



ANNEX

“DANIEL” – A YOUTH’S REHABILITATION JOURNEY

Radicalisation process

“Daniel” (not his real name) was first investigated by ISD in September 2017, when he was only 15-years-old, for posting on social media defaced images of President Halimah Yacob and calling for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to behead her. Investigations at the time found that “Daniel” was radicalised by pro-ISIS propaganda in social media channels and groups that were supportive of the terrorist group. He had been introduced to these channels and groups by someone he encountered on social media.

2. “Daniel” felt proud that he was given access to what he thought was exclusive ISIS content in a private chat platform. He saw himself as “cool” and one of the “chosen ones”, and this boosted his self-esteem and sense of belonging. “Daniel” became convinced that ISIS’s actions were “righteous” and its fighters were “true Muslims” and the “true Islamic army”. He also adopted the group’s us-versus-them worldview and considered Muslim public officers and politicians who are working for a non-Muslim government, such as President Halimah Yacob, apostates.

3. On account of his age and the assessment that he did not pose an imminent threat at the time, he was not dealt with under the ISA but instead, he was counselled and efforts were made to steer him away from the radical path. Despite these efforts, he remained staunchly supportive of ISIS. He was willing to help ISIS in its online propaganda efforts, and to undertake other activities if called upon by ISIS to do so. Even with the demise of ISIS’s so-called caliphate in Syria and Iraq in 2019, he still believed in the terrorist group and its violent cause. He was hence arrested and subsequently detained under the ISA in January 2020.

Rehabilitation Progress

4. ISA detention has been a sobering wake-up call for “Daniel”, but also a chance to turn his life around. “Daniel” had just finished his Secondary 3 in 2019 when he was arrested, having barely scraped by in his examinations. While in detention, ISD worked with his school and three Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG) volunteers who are also MOE-trained teachers, to see that “Daniel”’s education could continue. The teachers tutored him and guided him in his self-studies. During the COVID-19 Circuit Breaker period, arrangements were made for his tutoring to continue through video conferencing.

5. To the credit of Daniel and his tutors, his academic performance vastly improved. He scored four distinctions out of five subjects he had taken in his GCE N level examinations in 2020. This also had a positive impact on his self-esteem and outlook. When he shared the news of his examination results with his parents during their regular family visits, he told them that he had always felt like a disappointment to them in the past, but now felt that they could be proud of him. He also said that his excellent results would not have been possible if he had not been detained.

6. On the religious front, “Daniel” has been receptive to religious counselling. As with many individuals who fall prey to radical Islamist ideology purveyed by the likes of ISIS, his weak religious foundation was a key factor in his self-radicalisation. At the outset, the RRG counsellor observed that “Daniel” did not even know the basic tenets of his faith. The process of building up his basic religious knowledge is ongoing. He has also begun the process of rejecting radical ideology, and building up an immunity to radical influences by developing a deeper understanding of religious concepts and teachings.

7. On the psychological front, the psychologist engages “Daniel” regularly to address a range of issues, ranging from equipping him with critical thinking skills so he can better evaluate and discern information, to emotional regulation skills. Specific focus has been given to his emotional and self-esteem issues, because these had contributed to his vulnerability to radical influences. For example, through the sessions with the psychologist, he overcame feelings of anxiety and became less self-conscious or affected by what others thought of him.

8. On the social front, family involvement is important in all cases, but especially so in youth cases. The involvement and support of “Daniel”’s parents have been critical to the good progress he has made thus far in his rehabilitation. They visit him regularly every week, and view his detention as an opportunity for him to focus on his studies and improve his outlook on life. During the COVID-19 Circuit Breaker period, family visits for all detainees were suspended. Nonetheless, the detainees’ families, including “Daniel”’s parents, were encouraged to record video messages which were then relayed to their detained family members. Family visits for “Daniel” have since resumed through video-conferencing. “Daniel” has also been assigned a mentor, an RRG volunteer, to help him stay focused on his rehabilitation and guide him in developing pro-social skills.

9. “Daniel”’s journey is not over. Beyond the ongoing rehabilitation while he remains in detention, there is also a process of reintegration that lies ahead, when he re-joins his family and the wider society. But the path he has chosen – and it is his choice to be receptive to those trying to help him and to take ownership of his future – is a promising one, if he is able to persevere and not veer from it, especially after his release from detention.