

THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY MODEL

Background: The Montgomery County Model (MCM) is an initiative developed by WORDE, in partnership with the Montgomery County Police Department and the Montgomery County Executive's Office of Community Partnerships. In furtherance of President Obama's *National Strategy for Empowering Local Partners to Prevent Violent Extremism in the US*, the MCM has a core focus on generating public awareness about the risk factors of violent extremism, and empowering the appropriate figures to intervene with vulnerable individuals before they choose a path of violence.

Our model is the first *community-led* effort of its kind across the country and involves a wide variety of stakeholders such as county agencies, nonprofit organizations, youth activists, gang prevention experts, as well as faith-based community organizations and clergy. The leaders of the program recently convened at the White House with Director of Community Partnerships, George Selim, who commended the program and offered the White House's support to further its implementation. In addition to being county-funded, the program is now funded by the Department of Justice, as part of the agency's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grants program. WORDE's grant includes funding for the Police Executive Research Forum to develop training modules based on the MCM for its law enforcement members across the country.

Faith Community Working Group (FCWG): The MCM is executed through the FCWG, which is an official body within the Montgomery County Executive's Office of Community Partnerships. WORDE is actively involved in the management and administration of the FCWG and its programming. WORDE President Dr. Hedieh Mirahmadi and Rabbi Batya Steinlauf of the Jewish Community Relations Council are its Co-Chairs.

The MCM is best described as an early-warning system targeted towards the intervention and prevention of violent extremism through four interrelated parts. First is engaging and convening a wide range of public and private stakeholders, which includes diverse faith community leaders, public officials, law enforcement officers, educators, social service providers, and county agencies. This inclusive approach is specifically designed to reduce the stigma on Muslim communities by including a broad spectrum of other partners.

Second, is educating this wider circle of trusted adults to recognize the warning signs of an at-risk individual so they can refer him/her for an intervention before he/she turns to violence. This includes law enforcement training and community awareness briefings that identify the risk factors associated with violent extremism, and steps the community can take to intervene.

Third, the program is streamlining the process whereby the public and private stakeholders, as well as the general public, can refer at-risk individuals for an intervention. This includes not only cultural and spiritual centers associated with the FCWG, but also schools, social services organizations and county agencies that may come in contact with at-risk individuals. In addition, there will be a public contact protocol in place with the county's 911 and 311 information lines so they properly refer callers for an intervention, where necessary.

Finally, interventions to prevent violent extremism in vulnerable Muslim communities are carried out through WORDE's *Crossroads* program.

Crossroads: WORDE's *Crossroads* Program is a model for how community-based organizations can conduct interventions in this complicated field. The program is county and federally funded to provide free specialized care for Montgomery County residents from the Middle East, South Asia, and North/East/West Africa who are currently underserved by existing county programs and who may be vulnerable to violent extremism.

Crossroads uses a holistic approach by addressing the variety of risk factors associated with radicalization. The clinicians provide vulnerable individuals with culturally sensitive counseling and access to safety net services. Each client's individualized treatment plan is developed to reduce the ideological risk factors (*e.g.* intolerance, and extremist beliefs such as the justification of violence to address grievances), psychological factors (*e.g.* post-traumatic stresses and mental illnesses), economic factors (*e.g.* lack of employment and relative deprivation), and/or the sociological motivators (*e.g.* social alienation, marginalization, and acculturation difficulties) that lead to radicalization.

The program is uniquely focused on developing evaluation tools to ensure progress in decreasing the risk factors of violent extremism. This includes pre/post quantitative and qualitative assessments with scales that are validated from other studies (*e.g.* a scale to determine religious fundamentalism), as well as those partially validated by a study WORDE conducted with the University of Maryland on the relationship between radicalization and acculturation related stress.

In conclusion, the MCM demonstrates how a public-private partnership in preventing radicalization can be implemented, and also serves as a pilot study for how to scale and replicate such initiatives in other jurisdictions. The effectiveness of the MCM is being examined by a study funded by the National Institute of Justice and spearheaded by renowned terrorism expert, Dr. John Horgan, Professor at the University of Massachusetts, whose findings will be used to further enhance the program.