The Irish Men's Sheds Association

Waterford, Ireland

Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.

The Irish Men's Sheds Association's vision is for all men to have an opportunity to improve their health and wellbeing by being part of a community Men's Shed.
Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?

In Europe, men are more likely than women to die from all the leading causes of death. Ireland has identified men as a specific population group for the strategic planning of health within a national men’s health policy (2008). For an average of 13.7 yrs of their lives, men in Ireland experience ill-health or disability. Men in Ireland have experienced a 2.7 fold increase in suicide rates since 1980; 391 male suicides are recorded each year. 31% of men in Ireland ‘regularly’ or ‘constantly’ experience stress. These are repeated patterns in many countries and barriers to existing health services still exist in European countries, as well as worldwide. Health inequity is a reality for men. IMSA is solving the problem of how to effectively engage men in improving their health and wellbeing.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!

IMSA advocates a model that engages men in their health and wellbeing by building on strengths. Our aim is to ensure men have opportunities to take part in a community Men’s Shed. We do this by promoting the ‘Men’s Sheds’ model, together with empowering local communities who wish to develop Men’s Sheds. The community Men’s Shed is a version of the shed in the backyard – you might see men restoring bicycles for a local school, fixing lawn mowers, music, metalwork. You would see young and older men learning new skills from each other and learning something about life from each other. Men’s Sheds originated in Australia and ‘through the provision of mateship’ and a sense of belonging through positive and therapeutic informal activities, ‘Men’s Sheds’ achieve outcomes of positive health, happiness and well-being for those men who participate, as well as for families and communities’. IMSA’s solution is empowerment through knowledge and resources for communities who wish to develop a Men’s Shed.

Impact: How does it Work

Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.

We make a difference by generating knowledge on ‘what? how? why?’ a Men’s Shed is, and by providing supports to communities who wish to ‘grow’ a Men’s Shed in their area. We do this daily through: website, media and social media; Men’s Shed Start-up Service; Resource and Support Service; community-based information workshops and mentoring. In 2011 I conducted a radio interview within a town in South East Ireland; Wexford. I let the show and its listeners know what a Men’s Shed is, and answered queries. A local man from a rural part of County Wexford; Bannow, was inspired by what he heard, knowing that where he lived there were little opportunities for men to come together, other than the local pub! This man rallied a few more together, the group contacted IMSA for advice on how they would best set up a Shed. We met with the group 3 times in their community. This involved: listening to the men’s ideas; directing them to other Men’s Sheds for project visits; providing practical information e.g. insurance requirements, and being positive about what the men wanted to achieve for their own community. Bannow Men’s Shed is now up and running, and have received an IMSA Men’s Shed Start-Up Grant 2012; funded by IMSA through the Ireland Funds. The Start-Up Grants were the original idea of IMSA. We recognised the need for financial resources for small rural communities isolated from other community and/or health service providers, who would like to start a Men’s Shed. Through inspiration, listening and the right supports, IMSA was successful in making a difference for men and the community of Bannow, County Wexford.

Sustainability

Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?

No other NGO focuses on the growth of Men’s Sheds in Ireland. Several bodies in Ireland work to improve men’s health; Dept. of Health and Children, Men’s Health Forum, Men’s Development Network. Local community groups are working to improve life for men, such as Family Resource Centres and Local Development Companies. All of these are in receipt of Irish government funding. This is the only challenge which these bodies pose to the growth of IMSA. We envisage being successful in applications for government funding to promote the growth of Men’s Sheds. It is vital that we don’t duplicate work of government services-funded NGO’s. IMSA is unique as we provide a model, and tools, that communities can use themselves to respond to men’s health. We believe that this is real sustainability in practice.

Team

Founding Story

It was a series of events over time that led to the official launch of the Irish Men’s Sheds Association in October 2010. I had been working in community development for a long time, and was conscious that while it was easy to engage women in local health and wellbeing initiatives, the men were missing! The more I looked into this, the more apparent it became that this was not just a local or national issue, but one that affected men worldwide. Along with colleagues we found a successful model for engaging men in the community in the form of a Men’s Shed movement in Australia. This led to a study visit of Victoria in the Summer of 2009. I remember going into Sheds over there and there was such energy in them. It didn’t matter if it was a Shed that cost thousands to build or one that was just a few pieces of timber thrown together. I thought to myself, this has to happen everywhere! And we started in Ireland. Men’s Sheds can change the world; the concept is simple and effective.

About You

Organization:
The Irish Men’s Sheds Association

First Name
John

Last Name
Evo
About Your Organization

Organization Name
The Irish Men's Sheds Association

Organization Country
WF, Waterford

Country where this project is creating social impact
WF, Waterford

How long has your organization been operating?
1-5 years

Innovation

How long have you been in operation?
Operating for 1-5 years

Which of the following best describes the barrier(s) your innovation addresses? Choose up to two
Access, Equity.

Social Impact

Please describe the goal of your initiative; outline what you are trying to achieve

As a national NGO, with a community development ethos, IMSA is focused on the goal of empowering communities to develop a Men's Shed. It is important to us that all men have an opportunity to take part in such a positive space as a Men's Shed. It is also important to us that the good practice model of a Men's Shed, together with the core concepts of equality, non-judgmental, local governance, activity and community, is promoted and maintained in Ireland and beyond.

Our vision is that all men will have the opportunity to improve their health and wellbeing through taking part in a Men's Shed. Most importantly, our goal is centralised around a grass-roots approach; IMSA wants to support the ideas/visions of local communities, encourage the volunteerism and social conscious which exists among men.

What has been the impact of your solution to date?

To date, since 2010, IMSA has been successful in developing a strong organisation with a Board of Directors comprising of 17 grassroots and expert members, a staff base of CEO, and part-time administrator and funding co-ordinator. We have secured approx. €40,000 funding within the initial year of start-up with a commitment from funders for the next 2 years. On the ground, we have supported communities in over 40 areas in Ireland to set up a community Men's Shed in their area. These Sheds have over 700 men taking part and benefiting from the Men's Shed model. Over 65 Sheds are affiliated with the Irish Men's Sheds Association to date. Our website www.mensheds.ie is receiving on-going increase of site visits and unique hits, and is a unique website offering support and information to communities in Ireland. Our practice has recently received positive reference in both the British Medical Journal (2011), and a recent report from the Irish Institute for Public Health (2011).

What is your projected impact over the next five years?

Over the next 5 years IMSA will support the development of min. 200 community Men’s Sheds across the island of Ireland. The health and wellbeing impact of these Sheds will reach a minimum of 8,000 men in Ireland. IMSA will ensure that the model of a ‘Men’s Shed’ is understood within the wider community of Europe as a whole, and that Men's Sheds are a viable, key part of many rural and urban communities. IMSA will ensure that Men's Sheds are recognised at national and European level as key aspects of national strategies for men's health and wellbeing, with mainstreamed funding for community Men's Sheds. IMSA will ensure that Men’s Sheds are strong, sustainable and effective in promoting men’s health and wellbeing, and are a supportive collective, through a network of volunteer Shed Advocates.

What barriers might hinder the success of your project? How do you plan to overcome them?

Financial resources are a barrier which might hinder the success of planned activities of IMSA. We overcome this already through allocation of resources into generating funds. We have an employee (7 hrs/week) whose role is dedicated to sourcing and completing funding applications, and who will work towards generating income from other strands; corporate and fundraising. This has been successful to date. We plan to gain secure funding from Irish national government or EU health programmes. We monitor our applications and build on the positive aspects of these. We are part of an international research project into the outcomes of Men's Sheds which will generate leverage for evidence-based applications in the areas of men’s health, wellbeing and men’s learning.

Winning entries present a strong plan for how they will achieve and track growth. Identify your six-month milestone for growing your impact

Services and DVD launched at an inaugural National Men's Shed Conference, Ireland, August 2012

Identify three major tasks you will have to complete to reach your six-month milestone
Task 1
IMSA Shed Advocate Training: a network of community volunteers to facilitate Start-Up Workshops & promote good practice.

Task 2
Produce a DVD/Manual - How to Start Up a Men’s Shed in Your Area, based on experiences of Sheds in Ireland.

Task 3
Organise an IMSA National Conference, proven to be a very valid way of people learning about ‘what works’ with regard to Sheds

Now think bigger! Identify your 12-month impact milestone
IMSA will move to a new dedicated premises for the organisation, with funding from both national and EU health programmes.

Identify three major tasks you will have to complete to reach your 12-month milestone

Task 1
Successfully apply for funding through the Irish Government Dept. of Health and Children to support the IMSA Resource and Support Services.

Task 2
Successfully apply to the EU Call for Health Programmes 2012 for core funding to sustain the organisation’s activities.

Task 3
Secure an accessible, central and affordable premises to accommodate the head office of IMSA, training spaces and grounds.

Sustainability
Tell us about your partnerships
IMSA sees the Men’s Sheds in Ireland as our most important partners. Since 2010, we have supported the growth of over 40 Men’s Sheds, and are working together with these Sheds, to ensure the further growth and sustainability of Men’s Sheds. Our funders and also local community service providers are key partners. Currently one of our partnerships is with a local government education provider; County Wexford VEC, in delivering a Leargas funded European Conference on ‘Working with Men’ to generate knowledge among a wider community on innovative ways of supporting men’s health, wellbeing and learning.

Are you currently targeting other specific populations, locations, or markets for your innovation? If so, where and why?
We currently target all communities within the island of Ireland for the growth of Men’s Sheds and to avail of IMSA. We do this largely through media opportunities, our website and a growing ‘word of mouth’. Through Start-Up Grants, we focused on rural areas during 2012 as we recognised that within such areas there is a dearth of support opportunities from other services. We will continue this focused Start-Up Grant for rural Men’s Sheds throughout the year. We are focused on raising awareness among community service providers on what a Men’s Shed is, including training delivery at European level.

What type of operating environment and internal organizational factors make your innovation successful?
For IMSA, we need communities to believe in the potential of IMSA to support them in achieving opportunities for men in their community, through a Men’s Shed. Maintaining a transparent, accessible, honest, social-minded and happy internal organisation is making our innovation successful. This type of internal organisational together with skill, talent and effectiveness of staff and volunteers, success is happening for our innovation.

It is undoubtedly a better operating environment for IMSA when Men’s Sheds as a concept is understood and appreciated as a tool for improving men’s health, learning and wellbeing. In Ireland, and Europe, there is a growing body of awareness of the potential within Men’s Sheds evident in Ireland’s National Men’s Health Policy among others.

Please elaborate on any needs or offers you have mentioned above and/or suggest categories of support that aren’t specified within the list
IMSA is in a strong position to support other initiatives to develop/maintain gender equity within their service provision. IMSA has expertise in developing innovative ways to engage men in their health and wellbeing and we would be more than willing to share this knowledge and our experience.

We recognise that we are in need of additional support in the area of marketing our organisation.

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