

*When things like this are happening around you ... :*

**The relationship between preventing violent extremism and theatre**

**An evaluation of Theatre Veritae's *Not in My Name***

**Dr. Jenny Hughes, July 2010**

## Summary

- *Not in My Name* is a verbatim play commissioned by the Lancashire Constabulary in 2007, and produced by Theatre Veritae. This evaluation focuses on tours of the play to educational and community venues in Lancashire, Merseyside, Cheshire, County Durham and Oldham in 2010.
- The evaluation aims to identify the cognitive and emotional impacts of performances, and to provide insights into how the play ‘works’ across different settings. It is hoped that the evaluation findings will inform ongoing tours and support creative thinking about the diversifying uses of the play following its publication by Oberon in 2009.
- The evaluation findings indicate that the play has powerful cognitive and emotional affects and effects on audiences. Audiences of all ages and from each area reported that the play made them feel more informed and thoughtful about the issues raised, and sympathetic towards those affected by extremism (including victims, families of perpetrators, police and emergency services and Muslim communities).
- *Not in My Name* was seen as raising issues of importance and relevance to the various communities it toured to, including mostly white communities and more diverse communities. Teachers, young people, adults, Prevent officers and public sector workers report that the play provides a safe way to raise awareness of and ‘start a conversation’ about extremism, risky behaviour, racism and discrimination, and community cohesion.
- The play stimulated young people to think about risks of all kinds that they encounter in their own lives (including but not only extremism), and also inspired them to develop positive attitudes towards young people who are different to themselves.

- *Not in My Name* triggered questions about extremism from young people that were difficult to answer – especially relating to the unknown and unpredictable aspects of the threat and causes of violent extremism. There is a need to support teachers and youth workers to develop appropriate and imaginative ways of continuing a conversation about violent extremism, and other risks and threats encountered by young people as part of their everyday lives. In particular, the evaluation recommends that resources are allocated to sharing and developing innovative, creative and participatory approaches to helping young people navigate and respond positively to risk, especially those risks that are characterised by uncertainty and complexity.
- Specific aspects of the play and management of the tours need to be thought about carefully, including how to frame the play for new audiences and the challenges of generating audiences for tours to new areas. In addition, partnerships that pilot more risky, arms-length funding practices, especially in response to the need to develop capacity in and positive relationships with Muslim communities, might be usefully considered.

## Introduction

I think it's really good because you can actually see, when you're in a situation and things like this are happening around you, it's a lot easier to see when there's a play being done, it's about what's actually happening, you can see it clearly, and then you know how to deal with it (young person, Oldham)

During the early part of 2010, Theatre Veritae's production of *Not in My Name* toured to five areas, including Lancashire, the area in which the play was originally commissioned, and four new areas: Cheshire, Merseyside, County Durham, and Oldham. Tours were supported by Preventing Violent Extremism partnerships in each area, and the Lancashire tour in particular aimed to make the play available for adult as well as schools and college audiences. The Merseyside tour was co-produced by Theatre Veritae and Fuse: New Theatre for Young People, based in Liverpool; the Cheshire tour was co-produced by Theatre Veritae, Fuse and the Brindley Theatre, in Runcorn. This evaluation aims to understand the impact of the play across these areas in order to inform partners' planning of ongoing tours and support thinking about other uses to which the play might be usefully put following its publication by Oberon in 2009.

The evaluation is based on questionnaires with audiences of young people, adults, teachers and public sector workers in all areas. In addition, observation of performances and focus groups were carried out with audiences at four sites in Cheshire, Lancashire and Oldham:

- The Brindley Theatre, Runcorn – performances to young people from Halton High school and Brindley youth theatre, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2010
- Gujrat Hindu Society, Preston – performance to Lancashire Country Council staff, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2010
- Jinnah Centre, Burnley – performance to a community audience, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2010

- Failsworth School, Oldham – a performance to two visiting schools, Counthill and Breeze Hill, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2010

Qualitative snapshots of *Not in My Name* were generated in each of these four settings. The evaluation here included observation of performances, focus group interviews with audiences immediately after the performance or by telephone in the days following the performance, and follow up telephone interviews with teachers and other staff one month following the performance. Key informants from partnership bodies involved in commissioning and supporting the play were also interviewed.

This report is in four sections. A brief discussion of the context is followed by an exploration of the cognitive and emotional impacts of the play, drawing on questionnaires across all five areas as well as focus groups in the four sites. This leads to a more detailed analysis of the qualitative snapshots of the performance in the four sites, and is followed by a discussion of key issues arising from these performances. A final section offers recommendations for consideration for ongoing tours and other uses of the play.

It is important to note that the evaluation prioritised qualitative methods applied to performances in a small number of selected sites, and as such, it generates propositions that are suggestive only, rather than hard data offering a comprehensive overview of each tour. Qualitative evaluation aims to provide in-depth perspectives on phenomena by engaging with subjective experience, and people's interpretations of their experience in context. The outcomes are propositional, and grounded in close contact with the play in performance.

## **Context**

*Not in My Name* is a verbatim play commissioned by the Lancashire Constabulary in 2007, and produced by Theatre Veritae. It has been developed in continuous partnership with Lancashire Constabulary, and is part of an ongoing range of activities associated with the region's response to the Preventing Violent Extremism strategy (Prevent). Prevent is one of the key workstreams of CONTEST 2, the UK

government's counterterrorism policy established in 2001 and re-launched in 2009 (the other three workstreams are Prepare, Pursue and Protect). Prevent aims to disrupt ideologies of violent extremism, support individuals vulnerable to recruitment to terrorist causes and increase the resilience of communities to extremism. Achieving these aims has involved a turn to the participatory arts. Mapping of Prevent supported activities during its 'pathfinder' phase (2007-2008) found that 3500 young people had been involved in 'drama presentations and workshops' and that 19% of Prevent projects involved the arts. Drama is described in official Prevent documentation as a means of communicating narratives that counter extremism, building trust, and facilitating difficult conversations in safe spaces.

*Not in My Name* is part of a documentary theatre tradition – specifically, it is a piece of verbatim theatre, which means that it draws on real dialogue and testimony. For example, the play uses the words of victims, families and emergency workers following the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 attacks in London, accounts of the disturbances in Burnley in the summer of 2001, and interviews with people about the issue of terrorism. Whilst the words in the play are real, the story of the play is fictional. The play explores the impact of a suicide bombing carried out by Shahid, a young Muslim man, in a supermarket in his home town on the victims, the perpetrator's family and wider community. At the end of the play, the audience discover that the attack has not yet happened – the play has been set a year from the point of the performance – and the audience participate in an interactive forum where they meet the bomber and are offered the opportunity to advise him about other ways he can raise his concerns.

The Prevent strategy is an internationally unique attempt to pioneer a community-based counterterrorism response, raising awareness of the issue of extremism and its prevention, and offering communities most closely affected an opportunity to respond to these issues. It involves a partnership between counterterrorism agencies, the police and community organisations and has been controversial, most recently leading to a House of Commons Select Committee report that advises a review of its delivery. There are three key areas of controversy:

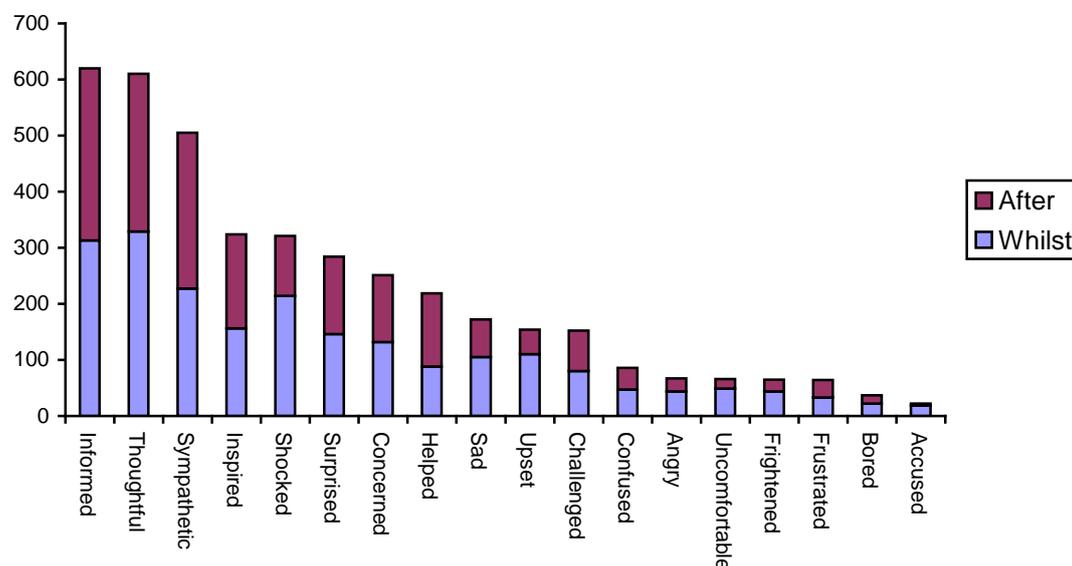
- Funds are allocated to areas with high concentrations of Muslim populations – alienating communities, fuelling Islamophobia and undermining community cohesion, as well as failing to engage those most at risk.
- Embedding counterterrorism approaches in community policing and local government partnerships – and instituting information gathering activities in supported projects – has led to allegations that Prevent is being used to spy on the Muslim community – to quote the Select Committee report – ‘many see ‘Prevent’ as ‘Pursue’ in sheep’s clothing’.
- A boycott of funding has left a vacuum and this has led to many ill conceived projects led by groups who lack knowledge of the issues and communities most closely affected by them.

This controversy had an adverse impact on the attempt to roll out the play to some community venues in Lancashire, for example, one performance for a group of mosques in the area was cancelled because of concerns about Prevent raised by some of the mosques involved. However, it is important to note that *Not in My Name* has toured to all areas – Muslim and non-Muslim – in recognition that extremism is an issue that appears in multiple forms and affects all communities. The play explores the problem of extremism from a perspective that acknowledges political discontent about UK foreign policy, and is focused on the struggles young people experience in their everyday lives that result, in part, from the negative impact of this policy. Rather than engaging in a debate about Islam and extremism, it positions Islam as a source of strength and resilience for those engaged in countering extremism in their local communities.

### **Impact – cognitive and emotional responses to *Not in My Name***

This section provides an overview of audience responses to the play, in particular reporting on findings from questionnaires filled out by audience members immediately following the play. Audience members were asked to indicate the three responses that most accurately captured their experiences *whilst* watching the play, and then *after* watching the play, from a range of options. This following graph shows responses from questionnaires from all five areas (n = 680).

Fig. 1: Please circle the three responses that most accurately represent the feelings you had *whilst/after* watching the play



It is notable that cognitive responses – ‘informed’ and ‘thoughtful’ – score highly here. Further breakdown of responses amongst adults and young people, and young people by area – consistently show ‘informed’ and ‘thoughtful’ as the two most frequently circled responses (see figures below, and the appendix). ‘Sympathetic’ and ‘inspired’ similarly feature in the four responses most frequently circled. These responses indicate that **the play had powerful emotional impacts but, importantly, the affect of the performance was secured by informed and thoughtful engagement in the issues raised.** The play raised awareness of and provided information about extremism and its consequences, and as such, extended the sensibilities – critical and affective – of audience members in relation to this issue. As such, the play helped audiences gain a sense of awareness of, control over and ownership of a fearful and threatening subject.

Comments on feedback sheets support this point, with audiences describing how the dramatisation of juxtaposed and diverse perspectives provided a thought-provoking engagement with the issues, at the same time as an accurate staging of their complexity. Audiences appreciated the alternative perspectives dramatised in the play, supported by a verbatim aesthetic that allows for the juxtaposition of diverse views

without seeking any easy reconciliation between them. As such, the play was seen as staging complex issues in a safe, managed way:

It was reality and it showed both sides of the story (young person, Lancashire)

It made me seriously think about the issues occurring in the world and what people would think and how they would feel if they had been affected by these issues (young person, Lancashire)

There was lots of detail about how people would react to a situation, I liked all the detail to how they explained it, it made you think about what it's like for the other side, it was interesting ... it gave you new perspectives rather than what they say in the papers (young person, Cheshire)

I liked it when they separated it out and presented all the points of view, I thought it was very meaningful, and watching the kid's heads as they were going back and forth between the characters, that was brilliant, I thought it was very very comprehensive (teacher, Halton High school)

Audiences reported that the play changed their perceptions of extremism as well as increased their concerns about the issue in an informed way. As such, comments on questionnaires evidence increased awareness generated in tandem with **critical engagement with sources of information about extremism, including information about who is involved in extremist violence and why**. This led to changed perceptions of the Muslim community for audiences that do not have frequent contact with Muslim communities – and reported resistance to making judgements about others based on information generated by the media. The comments here express a sense of relief and new insights gained from opening up a taboo issue for exploration in a way that is respectful of Islam, even-handed in its representation of different perspectives, and sensitive to the human causes and costs of violent extremism:

After the terrorist attack on London I had similar thoughts due to lack of information (young person, Country Durham)

Concerned - about the views and opinions people have on different religions/  
nationalities/ Sympathetic - for all those who suffered. Informed - about other  
people's feelings (young person, Lancashire)

As a Muslim, I didn't know what to make of it initially. I thought it may be  
negative, but then I understood it to be a good message of people's  
assumptions of Muslims (young person, Liverpool)

A mainly 'white' school with lots of misunderstandings that have been sorted  
(teacher, Shuttleworth College)

As part of this, young people in particular appreciated the complex and contrasting  
views offered by the play, as it offered an **accurate depiction of their experiences**,  
and **opened up a space to think and make their own mind up about how to  
respond**. Frequently, young people expressed surprise at the accuracy with which the  
play depicted the realities of experiences – 'it surprised me because that is actually  
what happens' (young person, Oldham). In addition, and in part explaining the high  
scores for 'inspired' in questionnaires, **audiences appreciated how the play  
provided a model for negotiating the negative impacts of prejudice on young  
people's relationships with each other**. The play models sensitivity towards and  
sympathy for others, rejection of prejudicial views and critical engagement with  
information:

It helps to put the message across to people instead of hearing it from  
magazines and the news and the press, there's different sides to everything,  
and because it's got everything going on at the same time it shows everyone's  
emotions and how you should deal with something like that (young person,  
Oldham)

It showed us what's been happening, what we have been feeling, and what's  
been going on around us (young person, Oldham)

It doesn't tell you what to decide, it gives you an option of what you want to believe (young person, Oldham)

I think it's really good because you can actually see, when you're in a situation and things like this are happening around you, it's a lot easier to see when there's a play being done and it's about what's actually happening, you can see it clearly, and then you know how to deal with it (young person, Oldham)

The following two figures show the questionnaire responses from adult audiences, compared and contrasted to responses from young people. These highlight a congruence of response across audiences.

Fig. 2: Please circle the three responses that most accurately represent the feelings you had *whilst/after* watching the play – responses from adults

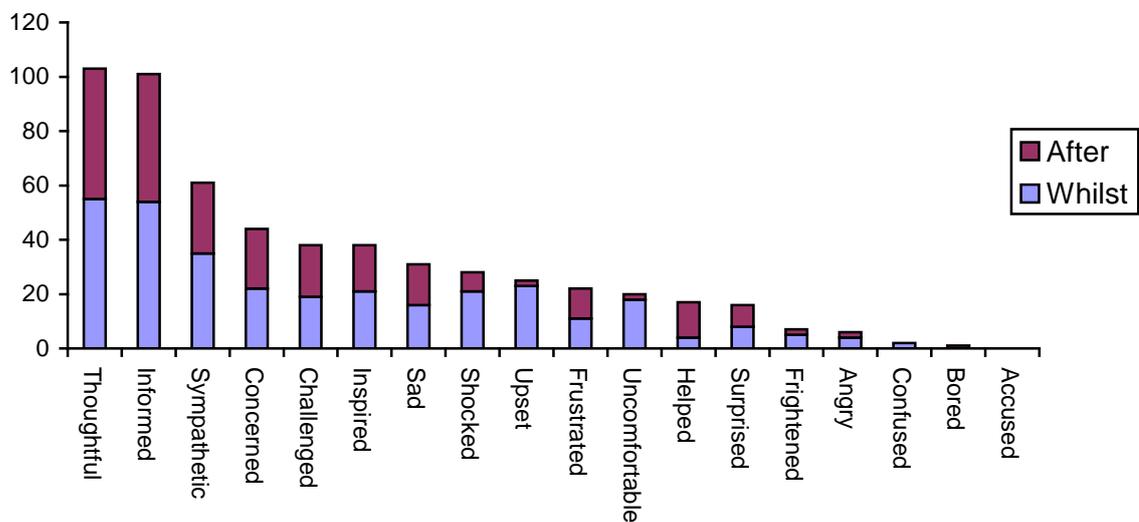
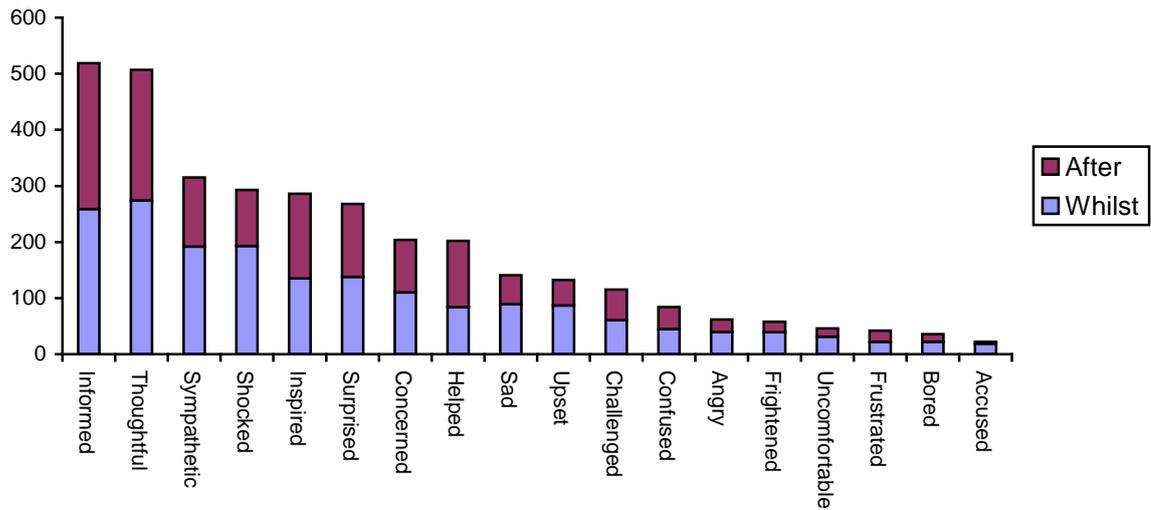


Fig. 3: Please circle the three responses that most accurately represent the feelings you had *whilst/after* watching the play – responses from young people



Whilst what is most notable is the congruence of responses, there is some evidence that the immediate impact of the play is felt more strongly by young people – with ‘shocked’ circled more frequently by them. In addition, young people feel *supported* by the opportunity to become more informed about the issue of violent extremism – ‘helped’ scores higher amongst young people. The slightly higher scores for ‘confused’ amongst younger audiences is also worthy of comment. This highlights the importance of effective framing and follow up activities for young people carried out in partnership with local agencies, to ensure that they have opportunities to process any questions and concerns raised by the play. ‘Concerned’ was also a high scoring response – again showing that the play provides a starting point for further explorations. This echoes a comment offered by Superintendent Andrew Pratt, Prevent lead for Lancashire Constabulary, who views the play as ‘a different form of engaging the public in a conversation and it gives them the vocabulary to use to talk about terrorism, and someone else to talk about, as opposed to “I heard this about that person” or “something happened”, they’re talking about the people on stage’.

The positive ways in which the play opens up avenues for conversations about the issue of violent extremism is widely commented upon by audiences of professionals:

It will make for easier discussion at school (headteacher, Bangor Community Centre)

Offered staff a good insight into how to approach topical and politically sensitive issues (teacher, Thomas Whitham Sixth Form)

I've learnt a few things, but most importantly it has allowed me to see how to approach delicate subjects such as extremism with the students (Advice and Guidance Officer, Lancaster and Morecambe College)

The play in a sense I suppose gives you a starting point, a starting point to start talking, to take aside maybe your friend, maybe your brother, how do you deal with this (youth worker, Lancashire)

A valuable 'tool' to commence debate within a safe environment regarding violent extremism (Prevent officer, Durham)

Whilst there is evidence that the play has an impact as an end in itself – clarifying misperceptions, challenging prejudices, and raising awareness – these comments raise the question of how the conversation might be continued after the performance. The need for – and the challenges of – providing ongoing forums for discussion is highlighted throughout the section that follows, and was also commented upon by adult audience members:

Having had experience of working on challenging views, I couldn't help but think if this was too close to home you would leave with a lot of emotions and perhaps nowhere to go with them (adult audience member)

In theatre, you can pretend, you can play, you can live it in a safe space, you can explore the different characters and understand them ... there's that safe space to do that and then you can step out of it and say I don't believe that but I can understand how he (the bomber) might have done that. So theatre is a safe space to do that, but as long as there's time for reflection and evaluation, but it's got to be done in the right way ... if you're throwing clichés at them they'll disconnect, but there's also the danger of giving them too much information and then they're panicking, it's good to give them information

that shocks them as long as it's done in the right way (youth theatre leader, Brindley)

### **Performance 1 – The Brindley Theatre, Runcorn**

The evaluation of the performance at Brindley Theatre included focus groups with young people from Halton High school (year nine pupils) and Brindley youth theatre, and interviews with a Halton High school teacher, youth theatre leader and Brindley's drama development officer. In common with the general responses noted above, young people and adults were positive about the play, commenting in particular on its usefulness to counter prejudice and racism, as well as introduce the issue of extremism in a safe way. In addition, a number of issues were raised in this setting, and worthy of further discussion:

- The reception of the play amongst white communities
- Dealing with questions that are difficult to answer
- The need to strike a balance between a citizenship education, community cohesion and Prevent agenda in order to market the play to schools and colleges in Cheshire
- The opportunities and challenges of effective follow up work to support a continuing conversation about violent extremism

The whiteness of the audiences here reflected the demographic of Runcorn. Young people from this area welcomed an opportunity to think about **how Muslim communities are negatively affected by extremism** – including as the victims of terrorist attacks – as well as have prejudicial views of the Muslim community challenged by the play:

Near to the end where that girl and the other girl who were the Muslims were up against the white girls, it made me think that not all Muslims are like that, some white people go around stabbing people and things like that but not all white people are like that, so that's made me think that not all Muslims are like that (Halton High pupil)

I actually realised how bad racism is, I didn't think it was as bad as it really is (Halton High pupil)

It's like realising that, even though it's not at the front of your mind, that is what you think and you do blame Muslims but it's not all their fault (Halton High pupil)

In addition to noting the impact of the play in challenging their views, young people described how the play inspired thinking about how to generate **a more inclusive sense of community** and positive relationships with others:

There isn't much in the way of different cultures here, it's just Runcorn, but I think the RS lessons do a lot to teach you about different religions, but this taught us more, I suppose because it gave us a first hand view and perspectives that you wouldn't normally see (youth theatre participant)

I think it makes an impact on us at this age, so when we grow up we take that with us (Halton High pupil)

It's a small town round here, we don't get to find out about different cultures so it's good that we have our eyes opened to it (youth theatre participant)

If more black people do move here it will make people more tolerant (Halton High pupil)

Young people and adults expressed a sense of the significance and relevance of the issue – 'it's happening everyday, everywhere ... it's totally relevant ... it's important for young people here because it's not on their doorstep but they need to understand it and to talk about it' (youth theatre leader). However, when asked to explore the relevance of the play to their own lives, they also made **a number of connections between the play and problems of conflict and violence in their own community**. For example, young people made connections between the play and bullying people who were 'different' in some way:

It's kind of like bullying, like calling people names and stuff, like racist names, if you keep on saying it and pushing them about, that's basically bullying (Halton High pupil)

People are different in schools, people are different, because they've got a different colour and a different religion and that, and they can get bullied, that's like bullying (Halton High pupil)

We probably don't realise there are different cultures in the town, but it might also touch on just how people are different, and how that causes conflict between people, like differences between how they dress, how they look, it's still the same kind of thing really (youth theatre participant)

The teacher from Halton High commented that the area surrounding the school is negatively effected by gang violence connected to illegal drug dealing, and that this might also be seen as a form of 'extremism' directly affecting young people and their families. **This broader conception of extremism as any form of behaviour that threatens people or puts them at negative risk** evidences the potential benefits of the play for triggering diverse explorations of risk and threat with young people. Follow up activities that take up this invitation might provide young people with an opportunity to shape responses to and more positively navigate the diverse kinds of risk and threat that are features of their everyday lives. A follow up session devised and facilitated by the youth theatre leader for her group was an example of this. Here, young people engaged in a devising session based on phrases that described their response to the play, such as 'things that you wouldn't normally do', and this led to explorations of risky behaviours such as drug taking and unprotected sex.

However, it is important to note that young people also responded positively to an opportunity to think about the issue of terrorism specifically – to explore a frightening subject in a safe way, and also explore the 'human' side of the problem:

... like suicide bombers, you're never really showed why they were doing it, like the whole thing about the football as almost like as a catalyst for what happened, you don't really think about that, you just see them as someone who

has been born and raised to blow themselves up, you don't think that to do something like that is difficult, but now you realise that they are people, you see the human side to them, and how it's lost ... (youth theatre participant)

Interestingly, this also led to **a desire to know more about the causes of violent extremism**. However, there were moments when the play raised questions that were not – and could not be – answered fully. During the interactive forum, a youth theatre participant asked the following question – ‘I understand that you can interpret the Koran in different ways, but why is it that so many people are interpreting it this way? Why have there been so many bombings?’ A similar query was also raised by the school audience – whilst they could appreciate why Shahid was left out of the play – ‘to show more of the reasons of why he's actually done it’, ‘so you can imagine what pushed him to it’, ‘so you focus more on how people around him were affected as well’ – they also wanted more extended, ongoing opportunities to explore the causes of Shahid's behaviour than that provided by the necessarily limited time frame of a play:

... when they said what was up with Shahid, they should show it as well, to show his reactions (young person, Halton High)

... because then we would get to experience who he actually is, and what kind of person he is (young person, Halton High)

The teacher commented that this lack of explanation – and the fears and prejudices arising from it - is exactly the gap that young people have to navigate in everyday life, and that therefore the absence of Shahid in the play itself was potentially productive. However, her personal response, given immediately after the play, was that the explanation of Shahid's actions was too simplistic a portrayal of a problem that was in reality far more complex:

The one point that I found odd was that it came across that because the lad hadn't got into the football team he then went down the terrorist route and I don't think that everybody would think that way, I don't see how that one failure could really push you down that road, because everybody experiences

failure in some way, so there needs to be more, to be looked at as to his mentality ... I thought there was a little bit of narrowing of what might be going on in his head (teacher – Halton High)

The evidence relating to the causes of violent extremism suggest that whilst the causes are complex, the explicit triggering event might indeed be as simple as an experience of rejection. Importantly, the play provides several additional possible explanations for Shahid's behaviour, including pressures at college and home, the negative influence of a peer and social isolation. Here, audiences were asking for a more extended opportunity to critically engage with the various clues provided by the play as to the causes of Shahid's actions. This commentary draws attention to the need for follow up work to support an ongoing conversation about the more complex causes of threat. *Not in My Name* is a response to a number of unknowns and uncertainties in the current global and local context – and it dramatises the responses of a diverse array of characters whilst they attempt to navigate these unknowns. Here, young people were asking for more opportunities to explore and devise their own responses to navigating these unknowns – **highlighting the importance of follow up work that explores the causes of extremism in more depth and does not offer reductive views of the problem.**

However, it was also clear that **this was not an area that staff felt comfortable dealing with.** Follow up activities in the youth theatre explored direct connections between the play and experiences of young people. Planned follow up activities at the school (that had not yet happened at the time of the interview a month following the performance) were to facilitate a cross curriculum project for all year nine pupils exploring the questions – ‘What is community? What is culture?’ – starting from explorations of local experiences and gradually leading into encounters with more distant or alien cultures. For the teacher involved, this community cohesion focus felt like an appropriate way of building up to exploring the issue of extremism for her school. It is clear from feedback from the Brindley and school that making **links between the Prevent agenda, community cohesion and citizenship education were important to adapting the play to the needs of this area** – and not just a retreat from dealing with more difficult issues therefore. The drama development officer at Brindley commented that schools are aware of their statutory obligations as

regards community cohesion and that making connections to the community cohesion agenda was also a vitally important tool in marketing the play to schools audiences.

In terms of entering into more difficult conversations about extremism, the long-term commitment to partnership working between schools, the local arts organisation and visiting theatre company were felt to be a key facilitating factor:

Schools have been concerned ... but its about those relationships, and not just sending a flyer but going to the school and explaining that there's all this package around it, it's not just the performance, it's not just a hit and run, and I think it's a start, and that's what I've said to Fuse, I think it's a start as a subject, it's not something that can be raised and solved in one performance, it's something that needs to be discussed and developed (drama development officer, Brindley)

The partnership in place here was made up of diverse bodies, and embedded in long-term relationships between the key agencies, some of which existed prior to the performance. Whilst this is fairly unusual for a touring educational performance, it was also felt to be essential by all involved, especially given the complexity of the issues and the need for follow-up provision. Here, the partnership involved Theatre Veritae and Fuse – combining resources to form the incoming theatre company, Brindley – the local arts centre, Halton High school and Cheshire Prevent team. This provides a good model for sustaining and building upon the impact of the performance. At the time of writing, the school's desire to complete some follow up work has led to ongoing consultation between Brindley, Theatre Veritae and the Cheshire Constabulary – with the local arts centre as a broker linking visiting theatre company and school, and also offering independent long-term support for the school. The drama development officer at Brindley emphasised **the importance of long-term commitment to partnership** to protect the artistic integrity of the centre and enhance the outcomes of arts provision, especially arts projects dealing with difficult and complex subjects:

We wanted to be a key partner, we knew the play, confident of the quality of the play as a piece of theatre as well as a topic promoting useful debate and education, and that we had a commitment from the company for prior and post work, because

the nature of the show is that a lot of thought and discussion could happen weeks and months after the show, and if an issue like bullying pops up we can draw on Fuse, and another piece could be worked on (drama development officer, Brindley)

### **Performances 2 & 3 - Gujarat Hindu Society (Preston) and the Jinnah Centre (Burnley)**

The second performance examined as part of this evaluation was aimed at staff from Lancashire County Council, and offered as part of a Prevent training day. However, low numbers registering for the event meant that a local college was invited and the training day cancelled, although fourteen staff did attend the performance and six took part in post performance telephone interviews. The low numbers registering for the event highlights the challenge of audience development for non-schools and college audiences, and a discussion of this is taken up below. Here, a brief summary of the feedback from staff is provided.

The staff interviewed after the performance were: a public service archivist at the county records office, a residential support worker with adults with mental health problems, a childcare services worker, a safeguarding social worker, a children and parents social services manager, and a training officer. Feedback about the performance was positive – the play was seen as communicating an important message, raising awareness of equality and diversity issues, and for the children's services worker, raising awareness of the issue of how extremism might negatively affect young people who are under her care:

I wanted to update my knowledge, so I know more about what is going on in the world ... there is a lack of knowledge and you can't deal with things if you don't know what is going on ... you never know what will happen, and the play gave you a way of thinking about what might happen and how to respond to it

The public archivist felt that the play offered her an opportunity to consider other ways of engaging young people in the public records archive, which includes

testimony about everyday life in Lancashire historically. Interestingly, the material held in the archive reveals something of the historical heritage of the problems raised by the play, and also suggests some novel and important avenues for follow up work for schools and community audiences viewing the play in Lancashire:

I was watching thinking about the similarities of attitudes to Irish immigrant workers in the 1850s who were brought over to break strikes in the cotton industry ... I was thinking that people are the same across the ages, they have the same experiences, the same fears, polarisation, it's just a different context ... so it's given me another angle to talk to people about as regards our materials

Unfortunately, the third performance, also in Lancashire, was also not well attended. It is important to note that whilst these two performances do raise issues relating to generating new audiences for the play, they were not representative of the whole tour in Lancashire, which did also support performances for larger audiences. The third performance, aimed at the community surrounding the Jinnah Centre in Stoneyholme, a predominantly Muslim area in Burnley, was attended by approximately ten young people, including some young Muslim men and friends of a cast member. Three young men were interviewed after the performance and reported that they did not know what the play was about before coming along. Centre staff reported that publicity for the play had not reached them and that they had not had an opportunity therefore to help attract an audience. However, it is clear that marketing materials had been sent by the theatre company. What was lacking here was a meaningful relationship with a local advocate with time, energy and understanding and commitment to the play, as well as knowledge of how to generate new audiences for the theatre. It is possible that the subject matter of the play and the controversial aspects of the Prevent agenda, also played a role in the disappointing level of attendance here.

In addition to the challenges for good partnership working raised by the Brindley performance, there is therefore a need to devote time and resources to working alongside a local advocate to promote the play to new audiences. Whilst there was a local advocate for this particular performance, more commitment to developing a

relationship and building a skill base was needed here. In future, this might involve: careful identification of an appropriate advocate who has the time and energy to commit; negotiation of interests in common and more extended, mutually beneficial exchanges of skills and experiences between advocate and partnership agencies; use of mentors from previous tours to build confidence in the play; and clear and practical guidelines for promoting the play to audiences who may not be used to attending a theatre performances.

Nonetheless, the three young men interviewed provided positive feedback, and also echoed the young people from Runcorn's desire to explore the causes and risks of extremism in more depth following the play. The play was seen as **a challenging and accurate reflection of the issue of extremism, and a useful conversation starter for ongoing work** with young people:

I thought the play was very strong and hard-hitting but I thought it was true, and that's how it needs to be because, and because it's strong and hard-hitting a lot of people are going to find it uncomfortable watching it

You watch the play and get informed as well, it's quite informative, there are a lot of things out there that are happening that are only talked about in certain areas and the play I feel covered everything, both sides, feelings, perceptions, basically everything was mentioned, it was quite good, there would have been a lot of questions after that as well, it would have raised a lot of thoughts, got people thinking

However, the young men also commented that the play did not go far enough to explore the causes of violent extremism. As part of this, they **debated whether or not the play should have centred on a character who is 'harder to challenge'** than the portrait given of Shahid – who they described as an 'easy candidate'. They also debated about whether dramatising a character that audiences might find more uncomfortable to watch would have been more helpful than portraying a familiar and likeable figure:

... Shahid, according to the play he didn't have the knowledge, but probably people like that they don't really have the knowledge but the problem is that they do have their own reasons for why they go down that road, a lot of times it relates to lack of knowledge, fear, there are a lot of things you can relate to with a certain character, there are many reasons to go down that line, so its much harder in reality to challenge ... what do you do with a person who is going to down that path, to drift from what he's doing, it's a lot harder in reality ... in some ways he was an easy candidate to get him down the right path but there are a lot of other things, so the play gives you a starting point, a starting point to start talking, to take aside maybe your friend, maybe your brother, in how do you deal with this

that character like he said was easy to turn, but there are some characters out there, we know a few characters, that once they're going down that path they're much harder to turn back around, not as much easy as talking, but like I said, about the play making you feel uncomfortable, if you try talking to this person it's ok because people can understand him, if you maybe changed the whole play, to make it about people who are really hard to change even though you're giving the right kind of knowledge and talking and things like that it would make people feel even more uncomfortable, so doing it with this person is good, who's gone from being a popular person, good at football, this is good, rather than choosing a person who is determined to go down that path

Interestingly, there are at least two perspectives being articulated here, both highlighting different views on the ethical issues involved in representing extremism. One young man thought the central character should have been harder to challenge, and that this would have provided a more provocative starting point for a discussion. The other suggested that showing someone who was an 'easy candidate' and ready to change was a positive and important move – and that the more uncomfortable conversations should happen in a different setting, after the play. Whilst the debate in itself is fascinating, what is perhaps most important here is the evidence of the success of the play in starting a conversation about preventing violent extremism.

The desire for **spaces in which to explore the more difficult, less easy to map and challenging aspects of violent extremism** articulated here echoes the responses of the Runcorn audience – again raising the issue of the need for follow up provision to help young people navigate this area in more depth. However, the question of how to do this – what kinds of conversation might be started, by whom, and with whom? – is open to debate. Further description of this particular performance might suggest one way forward.

The young men participating in the interview were practising Muslims and had set up their own youth group, a grassroots initiative committed to using the arts to challenge racism and tackle social exclusion (one of the young men was an Islamic graffiti artist). There is a powerful sense of a missed opportunity here. A local advocate for the play with the capacity to carry out follow up work as part of a meaningful partnership might have been well placed to continue the conversation with this group, as well as support a positive local initiative in a deprived community. Given the suspicions of the Prevent strategy, the pressing importance of engaging young people at risk of extremism, and the effectiveness of *Not in My Name* at starting a conversation about extremism, there may also be a case for developing **a more risky, participatory strategy** to supporting follow up activities in some contexts. For example, this might involve arms-length funding – remaining transparent about the source of the funding, but with no direct involvement or requirement for monitoring from Prevent teams as to how it is being used. Such an approach would not only build capacity and new partnerships, it may also stimulate the development of more trusting relationships between the police and Muslim community.

#### **Performance 4 – Breeze Hill school, Oldham**

Failsworth School in Oldham provided the venue for a series of performances of *Not in My Name* for high schools across Oldham Borough. A performance to an audience of year ten students from two schools, Breeze Hill and Counthill, was observed. A group of year ten pupils from Breeze Hill took part in a focus group after the performance, and two drama teachers were interviewed by telephone the following day and a month after the performance. The responses to the play were similar to those reported above – young people and staff welcomed an opportunity to explore a

complex issue and the challenges of developing understanding between young people from different backgrounds affected by this issue. However, **there was also a sense that the issues of violent extremism and racial conflict were extraordinarily complex to navigate**, especially in a context adversely affected by a history of difficult relationships and division between communities. This again highlighted the importance of follow up activities, an ongoing conversation, and good partnerships.

The group of young people spoken to after the performance felt that the play was extremely relevant to them – they were very aware of and in some cases had direct experience of racial violence – and made a series of connections between the play and their everyday experiences. Teachers expressed some nervousness about bringing young people to see the play. In particular, there were fears that raising the issue of terrorism would stoke existing tensions between Shia and Sunni Muslims in the school. The word ‘terrorist’, and explorations of the issue in drama classes, for example, were generally avoided because of a risk of offence. In addition, young people are frightened of talking about the issue – ‘if they say anything about suicide bombers they’re scared that people will assume they’re in favour of it’ (drama teacher). In the words of one young man:

You’re on about it yourself, and that’s where you get the wrong ideas from, you can’t go home and talk to your parents about it, like four of us went to the mosque and we were all asking the Iman about jihad and we didn’t even want to say the name and the Iman said why and we said because we might get law suited, or we might get locked up or they might class us as terrorists (young man – Breeze Hill)

These comments highlight the complexity of the issues raised by the play in some contexts, and the need for local knowledge in order to respond effectively and sensitively. In common with the performances discussed above, there was a desire to further explore the issue of extremism expressed by young people and teachers. For young people, this desire was expressed as a concern to understand more – one young woman commented that ‘loads of people’ misinterpret the Koran, but that does not lead most of them to extremism – and a young man commented in reply that – ‘the ones that are doing this is the ones on crack and in jail, and no one listens to them, the

reasons they do it is because they are on crack'. What is expressed here is a concern about how the issues raised by the play might be interpreted by some audiences over simplistically, negatively or reductively. This concern highlights the need to provide forums to support young people to continue to explore the issues raised, and to guide the interpretations of Islam and extremism that are generated as part of these ongoing conversations.

At the time of the interview with teachers a month after the performance, no formal follow up had happened (the drama teachers involved had been preoccupied with assessments). However, there was a plan to use the play as a stimulus for unit coursework in Drama for year ten pupils, starting from the theme of 'entrapment' and leading up to explorations of fear and extremism: 'the build up will be about something else, or appear to be, so that by the time you get to talking about extremism and prejudice, they know that you fear something because you don't understand it, that it's about ignorance' (drama teacher, Breeze Hill). Here, the plan is to explore a generic theme **rather than risk a direct focus on an issue of such sensitivity** in this context. That the work had not yet happened highlights **the difficulty of scheduling follow up activities in busy and pressured school schedules**, and also the need for a long-term relationship with schools if partnerships are to meaningfully support follow up activities.

### **Additional issues arising from the evaluation**

This section takes up a discussion of two additional issues arising from the evaluation, drawing on independent observations of performances and interviews with key informants. There are two areas of discussion:

- Framing strategies for the play;
  - Audience development and follow up activity.
- 
- *Framing*

Some audience members expressed the need for an introductory commentary to facilitate engagement – ‘this is what you’re going to see and this is where it comes from’ (Prevent officer, County Durham); ‘I would have liked an introduction, even if it was just this is who we are and why we think this is important’ (Lancashire County council staff). The lack of introduction meant that many audiences did not realise that the play was a piece of verbatim theatre – lessening its impact as an awareness-raising tool. Given the resistance to acknowledging extremism is a relevant issue in some communities, and also the pressing importance of starting meaningful discussions of the issue, **the powerful impact of knowing that the words heard have been spoken by somebody in the community about the issue of extremism** should not be lost: ‘they say it’s not real, it’s not an issue here, it’s not anything to do with me, it’s somewhere else and we can say that they play shows it effects everyone, and we’re all concerned, so let’s get on with talking about it ... and we can say people are talking about it, here they are and this is what they are saying’ (Prevent officer, Lancashire).

This need not involve an extensive introduction or commentary, just a simple explanation that the ‘words you are about to hear have all been said by someone in real life who has been effected by the issues raised in the play’. The exact wording, and any additional framing that is needed, might be best decided by someone who knows both the play and the audience. Some audiences, for example, may need an additional explanatory comment that ‘whilst the words are real, and have been said at some point by someone affected by the issue, the events in the play are made up – imagined by the playwright’.

The interactive forum received positive feedback from audiences, many of whom appreciated the opportunity to interact with Shahid and ask questions. However, some also commented that the forum was not explorative enough and was a little uncomfortable to experience. The managed and rehearsed nature of the encounter risks detracting from the seriousness and complexity of the issues raised by the play. **A more open question and answer session** with Shahid, perhaps also including those involved in the artistic development of the play, and a representative from the local Prevent team – might provide a more powerful encounter, and also create a space for young people to ask more complicated questions. In its present form, and especially in the urgent objective to prevent Shahid choosing an extremist path, there

is a sense that young people know they are expected to give the ‘right’ answer. There needs to be room to ask the more difficult questions, and a more diverse range of people on the platform at the end of the play or in an additional workshop would help safely contain the uncertainties and unknowns that may feature in responses – ‘we don’t know the answer to that, this is the information we do have, and the way I/we (playwright, teacher, Prevent officer, community worker, Iman) deal with it is as follows ...’.

- *Audience development and follow up activity*

Key informants connected to the Lancashire tour noted the difficulty of generating audiences for community venues, and the evaluation has also highlighted the importance of partnership working and local advocacy to enhancing the impact of the play. From the limited number of performances directly experienced as part of this evaluation, the Brindley performance provided a potential model of effective practice that might be shared. Here, the arts organisation acted as an advocate and broker between visiting theatre company and local audiences, avoiding a superficial and damaging encounter (‘hit and run’ – in the words of the drama development officer) – and also providing a resource for schools to draw on to support follow up activity. However, there are a number of other successful models of multiagency infrastructural support for the tour of the play, including examples from Lancashire, Merseyside, Oldham and County Durham. For signposting to similar examples of successful partnerships, interested readers of this report are advised to contact Theatre Veritae directly (contact details are included below).

Recruiting a *local* advocate and broker is particularly important. The four performances here highlight the radical contrasts in the contexts the play has been performed in – **an ability to draw on local knowledge of the complexities and sensitivities of the issue in each context would enhance impact**. In addition, given the pressures on scheduling in schools and colleges, ensuring that performances take place as part of a long-term partnership with a local advocate and broker that can offer **extended and flexible support**, increases the likelihood of follow up activities actually happening.

## Recommendations

- Touring performances are most effective when embedded in a local partnership structure that exhibits knowledge of specific contexts, flexibility, capacity for supporting audience development and commitment to follow up activity.
- The partnership responsible for the overall management of the theatre company and the tour should make building relationships with local organisations in communities targeted by the play a priority. This might involve supporting the development of context-responsive and imaginative strategies for promotion and follow up, as well as clear tasking of activities to generate audiences. This will have significant resource implications.
- Building local relationships to support preparatory and follow up work might involve the following: careful identification of appropriate advocates and local groups who share concerns about the issues raised in the play; clear negotiation with those groups to ensure they have the time, resources and energy to commit to preparatory and follow up work; clarification of interests in common and more extended, mutually beneficial exchanges of skills and experiences between advocate and partnerships where possible; use of mentors from previous tours to build local confidence in raising difficult and sensitive issue with potential audiences; clear and practical guidelines for promoting the play to audiences who may not be used to attending theatre performances.
- In some contexts – where mistrust and suspicion of Prevent is prevalent – it may be appropriate to recruit a third party with no connections to the Prevent team as the key agency supporting tours, and also to offer ‘arms-length’ support. This should involve remaining transparent about the source of funding for the play, but also fully handing over responsibility for promotion and follow up activities to local partners. There may be a case for developing a more risky strategy to support follow up activities in some contexts – with arms-length funding for follow up activities and no direct involvement or requirement for monitoring or feedback imposed by Prevent teams.

- There is a need to identify, develop and share good practice regarding imaginative, participatory and risky follow activities that take up the invitation articulated by young people taking part in this evaluation to explore the more challenging and difficult questions raised by extremism. A practice-sharing event, drawing on local, regional and national expertise ('Prevent – continuing the conversation'?) might support the development of capacity here. Given the radical contrasts in the contexts in which the play has been performed, there is no 'model' suggested for the specific content and structure of follow up activities. However, in response to the lack of expertise acknowledged by staff involved in attempting to facilitate follow up activities, there is a need to provide forums for the development, identification and sharing of innovative practice in this area.
- Framing the performance event – introductory comments and a more open interactive forum might more effectively frame the play for audiences. Introductions should stress that the words in the play have been collected from real people in the community concerned about the issues raised, and interactive forums might allow for a more open question and answer session both with Shahid (with an actor in role) and artists, community representatives with knowledge of the issues raised, and where appropriate, representatives of Prevent teams in the area local to performances.
- The availability of the published play script provides an opportunity to draw directly on the text and teacher's notes exercises in preparatory and follow up activities. In some cases, it may be appropriate to support independent productions of the play and/or a workshop package: 'there's some obvious places it should go, but not as a large production, as a different set of activities, we need to get out of the big production stuff now and think of other ways to use it' (Prevent officer, Lancashire). This more participatory approach may support more open-ended, imaginative and risky approaches to exploring complex issues with young people, and would need to be carefully planned and managed in ways that respond to the specific needs of participant groups in context.

- The published play script (which includes teacher's notes), should be made available to all school parties prior to the point of performance, so that teachers can introduce the play effectively to pupils and plan appropriate follow up work. In some areas, copies of the play were made available to schools and venues, but an extra effort is needed to ensure that these reach the teachers bringing groups to performances. It is worth highlighting that this will have cost implications for partnerships that need to be planned for, as Theatre Veritae are unable to obtain free copies of the play from the publishers.

## **Appendices**

### **1. Key partners, 2010 tours**

Theatre Veritae produces *Not in My Name* in all areas in strategic partnership with one or more local organisations. For 2010 key partners have been:

#### **Lancashire**

Lancashire Constabulary (project partners since 2007)

Lancashire County Council

#### **Merseyside**

Fuse: New Theatre for Young People (co-producers for Merseyside and Cheshire productions)

Merseyside Police

Liverpool City Council

#### **Cheshire**

Fuse: New Theatre for Young People

The Brindley Theatre, Runcorn (co-producer with Fuse and Theatre Veritae in this area)

Cheshire Constabulary

Halton Borough Council

#### **County Durham**

Durham Constabulary

Durham County Council

#### **Oldham**

Oldham Council

## **2. Contact details**

### **Theatre Veritae**

Alice Bartlett and Andrew Raffle (Co-Directors)

Registered company address:

Theatre Veritae  
145-157 St John Street  
London  
EC1V 4PY

[alice@theatreveritae.com](mailto:alice@theatreveritae.com)

[andrew@theatreveritae.com](mailto:andrew@theatreveritae.com)

### **Dr. Jenny Hughes (Lecturer in Drama)**

University of Manchester  
Oxford Road  
Manchester  
M13 9PL

[jenny.hughes@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:jenny.hughes@manchester.ac.uk)

### 3. Resources

Bartlett, A. (2009) *Not in My Name*, London: Oberon (playscript and teachers' notes)

Davies, L (2008) *Educating against Extremism*, Trentham Books: Stoke on Trent

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) *Learning Together to be Safe: A toolkit to help schools contribute to the prevention of violent extremism*, Nottingham: DCSF

Department for Communities and Local Government (2008) *Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder Fund: Mapping Project Activities 2007/8*, Wetherby, UK: Communities and Local Government Publications.

Department for Communities and Local Government (2007) *Preventing violent extremism – Winning hearts and minds*, Wetherby, UK: Communities and Local Government Publications.

House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee (2010) *Preventing Violent Extremism: Sixth Report of Session 2009-10*, London: The Stationery Office (Select Committee review of Prevent)

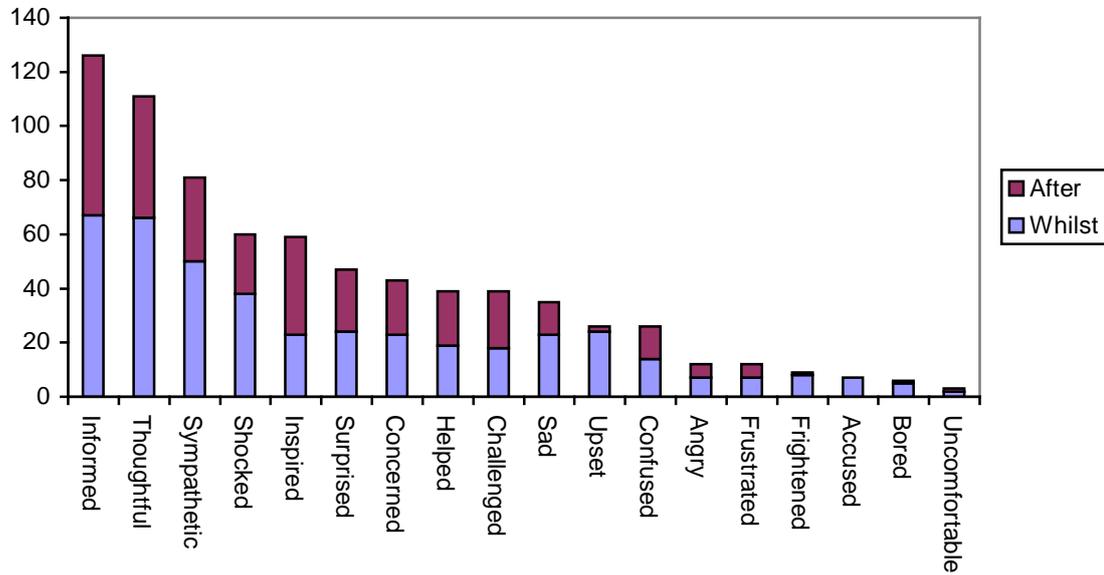
Kundnani, A. (2009) *Spooked! How not to prevent violent extremism*, Institute of Race Relations – a critical review of Prevent, available from – [www.irr.org.uk/spooked](http://www.irr.org.uk/spooked)

Thomas, P. (2009) 'Between Two Stools? The Government's "Preventing Violent Extremism" Agenda', *The Political Quarterly*, 80(2): 282-291.

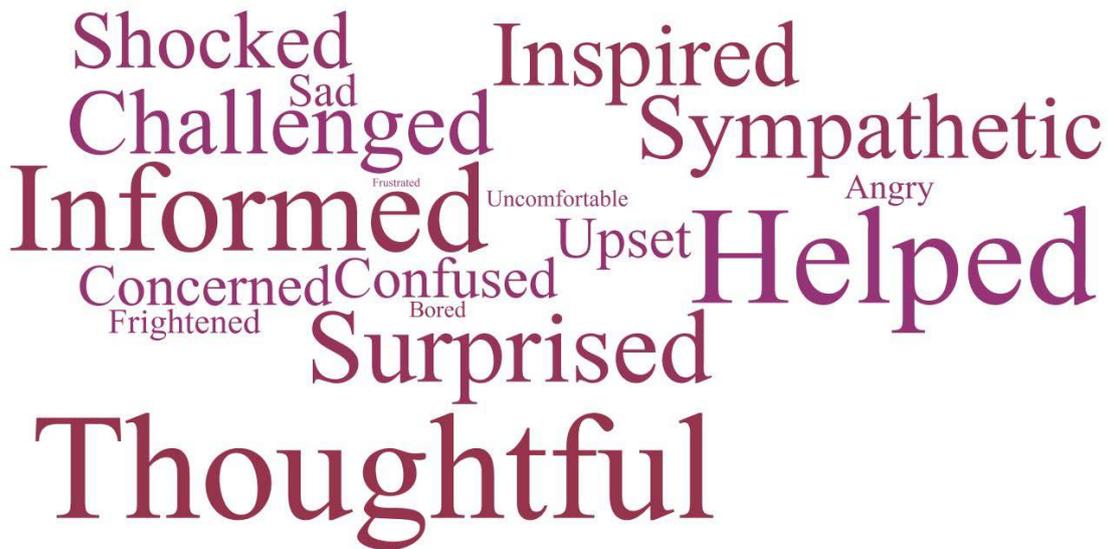
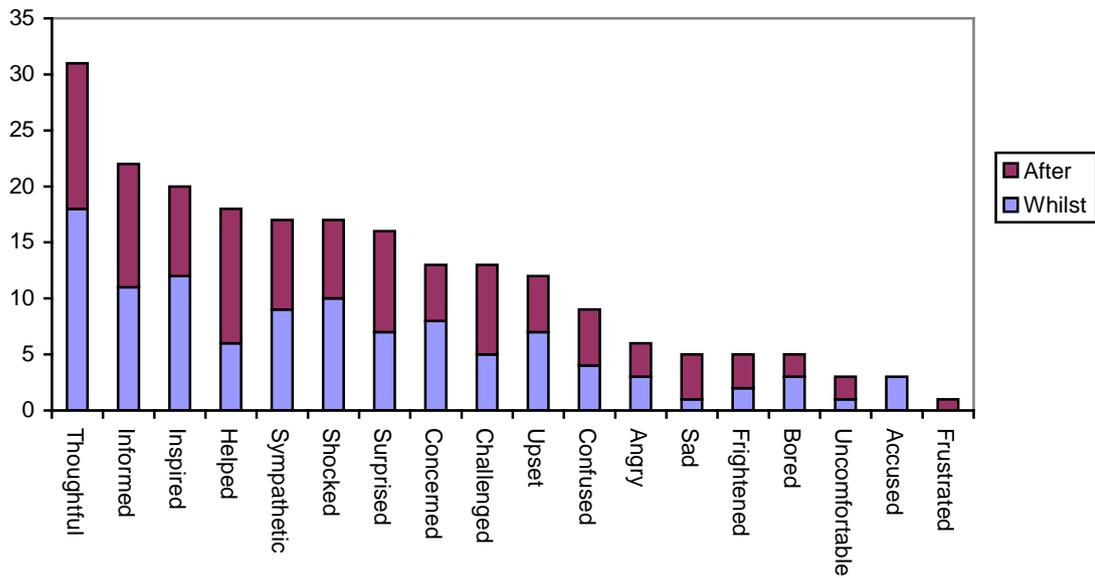
For additional government reports on Prevent go to:  
[www.communities.gov.uk/communities/prevent/](http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/prevent/)

**4. Young people's questionnaire responses by area**

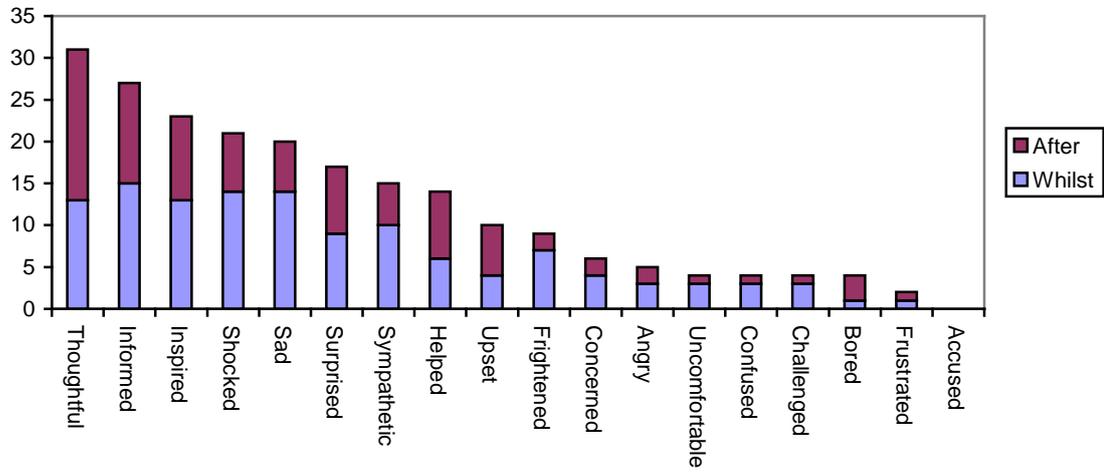
Young people - Merseyside



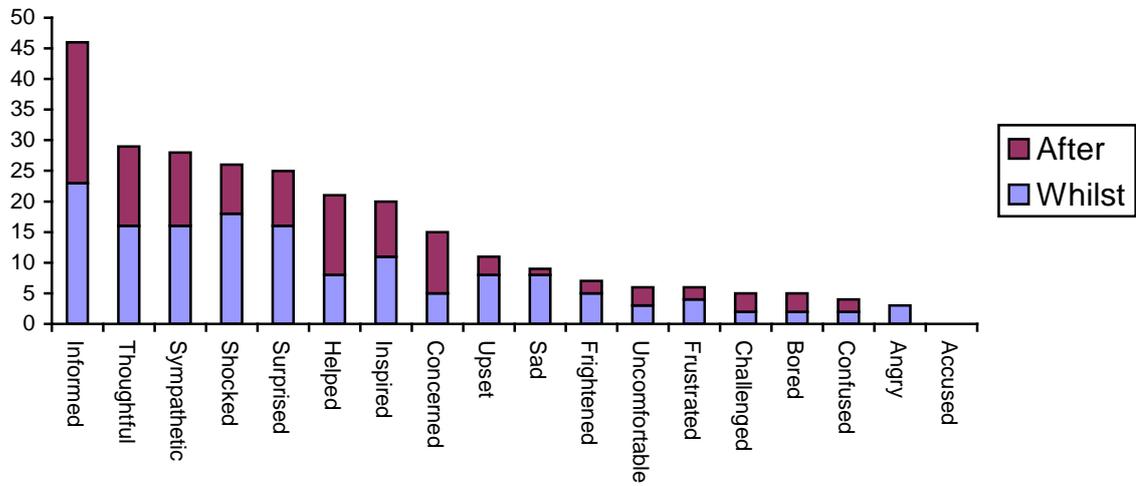
Young people - Oldham



### Young people - Cheshire



Young people - County Durham



Young people - Lancashire

