

# DIRECTION FOR BEDFORDSHIRE

## APRIL 2020



**Direction**  
for Bedfordshire

## DIGITAL NETWORKING FORUMS

Direction for Bedfordshire was created under a two-strand vision: firstly, to connect individuals who engage with/are at risk of criminality with services that can help them get back on track; secondly to promote better partnership working in Bedfordshire and connect services with each other.

While COVID-19 has limited our work engaging directly with service users, we have been using this time to virtually connect our various partners across the county. By using Zoom we have now hosted 3 Digital Networking Forums for the local authority areas: Luton, Central Bedfordshire and Bedford. We received a wide range of interest with 20 different services and organisations attending across the three forums. This gave partners from across the sector an opportunity to discuss how their service delivery has changed due to COVID-19, what is working well, and what issues or concerns they're facing. We are really pleased with the feedback we have received; with partners feeling how more connected they are at a time where we are all distanced.

We are going to continue these forums during isolation on a bi-weekly basis so that we keep supporting each other. We have also decided to host two forums moving forward for the North and South of Bedfordshire. We welcome people to join one or both as they see fit.

**Please get in touch via phone or email if you would like to join the future forums.**

This newsletter is an overview and update for partners of all that has been going on with regards to the Direction for Bedfordshire Offender Hub in April 2020.

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The end of April 2020 marks 44 days since Direction for Bedfordshire made the decision to work from home and isolate against COVID-19. Like everyone, this has meant we have had to adapt the way we work to ensure that we can deliver the most effective service for the public and our partners across the county. As always, we are being as flexible as possible to use our resources in the best way for the benefit of those in need.

## So, what have we been up to:

- Working from home has meant we have been continually innovative to keep up our two-pronged service delivery for service users and partner organisations across Bedfordshire. We have been operating in a non-direct manner and making full use of the virtual world by keeping in touch via **phone, email and video conferencing with Zoom**. We have updated our website directory to ensure that all contact details are correct, and have also added new service in the process – now 203 services across 10 pathway needs.
- COVID-19 has increased the vulnerabilities of the population as a whole, and so we wanted our service delivery to reflect this by expanding our usual working remit. At this difficult time, we are happy to be contacted by anyone who needs support getting in touch with services. We have connections and knowledge spanning the whole county; so, if we do not have an initial answer or solution, we have the capacity to make enquiries to find services that understand an individual's needs. **Please spread the word and all our contact platforms are overleaf.**
- We have continued to support the bi-weekly **RAG meetings** with the **Integrated Offender Management** teams in Luton and Bedford. These meetings assess individuals across various pathways to rate their engagement and progress. External agencies such as ResoLUTiONS/P2R, KeyStage Housing and Reactiv8 also attend these meetings to contribute on the engagement they have received from individuals, to corroborate with the comments from the IOM Police and Probation Officers. This is to ensure that a holistic picture is given of an individual so that discussions can be effective in moving them forward. Direction for Bedfordshire support these meetings by using our knowledge and contacts to signpost the nominals to services that can work on issue areas that are highlighted. This month we have been able to connect the Luton team with a representative from Luton Job Centre who will regularly attend the meetings going forward to give an update on individual's engagement with Universal Credit and job seeking.

# CASE STUDY

We received a referral from Luton NPS regarding a 18yo service user "Jacob". "Jacob" had been housed in a new area where he didn't know anybody and he had no money, food or essential household items. We immediately contacted his local foodbank who were able to help him with an emergency food delivery and also advised him on where to go the following day for more supplies. We then advised his Probation Officer on how to get a grant from the **Vicar's Relief Fund**, which successfully helped to purchase "Jacob" essential household items. The Vicar's Relief fund is run by the charity **St Martin in the Fields**. They can provide emergency grants of up to £150 for basic essentials, £400 for overcoming barriers to support, and £1000 for securing accommodation. Without the grant, "Jacob" would not have been able to fund everything he really needed. We were also able to help "Jacob" get his Universal Credit application processed very quickly, and arranged for him to get an advance on his payments of £200 – many thanks to **Bedford Job Centre** for helping us with this. Realising that "Jacob" may need a bit more of a helping hand with how to deal with this new tenancy and his bills, we have put his Probation Officer in touch with a floating support service who will be able to help him going forward. From start to finish, this referral took us 3 days to deal with, and we are pleased to have helped a young person get back on his feet after being homeless and starting from very little.

- Direction for Bedfordshire were asked by the National Probation Service to look at what additional housing provision could be sourced in Bedfordshire, for those people being released from prison with no fixed abode during the COVID 19 crisis. We were able to quickly use our contacts to find that there were options available if needed, and to put the new regional **HMPPS Homelessness Prevention Team** in contact with those providers. We are now also working with Bedford Borough Council to find resettlement accommodation for homeless people within their area, who are currently being housed in hotels. It is more important than ever that people are safely housed at this time, and we are working hard to help those trying to achieve that.
- Amongst the various attendees to our **Digital Networking Forums** was **Susan Lousada, the newly appointed High Sheriff of Bedfordshire**. Her role is to act as the Queen's representative for Law and Order in the county. Her role would normally involve meeting people in the public and thanking them for their service. As this is not currently possible, she has set up a website, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram to stay connected with the community. She is also happy to use these platforms to amplify the messages of the service sector. The High Sheriff wanted to **extend her thanks to all the work that is being done during this testing time to support the vulnerable**.
- We are now at a point where a big focus for us is analysing and discussing **how we safely and effectively return to direct, face to face contact with service users**, as the lockdown is lifted. Normally around 50% of our referrals are from self-referrals through our drop-in session work, so we want to ensure that we can return to this service delivery as soon as it is safe to do so. As we work collaboratively with partners from all over the county it is vital that we all coordinate our transition back to previous working practices, so that vulnerable individuals can be engaged. This therefore emphasises the importance of the Digital Networking Forums, so we can **stay connected and pre-plan a holistic approach in returning the Bedfordshire service sector back to normality**. To support this notion, please get in touch if your service needs any of our **leaflets or posters** – we can get these posted to you.

*"What a great way to bring us all together to hear about such wonderful support that's available"*  
SSG Services

*"It was great to hear how other organisations are coping with the COVID-19"*  
Penrose

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