

# Time to Rebuild S4 Ep04 Part 2 - Ahmed and Hanad

**Mark:** [00:00:00] Welcome back to part two of our chat with the extremely talented Ahmed Hassan and his colleague Hanad Hersi. Uh, in this part of the conversation we discuss in detail how they're making impact in the prison system. Um, and I honestly can't get over how good this conversation was, uh, and what they're doing at Youth Activating Youth (YAY). So please sit back, enjoy, uh, and reach out to us what you think about the conversation

**Mick:** I wanted to, um, move it a bit forward and, and get into a little bit is, um, just talking more about the work that you're doing, um, at Youth Activating Youth and, and also the, the, the justice side of things. Cause obviously we

**Ahmed:** We love justice. We wanna, we care about, um, the most vulnerable young people in our state, right. And this was a passion that was, that was done with. Um, you know, and in the back [00:01:00] of, you know, for a long period, we've seen it since we established this, this organization was established for, for young people who were falling through the cracks. Right. It was never, it was never said as youth justice, but it was basically established for those young people, vulnerable who were at risk and, you know, more likely than not that that end up because of their friends or the environment that they've grown up in, in, into, you know, maybe either offending or just touching base with the contact, uh, the, the criminal justice system.

So, you know, from that you look back, you know, it's 2014, 15, 16, then you had the Moomba riots, then it became whole issue. And you have, you know, all these people coming together in which you'd know very well at the MCG with under the Chief Commissioner's, um, Youth Summit, you know, and, and we're working with Victoria police quite closely at the time.

And then you look at it and you say, you know, there's all these people, um. What do we do? You know, we, we know what we're talking about. We know these [00:02:00] young people, some organizations know about it, and there's a whole completely other, a number of other organizations who are trying to obviously assist you with capacity and to, you know, obviously they're meanwhile, but they like to help you within this space, but they, but they are understanding of the issues pretty it's very minimal.

And, you know, we, you know, the media was chasing us around that day. I remember that very well in 2017 around the MCG. Um, but what we do remember was, um, you know, how committed Graham Ashton was, uh, you, you might not know, but Graham Ashton is still an external advisor to our organization. So he supports us, uh, in an advisory capacity, but just his support and his understanding and, and, and the way he's able to connect the dots is better than most people.

Um, and we're very fortunate to have him still contributing to YAY and, um, but obviously we only got to know him through the Chief Commissioner's Youth [00:03:00] Summit. And, um, prior to that, we, we were just, you know, working with them in good faith to, to obviously, um, get things done. And one of the issues that was, you know, raised time and time again, was the issue of unemployment amongst young people, um, on how we were gonna work that out.

And the Chief Commissioner took it upon himself and, um, kind of called in all, um, major small, um, business advocates. He got everyone together, businesses, you know, um, industry associations and got about, about two, 300 people at the MCG to provide jobs. Um, one of those was, um, Mark Stone, who was the Chamber of Commerce CEO.

I, I remember him very well standing up and saying, look, I wanna offer 10, uh, paid internship positions and we'll do that on the, the Victorian Chamber, uh, Commerce. Um, you can choose any business. And, um, we didn't know Mark, [00:04:00] um, and he was right at the front and we go, "Hello, my name's Ahmed." Ali introduced himself.

And, um, we both were like, alright, we'd like to come see you at some point. Um, we went and saw him in his office, nice office in Collins Street. Uh, we got a deal that would get five of the positions, um, to support young people into positions, um, of, of interning. And then if the business already the business is gonna keep them for six to eight weeks.

So the business is already getting, you know, they're not paying for this, the Chamber's paying for this. So they're getting basically a free employee who's qualified and all they're all they're asked to do is think about a potential ongoing opportunity for them. That's all they're asked for. And they've got two months to come up with that.

The business is already thinking, look, we're already gonna invest. We're not paying for it for two months. He's already gonna get free train let's. Let's just,

you know, do this and bring them on board. And which are a lot of credit to [00:05:00] KPMG, uh, Spotless Group and, and various other, uh, businesses done it. Um, and then, you know, the thinking about youth justice, you know, the same thing we did with AIG.

So it was about employment. So most vulnerable young people. So they wanna buy things. Young people wanna wanna wanna participate in society as much as anyone else, right. You've gotta be able to, it may not be a balanced playing field, but what they need is a job, right? Because a job can help you do many things in life: travel, purchase, whatever you own day to day, get a house on your own, whatever.

These young people weren't getting, uh, access, enough access. And I remember, um, presenting to the Premier's jobs and investment panel, which was very high rated kind of business executive leaders and, and, and the executive branch of government. And you had everyone sitting on that and it was basically its job was to create more [00:06:00] jobs.

Uh it's you know, it's, it's mandate was to create more jobs in the state of Victoria. You know, tap into potential opportunities or areas of growth and, you know, making sure that Victoria's well tapped in which I think they've done pretty well. But even at that point where we were creating a record amount of jobs, a lot of the most vulnerable were struggling.

So you, we had to think internally, how do we find employers who will overlook a young, a young person's criminal history, right? And provide a job. That's not easy. You had to take that risk, but you can't go out there on your own and advocate to a business why they should overlook a young person's criminal history because it's a risky position. But also we were offering a deal, which was you take that person and we'll come and supervise them and, and, you know, help mentor them at least two to three times a week.

So therefore it's not a huge burden, you know, turning up, making [00:07:00] sure - cause we'll put a plan in place. Um, and this is where we found a partner with the Australian industry group, they deal with manufacturing, um, and various other areas where they've got a lot of whole lot of industries that they represent.

So how do we tap into those and making sure, so Tim Piper is the head of the Victorian, uh, sorry. The, uh, he's the Victorian Head of the Australian Industry Group, uh, was coming with us, um, you know, putting on his, uh, shirt and driving to, you know, either the Western suburbs or the Southeast, and we were

talking to businesses. We were like, you know, we need this, this, and slowly, we started to break that cycle, whether it be mechanic shops, whether it be, you know, manufacturing.

So you started to break that cycle, right. And it's through a little bit of innovative thinking, but really getting those, uh, influential industry [00:08:00] figureheads to actually make that happen. So what we'd do is we'd go back a bit and we'd say, go to the prison. We're like, you want a job, right? So you're not gonna study.

So young person makes that very clear to you. So you need to find something that they're gonna get into and, you know, if they're going to be released, it makes it much easier to say they've got a plan to get into something, duh, you know, to the courts and, you know, therefore their chances of being released grows.

Um, but what we do is we encourage them when they're at their lowest point sight, you know, young people can often become more smarter in not a positive way, but also in the wrong ways and pick up the wrong skills, um, in, in, in prison. Right? So we'd build a plan with at the lowest point, we'd motivate them.

And so, look, we're not gonna, we're not gonna wait till you're released to mentor you. We're gonna mentor you now - we're gonna start now. Let's start the process now. We've messed up; we've [00:09:00] acknowledged that. Let's go to the next piece. Is there something that you'd like to address with me? Yes, no. You confidentially address it.

Then you go on to, what do you wanna do? And then you start devising that and you spend more time, but you don't only devise it with him. You devise it with his family, his close associates, his relatives. When you partner with all those people, you're more likely to get an outcome, but when you partner with him, but the most important partnership is with the young person because if they start believing in what you're talking about, then they're more likely to continue, engage and follow that blueprint and start doing things a little differently. And that's where it's very important because it only takes one or two or three young people to start changing till, you know, the 10 or 15 of them that [00:10:00] hang around together start looking like we're actually, yeah, he's, he's doing okay for himself.

We must, um, you know, get on board and then they slowly start coming to your office, man. I'm sick of this lifestyle. I'm sick of the police. You know, every

time I'm there, they're just checking me, randomly knocking on my house when there's an incident, you know, five kilometer radius of my house. If there's a robbing, I just get knocked on.

So young people were having these, you know, issues with police and, and just this continued, um, harassment, you know, just ongoing. So how do you break that? You know, then you, you, you create a dialogue with police, right? Police are not the easiest organization to deal with that by far, they need so many things to, to work on. But time to time, good people come through them and people who, who really wanna understand, um, how to do things, because the issue is to provoke a lot of young people, the way they speak, the way they, the way they come across is very [00:11:00] intimidating at times.

You know what I mean? It's, it's just like in your face and they push you to, to say or do something that's pretty extreme. And for a young person, who's, doesn't have a very good experience that just could take a matter of minutes in the beginning of an interaction.

**Mark:** To escalate quickly.

**Ahmed:** Yeah. So, um, but yeah, that's, that's, that's how, you know, our, our justice piece was nothing that we, um, think- it was just innovative. It was just something that, you know, policy was being followed by every other organization. How do we be different and be a, an advocate for the most vulnerable, the most... Young people who are not going to participate in those surveys where government policy, when government policy's been designed, they aren't gonna be involved in that consultation process.

You know that, so it's just gonna be a, a, a, a standard, um, policy that's set up by a number of experts from a number of universities [00:12:00] and large advocates and organizations who are gonna contribute to that. But the people that it very much relates to are not involved in that policy piece. That's critical, right?

Because if they're not involved in that policy piece, then who's that policy going out to serve?

**Mark:** Yeah, that's it.

**Ahmed:** So it's just a blank. It's just a blank policy, which is just there to address anything and everything, but really it's not tailored sensitive, and it doesn't have an approach. But, we also got to that policy angle through the

ministerial, um, crime prevention task force, which, you know, I, I really liked when minister Carroll came into, uh, minister Ben Carroll came into youth justice and, and crime prevention.

He really, he had a, he had a, he, he wanted to transform it. He wanted to make the justice space, you know, he wanted to address the causes of, of crime. Why [00:13:00] are these young people? So he brought together a number, a diverse number of people. I was the youngest at, on that table. And you had, you know, the social services, you had the Victorian Council of Social Services.

You had Woolworths sitting on that. You had Lendlease sitting on that. You had football, Victoria, basketball, um, AFL. You had all these people who, who are are very much friends of the crime prevention space because they can easily prevent that, you know, through their large businesses. Um, and you know, looking at how that came across and, and, you know, designing the strategy for government out of that task force for the next four years was pretty exciting.

Um, and I remember that very well, but you're looking at, you know, what causes young people to go into crime? You know, sporting clubs- what can we do to make that more accessible? What can we [00:14:00] do this, you know, funding and creating opportunities within business and within sporting organizations and the broader social piece and, and understanding really the place based, um, kind of solutions that, that are on offer.

So there's just so much I could speak about this all day, but it's just certain areas where we thought we played an important part. But also, we thought we really took those ideas from young people and connected them to policy and made government understand that now is the time not into the near future.

And, and, and, you know, thinking about it later, we can have this. No, no, no. All we can all do glossy things and announcements, but we, the substance of it needs to be, it needs to be, you know, done through a lens where it will help resolve [00:15:00] this issue now and into the long term. So that's what I'm so you know, passionate about. Yeah.

**Mark:** What you said there, when you were talking about getting to the young people at their lowest point, obviously in prison, I think that's so crucial. Because I always say to the young guys, we're running our courses in there, like you don't start training for a marathon on the day of the marathon.

**Ahmed:** Yes.

**Mark:** You know? And that's just like, if you're gonna look at the young person getting outta prison, you don't start working on housing then cuz you've got 12 hours before the sun goes down.

**Ahmed:** Correct.

**Mark:** And, and it's the same with, you know, trying to find a job and everything like that. You you're on the back foot when you start, when you're released. I, I love it. That's, uh, that's when you start, you know, you go, you go to where the cannon fires most loudest, that's straight into the, straight into the thicker things and then, and then you work from there.

**Ahmed:** Yeah. And, and it's like, you've gotta have your, um, employers ready. You've gotta have your, you know, you've gotta have your case managers and, and youth workers ready also. They've gotta be as devoted, um, to this job.

**Mark:** Mm-hmm

**Ahmed:** Like at the end of the day, [00:16:00] um, what we, we like to see is youth workers who go above and beyond. Because when you go above and beyond for a young person, they're more likely to go above and beyond for you.

**Hanad:** 100%, yeah. They'll give that same energy back.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** They'll give you that same energy, that same love back. And it's something that we see with, with a lot of the young, young boys and girls we work with, you know, especially in the youth justice space. It can be a very confronting space for a lot of people, you know? Um, you're dealing with some of the most, as Ahmed mentioned, some of the most vulnerable, some of the most at risk young people, you know, who've, who've gone through very, some sometimes horrendous stuff, you know. If you look at, you know, young people in out of home care, young people, you know- just listening to them and hearing their stories and what they've gone through. Right? So you, you gotta approach the situation with the, with the level of care. Right? But also I think the active listening piece comes in massive.

So we, we do a lot of work with, um, young people in

**Mark:** Mm-hmm

**Hanad:** Parkville. I'm, I'm a firm believer- I don't like the [00:17:00] clinical setting.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Mick:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** I can't do that. And I tell- sometimes I get told off. "Hey, listen, you can't do that, man." Nah, take me to the yard. You know, like I can, I can sit in the office in the chair and you know, nah, but that's not me. Right?

**Ahmed:** Yeah. You like shooting some hoops?

**Hanad:** No, I I, every, every time I go in there

**Mick:** Table tennis, Mark plays badminton.

**Ahmed:** There you go. Oh, you play badminton?

**Mark:** Badminton, basketball.

**Mick:** Every time we talk, we have a joke about every time someone we interviewed a new sport comes out that Mark's played in the prison. I'm like, I didn't even know you can play those sports man, but he does. So we get it.

**Hanad:** But you, but you see like when, when you do go in there, right?

**Mark:** Yeah.

It's you are, you're meeting one particular young person, but you got all these other young boys and girls gravitating towards you.

Yeah.

**Hanad:** "Hey, who, who are you? What do you, what do you do? Well, what are you here for?" And then what they realize very, very quickly with us, right, is we're not your everyday professional youth justice case managers, right? We know how to kind of like play, play between lines where we're professional, [00:18:00] but we understand you, you know? So I- it's understanding the language.



**Mick:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** And it comes back to positionality, you know.

**Ahmed:** Do play fair with them? Do you, do you kind of

**Hanad:** No, I definitely, I definitely play with them, but, but one thing, one thing I do realize is, and I was telling Ahmed about this, is when I, I started at YAY 2021 January, right? And I'd go into Parkville lunch. I'm I'm doing these sessions and having a chat to these boys and just kicking back with them. By the time I hop in that car on the way back to the office, my emails, I got like four or five new emails of like case managers or youth justice officers: "Hey, my young person just called me about your program. Um, do you have any capacity?" I'm like what young person is this?

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** And then you tell dashes, I just had a conversation with that young fellow.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** You know, and it's the smallest conversations go a long way. You know, it's these young people. I come from a place that, listen, it's what happened, happened. Yeah. But let's focus on now. Yeah. What does that journey back home look like? [00:19:00] Yeah.

And it's, we have a new youth justice program that we're launching at the moment it's called The Come Up, short for TCU. Right. So that, what is your come up? What does your come up look like? Yeah. What does your story look like? Yeah. And who needs to be involved? Yeah. And what steps need to happen for you to get there? Right. Whether it's employment, whether it's reconnecting, reconnecting with your family, with your faith, with your faith. Whether it's, you know, actually analyzing your group of friends. Yeah. Those conversations need to be had in need to be had inside those settings, you know?

And I'm, I'm, I, I keep it 110% honest with, with the young brothers and the young sisters. I'm like, "Hey, the mistakes of today are our lessons for tomorrow," right? What are we learning right now? Yeah, we've been here. We're locked up. It's not a pretty environment. Yeah. Mom and dad, aren't here. Family misses you.

You're a leader at home. Yeah. So what are we learning from here today? So as soon as those doors open and best believe when those doors are open, we're the first one's there.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Hanad:** When those roller doors [00:20:00] open, I'm there ready. Uh, listen. You're home now. Yeah. So now the journey begins. Yeah. You come up begins right now.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Hanad:** We've spoken about the plans in place. Yeah. We've spoken about what we're gonna do step by step. Now let's deliver it. So it is just a journey. So myself and some of the other amazing workers we have at YAY. It's just working alongside of these young people. Cause it's that reintegration piece is tough.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** Yeah. Yeah. A lot of people don't understand coming out of a custodial setting back into community. It is absolutely tough because A. You are dealing with the pressures of society. Yeah. You're automatically marginalized. Yeah. Ostracized because you are you're the bad egg. Yeah, you're that bad person.

So I wanna kind let you inside the, you know, the inner community. So you already feel at a disadvantage, but then people look at you different, opportunities aren't available to you. Yeah. It's hard getting back into school, getting back into work. There might be some issues at home. Mom and dad, you know, some of the young people have issues at home.

Mom and dad feel that sense of shame. You brought shame to the [00:21:00] family, et cetera. So it's understanding the various like intersectionalities and things involved with that young person. Right. And it's telling 'em, "Hey, you know what? It's gonna be a journey. It's gonna be tough. We're gonna go through it. But guess what? We're gonna do it together."

**Mark:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Ahmed:** It's really, really important. Yeah.

**Hanad:** Yeah.

**Mark:** Would you, just as much of education you give to the young people yeah that are coming out, do you do the same with the community? With young people coming back in?

**Hanad:** It goes hand in hand.

**Mark:** Mm-hmm

**Hanad:** It's the same energy and dedication and time we put into the young person, we're talking to the parents.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** We're talking to their guardians, you know, it's what role do you play?

**Mark:** Mm-hmm

**Hanad:** Yeah, because, these are young kids.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** These young kids are they're, they're dependent on someone else, you know? So talking to the elders, talking to their parents, "Hey, why is the situation like at the moment at home?"

**Ahmed:** Oh, you know, I remember good old days. Like you look at 'em, you know, talking, you know, taking 'em the piece of making parents understand. Like you have someone who, young person who's got court [00:22:00] and, and they're not aware the parent, or family's not aware, so you you'd obviously try to alert, you know, the family, like, you know, there's court tomorrow and, and still like, you know, some people wouldn't, some families don't even know and the young person himself is like, you know, pretty chilled about it.

Like yeah. Is what it is. You know, if it comes around, it comes around, you know, but I'm still, you know, I've got things to do tonight, you know.

**Mark:** Mm-hmm

**Ahmed:** So, you know, I I'd go and pick up, you know, families, a mother and her child, and the child that's got court, and come all the way from say the

Western suburbs or Southeast to all the way to, you know, to the children's court and, you know, facilitate a lawyer, you know, put that, all that things through.

And then, you know, it's very difficult when you come from single parent household, you're almost, you know, the, mother's almost everything in that household. And, you know, talking about my humble, good old days, that's what I, what we used to do. We used to focus [00:23:00] on the basics, you know, try to get young people through the system, um, through the, you know, especially the courts and all that, because that needs, you know, they're at a disadvantage obviously, but because they don't understand.

And certainly we didn't understand it as well as we do today, but we tried as much as we could through what we knew and what, you know, the, the, the um, what we expected to know that in terms of like, we provide a reference, you know, we provide a court support letter. We, we, we support 'em, you know, I, I remember supporting families who, young people who have only met once or twice, and they were sitting there with their families and they're like, "Oh, yo, you know, you've got your laptop and you could, you quickly write me a letter? Uh, I need a support letter."

And I'm like, "yeah, if I write this letter, but you are gonna be, have to be a regular attendee or so I'm gonna notify them that you're not a part of this, you know, program. Um, but you've gotta join up" [00:24:00] and they go, "yeah, I'll do whatever it takes, you know, right now, now or never, you know." So just thinking about when Hanad's talking like the families and stuff, we don't remember the good old, humble days where we used to actually be there, provide that support.

And, and you know, it's not only that support then, but it's the support you provide afterwards. That's critical because you've gotta, you've gotta have a follow through. Cause young people are very smart. If you don't touch base with them, some of 'em don't need to touch base with you. You're only there when you, they get in trouble.

So you've gotta change the relationship. You've almost gotta build up a friendship. So you gotta, gotta keep a friendship one on, on Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, uh, you know, and making sure that you are very supportive of what they're, you know, if, if they want to do, ah, if they're good at cutting here. Mm.

You know, one thing I've learned is, you know, there, and then take them to, to, to someone that, you know, give them the opportunity. Because when they say

that they [00:25:00] are looking for a chance, you know, and they're pretty skilled with, through the arts, t-shirts, design, creativity, they've just got so much, uh, they could give back, but it's- it's the opportunity and, and I like the work that Street do.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Mick:** Rebecca Scott. Yeah.

**Ahmed:** Yeah. Seeing, seeing it firsthand, we actually had one of our crime prevention, the minister of, meeting there. One of the things was to go see what, what it looks like. And, um, it's pretty amazing, you know, how they take vulnerable young people and, and provide them with opportunities.

**Mick:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Ahmed:** And that's just, just, I know they call it social, uh, social enterprise, but it's just so good. Like imagine you can help a young person establish a social enterprise, a barber shop. That's, that's all these things like it's powerful. Yeah. People believe into it. People buy into it. You know, as a first timer and, and seeing the work that Street was doing just, it took me back.

**Mick:** Yeah. Well, you gotta be [00:26:00] given like young people need to know. They need to be able to believe like there's, there's a couple of awards, I would say, like trust.

**Ahmed:** Yep.

**Mick:** Trust that you're gonna do for them. What you say you're gonna do come through. Yeah. Yeah. And, and they gotta trust you that you're not gonna be, you're gonna be different to everything else they heard before you.

**Ahmed:** Mm-hmm

**Mick:** Cause let's face it they hear a lot before them.

**Ahmed:** Yeah.

**Mick:** And it doesn't always come true. They gotta believe that there's an opportunity for them. They gotta believe. And then they gotta believe that they can fit into that opportunity. That they're good enough to fit in that opportunity.

**Ahmed:** That see themselves.

**Mick:** That they can see themselves in that opportunity and they can actually feel, and that's, that's a really important thing cuz you, as you all know, like we all know here, like self-esteem self, you know, confidence- it's always pretty low, but their ability is there.

**Ahmed:** Mm-hmm

**Mick:** They just can't see it sometimes of how good they are. You spoke with them. They've got skills. They've all got great skills using it for good or bad. Sometimes bad. But the skill sets they're there to do for good. But then it's just the opportunity that they don't see themselves sometimes in a job that they could do because they're [00:27:00] used to being told that they can't do much or, or they're not good enough to do that. And then you're suddenly trying to pump their tourism and say, no, you can. And sometimes you have to just give them the opportunity and, and do it slowly and then show them within it.

And then the rest they just take off.

**Ahmed:** Yeah.

**Mick:** But it's just that little bit as well. Um, I'm really interested in you talk about the family and you talk about that. We've talked a lot about that as well, but correct me if I'm wrong, I imagine it's really difficult when you're working with the young people as well, because the community that you work in and it's, I'm not just saying it's cuz of, you know, African community or whatever like that, but I'll be interested to get your take on this.

Yeah. So with the families, you would have large families.

**Ahmed:** Yep.

**Mick:** You would have, you know, family members that are probably already could be incarcerated or not. You, you would also have maybe parents who, as you've both gone to mention as well, don't understand the justice system, don't understand the community kind of support systems as well. Might be language barriers as well.

Like how kind of challenging is all them [00:28:00] layers on top of what you're already doing for a young person? I know you said you've talked a little bit how you break through them a little bit.

**Hanad:** Mm.

**Mick:** But is that fair to say that you're facing a lot, a lot of their barriers all the time, and there's so much distraction away from actually the young person who you're trying to work with. And so many things are against them already before you even get to them.

**Hanad:** Definitely. Definitely. I think that that piece around not understanding the system, it's, it's bloody hard to navigate. Yeah. It's really, really hard to navigate for anyone.

**Ahmed:** Seven years, eight years on mate. I'm still learning.

**Hanad:** Yeah. It's and it's for, for, we're talking about some new and emerging communities, very diverse community groups, right? Uh, where English isn't their first language. And if you've got a loved one, a son or a daughter who's, somehow somewhere, has been caught up in this system, yeah, and you don't know where to start. Where do you start? Who do you talk to you? We, we, we've got a large number of people in the community who would not call the police.

**Mark:** Hmm.

**Hanad:** Even if they're in [00:29:00] danger, would not pick up the phone and call the police because there's no trust there, you know. They would call their friends or their neighbors or their cousins or someone else before they call triple zero. Yeah. That's real. Right. But I think it's for, for young people who, especially young African men who are navigating the system, navigating the space, right. It's, okay- you look at before they even get there. What's happening outside? You know. A lot, a lot of the young people we work with, there's a lot of trauma behind the scenes of, you know, how they got there. And he comes back to looking at the root causes of crime, you know. Looking at poverty, looking at mental health, looking at family dysfunction, looking at things like lack of education or, um, employment, et cetera. You know?

So if that young person hasn't got the basic necessities to survive and to, to live a life of fulfillment, yeah, they're gonna find that stuff from somewhere else. Yeah. And you touched on an amazing point. That whole sense of belonging. Yeah. If I don't feel like I belong here. Yeah. If I don't feel like I have a [00:30:00] say or I'm significant in community and my voice isn't being heard, I'm gonna find platforms and other avenues where people will listen to me. Yeah.

So when I don't, I don't like to call it gangs. Yeah. I call it groups. Friends. Yeah. I feel I belong here. I'm empowered here. These people like me. They listen to me. They value what I say. Right? But then that now turns into, okay, I'm gonna start doing some petty crime. I always put it into a bit of a cycle.

So I think it's when a young person is marginalized from community, right? Where they're, they're not involved in education, employment, things aren't working well at home with, with the family. Right? And as community, we are very disorganized. Cause we still don't know till today until the present time, how to work with some of these, most, some of the most vulnerable people in our state. We haven't cracked it yet.

We still don't know, which leads these young people to find other avenues, as I mentioned, where they feel [00:31:00] comfortable, where they feel like they belong. But now they start getting involved in antisocial behaviors, risk taking, et cetera. They're young kids, it's quite normal, but then it's the level of risk taking and the level of crime that we're seeing today, which is concerning.

**Ahmed:** Do you wanna talk about the innovative piece? I think it's, it's he really, um, naturally delves into the work that we've done and well, Hanad came into the organization. I'll give you a bit of a background here, could share the story. Um, came into the organization when we started, uh, when he joined us. And second-

**Hanad:** Second day.

**Ahmed:** Yeah. Second, first, second day, just kept beating on about something, you know. And he's got a direct line manager, right? So he kept coming into my office and, you know, just telling his manager, telling us all around the organization, everyone. He was trying to get everyone on board. He's like, you know, "knife crime, knife crime, knife crime."

"What's wrong with this guy? Relax. It's it's your first week." You know?

[Laughter]

You're [00:32:00] just like, "No, no. We've gotta do something." And you know, just like, alright, first week second week, like, is he gonna stop? Nah, third week was the- then all of a sudden we're like, you know, you there.

So like we knew about the issue, but not to what he was seeing on the ground. So we told him we'd maybe put something together, um, and let us coordinate



some strategic, uh, you know, people that we could work with or, or, or speak to. Um, but it's just, you know, the work that he did and how convinced he was that this was something that we had to work on or solve or bring, um, some kind of attention to where we actually are addressing the issues.

We got that program into the state government's minds before it was a problem. I remember, you know, a number of senior people in government asking me, [00:33:00] "Is really a problem? You know, statistics don't say this, or they show this." And we said, "the statistics don't show how many people have been injured, but don't report it to police." Because if Hadan or I got into a bit of a scuffle and a knife crime and, you know, it wasn't too dangerous, but still it is a knife issue.

Then it will be resolved between the two families and not get to police. Mm. And that's how it's between a lot of cultures.

**Hanad:** So that, that wouldn't, that wouldn't contribute to the numbers though.

**Mark:** Yeah

**Mick:** Yeah, yeah. So this is happening regularly.

**Hanad:** This is...

**Mick:** So you were seeing this regularly?

**Ahmed:** So yeah. Yeah. So he got that done. So he got that program to us, but he can speak to it about why he was, I think, hell bent on it.

**Mick:** Yeah, because it was, oh, it was one of the things we really wanted to get to was this, because this is fascinating. Cuz I think when we met before, I kind of said to you, Hanad, and, and, and you Ahmed as well, that way, [00:34:00] way, way back early in my days in Bridge, they were putting toward putting together this kind of campaign years ago.

And, and I think I said you might not have seen it. It wasn't even on bus stops and all around knife crime. But there was nothing came from it. Like it was, it was acknowledged, but it wasn't to do with specific communities.

**Ahmed:** Mm-hmm

**Mick:** It was across the board.

**Ahmed:** Yeah.

**Mick:** Yeah. About knives. And then it was raised a little bit with, uh, you know, bus stops campaign here and there, and then it went.

**Ahmed:** Yeah.

**Mick:** So I'm really interested in this. So talk us through this because it's, I think this is really gonna be really interesting to our listeners and such a really important topic.

**Hanad:** Yeah. I think firstly, like I really wanna start with, when we talk about the issue of knife crime. Yeah. Knife crime doesn't have a race.

**Mark:** Mm-hmm

**Hanad:** It doesn't have religion. Doesn't have a background or a location. Yeah. Knife crime is an issue. Yeah. And it's an issue that isn't new. Knife crime's been around for a very, very long time. Long time. Yeah. It isn't this new phenomenon that we're dealing with today. Right? [00:35:00] If you look at settlement, you know, we had the Italians and um, the Greeks came into Australia. Then after that it was the Vietnamese community and there some situations there, then we had the middle Eastern Lebanese and Arabic communities and some issues there.

And then now we've got the African communities, et cetera, right. Knife crime's always been around.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Hanad:** If you look at the articles in the 1980s near 2000s, you know, there's some pretty horrific stuff that's happened in Melbourne. You know, that it's. But I think the, what we're seeing now, so coming back to it is why, why was there a need to do this?

I think it's, I think we, we are now seeing a generation, especially in some of the more impoverished neighborhoods in Melbourne, right? We're now seeing a generation of young people who all know someone who's been impacted by youth violence. That's crazy. Like there's a whole generation right now of young

people who know someone who's been impacted by youth violence, either threatened, stabbed, [00:36:00] assaulted, bashed, jumped, et cetera.

Right. And the whole idea of this whole knife crime campaign came about. Some of the young people I was working with, you know, in, in community, their stories was just, "Hey, this happened on the weekend. Hey, this person got stabbed." Like we've lost a lot of young people to youth violence. Way too much.

**Ahmed:** Because of the knife.

**Hanad:** Whether it be knife crime, whether it be due, due to suicides, whether it be due to mental health, like we've, it's all connected. Right. But we've lost far too many young people. And it got to a point where I've lost myself as an individual. Like I've lost five kids, like five young kids, like I've lost in span of three years, right, due to youth violence.

And it came to a point where, hey, listen, I'm not waiting for someone else to put together some program or some, you know, knee jerk reaction or some, you know, initiative that is nine times outta 10 gonna be [00:37:00] problematic. Yeah. It's our community. It's our kids. It's our young people. We should be doing something. Right.

So when, when I, when I came to YAY, I already came with my own agenda. I was like, "Hey, you guys, they gave me a PD." I was like, yo yeah.

**Mick:** Didn't mention it in the interview what you were there for, yeah?. 'I'll have a day to settle in then I'll be knocking on that door.'

**Ahmed:** There you go. Yeah.

**Hanad:** They gave me a PD. I was like, yeah, this looks cool. So let's do this now. [Laughter]. But, um, no. So we, I think with the, with the help of the organization, Ali, Ahmed, everyone, the whole entire team, we put together a, a program where it was very much needed. And the powerful piece was we used the voices of young people, both victims, perpetrators, their families, businesses, community leaders, et cetera, to kind of support us with this.

Right. Knife crime is a community issue. Yeah. But I think the issue we're seeing now at the moment is around young people who are confused, young people who are misguided, who are lost. [00:38:00] Yeah. And who don't have a

sense of direction. And you mix that in with the music. Mind you, let's get it straight, I listen to grime. I listen to drill. I, I, I bang out to it, you know?

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** But it's not my reality.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Hanad:** I don't, I don't listen to those lyrics and conceptualize it and actually follow through where sometimes young people who listen to those kind of music, right, will listen to those lyrics and can very much relate to it.

This artist is talking about things that I'm going through right now, whether it be crime, police brutality, broken homes. Yeah. Dysfunctional families, mental health, racism, et cetera. I can, I could resonate with this with this guy. He's speaking about my story, my struggle. But then it's when they start taking the violent side of it, the, the drilling and the stabbing and the slashing, and they start portraying that in community.

That's when it's the issue. There was this poem that, um, I read one time. It goes some, something along [00:39:00] the lines of, you know, thoughts become words. And words become actions. That was deep. And I was like, wow. You know?

Um, but I think with, with this campaign, it's, it's a drop the knife, save a life campaign we're running. It's a, it's a campaign run by YAY but we're working with a lot of organizations, agencies, key partners in the community. It's community led. Yeah. But the most important part is it's youth led. So we put together this youth network- an amazing group of young people who come together from all walks of life.

**Ahmed:** So you don't the- what, what needs to be clear here is that the team has nothing got to do with it. So even Hanad's where he thinks he should go, should shouldn't go.

**Hanad:** Mm.

**Ahmed:** So it's actually totally at the direction of the youth network. So they sit and whatever they put to it's not even a co-designed.

**Hanad:** It's youth voice.

**Ahmed:** Yeah. It's just that totally led by young people.

**Hanad:** Just give em, just give 'em the keys. Like they are SMEs, you know, subject [00:40:00] matter experts, right? They know exactly- they're living through this. Right. So you, you, you, you give them the platforms, the tools, the resources, the connections, networks, and you tell 'em, "Hey, you guys are passionate about this, so are we. Yeah. We're gonna be there behind the scenes as additional, you know, additional supports, but roll with this." Because it's very important for us to allow them to create a campaign that young people can identify with.

**Mark:** Mm

**Hanad:** That's, the piece there. I don't care about what government thinks. I would care less. Yeah. We've got kids dying on the streets, kids who are scared, vulnerable kids who are petrified to leave their homes. Right. So if it doesn't resonate and identify with those kids, it's not working.

**Mick:** I asked you this before, but I think for our listeners as well, one of the things I always think you've mentioned knife crime, working with all victims, perpetrators, so forth.

**Hanad:** Mm-hmm

**Mick:** From, I'm interested, from all the young people that you're speaking to who are [00:41:00] leading this. Yeah. How normal has it become for a young person to leave their house with a knife of some sort in their pocket? Not because they think they're going to use it, but because they think they're gonna need it as a defense. And that might sound crazy.

**Ahmed:** That's scary.

**Mick:** But because when you - and I spoke to you both about this before - when you have a knife in your possession, whether you use it or not, it plays a part. Like it's like, there's no going back because if something happens in that moment in your life, whether at a train station, whatever it is, whatever you have, something that you could potentially fall back on. Yeah.

So the intent is there because it's on you. You might say "I'm never gonna use it. It's for my protection." But if your protection, if you have to use your protection, you're gonna use it.

**Hanad:** Mm-hmm.

**Mick:** How normal, from what you're hearing from the young people and society and everything, um, and [00:42:00] how normal is that at the moment? How many people would be feeling that they need to carry a knife or are carrying some kind of weapon?

**Hanad:** It, it depends where you go, to be honest. Yeah. You know, obviously there, there's gonna be some parts of Melbourne where, you know, they might not experience any of this.

**Mick:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Hanad:** So completely normal, right. Um. Without, without, you know, hyping the situation up, right, I think it's pretty normal. I think it's what we're seeing right now, especially what the, the violence that's being played out in community is very much concerning to a lot of people.

Um, but also what we gotta take into consideration is how that is being seen by everyone else. We have social media now. We've got Snapchat, we've got Instagram, you know. It's, you can be within the comfort of your own home and be exposed to serious, serious types of buttons. Yeah.

And it's young people who see that they might not be involved in any type of crime, any type of unsocial behaviors, right. But it's happening in their neighborhoods, it's [00:43:00] happening in their communities, in their schools. Right. So that thought's gonna come now: "Hey, what am I doing to protect myself?" Yeah. "Do I need to carry a knife? Do I need to align myself with a certain group?" You know, with, with a certain team of young people. Because if I'm by myself alone in community, I'm easy pickings. These are the words of young people, by the way.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Hanad:** Right. They're saying, "Hey." I'm like, "Hey, yo, when do you start hanging out with these fellows? What's going on here?" "Good brother. Hey, listen. It's either I hang out with these brothers because it's my safety. Yeah. I gotta make sure I'm protected. I gotta make sure I'm safe because I'm by myself walking the streets, anytime, anywhere I can get rolled up on."

And you know, so that fear is there. It's very much real in, in community. Right. Girls too. No one talks about it right. There, there's a massive issue at the

moment happening with girls, especially in the youth justice system, right? Same thing. Yeah.

It's young people are scared and young people don't have a platform [00:44:00] or an avenue to kind of speak to someone with it. School. Their teachers don't understand them. Cause they're a bit too far removed from what's happening on the streets. Right. We already spoken about young people not trusting Victoria police and some of those mainstream providers and organizations, right.

Um, mom and dad are busy, single, single parent households. You know, mom's working night shifts, dad's working double time, et cetera. They they're barely home. Who do you talk to? Hey, I'm scared. I'm actually going through it. So if community can't protect me, if law enforcement can't protect me or if I don't trust law enforcement, right. I gotta make sure I damn well protect myself.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Hanad:** And that's what we're seeing now. Right. And unfortunately, young people who are vulnerable yeah, who carry knives just for their protection are the ones who - most of the time - get hurt. Cause they put - they're in compromising situations. Right? You gotta be very ballsy to stab someone, to be honest. You know, there was this guy on YouTube saying when you shoot someone you're very far away, you don't [00:45:00] have to be so close to him. When you stab someone, that's like face to face.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** Yeah. And if you, if you buckle, or something happens, that's your life right there. And it's what young people are fighting for nowadays, which is absolutely. I, I think is bullshit. I call it out and I talk to all the young people, right. It's- we are fighting for post codes, area codes, locations. We don't own suburbs. We don't own these suburbs.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** We're we, yo it's either we live in rental houses, housing commission, community housing. We don't own these suburbs. These are, we don't, it doesn't belong to us. Right. So we're we're we are losing lives. We're shedding blood for post codes for suburbs, just because you live on the other side of town.

I don't know you, so why am I fighting with you?



**Mark:** Mm.

**Hanad:** You know? And then you got other young people who get dragged into little disputes over social media for the pettiest of things, pettiest of things, you know. It's you just commented or you, you, you [00:46:00] like to comment, or you laughed at someone who who's made a joke about you. That's being played out on, on the school grounds now.

Yeah. There's a massive brawl. There's a stabbing, et cetera. You know, I always tell young people I'm like, guys, your life is way, is worth way more than an iPhone. Let's be serious right now. Yeah. Yeah. Like your life is way, way, way more valuable than a bloody iPhone, than a pair of shoes. Yeah. And I it's that pride thing too.

It's "Hey, I'm not giving, I'm not gonna give up my phone. I'm not gonna give up my, my wallet, my shoes." If someone has a knife to me, I'm stripping down button naked. Yeah. You, you take that. I don't care. You take that phone. Because my, my life is mean something to me.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Hanad:** You know? But it's that whole, uh, my pride, my name, my face. I gotta be someone in these streets.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Hanad:** Yeah. Because if you're not somebody, you're nobody.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** Yeah. Cause a, a lot of these young people are chasing that fame, [00:47:00] that status, that name, you know, and unfortunately what comes with that is the back end. It's all fun and games when you are, you're being that person. Right. But when you get hurt or your family gets hurt, or when you're thrown into a lockup or youth justice, right. Then you start questioning your decisions, then you start questioning your actions. Like, "Hey, where are all my friends? Where's mom, where's dad?" you know?

During COVID you guys, you guys know very well, these young people, you know, 23 hour lockdowns.

**Mick:** Yeah.



**Hanad:** 23 hour lockdowns in, in, in the cells. Cause the resources, the staffing, et cetera, they they're going through it. Right. So my whole thing's around the whole early intervention prevention. Right? It's we can stop this. Yeah. There's this perception now in community that you have to be a bad man.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Hanad:** You have to be a road man. You gotta be a driller. You gotta be someone serious. Now, like a lot of us, more toxic masculinity, you know, so that we, we gotta kind of go into [00:48:00] that, but also around, Hey, you can be you, you know. Be proud of who you are. You don't have to conform to what these guys are doing.

You don't have to kind of play by their rules. You know, you be you. I- stand, uh ,stand, stand your ground. You know? A lot of young people, that's very uncomfortable for them, you know, because we're living in a world where it's a digital world, social media, it's all about fame, money, girls, clothes, et cetera. If you don't fit in, you're a weirdo. Right?

**Mark:** Mm.

**Hanad:** That's bullshit. Yeah.

**Ahmed:** He summed it up pretty well.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Mick:** No, absolutely. You hit the nail on the head. Um, have you got a bit more time?

**Ahmed:** Yeah.

Yeah.

**Mick:** Cause we'll wrap it up soon in a while, but like

**Mark:** It's really good stuff.

**Mick:** Yeah. It's amazing. It's really important what you're speaking about. Um, yeah.

**Hanad:** That's right.

**Mark:** No, it's just, this conversation is just, so I was just thinking about it before and just sitting here and just absorbing it all and like being mindful about like right now. [00:49:00] Um, and going, it's just, it's, it's really enjoyable to, um, have conversations with, especially you guys, like we're in the same, the same industry.

**Ahmed:** Yes.

**Mark:** You know?

**Ahmed:** Exactly.

**Mark:** And, and it's just, it's, it's just really nice to be, to, to hear you guys doing. Cuz you know, when, when you're working, you got your head down and everything like that, you feel like, oh, you know, I, I know I'll, I'll back what we do. And then just hearing the same thing with you guys and just saying like how you conduct yourselves and how you're conducting YAY. You can see that it's like, like that's a game plan that works. Do you know what I mean?

**Ahmed:** Oh, it, it, it, it has to work like to a degree where not being, not being like arrogant or anything, but just being, putting proper confidence behind your work. Because I was told pretty young, if you don't believe in what you're doing, then how do you expect anyone to support it? So

**Hanad:** Exactly.

**Ahmed:** It's, uh, you've gotta speak with full confidence, with full conviction, and just let people know that this is how it is.

**Hanad:** Mm-hmm.

**Ahmed:** But you can't also, you've gotta also, you know, [00:50:00] you gotta always go through this thing that they call proof of concept. Like, you know, because it's not in, within the policy frameworks, you've always gotta prove what you're doing, right, is, is, is the right way. It's a model that works. It's a model that, you know, we could see the impact, um, and what young people. And we can draw case studies that are pretty successful out of it.

And you always come against this thing. Well, you know, it may have worked now, but what you think, how do you think this program would be supported

over three years? Well, one thing, what we know is that we never leave those young people. And part of the justice piece, if I could just speak to, over the years has been: how do you break the cycle of disadvantage for a young person, but you yourself, haven't gone through the justice system?

So therefore comes up the wording. You don't know what I'm going through. You [00:51:00] don't get it

**Hanad:** Or you haven't been in my shoes.

**Mark:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Hanad:** You've been a good guy. Yeah. You weren't a bad man. Yeah.

**Ahmed:** You know what I mean? You get all these things thrown at you. Hey buddy. So like you try to put him in his place and then you kind of struggle and then you eventually thought. But a thing that I've found very helpful, um, to aid the work that we do has been: how do you get a young person that you've helped reform or break this cycle of disadvantage, um, and, and a cycle of crime and come back to the organization as a mentor?

**Mark:** Mm.

**Ahmed:** Right. Especially a person who's respected and used to set, set the trends for, for, for a number of things or, or a group leader or influencer.

**Hanad:** Yeah. The influencer.

**Ahmed:** How do you get that one? Because they're the most trickiest and the quickest to do things in either way- the wrong or the good or the bad. But if you're able to get 'em on your terms and, and getting them to do some good [00:52:00] stuff, it's just powerful.

**Mick:** Yeah.

**Ahmed:** I can, I can tell you, it makes, it makes you do half the work you do.

**Mick:** Yeah.

**Ahmed:** Because there's a case in point, you know, case in point is right here. Yeah. He is reformed. You know him. I don't have to take who he is. You

know. And young people start saying, "well, well..." Don't make any excuses. I'll go, "look at him."

**Mark:** Mm-hmm

**Ahmed:** Yeah, today. Now. What, what, where are you going? Stop taking the substances, stop taking the things that make you go and do things that are, you know, sometimes that are, are beyond your control because of the things you take. So that's what I found very powerful is that peace that, when you get someone who's a hardened criminal and changing them, that they follow because that makes you do half the work and

**Hanad:** It comes back to credibility too, you know? And I think that that's

**Ahmed:** It gives you a track record too, of delivering. [00:53:00]

**Hanad:** Mind you like, don't get me wrong, I would never be in a situation and talk to young people. And I'm kind of like, you know, like what's what I'm trying to say? Like use their experiences. "I also had brother." I've never stepped foot, you know, in a, in, in a, in a custodial setting, in a correction setting as a, as a, as a prisoner, et cetera, you know. I'll keep it - I'll keep it 100 with you. I'll tell you exactly what's going on. But I've been around people, whether it be family, friends, associate, et cetera. I know what he's like on that side.

**Mark:** Mm-hmm.

**Hanad:** You know, you can never fake it. And a lot of my, a lot of my good friends right now, they, they, they're starting in the space, youth workers, et cetera. And they say to me, you know, "Hanad, how do you do it? What do you mean goodbye? You, you walk in that group. It's just normal. You know, you just jump in there, have a conversation, everyone adapts you up. Everyone says what's up to you." I just be me - be yourself. Yeah. Don't fake it. Be yourself. Cause I think sometimes like you automatically tell yourself, Hey, like I have to kind of like be [00:54:00] a little bit more like them and it to kind of fit in. And so they can gimme that, you know, that take of approval. You know?

Nah, man, be yourself. Be real because they, they can tell and they can tell straight away.

**Mark:** Straight away.

**Hanad:** Cause if they sense that little bit of, ah, you know, you're not genuine or this guy's put on a bit of an act. Right. You've lost him. Yeah. And you've lost him for good.

**Mick:** Yeah. Yeah. But there's a place for both.

**Hanad:** Mm-hmm.

**Mick:** Yeah. And it's - you're so right about what you're saying. And, and I've experienced that over time as well. There's a place for both because also I've also seen in, in drug and alcohol working, the work that I've been involved previously, where the lived experience and the person trying to, you know, come back in and support the other person, they're not ready.

**Hanad:** Yeah.

**Mick:** And then their experience is what they put onto that person. They're different to that person.

**Ahmed:** Exactly.

**Mick:** Yeah. And then I always, always have a lot of young people going, they, they would work with certain staff members and say, "oh, you know," cuz cause they could relate and say, "oh I'd knew you'd been through something", you know, or whatever. You wouldn't have told them or [00:55:00] whatever. But they just sense as you said, they know, they know really quickly.

**Hanad:** Yeah.

**Mick:** Yeah. If someone's got an edge or someone's got that, they've sussed it. They might know what it is, but they've sussed it and they go and go, "oh, I don't wanna talk to that person. They're just out of uni or just whatever." And I said, "you know what?" I'd say, "that person over there is gonna listen to you."

**Hanad:** Mm.

**Mick:** Right?

**Ahmed:** Yeah.

**Mick:** Like that, or person that's been through it won't listen to you.

**Hanad:** Mm-hmm.

**Mick:** Because that person that's gone through it will be reflecting on their process as you are speaking. And it's gonna, they might miss something that you're speaking about. Not all the time, because you do need the lived experience and they that's where it can be brilliant. But that person there who might just come through uni, they just wanna listen to you.

**Ahmed:** Mm-hmm

**Mick:** And they're gonna give you options.

**Hanad:** Definitely.

**Mick:** They're not gonna tell you how to do something.

**Hanad:** New perspectives too.

**Mick:** Yeah. Perspective. And you're gonna learn from you as you learn from them.

**Ahmed:** Exactly.

**Mick:** And the questions they're gonna ask you is gonna be different that might make you think differently. So don't shut them down.

**Hanad:** Mm-hmm

**Mick:** Or shut it- just be open to both. And it might not work for you and you might get more from the other person, but there's a place for both at times.

**Hanad:** Correct.

**Mick:** You know, and it's really interesting because, yeah, a lot of our guys, as you said Ahmed as well, [00:56:00] we've got people that now work in social enterprise who are crew leaders. They started as a crew member as a young person in a prison. Now they lead the jobs.

**Mark:** Mm-hmm

**Mick:** And the young people underneath them. And exactly like you say, the young people respect them and they can, they can cut through it. Really quick.

**Hanad:** But also there's also a point there around, like, I think environment's a big thing.

**Mark:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Hanad:** The space- we have to be very conscious about around the space we're creating for young people. And I think me and Ahmed always talk about this. It's- we work with- and, as I mentioned, some of the kids, uh, boys and girls who walk through our, through our doors, they will never, ever step foot in, you know, any, any of these other mainstream organizations for their own reasons.

Yeah. Right. And it's, whenever there's an opportunity where we take, you know, a group of young people to a consultation or to a forum or to a meeting. Yeah. It's you can sense that uncomfortableness.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** Not from the young people. From the other.

**Mick:** [00:57:00] Correct.

**Hanad:** The externals. Yeah. Yeah. Because let's be real now let's be serious. Right. It's. You want to engage at risk and disadvantaged and multicultural, and we're throwing all these terms out there. Right? I'm gonna bring you a group of young people. Yeah. Engage them. And you see it. It's panic.

**Mick:** It's a sweat.

**Hanad:** It's a shock, you know? "Well, my, what do we do? Oh, can we, uh, uh." Hey stop. Yeah, this is this. This should be your bread and butter.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** You know, but I think there, there there's a big education piece there.

**Mick:** Do you know what they forget?

**Hanad:** Yeah.

**Mick:** They forget to talk.

**Hanad:** There you go.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Mick:** Please go and just, just talk to them. It's a person in front of you.

**Hanad:** Have a conversation.

**Mick:** Doesn't matter. It's not a politician, it's not - it's a young a person. Just talk.

**Hanad:** I know.

**Mick:** And they will talk back. It's that simple. Yeah.

**Hanad:** I, I, I've never understood that. I've been working in the community space for a while now. Like I've never understood that. Why is this so uncomfortable?

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** Like these are kids. These are young people. Yeah, they might have a justice [00:58:00] background. Yeah, they might have done some crime. So bloody what? They're kids. This is an opportunity for you right now to make an impact on this young person. Yeah. To develop a relationship. Hello?  
[Laughter].

**Mick:** Did you ever get that question? We get like, yeah, we get this question a lot as well. I'm glad they ask it.

**Hanad:** Yeah

**Mick:** Because it then shows you how much we have to do.

**Ahmed:** Yeah.

**Mick:** Yeah. Cause so you get employers or you get people that come into the prisons and they say, "What should I say to the young people?"



**Hanad:** Oh my God

**Mick:** "How should I talk to them?"

**Hanad:** Yeah.

**Mick:** I say, "how do you talk to me?" And he go, yeah. You go "just like that." You know what I mean?

**Ahmed:** Not a special type of a human.

**Mick:** Yeah. Yeah. But, but it, then when a question is raised, not once, that's raised a couple of times, yeah, you understand the gap.

**Hanad:** There you go.

**Mick:** You understand the, the perception, you understand that. And then you kind of go, "they're young people. They are gonna love talking to you. Guess why? Because they don't, they're gonna be respectful of you cuz you are giving your time up to go into a prison and talk today."

**Hanad:** There you go.

**Mick:** The first thing they're gonna give you is respect.

**Hanad:** Mm-hmm

**Mick:** And they're gonna want to talk to you.

**Hanad:** [00:59:00] Yeah.

**Mick:** Chat to them as you normally would. And then you see them doing it.

**Hanad:** There you go.

**Mick:** And they come out on cloud nine.

**Hanad:** Mm-hmm

**Mick:** Like on an, an adrenaline rush or because they just had this perception and it totally went the other way.

**Hanad:** Exactly. You know, we had this, um, we, uh, we put together a survey for our knife crime campaign, drop the knife, save a life. Um, so we wanted to get an understanding of the perspectives and the opinions of stakeholders. Yeah. Professionals. Around, what are your thoughts on the issue? Is knife crime an issue? You know, do you work with young people who are impacted by knife crime? Victims or perpetrators. Right?

And some of the numbers that rolled in - mind, mind you big shout to Gilbert and Tobin for helping us out with that. The stats that rolled in. So we had high numbers, 90% of the stakeholders. So, oh, we had 92 people, 92 respondents for survey. So 92 professionals, social services, the health sector, law, police, private, philanthropy, et cetera.

Right. 92% of people said knife crime's an issue. A further than 95 said knife crime has risen in the last five years. Right. [01:00:00] But there's this one stat that only 22% of survey respondents felt that they're equipped to support young people impacted by knife crime.

**Mark:** Wow. Right.

**Hanad:** Only 22%. This is social services by the way.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Mick:** Yeah.

**Hanad:** We're talking youth workers, community development officers, mental health workers, et cetera. Right. Only 22% of the 92 survey responders felt that they're equipped to work with young people impacted by knife crime, youth violence and any other trauma. Right. Which goes to show that gap. Yeah. Like if we don't know how to engage with these young people, if we don't know how to support them in their darkest hours, right, what does that say about us?

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Mick:** Yeah.

**Mark:** Yeah. And it shows where, where we should be putting funds in to educate our staff, like as a youth worker myself, like I'm big campaigner that we've, we've gotta, we've gotta make the industry recognizable.

**Ahmed:** Definitely.

**Mick:** And hear from people that are on the ground.

**Mark:** Yeah.

**Mick:** Like I already- my mind is racing. Like you talking with this knife [01:01:00] crime, you're talking about this, you know, the young committee that are leading this, you know, like they should be presenting. Like, I'm sure they are like, they should be presenting to all our staff. They should be presenting to all youth worker staff.

Like they should be like, they're the ones that you would be even delivering to facilitation and training to staff about this. The awareness piece as well around it because, we all know, like if I was to sit in, in a room and listen to people that have been through it now would understand it, talk to you about it and raise your awareness on it, you're listening. You're hanging on every bloody word. You're hanging on every single word because you know, and you know, it's gonna have a benefit for you as well.

**Hanad:** Mm-hmm

**Mick:** Before we finish today, I'd like to like round it up a little bit, like round it off a little bit where one, one side, where is the, what's the next stage for the knife crime, um, the, the campaign, everything that you're doing on that? Yeah. What, where does it, where is it going to go next? And what do you see as, as you know, the next stages of that?

**Ahmed:** Yeah.

**Mick:** And then I'll, I'll get back to the kinda last bit. It was about YAY as well and what's the kind of work that you're working on now and anything new [01:02:00] and, and so forth.

**Ahmed:** Yeah. Yeah. I'll, I'll touch on definitely the future perspective. Yeah. But you can.

**Hanad:** Yeah. So with our knife crime at the moment with our campaign, so we've got our community conversations coming up in May. So we we've split the sessions up into two. So we're, we're going back, going back out into community, you know, just to get some more information and feedback from whether it be stakeholders, parents, young people, cultural leaders, you know, religious leaders, et cetera.

So we're running a number of sessions, about seven sessions at the moment, in about six, seven different LGAs around the Northwest, um, led by our young people, the youth network supported by the YAY team. We're inviting all stakeholders, uh, from any industry, businesses, parents, young people, teachers, principals, police officers, come out there, let's have a conversation.

You know, let's, let's really have a honest, serious conversation around what's happening, you know, uh, around the issue of knife crime, youth violence, and how are we supporting our young people? And I think from there, uh, with the help of VU, we're gonna put together a bit of a report around the findings of the [01:03:00] community conversations, which will be followed by a campaign, which is developed by once again by our young people, which are, which aims to educate and raise awareness.

Right. But that's just, that's just what YAY is doing and what we're doing with the, with community. But I think collectively, each organization, community group, individual, plays a part in this. You know, we all have a role to play around keeping young people safe, you know? And what does that look like for each organization?

I encourage individuals to have a conversation. What are we doing about this? Yeah. Like what are we doing internally to support young people? You know, do we have things in place? Should we be having more conversations? And it's real grassroots. Yeah, come back to the ground. Yeah. I, I, I beg people come back to the ground because sometimes you can get lost in the sauce.

Right? I think not a lot of people knows about Ahmed, right? Like I think Ahmed, you see Ahmed with, um, you know, the, the media presentations and talking to very senior members of government, et cetera. Ahmed's in the streets.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Hanad:** [01:04:00] I'm I'm as on the ground doing the same thing. I am doing the same thing that all these other youth workers are right. Come back to the ground. Let's really connect. Let's collaborate. Let's work together because I think we owe it to ourselves. But most importantly, we're owe it to these kids. Yeah. This next generation. Because no young person should feel should every young person should be, should feel safe in their community, should feel safe in their home.

Every young person should be, should feel safe in school. Right. So if we have platforms and connections and resources where we can, you know, enhance

their safety and kind of empower these kids to kind of feel like they belong and they're safe and they're comfortable, let's do that because we see the other side of it, which is, you know, the over representation of African and Pacifica and indigenous and Torres Strait Islander young people in the system.

Right. These, these jail cells are packed. Yeah. There's too many kids in there. They shouldn't be in there. Right. That's we should always come back to the point. These are kids. Come back to that point. Yeah. Whenever the media tells you something, whenever you are a police [01:05:00] officer or some politicians you embark on about something, these are young people.

Yeah. And if you, if you start from that position there, you're doing okay.

**Ahmed:** Perfectly said.

**Mick:** Yeah. Well said, Hanad. Love it.

**Ahmed:** Yeah. So, well, wanna acknowledge you, mate. So like fortunate to have you in the team. Uh, but look, um, yeah for an organization, um, we've got key priorities. So our priority is now that you know, we're coming outta COVID, we've, we've been planning a lot, I guess, you know, and 2020, 2021 was a lot of stop start.

But one thing that's come very clear to, to me and the rest of the team - and this is through the programs team that we've been working with - is that the piece that education, you know, schools and, and other schooling, uh, educational institutions have to do with this. If why do a lot of young people [01:06:00] don't feel like they can stay in school and feel like they can contribute and finish and feel empowered and motivated to do that, just like every other kid? Why? What's stopping you?

Right. So our focus is very much gonna be on the educational piece where you're gonna, so we find young people towards the end, you know, when they're at risk and going towards, you know, being, becoming in contact with the criminal justice system. It costs between 500,000 and 600,000 per annum to keep them locked up.

On the front end, it would cost it, mm, 40, 50, 60, 70,000 to support 'em.

**Mark:** Mm.

**Ahmed:** And that's just trying to keep 'em away from the right. Why do we always have to deal with the issue when it's too late? Why can't we be proactive and get ahead of it?

**Mick:** Mm-hmm

**Ahmed:** You know, so that's the piece that we [01:07:00] will, we'll be wanting to look at and try working towards solving. Right. Um, the other piece is employment, right? Too many people in our communities and we come across are not, um, building their careers. You know, they're in industries, they're everywhere, but they, a lot of young people complete degrees, but can't get into the jobs that they're qualified in, which is a bit of a problem and is a growing one.

So now our focus is we've got some fantastic, uh, partners and industry friends that we have, um, brought together. And we're gonna be placing people into, into, into positions where, where we've got, you know, the, you know, a large number of industry friends who are coming together to actually solve this problem.

So it's quite funny after you, you, you do a few things and, and raise a bit of the awareness around the business circles, how many people would wanna come out and help after COVID.

**Mick:** Mm.

**Ahmed:** Um, and the third piece [01:08:00] is the justice piece. Very important. You know, YAY's always been, YAY's always been known for two things, you know: justice and employment.

Um, but also we've, we've been known for, um, to do leadership, you know, empowerment, you know, community, um, you know, engagement and all that. But the two main pieces are employment and, and the youth justice and the educational piece is soon to come in. So we've got our hands full, um, to say, um, so, uh, that we are going to be really busy, really looking to strengthen that level of engagement that we had pre-COVID.

It's just been very destructive. We're in a stop start, um, phase always because of COVID and then cases go too much and then people don't want to get it because they live with elderly people. It's, it's pretty, you know, it's not. We're not getting a smooth run at it in terms of [01:09:00] engagement. So we're slowly building it out.

And, um, we are very, very much, uh, you know, looking towards a better future for young people and finding what's what's now very important for me. And, and COVID personally has taught me is: how can we enable and empower the next generation of young leaders? Because by empowering them, you change a generation.

**Mick:** There you go.

**Ahmed:** Empower a whole young people, you know, youngsters that are coming up, youngsters that have a lot of doubt in them. But when they see someone of their age group doing it, trust me, there'll be a lot more people that do a, a lot greater things. Not only in the community space, we don't wanna see them only in only see them in every other space where that be in academia, sports, um, you know, going into different areas, you know, in life and, and society. And just being leaders. Just go, go and share that, [01:10:00] you know.

**Hanad:** You know what's interesting? Um, we, we get asked a lot around people who want to come and volunteer for YAY and we're jam-packed. We, we have so many volunteers, right? Sometimes we, we tell 'em, "Hey guys, we there, we can't, you know, we have all our positions are taken up." But I always tell anyone who asks me, "Hey, you can volunteer in any way, shape or form."

So I say, "what are you doing right now? Are you working in the business sector, corporate, in academia," et cetera. I'm like, "who do you, who do you talk to from community?" And they go, "what do you mean?" "Like who do, who do you mentor?" "Oh, my brothers, my-" Nah, come on. That's that's your duty, man. You, you, you gotta do that regardless. Right?

It's find two young people, any two young people, yeah? That you're close with, who have similar interest in you, yeah, in with the work, whether it be professionalism, et cetera. Right. Make it a commitment in a year, in a 12 month period. Right? [01:11:00] Touch base with them, go out for a coffee, do something with them, help 'em out.

Yeah. That's also volunteering, you know, connect with them. Yeah. And I think sometimes we get too caught up in the community space. We got, we got brothers and sisters who work in the government space in banking and, hey, there's kids right now doing their uni, first year uni, there's kids in school who need that, you know, like information, that sense of direction, you know. Spend some time with them.

Buy him a coffee. Yeah. Have a chat. Hello? [Laughter]. Yeah, there you go, right? Hello?

**Mick:** Hello. Hey, and before I leave you ask you a quick question. We ask of every, uh, every one of our guests, um, and, uh, you mentioned a word, like, I think you said it beautifully. Um, and Hanad, you were talking about they're only kids.

**Hanad:** Mm-hmm.

**Mick:** We're working with kids. Um, we like to reflect back a little bit, so. Start with you, um, Hanad, and then we'll go to you Ahmed. So when you were a kid, what did you wanna be when you grew up?

**Hanad:** Oh, wow. Uh, this is an easy one. I wanted to be paramedic.

**Mick:** [01:12:00] Okay.

**Hanad:** Yeah. I, I really wanted to be paramedic. Um, I actually did a, I did a whole year at, at VU, um, in Para medicine. Didn't didn't manage to, to finish it. Just, I've always loved helping people, you know? So I saw para medicine. I was like, man, this is, this is amazing. You know, you're on the front lines, you know, you're helping people in their, in their toughest of times, you know? Um, but yeah, I think it's, yeah, I've always wanted to be paramedic.

Yeah. Now, now just watch the shows. I'm like, yeah, yeah. [Laughter].

**Mick:** Well, you were like, yeah, well you are helping people, aren't you? You're helping not just the body, but the mind now as well. So yeah. So you're doing that and, and you Ahmed?

**Ahmed:** Um, growing up or?

**Mick:** Yeah, when you were younger, like what did you wanna be when you grew up?

**Ahmed:** Um, politician. No, I'm joking. [Laughter].

**Mick:** Yeah. You gonna be on your way.



**Ahmed:** There you go. Do you know what's so funny? Everyone would be like, "yeah, yeah, yeah". No, honestly, I wanted to be in IT. Like I wanted to be in the IT sector and, and working with computers and stuff like that. I really enjoyed that. But a lot of people would say, "oh yeah, yeah, yeah, no, that resonates with [01:13:00] me, politician." Right?

**Mick:** You're politician material, mate. You fine.

**Ahmed:** Never mate. Never get stuck into that. Right. I'll tell you that much. Never say never, but um.

**Mick:** I'd say there's a few people that might think differently, mate. I'm sure there's people talking to you behind the scenes giving you that knowledge.

**Ahmed:** I've I've I've told them that I'm very much committed to my day to day job, uh, because it's rewarding and I do not wanna get stuck in the, uh, media sector. Yeah. Uh, sorry. In the, in the, in the political circles.

**Mick:** I'm writing that down now. And then when we meet, when, in the next little while I'll be saying

**Ahmed:** There you go.

**Mick:** "Remember you said that? Now look at you." Hey, it has been an absolute pleasure talking to the two of you.

**Mark:** So good.

**Mick:** And just to let you know, myself and Mark, we, when we started this podcast, we wanted to, we wanted look at solutions and the issues and the problems. We really wanted to focus on the solutions. And we really wanted to shine a light on people doing great work. Because I think in every, like in every community and all that, there's a lot [01:14:00] of negativity about what's going on. Yeah.

**Ahmed:** Mm-hmm.

**Mick:** But you look at something like, um, YAY, you look at what you both individually are doing and, but then both with your communities and, and, and YAY what you're doing as well. And it's so powerful and it's having a major impact and you're doing some amazing work.

And I know you're, you're only getting started in some ways to continue to do that amazing work. So like thank you for doing that work. Yeah. Cause I'm sure like you don't do it for the, for the acknowledgements. You can tell that. But you're doing some absolutely inspiring and so worthy and such needed work for your communities. Should be very proud of what you're doing.

Um, and thank you for doing that. Yeah. Thank you for sharing today and thank you for educating as well. Cause we wanted to do an episode, um, around, you know, the African community and all that, but we were very, um, aware that we needed to have the right people on to be able to do this and to be able to give them a platform so we can learn from them.

Yeah. Cuz we don't, we don't pretend that we know, you know. Um, so really what you've talked about today [01:15:00] is being just incredible. So thanks again, and uh, wish you nothing but the best at what you're doing. And I get a little bit of a sneaking suspicion we're gonna be working a bit closer together anyway going forward because I can see some, some synergies and alignments and straight away we, we can, you know, we can stay chatting about how we can, you know, impact together as well, so.

**Ahmed:** Thank you for having us on and we very much appreciate what YMCA does and especially the ReBuild project that you guys are doing and, and how impactful it is. And, um, to be honest, you, I learned it through the news.

**Mick:** Yeah.

**Ahmed:** Uh, when I saw it. Uh, but yeah, thank you. And, um, we very much appreciate it. The chat, it was fun. It was engaging. There you go. And Hanad was the legend of the chat.

**Mick:** You put yourself down there and said Hanad might be speaking and mate, you were straight up onto that mic. [Laughter].

**Hanad:** That's what always, that's what he always does by the way. [Laughter].

**Mick:** Hey, thanks fellas.

**Ahmed:** Thank you guys.

**Mark:** If anything in today's episode has raised any issues for you or someone you know, head over to our website for a full [01:16:00] list of services that

may help at [ymcarebuild.org.au](http://ymcarebuild.org.au) under the podcast tab. This podcast was produced by Mick Kronan and Mark Wilson. Editing done by Mark Wilson.