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GOOD STORY

The Lancashire County, England, Constabulary's Counterterrorism Community Outreach Programs

SUMMARY

The Lancashire County, England, Constabulary developed a series of outreach programs designed to generate community awareness regarding the nature of the terrorist threat to the county. The programs educate Lancashire citizens on the root causes of terrorism as well as actions that law enforcement officers in the community may take to mitigate terrorist threats.

BACKGROUND

The United Kingdom (UK) has been the target of significant terrorist activity since the September 11th terrorist attacks in America. The 2005 London Underground bombings targeted London's public transportation system during morning rush hour, killing 56 people and injuring 700. UK law enforcement foiled a plot to blow up 10 planes traveling from the UK to the United States and Canada using liquid explosives in 2006. In addition, 2 individuals crashed a truck filled with propane canisters into the main terminal at Glasgow International Airport in 2007 in an attempt to cause mass casualties. The majority of the perpetrators of these attacks were British citizens of Muslim faith inspired by radical Islamic terrorist ideologies.

In light of these incidents, the UK Home Office revised its CONTEST counterterrorism strategy, which it initially released in 2003. The *Prevent* section of the updated strategy focuses on the root causes of radicalization and extremism in local communities. The section also highlights the importance of engaging the public on counterterrorism issues. In a 2005 speech, the director of the UK's Security Service (MI5) stressed "the importance of public communication, of telling the public in broad terms what the threat [of terrorism] is, and [of] trusting them to respond sensibly."

The United Kingdom Home Office serves as the lead government department for immigration, drug policy, counterterrorism, police and public safety, and science and research. To learn more about the Home Office, please refer to the [Home Office Web site](#).

The Home Office developed a handbook, *Delivering the Prevent Strategy: An Updated Guide for Local Partners*, in June 2008. The handbook assists local law enforcement authorities in developing and implementing the Home Office *Prevent* strategy in their own jurisdictions. It outlines strategies for how local authorities can effectively engage members of the community in counterterrorism awareness programs and can generate support for community policing initiatives against terrorism. The handbook also provides information on how to obtain federal funding in support of local *Prevent* initiatives.

Community Outreach in Lancashire County

Beginning in 2006, the eastern region of Lancashire County witnessed a series of high-profile arrests linked to national terrorist plots. As a result, the UK media highlighted Lancashire as a geographic “hotspot” for terrorism. Muslim communities in Lancashire began to criticize law enforcement counterterrorism policing tactics, stating that these methods were “not understood, leading to distrust and fear” in their communities. Over time, several communities in Lancashire withdrew their support for Lancashire law enforcement counterterrorism initiatives.

Lancashire County is located in Northwest England. In 2005, the county had a total population of 1.45 million people with the following ethnic composition:

- 89.7% White British
- 6.0% South Asian
- 2.1% Other White
- 0.9% Mixed Decent
- 0.7% East Asian and Other
- 0.5% Black

To address this issue, the Lancashire Constabulary sought to develop outreach programs that would better assist local government authorities, school districts, and community groups in understanding and implementing effective actions to prevent terrorism. Through these programs, the constabulary wished to encourage discussion and debate among different ethnic and faith-based groups regarding the societal implications of policing against terrorism. To develop these programs, the constabulary drew ideas and principles from the Home Office *Prevent* handbook.

GOALS

The Lancashire Constabulary’s counterterrorism community outreach programs aim to: undermine extremist ideology and support mainstream voices; increase the capacity of communities to engage with and resist violent extremists; and address community grievances that may contribute to the rise of violent extremism. These programs help to ensure that Lancashire citizens can “go about their business freely and with confidence.”

DESCRIPTION

The Lancashire Constabulary has developed a series of community outreach programs based upon the Home Office’s *Prevent* strategy. The programs are built around the principle that “to combat the terrorist threat is to work hard to prevent people from becoming involved in extremist activity in the first place.” To achieve this goal, constabulary officers work with community facilitators and local theater groups to deliver educational services to Lancashire citizens through the All Communities Together Now (ACT Now) program, Operation Topcat, and the theater production *Not in My Name*.

ACT Now Program

In late 2006, the Lancashire Constabulary worked with representatives from several community organizations to develop the ACT Now Interactive Table-Top program. ACT Now is a classroom exercise that encourages members of the community from different faiths and ethnicities to consider how law enforcement authorities can keep communities safe from the threat of terrorism. The constabulary developed the exercise based upon the principle that “police counterterrorist tactics will only command public confidence if they are, and are seen to be, appropriate, proportionate, and fair.”

The exercise takes place over a 2-hour time period and requires participants to role-play as police investigators assigned to investigate a fictitious terrorist incident in a nearby town. During the course of the investigation, participants receive “intelligence” from a DVD briefing and must make critical decisions based upon this information. The exercise

facilitator emphasizes that these decisions will have a significant impact on the lives of citizens in the participant community. Participants must handle media inquiries regarding the fictitious investigation and develop strategies on how to communicate information regarding the investigation to the public.

Since April 2008, the constabulary has presented the ACT Now program on over 70 occasions to over 1,300 participants throughout Lancashire County. The majority of these presentations took place in schools, colleges, and community centers. The success of the program has led to significant demand from police agencies across the UK to deliver ACT Now in their jurisdictions. Beginning in 2009, the Association of Chief Police Officers in the UK adopted the program in order to present it nationally.

Operation Topcat

Officials from the Lancashire Constabulary developed the Operation Topcat program to educate specific community groups and agencies on the impact of counterterrorism policing efforts. Whereas the ACT Now program focuses mainly on different ethnic and faith-based groups, Topcat targets emergency planning organizations, adult and senior citizen groups, neighborhood watch organizations, media agencies, and professional educators.

The Topcat program's objective is to create an open forum for participants to discuss current counterterrorism policing practices as well as the local impact of pending anti-terror legislation. Lancashire police officers facilitate the program and ask participants to address questions that may arise when trying to determine an appropriate law enforcement response to a local terrorism incident. Participants are encouraged to share their own opinions on current law enforcement counterterrorism initiatives and to brainstorm about how communities with diverse ethnic and faith-based groups can reach joint solutions on strategies to counter terrorism.

Not in My Name

Not in My Name is a theater production commissioned by the Lancashire Constabulary and performed by a local Lancashire youth theater. The play recreates a fictitious terrorist attack from planning until execution and is told from the perspective of 12 young people involved in the incident. The characters in the play have diverse ethnic backgrounds and faiths. At the conclusion of the play, the actors encourage audience members to discuss the issues brought forth by the play. The audience then "meets" the character who perpetrated the terrorist attack, and together they trace his steps and thought processes from start to finish. The actor pauses at the conclusion of each step to allow the audience to debate where he could have taken an alternate course of action and who in his life may have been able to help him reach a non-violent path. The success of the play has prompted several Lancashire community organizations to request a performance. As of October 2009, the youth theater has performed the play to over 1,000 people.

REQUIREMENTS

Keys to Success

Community Engagement

The Lancashire Constabulary relies on the active participation of several ethnic and faith-based community groups in Lancashire to develop and update its community outreach programs. Cooperation and support from these organizations encourages more citizens to participate in the constabulary's programs.

Officer Awareness

The success of the Lancashire Constabulary's community outreach programs depends in large part on the awareness of its officers to the cultural differences in their communities. Without this cultural sensitivity, the constabulary's outreach programs would not be as successful.

Link

The Lancashire Constabulary
<http://www.lancashire.police.uk/>

REFERENCES

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