

# DIRECTION FOR BEDFORDSHIRE SEPTEMBER 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.

COVID-19 limited our face to face engagement with both partners and service users, and one solution to this was 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 time has gone on, we have changed the frequency of the forums and they currently run every 4-5 weeks. This is constantly reviewed in line with partners transitioning back into more direct service delivery with clients. 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 September 2020.

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September marks six months since normal life in the UK was turned upside down, and we all had to adapt to a new way of working. It has been a challenging time, and with recent news of restrictions possibly lasting another six months, we definitely still have a long way to go. The needs and vulnerabilities of our clients across Bedfordshire have increased massively, and the wider public have faced challenges that many have not seen before. While many things may be uncertain *Direction for Bedfordshire* are confident in the support that we can provide, and in the dedication of all the partner agencies in the county to take these testing times in their stride. Partnership working has excelled over the course of the year and we are really pleased to be able to create links between professionals wherever we can.

## So, what have we been up to:

- This month we started back with some face to face interactions with **Keystage Housing service users**. We have been engaging with a number of residents during lockdown and remote contact was sometimes difficult to upkeep. This inconsistent contact hindered the relationship between *Direction for Bedfordshire* and the service users, and limited the progress we could make in signposting them to support. We therefore organised safe socially distanced drop-in sessions to regain those relationships, and put some action in place. We also introduced the service to residents who had not yet engaged with us.
- *Direction for Bedfordshire* will be hosting another **drop-in session at SMART Prebend, Mercure Hotel in Bedford**. SMART have been supporting everyone who have been temporarily accommodated at the hotel throughout lockdown, in order to prevent homelessness. Drop-in sessions have been a key element of direct, effective engagement with service users for *Direction*, to break down barriers and promote our support to those who need it. Anyone staying at the hotel is welcome to come to this session, so please feel free to contact us for any further details if you're working with any of the residents.
- We were invited to present to the **Luton Vulnerable Women's Group** who work in partnership to support women who may have substance misuse issues, are homeless or are engaged in the commercial sex trade. *Direction for Bedfordshire* can support these professionals by using our capacity to provide or research answers to enquiries that the group are presented with. The women that the group support are some of the most vulnerable in the community, which means the professionals have intensive workloads. If we can ease that load in any way then we are always happy to help. Where we can engage directly with service users, then we want to encourage that, but in cases where an individual is quite vulnerable and already engaging with a number of professionals, then we want to lend our support to the services that are already making positive contact.
- **Embrace: Child Victims of Crime** have been delivering a series of webcasts this month around topics like keeping children safe from cyber-crime, and disrupting gang culture to prevent knife crime. The guest speakers were extremely insightful and raised practical points to move forward with.

# CASE STUDIES

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

"Jamie was unhappy with his living situation and wanted to move out of Luton to get away from the bad influences that previously led to his offending, and make a better future for his young children. He has family caring responsibilities and so wanted to find out what options we available to move 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 two weeks, and so to avoid delay, we asked if Jamie would be comfortable completing the over the phone with us; as he said 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 started for him. This built a stronger relationship with the service user and gave extra value to *Direction for Bedfordshire* from a Probation perspective."

"A huge thank you for your support and input. It has been so helpful to have an organisation out there can pull together and navigate areas we have little knowledge of."  
NPS

"Thanks for the help again it has been invaluable"  
BeNCH CRC

"Thank you for your support and your time!"  
Service User

"Thank you for your commitment, this wouldn't have happened without you"  
Service User

"As an Offender Manager I really cannot express enough gratitude and all the help you set up."  
NPS

"Well done to you guys for bringing us all together. There are people out there that I wouldn't have connected without this forum"  
Penrose Roots

"It has been brilliant being part of the forums"  
The Like Me CIC

- **Luton Jobcentre Plus** have recently introduced a **Women's Forum** made up of partners working with women and families in the area. This is to explore how to support women in our local community, particularly concentrating on the barriers and challenges experienced in trying to find or return to employment. The Jobcentre are able to provide easements to customers on their employment commitments. This is particularly helpful for survivors of domestic abuse who have vulnerabilities and other life elements that may be restricting their job search and engagement. Individuals who are engaging with another support service can access these easements. The Jobcentre also want partners to encourage their clients to be as open and honest as possible with their Work Coaches, so that they can provide the right support. It can be more damaging to an individual's progress if the Jobcentre proceed with the normal service delivery, and are not made aware of the wider picture.
- Following the relationship built over the last year with the Female Approved Premises in Bedford, we met with the team at the **Male Approved Premises** in Luton this month to discuss similar service delivery for their residents. The property has been vacated since March due to building works and the team hope to have residents returning within the next few months. The bi-weekly drop-in sessions added extra value of *Direction for Bedfordshire* to both the staff and residents in Bedford, and we look forward to working with the team and residents in Luton in the near future.
- **Central Bedfordshire Council** delivered a virtual **Homelessness Forum** to promote the work being done to combat homelessness, and to educate the attendees that prevention is everyone's business. They collaborated with the National Homeless Charity **Crisis** and held presentations around: The Vagrancy Act and the guidance being developed to change the enforcement role of the Police; the joint working with the DWP for integrated housing and employment support; Critical Time Intervention; and perceptions of homelessness amongst the public and how these must be understood to frame prevention in a positive way. Central Bedfordshire Council have been responding to a much higher rate of emergency homelessness intervention due to COVID-19, and urge those at risk of homelessness to engage with the council at the earliest stage.
- We attended a training session about **Loan Sharks** from the national **Illegal Money Lending Team**. During a worldwide time of financial uncertainty, it is so important to understand loan sharks and how they target the most vulnerable individuals. In areas of high deprivation roughly 12% of households access loan sharks, which may only increase during COVID-19. Most victims take nearly three years to report this financial abuse, by which time they have been charged a much larger sum than what they borrowed. Victims can range from all ages and majority of loans are accessed for everyday expenses. There is a **24-hour hotline on 0300 555 2222** for victims and anyone with information on possible loan sharks in their area, which is completely confidential.
- **Jobcentre Plus** partner with **The Shaw Trust** for their Work and Health Programme which supports vulnerable individuals, including ex-offenders. We met with them to get a better understanding of the programme so that we can highlight this support to our service users who want are ready to take the next steps in their employment journey. Those who are eligible for this support are assigned a Support Manager who can assess their needs around confidence, CV writing, disclosure letters and training. When an individual is ready, they can use their employer contacts to link individuals to sustainable roles.

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## YouTurn

Restore, Reform & Reintegrate

