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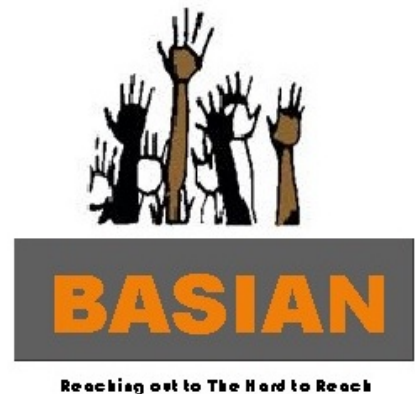
REPORT OF THE BASIAN ENGAGE PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM PROJECT

BY

BASIAN IN READING

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Reading Borough Council**



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Many people have contributed to the BASIAN Engage Preventing Violent Extremism Project in Reading and we welcome the opportunity to acknowledge their support and guidance formally. First, thanks go to all the individuals who engaged in the preventing violent extremism interventions and workshops.

Second, special thanks to colleagues and volunteers at BASIAN. Their hard work, talents and persistence have been fantastic.

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(PVE Management Group)

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BASIAN (Black & Asian Service In Alcohol & Narcotics) is a registered charity and BME specialist service based in Reading. It offers support, advice and guidance to the socially excluded and most vulnerable young people and adults from within our communities. BASIAN has privileged access to this section of the community, through a well designed mentoring and outreach program. BASIAN have taken it from a successful nationally recognised community engagement model, which they have worked on with UCLAN (University of Central Lancashire) which heads in community research. BASIAN aims to reduce crime and offending in the Reading area and it does this by:

- Working in partnership with voluntary and statutory agencies
- Working with drug users and ex-users, offenders and ex-offenders, vulnerable young people, as well as families and friends and carers of those mentioned above
- Providing clients with mentors who offer advice, guidance and support
- Signposting clients into existing support services

BASIAN was founded in 2005 after two members of the local community were recruited as lead researchers on a community engagement project funded by the Home Office and managed by UCLAN, into substance misuse amongst BME members of the Reading community. Both Shahid Farid and Urfan Azad helped in compiling a 100 page report of the year long project. The report was recognised as a good conduct guide by the Home Office and was sent to local (DAAT) Drug Alcohol Action Teams across the country. BASIAN has been nationally and most recently, internationally recognised for its work on the Crossing Continents BBC program. In which one of the founders of the organisation traced his tracks back to the borders of Afghanistan and Pakistan, where he was sent by his family to tackle his drug problem. In 2007 BASIAN awarded The Pride of Reading Award in Community Development. In March 2009 were awarded The Muslim News Award 2009 of Excellence, by the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Hazel Blears. Most recently were awarded the BCF award for Tackling Gun/Knife Crime & Serious Youth Violence by Prince Edward in September 2010.

BASIAN have spoken on a number of national conferences as well as giving interviews on their work on local, national and international media. On a strategic level BASIAN are members of the Race Equality and Diversity Scrutiny Panel at the Home Office, which is built up of 10 members from across England. They are elected members on the Criminal Prosecution Service & Hate Crime Scrutiny panel. BASIAN have been acknowledged for its input into national reports on BME prisoners carried out by the Ministry Of Justice and (NOMS) Nation Offender Management Service, their work and case studies have been used as a good practise guide. BASIAN are supported by Reading Borough Council, Thames Valley Police and the Home Office for the three projects they run, which consist of supporting BME drug users into treatment, Tackling Gun/Knife Crime & Serious Youth Violence, and Preventing Violent Extremism.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 National Policy & Local Context

The national context for the BASIAN Engage project sits within the Government's revised version of the UK strategy for tackling international terrorism, known as CONTEST (HM Government (2009). *The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering International Terrorism*, TSO (The Stationery Office)). Delivery of CONTEST is organised around four main workstreams:

- *Pursue*: to stop terrorist attacks
- *Prevent*: to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting violent extremism
- *Protect*: to strengthen protection against terrorist attacks
- *Prepare*: to mitigate the impact of attacks where they cannot be stopped.

Each of these workstreams has a series of objectives within CONTEST's strategic framework. The *Prevent* strand from the four workstreams provides the detailed and relevant context for Reading Borough Council's work as a local authority in this field and for the BASIAN Engage project specifically. The nature of the government's Prevent strategy promotes the facilitation of collaborative work with communities to address violent extremism.

HM Government (2009, p. 84) states in its CONTEST strategy that:

Strong and empowered communities are better equipped to effectively reject the ideology of violent extremism... CLG has a central role in ensuring that communities are at the centre of our response to violent extremism

The Prevent strategy has five core and two cross-cutting or supporting objectives. These are:

- Objective 1: Challenging the violent extremism ideology and supporting mainstream voices
- Objective 2: Disrupting those who promote violent extremism and supporting the institutions where they may be active
- Objective 3: Supporting vulnerable individuals
- Objective 4: Increasing the capacity of communities to resist violent extremism
- Objective 5: Addressing grievances

Cross-cutting objectives:

- Objective 6: Developing Prevent-related research and analysis

- Objective 7: Strategic communications

These objectives have been articulated in depth in government policy documents. Details can be found in the CONTEST strategy itself (HM Government (2009, pps. 88-92)) and in HM Government (2008) *The Prevent Strategy: A Guide for Local Partners*.

The prevention of violent extremism is also embedded in performance management frameworks, including National Indicator 35 (NI 35) and Assessments of Policing Community Safety Indicator 63 (APACS 63). These indicators are designed to measure and assess performance to help develop the effectiveness of local authority, police and local partnership activities on building community resilience.

1.2 BASIAN Engage Background

Engage was a new project which progressed from the work that BASIAN were doing have been for the past 5 – 6 years in engaging vulnerable members of the Reading communities.

Engage

was an innovative and challenging project which engaged with vulnerable members of the Muslim community to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism.

The research BASIAN had undertaken including anecdotal evidence from outreach clearly highlighted a 'profile' of the people that were vulnerable to radicalisation and violent extremism. The profile was those that were often labelled as 'hard to reach' by public sector agencies and the police. However the Engage project demonstrated an ability to reach this section of the community, which included ex-prisoners, (ex-)drug users, (ex-)offenders (including gang members), vulnerable young people and families and carers.

BASIAN identified members of gangs and criminals which were promoting a culture of legitimising their criminal activities through a misinterpreted religious identity. Vulnerable young people were quoting religious text to justify criminal behaviour. For example members of gangs were suggesting it was halal (permitted) to commit fraud, such as credit card, VAT fraud, benefit fraud because it was a form of 'economic jihad' - a way of making the British economy crash.

In addition drug dealers believed it was 'halal' to supply drugs to the kuffar (non-Muslims) and it was 'haram' (not permitted) for community members to co-operate with Police when crime was committed. At the same time there was a culture of 'denial' of problems existing in the community, due to issues that were seen as sensitive and bringing 'shame' on the community. Hence community leaders felt it was necessary to protect 'izzat' (honour) in the community. Many young people were flown back home to the Asian sub-continent due to their drug addiction and crime by family members - exposing them to potential radicalisation and 'jihadi' training camps.

1.3 Engage – A Community-Based Programme

The Engage project expanded on existing work done by BASIAN in the substance misuse field to include preventing violent extremism. BASIAN delivered a community-based programme in the Reading area which included mentoring, training and guidance to vulnerable young people.

The vulnerable young people had been socially excluded i.e. lived in poor housing conditions, underachieved in education, unemployed, faced discrimination and involved in crime. The vulnerable young people lacked correct Islamic knowledge and were vulnerable to extremist knowledge via the internet, social media and dysfunctional role models.

1.4 Empowerment & Resilience

The mentoring, training and guidance were designed to empower vulnerable young people to be resilient to radicalisation, raise aspirations and self-confidence. The vulnerable young people were reached through community outreach. We designed a mentoring and training programme which gave young people the cognitive and practical skills to be resilient to the messages of violent extremism and the potential to be groomed or radicalised. BASIAN team empowered individuals from a theological perspective to alternative messages from an Islamic perspective on promoting citizenship, community cohesion and peace. Participants gained skills and knowledge to be resilient, confidently articulate and defend themselves against potential extremist messages and those trying to radicalise them.

1.5 Social Exclusion

ENGAGE project identified that the lack of connection with the British state due to social exclusion (poor jobs and low education levels) was leading people to an identity crisis and seeking alternative identities, significantly increasing the vulnerability to violent extremism.

A core part complementing the BASIAN Engage approach was to provide IT courses, such as web design and PC maintenance and repairs. Another key aspect was CV development and support and job interviewing skills.

The 2 latter aspects of the training and mentoring were identified by vulnerable participants themselves as something they required to overcome poor educational attainment and a lack of job opportunities. BASIAN training and mentoring enhanced the individual's connection with the state and reconciled their identity as British citizens by raising their aspirations and self-worth.

1.6 Reading Priorities

Reading Forum Against Extremism (latterly known as Uniting Reading) identified four key priorities to focus on in the Reading area:

- Women
- Young people

- Faith
- Raising awareness of the issues surrounding violent extremism

Reading Forum Against Extremism was the local partnership consisting of key stakeholders including the council, police and other community preventing violent extremism projects. One or more of the Prevent objectives and key priorities had to be reflected in all applications. All project proposals were assessed according to how they would meet these objectives.

1.7 BASIAN Engage Aims & Objectives

BASIAN Engage aims were to contribute to the Prevent objectives and local Reading priorities. The project overall aim was to achieve the following:

- To help vulnerable young people become resilient to messages of violent extremism and targets for radicalisation

BASIAN Engage objectives were to:

- Help vulnerable young people become resilient to messages of violent extremism.
- Provide young people with mentoring, training and guidance resulting in them becoming resilient to grooming and radicalisation.
- Help raise young people's aspirations, self-confidence and worth so they feel a sense of belonging and adopt British Identity

2 METHODS

2.1 Project Team

BASIAN recruited 2 key community outreach and engagement workers and 1 co-co-ordinator - as the project progressed 3 volunteers were also recruited. The project team had good access to the target group because the outreach workers and volunteers were from vulnerable and socially excluded backgrounds including ex-drugs users, ex-offenders and ex-prisoners.

2.2 Target Group

The target audience and beneficiaries were members of the Muslim community that were vulnerable to violent extremism. The profile of the target group consisted of people often labelled as 'hard to reach' by public sector agencies. BASIAN reached this target group, which included ex-prisoners, (ex-)drug users, (ex-)offenders (including gang members), vulnerable young people and families and carers. The target age range was between 18 – 35 years old. However if vulnerable members outside this age group or even target group were identified BASIAN still engaged with them on an inclusive basis.

2.3 Two Phase Approach

The project was delivered from October 2009 till Sept 2010 with two phases of outreach work, mentoring and workshop delivery.

2.4 Recruitment Method

The BASIAN team used an intervention method of educational workshops, outreach work and mentoring to engage and empower people that were vulnerable to radicalisation. The outreach was the conduit into the structured training workshops and mentoring. The recruitment method to the workshops and mentoring was through outreach work, local publicity and criminal justice agencies such as the police. Furthermore, a snowballing methodology and word of mouth in the community facilitated recruitment to the workshops.

BASIAN believe that there is no typical profile of those that are vulnerable to extremism.

2.5 Interventions

The duration of the workshops was 4 hours, with regular breaks. All the workshop participants received workshop packs with a folder containing all the workshops content and hand-out material. The workshops were interactive and covered group based activities. The training workshops and mentoring content included equipping participants with the cognitive and practical skills to be resilient to the messages of violent extremism. The workshops and mentoring content covered from a theological perspective alternative messages and arguments to potential extremists. Six workshops were delivered in both phases. Themes for each workshop were:

- Workshop 1: Islam, Community Cohesion & Citizenship
- Workshop 2: General IT Skills & PC Maintenance/Repairs
- Workshop 3: Islam & Peace
- Workshop 4: Web Design
- Workshop 5: How to Counter Extremist Theology
- Workshop 6: CV Writing & Interview Skills

2.6 Volunteers

One of the aims of the workshops was to instil transferable skills in participants in order for them to work as potential 'volunteer outreach workers'. The participants were encouraged to repeat and share the learning from the workshops with their peers. The workshops taught the volunteers how they could structure the learning on preventing violent extremism to raise knowledge and awareness in the community. Therefore the workshops benefited not just the workshop participants but the wider community.

2.7 Partnerships

A consultation and advisory partnership group provided governance to the project. Initially known as the Reading Forum Against Extremism, latterly known as Uniting Reading was the local partnership consisting of key stakeholders including the council, police and other community groups.

An internal project development forum was also established – this forum was where the daily and weekly issues of the project were discussed to ensure its smooth running

2.8 Monitoring & Evaluation

ENGAGE was complimented by monitoring and evaluative elements - both qualitative and quantitative data was gathered for this purpose. Regular monthly and quarterly reports were provided to Reading Borough Council.

2.9 Budget

Reading Borough Council allocated £48,000 to the BASIAN Engage project. The money was broken into the following key elements:

Management and administration, including financial accountability and overheads (phone, printing, internet, electricity etc) = £10,000 (includes overheads)

1 project leader 0.5 FTE @ £24K pro-rata (facilitate and deliver workshops) = £12,000 part-time

2 community outreach and engagement workers, 0.5 FTE @ £20K pro-rata (facilitate & deliver workshops), £10,000 per worker = £20,000

Recruit potential volunteer outreach and engagement workers = £3000 expenses (to include travel, childcare and subsistence)

Training workshops on Islamic theology = £1500 includes travel costs

IT related workshops/CV development & job interviewing skills = £500 includes travel costs

Produce and disseminate a report with recommendations = £1000

3 CORE DATA

BASIAN engaged with 47 participants in the first phase and 50 participants in the second phase - 97 in total. The tables below show the demographic profile of participants in both phases of the BASIAN Engage project completing all the workshops and interventions. Twenty five participants successfully completed all the workshops.

Phase One Data

Table 1: Age

Age	No. of Respondents
16-18	0
19-21	3
22-24	7
25-29	2
30-39	0
40-49	0
50-60	
TOTAL	12

Table 2: Gender

Gender	No. of Respondents
Male	12
Female	0
TOTAL	12

Table 3: Ethnicity

Ethnicity	No. of Respondents
British Pakistani	12
British Indian	0
British Bangladesh	0
British Asian African	0
Mixed	0
Others	0
TOTAL	12

Table 4: Length of residence in UK

Years	No. of Respondents
1-5	0
6-10	0
11 years or more	12
TOTAL	12

Table 5: Citizenship

Citizenship	No. of Respondents
British	12
Refugee	0
Asylum	0
Other	0
No answer	0
TOTAL	12

Phase Two Core Data

Table 6: Age

Age	No. of Respondents
16-18	0
19-21	3
22-24	7
25-29	2
30-39	0
40-49	1
50-60	
TOTAL	13

Table 7: Gender

Gender	No. of Respondents
Male	13
Female	0
TOTAL	13

Table 8: Ethnicity

Ethnicity	No. of Respondents
British Pakistani	10
British Indian	0
British Bangladesh	0
British Asian African	2
Mixed	0
Others	1
TOTAL	13

Table 9: Length of residence in UK

Years	No. of Respondents
1-5	0
6-10	1
11 years or more	12
TOTAL	13

Table 10: Citizenship

Citizenship	No. of Respondents
British	11
Refugee	0
Asylum	2
Other	0
No answer	0
TOTAL	13

4 FINDINGS

The deliver of the BASIAN Engage project was both challenging and rewarding. It was challengin* because of the hostile environment created by specific organisation and individuals. An orchestrated campaign in Reading had a significant impact on community views to discredit the preventing violent extremism projects. It was rewarding because the BASIAN team were able to challenge extremist views, change extremist thinking and go one step further and change extremist behaviour.

Community Suspicion

BASIAN team consistently received threatening behavior verbally and through emails expressing anger in their participation in the preventing violent extremism programme. It was often stated in these exchanges:

...should not be compromising your religion.

...you're a sell-out

It was felt that delivering a Prevent project and being Muslim was not possible, outreach workers had to choose one between the two. An Islamic website also had a discussion forum running on a BASIAN staff member, spying and making comparisons with the Quilliam Foundation founders.

BASIAN overcame these allegations by challenging these views and demonstrating through scholarly verdicts that preventing violent extremism and being a 'Muslim' were both compatible:

Person A [BASIAN outreach worker] advised him it is our duty to prevent violent extremism in our communities with some proof from the statements of the prophet (PBUH).

Intelligence Gathering

The suspicion also came from rumours that BASIAN were collecting intelligence and worked as informants. Once again pressure was applied on BASIAN to withdraw from participation in the project. It was often stated to BASIAN in these exchanges:

You're not aware of the secret agenda behind PVE (preventing violent extremism) policy (prominent community member)

BASIAN responded by clearly articulating the aims and objectives of the Engage project and understanding of the national Prevent agenda. It was clear that the community needed to clearly understand the Prevent agenda and overcome misconceptions that it was an intelligence gathering covert programme.

A front page editorial in the Guardian newspaper on how Prevent projects were being used to spy on Muslim communities added fuel to the fire, providing support to those suggesting PVE was about spying (BASIAN staff member)

Future work should consider raising community awareness of local preventing violent extremism projects, the organisations and their work. A myth-busting campaign on Prevent would be very helpful.

Identification of Extremism

The BASIAN team identified that vulnerability AQ inspired violent extremism was a bigger problem than first anticipated, both within the community and prisons. There were a growing number of sympathisers amongst young vulnerable people to the AQ ideology.

BASIAN outreach work identified extremist views and sympathies towards Al-Qaida (AQ). Terrorism was often justified as a response what participants considered oppression by the allied forces in Muslim lands. A common question to the team was:

...as Muslims in the West why can we not retaliate to foreign aggression and oppression in Muslim lands by non-Muslim forces by carrying out acts of violence in the non-Muslim lands

BASIAN were happy that participants were openly asking them questions which they could address. This question was successfully addressed through particular evidence from a famous scholar on how Muslims should behave in non-Muslim lands – the BASIAN team challenged and changed these views.

Shaikh al-Uthaimen: How Muslims Should Behave in Non-Muslim Societies

The esteemed and late Shaikh Muhammad bin Salih al-'Uthaimin of Saudi Arabia stated, during a tele-link in the evening of Friday, 28th July 2000, to an audience in the city of Birmingham, UK:

“ ... Likewise I invite you to have respect for those people who have the right that they should be respected, those between whom there is an agreement (of protection) for you. For the land in which you are living is such that there is an agreement between you and them. If this were not the case they would have killed you or expelled you. So preserve this agreement, and do not prove treacherous to it, since treachery is a sign of the hypocrites, and it is not from the way of

the Believers. And know that it is authentically reported from the Prophet that he said,

“ *Whoever kills one who is under an agreement of protection will not smell the fragrance of Paradise.*

Do not be fooled by those sayings of the foolish people, those who say "Those people are Non-Muslims, so their wealth is lawful for us (to misappropriate or take by way of murder and killing)." **For by Allaah - this is a lie. A lie about Allaah's Religion, and a lie about Islamic societies.**

So we may not say that it is lawful to be treacherous towards people whom we have an agreement with.

O my brothers. O youth. O Muslims. Be truthful in your buying and selling, and renting, and leasing, and in all mutual transactions. Because truthfulness is from the characteristics of the Believers, and Allaah - the Most High - has commanded truthfulness - in the saying of Allaah - the Most High -

﴿ **O you who believe - fear and keep your duty to Allaah and be with the truthful** ﴾

And the Prophet encouraged truthfulness and said,

“ *Adhere to truthfulness, because truthfulness leads to goodness, and goodness leads to Paradise. And a person will continue to be truthful, and strive to be truthful until he will be written down with Allaah as a truthful person.*

And he warned against falsehood, and said,

“ *Beware of falsehood, because falsehood leads to wickedness, and wickedness leads to the Fire. And a person will continue lying, and striving to lie until he is written down with Allaah as a great liar.*

O my brother Muslims. O youth. Be true in your sayings with your brothers, and with those Non-Muslims whom you live along with - so that you will be inviters to the Religion of Islaam, by your actions and in reality. So how many people there are who first entered into Islaam because of the behaviour and manners of the Muslims, and their truthfulness, and their being true in their dealings.

Similarly a workshop participant justified suicide bombings – it was permissible in Islam - he felt the support for suicide attacks was widespread within the community. The Engage team provided numerous evidences from the Quran and prophetic statements of the prophet Muhammad condemning suicide and killing. The team also emphasised the sacredness of human life, and presented video statements of modern day scholars who refute violent extremist ideologies. The scholars also refuted individuals such as Osama Bin Laden and AQ ideology.

Once again the Engage team managed to challenge and successfully change these views amongst project participants.

Individuals identified who praised AQ also spoke of the permissibility of criminal activity such as fraud, drug dealing, robberies and other serious crime, as a form of 'jihad' on the Western society. New Muslims that had recently converted to Islam were also sharing the same extremist views and showed vulnerability.

It was also concerning that individuals would consider reporting any known terrorist activity to the police, even if they were of this activity in the local community. Once again BASIAN staff challenged these views with sound evidence from reputable and well known scholars, stating:

...doing the right thing and informing the authorities.

Anwar Al- Awlaki

A dysfunctional role model, Anwar Al- Awlaki was very influential amongst the people we were engaging within the community. Awlaki had significant support and the Engage team often challenged his views which were prominent amongst the participants. Awlaki of Yemeni descent, born in Mexico and resided for many years in the U.S is currently living in Yemen. He has his own blog and website through which he promotes his extremist ideology. This individual praises suicide attacks and calls them martyrdom missions - he is someone who is directly influenced by the late Sayyid Qutub (author of Milestones). Anwar Al-Awalaki is latterly known by his statements where he praised the Fort Hood attacks where U.S service men were killed. He suggested there was nothing wrong with Muslims joining the British or American forces to infiltrate them.

Workshops – Bridging the Knowledge Gap

The project workshops were very successful, with plenty of interaction and discussion. The interest in the workshops resulted in them often running over the allocated time slot. The workshops also highlighted the gap in correct Islamic knowledge. For example many people did not know the actual meaning of their religion Islam. This creates vulnerability in a person to become a target of violent extremism. BASIAN covered the link between Islam and peace successfully, with a study of a very famous peace treaty put together by the prophet Muhammad. A copy of the treaty of Hodaybiyah can be found in Appendix 1.

The skills and IT workshops were popular, with participants requesting other skills workshops beyond the project lifetime. The countering extremist theology workshop was the most popular. Phrases and words used out of context by violent extremists such as 'takfir' (ex-communication) and 'jihad' were misunderstood. The Engage team helped participants understand the flaws in extremist concepts and ideas.

BASIAN team showed great skill in facilitating outspoken, challenging and opposing views in the workshops, with minimum concern for other group members. The core data forms completed at each workshop proved difficult with questions initially on Islamic groups and sects. Therefore in order to get participants to complete these surveys, the questions on Islam were deleted.

Sharing Good Practice

Thames Valley Police Prevent team in Reading regularly visited the Engage project. Project material and workshop handouts were given to key stakeholders such as the police and council. BASIAN have also shared their experiences on the project through a BBC Asian Network and Radio 4 documentary. Public sector professionals also made requests to undertake the BASIAN preventing violent extremism workshops themselves. BASIAN also disseminated and presented project learning at a GOSE event.

Social Networking

The team also noticed the increasing problem of the spread of violent extremist views on social networking sites, such as Paltalk in which chat-rooms were set up by AQ sympathisers. In these rooms and through other social networking sites they were propagating their violent extremist views.

Criminal Justice System

BASIAN identified some project participants through drugs work which were vulnerable to violent extremism. There was also an increase of individuals in the criminal justice system attending the workshops in the second phase, with a high number of prison leavers.

Individuals recently released from prison highlighted the growing number of takfiri and jihadi groups within prisons affiliated themselves to Muslim gangs and continue to propagate the legitimisation of criminal acts through violent extremist ideologies. These statements have also been backed by national reports on known radicals who have been released from prisons.

Hence the importance of future BASIAN work including engagement with prisons as well as an increase in supporting people post-release to facilitate re-integration in the community.

10 of the 13 who attended were on probation orders or within the CJS.

Speaking to a client referred to BASIAN through probation in one to one key working sessions, BASIAN realised the vulnerable individual needed wrap around support but also held violent extremist views which needed addressing. Previously this hadn't been picked up by probation. It could have been due to 2 factors, firstly the client did not express his views or opened up to other agencies such as probation who are working with him, or those who have been working with him have not identified it and are unaware of the risk factors. Further details are provided in case study 2.

Gang Culture

Workshop participants spoke about their own experiences within prison, gang culture was mixed with religion, some of the gangs mentioned were PDC (Poverty Driven Children) LTA (Loyal To Allah) and MS (Muslim Soldiers). They spoke of violence being used in the name of religion and a misconstrued understanding of Islam. Criminal activities were justified through a false understanding of Islam. Members of the group spoke about cases where punishments were carried out on individual inmates - individuals being attacked for various reasons, such as someone not praying, following a different Islamic school of thought to them, not agreeing with the criminal acts done in the name of the religion.

Recent incidents have raised alarm in how real the problem...Although a recent shooting in Reading was not linked to violent extremism, it emerged that some of those involved held violent extremist views...

Case Study 1

Background

BASIAN had come into contact with young people through their existing work in the drug field and working with offenders/ex-offenders. Individuals who had expressed violent extremist views and those who sympathised with the AQ ideology as a legitimate form of Islam. The Engage team wanted to address these extreme views through engagement and exposing these vulnerable young people to authentic Islamic texts and scholarly views which clearly apposed this misconstrued form of Islam.

Approach

The Engage team engaged with (X) through community outreach, whilst speaking to him around issues of re-offending and drug misuse. After a few outreach engagement sessions the Engage team offered him further support to address his problems. Once (X) attended the office for further support he was informed about the set of workshops the team ran on PVE

and was told of particular workshops such as, Islam & Peace, How To Tackle Extremist Theology The Counter Narrative along with various other workshops. This was not enough as the team had to identify whether (X) had violent extremist views or was in actual fact vulnerable to violent extremism. The Engage team continued to engage with (X) and decided to recruit him to attend the PVE workshops after hearing his views on violent extremism acts committed in the name of Islam, and his sympathising with the AQ ideology and in particular around suicide bombings in the name of jihad and their permissibility of them.

Successes

Success could not have been measured in any better way than the example of (X) who attended all of the workshops, after having completed the workshops and gained an understanding and having been exposed to mainstream Islam. Agreed that suicide bombings were not a form of jihad and nor were they legislated by the religion of Islam. He also disagreed with the AQ ideology and Bin Ladin not being a person who represented Islam, rather he said that he was an individual who was committing criminal acts for personal gain and had no interest in benefiting the Muslim world or the Muslims. At the time (X) first engaged with BASIAN along with various vulnerabilities he was also homeless, through the course of the project (X) was housed which in it self-raised his aspirations and self-confidence and worth.

Conclusion

The BASIAN Engage team realise the importance of this type of engagement continuing, in supporting vulnerable individuals such as (X). The great benefit of community engagement in identifying and supporting individuals such as (X), this will also have a wider impact, as misconstrued Islamic understanding can be challenged through positive means of debate to a wider audience.

Case Study 2

Background

As above.

Approach

The Engage team engaged with (Y) shortly after his release from Prison, he was referred to BASIAN by Probation to break the cycle of re-offending. We spoke to him regarding the support we would offer him around one to one mentoring sessions and relapse prevention. (Y) Started engaging with BASIAN after the completion of both phases of the Engage project. After a few sessions of one to one support, (Y) started expressing views which were of concern to the team. BASIAN realised (Y) held views which sympathized with the AQ ideology.

Challenges

The main challenge in relation to (Y) unlike others BASIAN had worked with throughout the

course of the Engage project, was that he had started engaging with the team after the recruitment and delivery of the PVE workshops. This was overcome by a very professional approach which the team adopted in supporting (Y) on a one to one basis, outside of the realm of the PVE workshops. The Engage team realized the importance of this approach as (Y) was identified as someone being vulnerable to the AQ ideology, because of the views expressed as well his legitimisation of criminal acts as a form of jihad in the British government/system paying back for his and the wider Muslims world's grievances. Again it was the privileged access BASIAN had to the vulnerable young people they were engaging with, such as drug users/dealers/(ex)-offenders BASIAN had built a relationship with since their work at a grassroots level for a number of years. Without this privileged access to the young people and the respect and understanding between BASIAN and these young people, it would have been extremely difficult to work with and support these vulnerable individuals.

Successes

In the short space of time the BASIAN Engage team worked with (Y) they managed to build a good relationship with him. The Engage team managed to do this through trust and understanding, they challenged his views on violent extremism in the one to one sessions in a positive and friendly manner. During the time the one to one engagement started and not long after his referral from probation, RCRE held an event on Drugs & Violent Extremism, (Y) went along to the event and expressed his views. The Engage team continued to engage with him around PVE whilst at the same time addressing his offending behavior. The team had some concerns as to why (Y) was not identified as someone being vulnerable to violent extremism by the prison or his probation workers. This was either that (Y) did not express his views to his key workers and other professionals, or that those other agencies working with him were not aware of the risk factors and views held by someone who is vulnerable to violent extremism.

Conclusion

The BASIAN Engage team realise the importance of this type of engagement continuing, in supporting vulnerable individuals such as (Y). The team also understands the need for a good working relationship between agencies, and referral pathways for individuals such as (Y) once identified as vulnerable. The Engage team feels it is very important for frontline staff of services, to be able to recognise risk factors and identify individuals vulnerable to violent extremism.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

BASIAN are continuing to monitor and provide wrap-around support to Engage project participants. The support is in the form of peer-support, mentoring, employment and training. It is vital work with these participants is monitored and continued in order to prevent relapse into criminal activity and violent extremism.

BASIAN need to continue delivering an aftercare support package to existing vulnerable individuals

BASIAN have continued to identify vulnerable individuals to violent extremism either through outreach work or referrals. They have successfully worked to change the views of one violent extremist since the completion of the Engage project.

BASIAN need to continue identifying vulnerable individuals and preventing violent extremism

The housing, training and employment needs of clients were often key risk factors to involvement and sympathies to AQ inspired extremism. The Engage project involved help and support to participants around these needs outside of the formal project workshops.

BASIAN to provide support around housing, training and employment to vulnerable clients.

It is important to note that the referrals were not specifically in relation to violent extremism. Criminal Justice agencies had missed the AQ sympathies in the clients referred to BASIAN.

Criminal Justice agencies (prisons, police and probation) to formalise referrals to BASIAN

The extent of violent extremism within local prisons was clearly demonstrated by project participants.

BASIAN to deliver the preventing violent extremism workshops and peer support within prisons

A considerable amount of public sector agencies requested training on the Engage preventing violent extremism workshops.

BASIAN to deliver the Engage Prevent workshops to criminal justice agencies.

Likewise the interest in the Engage project workshops was high amongst the wider Muslim community, including women was high. A future Engage approach would consider a tiered approach to delivery of the workshops, trying to engage wider community members which have not yet supported AQ inspired extremism but nevertheless might be vulnerable in future. At the higher end of the tier would be those already with sympathies with AQ ideology.

BASIAN to deliver the Engage workshops to the wider Muslim community, including women.

The extent of suspicion and misconception around prevent activities in Reading was very high.

BASIAN and Uniting Reading to raise awareness of Prevent objectives and projects, including a myth-busting campaign.