Hi,

Please see my feedback below; I hope this is taken into consideration when formulating the new youth policy.

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Many young Muslims have lived most, if not the majority, of their lives under the framework of the global War on Terror.  This is a climate that has routinely criminalised Muslims, questioned their allegiances to Australia and created a pervasive culture of suspicion and fear around their communities.

In response, young Muslims have rarely been able to offer an alternative narrative beyond denouncing terrorism and projecting images of the ‘good’ or ‘well-behaved’ Muslim.  This has generally frustrated a demographic that already feels censored and without a space to articulate their legitimate grievances about Australian foreign policy, security legislation and racism in the wider community.

In an effort to isolate and neutralise perceived threats within the Muslim community, the last decade of public policy has ultimately alienated far more young people.  Young people have been cornered into only being able to express what they are not.  The vast majority of funding available to Muslim community organisations for development and events and activities has invariably come with conditions that it be committed to ‘de-radicalisation’ and ‘countering violent extremism.’

These approaches from government and community leaders have served largely to spread dissatisfaction and wider resentment across young people in the Muslim community.  The myriad factors that lead to acts of terrorism – social exclusion, unemployment, harassment by security agencies, personal family circumstances and the mental health of specific individuals – are truly beyond the scope of the Muslim community, particularly young people.  However, the persistent message from a federal level has been that incidents of so-called terrorism and violence occur as a result of Muslims simply not working hard enough to combat such behaviour.

In fact, by declaring militant brands of Islam as the most antisocial and oppositional identity that can be adopted by individuals, authorities have actually provided a convenient template for young, disaffected men looking to commit anti-social and potentially violent acts.  Indeed, a teenager simply associating him or herself with particular global movements via social media can now elevate an otherwise singular, random act of violence to an incident of global concern.

In short, young Muslims in general have become largely disaffected with community leadership and government with regards to community development initiatives.  There is widespread scepticism about agendas behind any available funding for new community initiatives.

Young Muslims at large have lacked opportunities to express their identity and opinions on their own terms.  There needs to be a concerted effort to open up such spaces to ensure social alienation does not become and endemic and inter-generational phenomenon.  To foster a true sense of belonging, young Muslims should be given the opportunity to vocalise their hopes as well as their fears and frustrations as frankly and openly as any other young people.  A true ‘alternate narrative’ must be nuanced and multifaceted, not simply a negation of a nebulous ‘extremist’ identity.

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Should you have further queries please let me know.

Regards,

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