

DIRECTION FOR BEDFORDSHIRE

JUNE 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 June 2020.

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

Direction for Bedfordshire Coordinators: Lauren Cox and Emma Freeman

We are now half way through 2020 and if you asked at the start of the year how it was going to pan out, no one would have expected the situation we've found ourselves in. However, the continuously high morale and momentum of all Bedfordshire partners to support each other and their clients, whilst managing the personal struggles that COVID-19 has brought, must be noted. Direction for Bedfordshire have been working to ensure that people still feel connected during this isolated time, and we look forward to continuing these positive working relationships as we slowly transition back to more direct service delivery.

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.**
- We attended the **Luton Against Sexual Exploitation (LASE) Meeting** which brings together various partners that support women in the commercial sex trade. This highlighted the stark need for clear government directions for COVID-19, as unclear guidelines do not work well with these women and with the Luton community as a whole, as many of our vulnerable will be putting themselves at risk. It was felt that the relaxation of lockdown rules was putting people at more risk, as they are not being cautious or social distancing. The quality of the lungs and hearts of these women put them at further risk of COVID-19, and with emergency housing now coming to an end there is a definite feeling that this vulnerable group and others will only become more vulnerable.
- We have been working closely with **Reactiv8** this month, who have been providing housing throughout lockdown for prison leavers and other vulnerable people to help prevent homelessness. We have attended their accommodation to introduce our service to the residents, and are now working with several of them to support them move forward with their lives. We look forward to continuing to support Reactiv8 with their endeavour, and we especially love their positive outlook to empower people! Direction have also been supporting them in this initiative by finding donated furniture for these new properties, and linking them with a delivery driver to collect these items. COVID-19 is continually showing the generosity of the communities in Bedfordshire who have really helped those in need.
- **TheInformationHub** run by **Unlock** has been added to our Direction for Bedfordshire online directory. This comprehensive self-help resource has information on a wide range of issues that criminal convictions can affect. Many people are aware that this can affect employment, and need to know how/what to disclose when applying for jobs. Other impacted areas of life that they not be so widely known include insurance, travelling abroad, housing, further education etc. and this website will give further information around these areas.

CASE STUDIES

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

"We received two referrals this month from **Squared** residents who wanted to make positive use of their time and get involved in volunteering. They both had an interest being outside and doing activities with their hands. We linked them with the **Penrose Roots** project who are currently working with volunteers in the community gardens. This opportunity not only gives individuals a positive way to spend their time, but it is a good mental health activity and gives back to the community."

"Jane was relocating from Luton to start afresh in Milton Keynes, so her probation officer contacted Direction for Bedfordshire to see if we could help with finding free or low-cost furnishings for her new property. As Jane was still under Bedfordshire probation services, we were able to help. We linked her with various different services including **MK Storehouse**, **Re-Use** and **AgeUK Kiln Farm**. As she was moving to a completely new area, we also signposted her probation officer to make a referral with **Connect Support** who can provide community floating support in Milton Keynes."

"James had recently been released from a long prison sentence and was living back in the family home with this wife. His probation officer got in touch as the couple were finding it difficult to adjust to this situation, and were looking for some counselling. We initially passed on the link for **Click Relationships** so they could access their listening service. We made enquiries with **Relate** to see if there were any free sessions available, and we were able to pass on details to probation about what could be offered if they were to fund an initial assessment and four sessions. The couple would be able to construct some strategies for understanding each other better. We also signposted to **MIND** so that if couple's counselling was out of the question due to cost, they could still access counselling on an individual basis."

- We built a new relationship with JP Smith who started Boxing Luton and is now working on **Boxing Saves Lives**. His work over the years has highlighted how important boxing can be for young people, those at risk of criminality, and individuals who suffer with poor mental health. He is currently working with the OPCC and uploading YouTube videos with the James Campbell collective. His goal is to work towards a Boxing Bursary that can help disadvantaged people access the sport as a reactive and preventative resource to reduce offending, learn discipline, and be part of a positive community.
- We supported **SSG Training** with their work on getting various Bedfordshire partners to be Virtual Guest Speakers, and even had a slot ourselves. Normally they would bring guest speakers into their classrooms so that candidates were aware of the support available for various needs. They therefore were innovative to produce guest speaker videos to ensure that candidates still got this support while remote working.
- **BeNCH CRC** and **NPS** are two of our biggest referral routes, so we wanted to touch base with the teams once again so all team members were aware of our service and felt confident to contact us if they, or their service user, needed any signposting support. We attended team meetings for both Luton teams so that any questions could be answered, and so that we could market ourselves again after being less visible during lockdown. Once dates can be arranged, we will do the same for the Bedford teams.
- Similarly, with the work we are doing with Reactiv8's housing in Bedford we want to mirror this service in Luton for **Keystage Housing**. We have previously been delivering bi-weekly sessions in their HARRP property but we want to extend this service to work to their other residents. Our meeting with them this month brought out some really good ideas; including working together on a monthly induction so that residents are aware of Direction for Bedfordshire from the outset of their tenancy. We want to be a more readily available resource for the residents, so that we can also support the staff with their ever-growing workload.
- We had a really helpful meeting with **People Plus** and the new Learning and Skills Manager at **HMP Bedford**. Joanna from PP works to dispel myths amongst smaller local employers to encourage them to employ offenders. Direction for Bedfordshire have noticed that there is a service gap within the community for linking offenders with employers and providing them support to sustain employment, and therefore we wanted to know more about support that is already given in this area. Jamie is new to his role at HMP Bedford and is looking to get Direction for Bedfordshire more involved with the residents. They host a weekly residents council which we would look to attend in the future to engage with representatives of the prison population. The prison conducts a Learning Skills Analysis to collate the opinions of the residents so they are providing the most effective education courses. We also hope to have a promotional video on Way Out TV inside the prison so that the residents can be more familiar with our service.
- With employment in mind as a key part in rehabilitation, we have been having conversations with organisations who provide bespoke employment support for offenders and vulnerable individuals. We want to know what is already out there and how we can incorporate this support in Bedfordshire. We appreciate that there is a wealth of support to get individuals work ready, but we now want to progress this further so that people are seeking appropriate employment and staying in it.

"Today's forum
was really
useful"

ResoLUTions

"It was great
to be a part of
yesterday's
forum"

NACRO



YouTurn

Restore, Reform & Reintegrate



Bedfordshire
Police & Crime
Commissioner

PHONE:

0800 917 5579

WEBSITE:

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

EMAIL:

info@directionforbedfordshire.co.uk

TWITTER:

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

<https://twitter.com/Direction4Beds>

FACEBOOK:

[@direction4beds](https://www.facebook.com/direction4beds)

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