

IRISH MEN'S SHEDS

As one member of the men's shed in Co. Waterford, south-eastern Ireland put it: "If it wasn't for the shed, I'd be a different person now. Over the past year, everything has changed. I don't mind saying that I was in a pretty dark place this time last year. I don't want to put it too dramatically, but I'd even say that the shed saved my life."



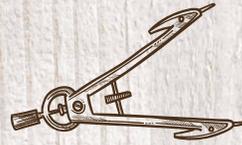
The Ireland Funds is helping strengthen communities all across Ireland, one men's shed at a time.

Photos : Aengus McMahon





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Men's sheds are shared community spaces where men can exchange skills, make friends and contribute to their communities. They allow men to explore different approaches to masculinity, based on shared experience, frankness and openness to new ideas.

Since 2011, the Irish Men's Sheds Association (IMSA) has grown from a cellphone number to an umbrella organization overseeing almost 500 community organizations throughout the island of Ireland.

The support of The Ireland Funds has allowed the Irish Men's Sheds movement to grow to almost 500 sheds engaging over 12,000 men on a weekly basis. The Irish Men's Sheds Association was a recipient of the Small Grants Round long before we became an Ireland Funds' Flagship Awardee in 2017, receiving €100,000 over 2 years. The Flagship Award has also facilitated the development of a unique Shed Support Volunteer program, whereby a single individual volunteer in each of Ireland's thirty-two counties is trained to offer logistical support and information to all the sheds in his county.

"Without the direct support, guidance and encouragement of The Ireland Funds, under its Flagship Awards and a range of other supports, it is inconceivable that men's sheds would have developed into the national phenomenon they have become," says CEO Barry Sheridan. "The endorsement of The Ireland Funds has been a signal to other donors and agencies that the Irish Men's Sheds Association is a professional and reputable charity with a genuine commitment to improving society."

The impact of the men's shed on an individual attendee can be at once subtle and dramatic. The enduring and growing appeal of the men's shed model lies in its simplicity; however, that simplicity belies a depth of impact that can be truly transformative.

The granddaughter of a men's sheds member in Co. Mayo, on Ireland's Atlantic coast, described the transformation in her grandfather's life: "For five years, we couldn't get granddad out of the house. He didn't really have an interest in anything anymore. He was very, very reluctant to join the shed, but I drove him over and said I'd come and pick him up whenever he wanted if he didn't like it. Well, to cut a long story short, we hardly see him at all now under dinnertime! He's so completely at home in the shed and everyone in town knows his name from the community projects he's involved in."

Men's sheds have been proven to benefit the health and wellbeing of their members, with over 90% of members reporting improved wellbeing. To consolidate this impact, the IMSA has introduced its Sheds for Life initiative, a health and wellbeing programme backed by Ireland's Health Services Executive. The IMSA is also advising nascent men's sheds movements in Iceland, Central Asia, the United States, Denmark, Kenya and a number of other countries and regions and was recently invited to address the World Health Organization on the benefits of men's sheds. Without the support of The Ireland Funds, this level of reach and impact would have been beyond the IMSA.



Men can be reluctant to talk about their feelings and this means that they usually don't ask for help. Probably because of this many men are less healthy than women, they drink more, take more risks and they suffer more from isolation, loneliness and depression.

Good health is based on many factors including feeling good about yourself, being productive and valuable to your community, connecting to friends and maintaining an active body and an active mind. Becoming a member of a Community Men's Shed gives a man that **safe and busy environment** where he can find many of these things in an atmosphere of friendship. And, importantly, there is no pressure. Men can just come and have a chat and a cuppa if that is all they're looking for.



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