

# DIRECTION FOR BEDFORDSHIRE MARCH 2021



**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 have been hosting two forums to cover the North and South areas of Bedfordshire since April 2020. Since then, we have received a wide range of interest with 20+ different services and organisations attending across the two forums. This initiative has given 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 have been overwhelmed by the positive response and feedback and are really proud of what has been achieved during these difficult times. Collaborative working has been enhanced as a result of the forums, and new partnerships have continually been formed.

We would like to thank all the partners and professionals that have contributed to the forums and we continue to invite professionals to come along and get 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 March 2021.**

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

**Direction for Bedfordshire Coordinators: Lauren Cox, Emma Freeman and Lucy Whitwham**

This month marked the one year anniversary of lockdown measures being implemented. This year has been uncertain and challenging to say the least; with sadness, loss and devastation across the community. *Direction for Bedfordshire* however cannot deny some of the positives that have risen from these unprecedented times. Partner organisations have adapted their provision to support not only their existing service users, many of whose needs will have increased as a result of the pandemic, but also to cater for a surge of new clients whose circumstances have been turned upside. Services have had an ongoing battle with isolation, digital poverty and exclusion, and staff resilience due to illness throughout this time; and have still sustained high levels of delivery. Bedfordshire as a whole should be proud of the work they have delivered in partnership to work with a holistic approach.

## **So, what have we been up to:**

- The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner will be delivering media coverage throughout April to commemorate **Direction for Bedfordshire's 2<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary!** Since our launch in April 2019, we have received **over 600 referrals** and are now receiving **roughly 1000 website views a month.**
- **Homeless Link** deliver **Community of Practice** sessions for each region or county focusing on different topics or issues associated with homelessness. At the start of this month, they delivered a session around women's experience of homelessness. We heard a presentation from **Keystage Housing** and **Mary Seacole** about the work they've been doing over the last year with their **Women's Navigator Pilot Project**, which set out to deliver a personalised service and direct access to move on accommodation plans for hard to reach and at risk women sleeping rough or in unstable accommodation in Luton. They also wanted to build a pathway of co-ordinated support and housing options for women. The findings from this pilot recognised that past and present trauma is prevalent for the females they supported, building trusting relationships between partners brings about positive change, services need to be trauma informed when working with these women, and accommodation is only part of the solution to fully address the revolving door of female rough sleeping and homelessness. We also heard from Sara who has started '**Shoosh no more**' who shared her lived experience of domestic abuse and homelessness.
- **NACRO** delivered a webinar this month: '**A Justice System Fit for the Future: Leaving Prison, Reoffending & COVID-19**' with Sophie Linden, London's Deputy Mayor of Policing and Crime; Labour MP David Lammy; and Lavina Aleri, a NACRO Resettlement Worker. There were discussions around court backlogs, institutional racism and disproportionality, the increase in women's prisons, the importance of employment and housing to reduce reoffending, and the detriment of short sentences and Friday releases on support services delivery and impact. Mental health was also a key underlying theme.
- We also linked with **PoetsIN** who are an award-winning **creative mental health charity**. They help adults, children and young people struggling with their mental health, using the power of words via online and in-person creative writing workshops and online communities. They provide a community, tools and education to empower the self-management of symptoms, and creating open discussion to reduce the stigma surrounding mental ill-health.

# CASE STUDIES

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

"We were contacted by an NPS Probation Officer and a Bedfordshire Police Officer who were supporting a gentleman who has been without a bed or mattress for 6 months, and has had to sleep on the floor. They wanted to see whether we could help with finding a solution to his problem. Over the pandemic period we have had some extremely generous offerings from members of the public when posting for donations on the community Facebook pages. On this occasion we were able to secure a mattress and bedframe from a kind person replying to our post on 'Covid-19 Luton Community Action Group', however there was a slight delay in being able to secure transport to collect and deliver these items. The service user did not have the funds to pay for a local service so we had to wait and rely on a kind offering from the public. We decided to post on the 'Next Door' app asking for free or low cost transport recommendations, to which we received a reply from an employee at **Islebest Ltd.** who offered to collect the items and deliver them to the service user's address for free. On the day of delivery Islebest Ltd. went above and beyond and offered to help him with additional furniture as they noticed he did not have many home comforts."

"We were contacted by a London Youth Offending Service worker who was working with a family who had recently been moved to Bedfordshire. They asked if we could support the 17 year old son to get back into education and training. Through speaking with the young person, we found out that they had missed out on completing their GCSE's and wanted to get an apprenticeship to learn a trade. We contacted **NOVA Training** as they have a good understanding of the needs of vulnerable young people, can support them through their education and champion them with apprenticeship placements. This young person is now engaging well with **NOVA Training** and we wish them the best of luck in settling in with the service and into a new area. On the back of this referral, we have also been working with Mum to help her get back into employment after 17 years, and have linked her with **SSG Training** and **Bedfordshire Employability and Skills Service** to discuss her options."

"Thanks for this – great help!"

**Luton Approved Premises**

"You have done brilliantly to find all of this out"  
**Liaison and Diversion**

"Thank you so much, really appreciate your help"

**Healthwatch Luton**

- We reached out to **2Makeit** this month to learn more about their work in prisons and the community to deliver creative programmes around art and music. They have adapted their prison based music programmes for the pandemic and have produced an innovative '**Songbird Project**' - prisoners can write lyrics from within their cells, they then send their lyrics to 2Makeit where their in-house musician puts music to the lyrics and they will produce a CD for the prisoner and their family. Their '**Made Visible**' project allows people to create their own artistic material with all the resources provided for free. The art created is then displayed in an exhibition, in an online format as a result of COVID-19. These projects have had a massive impact on mental health and allow people to express themselves in different ways. 2Makeit are also keen to deliver through the gate services to continue people's progress and can be in different forms like general life support, advocacy etc.
- **St Giles Trust's SOS+ Service** delivers early intervention work in educational settings, through preventative sessions on violence, vulnerability and exploitation. They delivered a webinar for professionals around County Lines and the experiences of young people who are exploited in this way. The two presenters used their lived experience to emphasise the points raised and give extra context. They looked at the process of county lines itself and the process of grooming used by gangs to exploit young people. They debunked the myths around this glamourised lifestyle often displayed on social media and stressed how these young people could utilise their drive and business minds if there were healthy, positive targetters and opportunities available to them.
- **Opening a bank account** is proving to be a catch 22 for our clients - they need money to pay for suitable ID to open an account, but cannot receive any money until they have an account for their benefits to be deposited into. Credit Unions are normally more flexible with their ID requirements, but as they are working remotely, they can only accept online applications which requires formal ID submissions like a passport or driving licence. We want to support partner agencies who clients are experiencing this issue to broker a relationship with local banks who would be willing to consider alternative forms of ID, so these vulnerable people can open a bank account ASAP to receive their benefits. Individuals are more likely to reoffend the longer they are without legitimate means, so please get in touch if you have links with any local branches to help rectify this issue.

## Service Shout Out!

The **Disability Resource Centre** have a vision to empower people of all ages who are affected by **disability and health conditions**, to fulfil their potential and aspirations. We are proud to have been recently awarded the **Level 3 Disability Confident Leader accreditation** by the Department of Work and Pensions. Their wide range of services include free training and development opportunities. At this crucial time, they have online programmes designed to develop personal, IT and employability skills to help participants find work, through their '**Support into Employment**' programme. Individuals eligible for this programme must be either a **carer, over 50 years of age, have a physical disability, long-term health conditions or mental ill health**. They are also helping people manage their physical and mental wellbeing through our 6-week '**Wellbeing Matters**' course. Through a series of online workshops, they equip people with the tools to achieve a better state of physical and mental wellbeing.

### A message for all employers

If you have any **full time or part time work opportunities** for our candidates, the DRC would like to hear from you. The Employer Engagement Officer can refer candidates to you who are graduating from the Support into Employment programme and have the relevant skills and attributes you are looking for.

To find out more about their services please visit [www.drcbeds.org.uk](http://www.drcbeds.org.uk). For any enquiries related to their online programmes or if you are an employer interested in working with them, please contact [hlw@drcbeds.org.uk](mailto:hlw@drcbeds.org.uk)



PHONE:

0800 917 5579

WEBSITE:

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

EMAIL:

[info@directionforbedfordshire.co.uk](mailto:info@directionforbedfordshire.co.uk)

TWITTER: @Direction4Beds

<https://twitter.com/Direction4Beds>

FACEBOOK: @direction4beds

<https://www.facebook.com/direction4beds/>



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Restore, Reform & Reintegrate

