

Bloke's shed a healthy place

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BUILDING UP: Whangarei Community Men's Shed steering group members including Jon Borrett, left, Jeff Griggs, John Williams and guide dog Gracie, Dave Kelsey, Jeremy Busck and Doug Macdonald are excited about the Men's Shed concept.

Access to a garden shed and social contact keeps men healthy and well-adjusted, according to international research.

And this is why a shed for men of all ages is getting such good support.

The Whangarei Community Men's Shed has just become an incorporated society. About 20 people are involved in the steering committee.

The aim is to provide a place where men can socialise, work together, learn some new skills and share their talents and knowledge with the community.

Whangarei is following a successful model developed in Australia, where there are now more than 700 community Men's Sheds. About 50 are also being developed in New Zealand but Whangarei is the first one in Northland.

Steering committee member John Williams says hundreds of people have already rung up expressing interest or offering goods that could be used.

John is legally blind and says the Men's Shed project has already helped turn around his life, giving him and his "girlfriend" guide dog Gracie a purpose.

"I got introduced to the Men's Shed through Age Concern – before then I had four walls and a chair and that was where I stayed."

John has been in charge of fundraising and has helped the group raise \$1000, as well as getting backing from Mitre10 and Sir Michael Hill.

The society has also struck a deal with North Haven Hospice and St Vincent de Paul, and they will fix broken goods donated to both organisations in return for help setting up.

Member Jeremy Busck says male-only socialising is an important part of the concept, but women could be included in special workshops.

"It won't work otherwise. Men won't talk about their health problems eye to eye, but they will shoulder to shoulder. If women are in there, the conversation changes."

The next step for the Whangarei Community Men's shed is to find a suitable venue.

It hopes the Whangarei District Council will provide a unused building, with the group being able to do the maintenance on it. The old railway station is one site suggested.

Councillors were supportive of the concept during a presentation last Wednesday by steering committee members.

Councillor Sharon Morgan says it's a brilliant idea. "I think it is true community spirit."

Whangarei Leader