

DIRECTION FOR BEDFORDSHIRE

JULY 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 July 2020.

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As restrictions and guidelines continue to relax, with the conflicting information of a looming second wave of COVID-19, it is definitely a difficult and confusing time for everyone. Partners across Bedfordshire are working tirelessly to keep the most vulnerable individuals in our communities safe and engaged, while juggling the personal stresses and strains this pandemic has brought with it. Direction for Bedfordshire have witnessed first-hand how partners from different service remits in the voluntary and statutory sectors have pulled together for support during this challenging time. We look forward to keeping up this momentum as we phase into the 'new normal' to make Bedfordshire an even stronger collaborative network.

So, what have we been up to:

- Early this month we attended the **GamCare** training which highlighted the often-hidden harms problem gambling causes to women and young people. We must remember that gambling is not just centred around money; commercial sexual exploitation means that women can use their bodies as something of value to gamble with, and prisoners can gamble with prohibited items that are of value in that setting. While popular sports such as boxing, football and horse racing promote gambling as a fun social activity amongst men, there are many hidden risks that lead women and young people to get into problem gambling. GamCare therefore understand these risks and work with not only those who have a problem with gambling, but also their loved ones that are negatively affected by this addiction. If you are working with anyone who may be showing signs of problem gambling, please get in touch so we can link you with GamCare for support.
- **SMART Prebend Centre** are currently running services at the hotel in Bedford where numerous homeless people have been supported into accommodation throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been an overall success for many and has improved their future outlook towards a more stable lifestyle. It is often a challenging time for individuals to transition towards independence and reduce the support they receive. *Direction for Bedfordshire* are keen promote our service to as many professionals as possible so that we can signpost people to other opportunities and agencies that can help with specific challenges when they move on from supported accommodation.
- We met a Community Wellbeing Champion from **Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity**. They offer a Social Prescription service in Bedford and surrounding areas. It was great to be able to share ideas about what is currently going on in Bedford and how we can help people. We continue to work in partnership to make sure that all of our service users get the most appropriate support for their needs.
- We also attended a webinar on criminal records by **Unlock**, which clearly explained and demonstrated the different types of DBS checks, and defined spent and unspent convictions. It gave the various professionals in attendance a better understanding of how to support service users who have criminal records when they want to get back into employment.

CASE STUDIES

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

This month we were contacted by a Luton Probation Officer who needed information on Bedford food banks for a service user who had been housed in Bedford. We were able to provide her the information for the **Trussell Trust Foodbanks**, and also the **Dine with Us Community Fridge** which is a great service in Bedford. [Direction for Bedfordshire are now a Bedford Foodbanks Referral Agency. Please contact us if you need vouchers.](#)

"Sean had recently been released from prison and was struggling with his mental health and feeling isolated. He was particularly concerned about the reduced amount of benefits he was receiving compared to what he was in receipt of prior to custody; which meant he could not afford to do certain things that had previously helped his wellbeing. We made an enquiry with the **Job Centre** who confirmed that he was in the process of being assessed, and when chasing up the decision, they were hopeful that he would get an increased payment once the decision was confirmed. We relayed the information to Sean and he was thankful, saying "You've done more for me in the last hour than anyone I've asked in the last 6 months". Sometimes, a small thing can go a long way to make a real difference. We will stay in touch with Sean and support him until he gets the help he needs.

"Jamie wanted to move out of Luton to get away from bad influences that previously led to offending, and make a better future for his young children. He has family caring responsibilities, so wanted to find out his options for moving to a neighbouring area. We got in touch with **Amicus** who has a number of properties in Central Bedfordshire and they sent over a referral form. Jamie's Probation Officer unfortunately was on leave for some weeks, and so to avoid delay we completed the form with him over the phone; as he often does not feel confident when filling out documents alone. Jamie really appreciated this gesture and was grateful that we were able to get this process moving for him."

"Thanks again for the forum, as always very beneficial to hear what's going on within the area"
SSG Training



YouTurn
Restore, Reform & Reintegrate



- We linked up with the manager for the **Probation Peer Mentoring Scheme** after reading about their impact on service users who are particularly hard to engage with; due to their chaotic lifestyles, attitude or behaviour. They can work with both BeNCH CRC and NPS to pair service users with peer mentors who have personal experience of the Criminal Justice System. The mentor can empathise with the individual to create a trusting relationship outside of the statutory supervision from a probation officer; which in turn can improve engagement with other services. We are working with the IOM teams to increase the number of local people that are referred into this valuable scheme, and hope to see some good results very soon.
- We attended the **Bedfordshire Child Exploitation Briefing Session** to learn more about the Home Office CE Disruption Toolkit. This national overview was presented by CYP First's Andy Thompson and Helen Matthews, and gave detail of how acts of child exploitation need to be disrupted, rather than criminalising the children. Many Orders, Warning Notices and Cautions were highlighted that take the onus from the child onto the abuser; interrupting acts of exploitation and making them more difficult to occur. On a local level there was information shared about Bedfordshire's Child Exploitation Tool which is for complete multi-agency use. An update was also given around the exploitation picture in Central Bedfordshire, and how contextual safeguarding is used to look at the bigger picture surround vulnerable young people. [Direction for Bedfordshire](#) value training courses such as this as it enhances our understanding of this issue in our local area. Child exploitation may not always fall under our remit, but if we were to encounter it, then we would have a better understanding of who to get in touch with and how the situation should be handled.
- Our Digital Networking Forums consistently spark effective discussion points, and most recently the attendees at our latest **Bedfordshire South Forum** were concerned around the **spike in COVID-19 cases in Luton**. It was discussed that the most at risk areas could be facing a spike due to the lack of information and guidance available in languages other than English. Luton is a multi-cultural area and with that we must ensure that all communities are receiving the right support. It was agreed that partners would work to promote and distribute various translations of the COVID-19 information on their social media, with service users and the wider community. These messages must be made easily accessible, and therefore available in corner shops, faith buildings, the town centre etc. so that all ages in the community are keeping themselves safe. We want to ensure that these hard to reach groups are not left out and are fully informed. [Please get in touch if you need access to any of these translations.](#)
- At the latest **Bedfordshire North Forum**, there was representation from **Bedford JCP** who gave an update on the different types of government funding that has been allocated to the DWP. There is a particular focus on ensuring that young people are not at a disadvantage in the aftermath of COVID-19, to enter the workplace and sustain employment. The Work and Health Programme has widened its criteria due to increased unemployment, including eligibility for ex-offenders. They recognise that there is a gap in Bedfordshire for specialised Job Coaches and employment services that understand the barriers that vulnerable individuals face, and they want to improve this; particularly improving engagement with female offenders. This large-scale funding means that Bedford JCP are looking to work in partnership with organisations to effectively deliver these new initiatives, and welcome conversations to build effective packages of support.

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