


INEE RoundTable 'The Role of Education and Youth in Preventing Urban Violence and Countering Violent Extremism'

- Case Studies from Research and Practice -

Summary

	Organisation	Children in Crisis
	Location	Afghanistan
	Title	Education and Juvenile Justice
	Key Themes	Justice, Terrorism, Abuse, Social Work/Counselling
Overview: Children in Crisis (CiC) began working in the juvenile justice sector through the provision of social work to children and families. In response to a series of events CiC began providing a much deeper level of support within the Juvenile Rehabilitation Centres (JRCs) aimed at targeting the level of conflict between young people and within the wider society. This focused particularly on those arrested and detained for national security crimes. The project focused on providing education, social work, and forms of counselling to reduce reoffending and tackle the drivers of violence and extremism in young male detainees.		

Description of Context:

The justice sector in Afghanistan is extremely weak. The formal system works in parallel to the informal, but powerful, justice system. High level corruption creates a system that supports abuse, maltreatment, and offers little in the way of rehabilitation. This increases the likelihood of recidivism as well as furthering the divergence between those incarcerated and the wider society. This has the potential to lead to greater radicalisation and violent expressions of opposition where children have few protective environments and are welcomed by the more extreme organisations and ideologies.

Around a quarter of cases in the juvenile justice system are drug related – either for using or involved in the drug trade. About 10% of children and adolescents (those aged 13 to 18) are arrested and detained for what are called 'security crimes'. This ostensibly means some degree of participation in the Taliban or other anti-government groups, though in practice often relates to simply being a relation of someone else charged with such a crime.

Explanation of the Intervention:

a) Methodology and Approach

Children in Crisis began a series of interventions designed to enhance the basic social work training we had previously been providing. These specifically used education as a mechanism for overcoming the issues of trust, poverty, and identity that we saw as drivers of crime and the tendency for young people to be involved in extremist groups. This was done with all children at the JRC not simply those arrested for security crimes. Overall, the activities were based on a belief that an intervention should not attempt to take children in abnormal cases and attempt to give them the same solutions as normal cases.

b) Implementation Process

CiC supported the creation of an 'Open Centre' at the JRC which allowed for day-release sentencing and particularly pre-trial detainment. This aimed to reduce the level of incarceration, as well as the social stigma and perception of a child as a 'criminal'. We supported transportation for juveniles to come to the centre every day and provided a level of regularity that many had previously been missing. At the Open Centre the juveniles attended educational and vocational classes. CiC began using material designed for adults to cover basic subjects of reading and writing but crucially introduced methods of delivery designed to both appeal and to have greater value, focusing on IT and English courses.

Parents and guardians were encouraged and supported to come to the JRC once a week to maintain positive links with their children and begin the process of preparation for release. The Social Workers brokered these situations and provided joint counselling between the family and the child at the JRC. The project focused on the development of trust and psychosocial health between juveniles. Teachers were trained in child centred methods that promoted more positive pedagogical techniques, they shook hands with the children, addressed them as equals, and requested their input and opinions. This was an attempt to make juveniles feel respected, to have positive models of leadership, and to be introduced to critical discussion as a method of resolving inter-personal conflict and reducing the risk of the JRC being a catalyst for extremism and violence.

Results & Findings:

Despite the challenges of evidence, we were able to see a drop in the number of children being re-arrested as well as the number of children being sentenced to alternatives to detention and the Open Centre increasing steadily, a sign that the justice system was recognising the value of the approach. There was also a significant drop in the level of violence within the JRC as reported by the Director. Open Centres are now being developed in JRCs in other urban centres.

Conclusions:

The work of this project was essentially more preventative than around rehabilitation. Once a child has, in the overused phrase, been radicalised, then different efforts are required. Again, it's very difficult to know what will have an effect, and not everyone will be impacted in the way you might hope. In certain cases, different efforts need to be taken, and this means having teachers who are able to identify cases of more serious trauma or negative attitudes that need more targeted counselling by social Workers. However, from this project we were able to use methods of building trust, delivering skills and education of genuine relevance, and providing basic care and psychosocial support for young people appeared to have an extremely positive effect.

Links:

'An assessment of Juvenile Justice in Afghanistan', Terre des Hommes, Jan 2010
<http://www.tdh.ch/en/documents/an-assessment-of-juvenile-justice-in-afghanistan>

Key questions and considerations for further engagement:

- i. How to work in corrupt systems?
- ii. What if the only system involved is a driver of the problem?
- iii. How to show evidence of change in this context?