

Time to ReBuild S4Ep3 Ahmed Hassan & Hanad Hersi Friday 1 July

[00:00:00] **Mick:** All right, Mark Wilson.

[00:00:02] **Mark:** Mick Cronin.

[00:00:03] **Mick:** How are you?

[00:00:04] **Mark:** Doing well

[00:00:05] **Mick:** Very well. Good, good. Well, it's um, it's a unique team we're gonna do today cuz we're um, we've never caught on a Monday morning. Usually, you know, motivation can be low on a Monday morning. So, uh, but it's not today because, uh, we've got a couple of great, um, guests, um, and uh, really, really, really happy to have, um, them today speaking to us.

[00:00:24] **Mick:** So two guests we have is one is Ahmed Hassan and also we have Hanad Hersi. So I'll just give a quick bio on, on our guests before we jump right into it. So we'll start with you. Um, Ahmed. So in 2014, at the age, the ripe age of 18, uh, you started, uh, you co-founded Youth Activating Youth um, so born in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne of parents to Somalia and Eritrea, Ahmed is driven by desire to form social co um, cohesion, bridge cultural devoids, and activate the best outcomes for young people from multicultural backgrounds across [00:01:00] Victoria, Youth Activating Youth offer support to marginalized and disadvantaged young people, particularly those who consistently fall through the cracks.

[00:01:08] **Mick:** Um, it provides them with essential skills needed to build self-confidence. And self-sufficiency originally a youth led committee. Um, Youth Activating Youth has grown into an established non-for-profit organization with a committed team and a diverse and multidisciplinary board. Ahmed is also a director of the board of the Western Bulldogs community foundation, and also a member of Australian multicultural council. And most recently he was awarded a 2022 young Australia of the year award, which also led you to be nominated to be the young, or you were young Victorian, sorry.

[00:01:43] **Ahmed:** Yes. Victorian.

[00:01:43] **Mick:** Should I say, sorry, young Victorian, which also led you to be nominated to be young Australian of the year, which is, uh, no mean feat. Didn't win that one though no?

[00:01:52] **Ahmed:** No

[00:01:53] **Mick:** Ah, shit can't win them all eh.

[00:01:55] **Ahmed:** No, you gotta be kind, share the love.

[00:01:59] **Mick:** But [00:02:00] a what an amazing achievement. So really, really, really, um, pleased to have you here. And then we also have Hanad. Wait, we wanna get this one. He'll do the, the editing. So an Hanad Hersi is the programs coordinator for youth justice at youth activating?

[00:02:17] **Mick:** No, sorry. Hanad Hersi is the programs coordinator, youth justice. Youth Activating Youth non-for-profit organization based in Melbourne that supports multicultural young people. Hanad work closely with some of the state's most vulnerable and highly risk young people, as well as repeat offenders, victims and perpetrators of violence who are often the most difficult to reach.

[00:02:38] **Mick:** Hanad is a passionate youth just as, or Hanad is a passionate youth justice advocate and is currently working on an anti-knife crime campaign that looks to raise awareness and educate young people and the wider community about the dangers and serious consequences of knife crime. Gentlemen, welcome to Time To Rebuild.

[00:02:59] **Hanad:** [00:03:00] Thank you.

[00:03:00] **Ahmed:** Thank you for having us.

[00:03:02] **Mick:** So we got a lot to unpack today and a lot that we're gonna ask you as well, but I suppose we'll just, we'll kick it off by just getting a bit of a background from both of you and, and feel free to have jumps in for us. Um, a little bit about your background growing up, um, and what kind of led you to the kind of work that you're, you know, the great work that you are doing.

[00:03:22] **Ahmed:** Um, thank you for having us actually. Um, it's so good to be on this podcast and, um, look, um, you know, growing up, I think, uh, I, you know, grew up in a very diverse, um, you know, environment and, and, um, schooling, sporting, um, you know, work, met some fantastic and ambitious

young people, um, growing up in, um, you know, in the Northern suburbs, you, you obviously see some of the disconnect and how, um, you know, the, the [00:04:00] education system can be supportive of some students and some students can't find that support that they need and obviously go off onto either TAFE or trying other things. And if those work out, you know, some, some students obviously try and make things happen. But, um, but what, one thing I really saw was students that continue to fall through the crack because the education system's not so supportive of them.

[00:04:25] **Ahmed:** Um, and the frameworks were not there to obviously understand some of the issues and obviously go above and beyond to keep the student to actually complete the schooling, which is very important. You know, um, a lot of the work is done in school so that, you know, you keep a young person out of a life of crime.

[00:04:44] **Ahmed:** Um, but what we saw was, um, you know, a schooling system, which, which actually enjoyed some of these young people's talents in terms of sporting and arts, but you know, when it came to educational outcomes was pretty low. So, [00:05:00] um, It was all the things that we saw and I saw it, especially growing up in one of the most culturally diverse schools in the state, over 60 different cultures.

[00:05:10] **Ahmed:** Um, uh, so good. Um, you learn so much the lessons from that time, still live with me till today. So, um, but I, I still have, I still see a lot to do. That's still left since that time that still hasn't been achieved in terms of making sure that students are supported in school, making sure that they are able to participate in sporting, uh, after or bef uh, after school, you know, on the weekends so that they, they feel like every other student, um, uh, those are just some of the things that, you know, still keep me motivated to solve.

[00:05:51] **Ahmed:** Um, because I look at, um, issues that. What was happening in my time and how can we resolve some of those issues so that young people could [00:06:00] still have an equal playing field. Um, but yeah, I'll pass on to my great colleague who can give you a bit of early upbringing.

[00:06:08] **Hanad:** Yeah, I think, yeah, he smashed that by the way um, it's interesting. I kind, I kind of fell into it to be honest. I don't know where I started growing up. Um, in public housing, you know, grew up in North Melbourne for a bit in the public housing towers. I come from a family of 11, so mom and dad included. So we've got like three sets of twins in the family.

[00:06:29] **Hanad:** So three sets of twins got three sets of twins. No sat down. Yeah, we got, we' got a big team, big team. Shout out to the family.

[00:06:35] **Mick:** You, you, you are more and would achieve an award above Australian of the year, I reckon for three sets of twins,

[00:06:42] **Hanad:** Three sets the soccer team soccer.

[00:06:44] **Mick:** That is a soccer team.

[00:06:47] **Hanad:** There you go. But, um, no, it just I've always been in the space in some capacity, you know, when I was younger, you know, just connecting the dots, you know, supporting people, whether it'd be young people, elders, parents, you [00:07:00] know, information, sharing's powerful, you know, and you, you sort of find yourself in positions where, hey, like you're sort of making a difference.

[00:07:07] **Hanad:** So, um, kind of coming to the community space, I was very much connected to the young people in my community, my friends, my peers, their friends. So when you come, when you came to like, things are like things like, um, camps or events, or, hey, let's organize a party or let's do something. Right. I was always that one kind of bringing people together, you know?

[00:07:25] **Hanad:** So now I'm thinking, oh, okay. So what, what more can come of this? Yeah. Obviously work living in community, you see a number of things happening good and bad, you know, um, where living some of the more, you know, deprived communities in Melbourne. There's a lot of young people there or young people and families that are vulnerable, you know, uh, don't have access to basic things.

[00:07:44] **Hanad:** You know, whether it be, um, employment, education, a lot of health issues, you. So the conversation started turning around to, okay, how do we kind of build platforms and pull people in positions now where we can get information out, people right. [00:08:00] What does that role look like? Then I started realizing, hey, there's thing, there's something called community work where you can actually do this for a living.

[00:08:07] **Hanad:** You can help people support them, guide them, mentor them, and yeah, you get paid for it, you know? And the money aspect was, was never a thing for me, but I'm like, hey, I do this thing on the regular. This is me on, on my day to day. Right. You, you see someone, you help them. And I was

like, hey, I got offered a job at a, at a very, um, at North, at the North Melbourne football club, their community organization at the huddle.

[00:08:30] **Hanad:** That's where I had my first crack in the industry. Um, led by Cameron McCloud, their CEO. Um, yeah, just learned a lot there. Just, yeah. Got to connect with, you know, number of different, uh, community groups, stakeholders, government departments, you know, and now I'm in the space just working. Um, particularly in the youth justice space, which is very, very interesting.

[00:08:52] **Hanad:** Um, I get asked a lot by my peers, but my mom always says, hey, your job is very, very stressful. And I'm like, yeah, I [00:09:00] know, but it's, I like it. I love it because a bit about why I started in a Y J space. And it's, it's a bit of a story growing up in, in community. My uncles, when they first came down to Melbourne, right.

[00:09:13] **Hanad:** Mischievous, troublemakers, you know, so we, we, we always had that. Um, but it got to a point where some individuals in my family, you know, um, started what's the word, you know, getting coming in contact with the criminal justice system a bit too much. Right. And my grandma doesn't speak a word in English.

[00:09:33] **Hanad:** Doesn't know what's going on. So she's, she's making these trips now to custodial settings all over the place. She's going to over here, over there on the bus by herself. And I started going with her, well, you know what, hey, lemme just tag along, say hello to my uncles. This that. And this, that kept on happening for a number of years, for three, four years, where to a point where it became normal, you know?

[00:09:55] **Hanad:** So I think that's something that always draws me back to these kind of settings, [00:10:00] where working with some of the most vulnerable young people across the state, like I understand their stories, their struggles, their trials, and tribulations. I'm able to relate to it in a way that I can connect with them, you know?

[00:10:10] **Hanad:** And it makes my, it makes my job a lot easier cause we're starting from a position of understanding. So yeah.

[00:10:16] **Mick:** Yeah. Um, I shout out to Cameron McCloud. He was actually, um, back in the very early days of bridge project and he was part of the, um, steering committee.

[00:10:26] **Hanad:** Oh, nice.

[00:10:26] **Mick:** Yeah. So great walkie doors. And I met, went to the huddle and, and met him there, um, few fair few years back now as well and great walkie doors, but just, yeah, super, super nice guy would like, you know, making great impact.

[00:10:38] **Mick:** Yeah. Just, just got that real big, like hard to wanna do. Right. And, and every time you meet him, he's always so interested in what you're doing and how he can help. So yeah. Shared out to him as. One of the things I was really excited about having, um, you guys on was because I feel and correct me if I'm wrong and I'll Mark, you feel the same.

[00:10:57] **Mick:** It's a great opportunity for us to understand [00:11:00] what it's like growing up, you know, as young African males in the community, cuz you hear media and you hear everything else. And it's, I always think there's, there's, there's a degree of what's actually real and what's actually a little bit more dramatized.

[00:11:14] **Mick:** For whatever reason. Yeah. So like when you were both growing up and you were young, like Hanad you touched on it a little bit, but I'll be interested to get a little bit more on a, like what was it like in your neighborhoods and what was like in school? Like, like was there a lot of trouble? Was there not so much trouble? Like, is it, is it always that misrepresentation as well? So it'd be keen to hear from people that have lived through it. What you, what, what it was really like.

[00:11:38] **Ahmed:** Well, you look at it and you're growing up, but not only as a, as, as a young black African male, but you also, you're a young, Muslim and growing up was you've you obviously see tense times in, in, in community.

[00:11:55] **Ahmed:** And, you know, I've been able to see two [00:12:00] periods where things were not so good between community and government and, and, and policing and, you know, protective, uh, you know, policing agencies where you look at growing up, you look at, there was a war on terror, and, you know, if you are Muslim, you know, if you wearing a head scarf, um, you know, there was all these things that these suspicions around the community, and who would go overseas to fight. And, you know, that obviously created an us and them, um, in the community because it was being used at the time of, um, you know, the time growing up, you could see a lot of that and in the later years to, from, you know, 2016 and 17 to almost today, what you see is

young African people being misrepresented on the, on the news and you're being used for a political gain.

[00:12:56] **Ahmed:** Um, almost because it's an issue that [00:13:00] gets, you know, every incident that happened, it was blown out of proportion, but you looked at the statistics and it was barely anything, you know, of rise, except for some areas where you look at it with, you know, when you dig deeper into the stats and you say, all right, you know, we've gotta acknowledge that there is a bit of a problem here, but it's not, what's being, you know, shown on, on the media.

[00:13:22] **Ahmed:** So you've gotta be all very, um, clever to, to, to see beyond, um, the headlines. And we always ask people to see beyond the headlines, but. As a young person, you know, I think I was about 20, 21 at the time 21. Yeah, 21. And, you know, fronting media conference after media conference and putting together, you know, sitting on the TV 4:00 PM news desk live and, you know, it's your community first thing.

[00:13:52] **Ahmed:** And you've gotta stand up as a 21 year old, barely with any media experience, um, was, was a [00:14:00] tough time to be honest. Um, because from there onwards, um, you know, everything that happened, you were almost the figure that needed to step up and, and stand up and, and answer those things. But one thing I was really proud of was that I wasn't only an advocate or, or a media person. I was actually doing the work on the ground. So I knew what I was talking about. I knew what the issues were deep down. I was visiting those prisons. I was in there. I knew those kids. I, we were working with those kids that. The media often portrayed as, as gangs and criminals. So the thing is, I felt very proud to think, to represent my community at the time, but also to call out where there was an issue and saying, you know, there was, this was wrong, this shouldn't have happened.

[00:14:49] **Ahmed:** And we always used to say clearly, um, anyone who does that, I always felt for victims of crime, because you do sometimes hear of their stories. And, and, and most times you hear [00:15:00] of their stories, but what, what really goes, you know, a lot of people say, oh, you know, you're just, you know, you're protecting repeat offenders. No, I'm not. But I'm saying, you know, don't blow out of proportion because you don't want to harm, um, their future prospects in terms of, you know, just putting X through their name and saying, look, you're just gonna be a regular visitor to our prison. No, no, no. It can change. You know, couple of years of misbehavior doesn't need to set you up for, you know, you don't need to be coming down a life of, of crime where young people, these days, I feel understand very quickly what a life of crime

looks like. And when they do it for a couple of years, wake up very quickly and say, hey, I know I'm 22, 23. I am not, I am not gonna be 45. And, you know, in and outta prison and hustling on the streets, like that's not me gonna be me.

[00:15:57] **Ahmed:** So it's just that, you know, [00:16:00] growing up, you saw a lot of things like both as Muslim and African young person, but, you know, it was very different, you know, at first it was, you know, you know, people were, were suspicious of the mosques and what were happening and what were the young people being told and the war on terror. And then a little bit later on, it was, well, that still continued, but then you had the African gangs thing and. By then I was, um, of age and I thought, yeah, 21, you should be able to step up for your, um, fellow youngsters and, and, and, and call this out and, and, and challenge even the highest office in the land or whoever it is, um, an MP or a business person or whoever, or, or a radio shock jock. You just gotta be able to call it out and, and face them one-on-one.

[00:16:46] **Mick:** I've all like, and it's amazing to hear you top that, cuz I've seen you around and, and we've been in the same circles, didn't know each other, but we've been in the same circles for a long time. And I, I remember being at like, you know, um, I think it was the youth [00:17:00] summit that was led by the police commission and we had Steven Lean on speaking about that just recently we had him as a guest and he was talking about it and Steven does a lot of great work, you know, and we spoke very positively about the work that was doing with African communities as well.

[00:17:12] **Mick:** What always struck me about you was like one you were very young. Yeah. And I always, I always felt there was so much pressure on you at times because you were, um, like the poster boy in some ways. Yeah.

[00:17:24] **Ahmed:** Correct.

[00:17:24] **Mick:** Yeah. You know, you knew what, and, but the most impressive thing was of how you spoke. I was always like captivated by how you spoke, because you knew what you were saying. Wasn't scripted. Wasn't whatever. It was real, real experience, real life, but genuine passion and a genuine want to what it was. But that pressure used to always strike me. When you were like that age, I'd see at 18, you'd see at 19, you'd see in the TV then you'd see you were every everywhere else. Um, like what, like, did you just learn as you went a little bit, or did you, like, you obviously have mentors around you and people in the community that were actually helping you on that? [00:18:00] Because I think that was a real big responsibility for someone your age and you did it fantastic. Which is why at this age, everything that's

come that we talked about your accolades and everything else there. But the work and the passion is, is, is even more, more like ignited. Yeah. It helped you cheer out time. And how did you kind of, you kind of, cuz we kind of saw you mature and grow like really quickly in that space, more so than people that have been dealing with it for 10 years, 12 years being able to talk like you were able to talk at 18 and 19 years of age,

[00:18:28] **Ahmed:** Look, I've gotta pay a great credit to my, um, colleague Ali. Um, we obviously we co-founded YAY together, but you know, it was, it was basically both of us on the board to a degree and, and the community members just in general, um, you know, they'd just general members, who'd call you after a press conference or they'd seen on the news and they'd say, look, you spoke pretty well, but would like you to maybe touch on that more, you know, this aspect of what you spoke about and you know, the feedback was, was 80%, I could [00:19:00] say 85%, great. And then you'd cop some yeah. Wacky stuff. Like why do you have to stand up and legitimize this? So I said, so, alright, so we're gonna go by it. If, if you don't stand up and, and, and, and, you know, protect your own, then you're gonna let every other person, you know, write, say anything they want and no one challenges them.

[00:19:22] **Ahmed:** That's not on. Australia's about, you know, it's about, you know, challenging each other's ideas and thinking, um, I think Australia's a democracy which is open to, you know, freedom of speech, but also you can be challenged on that. You know what I mean, your ideas. So, and that's why we have media there. That's why we have, you know, newspaper around, you know what I mean?

[00:19:44] **Ahmed:** I, it was, it was, I made a complaint once to, to the Herald Sun and I said, look, I'm not too happy with one of your, uh, people who write for you every now and again, one of your opinion piece individual. I'm not gonna say the name, but, and [00:20:00] this is a person very high up. He said to me, uh, well, I'm the, he's got an opinion and he writes it every couple of days, but I said, look, look what he is writing. It's absolute shocker. Don't you guys. And, and they said to me, look, um, why don't you contribute your piece to it too, start writing for us and, and, and, and, you know, give a counter argument and make sure that they're able to, uh, people are able to, to, to find the truth for themselves almost, you know, so that's what I've had to come up against because I knew it was never gonna be a balanced game, but I knew if you challenged it enough, you'd get enough people to hear you and jump on board and, and support the work and over the journey I'm just grateful for all those people. You know, when, when you are seen, when you are. Proactive then you're more likely to gain some support.

[00:20:52] **Mick:** Do you feel there's more voices now because of what you've done, do you think you, I, cuz I would think, I would imagine as a lot of people would look to, you know, you as a role model, [00:21:00] but also look to you as, as a voice and look at you what you've done and you've wedged open that door a lot, you know, and you've made it possible. Um, is that something that you feel and do you think there's a whole, and doesn't go to the bulge is like, is there a whole, do, do you see the next leaders, the next voices? Do you see multiple voices now because of that?

[00:21:18] **Ahmed:** You have, you have to that's the way I've always seen it. I haven't seen it for me to only sit on the chair, but I've seen it for other people. There's so many, there's a list of organizations that are, that are media organizations in this country. Uh, they're all looking for diverse voices and, and trust me, they are looking for diverse, uh, diverse voices because it creates a different opinion. It gives them a different lens, regardless of what you have to say, you know, um, it, it's, it's obviously it's gotta be a contest of ideas, you know? So, um, and I feel like the next generation, I I'm, I don't want the next generation of young leaders to say, look, I've gotta wait till I'm [00:22:00] 30 media trained. And, um, you know, I think I've went out and got some good people to train me who have obviously spoken on the media and, and all gained all that support, but it, it had to happen pretty quickly because it was there and then if you didn't make it, then, um, you know, it's not like the time would pass, but it's like the issues would continue to grow. So the next generation of young leaders, more than happy to, to be called upon and, and asked for opinions, but I'm, I'm, I'm comfortable in knowing that many of them are very confident speakers.

[00:22:36] **Mick:** Yeah.

[00:22:36] **Ahmed:** And would wouldn't would rise to the chance. What about you?

[00:22:38] **Hanad:** No, definitely. I think you, you said it well, um, I think the work Ahmed and Ali and so many other advocates in the community, you know, the work they've done so far has really opened a door for so many other young people where they're not really standing back now, you know, they're not gonna wait for someone to open the door for them, you know? So either they're kicking the door down or going through the window, as I say. Right. Yeah.

[00:23:00] But it's, it's really important because, um...

[00:23:02] **Ahmed:** You can talk about the towers, what happened with towers?

[00:23:05] **Hanad:** Yeah. Perfect example.

[00:23:06] **Ahmed:** It was, it was, it was a way of background. Um, a lot of people, um, were talking about the towers and what was going on. This man, and I just wanna acknowledge his work because not a lot of people know him for this, but he was there every day while his wife was pregnant, heavily pregnant, actually. And they both contracted COVID whilst he was working hard every day under those stair, under those towers, providing food, cultural messaging, uh, health equipment, uh, health, um, um, things that people needed for their, for their, for their, for their, uh, homes and elderly people, all their medication and stuff. Sorry, medication just, could you touch on that?

[00:23:53] **Mick:** Yeah, I'd love to hear it.

[00:23:54] **Hanad:** I think 2020 start of lockdown was interesting for anyone to be honest. Um, [00:24:00] we...

[00:24:00] **Mick:** What happened?

[00:24:02] **Hanad:** There you go. Well, I think, I just think just the, the whole situation with the lockdown, the towers of the nine towers in north Melbourne in Flemington, it's very tragic, um, traumatic experience for the residents for, for, for the 3000 plus residents who had to go through that. Um, and very early on, you know, being from the local community, uh, once upon, in time living in those, um, high-rise buildings, you know, having a lot of family, friends, cousins, et cetera, still there it's, it was a no brainer, you know, it's like, I, I have to be there, have to support, dunno what that looks like at the moment, but I just have to do something. And, um, it was tough. I would probably say probably the toughest two weeks of my whole entire life. Um, just seeing what went on during those two weeks around just how community was helpless, you know, voiceless, you know, just being stuck, you you're locked up in, in the house for two weeks. You can't get out. No warning, no information, no food. And it's interesting because on a Sunday, right, for majority of the, um, [00:25:00] residents that live in those buildings, Sunday's a shopping day. Grocery day, you go to the local shops. You buy your Saturday.

[00:25:07] **Ahmed:** You mean Saturday, Saturday.

[00:25:07] **Hanad:** It was Sunday actually, or Saturday next day was Sunday right?

[00:25:10] **Ahmed:** The next day was Sunday yeah. I remember that time very well. Cuz I came out of hospital the night. Yeah. Before the lockdown. So I was out of action myself. Yeah. Uh, but yeah, the Saturday it was around Saturday 3.30. I think the police were, were, were rained in. So yeah. You just look out you outside, you got probably two, 300 cops outside the house.

[00:25:30] **Mick:** Yeah. Cuz they shut it down quick. Didn't they? It was shut it down. There wasn't even a, I remember it wasn't even a warning of time to get people out to get stuff.

[00:25:37] **Hanad:** Nah, they shut it down real quick. And mind you, we're talking about a community who has. There's issues there around overpolicing and lack of trust within, you know, authority, police services, et cetera, right. Seeing 300 police police officers at your doorstep. It's like, Hey, what is going on? What's happening? And for a lot of the families there, a lot of, a lot of the young people there, it was traumatic, straight away having no information [00:26:00] available to you. Right. And you're getting a majority of information from the news.

[00:26:03] **Hanad:** Um, but nevertheless, I think one thing that really stood out to me during those two weeks was the young people who stepped up and we're not talking young people. They they're young people from community, but they don't necessarily work in the community space. We're just talking about young kids who are stepping up day in, day out pulling 15, 16 hour shifts.

[00:26:23] **Hanad:** Yeah. And what they're doing is interesting enough taking it to the men. Yeah. They actually say, hey, this is wrong. This is bullshit. If you're gonna do this, make sure you do it right. We need some messaging. We need some cultural appropriate food. Yeah. No brainer. You need some halal or yeah. What, whatever, you know, vegan or et cetera. Right? Kosher, you need support services, welfare checks. Right. And you've got these little 16, 17 year old young people having conversations with executives within government. Yeah. Chest up saying like it is. And then at that moment with everything going on, I just took, [00:27:00] took a moment and realized, hey, this is, this is good. Like the future's looking really, really bright at the moment because I think the young people I speak to on a daily basis now, you know, it's, we're not waiting anymore. Yeah. You know, we're born here. We're raised here. We're Aussies. Mm. Yeah. And it's time for us to have, you know, a say in how, how communities are being supported, what resources are available to us here. And that advocacy piece right now is a conversation on everyone's mind. Yeah. Yeah. If, if we haven't got it, how are we gonna get it? Who do we need to talk to? And I think with, with Ahmed, a young person, like Ahmed, you know, it's

so many, I tell Ahmed every time, every time so many young people look at you, you might not see it. They look at you and they see the news you're making. Right. And they're get inspired by that. They're like, Hey, this is, this is one of us. This is one of the brothers from community having conversations with politicians, prime ministers, et cetera. That's wild. Yeah. Yeah. That's really, really wild at that's good.

[00:27:54] **Mark:** Yeah. At that time, like were the young people being listened to as well?

[00:27:58] **Hanad:** Oh, they had no choice.

[00:27:59] **Mark:** They had no choice.

[00:27:59] **Hanad:** You [00:28:00] had to. It is. Um, it's interesting. I'll give you guys a bit of a story, right? So we had, we set up a base, we set up a base in the local mosque, which was across the road in North Melbourne right. So, um, government had their own base. We had our own base volunteers. Majority of us don't know each other. Yeah. Different parts of Melbourne because Southeast, Northwest, Mildura, Bendigo, people come out of nowhere were in this room. People are working on coms. Emergency management. You got a fundraising team over here. You got people doing the deliveries et cetera, to a point where government's like, hey, you guys, who are these people?

[00:28:37] **Mark:** Yeah.

[00:28:38] **Hanad:** No one knew who these kids were. Yeah. Like who are you guys? What organization are you guys from? They're like, we're not from an organization. What advocacy group? No. Where community members, these are our people. So we're gonna support them. We were organizing 3,000 to 4,000 packets of food per day. We're talking milk, bread, uh, veggies, [00:29:00] meat. We had a list of residents. Residents are calling us on our, on, we had a mobile phone setups call line setups, et cetera.

[00:29:06] **Ahmed:** It was a shopping center inside doors. It was a shopping center inside that market.

[00:29:09] **Hanad:** Salvation army got involved. Coles getting got, got involved. The local businesses around the community stepped up enormously.

[00:29:16] **Ahmed:** Farmers Federation gave you guys.

[00:29:18] **Hanad:** Yeah. Yeah. Um, uh, what's the, um, trades trades hall, trades hall trades hall, Lou Kaari from, from the union. They came in, you know, they helped us out with fridges, transportation, walkie talkies, you name it. They raised \$250,000 in a matter of three, four days. So, and now we've got resources behind us, you know? Yeah. So, well now we've got resources, we've got connections. We've got people coming in to help. We've got media coming in, you know, actually want to speak to young people, speak to residents around what's actually happening.

[00:29:47] **Ahmed:** So what caught me was, can I just say this? What watching from home and fairly helpless uh, you know.

[00:29:54] **Hanad:** You had the COVID eh.

[00:29:55] **Ahmed:** I had COVID at the time and I...

[00:29:57] **Mick:** You were hospitalized for it yeah.

[00:29:58] **Ahmed:** I was, I was just spent about [00:30:00] five days there and, uh, it was pretty tough, you know, I could laugh about it today, but a lot of people didn't make it out at that hospital, but it was sitting at home and the number of requests that were coming in. Um, you know, from people just like, Hey, could you help? Could you do this? Could you do this? And you know, I wasn't eating at the time, dropped a lot weight. Um, you know, still had a lot of pain in, in my body and shake. So, so that, you know, the recovery was a bit slow to start. But what you saw was I felt so proud that I saw young people on TV who were speaking, who didn't couldn't care less about what protocols to follow, but to do what was necessary at the time. And it was to raise their hand and, and say that this is not right. We need more of this. We need this support. And they were quite articulate, young people. You read their [00:31:00] papers on, on, on the guardian and various, uh, news outlets. I was just. I was, I was, I was proud that you didn't have to do any advocacy work that they didn't need to, uh, reach out and, and find, um, contacts for thing.

[00:31:16] **Ahmed:** They were speaking to international media. They were speaking to Washington Post and Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, CNN, um, you name them. They were speaking to international. And therefore I felt as though, well, you know.

[00:31:32] **Mick:** It's interesting that in such cuz remember that time, remember it well, and I, we looked at it from a different lens. I, I was at home sitting there as well, and I remember having many conversations going like there's so many

layers to this that no one knows and no one can actually see. You've just, you've just mentioned a few. Yeah. And I know there's loads more and, and what's probably not, people don't know is how everything was activated. Like you just spoke about. [00:32:00] How many people got involved, how it actually, you know, mobilized the community to, to, to, you know, try and come in and do the right things. Cuz this is just human. Mm. This is humanity. Mm-hmm . Yeah. And I, and what struck me was I was, I was saying like, you gotta understand that you just, if you lock something down like that yeah. For every reasons that you are now having people in environments that are not always positive as well, another layer, right. That are not positive environments. And you've got people in there for seven, eight, whatever. I dunno. How long it, how long was it? How long did they,

[00:32:31] **Hanad:** Uh, so 14 days.

[00:32:33] **Mick:** 14 days went for, yeah. So two weeks you're putting people into environments that they wouldn't normally be in there for an hour in a day. Yeah. And then suddenly you're in that. And then you add everything on top of it. Like, as you spoke with food and just your basic, um, human needs, I don't think people really understand. The gravity of what it is, and even listening to you, you both speak about it. I think I even understood the gravity of what you were facing. [00:33:00] Ah, this this'll tell it's incredible listening to you talk about this.

[00:33:04] **Hanad:** It is guys I'll, I'll tell you it's what, what the broader community saw and what was shown on the media compared to what was actually happening on the ground is night and day like it was the most serious two weeks you can ever imagine. And I'll let you in on a bit of a situation that took place. One, one particular story that really stood out to me. And this was the third day during the lockdown at that point, we're still not there yet. Yeah. The coms aren't clear. Yeah. The food that was given out is expired at this point. We're giving residents expired food, frozen food, and how it's even being delivered to them, just thrown onto their doorsteps.

[00:33:48] **Hanad:** Right. But it was one night when I was downstairs, probably about 10:30 PM. So there's a barricade between, so there's a police barricade between the residents and us, the volunteers. And we are, [00:34:00] we're trying to be safe cause we didn't wanna catch COVID. We're trying to like get information from the inside and trying to support what we can, I kid you not, there was this one mother with her infant son, our, I kid you not, our kid's about six, six months, five, six months old. And she's downstairs in the lobby. So at that point you are, you are assuming the whole entire building's positive. Right?

So it's not even a safe environment for the kid, the kids, there's no mask, et cetera. And the mother's screaming, yelling, and she's saying, I need baby formula. I'm thinking, yeah, we've got trucks of baby formula. She goes, no, no, no. My son has a particular type of baby formula. He doesn't do the, the, the normal brands, you know? And I'm like, oh, okay. What do we do? She goes, where do we get it from? She goes, you have to go to this place dead night. It's closed. And then she says in, in, in language, she goes, Hey, she's legit grabbing her son at this moment. She's trying to pass him through the barricade. Yeah. She goes, take my son. Yeah, because I can't help him here. [00:35:00] I can't legit. I cannot support him here. Take him off me cuz he's better out there with you than he is with me here. That's a severity. Just like you are there. I'm like what in the bloody world is going on. Like it was shocking. There was just trauma and mind you, the people in those buildings, like some of the people have acute mental health issues, AOD come from family violence, backgrounds, et cetera. They need support and we've locked some of the most vulnerable people up for two weeks. And I think there wasn't a clear plan in place on how are we gonna support 3000 plus residents. Yeah. And it was clear from the, from day dot. There wasn't a plan in place to a point where the very first day. I was, I snuck into a meeting that happened outside and mind you, I've never spoken about this. If you actually, if I'll tell you guys this right during those two weeks, my emails, my Instagram, my social media was flooded every single media company, newspaper agency, et cetera. Hey, Hanad, Hanad, [00:36:00] Hanad, and I made a decision. I don't wanna speak to media. I'm just gonna do what I'm doing. Someone else to take care of it. Cause there's other peoples there's, there's other members of the community who are in positions who know this kind of stuff. I'm gonna play my role. Someone else can play that role there. But there was that one meeting that took place. And this is the very first day. And there was a number of organizations, agencies, departments around that meeting around, okay, how are we gonna transport, transport, food upstairs? And everyone kept on passing it to each other, you know, passing the ball. Well, we can't do it or we can't do it.

[00:36:34] **Hanad:** Or we got taugt and I'm still like you guys having to laugh or you just rock down 3000 people and you guys are arguing about who's gonna go upstairs and deliver food. You guys are taking the piss. It was that level of disorganization. Yeah. That really a working community. Yeah.

[00:36:48] **Mick:** Yeah. I think that's a word I think you brought mentioned is like, yeah. If things have to happen, you've gotta have some kind of plan.

[00:36:54] **Hanad:** Definitely.

[00:36:55] **Mick:** Because the, like the fall out of that, I would imagine like even [00:37:00] today is still trauma and there's still everything that will continue for people there. People that maybe had already experienced disadvantage, but people that maybe hadn't experienced disadvantage. And because of that, they suddenly their mental health, their wellbeing has been challenged. Yeah. And might never, and might not be the same because of, and need that support now as well. That is a and, and absolutely fascinating. Um, but also I think the word we're looking for is, is, is it's like shocking as well, but heartbreaking as well, just to hear just so we have stories.

[00:37:34] **Hanad:** Yeah, man, I'll let you, uh, one thing I want to add is two years on that happened 2020 July. There are still members or individuals and families in the community who still haven't gone back because of, because of that still two years on that traumatic, they said, nah, yes, we cannot go back. Cause they don't know when that's gonna happen again. You know? And it's just moved out [00:38:00] completely. This is their homes, places where they lived for 20, 30 plus years just packed up shops as no. Yeah. That was a bit too much. Yeah. Cause that place now reminds him of that traumatic experience. Mm. You know?

[00:38:12] **Mick:** Yeah. It's like, it's probably a segue into it in a way it's, it's kind of like precedent in a way. Yeah. And why you don't want to like why that has that holds that, you know? So I really appreciate sharing that. Yeah. Cuz that is so educational to people that listened and so needed to be heard. So I really appreciate, and also, like, appreciate the walk that you did, like incredible what you, what you have done there and

[00:38:39] **Hanad:** Never, never spoken about it first time.

[00:38:41] **Mick:** Yeah.

[00:38:41] **Hanad:** First time ever shared exclusive yeah. Is a real exclusive.

[00:38:44] **Mick:** But I'm so glad you did, because my eye had like sh I can, yeah. I was like goosebumps, but in a way of, and also going, like I was speechless, it's gone make you uncomfortable. Yeah, it does. And it should. Yeah. You know what I mean? That's exactly how it should be.

[00:38:58] **Ahmed:** Yeah. No, it makes you feel uncomfortable.

[00:38:59] **Mick:** It [00:39:00] makes you feel actually a bit angry as well. It makes you feel like, yeah.

[00:39:02] **Ahmed:** Like it's like, how can this happen? We're living, we're so fortunate. And just the whole COVID time is just, you know, as, as Victorians and Melbournians, especially like, it's not a place where a lot of people wanna revisit, to be honest.

[00:39:17] **Ahmed:** No, you know, you know, you can't dark time. Yeah. It's, it's a very dark time, you know, even like to like, I don't know, like I don't wanna get to the politics of it or, or, or, or which individual persons were involved or, or where the. The issue, but you just look at it from, you know, from COVID to, you know, vaccines, to, you know, isolation, you look at all that, and you're just like, just don't wanna hear anything got to do with vaccine COVID mm, yeah. Locked down. Anything of the, of those, uh, you know, not, not to be mentioned, let's just look at just some type of recovering as a community in our recovering that healing process, right? Yeah. Just that, [00:40:00] just that process that we all go through and just enjoy some holidays away from the state or within the, you know, obviously within regional Victoria, but just. Let's let's get back to, you know, doing what we love coming together at cafes, you know, going to the footy, um, you know, going to, you know, seeing the arts major, major, major events looking at, you know, what really is Victoria Melbourne about?

[00:40:24] **Mick:** Yeah. It's um, I only something the came. I was out on Saturday night. Yeah. I had been out in a long time and for Saturday night I out and, uh, it was, I was at a, um, friend's 30th birthday. It was in Richmond, but you know, I got on getting the train. It was like Richmond, Bulldogs were playing. The Grand Prix was on. Um, I've never seen a place busier. I've never seen that many people out. I've never seen every know bars, completely like, like packed, um, food restaurants everywhere at public transport, the streets. I actually had to take him in and I was like, this is crazy. Like, I've forgotten what this is like, you know? And, [00:41:00] and, and you nothing have a little bit of anxiety around. It was just like, I was like, Wow. It's gonna take a minute to actually look at this. You know what I mean? And then, and then going back to what you said, I was like, this is what it used to be like. This was the norm. Yeah, correct. Yeah. And, and I, I was glad I came back to, to, you know, saying to my wife the next day I was like, but that's what you, this is, this is living. It has to get back to this, you know? And you can't live with the fear of, yeah. I might get cold or whatever. You're like, you just gotta live your lives and live, live on now because too much damage has been doing the either way you can't look back.

[00:41:28] **Ahmed:** Yeah. It, it was just awkward though. I remember coming out lockdown and, um, not being, I, I had my first meeting. Right. So, and then

you you've had that, the mask on, at a cafe unless you're drinking something. So you, you, you're talking to the person and the place a little bit louder and trying to yell through your mask, that person trying to yell. And it was just like, this is, this doesn't make sense. Yeah. I'm like, mate, are you, are you okay with, you know, asked the cafe? Oh, no. I'm like, It's just becoming a bit difficult. Um, it's taking a little bit more energy from [00:42:00] me. Yeah. Uh, do you mind if I take off my mask and talk to him, like, I'm happy to pay the fine. I couldn't care, but let me just, you know, we tried this for 10 minutes, not work and it's not gonna work. So I said, let me take it off. Like you looking at it that time. And also, you know, when you came outta COVID. I remember, I couldn't even focus at like, look at the person who I'm talking to in the eye for like more than a couple of minutes. And now I just get distracted and look away and on my phone and stuff like that. Cuz you were talking through a screen and then you were able to ah, you know, chat at the same time and do 50 other things around the thing.

[00:42:35] **Mick:** Ah, yeah, it's exhaust. And it was exhausting when you're in a meeting after meeting, looking at the screen, you're not meant for that. You're always having example built from that, you know? And I'm the same look. Alright. Look with a mask and in meetings and an Irish accent, I was just, I was, I was facing every challenge that could be, so God knows how many people walking a meeting and going, I dunno what the hell Mick was talking for half an hour. I just kept nodding forgive. Yeah, that's right. A lot of contracts got signed in. It was good though. You know, they didn't know [00:43:00] what I was on bill. Just sign it there.

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