

DIRECTION FOR BEDFORDSHIRE

APRIL 2021



Direction
for Bedfordshire

DIGITAL NETWORKING FORUMS

We initially planned to host a series of Partnership Events to bring together the wide variety of services delivering excellent work in Bedfordshire, starting with a Luton event in March 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic completely stopped these plans in their tracks and organisations found themselves working remotely, or delivering a reduced service under lockdown conditions. The increased needs of service users as a result of the pandemic required a strong, collaborative approach from partners across Bedfordshire. We wanted to ensure that professionals stayed connected and were aware of how each other were working to deliver holistic support to highly vulnerable members of the community.

We rapidly reacted by introducing 'Digital Networking Forums' via Zoom with the intention of sustaining strong partnership links amongst partner agencies in the absence of face to face contact. We wanted these forums to be an open platform for partners across the voluntary and public sector to share information and advice outside of their usual working remit; service users have multiple pathway needs so it is crucial that key workers know what support is available to address each of these needs.

We have been overwhelmed with the support that these forums have received and we are incredibly proud of the consistent positive feedback. The forums have allowed partners from different areas of the voluntary sector to learn more about each other, and even continue these conversations offline to build new partnerships and service collaboration.

These forums are ultimately for the benefit of our partners and we cannot thank all the new and returning representatives enough for contributing to interesting and helpful discussions each month.

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 April 2021.

Direction for Bedfordshire Coordinators: Lauren Cox and Emma Freeman

April marked the **2nd year anniversary of Direction for Bedfordshire!** Since launching in 2019 the service has evolved from an email and phone signposting service, to an advice and support service. We now engage more with service users and we are also using our extensive network to conduct drop-in sessions within partner agencies to make ourselves visible and accessible to those in need of support. COVID-19 disrupted our service delivery, but also gave us an opportunity to adapt to ensure that we still serve the needs of our service users and partners. We have built a reputable service that is positively recognised by all those that we support or collaborative with. May marks the PCC elections and we would like to thank Kathryn Holloway, our Police and Crime Commissioner, for her commission and support of Direction for Bedfordshire over the last two years.

2020-2021 Highlights:

- Please see the detailed **infographic** that has been circulated with this newsletter for our **headline facts and figures** for the last year.
- We have seen a **vast increase in referrals** during our second year of service, which can be attributed to both our raised profile across Bedfordshire after our first year of promoting and collaborating with partners, and to the increased need for support in the community caused by COVID-19.
- Despite our whole second year of service happening in the midst of a pandemic which significantly restricted face to face contact, we have still **consistently worked directly with service users** to fully understand their needs. If a professional approaches us for support on an individual's behalf, we have always been keen to engage with the service user directly through remote devices. As our typical referral routes are supervisory interventions such as Probation and Police, we build a separate relationship with services users as a third party, support service. By building this rapport we can gauge their individual needs and understand the situation from their perspective. We also ask for service user's consent to engage with other professionals involved in their lives to deliver a joined up approach for support.
- The lockdown restrictions and remote working certainly did not diminish our ability to connect with new partners and **increase our professional network**. We have gone above and beyond to achieve the second strand of our service mission to enhance collaborative working in Bedfordshire. With every new connection that we made, we have invited them along to the Digital Networking Forums to further promote the valuable service or information. We have increased our scope of partner agencies to either work with directly to support our service users, or to further our professional and local knowledge of service delivery for future enquiries.
- We must acknowledge the overwhelming **kindness and generosity from the public in providing donations** for our service users over the last year. Emergency funding was incredibly stretched and many individuals being housed meant that they needed support with accessing homeware to make them comfortable during lockdown. We put posts out to the public via social media and received endless offers of free items, of which we would then collect and deliver to the service user or organisation.
- We would finally like to **extend our huge thanks to Susan Lousada**, the High Sheriff of Bedfordshire in 2020-21 for her commitment to community support and her active involvement in our forums to support partners across Bedfordshire.

CASE STUDIES

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

Stefan wanted to set up his own mobile barbers but needed financial support and advice to do so. He really needed face to face support as he struggled to use online platforms and IT. We contacted **Wenta** who offer 1-1 enterprise support in Bedfordshire. Although their offer is normally online and via telephone, they agreed they could make an appointment with him face to face. This service is free to use; they have comprehensive webinars on how to set up a business, together with individual advice and guidance on how to go about it, and access to business loans. We wish Stefan all the best with his idea!

Joseph was unfortunately let go from his job due to his offence and he wanted to make a new start in a different area. He wasn't eligible for benefits so he would also not be able to receive employment support from Jobcentre Plus. He had not applied for work in many years and needed some guidance. We passed on the information for the **NACRO** disclosure helpline for advice on disclosing his offence to employers, and also information from **Unlock** about when convictions become spent. We also linked him in with the **Bridge of Hope.Careers** inclusive jobs board to search through jobs with employers dedicated to inclusive employment. Joseph found a few roles he wanted to apply for and started to put together a CV. We connected him with **Bedfordshire Employability and Skills Service** to support him with CV writing and application tips.

An NPS Probation Officer contacted us as one of their service users, who is facing an immigration case, was struggling to register with a GP surgery due to a lack of documentation. We contacted our partners at **Lea Vale Medical Group** who welcomed the service user to register with their practice, but also raised that he should be able to register with any GP surgery as you do not need proof of address, immigration status, ID or an NHS number. We linked the Probation Officer with Lea Vale so that they could work together to register this service user to the GP practice. They were appreciative of our prompt response and will use this information to support future service users.

So, what have we been up to this month?

- One of the objectives for this coming year to further improve our service is to **increase our reach, diversity and inclusivity**. While we cannot determine who professionals will refer to our support, we want to ensure that we are linking up with all of the different groups and communities in Bedfordshire. We want to do more to widen our accessibility and visibility so that anyone in need of support knows what we can offer and how to get in touch. With lockdown restrictions starting to decrease we are eager to get back into the community and make direct contact with new people. If we can add value to a group, community or organisation, not matter how big or small, then we are fulfilling our mission of linking those in need with information or advice which helps them move forward in their lives. Please do get in touch if you are involved in partnerships that we could positively contribute to, or if you have any key contacts in hard to reach groups.
- We connected with **Empowering Education** recently to learn more about the wide range of services that they offer in Luton. In 2007 they started as a voluntary service for BAME and hard to reach communities to engage them in support around employability, mental health and other informal workshops. They empower low income adults to reach their goals and potential; starting with informal workshops and then supporting them onto progression routes like education or employment. They also deliver immigration workshops and have supported over 700 people since the scheme started. They offer a free service for Windrush applications and EU settlement, as well as a basic ESOL course. They are keen to work in partnership with other services to build a relationship with service users in a comfortable environment, to then invite individuals into their centre once they are ready.
- We reconnected with **Uprising**, a national youth leadership and employability organisation, to hear about their latest work. They provide routes to leadership and employment for 18-25 year olds to break the cycle of unrepresentative power in the UK. Their **Stand Out** programme is free, delivered online and available in July or October 2021; providing a month of employability workshops supported by 9-12 months of 1-1 mentoring. Their **Leadership 6** month programme of weekly skills and knowledge sessions supports young people into social action.

Thank you for inviting me to yesterday's networking event. I found it really useful. It was great to hear about all the amazing work everyone else is doing.
PoetsIN

"The forum was very informative, thank you for inviting me"
The Bridge Project

"Your service have become a vital cog in the Liaison and Diversion service's wheel"
Liaison and Diversion

"Thanks again for another great meeting. Some really good connections being made as a result."
Project NOVA

"Huge help as always"
BeNCH CRC

Service Shout Out!



Founded in 1987, **NOAH's** mission is not only to care for those suffering multiple deprivations, but also to help them learn basic life and vocational skills to ease them back into training and employment. Our training provision seeks to address poverty by helping people to realise their full potential, it uniquely combines welfare services with work experience and volunteering opportunities in our social enterprise. This offers participants a complete pack of support and guidance towards work as well as helping those who gain employment with settling in their new jobs. Our courses run across Bedfordshire both face to face and online. We run wellbeing courses such as **Cooking on a Budget**, employability courses such as **Progressing into Work** and even **ESOL** courses. We have recently launched our **Working Solutions** project which provides 1:1 employability support 5 days a week across the county. We have also launched our **Routes** programme which is a 12 week employability course for those aged between 18-24 and links in with the new government Kickstart Scheme. We are a Kickstart employer and have a variety of opportunities available within NOAH and our business partners. Excitingly, we have our own **Rainbow; Inclusive and Diverse Recruitment Service** which is linking our clients with sustainable employment. For information about our courses visit our [website](#) For information about **Rainbow Recruitment Service** - Contact us on 01582 726152 or academy@noahenterprise.org

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Restore, Reform & Reintegrate

