

## Tackling poverty and teaching skills with MEDITE SMARTPLY



The New Community Men's Shed, a social enterprise established in May 2019 teaches joinery skills using SMARTPLY OSB to male refugees in Waterford, Ireland.

Members are drawn from the Viking House Direct Provision Centre for refugees in Waterford and are encouraged to engage in team joinery activities to build not only skills and useful items, but new connections too.

"Refugees are among the most vulnerable groups in our community," said Frank Kennedy, Manager at the Men's Shed, "They arrive in the UK with few to no connections to their host community, little English language speaking ability and are most likely to enter a cycle of poverty which may last for generations. We think that we can prevent this by engaging them in a Men's Shed."

Members are encouraged to engage in 30 hours or more of group activities at the Shed, during which time they'll build items of furniture and also learn basic English through immersion in the language.

"We try to create an informal environment- this is a place to relax as much as it is to learn and focus the mind on productive activities," explains Frank. "However, our golden rule is that English must be spoken at all times. This way, the members learn because they simply must- much as they would have to without the

Shed. The difference is, we're a friendly, safe space, where they can ask questions."

### Why SMARTPLY OSB?

"The members may want to learn joinery when they come here; they also may not," said Frank. "The point of getting them all to participate in joinery as a group is that it's an activity where they work with their hands, where they will need to communicate with one another to make a group project work. New skills are learned along the way.

"SMARTPLY OSB has helped us bring the team together in that it's a strong, structural material that is both hardwearing and cost effective for the members to practice with. SMARTPLY OSB is a strong, quality material and being very close to the SMARTPLY factory here in Waterford, we are luckily able to source more directly from SMARTPLY fairly regularly.

"It's also important to us that SMARTPLY is a local Irish manufacturer and brand. As a company they're a big local employer and their ethos of supporting their community reflects our own."

SMARTPLY OSB has also proven ideal for this application in that it is manufactured with zero added formaldehyde, making it one of the safest OSB panels to cut and work with by hand, and is sustainably produced.

## Life after the Shed

After 30 hours participation in the Shed activities, Frank and his management team are able to better understand members' abilities, their interests and what they find challenging. "After getting to know the members, we are able to use our connections within the community to secure appropriate work-based courses for them in their chosen trades, or tutors to teach programming, MS Office and computerised accounts. In the past, members have studied anything from forklift operation, barista training and hairdressing to painting and decorating, photography and horticulture."

Find out more about SMARTPLY OSB here:  
[mdfosb.com/en/smartply/products/smartply-osb3](http://mdfosb.com/en/smartply/products/smartply-osb3)

Keep up with the New Community Med's Shed on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/waterfordcitymensshed](http://www.facebook.com/waterfordcitymensshed)

To keep up with a growing demand for computer-based training, the New Community Men's Shed is searching for donations of working used laptops. Be in touch with Frank if you have items to donate: [Kennedy.frank@outlook.com](mailto:Kennedy.frank@outlook.com)

