

DIRECTION FOR BEDFORDSHIRE

MAY 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 are hosting two forums to cover the North and South areas of Bedfordshire. We have received a wide range of interest with 20+ different services and organisations attending across the two forums. This gives 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.

As things are slowing down, it was decided that we change the frequency of the forums to every 3-4 weeks. This will be reviewed if there are any major Government announcements. We want to ensure that the forums stay relevant, effective and useful for all of those involved.

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 May 2020.

Written and Edited by: Lauren Cox (Offender Hub Coordinator, YouTurn Futures)

Direction for Bedfordshire Coordinators: Lauren Cox and Emma Freeman

As many of you know, Direction for Bedfordshire is delivered by YouTurn Futures on behalf of the Police and Crime Commissioner, Kathryn Holloway. We are very keen to make sure that both YouTurn Futures and Direction for Bedfordshire makes a difference. We have just completed and published our Impact Report showing what we have achieved, and how our work has made a difference. You can access a copy of the Impact report on the Direction for Bedfordshire website or by clicking on this hyperlink <https://directionforbedfordshire.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/YouTurn-Impact-Report-2019-2020-V3.pdf>

So, what have we been up to:

- 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.**
- To increase the accessibility and ease of use of the Direction for Bedfordshire website, **search and translation features** have now been added. The search bar can be used for keywords that are included in the short bio. of the 203 listed services. This is to save time for users who know exactly what kind of service they need, without scrolling through the large directory. The translation feature is essential to cater for the diverse community in Bedfordshire, so that information is available for all. Please promote this feature to any service users for whom English is not their first language, so they can get in touch with professionals.
- We had a virtual meeting with **The Forward Trust** this month to learn more about the work they do with ex-offenders and those in recovery from substance misuse. It is really encouraging to hear that 35% of their staff have lived experience so they have an informed practice and mission. They are a merger of the previous RAPt and Blue Sky, with the majority of their work being delivered as recovery programmes inside prisons. Within the community they have projects that promote employment and enterprise. Their usual service delivery would typically be out of reach for Bedfordshire service users without reliable transport. However, COVID-19 has meant that they have had to move their employment courses online, starting initially with customer service skills. We will keep up a working relationship and refer any relevant service users to get support with these areas.

CASE STUDIES

All names have been changed to protect the service user's identity

“Jason was due to be released from prison and was going to be homeless, without a mobile phone or any face to face contact with his Probation Officer for nearly a week. We were able to get him a mobile phone and made sure that he could receive it on the day of his release, to give Jason the best chance of adhering to his appointments after release and making a new start.”

“Lee was on bail for a serious offence, and he wasn't engaging well with any professionals involved in his case; who were concerned that he was at risk of committing other offences. As we are an independent and confidential service, Lee was happy to engage with us. We were able to discuss his situation, help him identify what he needed, and then got him access to support; including mentoring from **Reactiv8**.”

“Thomas had been housed in Flitwick but had very minimal furniture. We informed his Probation Officer of the **Vicar's Relief Fund** to be given a grant to furnish the property. When contacting the **Bedford Foodbank** for ideas of furniture donation services in that area, they passed us on to Gordon at **The Need Project**. Gordon was extremely helpful and provided multiple essential items. The generosity from donation services in this case meant that an application was not necessary to the Vicar's Relief Fund.”



- There have been some interesting common themes that have arisen from our Digital Networking Forums. Firstly, there is an overall decrease in referrals across the voluntary sector. This includes domestic abuse services, which raised a lot of concern as figures would suggest that cases of domestic abuse have increased during lockdown. Most services receive majority of their referrals via face to face interaction, so the absence of this means that services are possibly not reaching all of those in need during this time. As a result of this, there is a general feeling and anxiety that there will be an influx of referrals as lockdown restrictions ease. This, paired with social distancing measures, means that it will definitely be a tough road getting back to full service delivery. Therefore, we need to support each other in any way that we can, and sustain our efforts to stay connected in the coming months. On the other hand, there were some positive working practices to be noted from utilising more remote platforms. Some services were going to be reflecting on the way they have been currently interacting with service users, and incorporate these into their normal service delivery. Services that cover a wide geographical area have noticed that their productivity would increase by using phone and video calls for some appointments, rather than spending valuable time driving to and from various locations.
- As Government announcements and guidelines are put in place to ease lockdown restrictions, Direction for Bedfordshire are looking ahead to ways of resuming normal service delivery in the safest and most effective way. We appreciate that all the different partner agencies that we deliver drop-in sessions within, will have their own risk assessments for their service building and service users. Many organisations will be using a phased approach where initially they will solidify arrangements for staff to return to the office, and following that would be a phased return of limited numbers of service users entering the building. At this stage Direction for Bedfordshire would like to make our service available for **virtual drop-in sessions via video conferencing**, for those who need signposting and information support. We want to use this technology to bridge the gap of no face to face contact with the public during lockdown; while still adhering to social distancing measures.

“The digital forums have provided further insight to the wonderful people and services available to help such a vast range of people, which lead to an idea about sharing providers & services in the county in an innovative way to encourage engagement and support.”
SSG Services

“Yes, I really do find the forums a chance to speak to like-minded individuals during these difficult times. Also, if a referral comes in, I know where to go to for help and advice. It never ceases to amaze me how much great work is being done by different organisations. FYI, you get a mention at our Skype meetings and I would use these sessions as good standard ways of working in these difficult times.”
Project NOVA

PHONE:
0800 917 5579

WEBSITE:

<https://directionforbedfordshire.co.uk/>

EMAIL:

info@directionforbedfordshire.co.uk

TWITTER:

[@Direction4Beds](https://twitter.com/Direction4Beds)

<https://twitter.com/Direction4Beds>

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