



In Our Own Words

Tools for Self Reliance—Milton Keynes

In Our Own Words

is a series of reports written by people in Africa who have received assistance from Tools for Self Reliance, and by our volunteer groups across the UK.



Like the other 70 or so TFSR groups in the UK, we collect and refurbish old hand tools to make up into toolkits that are sent free of charge to craftspeople in developing countries.

Our group is special, though, because we are based in Camphill Milton Keynes, a working community based on sharing and involvement, for adults with learning difficulties (the Companions). Other practical activities that take place in the community include weaving, baking, cooking, and organic market gardening. The community has a strong ethos of self reliance - they grow much of their own food and construct most of their own buildings.

Of the 44 Companions who currently live in Camphill MK, about 30 work some of the time in the Tools workshop. They take part in one or more of the nine refurbishing sessions held each week.

Above: Some members of Tools for Self Reliance Milton Keynes [TFSR (MK)] with a completed builder's tool kit ready for shipping to Uganda.

Below: TFSR (MK) group member Helen cleans rust from a hammer head using a wire brush.



Tools for Self Reliance, Netley Marsh, Southampton SO40 7GY

Tel : 023 8086 9697 Email : info@tfsr.org

Registered Charity number 280437

Camphill co-workers, mostly long term volunteers from around the world, also help in the tools workshop. Volunteers from the local area work in the workshop one evening per week.

It can take hours of patient, skilful work to transform a neglected, rusty old saw, chisel or hammer into a 'good as new' tool.

Most of the rust-removal work is done by hand with abrasive paper or a wire brush. Once the tool is cleaned up, wooden handles receive a coat of linseed oil, and the metal parts are either oiled or painted. The quality of the final result is very important to us.

"Usually a tool takes a few days", said John Woollard, one of the companions who has been coming to the workshop for five years, "But sometimes it takes a couple of weeks if the tool is particularly difficult."

After they have been cleaned and oiled, tools such as planes, chisels, saws and drill-bits need to be sharpened. Much of this work is done by the evening volunteers, who also carry out repairs such as fitting replacement wooden handles to chisels and hammers.



When each tool is finished, its sharp edges are wrapped in newspaper for safety, and the tools are stored on racks ready to be packed up into kits.

Right (top): TFSR (MK) chairman Bill puts the finishing touches to a chisel using a water-cooled sharpening wheel.

Right : the workshop is highly organized! For every type of tool we have a box for unrefurbished tools and another box for tools ready to pack.

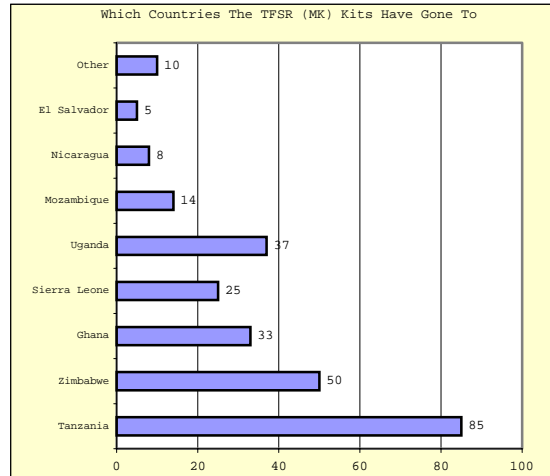
Below: before and after. Tools in the condition that they enter the workshop (left) and how they leave it (right).



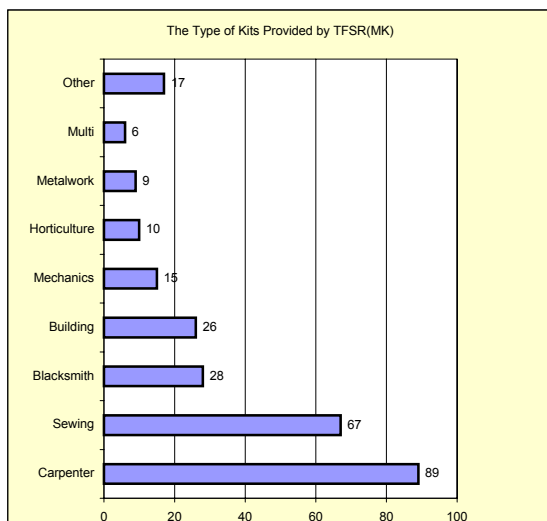
Something that marks TFSR (MK) out from most other UK groups is that it is run as an independent company with registered charity status, employing two full time staff, David Webb the Project Manager, and Steven Brewer, the Workshop Assistant. TFSR (MK) is closely linked to the UK's national TFSR charity, who nominate one board member and receive at least 80% of the workshop's output of refurbished tools.

From time to time, TFSR (MK) responds to direct requests from other charities for toolkits to help people in need around the world. We have sent builder's and carpenter's toolkits to El Salvador and Nicaragua to help people rebuild their homes after natural disasters, and horticultural tools to families in Kosovo returning to their homes after armed conflicts.

Our workshop has been running for 12 years, during which time we've refurbished about 20,000 tools. We celebrated our 200th toolkit in the year 2000, and are now well on the way to our 300th. Last year we shipped 12 carpenter's kits, 4 mechanic's kits, 4 builder's kits, 3 sewing kits, 2 metal-worker's kits, 2 bicycle mechanic's kits, 1 blacksmith's kit, and 1 mason's kit.



Above: volunteer Syd uses the shot-blasting cabinet to clean a badly rusted tool.



We originally started in an unheated garage, then spent a couple of years working in an upstairs room with a low ceiling and bouncy floor, but for the last 6 years have been based in a large, warm, well equipped ground floor workshop.

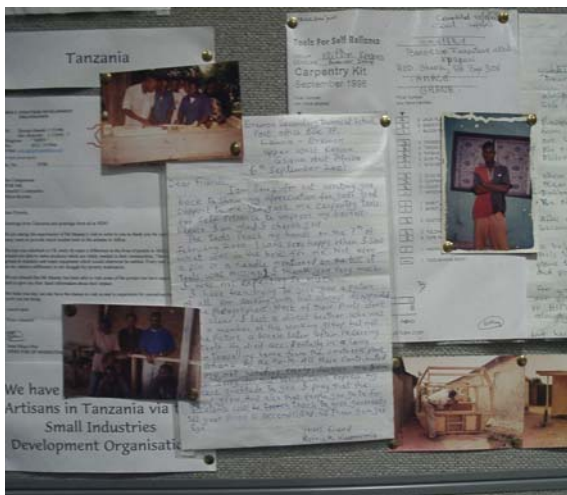
Over the years, the workshop has become much more 'professional', with power tools to speed up crate-making and an industrial shot-blasting machine to deal with very fiddly or difficult de-rusting jobs.

Old rusty tools, our 'raw materials', are donated by local people. Rotary groups

have been enormously helpful in organising tool collections for the workshop. Some tools (such as anvils) are rarely donated and have to be bought. Some other components of tools kits, such as new hacksaw blades, also have to be purchased to complete the kits.

Although Camphill Milton Keynes provides the workshop building, the running costs of the workshop such as staff wages and equipment purchase and repairs also have to be paid for. TFSR (MK) raises a little money by selling refurbished tools which are unsuitable for inclusion in the kits, such as garden shears, but much of the funding to run the workshop comes in donations. We have had significant support from several charitable trusts, and have received support from Narita, a UNESCO women's group in Japan, for the past five years.

Occasionally we receive letters and photographs from craftspeople who are using the tools we have sent. Our efforts to recycle unwanted tools in our own country and increase our own skills and self reliance are rewarded by news of how the kits have helped people in other countries to help themselves.



Above: tool refurbishers at work. There are usually about 10 of the 40 TFSR (MK) volunteers working in the workshop at any one session.

Below: TFSR (MK) project manager David services an electric sewing machine. Sewing machine kits make up a significant proportion of TFSR (MK)'s output.

Left: feedback from groups of artisans who are using the toolkits we have sent.



Tools for Self Reliance Milton Keynes: registered office 7, Sterling Close, Pennyland, Milton Keynes MK15 8AN, UK. 01908 670825. The project manager is David Webb. Email david@tfsr-mk.org.uk Registered charity number 1017363.