

Teenage inmates recruit radicals

EXCLUSIVE

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Teen terror suspects are radicalising other detainees, leading prayer groups and preaching extremist ideology inside juvenile justice centres, prompting the public sector union to call for a customised facility to house radical young offenders.

The Weekend Australian has been told juvenile justice authorities are struggling to manage a small number of radicalised inmates, some of whom have been arrested for allegedly plotting violent, Islamic State-inspired attacks.

It is understood authorities are concerned about two inmates in particular. Both were arrested in a Bankstown back alley last year, allegedly as they were en route to launch a terrorist attack. The boys, neither of whom can be named due to their age, had bought bayonets from a Bankstown gun shop and had stopped at a small prayer hall to perform ablutions and pray, a prelude, police say, to the attack.

Both boys were well-known to counter-terrorism police.

Since arriving in juvenile justice, sources say, the boys have been difficult to manage. One is leading prayers and attempting to convert other inmates, in particular indigenous detainees, sources say.

NSW Police counter-terrorism teams are aware of the risk and the government is discussing how to help authorities manage this relatively new youth justice problem.

Juvenile justice industrial officer Julie Bond said radical inmates were assuming "leadership" roles inside the centres.

"Most are compliant but we're starting to observe a change in the behaviour of other kids," Ms Bond told *The Weekend Australian*. "They're up on a pedestal. Other kids view them as greater peers."

Radical inmates comprise a small fraction of the overall number of juvenile detainees. Just four of the 287 youths held in juvenile justice facilities are in for terror offences, although with the age profile of terrorists dropping, there is a widespread expectation that number will rise.

Many of the youths held in juvenile justice centres are Aboriginal and are considered to be particularly vulnerable to radicalisation as they often receive less support throughout their incarceration.

Public Service Association general secretary Stewart Little said the problem inside juvenile justice facilities had reached the point where a specialist facility was needed to manage extremist inmates. "Radicalisation is not restricted to adults in the NSW prison system," he said. "My members at the juvenile justice centre at Cobham have to deal with radicalised young people who openly speak about waiting for an opportunity to behead someone."

Juvenile justice facilities operate on different principles from adult jails, the primary purpose of which is to punish. Juvenile justice centres are instead focused on intervention and

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rehabilitation. This can make it harder to manage extremist detainees, who cannot be kept in specialist facilities or locked away from other detainees for extended periods of time.

Mr Stewart said that, compounding the challenge for staff, was the fact officers did not carry weapons or protective gear.

"These kids are housed at the Frank Baxter Centre and Cobham and have absolutely no fear or regard for authority," he said.

He added the government had a duty of care to protect juvenile justice workers. "The creation of high-risk units inside each centre as part of the budget would be a critical first step," he said.

Ms Bond emphasised staff did not want to see a SuperMax-style facility built for children. What was needed was a secure facility where high-risk detainees could be given access to specialist programs in an environment where both staff and other detainees were protected.

A juvenile justice spokeswoman said prayer sessions were to be supervised by chaplains.

"Radicalisation and violent extremism are emerging areas requiring attention within Juvenile Justice," the spokeswoman said.

"Juvenile Justice has been engaging with various State and Federal organisations to develop appropriate training for staff and continues to work with key stakeholders to ensure there are appropriate responses available to staff to manage all detainees."

NSW Corrections Minister David Elliott said his government had spent \$1 million last year assisting staff to manage high-risk detainees.