

Life and faith in rural Britain...

COUNTRYWAY



An unlikely story

In February 2017, 'Whitby Men Doing their Stuff', an article featuring SAMS Men's Shed near Whitby, appeared in Country Way.

This Men's Shed was the first in North Yorkshire and used the old schoolroom behind Littlebeck Methodist Chapel, deep in the picturesque moors on Wainwright's Coast to Coast walk (whitbysheds.co.uk). It was an unlikely place for a Men's Shed; now in its fourth year, is SAMS still doing its stuff?

Indeed it is! This one Shed has expanded to six in four venues between Staithes and Robin Hood's Bay; two of these are primarily for women. That growth is mirrored nationally, with the number of Sheds nearly tripling to over 500 in four years. Why? Simply because they're meeting a need.

People are vulnerable to isolation when major life changes occur: retirement, ill health, bereavement, low mood, moving to a new place, relationship breakdown, the onset of dementia. Sheds give back some of the banter, camaraderie and purpose of working days with others, and encourage new 'mateship', as the Aussies who started the Shed movement would say.

Mission accomplished? No, the mission has broadened!

Whitby Sheds is now taking the lead in children's and youth activities with the support of Whitby Eskmouth Scouts and two local schools. Why this diversification? Because isolation, loneliness and feelings of disconnection can affect those at all ages and stages of life, including the young.

Safe, stimulating out-of-school activities are needed. Concerned that the virtual world is threatening to displace reality, we wanted to create a space in which young people could find and develop meaningful relationships. Observing this in some of our own families, the first step was to find out from the UK Men's Shed Association whether there were any existing initiatives connecting youngsters and Sheds. We were pointed to Volunteer It Yourself (volunteerityourself.org), a national organisation working with schools and groups on DIY projects.

As a result, Whitby Sheds partnered with VIY in two very successful projects in July 2018 with students making garden furniture and Scouts undertaking a yard makeover. This was the spark that first got us thinking about workshops for children and young people.

Nine months later, with a funder's encouragement, Kidz Making Good (kidzmakinggood.org.uk) materialised, a year-long pilot for diverse out-of-school workshops during term breaks and on some Saturdays. There now even a Youth Shed at the Scout Hut in Sleights! The challenge is to inspire the community to join in.

Four months into the programme we're beginning to see the impact KMG can have. We had a great couple of days making push carts with a dozen youngsters, including two who have been diagnosed with ADHD. As parents arrived to pick their children up, one of these lads – taller than me – enfolded me in a 'man hug' of appreciation. That, not carts, was the real fruit of our labours.

All this from an unlikely Shed at a Chapel in the middle of nowhere!

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