Briefing Topic: Building Peer-to-Peer Engagements

Overview

Encouraging peer-to-peer conflict resolution and violence prevention initiatives among young people helps communities build resilience against terrorism and, in turn, provides critical **protective factors for youth**. Similarly, training and empowering young people as leaders contributes to youth supporting one another. They can sustain this support through social events and digital media platforms, benefitting vulnerable individuals with social grounding,[1] such as a sense of belonging, social inclusion, and peer support.

Peer-to-Peer Engagements

Sustainable violence prevention work requires a comprehensive approach to enable environments where all citizens feel included, engaged, and empowered as leaders in preventing violence.[2] Working with youth as leaders involves educating youth populations, which then empowers them to educate other young people, otherwise known as peer-to-peer learning. Such learning is enabled by peer support—or empathizing with another's situation through the shared experience of emotional and psychological pain.[3]

Investing in training youth leaders is shown to create positive role models

> **Protective factors** are conditions or attributes in individuals, families, communities, or the larger society that increase the health and well-being of children and families.[6]
>
> Protective factors for youth: [7]
> 1. Positive physical development
> 2. Academic achievement/intellectual development
> 3. High self-esteem
> 4. Emotional self-regulation
> 5. Good coping skills and problem-solving skills
> 6. Engagement and connections in two or more of the following contexts: school, with peers, in athletics, employment, religion, culture

who are prepared to mitigate conflict in their communities.[4] Informal engagement and education play a key complementary role where youth-work by civil society and private sector organizations can support violence prevention and counterterrorism frameworks, as well as promote social cohesion based on positive and enjoyable activities.[5] Prevention initiatives can engage young people by developing and implementing robust peer-to-peer programs.

For more information, visit www.dhs.gov/cp3

Engaging youth as partners in building resilience will create safer, more aware societies. The U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center released an operational guide, *Enhancing School Safety Using A Threat Assessment Model*, that states "students, teachers, staff, school resource officers, and parents should be provided trainings and guidance on recognizing behaviors of concern, their roles and responsibilities in reporting the behavior, and how to report the information."[8] According to a 2008 study on bystanders:

> Prior to incidents [of targeted school violence], other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or plan to attack…This suggests that attacks might have been avoided with proper observation techniques and more open sharing of information… Of those individuals who had prior knowledge, 93% were peers of the perpetrators—friends, schoolmates, or siblings. [9]

Violence Prevention and Counterterrorism Frameworks are based on the needs, challenges, and resources within a community and on leveraging existing prevention and intervention resources.

Highlighted DHS-Funded Prevention Initiative

Communities
Acting to
Refer and
Engage Training

During DHS's FY16 **Countering Violent Extremism Grant Program**, The *Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority* in Chicago received funding to build the CARE bystander training program that helped participants develop skills as engaged bystanders. The goal of the training was for participants to be able to more easily identify concerning behaviors and, as appropriate, intervene or refer individuals to resources in their community. CARE can be replicated in schools and other youth communities, such as church youth groups. Different skill building methods from cognitive behavioral techniques—active listening and giving feedback— are built into the training to teach participants potentially effective ways to communicate with someone about whom they are concerned.

For more information, please contact TerrorismPrevention@hq.dhs.gov
For more information about the FY20 TVTP Grant Program, visit www.dhs.gov/tvtpgrants

Highlighted DHS-Funded Peer-to-Peer Initiatives

The 2015-2017 **Peer-to-Peer: Challenging Extremism Program** (P2P) was a university student competition that directly engaged millennial audiences through their participation in developing, designing, and implementing social media campaigns to combat violent extremist messages online.

P2P was managed by EdVenture Partners, and DHS sponsored the domestic portion.

Education	**Project PACE** produced tailored, educational content for at-risk youth (ages 13-25) to equip them with the tools they need to challenge misinformation, enabling young people to generate an unbiased and informed opinion on extremism and its many surrounding issues. www.facebook.com/projectpacep2p/
Community	**Inkblot** emphasized the importance of social bonds and belonging, focusing on the peers of at-risk individuals (ages 19-25) who may be the first to recognize subtle behavioral changes. Inkblot seeks to educate peers on the radicalization process and vulnerabilities to extremist recruitment. It also provides them with tools and resources to better recognize such subtly different behaviors and engage with the individual in question. www.inkblotproject.com/about
Engagement	The **Rhody Ripple** campaign was centered around the idea that small acts can affect big differences, which can ultimately help prevent violent extremism. Youth audiences participated in social media challenges that were designed to create a more connected, inclusive environment. www.createuri.blogspot.com

While DHS has previously assisted in funding the aforementioned programs, the most successful violence prevention and counterterrorism frameworks are tailored to the needs, challenges, and resources within a community and seek to leverage existing and sustainable prevention and intervention resources. Check with your local state-government agencies, community organizations, and academic leaders to stay up-to-date with funding opportunities for youth programs.

For more information, visit www.dhs.gov/cp3

References & Resources

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*Epuka Ugaidi is part of the Campaign Toolkit, a free resource for organizations looking to deploy campaigns against hate, polarization and extremism.

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