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Addressing youth radicalisation: building community-led intervention in Australia

**Brisbane 27 May 2016 – Generation Next**  
 Dr Clarke Jones  
 Co-Director - Australian Intervention Support Hub (AISH)  
 Australian National University

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## Introduction

- *My work is grounded on the notion that intervention must be embedded within activities that engage and support communities, and that their partnerships are essential to the success of the longer-term goals of community safety and harmony*






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## Engagements for evidence based research

- International: (Canada (RCMP), NZ, Singapore, UK, Philippines, United Nations, Netherlands)
- Federal Government: (AGD, AFP, Education, DSS, DFAT)
- State Government: (Vic and NSW), DPC, Police, Education, Corrections, DSS
- Local Governments (Vic and NSW)
- Non-government organisations
- Service provider networks (Vic and NSW): organisational, individual and youth workers
- **Community organisations (Vic and NSW): general, ethnic, locality and religious based**






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## What have we learned?

- We recognise the many good programs are conducted overseas and many refer to them as if that program should run here
  - However, how much should we base our strategies on overseas models? Universal approaches and evaluations can run into difficulties because often they can lack the cultural, religious and local nuances required for effective interventions
  - Local solution must be developed for local problems
    - What works in the UK may not work in Australia
    - What works in Sydney may not work in Melbourne
    - What works in Dandenong may not work in Craigieburn

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## Community-led intervention

- Community-led intervention is a relatively new concept
- What we first knew of intervention (in CVE), it was commonly referred to as 'de-radicalisation' and was conducted predominantly in correctional settings
- Intervention to address anti-social and violent behaviour isn't an easy task - there is no silver bullet solution
- Individual pathways to crime are seldom the same
- Therefore, models of community-led intervention will also vary in type, duration, intensity and place




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The 'R' Word:  
Radicalisation

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## Pathways to Radicalisation: Community


- Marginalised culture / Ethnic minority
  - Isolation / alienation
  - Lack of connection to Australian society or mainstream community
- Disadvantaged neighbourhoods (socio-economic)
  - high unemployment
  - Lower standards of education
  - Lack of opportunity

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## Family

- Dysfunctionality
- Socially disadvantaged
- Parental neglect
- Mental health issues
- Violence: psychological and/or physical abuse
- Strict or enforced cultural / religious observance



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## Individual

- Early conduct issues / school exclusion
- Lower levels of education
- Unemployment
- Rejects society's conventions
- Feeling victimised
- Rebellious / defiant
- Fragmented social identity
- Sense of excitement / thrill
- Elevation of status in social group
- Lacking direction or pathway in life
- Desire for a sense of belonging
- Involvement in local youth gangs / criminality

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## Community engagement and intervention

- Government policies surrounding intervention are often criticised because they
  - lack real connection to the actual problems experienced by young people, their families and communities
  - lack genuine grassroots consultation in policy formulation, application and validation
  - lack the cultural/ethnic and religious nuances required to adequately address underlying social issues / criminality
- All lead to a lack of community buy-in and trust

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## Community engagement and intervention

- Most Western models of intervention have adopted a top-down risk-based approach, focussing only on addressing individual risks of violent offending
- This appears to be often done at the detriment of a young person's interests or qualities
  - there is a danger in identifying individual qualities as risk factors, rather than positive attributes to encourage and advance a young person's future

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## Community engagement and intervention

- Risk-based approaches have meant that police agencies are currently at the forefront of intervention efforts in Australia (and overseas)
- Yet, police are asked to perform a difficult dual role of community enforcer and community friend
  - *it is difficult to punch someone in the face and then try and shake their hand*

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## Community engagement and intervention


- Negative personal experiences with police
  - Feelings of victimisation, harassment can translate to inherent issues with defiance and rejection of police-led intervention



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## Community engagement and intervention

- Police engagement efforts are viewed with some suspicion by communities for a number of reasons
  - First, Muslim communities perceive that they are being unfairly assigned a collective responsibility to attempt to curb violent extremism, yet other communities are not being asked to address anti-government, racist, and other forms of discriminatory actions
  - Second, some community groups believe that police community engagement may be linked with efforts to conduct surveillance or collect intelligence on individuals and organisations

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## Community engagement and intervention

- Third, even those who have favourable impressions of local law enforcement, they see engagement efforts as part of a federal counter-terrorism program
- Their unpleasant experiences with government agencies, particularly with respect to airport security, refugees and immigration control, taint their support for partnerships with policing agencies

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## Community engagement and intervention

- Do we start from the wrong position (with risk and police)
  - does this position contribute to 'defiance' and lack of cooperation with some young participants?
  - When police are involved in intervention, there is the connotation that the program is mandatory
  - We must be careful that coercive approaches (with police-led intervention) do not exacerbate the underlying factors that contributed to radicalisation (discrimination, alienation, marginalisation and rejection) in the first instance

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## What works in intervention?

- **Individual Treatment** - *Desistance theorists* argue that effective interventions should be tailored to the individual risks and needs of offender (Farrington, 1995)
- **Behaviour is learned** – Therefore it is amenable to change (Cumow, Streker & Williams, 1998)
- **Pro-social relationships** - New social relationships can influence change towards new attachments and new identities, even with the hardest of offenders (Jones, 2014)

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## What works in intervention?

- Lessons from existing programs can assist in establishing evidence-base for addressing anti-social and violent behaviour:
  - behavioural modification,
  - drug and alcohol,
  - anger management,
  - gang desistance,
  - family or domestic violence, and
  - sex offending

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### What works in intervention

- Programs that deal with other problem behaviours, which are often precursors to delinquency and anti-social behaviour, may turn out to also prevent or address radicalisation (Greenwood, 2009)
- Research to address anti-social behaviour is strongest and most promising for school and community-based interventions
  - there is less research to draw on for custodial or tertiary programs, which suffer methodological problems

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### Are current intervention strategies working?

Is this the wrong focus?

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### Are current intervention strategies working?

- Psychological evidence suggests that making threats up front in intervention engenders defiance, *i.e. with the current focus weighing too much towards the criminal justice system, security and sanctions*
- Intervention will work “especially well when it is backed by a willingness to escalate to more incapacitative measures” (Braithwaite, 2004)
  - **Yet, the possibility of escalation must be threatening in the background, not threatened in the foreground of problem solving (Braithwaite, 2004)**


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### What are the possibilities for intervention?

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## A new approach is needed

- An individualised community-based approach that:
  - targets social disconnection and dissolves alienation
  - builds new identity through pro-social relationships
  - creates an intentional community of care to control behaviour, which is harmful to self or others
  - provides support and assistance to influence behaviour change
  - offers a space where stigmatising encounters are suspended and a sense of personal worth and positive identity can be re-established

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## Questions?



7/10/14/12