

Wayland Men's Shed

The concept of a Men's shed in Watton was first discussed by 7 local men who felt that the men of the area would benefit from a meeting place locally. The first meeting was in 2016 and after some months looking for a suitable venue, we were able to move into a vacant MOD property which had originally been a school dating back to 1836. Although we were up and running in late 2016, our official opening was in April 2017 with the local Mayor attending. At that time there were 40 members.

When we moved into the old school house, we were able to transform a small outbuilding into a workshop and a derelict piece of ground into a garden. The inside space was used for meeting up, playing games, and chatting over a cup of tea or coffee. It was evident that there was a need for a men's group to support the well being and mental health of men in the local area, as membership grew over the coming months. A committee was formed and a constitution put together with a constitution, member's handbook and supporting policies. A social secretary was appointed and different activities and events were organised. A monthly newsletter was started to keep members updated.

In March 2020 we closed our doors due to the pandemic and lockdown. During this time, we continued to communicate with members through the monthly newsletter and the committee made regular phone calls to all members to check on their health and well-being. Prior to lockdown we had 75 members.

In May 2021 we were starting to prepare for re-opening but found out that the MOD were unlikely to renew our tenancy of the old schoolhouse, which meant that we had to look for new premises. A request at a Zoom council meeting, when giving a report on how we had spent grant money, led to an offer to move to Watton Sports Centre. After meetings with the sports centre management, an agreement was made that we could utilise the old groundsman's building for a workshop and use the bowls club room on days when it was not being used. In order to accommodate our computer group, the groundsman's building was partitioned off to provide for them and a workshop. With money we had accumulated through membership fees and daily attendance subs, we converted and decorated the workshop building to make it fit for purpose.

In recognition of the work we were doing, we have received the Mayor's annual charity fund twice. We have been successful in securing a grant from the Norfolk Community Foundation Connecting Older People Fund which paid our social room rental for the year 2021 to 2022. Another grant from the lottery community fund is paying for our rent and insurance from 2022 to 2023. In addition, it will help with the electric bill for the workshops and subsidise coach trips throughout the year. The Co-op Breckland Funeral Service have generously been supplying us with tea and coffee.

Our shed is unique in the following ways:

We have a workshop for members to engage in their own woodwork projects along with requests from the community for items and small repairs around the sports centre.

There is a computer workshop that receives computers and printers for repair or if unwanted either broken up for scrap value or if repairable, sold. This boosts our funds as well as giving members an opportunity to learn more about computers.

Since the start of our social programme, we have held 51 events, 71 outings and been involved in 15 Projects.

Outings have included: Photo group excursions x 23, Pub Lunches x 8, ten-pin-bowling x 15, Duxford air show x 3, Stanford Military Training Area (STANTA) x 2, Whitwell & Reepham Station, Cromer Pier Show x 3, Gressenhall farm and workhouse museum, Bressingham Gardens and Steam Experience, Bletchley Park, Carol Service at St Mary's Church West Tofts x 2, Yarmouth Dogs x 2, Fakenham Races, Watton Radio Model Club x 2, Mid Norfolk Railway Afternoon High Tea (Dereham to Wymondam) x 2, Battle of Britain Memorial Flight Visitor Centre and RAF Marham.

Events have included: Cheese & Wine Evenings x 6, Quiz & Chips evenings x 18, Christmas Meals x 6, Mulled Wine & Mince Pie mornings x 5 and a Summer Bar-b-Que.

Recently we have started two more sub groups: A Music Appreciation Group where members listen to each other's choice of music and give a score x 5. A Shanty Group x 6.

A full programme of outings and events is planned for the coming year.

Our shed is getting men visiting through recommendations, referrals and word of mouth on a regular basis with the majority of these becoming members. From testimonials that have been provided after a request for members to tell us what the shed means to them, it is apparent that we are making a big difference to people's lives and adding to their well-being. This is not just the men themselves but their partners, wives and close families as well. All of these are available to read on our website.

It is difficult to fully appreciate the difference attending the Wayland Men's Shed has made to each individual and their family members. However, it is evident that the existence of our men's shed is important in aiding and supporting the well-being of men in the community. Although not all members attend each session, they can take comfort in the fact that they are free to come and go as they like.

Due to the age group of most members (average age of members is currently 72) there are periods of illness or times that they are unable to attend. We have a system for recognising when a member has not attended for a long period and contact them to check if they need extra support. The Shed provides a place for men who have lost their partners to meet with others and escape from the loneliness of living alone. It also allows for those with partners to have a break from everyday routine and mix with other men. I have had one wife say to me, "Thank God for the Men's Shed Malcolm, it gets him out from under my feet for a few hours each week."

The various social functions and outings are open for partners and family members to participate in. These have proved very successful and extends the benefits of Men's Shed to the wider community.

We continue to look at ways to improve our ability to support men through innovation and to provide a comfortable and relaxing place to attend. A computerised booking in and out system ensures that we know who is in attendance and who has been missing for a period. Membership numbers did drop due to the lock-down period but as confidence has grown membership has risen to 75.

Our Website, www.waylandmensshed.co.uk has information about events and outings as well as a copy of our monthly journal and a picture gallery. I ask the judging panel to visit our website to see how we are making a difference and what we are providing for the men of the community.