Okehampton Men in Sheds CIC

Review of Activities, Community & Mental Health Benefits, and Future Plans



Spring 2023

Opening summary: Director's reflections

It seems only yesterday that our local Rev'd Stephen Cook asked me if I had heard of the Men in Sheds movement, back in 2015. Since that time, Okehampton Men in Sheds has become central to my life, together with the many friends and wonderful community groups I have met, and the Shed has partnered with along the way.

Okehampton Men in Sheds had small beginnings, Breakfast clubs with those who also expressed an early interest, discussions about where, and how – and the ever-present spectre of funding! But here we are 7 years down and I can hardly believe what the magnificent Okehampton Shedders have achieved in that time – they are simply the best!

They built a fine shed which opened in 2018, set up a formal Community Interest Company to enable us to ensure all funds benefitted only the Shed. We have built numerous bird boxes, wooden toys and so much more, too many to list but a few examples later! Plus, in doing so, we have recycled goodness knows how much wood and items gifted to us by our wonderful local community. This enables us to give these items a second life, either by our use, or through other community groups, rather than ending up in landfill!

As if this wasn't enough, the Shedders have also sent large volumes of old tools to our friends at 'Tools for Self-Reliance' (www.tfsr.org.uk), who repair them for www.amigos.org.uk'. This charity in-turn send the working tools to rural communities in Uganda, giving these communities the chance to build their life and earn a living wage for their families.

We continue to dream big, and be ever grateful for the ongoing and, never ending support of the Okehampton community. We hope we have been able to do you proud – and will always do what we can no matter how large or small – including the odd repair for a local elderly resident – and larger mud-kitchen toys for our local school. We are here for you as you have been for us. Together, we continue to make Okehampton a great place to live, and all of us, whatever our abilities, health, gender or age, can play a part in that.

Thank you – and remember we are always here for a cuppa – drop in and say hello - Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday!

Phil Bush. *Co-Director Okehampton Men in Sheds*

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1) General introduction: the national and international Men's Sheds movement

Men in Sheds is a rapidly expanding movement to support Men's Mental Health and provide opportunities for them to contribute to their communities. Internationally, there are Men's Sheds Associations in Australia, Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, Ireland, USA and Sweden.

It is estimated that the number of Men's Sheds globally is approaching 1,800 supporting an estimated 100,000 men.

Okehampton Men in Sheds is part of the UK's National Men in Sheds Association, and as such, gains the benefit of these wider friendship groups and mutual support (https://menssheds.org.uk/). UK Mens Sheds Association was originally founded in 2013. Back then there were just 30 Mens Sheds in the UK, but fast forward to 2022, and there are over 600 UK Men's Sheds, with an additional 150 or more in planning at any one time. That's around 13,000 UK members benefiting from regular social interactions, new and improved skills, and regular, active participation in activities they enjoy.

The UK rate of growth of Men's Sheds is between six and nine new Sheds a month – the contribution this is making to Men Mental Health is incalculable.

2) Men's mental health

Tragically, the UK male suicide rate was 15.8 per 100,000, compared to a female suicide rate of 5.5 per 100,000; this alarming number rises to 48.4 per 100,000 for men identifying with disability. Okehampton alone recorded 6 male suicides in 2022 (Okehampton Times).

Evidence from the Samaritans shows that men aged 50-54 have the highest suicide rate of any demographic, and sadly, men of any age are more likely to take their own life than women. The Samaritans conclude that, early intervention with regular socialisation and supportive mutual friendship is the route 'most likely' to lead to prevention and longer-term mental health benefits. Mind (mental health charity), report that, men are less likely to 'open up' about feelings than women, and are typically more likely to be isolated and not seek help when mental health issues arise. This has led to what Mind describes as a, '*silent crisis in Mens' mental health'* in the UK.

There is a clear and well evidenced need to provide a stimulating space for men to socialise, across generations and abilities, crucially - whilst *also* engaged in meaningful activities. Research also shows that men tend to talk – shoulder to shoulder – rather than face to face. Hence the motto 'shoulder to shoulder' adopted by the Mens' Shed movement, to acknowledge this - alluding to the men working side by side at their workbench and chatting.

The 'Shed' movement, is uniquely placed to provide an 'open' place of support for Men who may be impacted by issues such as isolation, poor health, bereavement and/or loss of employment kinship; their rapid growth provides evidence of how much it is valued by its community of service users.

3) Devon Men in Sheds groups

Devon's Men in Sheds movement also reflects this national picture of rapid growth. Devon's Shed community, or 'Shedders' as they are known, has grown rapidly in the last decade.

Devon groups have opened in:

> Tavistock, Exeter, Newton Abbot, Torquay, Brixham, Kingsbridge, Yealmpton, Torrington, Holsworthy, South Molton, Ottery, Exmouth, Honiton, Budleigh Salterton, Kenton, Illfracoombe, Minehead, Westward Ho and Bideford. With 3 Sheds across Plymouth.

Many of these 'Shedders' across the county meet up to share ideas – and this Devonshire wide Shed community continues to go from strength to strength; discussions are also underway to explore ways to enhance this wider kinship further. Additional Devon Sheds are also planned, for example, Mortonhampstead plan to open later this year.

Okehampton started in 2016, and built their shed themselves which formally opened in 2018. Recently (Feb 2023), Okehampton and Mortonhampstead Shedders met for a day at the Okehampton Shed; together with Mortonhampstead Parish Councillors Catherine Back and Vivienne Hodges who came along to see what wonderful community work the 'Shedders' do.

Joint visits such as these, form bonds of friendship and shared interests which have great benefits for both local communities, and the Shedders themselves.





Figures 1 & 2: Okehampton Men in Sheds meet up with Mortonhampstead 'Shedders' to share skills and ideas. Feb 2023.

4) Introducing Okehampton Men in Sheds

In just 5 years since the Shed opened, Okehampton Men in Sheds has already become a much-loved local community hub, providing meaningful activities for men of all ages and abilities. The volunteer led group have Shedders from a wide demographic including disabled, retired, and younger men referred from our local medical centre. Many of our retired Shedders have health problems/disabilities which have led to social isolation e.g. stroke, early stage dementia, visual impairment, but equally many have become isolated due to retirement, unemployment or bereavement. One aspect of the work which may be less evident, is the support provided to carers to take a break i.e. whilst their loved one (husband, father, brother), is in the Shed, carers undertake their own activities.

In a safe, social space, the group work together to repair, recycle & make items, with plenty of tea breaks too! They routinely welcome visitors from the local community, who ‘drop in’ for a cuppa, donating old tools, wood and items which would otherwise go to landfill; and/or seeking to have their own items repaired at the Shed which the Shedders are always glad to do.



Figure 3: Phil and John make more bird boxes!

Donated items are repaired to sell for Shed funds, or to give away to other local charities. Shedders also regularly support other local charities and schools to repair/make equipment for their cause, as part of their programme of numerous outreach projects. The Shedders work with local community partners to support them with a friendly ‘volunteer force’.

Shedders delight in being able to provide these local groups/charities with the opportunity to have a ‘volunteer support team’ to deliver their own events and projects. They also enjoy the opportunities for more local connections and mutual friendships.



Figure 4: Okehampton Shedders enjoy a cuppa at Okehampton Gilead Project, after helping in their garden & building compost bins.

5) Okehampton Men in Sheds history

The earliest suggestion of a Shed in Okehampton was in 2015, and then started initially in 2016 with a regular breakfast club and walk, amongst the members in the early days were: Rev Steve Cook, Phil Bush, Terry Kemspter, Nic Butcher, Rodney Bridges and Cliff Pantry.

In 2017, a fundraising dinner attended by 40 members (and partners), was the catalyst for the first plans for a permanent Shed. After negotiations with Okehampton United Charites who kindly leased the land at a ‘peppercorn rent’ and with the support of various fundraisers – bolstered with some generous donations – the funds were found to build a Shed. The Shedders themselves planned and built the shed, together with navigating site upgrades to utilities such as mains water, power cables etc.

The Shed foundations were laid in March 2017, the structure was finally ‘water tight’ by the late summer, which led to a busy winter fitting out the inside and installing power tools and workbenches following many generous donations. The Shed was opened in Spring 2018, complete with celebratory cake (the first of many!), and closely followed by building a BBQ for summer!



Figure 5: Handrail being installed 2018 as part of the new Shed construction.



Figure 6: Early days, the Shed opens in Spring 2018.



Figure 7: A new BBQ area for summer parties.



Figure 8: BBQ built by John in 2018.

Once opened the Shedders got busy building a wide range of wooden items and had stalls at various shows, e.g Inwardleigh Fair, and started volunteering to help at community events e.g. as Stewards for Okehampton Show. At these events Shedders were able to recruit new members and sell some of the first items they had made, including boot stands, hedgehog boxes, planters, bird boxes and barn and tawny owl boxes (both distinctly different).



Figure 9: Inwardleigh Fair 2019.

The ‘Covid years’ shut down activities temporarily, but thankfully as the Shed was well ventilated – it could be opened again as soon as formal lockdown ceased. At this point, the Shed needed more than ever, as all Shedders, along with so many others, had keenly felt the mental health impacts of isolation.

It was at that point in August 2021, a new Shedder arrived, the first member who used a power wheelchair, a gentlemen with MS who had been totally isolated and on the shielding list. He said “*the Shed was lifeline for me – to be honest I was under the care of Okehampton Medical Centre for my mental health as I had been so down, but going to the Shed – I feel part of something again – like someone has given me part of my life back”.*



Figure 10: Gilby, one of the Shedders, who uses a power wheelchair, enjoys helping build a ‘Tin Can Alley’ for the Men in Sheds community fun day.

Since the difficult covid years, the Shed is growing in membership, enabling the Shedders to take on ever more complex projects – but never forgetting the importance of small repair tasks for the local community. As the group grows, the skills they can all contribute continue to expand too!

6) Okehampton Men in Sheds: member numbers and profile.



Figure 11: Regular ‘Shedders’ who attend weekly.

The Shed has around 30 members, with about 20 active attendees for periodic visits, and about 10 regular weekly attendees. Most regular members are retired (but certainly not all). Some Shedders' have disabilities or ill health which has led to social isolation, equally some have become isolated in

retirement and/or due to bereavement. Some do not identify with a health problem, and simply say they attend to socialise, learn and/or share a skill and/or contribute to community projects.

Younger Shedders are typically keen to learn a new skill – but also value the social aspect and the opportunity to chat to other, often older men, with whom they can be candid about their life experiences through informal dialogue – benefiting their mental health through this mutual support and empathy. Whilst more meaningful conversations often occur on the 'Shed deck' outside, inside the laughter and relaxed atmosphere helps many more to *"forget my troubles for a while"* as one Shedder put it, and "*see the funny side of life helps me when I come*", commented another, reflecting on his reasons for coming to the Shed.



Figure 12: Repairing old chairs, and a welcome cuppa lined up too!



Figure 13: Shedders enjoying building the go cart for the 'Who Let the Dads out' bid to win the Bideford Soap box Derby in June 2023, raising money for North Devon cancer charity 'Chemo-heroes'.

About 4 of the Shedder's who attend regularly, are supported at home by family or friend carers who bring them to the Shed. This gives the opportunity for their carer to take a break, knowing their loved-one is safe and enjoying an active, enjoyable social occasion.

We are regularly getting more enquiries from men wanting to come to the Shed, and also family carers wanting to bring their 'cared-fors' to the Shed. As the Shed becomes well known in the community, it is becoming increasing difficult to accommodate the additional demand, this is addressed in parts 12 &13 of this report.



Figure 14: Jane who is a full-time carer for her husband Gilby, who is one of the Okehampton Shedders. Jane enjoys time to herself when Gilby is at the Shed.

The mix of demographic, ages, skills and characters amongst the Shedders is partly key to its success they all "*muck in together*" as one Shedder said, "….*but that's what makes it work*. *I just feel like one of the team here, I don't feel different".*



Figure 15: Graham demonstrates the wide range of Shedders skills!

7) Media coverage and online presence

Okehampton Men in Sheds has a wide online and community presence utilising various media across the district. We also distribute leaflets in village halls and via GP surgeries, Okehampton show etc. This is important as many of the vulnerable men we are seeking to support are digitally isolated, i.e. do not have and/or are unable to use a computer or smart phone .

The Shed Facebook page has 181 followers, which given most Shedders do not use social media this is encouraging and demonstrates wider community support.

https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=10008307280526

The Shed has regular articles in the local press, including Okehampton Times, Oke Links, Dartmoor Life and the local parish Beacon Magazine. A few examples of Press Cuttings are provided in the appendix. One of the founding members, Nic Butcher, maintains a web blog via: https://okehamptonshed.wordpress.com which provides a humorous and informative record of some the Shedders antics over the years.

The Shedders also have a community A-Doddle page – which provides more information for the wider community who may want to learn more about what they do and volunteering opportunities too:

https://adoddle.org/app/projects/6098/okehampton-men-in-sheds

The Shed is also a member of ‘ a good thing’ which provides us with opportunities to obtain free resources from businesses who have surplus stock, which can used for our own purposes or to pass onto local groups as required: https://www.agoodthing.org.uk

The Shed is registered on Devon County Councils’ Pin Point live:

https://services.pinpointdevon.co.uk/kb5/devon/services/service.page?id=2TxzQE_SWns

The Shed can also be found via the national Men in Sheds ‘ find a shed page’:

https://menssheds.org.uk/find-a-shed/

and the Shed is part of the Devon connect website for West Devon:

https://devonconnect.org/profile/okehampton_1983

And West Devon Community Voluntary Service web site:

https://www.westdevoncvs.org.uk/projects/in-touch-at-home-oke/

The Shedders have also distributed numerous leaflets and posters around local village halls, example given in appendix. This is important as mentioned previously, many of the men we are seeking to support are digitally isolated.

Finally, the Shed has it’s own lottery page, via West Devon’s Seamoor lottery, which helps to raise funds for us and other local causes: www.seamoorlotto.co.uk/support/okehampton-men-in-sheds-cic

8) The Shedders in their own words



Figure 16: One year in the shed: keeping busy building community games, summer fun days, and Christmas parties.

This is a truly exceptional project, its rapid growth in a short space of time shows how much it is needed and valued not just by the service users but also by the wider community. A local resident who donated some items and also attended the 'free family fun day' which the Shedders hosted last summer, commented:

> "*it is such a welcoming place, the affection for the project and the goodwill amongst the Men for each other, is evident from the moment you walk in".*

The Shed Directors recently asked for feedback to explore what the Shed meant to the Shedders, and the replies were as follows:

> "*I look forward to coming to the Shed it is the highlight of my week"*
>
> *" the Shed has been a lifeline for me – I was feeling so miserable and just sat watching the TV all day, I had nowhere I felt I could go on my own since my wife died";*
>
> *" since my disabled husband has been coming to the Shed, I get a valuable break each week, and he is so much happier now he has some male company – he is housebound and this is his only trip out every week. The fact that you also help us with the wheelchair makes it possible for me to bring him".*
>
> *"I only just moved here when I retired a few years back and didn't really know anyone. I was bit reluctant to come to the Shed at first, but thought I would give it a try. That was 4 year's ago – and now they can't keep me away! I really like that I feel useful here – I can contribute my skills, and enjoy the company; it gets me out of the house and keeping active."*
>
> *"I love the relaxed and mutually supportive 'can-do' environment i.e. what we can do is much more important than what we can't – and if one person can't there is usually a Shedder who can! "*

Speaking to the wife of one partner who cares for her husband with early stage dementia, she brings her husband to the Shed for 2 days a week, for the last 4 years:

> *" The shed is vital to me – it gives me time to catch up on my jobs at home whilst [my husband], is at the Shed. Hard to describe what it means to me – but it is also a 'mental break' – gives me a chance to catch my breath and have some 'me' time".*

She went onto say:

> *" I know he is safe there so I can relax - [my husband] does not remember what he has done during his time there, when I ask him – but he skips out of the house on his 'Shed days' – and comes home grinning like a 'Cheshire cat' – he enjoys a sense of purpose there – he enjoys teaching the younger men too – he has described that he feels a bit like an Uncle to them, and that he enjoys a good laugh there too – he doesn't feel different – he is one of the Shedders – and they look out for each other"*

These 'first hand' reflections, and those given in earlier parts of this report, capture what is different about the Shed; it is the mix of skills, health challenges and the Shedders own varied life experiences which mean they can all support each other.

Most importantly – they want to feel they can still contribute to their community despite any challenges they might have as individuals, and the Shed provides them with that opportunity.



Figure 17: Christmas party is an opportunity for families and friends to enjoy time with the Shedders.



Figure 18: Xmas lunch enjoyed by Carers, Shedders and Partners.



Figure 19: Two keen Okehampton Shedders, Terry and John.

9) Community mental health & addressing isolation: how the Shed acts as a conduit for friendship and support networks

Shedders pride themselves on providing a welcoming space for all, so although the main group is retired men, as mentioned previously younger men also attend; regardless of mental or physical health challenges and/or disability everyone is a Shedder once they come to the Shed. The importance of welcoming a wide demographic can-not be over stated when describing the value of the social space that Men in Sheds provides.

One example is a Shedder mentioned earlier in this report, a gentleman of 62 years who is profoundly disabled with Multiple Sclerosis - he uses a power wheelchair and was housebound prior to coming to the Shed. His wheelchair has been embraced by the Shedders as an opportunity to get together to build

a special ramp, assisting his easy access, and yet another excuse for a cuppa with a ‘cut the ribbon’ ceremony!

This disabled gentleman has made a particularly warm friendship with a Shedder who is a young man (age 27) with Asperger’s; they play chess and cards etc. This young man also visits him at home and hence provides mutual support on non-Shed days.

There are many such examples of social connections across age, social and ability divides - which would not be possible without the Shed acting as a catalyst to develop these friendships.

The wider outreach work provides extensive opportunities for further social interaction, for example last summer the Shed was successful in gaining a grant from Great Western Railway to fund the cost of materials to build traditional fun-fair equipment (coconut shy, tin-can alley, football game, electric buzz etc).

These games, all built from scratch, have been delivered to and utilised by multiple local charities and schools for their fundraising fetes over summer 2022, and are stored and maintained by the Shedders ready to be used again for many summers to come!

The value of these games runs far beyond the help given to local charities to raise funds. The games were also used when the Shedders hosted a free family fun day at the Shed – in which they were able to welcome many local residents – providing a backdrop to enjoy the free fun and games and a free BBQ too!

The social value of this for the Shedders was wide ranging and ongoing. The opportunity in a relaxed and familiar setting to meet with many local people and develop friendships in their community which otherwise, are unlikely to have been fostered.



Figure 20: Community Fun Days, sponsored by Great Western Rail, provided the Shedders the opportunity to build fun fair games and host 3 free days of fun over May 2022 bank holiday – plus free BBQ.

Such events provide the Shedders with a sense of belonging to a wider community, feeling useful, productive, and wanted. One elderly gentleman commented when asked what he likes about the Shed "*the most important things is I feel part of something, at the Shed I feel I can contribute".*

The 'Who Let the Dads Out' group provides another vital link between the Shedders - across the generations - often lost due to family breakdown or distance. The retired Shedders enjoy supporting the children to make items – share skills – and crucially this also provides a space both for the dads and children to share experiences, learn new skills and make new friends.



Figure 21: The Shedders join dad's and children at Okehampton's 'Who Let the Dads Out Group'.

Michelle Farrelly, who runs 'Who Let The Dads Out Okehampton', reflected on the benefits in a press article (see appendix), for Devon Community Foundation, saying her plan to create an intergenerational group has proved hugely successful. Michelle commented that Men in Sheds have helped:

"*the dads and children with activities such as woodworking"…"the dads really enjoy talking to the older men about parenting". "And the older men really enjoy spending time with the children"* She adds that "*being a parent can be very isolating and dads in particular often find it harder to access support networks. This group helps them to build friendships and connections within the community, while the older men are able to share their skills and experience."*

A further endorsement of the efficacy of the work the Shed does, came with referrals of younger men with mental health challenges from the Okehampton medical centre. The mental health staff see Okehampton Men in Sheds as one of their key partners. To further support the Shedders, grants have been obtained to provide a hot meal at lunch time, vital for those who usually eat alone or are not able or inclined to cook.



Figure 22: Toy houses made by one of the Shedders, and the toy train made together with Who the Let the Dad's Out Group.



Figure 23: Shedders have a summer BBQ for family and friends.

10) Community links and partners

The Shedders pride themselves on their community work – these collaborations are at the core of what they do, as one Shedder put it "*being part of that is what it is all about for me*". Their community work is rich and varied; some examples below:

- **Okehampton Medical Centre**: one of the Directors attends local mental health framework meetings, and the medical staff have referred men of all ages to the Shed.
- **Okehampton Food Bank:** good links with local food bank, e.g. last autumn they went apple picking from a tree in the medical centre, sorted the apples and delivered them to the food bank and local charity kitchen.
- **Local Churches**: The Shedders have helped local churches with repair/replacement of small artifacts where possible, e.g. building a large oak cross.
- **The Gilead Foundation**: The Shedders team have undertaken a wide range of garden and repair works for the women and enjoyed time chatting over a cuppa and cake too.
- **'Who Let the Dads Out':** Regular support/ meeting up to build inter-generational friendships, e.g. retired Shedders working with Dads to mutually learn new skills, and enable children to safely use tools with their Dad's e.g. building wooden toys and building a 'go cart' for entry to Bideford Soap Box Derby.
- **Okehampton Library**: maintaining links with the Friends of Okehampton library group; recently built a reading den for children's corner.
- **Okehampton Show** – providing stewarding support for car park.

- **British Legion:** supporting their coffee morning with stall and selling bird boxes – cuppa with BL members. Helping with minor repairs to their premises, e.g. repainting doors, repairing furniture.
- **The Fountain public house:** Landlord supports Men in Sheds, and supplies old furniture items which would otherwise be landfilled, numerous items have been gifted as part of an ongoing upgrade of their premises. Men in Sheds refurbish these items and pass onto others in local community e.g. they refurbished bar chairs for the British Legion.
- **Tools for Self Reliance / www.amigos.org.uk**: Our out-reach work extends to a wider global community– as we send tools to the charity 'Tools for Self-Reliance', which provides tools to small communities in rural Africa.
- **Lindfield day services:** small farm and workshop in Crediton for those with physical / learning disabilities; working closely together with Shedders to share tools and surplus items /resources – including large volumes of old electrical/household items to sort for recycling.
- **Okehampton McCarthy and Stone:** supporting residents, some of whom are Shedders; various tasks e.g. household repairs, garden bench repair.
- **Local schools:** numerous activities, including fundraising support, building requested items.
- **Numerous local events:** for example: various school events e.g. helping with 'teddy parachute jump' off St James Church Tower, to help raise school funds, village halls e.g. Belstone Village Hall Bazaar.
- **Stickepath Parish Council:** The Shedders built an outside leaflet/notice board for the village.



Figure 24: British Legion Coffee Morning March 2023.



Figure 25: Making fun fair games – and fun testing them too!

11) Shedder's example projects list

The Shed boasts a wide range of skills amongst the Shedders, this includes: French Polisher, Bricklayer; Joiner, Welder, Carpenter, Site Project Manager, Technical; Welding skills, Electrician, and Ecology / Conservation skills.

Just this year alone Okehampton Shed has undertaken numerous projects too many to list; but here are some examples of the breadth of work undertaken:

- ✓ Outdoor Mud Kitchen for South Tawton Primary School
- ✓ 50 Dormouse boxes for the local Woodland Trust
- ✓ Numerous minor repairs for Okehampton residents e.g. a specialist repair of a "much loved chair"; lawnmower repair for elderly resident; toaster repair for elderly resident; lamp repair elderly resident; neighbour deck chairs repaired & fabric replaced; "much loved" wheelbarrow repaired; broken table leg repaired for local resident etc.
- ✓ Support to local businesses: shredder repair for local business (preventing landfill); supporting local business in premises move.
- ✓ Oak crosses (recycled timber); beautifully crafted heirloom pieces, gifted to St James primary School and Chagford school hall.
- ✓ Fun fair games made and available to local villages/ schools for fundraising at summer fetes / events.
- ✓ Reading Den made for 'friends of Okehampton Library group'.
- ✓ Several large wooden compost bins, planters, polytunnel construction and ongoing gardening work for Okehampton Gilead Project.
- ✓ 50 wooden seed trays for Fatherford Community Garden.
- ✓ Numerous bird boxes, (including Owl and Swift), garden obelisks, and garden planters from scrap wood.
- ✓ Go-cart built for 'Who Let the Dad's Out' entry to Bideford Soap Box Derby.
- ✓ Painted doors for Okehampton British Legion; repaired and replaced chairs.



Figure 26: Old chairs donated by Fountain Inn: repaired, re-painted, upholstered, and given to Okehampton British Legion for their club.





Figures 27 & 28 above: Shedder's woodwork skills, items made from recycled wood.

12) Future plans: wheelchair accessible mini-bus

The Shedders are now working towards the purchase of a mini-bus, this is a vital piece of equipment at the core of their future plans, and ability to extend support to the most vulnerable within the community.

The mini-bus will enable them to support those isolated from transport networks or without access to their own transport. The Shed operates in a very rural area, and many who live in outlying villages can not get transport – and /or are not able to use public transport for health reasons. Often these are amongst the most isolated people in our community, and are reluctant to 'ask for help'.

Persuading these more vulnerable men to come to the Shed, requires being able to support and reassure them that – there will be someone who can readily take them home if they feel unwell, or if they only want to stay for a few hours. Hence the Shed needs the flexibility of having its own transport - to encourage some of these more vulnerable men to come to the Shed.

A mini-bus would also provide transport for Shedders when undertaking outreach work – and in turn, extend the outreach work and opportunities in the wider community. There is also a need to carry tools and equipment as part of this work, and hence the plan is to have a tow bar and trailer as part of the mini-bus purchase – as well as sign written for Men in Sheds.

Crucially, we are keen to ensure the van also has wheelchair/ramp access – which adds to the cost – but importantly is 'value for money' as it ensures our disabled Shedders can also attend events, transported together with, and not separated from, the rest of the group. It is vital that all Shedders can travel and arrive together, along with their trailer full of tools and materials (wood, paint etc).

The mini-bus will be increasingly necessary given plans to increase the size of the Shed in 2023, and this will provide the option to open additional days of the week, and crucially, encourage more service-users to join the Shed.

Several Shedders have a full driving licence and are able and keen to drive the mini-bus. Currently these Shedders are using their own cars to collect materials and drop off repaired items as required; they are also transporting some Shedders who do not drive to enable them to get to the Shed. As the Shed grows it is untenable to keep going on this basis, it also severely limits any ability to transport larger materials, donated items etc.

The Shedders envisage the mini-bus enabling them to assist the local community, other charities, and schools with many more outreach projects and ensure that many more Shedders can take part in these events. Shedders want to make this to be a truly community project, reaching out to all.



Figure 29: We start with a tyre – launching the mini-bus fund!

13) Future plans: shed extension

Shedders also envisage, that together with the mini-bus, the planned Shed extension will be a catalyst for the thriving community of Shedders to continue to grow. This is key to future plans, providing a larger kitchen area and table/chairs for socialising. The work area of the Shed will also be extended to enable a wider breadth of work to be undertaken e.g. to include detailed metal work as well as wood work, but also more complex projects with more workbench space. Crucially the new Shed will include a disabled toilet, and better welfare facilities.

The extension of the shed, together with our new mini-bus will enable us to encourage more men to the shed. Currently we are limited in our ability to accommodate more members as the shed space is at capacity. We are getting more enquiries as the Shed becomes well known in the community, and are increasing find it difficult to accommodate the additional demand.



Figure 30: The Shedders have a host of skills to offer; and are keen to build their own shed and even a BBQ extension!

14) Shed management: members involvement in decision making

The Shed has been set up as a Community Interest Company (number no. 09973707), with all profits remaining in the Shed funds for the benefit of all.

The registered Directors are all routinely involved in the day to day running and activities in the 'Shed', in that sense they are also service users. The organisation is volunteer led, with no paid staff. Everyone (Directors and service users) is passionately committed to its success - there is no feeling of

hierarchy - quite the contrary - everyone is involved and part of the decisions for the shed and its development.

This is truly a volunteer user led organisation in every sense. The Directors are largely the original service users that set up the organisation, with newer members encouraged to take a formal role in the running of the Shed if they wish - and hence it can be seen from Companies' house that additional Shedders have taken this more active role in the last couple of years.

Whilst the Shedders do not have formal 'committee meetings' all decisions are taken only after much discussion and sharing of ideas over a cuppa –to ensure a consensus is reached. All Shedders are supportive and facilitate dialogue with those whose health might prevent their full part in discussion and/or decision making.

As an example of how user-led activities are at the core of what we do, a couple of years ago – the Shedders sought to have the shed enlarged to extend activities, improve welfare facilities and welcome new members.

Everyone has worked together to support the Directors in submitting a successful lottery Grant to fund this construction project. The Directors are now working with the planning authorities and our landlords to secure final building regulation / planning permissions to enable construction to start.

The Shedders are all keen to play an active role in the construction of this new Shed extension – and involve many local trades people in the community who have said they would help them in the construction process.





Figure 31: Working and chatting together ‘shoulder to shoulder’.

15) Closing summary

The Okehampton Men in Sheds will continue to be at the heart of their community in all they do. The Shed also has a bright future as part of the growing community of Shedders across Devon. They remain keen to develop those wider links still further, sharing skills and friendships – whilst, crucially, also ‘making it easy’ for their ‘family of Shedders’ to grow within their ‘home patch’.

They are keen to break down the barriers amongst those who are vulnerable, throughout Okehampton and beyond, to enable them to come and/or benefit from the Shed!

The Shed will continue to welcome men of all ages and abilities with ambitious plans to keep growing year by year – looking ahead to celebrating their 10th Anniversary in 2028!

Okehampton Men in Sheds CIC

Community Gardens, Fatherford Road, Okehampton, EX20 1QS

Open: Wed, Thurs and Sat 10-4pm.

Okehampton Men in Sheds

Blog: https://okehamptonshed.wordpress.com/author/okehamptonshed/

Web: https://adoddle.org/app/projects/6098/okehampton-men-in-sheds

16) References

Samaritans (2022) https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/suicide-facts-and-figures/latest-suicide-data/

Mind (2020) – Mens Mental Health 10 years on. https://www.mind.org.uk/media/6771/get-it-off-your-chest_a4_final.pdf

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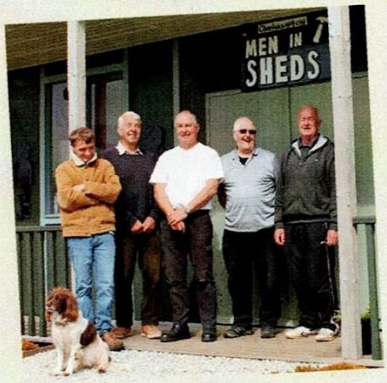
International Mens Sheds Association (2023): https://menshed.com/about-mens-sheds/

Movember Mens mental health https://uk.movember.com/mens-health/mental-health

17) Appendix – press cuttings / leaflets

Learn skills and make new friends with the...

Okehampton MEN IN SHEDS



Who are we?

Men in Sheds is a worldwide movement that takes different forms in different countries. It offers spaces for men to get together, share skills and make things. For some time a group of local men have been working to provide a shed in Okehampton and after a lot of hard work and fundraising we have a wonderful facility in a beautiful setting. We are still in need of more money and more tools but most of all we would like to find more people to come and join us. You can be sure of a warm welcome.

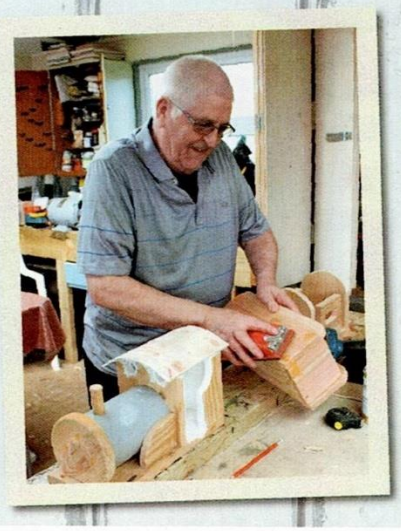
Opening Times

Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday

10am til 4.30pm

Contact one of our friendly team:

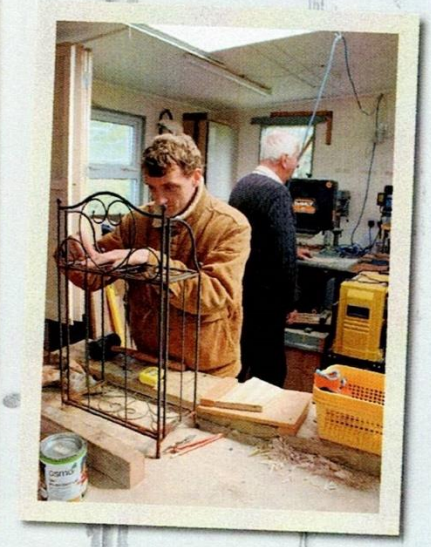
Terry **01837 53621** Phil **01837 54894**





What do we offer?

- An enjoyable, friendly and safe environment for practical activities and learning.
- **Instruction and skill training in a well equipped workshop.**
- We work with other agencies to help those who are isolated or lonely by offering a place of support and purpose.
- **We enable those with skills to use them for the benefit of others, of all ages.**
- We provide a useful space which can be shared with other community organisations.



You can find us at:

Okehampton Community Garden,
Fatherford Lane, Okehampton, Devon, EX20 1QQ

Contact one of our friendly team:
Terry **01837 53621** Phil **01837 54894**

The Times' Sarah Pitt pays a visit to the 'Shedders' at Okehampton Men in Sheds



● Graham Storer, John Woodward, Mike Tyson and Terry Kempster, four of Okehampton's Men in Sheds.

Spending time with the Men in Sheds

I KNOW straight away I've come to the right place when I pull up beside Okehampton Community Garden off Fatherford Lane. There's a big sign saying Men in Sheds over the funky-looking premises where members meet on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

And inside, on this rainy summer day, a warm welcome awaits me. Regular 'shedders' Graham Storer, Terry Kempster, John Woodward and Mike Tyson are sitting around the table with lunchboxes and the teapot, taking a midday break. From here, there's a panoramic view out across Dartmoor.

There's a homely appeal to the 'shed' – more a workshop really – which the group call home three days a week. They made the building themselves, drawing on the many skills of members, from electrical know-how to carpentry to building. They pull me up a chair and I'm provided with a mug of tea while they tell me more about themselves.

The Okehampton Men in Sheds was born as an idea in 2015 and built by the members themselves on a modest budget with funds from West Devon Borough Council, Okehampton United Charity, Okehampton Town Council, Okehampton Hamlets Parish Council and others.

Okehampton's answer to a communal 'man cave', complete with veranda, opened in the summer of 2017 with the intention of providing a space for retired and semi-retired men to get out of the house and learn new skills from each other in a sociable and relaxed environment.

It proved a winner, to the point that the group is so busy it now hopes to extend its meeting place substantially. Members plan to secure planning permission and raise £35,000 to do this, and already have lottery funding to cover their electricity bills and ground rent over the next five years.

Once they have their extension built they plan to offer woodworking classes, as they have really honed their skills in their thrice-weekly sessions.

There is evidence all around us of their handiwork, from professional looking wooden ornaments that could go on a mantelpiece to the substantial cross made of oak, a work in progress for the school hall at the new St James Church of England Primary School.

In pride of place on the workbench, the cross is being carved by a retired stonemason whose work can be seen in Westminster Abbey. He is in the process of carving the school logo and a spray of ivy, to reflect the school's focus on nature.

'We have a lot of skills among us,' says Terry, himself a retired marine engineer. 'These days people still do some DIY, but not as much as my generation did. That's why we thought doing workshops would be a good idea.'

Men in Sheds is a very 'make do and mend' outfit. It makes use of reclaimed wood which is donated to the group. Terry shows me the shed out the back which is crammed with wood and the stacks of wood keeping dry in a cavity beneath the shed itself, which has been built on slats. Kitchen units were donated to the group by the local Howdens kitchen supplier and fitted by the Men in Sheds themselves.

Members also encourage wildlife, with their owl boxes being very popular. Some are sold to boost the charity's coffers.

Men in Sheds in Okehampton, in common with others up and down the country, aims to alleviate loneliness and even depression in retired and semi-retired men.

In that way, this shed is very different from the shed to which a man might escape in his own garden.

'The socialising is so important,' says Terry. 'Lots of the people who have joined us over the years have been quite lonely. After they retire they get stuck in their houses and don't ever really get out or have the chance to do that much in the community. So firstly what we offer is a chat with a cup of tea and then if you want to make something you can get involved.'

While there are now more than 400 sheds across Britain, according to the UK Men's Sheds Association, the organisation which helped the group get off the ground.

In fact, though, as Terry explains, the concept started in Australia.

'The Australian government spotted that these guys were all retiring and were just grabbing a few tinnies and slumping in front of the telly and really forgetting about everything else,' he says. 'They decided they had to do something to help them. So the Australian government paid for the sheds, which is a bit different from here in the UK because we didn't get any government funding.

'One of the things that has surprised me is that we have had a lot of people come who have been suffering from mental health issues to try and get them back on track. Some of them have stayed. We even found one person a job. That wasn't something I was expecting.'

Project manager Phil Bush says meet ups in the shed replaces the camaraderie of colleagues which many men find themselves sorely missing when they retire.

'Men retire with the expectation that retirement is going to be spectacular, but I'm afraid to say that it isn't unless you happen to win the lottery and even then, money doesn't necessarily make people happy. They often find themselves saying to themselves "I've cleaned my new car, I've cut the grass, I've tidied the shelves. What do I do now?"'

'That's where Men in Sheds come in. We are open from 9.30am to 4.30pm and you can come in anytime you like. You don't have to be there at 9.30am and if you want to come in at 3.30pm you can. The only rules are that you come when you like, go home when you like and drink as much tea and coffee as you like.'

There is no obligation to be the life and soul of the party, he adds.

'In our tea breaks we air our views on practically any subject and if you are not a conversationalist you don't have to say anything. You can just sit and listen.

'There is never any pressure to do anything you don't want to do. If you've worked in an office and don't know how to work a sander we will show you, nobody's going to tell you off or bite your head off. You're here to relax and enjoy yourself.

'You can guarantee, too, that you'll find someone to talk to, and before you know it you'll be meeting them for a drink down The Fountain.'

Men in Sheds is holding a barbecue on Saturday, July 27 from 4pm to which all are welcome.

For more details contact Phil Bush on 01837 658779.

Drake's Auctions
Auctioneers Valuers
Tavistock
15TH JULY @ 10AM
UNDER THE HAMMER THIS WEEK
A general and garden sale to include, gold jewellery, furniture, art inc. Ltd. Ed. Russell Flint & Widgery. Books, Guitars & musicians equipment, model aeroplanes, ceramics inc. Poole & Sèvres style, tools, childrens play equipment, garden furniture.
CATALOGUE ONLINE FROM FRIDAY PM
VIEWING SAT 9AM-12PM SUN 12-4PM
DRAKESAUCTIONS.CO.UK
01822 616992

Okehampton and Tavistock Times 11th July 2019

News in brief



Men in Sheds plan Jubilee fun

OKEHAMPTON Men In Sheds have been busy in their workshop on the outskirts of town getting ready to host children's fun days in the run up to the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

Thanks to a grant from train company GWR, the group is planning three days of fun and games at their site at Fatherford, which they share with the Okehampton Community Garden. The activities will run on Saturday, Sunday and Monday, May 28-30, the days before the royal Jubilee celebrations.

As well as games like Splat the Rat, Ring the Bell, Throw the Hoops and a Coconut Shy, the Men in Sheds are currently busy making other new and unusual games for the children to enjoy which will later be available to other community groups. Pictured above is the work in progress. Refreshments will be available on each day, including beefburgers, hot dogs and soft drinks as well as tea and coffee. There will also be ice cream, popcorn and candyfloss, with tables and chairs arranged so everyone can enjoy family time together, and a gazebo, just in case the weather turns wet.

The Men in Sheds say that the aim is to provide a low cost day for families already hard pressed financially by the current rise in the cost of living. The site is easily accessible to disabled people and the group hope that families with children with physical or mental problems will find it a welcoming place and get a lot of fun and enjoyment out of it. All children must be accompanied by a responsible adult.

Okehampton and Tavistock Times 19th May 2022

Peter Turner, who is planning to set up the group in Moretonhampstead, said: "We had a great day with the Okehampton Shedders. We are very keen to get our Shed up and running, and this has really spurred us on! At the moment we are seeking a suitable local site. We welcome any ideas and support from our Moretonhampstead community to make this happen!"

Phil Bush of Okehampton Men in Sheds, said: 'We had such an interesting day with Moretonhampstead 'Shedders'!

'Wonderful to hear about their plans and to be able to share idea – together with lots of cake and cuppas too! We warmly wish them every success as part of the growing 'family' of 'Shedders' in Devon!'

Okehampton's Men in Sheds group started back in 2016 in order to provide a welcoming social space for retired men, and is now much-loved by the Okehampton community. Most recently, members made a reading den for the children's section of Okehampton Library.



● Okehampton Men in Shed's

Men in Sheds shares skills

OKEHAMPTON Men in Sheds recently met up with men from Moretonhampstead, who are keen to start their own Men in Shed's group, to share skills and show off the work it has done for the community.

Moretonhampstead men enjoyed a tour and chat to see the work of the Okehampton Shedders.

The group were also joined by Moretonhampstead Parish Councillor Catherine Back and Vivienne Hodges who came to see for themselves the great difference the 'Shedders' make to their community.

Okehampton and Tavistock Times February 2023

Okehampton and Tavistock Times `13th May 2021

Men in Sheds leap into action with big ambition

AS we all come out of our individual burrows after this long hibernation, Okehampton Men in Sheds (OMiS) are immediately leaping into action. The men have huge ambitions and are already engaged in a number of specific projects as well as their previous and ongoing ones.

Their traditional ones are making boxes to house dormice, hedgehogs, birds or owls. They also renovate old tools and are glad to accept gifts of tools to be refurbished and sent on to Africa via the Amigos link or to Lindfield Day Opportunities (a centre that caters for those with learning difficulties).

They are happy to accept old timber, wood or metal which they can usually recycle. New projects include a two-metre cross for Chagford Primary School and a model train for the Who Let the Dads Out? group as well as some garden obelisks.

When a husband, father, or brother dies, the relatives are sometimes left with a shed full of part-finished projects or tools and fixings, wondering what to do with them. OMiS are there to help and will come and sort out the shed and its contents and either recycle them or offer advice on value and how best to sell them. Currently their big ambition is to quadruple the size of the shed. The landlord has agreed, the architect has drawn up plans, planning permission has been sought and it may soon be there. If this huge extension can be built (by the men themselves) there will be opportunities for motor mechanics, metalwork and welding as well as extending the woodwork activities to include woodturning and beginners' classes. They hope to provide toilets and some catering too! The shed, at Fatherford Community Field, is open on Wednesdays and Saturdays 10am-4pm. All are welcome so pop in and take a look. For more information on OMiS, call Phil on 01837 54894.

Okehampton and Tavistock Times 29th Dec 2022

Library shows off new reading den

OKEHAMPTON Library officially revealed its new children's reading den last week (December 21), which was proudly made by Okehampton men's social group, Men in Sheds.

The library turned to Men in Sheds asking them to construct a custom-made reading den for the children's section, after it struggled to find any off-the-shelf structure which would correctly fit the space.

Library manager Carole Cornwall, said: 'We had the space but everything was too big, too small or hugely expensive. It was suggested we go to Men in Sheds and now we have something purpose-built. We are so grateful.'

The Friends of Okehampton Library funded the project with a donation of £100 to Men in Sheds and covered the purchase of the fabric covering the den, which will be changed according to seasons and events.

Phil Bush, project manager for Men in Sheds, said: 'It's always a pleasure for Men in Sheds to fo someting for the community.'

The new den will provide children with a new place to relax and read and is also large enough to accommodate a parent or guardian if they wish to join their child.

The project is part of an ongoing Friends of Okehampton Library initiative to fund events, childrens' activities and othee equipment for the library.

Earlier this year, the Friends of Okehampton Library hosted their first music event since covid in order to raise money for the library.



● From left to right: Men in Sheds members Graham Watson and keith Stephens with Okehampton library manager Carole Cornwall.

Okehampton and Tavistock Times 30th March 2023

Working together on go-kart project

OKEHAMPTON'S Men in Sheds and Who Let the Dads Out are busy building a go-kart together, which they will enter into the Bideford Soap Box Derby, to encourage inter-generational activities.

The joint group will be competing with 61 cart teams from across the county, and is now officially entered as 'Team 59: Who Let the Dad's Out'!

Graham Watson, Men in Sheds member, said: 'We are having such fun building it — brings back memories of when we were kids — except now we can use more power tools! We are using all recycled materials. We have welded a new chassis — with a wheelchair seat on top. We still have a way to go but it will be the 'up-there' with the best of them once it's finished! We have all enjoyed sharing ideas and working together – very soon we will be ready to paint it – and the kids have great ideas for that too – watch this space!'

The Derby has become a popular annual family event in Bideford, raising large sums for local charities. The Okehampton team are raising money for the North Devon charity Chemohero, which provides 'boxes of kindness' to chemotherapy patients.

To donate visit Just Giving page Okehampton-Bideford Soapbox Derby for Chemoheros.

Okehampton Men in Sheds was set up in 2016 to support to address loneliness, isolation and enhance mental health amongst men. Their workshop is in Okehampton Community Garden in Fatherford Road, where they work together to help with various community projects.



● Men in Sheds and Who Let the Dads Out are working on the go-kart project together. Here they stand next to the half-completed vehicle.

News in brief

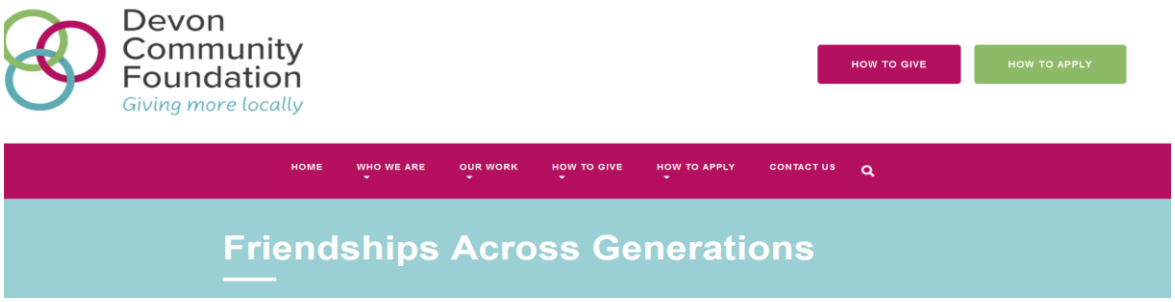
Go-kart building mission

OKEHAMPTON men's groups Men in Sheds and Who Let the Dads Out have joined together to build a go-kart for the Bideford go-kart race this June.

The two groups will be making the go-kart as part of a joint venture and held a preliminary meeting on Saturday (January 14) to discuss plans.

Phil Bush from Men in Sheds, said: 'Probably about a year ago, we though to get the two age groups together.'

Men in Sheds is a national organisation which provides retired men with opprtunities to socialise with others while Who Let the Dads Out provides opportunities for fathers and their children to spend time together.



Who Let The Dads Out Okehampton working with Okehampton Men in Sheds

https://devoncf.com/blog/friendships-across-generations/?fbclid=IwAR2qERD1lwz4G0tziinEXtbbaGyDDnSMzgjDP6KQmQz0Vq_liVS8Xd28xrM

11/1/2023

Passing on Skills

This has worked well in Okehampton, where Who Let The Dads Out—a group for dads and their children—meets regularly with the local Men in Sheds group. Men in Sheds typically bring older men together to pursue practical interests, such as making and mending things, in a social setting.

Michelle Farrelly, who runs Who Let The Dads Out Okehampton, explains that the Men in Sheds come along to every session, helping the dads and children with activities such as woodworking. From the very beginning it was Michelle's intention to create an intergenerational group and it has proved hugely successful. "The dads really enjoy talking to the older men about parenting," says Michelle. "And the older men really enjoy spending time with the children." She adds that being a parent can be very isolating and dads in particular often find it harder to access support networks. This group helps them to build friendships and connections within the community, while the older men are able to share their skills and experience."







- What do we do?
- Would you like to join us?
- Can you help?

What we do? *We repair, recycle, and make things for the community, local schools and charities. We support Mens' mental health by providing a warm and welcoming social space. We always have a range of projects underway, and love to hear from the community to help with your projects too!*

Would you like to join us? *We warmly welcome new members to our growing community of Shedders. All ages and ability welcome – everyone 'mucks in' together, with plenty of laughs and cuppas along the way! Our Shed is open 3 days a week – pop along for a cuppa to see what we do!*

Would you like to help? *Thank you for thinking about how to help us. We love to help our community – but a little help for our Shed goes a long way too! If you have any wood, or items which might need repair – which could then be useful for us to sell for our funds – or that we can repair and gift to a local charity – please do drop items to us. We are always glad to receive old/ broken tools too, and work closely with a charity who gifts repaired tools to small communities in Uganda.*

Located: Community Garden, Fatherford Rd, Okehampton, EX20 1QS.

Open: Wednesday, Thursday & Saturday 10-4pm

More information about what we do:

www.adoddle.org/app/projects/6098/okehampton-men-in-sheds

Email: jane.sweetbriar@outlook.com / gwatson1@hotmail.com

Okehampton Men in Sheds