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Youth Work responses to prejudice and extremism

Dr. Paul Thomas

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Content

- **Aims of the session**
- **Academic evidence about Prejudice and young people**
- **Educational approaches that can work and those that won't**
- **How we can move forward**

Aims of the session

- **Make sense of what's going on at present**
- **Identify how to 'up our game' on this**
- These are national problems
- Youth Work has a unique role to play
- You already 'know' a lot about these issues
- We need to be able to discuss these issues openly and honestly

Academic evidence- all young people

- 'Parallel lives' and segregation has a negative effect on prejudices about 'others'
- Policies of past twenty years have made these separate identities stronger
- Economic change has had a negative effect on the identities of the less well-off
- Internet and media can re-enforce prejudices
- Political groups have a similar role - 'cumulative extremism'

Academic evidence – Muslim young people

- 'Muslim' identity is very strong, as shown by our local research
- Many positives about that but it does have downsides
- Islamist ideology is being promoted by some groups, like HUT, and on the internet
- Some individuals can then travel further towards violent extremism
- PREVENT has an unhelpful focus on Muslims only

Academic evidence – White young people

- Focus on ethnicity has ignored economic class, so ignoring the situation of the White working class
- There has been a 'white backlash' against anti-racism, as it's sometimes been understood and practised
- Groups like BNP have stirred such views up, but they are reflecting as much as leading
- Young people express 'race' prejudices partly because 'race' is what we always seem to talk about

Educational responses – what **doesn't** work

- Too much stress on rules that 'police' and judge young peoples' attitudes, language and behaviour around these issues can be counter-productive
- Input that is like school, 'lecturing' them won't work
- Throwing young people together without careful planning or without their agreement will end badly!

Educational responses – what can work?

- Well-planned Cohesion work that brings people together - 'Contact theory'
- Work being fun and stressing positives
- A 'human rights' approach that focuses on what we all want and all have in common
- Political education processes that enable young people to learn how to debate and argue about things openly
- Work around how to understand the media and the internet
- Work with young men around macho attitudes

Moving forward – key questions

- **What are we doing well at the moment?**
- **What do we need to get better at, or do differently?**