Inverurie and District Men's Shed – a snap shot of the road it took to achieve 'old hands + new hands + healthy minds = Happy Men', families and communities.

By Jason Schroeder, AVA Men's Shed Development Officer

In 2013 the Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action Men's Shed Development Officer held several community presentations to see if there was enough interest in the local community to support the creation of a Men's Shed in Inverurie. The presentations were well attended and towards the latter part of 2013 a steering committee was formed. The next step was to get the group constituted and become a Scottish Charity so they could steer their own ship on a destination of their choice. A lot of work and commitment was undertaken to achieve this and the committee were rewarded with Scottish Charity Status.

In becoming a charity the group - now called the Inverurie and District Men's Shed - could apply for funding and started looking for suitable premises. During this period (which took several months) the men chose to meet in the Inverurie Community Centre to build relationships with each other, create a meeting place for new members to hear about the shed idea and join in the adventure.

The group first found financial support through NHS Grampian and the Aberdeenshire Health Improvement Fund who financed a polytunnel. The men purchased the 21 metre polytunnel and erected it themselves in the community space at the Harlaw Day Centre. They prepared the land using a local tractor belonging to one of the men and utilising the many skills found within the group. Take a look at the two videos on the Scottish Men's Sheds Association You Tube channel (www.scottishmsa.org.uk) of this process. After several months of meeting in the polytunnel rather than the community centre, the tunnel was full of vegetables and flowers. In April 2015, the polytunnel was officially opened by local celebrity, Jim McColl, from the BBC's Beechgrove Garden.



During this time of growth in the polytunnel, the group were still busy with a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) with Aberdeenshire Council to take charge of a storage shed belonging to the council in the Harlaw estate (Unit 19, Harlaw Way, Inverurie, AB51 5SG). It wasn't in the centre of town

which would have been more accessible for users but it is on the local bus route and it was deemed usable for their purposes. A bank account was created and a development and business plan was written and submitted with the stage 2 part of the Community Asset Transfer to the council.

During this period many funding applications were completed, many were not successful but some were and the men managed to attract enough funding to convert the Shed into a very professional workshop and hobby area. To date the men have had support from over twenty-five donators which in itself is a major win for the funding committee and also shows the level of national and local support for their Men's Shed. The majority of the workshop conversion was again done by the men of the Shed. It was officially opened by Aberdeenshire's Provost Hamish Vernal in January 2016.



The next stage of development to focus on is the two porta cabins which have been delivered. These will be completely gutted and refitted to create the social space, kitchen and toilets. They also need a roof to protect the two cabins which have now been joined to create one space. Funding for this part of the project is ongoing.

The three years I have been supporting and encouraging the men has flown by but nevertheless I hope that the overall process of creating Men's Sheds will become quicker. It is an incredible ask of a group of people who don't know each other to stick together to create something which will not only benefit their lives but men, families and communities they haven't even met - and all done by volunteering themselves. I am so glad that there are people in our communities in Scotland who have what it takes to create these amazing spaces and blaze a new trail to improve our country's social health in such a selfless way. The comradery and banter is always evident as these talented local men roll up their sleeves and create a wonderful place where mentoring, upskilling, relaxation and friendships are to be nurtured and enjoyed. This is the second of Aberdeenshire Men's Sheds to open since 2013 and it's a real benefit to the Inverurie and district communities and a real credit to the men and their many supporters.

For more info: www.inveruriemensshed.co.uk

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