

Your Stories:

SSI LAC participant builds community through men's shed

For many years, Foster Cortis was unemployed due to living with arthritis, a lung condition and chronic depression.

Through SSI's Local Area Coordination (LAC) program, he has achieved his goal to start his own men's shed, giving him a community and friendships.

Mr Cortis joined his first men's shed as part of a placement for his Youth Work Certificate and enjoyed the community spirit encouraging him to continue his engagement after completing his studies.

When Cumberland Council was formed in 2017, there wasn't a men's shed on the west side of the district, and some of Mr Cortis' friends volunteered to start one.



Cumberland Council's Mayor helped them secure a large house on a one-acre block, and within a month, the men's shed was up and running.

Mr Cortis' LAC, Oula Kabbara, provided him with social and logistical support and was crucial to his success. Over the course of a year, her compassion and encouragement helped him to build the confidence he needed to achieve his dream.

Since then, the West Cumberland Men's Shed has grown into a social enterprise that keeps broken household items out of landfill.

Its members restore, upcycle and recycle items from desk chairs to bathtubs. Mending belongings at little cost, members often only charge for materials and help individuals clear out garages and find new homes for old furniture.

The group is currently looking for funding to open a metal workshop to restore more items like wheelbarrows and cars.

"It's hard to sum up what we do. The best way to find out is to come and visit," said Mr Cortis.

Over the past few years, the men's shed has grown from three members to 45 and inclusive of all, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity and skill level. The only thing not welcome is bigotry, which Mr Cortis said people can "leave at the door."

The shed has evolved into a thriving oasis in the middle of suburbia, with kangaroos, bush turkeys and a large veranda for chats over coffee.

"Everyone supports everyone. If we don't see someone for a while, we check if they're okay."

"We encourage people to seek help if they need it. And everyone is welcome."

Mr Cortis recently started a women's program at the men's shed, creating an inclusive environment for women to learn and share skills.

"We teach people new skills from the ground up. They pick a project, and we show them everything they need to know."

"I love helping people. In 2017 you would have seen a man who was broken. But since then, I've felt better about myself. My life is completely turned around."



SSI is partnered with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to deliver LAC services in NSW.

As an LAC provider, SSI supports people aged 7 - 64 to access the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and other mainstream services in the community.

For more information and to find out if you're eligible for NDIS support visit our [LAC webpage](#).