

## **"SHED STUFF" Improving men's mental health through engagement in Men's Shed community organisation**

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### **Introduction**

The focus on men's health is a relatively recent phenomenon in Australia. Rate of diseases, differentiated by sex, which highlighted the poorer status of health amongst men, was an important stimulus that put men's health on the national agenda. The "emerging social phenomenon" of the Men's Sheds provide an opportunity for social inclusion to men that are stigmatized and discriminated due to mental illness. A review of the literature indicates that there has not been (in Australia) projects in a "Shed" environment for men who are diagnosed with a mental illness.

### **Objectives**

Improve men's mental health and well being within a community integration project

### **Description of project**

This paper presents the outcome of a collaborative project between a Mental Health Services (Perth, Australia) and a community organisation, Fremantle Men's Shed, in promoting men's mental health and well being. This project aimed to engage men who experience mental illness, in 20 weekly 3-hour sessions. These sessions concentrated on developing skills, namely woodwork, metalwork and occupational health and safety. This opportunity allowed the participants to immerse in a normalizing experience and leave behind their identity of a "patient", "sick person" at least for 3 hours a week. Surprisingly (or not), these three hours of "shed stuff" had also repercussions in their well being.

### **Results/Discussion**

In the Men's Shed, the participants were exposed to a welcoming environment where informal learning was facilitated by mentorship and peer support. Men were able to reduce social isolation and enhance self-esteem, they felt more empowered and their sense of efficacy increased.

### **Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy**

The knowledge of the "Men's Shed" in Australia (an internationally) as a socially supportive environment is very important for the delivery of occupational therapy services. From this knowledge, occupational therapists can work in partnership with Men's Sheds in community projects that address the principles of the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion through a gendered approach to mental health (Morgan, M. et al, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

The engagement in the Fremantle Men's Shed project has had a positive and long lasting impact in the participants' mental health