

## Men's Sheds adaptations for Shedders with visual disabilities

Whilst adaptations and assistive technologies are important to help those Shedders with visual disability, individual and Shed wide communication is critical so that the Shed remains a safe and enjoyable activity for individuals with visual impairments, and all other Shedders.

### Individual considerations:

- Discuss individual needs and preferences with any Shedders with visual disabilities to determine the most effective adaptations. Some suggestions as to how to approach this include:
  - A respectful question you might ask is, "*Would you mind sharing any specific ways the Shed can support your visual needs?*" This gives the person control over how much they'd like to share and invites them to communicate what's most helpful in the context.
  - If you're in a situation where understanding their vision capabilities would help you support them further, you might ask, "*Would it be helpful for you to describe how certain environments affect your vision or if there are adjustments that make things easier to see?*"
- If the individual is new to the Shed, then consider linking them with another Shedder (a "Buddy") until the individual is fully inducted to the Shed.
- Encourage the individual to share details of their eyesight with other Shedders to prevent any misunderstandings. Effective communication, including clear verbal cues and descriptive language, becomes paramount when interacting with people who are visually impaired.
- Don't be afraid of letting the individual undertake tasks – they may or will know their own capabilities but let them know support is there if required; this will develop optimal confidence.
- Discuss with the individual whether wearing a visually impaired badge may help. A visual impairment badge can help people know that they have sight loss and can communicate their situation with others.
- However - Some visually impaired people may feel embarrassed about wearing a "Visually Impaired" badge due to the stigma associated with blindness and disability. The badge may make them feel self-conscious and different, as it visibly marks them as having a disability. Additionally, some people might think that wearing a badge makes them appear less independent or capable. They may worry that others will perceive them as helpless or in need of continual support. This can be particularly difficult for those who are newly visually impaired.



Yellow badge, to be worn, labelled *VISUALLY IMPAIRED* - *Please be patient with me*. It has a universally recognised eye symbol as representing visual impairment

## Encourage regular eye exams amongst all Shedders:

- Encourage all other Shedders to undertake regular eye exams to monitor vision changes and adjust Shed adaptations as needed.
- The NHS recommends getting an eye exam every two years, but your optician may recommend more frequent visits, especially if you are aged 55 or over.
- Eye exams can help detect eye diseases like cataracts, glaucoma, and age-related macular degeneration, which can lead to vision loss.
- Eye exams can also identify warning signs of other conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular issues.

## Shedders:

Ask all Shedders

- To take note and always check with any Shedder with a visual impairment before they move larger items in the Shed around.
- To always return tools and other equipment to their normal place of storage or display.

**Remember that every Shed is different – the approach you take to adaptations will vary depending on what your members want and what works best for your Shed.**

**The following suggestions are not recommendations, and will vary depending on the individual circumstances of individual Shedders and the Shed, as well as affordability.**

Here are some suggestions for adaptations and assistive technologies to make a Men's Shed more accessible for individuals with visual disability.

## Lighting

- **Bright, focused light:** Ensure adequate lighting throughout the Shed, especially where tasks require precision. Consider using adjustable lighting fixtures or task lamps that can be directed onto specific work areas.
- **Avoid glare:** Minimise glare by using matte finishes on surfaces and avoiding reflective materials.
- **Natural light:** If possible, utilise natural light, but ensure it's not too bright or causing glare, at any time of day when the Shed is open.

Note – Whilst some people with visual impairment will appreciate well-lit areas, some people with visual impairments have increased sensitivity to light, making bright environments painful or overwhelming. For example, for people with conditions like cataracts or macular degeneration, bright light can cause discomfort and make it difficult to see due to glare.

## Tools and Equipment

- **Ergonomic tools:** Choose tools with large, easy-to-read labels and comfortable grips.
- **Magnifying glasses:** Provide magnifying glasses in various sizes and styles to assist with small tasks. Consider both handheld and table or bench mounted. Many table mounted magnifying glasses are fully adjustable for positioning and come with their own lighting. Ensure light switches are local to the magnifying glasses or fitted with a remote-control power switch. There are also electronic magnifying devices which may be useful. The Smart Magnifier or SeeingAI Apps may be useful.
- **Magnifying tools:** In addition to magnifying glasses, provide large-print rulers and other tools that enhance visual clarity.
- **High-contrast tools:** Use tools with contrasting colours to improve visibility.
- **Voice-activated tools:** Explore tools that can be controlled by voice commands, such as routers or table saws.

## Workspaces

- **Organised workspaces:** Keep workspaces clean and organised to reduce clutter and confusion, and to minimise hazards and to make finding tools easier. Make sure circulation routes in the room are obstacle free and remove any trailing flexes or wires.
- **Maintenance:** Rapidly fix any hazards in the Shed such as loose carpeting, flooring, or broken handrails on a staircase.
- **Contrast colours:** Use contrasting colours for work surfaces to enhance visibility.
- **Stairs:** Add reflective tape or coloured paint to the edge of each step so there is a clear demarcation of where each step ends as you descend.
- **Visual aids:** Graphic floor markers are a great way to communicate important information to Shedders in a way that's hard to miss. By placing markers on the floor, Sheds can indicate safe walking paths, areas where caution is required, or designated storage areas. This can improve safety and reduce the risk of accidents.
- **Sound deadening:** As people with absent or impaired vision use acoustic impressions much more, their sense of hearing may be better trained. Because of their increased dependence on auditory cues, it is important to ensure that, wherever possible, the noise from machines in the Shed is minimised.

## Safety

- **Safety glasses:** Ensure individuals with visual disability (and all Shedders) wear safety glasses to protect their eyes from flying debris. You may need to obtain specialised Over-the-Glasses Safety Glasses.
- **Clear pathways:** Maintain clear pathways throughout the Shed to avoid tripping hazards.
- **Safety training:** Provide specialised safety training to any individuals with visual impairments, emphasising the importance of using tools safely and being aware of potential hazards.
- **Tool Safety features:** Ensure that safety features like automatic shut-offs and guard rails are clearly marked and accessible.

## Additional considerations

- **Assistive technology:** Explore assistive technology options, such as screen readers or braille displays, that can be used in conjunction with woodworking and other tools.
- **Voice technology:** Solutions like Amazon Alexa or Google Home where Shedders can use this technology simply by using voice commands may be possible in some Sheds.
- **Tactile guides:** Incorporate tactile indicators or raised markings on equipment for easier navigation by touch.
- **Voice-activated tools:** Consider tools with voice commands or audio alerts to assist in guiding users during tasks. For example, you consider buying talking tape measures for the Shed.

By implementing these adaptations, you can create a Men's Shed that is more inclusive and accessible for individuals with visual disability.