance of the venue.

v. Nenagh

This shed began in 2012, under the auspices of St. Vincent de Paul as a social initiative related to mental health. In the following years it has moved location four times to its current location. In the discussion earlier on the importance of having a physical location for the shed the movement has been disruptive for the shed and they are only now feeling they are settled. They are faced with the challenge of a very significant rent cost which will need to be managed each year but they will now be able to set their own workshop and store equipment and establish a proper base.

The focus of activities in the Shed is primarily on activities eg. wood turning, basket weaving etc. which is seen as essential to engage the members. The members also get involved in a number of trips to various venues throughout the country and these are enjoyed by the members.

The membership consists of a core group of 12-15, the shed membership fee of €20 per year and the shed has engaged with a recruitment process and they held an 'open night' where new people came along. After this initiative they held Defibrillator training and Health and Safety training which engaged the new members, but they have been challenged to keep them engaged and many drifted away.

b. Governance and Leadership

The volunteers with these sheds see the role of the Men's shed as one of *'inclusion..'* and from that flows good mental and physical health. (1) There was agreement that the Shed's to be successful need to ensure that everyone feels a part of and ownership for the shed. The goal of leadership then in the shed is to ensure that *'it must be everyones shed'* (1). It is also essential for its long term sustainability that the shed is embedded in its own community. The challenge for the leaders with was that in their experience the members *'..don't think about 'down the road'* (2) *they are not thinking strategically, they are not thinking about the sustainability of the sheds'* (2) *'I don't think that the lad's are up for [this type of] working..'* (2) *You have a capacity issue and an age issue.* (2)

The Men's sheds are charities and operate under the auspices of the Charities regulator and the requirements for best practice (<https://www.charitiesregulator.ie>) in the operations of the

organisation. The requirement to comply with the appropriate standards and associated standards (eg. Health and Safety, Food Safety etc. <https://www.charitiesregulator.ie/media/1693/risk-management-for-charities.pdf>) is a considerable burden for Sheds. One of the participants commented that *'The language of Governance is not of interest to most people in a shed and the challenge is to find someone who is interested and to mentor them along. They saw that it was critical that decisions would be made collectively and written into the constitution. (1)* In this shed consideration was given to the process of creating the constitution to ensure that everyone shared in its creation and to ensure ownership of the final document (see below)

Note: The process of the creation of the Constitution in this shed was interesting: The first draft included space below each section to allow the members to add in or suggest deletions of each piece and this was then taken away and the constitution redrafted. The process was followed up by a review of the constitution and the introduction of subsequent amendments in the years that have followed.

Figure 3: Creating a Constitution.

Each of the Men's Shed has elected volunteer leaders, at a minimum a Chairperson, a Secretary and a Treasurer, the officers are critical to the operation of the shed but getting volunteers for the roles is a struggle in each Shed. One Shed described the experience of threatening a 'lock out' unless the officers were appointed. One participant commented that *'At the moment the group is neither could or would take on the leadership role..this may be related to a sense of confidence and competence..'* (4). The challenge of identifying and sustaining the leadership of the shed from within the volunteer membership is a considerable challenge for the sheds. The challenge is also reinforced by the profile of the membership of the sheds.

c. Finance

In this research the issue of accessing and sustaining funding for the shed was of particular concern. From a governance perspective there is a minimum requirement for financial transparency and record keeping. From the perspective of the shed the sustainability of the shed will hinge on having access to funding/support to finance the activities which are central to the shed project.

For some sheds the cost of running the shed can be considerable because of expensive rent costs. Insurance costs are in the region of €1,000 per year. While the income for this group of sheds from sale of goods and fundraising (eg. flag days) is in the region of €2000, sheds engaged with other funders and grants may have incomes of up to €15,000 per year reflecting the level of projects that they have been engaged with. While three of the sheds had a charge for membership of €20 euro to encourage

commitment to the shed, there is no recommended charge. The sheds have also been involved and organised fundraising initiatives to provide seed funding for projects.

The availability of funding is quite limited, the IMSA has a yearly grant available to organisations to help specifically with overhead costs such as utility bills and materials related to activities. The ETB has to date provided funding for training related courses and the Sports partnership has also been a source of funds. One shed was engaged in service delivery for another volunteer agency and got an income from this activity.

One of the key activities for the participants was applying for funding for the organisation. The skills attached to this were: being able to identify sources of funds, building a knowledge of the funding gatekeepers and connections, form filling and understanding the requirements of the various funding agencies. The administration attached to funding included recording keeping, accessing a number of quotes for each application etc. *'filling up forms, ...need three quotations.. then we learned that they would take quotes from the computer.'* (3) which was a challenge at the beginning, but they describe that *'we learned a lot over the years'* (3) One leader was described as *'..relentless, he is fantastic at getting money, its all down to him'* (5)

One of the other struggles for the sheds during the set up process was *'..the process of creating a bank account, this process was very slow and could not access finance.'* (3) until they had a bank account. The suggestion for new men's sheds is that *'..they should get a base grant for setting up costs, then the following year they submit all their receipts and will be entitled to the equivalent of all this expenditure the next year...'* (3) This seed money would *'..cover insurance (up to 1,500) then you need a venue and the rent has to be paid and then you need to buy some pieces of equipment.'* (3) The early payments in this shed were paid out of peoples own pockets which is not best practice but was necessary.

One of the observations about funding and financial awareness among the members was *'I would probably go off in a tangent and apply for funding.. you get the funding..now lads I have the funding for this , what will we do with it..'* (4) *'They wouldn't pay a lot of notice.. until the funding comes through.'* (4)

Each of these sheds has benefitted from the expertise of the volunteers in helping each shed to set a strategic direction for the sheds and in accessing and sustaining the funding effort to ensure an active shed experience for the members.

6. Impact of NTDC support worker.

NTDC appointed a part-time support officer for the men's Sheds in 2021, when MR took up the post. This has provided support to the five (soon to be six) stand alone sheds in North Tipperary. *A similar role was established in South Tipperary.* The role of the support worker is viewed as critical from the perspective of the participants in this discussion. They see the role of MR *'we 'always have him to fall back' (5)* They identify that *'..without [him] the shed would be stagnant, with [him] the shed is developing, that is the difference.'* (4) They describe that *'[he] is in contact and sometimes twice a week and when we visit him he has great knowledge, he is sharing the information from the experience of the other sheds. He has gone to another shed and found the solution.'* (5) *'NTDC has done more for the Mens shed [he] has done more for the Shed.. they have provided training, organised trips, provided funding for events.. but the important thing is that he listens..he knows that I am struggling and he gave me a phone call.. he understands and takes in what you have said.. he thinks about this and comes back with a solution'* (5) *'he is coming into his own'* (3) *'he is genuine, top class person'* (3) *he is a great support to the shed and helpful in setting up a shed.*

The various roles played by the NTDC worker are:

Information Sharing: Using his Network to access and share relevant knowledge with participants. *'he can offer these other options.. he will remind me that there are other options and other ways of operating..'* (2)

Co-Ordinating: Bringing the Men's Sheds together has been beneficial for the Sheds. *'He is trying to bring all the sheds together, he is trying to bring everyone together. Some sheds are happy to work together. Sharing information, he understands the function of the sheds, it is a support, communication..'* (3)

Support for Leaders: Being at the end of a phone has been seen as critical in sustaining the motivation of leaders to continue. *'..with the funding there is more opportunity and we would be lost without him.. I would have given up without [him]..'* (2) *'Some sheds will really depend on him..'* (3)

The role of the support worker has developed into a critical support role for the sheds. The impact of the role has been universally acknowledged and appreciated by the participants. The impact of the role has already influenced the direction and the sustainability of the shed.

7. Sustaining the sheds.

In capturing the learning and the experience of the participants in this project its purpose was to explore how the success of the shed can be sustained into the future. The scaffolding that sustains the Men's sheds currently is made up of the shed members, supported by the officers, the volunteer co-ordinators (facilitators) and the NTDC support worker. Together these contribute various skills and competencies required to sustain the sheds through their different stages of development.

In completing all this work in the shed the project attempted to identify the hours spent by the participants leading/co-ordinating the sheds. One person said *'.. I am embarrassed to admit 'its at least 20 hours per week' (2) Ringing the electrician, meeting the electrician, following up in activities, conversations with other sheds, Mens shed meeting, (2) 'I could hand over more responsibility to them..' (2)*

In these five sheds the hours allocated to Shed work are reported as follows:

Shed	Hours spent by volunteer co-ordinators and officers on Shed related support.
MBL	Min 20-30 per week
Thurles	Min 25-30 per week
Borrisokane	Min 20 per week
Silvermines	Min 20 per week
Nenagh	Min 6-8 per week
Note: During the early part of the year where most funding deadlines exist is the period of max volunteering.	

Figure 4: Volunteer hours in Sheds

The hours are peak hours and the factors influencing these allocations are: funding deadlines at year beginning, project completion deadlines and work as well as planning and developing the sheds. These hours are considered essential to ensure the viability of the Shed's and their sustainability. One person said in relation to this leadership role *'I didn't realise how much was involved in it.'* (5). The volunteers are allocating an unsustainable level of time to the sheds, it is possible to invest this level of time in a short period but not possible in the longer term. The volunteer facilitators have demonstrated a great variety of skills and competencies in leading the sheds so far, they have and are allocating a great deal

of time to ensuring the sustainability of the shed and they express a real satisfaction in contributing to the shed and making a difference in peoples lives.

There was also a great satisfaction in getting funding for these organisations and they see *'Running the shed 'is a big responsibility' (5)*. They have a vision *'.. that every village/community in Tipperary would be 'infected..' (1) with a Men's Shed*. However, there is a real concern that this level of engagement is not sustainable and one person describes the experience as *'The lads seem to look to me, well (x) what will we do next? I'm running things but I don't want to be running it' (5) wondering if the shed is in order. ..Im getting fair pissed off' 'I need a break..' (5)*

What is also apparent is that there are different requirements of volunteers at each stage of the development of the shed. Each of these stages requires a different level of expertise from volunteers at each stage. It requires a different set of skills and competencies at each stage and these are identified under each below:

- i. Stage 1: Start ups.
- ii. Stage 2: Shed is up and operating.
- iii. Stage 3: Sustaining the sheds through their natural cycles and ensuring the long term Sustainability of the Shed

i. Stage 1: Start up

This is the stage at which the idea of a shed becomes reality, it is also the time where the 'founders' vision for the shed will become apparent. It is the place where a vision of the future shed, its purpose, who the members will be and the nature of the shed itself will begin. At this point in the process this vision appears to be concentrated in the 'founder's' head and others will be introduced to this as the process develops. This is supported by *'Yukl (2010) proposes that leadership empowers the process of building commitment to an organisation's objectives and inspires followers to accomplish these objectives. Decisions made by leaders, such as Men's Shed co-ordinators, particularly those who are founders of a former organisation, have an effect not only on the direction of the organisation but the direction of its members (Schein, 1992; Schneider, 1987). Schneider et al. (1995) suggest an organisation's goals are in effect an operationalisation of the founder's personality. Thus, leaders, particularly founders, of organisations such as Men's Sheds, embed their personal "self" and characteristics into organisations by establishing their own objectives of the organisation, which then attracts people who have similar values as the founder (Schneider, 1987). Source: Southcombe, Cavanagh, and Bartram, 2015:976.*

Based on the experience of the participants at the early stage of the set-up of the Shed's the skills that emerged as essential were:

- i. Knowledge of the location and the community
- ii. Knowledge of the parish networks and key stakeholders
- iii. Capacity to draw people together. (facilitation, networking, co-ordinating skills)
- iv. Capacity to locate a venue and negotiate the arrangements
- v. Creating a constitution (knowledge of good governance practice and process)
- vi. Recruiting members. (knowledge of recruitment methods and strategies in a community context, including new members)
- vii. Registrations with any relevant agencies: PPN, IMSA etc.
- viii. Insurance for the shed and its activities.
- ix. Funding for set up costs. (accessing funding, managing finances, accessing banking facilities)
- x. Health and Safety compliance.

ii. Stage 2: Shed is up and operating:

At this point the issue of everyday management of the shed becomes important

- i. **Planning activities** *'you need to keep thinking and coming up with new ideas' (4)* and in the experience of these participants the responsibility tends to rest on the few rather than the many.
- ii. **Implementing the agreed activities.** Ensuring that what is planned is delivered *'That man needs that path to get into my shed' (1) The result of the work that I did (1)* This requires persistence, organisational skills and ability to locate information and resources.
- iii. **Networking with funders and trainers** and other resource providers is essential. This step is considered essential but takes time to make and build connections through meeting and talking with people.
- iv. **Recruitment** of members continues and is essential in sustaining the sheds themselves. In considering recruitment the sheds see the importance of reaching out to more vulnerable members of the community. *'Some of the members had a disability (physical) but they did not stay coming but we don't know why? Offered an opportunity for the man to reach out to the potential members, I would be very conscious of health issues and this should not stop them being able to get involved in the shed ..we will find something for you to do.'* (4)

- v. **Appointing officers** is essential and ensuring rotation of the leadership of the shed is essential but as suggested earlier this has its challenges. Ensuring that the constitution includes a requirement for rotation is helpful in ensuring that this happens and in avoiding burn out.
- vi. **Fundraising** continues, ensuring there are resources to deliver the plan continues. Applications for funding takes a more central role *'filling up forms, ...need three quotations.. then we learned that they would take quotes from the computer..' which was a challenge at the beginning, we learned a lot over the years. (3)*
- vii. **Record keeping** is critical of finances, membership, agreements, insurance etc.
- viii. **'Training' or learning from other Sheds** is important in maintaining the energy of the shed. The role of NTDC in facilitating exchange of information and knowledge has been invaluable. It avoids duplication of learning and frustration.
- ix. **Building belonging into the shed.** Maintenance of the shed itself and building social connection is critical. Ensuring that everyone feels 'a part of' the shed and belongs to the shed is essential. Group management skills and competencies are critical to this process and in many sheds this process will happen naturally but in some cases when a shed is ensuring that new members 'fit in' this will take extra facilitation and minding to ensure that it is *Much more than people just coming together 'they know each other, and tolerate each other.. (2)*

iii. Stage 3: Long Term (critical in sustainability of the shed)

This is the stage after the shed has been set up and has been successfully operating over a period of time and has settled into a routine. But to sustain itself it is critical that there is regrowth and renewal to ensure that the shed is sustained.

- i. **Replacing members** *'we have a few new people this year and two people left off but then two new people came in' (4) There are very few people below 60 in any of the Shed's and this is a problem.*
- ii. **Maintaining the group** while welcoming new members *'Future, some of us will be dead and gone..' '..if it stays as healthy as it is it would be great..' (4)*
- iii. **Coming up with new activities**
- iv. **Renewing officers** and 'training' new officers.
- v. **Strategic planning and yearly planning.**
- vi. **Networking** with other sheds.

The table below attempts to summarise the competencies required overall for the sheds.

Planning and Governance	Funding	Organising and Administering	Networking
<i>Yearly plans for the shed. Strategic Planning. Registration of the shed. Insurance and health and safety compliance. Meeting management. Governance</i>	<i>Applications for funding (online and paper based) Identifying funding sources. Conducting funding activities eg. Bucket collections. Administering a funding system including records and details. Quotes</i>	<i>Events Outings Training activities Organising members for activities. Following up (e-mails, phone calls</i>	<i>Liaising with members Linking with support agencies especially NTDC Linking with IMSA Linking with potential supporters Linking with connected stakeholders. Potential connections with PPN committees.</i>

Figure 5: Categorising the volunteering work in the shed.

The experience of the volunteers is mirrored in the literature. This job of visioning the future is seen as important and Southcombe, Cavanagh, and Bartram (2015), ‘. discuss the role of vision creation in encouraging ‘followers’ to work together towards a common goal. [*and also identify the importance of*] The concept of ‘value congruence’... and its role in the relationship that exists between the leader and the followers.’ But while this is seen as a critical element in ensuring the long term sustainability of the shed it must be considered in the light of the age profile of ‘shedders’ in Ireland (see Figure 2 above) and the second challenge is that the profile includes people who have not necessarily had experience of the types of skills necessary to manage the sheds process and have limited technology skills. Leadership for the sheds is complex and there are many dimensions to running a successful shed. The question arises then as to how leadership is to be exercised in the shed to sustain the shed? The people that participated here were very well informed and had many exemplary leadership skills and a keen awareness of the role of and potential contribution of the sheds in their communities. But as one participant pointed out ‘*These skills are not easy to come by, and not easy to train either.*’ (3)

The answer to the question is multilayered, at a practical everyday level every member and officer is involved and contributes to the activities of the shed and will contribute their own skills and knowledge

to events and activities, *'they do have social events by themselves.'* (2) they would 'have a good shot' at continuing now, for them the social element would be what they would go back to eg. card games, watch matches, have a cup of tea.

From the perspective of the leaders that participated in this report was that the broader elements of: Networking, Governance and Funding applications in particular or the longer-term strategic direction of the Shed is of concern primarily to one or two people in each shed. In this area there is a sense of a need for a directing type of Leadership style. The reason for this as presented in the research can be connected to the Fiedlers Contingency leadership Model. This model speaks to the relationship between the leaders and the followers and suggests that the most appropriate leadership style relates to the level of readiness of the followers to take responsibility for leading in the organisation. In the Sheds this 'readiness issue' is related to the age of the members, the prior experience of members in running organisations, the nature of their engagement with the shed, the physical energy of members, the skills level of members, etc.

8. The future of the Men's Shed.

In summary the Men's Sheds movement has made a significant contribution to the quality of life of the men who participate in them. The success of the shed is built on creating connections, *'It role is primarily as 'social support' it has replaced the pub, the church etc. (2)* The Shed works because of the leadership capacity that it has access to at any one time. The participants in this project each want their shed to *'..if it stays as healthy as it is it would be great..'* (3) There are some challenges as discussed above and some additional ones which deserve consideration.

The Shed as a place of activity which engages men and then facilitates connecting building is being challenged by the participants in these discussions. One has identified the need to include other men eg. Problem with the shed is that the shed is *'.. that they make something..' instead it should be a 'a facility that's available for everybody..' We have been working on bringing in younger people (2)* Another participant has identified that *'there are an awful lot of directions that you can take it without deviating from the ethos of the shed..'* (4) There is a great potential for the shed to impact on a broader level.

In more recent times consideration has been given to including women in some of the activities and the question of including them in the membership of the Shed has arisen. So far the consensus appears to be on collaborating for example in sharing activities rather than including within. This has led to the

development of some Womens Sheds in Tipperary, though this development is at an early stage. In this space too is the potential for future work that examines opportunities for meaningful collaboration between Sheds and surrounding community services which could help provide more pathways for men to access support without compromising the integrity and intentionality of Sheds as peer-run spaces. (Lefkowich & Richardson, 2018)

Leadership will continue to be a challenge for sheds, the participants in this project made and continue to make significant contributions to the shed. To replace them will be a challenge and the profile of the members will make the challenge more significant. In addition, there is the perception that post *'Covid made men lazy, it changed everything, they are sitting at home and are still-doing that'* (5) has brought other challenges to the sustainability of the sheds.

Founders Syndrome

This is the name given to the experience of organisations where ' .. decisions are not made collectively. Most decisions are simply made by the "founder." All other parties merely rubber stamp what the founder suggests. There is generally strong resistance to any change in that decision-making, where the Founder might lose his/her total control of the organization. Boards of these organizations usually don't govern, but instead "approve" what the founder suggests. Planning isn't done collectively, but by the founder. And plans / ideas that do NOT come from the founder usually don't go very far..' Source: https://www.help4nonprofits.com/PDF_Files/ARTICLE-Founders_Syndrome_Who_Me.pdf

At the outset of the Shed there is generally a person with whom that Shed is *anchored 'we identify a shed with a person'* (1) *when I think of Shed's I think of (particular names)* and the participants in this project have experienced that *'..anything I've every got involved with I end up leading it (5)'* This may be a challenge to the sustainability of the Shed. The transition from the founder to the next leaders is not insignificant. This is an experience not exclusive to Mens' Sheds, it is common in all organisations.

Relationship with IMSA

The role of the IMSA as supporter of the individual Sheds is not without its challenges based on the experiences of these participants. Access to the Sustainability Grant for Sheds has been an invaluable resource for the Sheds since its inception. This grant funding has been a really important element in ensuring the sustainability of the Sheds however as this grant funding is allocated on a year by year basis its future is not guaranteed. Because the running costs of the Sheds in North Tipperary are considered to be approx. €2500 per Shed per annum the Sheds are not cash rich as they generally operate on a donation basis only, to avoid cost becoming a barrier to participation for their

members. Most Sheds do not have €2,500 on deposit and are therefore dependent on availability of grant funding to cover their costs at year-end.

The role of the Elected Officers and Co-Ordinators

The literature on leadership and sustainability in Men's sheds has spoken about the role of a co-ordinator whose role includes '...envisioning, empathy and empowerment. In these Sheds the co-ordinators had a clear vision for the future; most of these leaders talked about the future growth and sustainability of the Shed'. (Southcombe, Cavanagh and Bartram 2015: 983) This role is perceived to reside in one person rather than the group as a whole. This mirrors the experience of the participants in this project. The literature also identifies that 'The pivotal role of a skilled co-ordinator, usually in a paid position, to provide the organisational skills that enables older men to learn and share skills as well as empowering them to act as co-participants in the operation of an intervention was a common finding in both reviews (Milligan et al. Reference Milligan, Payne, Bingley and Cockshott 2012). This is supported by the response of the participants who suggest that members '*are trying to figure out their place in the group*' they don't want to be the leaders or step up, '*peers will have difficulty in challenging each other*' (2) The importance for the members to fit in and belong to the group creates a tension between leading and simply participating in the group.

Recommendations and conclusion

In conclusion the success of the shed and its contribution to communities is acknowledged. The sustainability of the sheds will depend on the provision of sustainable leadership which will depend on creating appropriate support structures. In considering the appropriate approach it is essential to give consideration to the volunteering time that has been and continues to be allocated by the participants in this project to the Sheds'. It is also important to keep in mind the purpose of the shed as a mechanism for social inclusion and this is reflected in the membership cohort.

- What becomes clear is that given the profile of the participants in the sheds and the quality and quantity of the work currently provided voluntarily to sustain the sheds, that the requirement for professional support through an **additional support worker** is essential in ensuring the sustainability of the sheds into the future. The objective would be to be able to offer each shed the equivalent of one days support per shed per week.

The creation of such a support structure will ensure that the sheds have access to the Knowledge and skills required through each stage of their development from start up to maturity. It will also ensure that as sheds move through these life cycles and need to refresh and revive that that can be supported and will be essential to ensure the sustainability of the shed.

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