

MONTHLY

# Have a Go

## NEWS

### Fremantle Men's Shed



Left to right; Bill Johnstone, Bob Fleming and Gordon Creswell

by Frank Smith

FREMANTLE MEN'S shed has provided a mixed range of opportunities, learning experiences and services for men in the Fremantle area since 2004.

"Men retire to a four by two and need a shed," said volunteer coordinator Bill Johnstone. They need their own space and the opportunity to socialise with other men.

While the 'shed' caters mainly for the over 50s, members range in age from nine to 90.

"The 90-year-old comes in twice most weeks. Other men often come with their kids. Fathers and sons work on projects together.

"The shed meets several needs, as well as providing a space to do woodworking. It provides company and helps men expand their social network.

"Often groups make friends and do other things, like go off to the footy together," said Bill.

"The shed was my idea. I'm a primary school teacher and when I took long service leave in 2003 I saw a shed operating at Nambucca in New South Wales. Like Fremantle it was mostly retired men [who used the shed]. I thought the idea would work here."

When Bill got back he found widespread support.

"We had a committee of 12 guys within a week."

Fremantle mayor Peter

Tagliaferri helped them find a building.

It was owned by Fremantle Pigeon Racing Club, although on Education Department land and had been disused for five years.

"The youngest member was 75 and the building was nearly derelict. With help from Peter I found the secretary. His wife said we could have the shed provided he could join."

The shed has since been gifted to the committee.

"At first there was only a single workbench, but new members brought in extra tools and equipment."

Since then the committee has begged or borrowed machinery or purchased it second hand from funds members raised themselves.

Recently they received a grant from Chevron to install 3-phase power in another shed, which will become the metal workshop.

"The shed was given to us. We just had to dismantle it, cart it here and re-erect it," said Bill.

The shed membership grew rapidly to more than 70 men who each pay \$50 subscription.

"At first members come because they need a workshop. Then they ask what can I do to help?"

The members took on community projects including repairing a boat used to teach youngsters sailing at Fremantle Sailing Club. They also undertake furniture repairs and gardening projects.

They hold regular toy workshops. Last Father's day they held a workshop at Kings Park. Kids and parents made toys from parts that had been pre-cut at the shed.

"More than one thousand children got a toy and we used up every scrap of wood," said Bill.

The shed is much more than a workshop.

Boys come to the shed as part of the Education Department's Youth at Risk program. These are boys who have been expelled from school for disruptive behaviour. They range in age from 10 to 16.

Alan Gowland coordinates the shed and a teacher comes too, bringing tools and wood. The boys, who say they have retired from school, learn construction skills.

"They get a TAFE Certificate 1 in construction by stealth," said Bill. "Three have gone on to do pre-apprenticeship courses.

"It cuts both ways. The older guys better understand youths and the youths appreciate their skills and are prepared to follow the rules."

Older men recovering from depression are another group that use the shed. It helps ease them back into society.

The shed provides a non-threatening, non-institutional environment to connect to other people and community activities.

Another room is set aside

for computers. A Computing for Seniors class called "One Click At A Time" is held weekly. Women join in that activity.

"Seniors are often bypassed by computer technology. But they need email and word processing skills to keep in touch with their children and grandchildren," said Bill.

Other courses, financed by TAFE, include vehicle maintenance, local oral history and home maintenance, using tools and a Grancare course for grandparents who are acting as primary carers for their grandchildren.

The building is also used for a band practice and a men's group meeting.

The only threat facing the shed is the Education Department plans to sell the site for high density housing, but when that happens, the members have been promised alternative accommodation.

The wood workshop is open to members from Saturday to Wednesday. It is reserved for community activities on Thursday and Friday.

Bill says that 85 per cent of people who use the City of Fremantle community programs are women. So the City has funded a part time community liaison officer to engage more men through the shed.

"Men develop the self confidence to talk to each other and discuss men's issues such as prostate problems. Older men prefer informal learning," he said.

For more information, please contact Bob Johnstone on 9336 3959.