

Time to Rebuild Season 4 Episode 2

[00:00:00] We at time to rebuild, we'd like to acknowledge that this podcast is produced on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging. At the YMCA Rebuild we're in the business of reducing recidivism in Victoria. And in no way, do we condone criminal activity discussed in these episodes, we support victims of crime and are committed to creating a safer community.

[00:00:27] Well, the research tells us, um, that some top percent of incarcerated people, um, should identify somewhere in the spectrum of LGBT. Um, but if we look at participation in LGBT programs at Ravenhall they don't reflect those statistics. So one could really infer in, certainly in my experience, I could really infer that there are people who identify, who haven't come out to haven't, you know, told their family and friends.

[00:00:52] And I think the rationale for that is ..well prison isn't really the perfect place to be vulnerable. It's not. You don't think 'Prison and [00:01:00] vulnerability', they don't really go hand in hand. Um, and I think also the process of socialization of this hyper masculine place where things like violence is so intrinsically accepted by the men.

[00:01:12] The use of drugs is so intrinsically accepted by the men.. It's very difficult to then come out as being a gay person or a BI person or a trans person in an environment that really looks at masculinity as a superior kind.

[00:01:30] You asked me the questions and I'll talk... I think you've been yelled at a few times, mate? ..That's a really good point that you make because we're, this is what this podcast is about; is giving out another side .. You're going to...you're going to do things that compromise, maybe the values and morals that you were brought up with, or maybe they fall right in line with the values and morals I was brought up having.

[00:01:48] Um, my focus is just focusing on what I'm going to do when I get out...And all the stuff that you might not thought of. that goes on in a prison.... Yeah like how many alarms get set off when you walk in with Mick [00:02:00] Cronin.

[00:02:06] **Mark:** Today on the show, we sit down with a young man at the time of the recording, uh, was serving a sentence in Ravenhall he's name's Noah. And we reflect on his journey and experience as a young man who

identifies as gay. Uh, and the challenges that come with that when you're put into a prison setting. Noah's ability to critically assess his situation and reflect without judgment makes this conversation tremendously insightful. And both Mick and myself, uh, learnt so much. Without further ado, let's get into it. First off. Thanks for sitting down with us Noah today. And we got you back for a reason because you're a great advocate for people in prison at the moment. Um, and one of those groups. That you advocate for is the LGBTQ community here in the prison.

[00:02:54] **Mark:** Can I ask you, how do you represent the community here in the prison?[00:03:00]

[00:03:00] **Noah:** I think, uh, because the community, um, in prisons or outside the community, um, you know, the wider community is so marginalized at times, um, representing them doesn't really mean kind of taking on their views or you know, but simply advocating for, I guess, nuances that the general population might not be aware of.

[00:03:21] **Noah:** Um, and you know, as this journey of educating people about LGBT communities and, and the perspective that they provide to the wider community. I think it's just really about advocating for that and championing that and educating people that -if we listen to the various, smaller minority groups in our communities and in our social groups, um, that we'll have more cohesive, um, safer, happier social organizations out there. And I think in prison, that's kind of even more amplified, um, because, uh, I [00:04:00] consider that's even more amplified because, you know, when you look at sort of the demographic of incarcerated men and women, for that matter, um, they're from the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum, they have, they haven't been exposed to these kinds of communities. They haven't attained the education to understand some of the nuances and differences that the LGBT communities provide.. Um, and so here it's really just about educating them. And I think you can represent the community by answering the question as the men ask, it might be ridiculous questions, you know, things that you don't imagine, but you answer it anyway to the best of your ability. ...In the hope that they walk away with a better comprehension of what LGBT community means to me. Um, and hopefully to them.

[00:04:41] **Mick:** That's really interesting. And do you mind me asking and how do you identify?

[00:04:45] **Noah:** I'm gay. Um, yeah, so it's a very different...I'm very open about it in prison now, but when I first came here, I wasn't.

[00:04:53] **Mick:** And that's really, that's something we want to speak to you about or find out more about in that sense.

[00:04:59] **Mick:** And [00:05:00] if we step it back then, before we get to that point, like, ... You know the question that the listeners probably want to know, well, like how, how did you end up in prison? Like where did your life, like, can you give us a bit of a background, how you grew up your background, like, you know, um, you don't have to go back as far as you want to, whatever your, your upbringing and then how it led, how you led to be, you know, sitting in front of me and back in, uh, in prison and on this podcast.

[00:05:23] **Noah:** Um, I think, you know I had a lot of time, I've been incarcerated for some period now. And I think in that time, you think, and reflect.. How did I end up here? You know, it's not, you don't wake up in the morning as a child thinking I'm going to go to prison one day. It's not an aspiration. Anyone kind of thinks about.

[00:05:38] **Noah:** But certainly for me, when I reflect back, I think being uncomfortable, you know, in my own skin being gay person, um, for predominantly Catholic Christian upbringing, it was a very kind of, um, different experience. And not that my parents or my family members were ever against gay people or the LGBT community as a whole, but there was certainly this air of [00:06:00] "we don't want you to be that because we know what that carries with it."

[00:06:04] **Noah:** You know, the sort of stigma that comes with being an LGBT person. And I think I tried to, um, artificialise myself and purvey a certain, um, a different personality. Um, and that of course required money and money that I didn't have. Um, and I think from that point, you know, that kind of sense of financial ability or financial independence allowed me to express my own self. Um, but I gained that illicitly, and I guess that's why I'm here. But I think, you know, my offending or why I'm in prison, I can really relate to that discomfort or that stigma that's associated with being an LGBT person. That's not to say that it's not my, you know, that's its not my fault, but certainly, um, the social stigma and the social expectation that's inherent with it has contributed to that feeling of, I need to portray a certain type of individual to feel accepted.

[00:07:00] And I think that's what most LGBT people want is just acceptance.

[00:07:03] **Mick:** Yeah. That's super interesting. You were wanting to live a lifestyle, you wanted to, you know, you wanted to be accepted, but you wanted to live a lifestyle that showed in some way that you are apart of that ...and to do that, you didn't have the means to do it. It's really, really interesting. And so

now we're, then I'm also interested in when you are facing prison time. So when you're sentenced, um, or you're, or you're brought into remand and sorry, you're in prison. What goes through your head? Did, did, at any stage, did you feel that being a gay man...going into a prison and environment, which I'm taking, you didn't know much about yes. Yeah. I'm hoping, I'm gathering you had no idea about it, because no one really goes and studies prison just, just in case "I better study that. Just the case on the off chance I ended up there." Did you have some [00:08:00] genuine, you know, fears for yourself and, and how this would, how, how you would be able to, um, go into prison and how your prison time would be?

[00:08:08] **Noah:** Absolutely. I think even when you're not in prison, in the community, when you meet a new bunch of people, um, you already feel ambivalent to kind of...that's not the first thing you say, you know, it's, it's certainly would probably one of the last things you say. Um, I'd like to say that it's one of the last things you say, because it's unimportant, but really it's one of the last things you say because it's so personal, and you don't know how people are going to react, you can't control that, that reaction..In a place like prison where you see on movies and televisions and the media that it's this really bad place with violence all around, that's so hyper-masculine, you certainly - that that's the last thing you want to do, is come out as a gay person, I didn't do that until I came to Ravenhall. Um, but the expectations that you have as being a gay person in prison, [00:09:00] without any experience of being in prison or having studied, you know, what prison is like, it's all very negative. You know, you feel that you're going to be threatened. You feel that your safety is going to be at risk. But once you come into prison, in the first few weeks of coming into prison, people didn't really kind of care. They didn't really ask. Um, and when I did eventually tell them, um, they were very supportive and if anything, quite..interested in knowing more about it. Curious. And I think that curiosity, you can exploit that in a positive way to answer their questions so that they can walk out of here thinking, oh wow. You know, I just had the interaction with a gay person in prison. And with the hope that they, when they leave the prison experience, they can then take that on board with them and not see gay people, LGBT, or the LGBT community as a whole, as this polarised place, thought in your mind that you, that's not so tangible and realistic. Um, and for them, this is a realistic first-hand experience. And, um, for a lot of them, [00:10:00] it's probably the first time they ever really asked these questions or interacted with an LGBT person. And so, as you know the first experience you have with someone with something is, is really impressionable. And so I think for me, it wasn't just kind of, there was a sense of duty to kind of answer these questions. I mean, if, if people in the community, uh, are struggling, um, and me coming into prison, there's already this polarized idea of being an LGBT person. In

some respect, I felt this sense of duty to answer their questions, and, and be an advocate, um, for the community.

[00:10:35] **Mick:** It's wonderful. I'm curious as well in regards to - it's like you're coming out for a second time. You're coming out in prison.

[00:10:46] **Noah:** Absolutely. Yes.

[00:10:48] **Mick:** Yeah. Now I'm not sure if people are coming out for the first time when they're in prison as well. Um, meaning that they obviously have, you know, they're obviously in the community, you know, they're comfortable in, in, in, you know, come out and everyone [00:11:00] knows, you know, and their sexuality and where they, where they sit with that -But in prison, did you find that there, um, there was some people that were, you know, very guarded in that and their identity? Or, did you, did you feel - that's the first part of it and the second part - did you feel by having conversations with someone like yourself and other people that, that helps them to then go, you know, I don't have anything to be concerned about. I should be who I am, whether it's in prison or whether it's in the community. It's the same.

[00:11:28] **Noah:** Well, the research tells us. Um, that some top percent of incarcerated people, um, should identify somewhere in the spectrum of LGBT. Um, but if we look at participation in LGBT programs at Ravenhall they don't reflect those statistics. So one could really infer, and certainly in my experience, I could really infer that there are people who identify, who haven't come out, who haven't, you know, told their family and friends. And I think the rationale for that is, well prison, isn't really the perfect place to be vulnerable. It's not, you don't [00:12:00] think prison and vulnerability. They don't really go hand in hand. Um, and I think also the process of socialization of this hyper masculine place where things like violence is so, um, intrinsically accepted by the men. The use of drugs is so intrinsically accepted by the men. It's very difficult to then come out as being a gay person or a BI person or a trans person in an environment, that really looks at masculinity as a superior kind. And I think, um, and that that's not to say that gay people are not masculine, but certainly the idea of people's head of you as a gay person, you're not masculine. Um, and would that stereotype, it's very difficult for people to come out, um, and express that through, um, sexual identity. In saying that, um, there are, there have been people that have attended the support group period. Um, Ravenhall that are not out with their family but they've come out in prison because they have noticed, [00:13:00] or they have sort of realized that there's this opportunity to explore what it's like coming out, because you're kind of in this impermeable microcosm society, we can kind of experiment and see, well, how is this, how are people

gonna react here? You know, is that going to emulate when I get out of prison? And so, there have been a number of people that have come out in prison where their families don't know. And I think in my experience, it's been quite a refreshing experience for them. They feel that, um, wow. You know, people aren't as judgmental people are actually really accepting. And if anything, the world's moved on so much. But, in saying that, being a gay person out in the prison community, you definitely get those slurs. You get sort of the commentary on the side. And I think that can really be, um, reduced down or essentially realized, um, to them not really understanding, well, having had no interaction with the LGBT community. And to me, it's just sort of a behavior of [00:14:00] ignorance of not really understanding. Uh, but you know, I've always overcome that by approaching them and having this conversation that we're having right now about LGBT people and most of the time, and in my experience all the time, um, they walk out of that conversation feeling a bit more comfortable approaching me or talking to me. And that's such a great experience. And I think one that I feel very proud to have been able to achieve. In saying that not everybody can do it. I think you need a lot of balls to, to go into that and, you know, talk to a large man who is very anti gay, um, or has been very anti gay in the past. But I think if you come into that conversation with an open mind and you see an opportunity for them to come into that conversation with an open mind, I think you can really get a lot out of it.

[00:14:46] **Mark:** Yeah. Is that something you have to wait for? Like the slurs and everything like that to initiate that conversation? Or is it something that you advocate uh, and there's a space where you could hold dialogue and let them come [00:15:00] to you.

[00:15:01] **Noah:** Um, for me, obviously there's no formal space where you can kind of ask these questions. And for me, it's merely in my interactions with the men, but I think I like to wait for them to ask these questions or make those slurs because I like to think, and it's certainly been my experience that they're ready to have that conversation. I don't think it's right for me to then go and advocate, you know, like a, like a very religious person advocating for religion. I don't think that's going to be the best way for them to kind of accept it and be open to it. When they make those slurs and ask those questions. In my opinion, that's when they're most open to having this conversation.

[00:15:36] **Mick:** Um, and it's interesting because. I find this fascinating, because what you're saying is it can be about religion. It can be about everything else. Probably the difference a little bit is if you were in the community and you had these slurs, that conversation fades, they walk away, and you walk the other way. That can't happen here.

[00:15:52] **Noah:** Absolutely.

[00:15:53] **Mick:** So that's the way I feel. It's really powerful what you were just saying, because. You're right in a way [00:16:00] that they, you know, they might be saying something, but it's because it's coming from a place where it's probably just not understanding or maybe wanting to understand more, but not knowing how to approach that conversation. So relating back to what you know is, is how you, you know, your dialogue of how you say it, which is, can be hurtful. It can be whatever- but leads to something that becomes quite fruitful. Yes. And beautiful. In the sense of a conversation where it's educational and you both walk away, then again, Put a different way of doing it. And then you come back again. There's there's no, that's, that's kind of mitigated or eliminated.

[00:16:32] **Noah:** Absolutely. I mean, when you think of prison, right. Or if you think of the community and the outside, you become friends or you become acquaintances with people who are like-minded, you know, have similar interests to you. So already you're forming those, those bonds based on, on similar interests. But in prison, you're forced in this environment where you're not, you don't necessarily get along. You have nothing in common, but you have to, you have to co-exist and you have to in some level of function as a community, [00:17:00] and that's when these opportunities come about, but in the community, that doesn't happen. But here it does. And I think that's probably why this advocacy of the LGBT community in prison can be so powerful that might not necessarily translate to the outer community.

[00:17:15] **Mick:** So it's fair to say that how we, how you go about it now and how we're advocating now and had a conversation having now there's a lot to be learned from in prison that can be transferred into the community.

[00:17:27] **Noah:** Absolutely.

[00:17:27] **Mick:** And I'm sure like geo and corrections and everyone else will be behind this. And it's something that probably people listening to this would not understand. They would not even grasp in their head that actually this positive work being done within prison walls that we could learn about in the community.

[00:17:43] **Mark:** And I love that because it's always the other way around.

[00:17:45] **Noah:** It's always the other way around. Absolutely.

[00:17:47] **Mark:** People think that you got to take the standards from the community and bring it into the prison, but we're taking the standards from prison and putting it into the community.

[00:17:55] **Noah:** And I think when you, you can really see, um, prison become this space [00:18:00] of learning for the broader community, but people don't necessarily come to prison to learn. Um, in fact, most people, most policymakers, um, go into prison to, to teach, but they don't come here to learn. And I think, you know, if people spend a bit more time investigating what prison can offer and what the people in prison can offer, I really do think that we'd have a, um, we can learn so much out of it just like what we discussed today. Um, and I think that that's something that we should take forward in the future, not just within the LGBT community, but certainly within broader social issues that surrounding

[00:18:35] **Advertisement:** Stick with us, we'll be back after this short ad. There is more to rebuild than just the delivery of commercial maintenance. We also have an online shop selling a variety of handcrafted wooden products made by me within our custodial we're in community workshops. We have fold up desks, planter boxes, toys, chopping boards and chess boards. And, the one of the kind - grazing boards made by me. So get some of them. Each [00:19:00] product represents a story. And by purchasing any of these quality products, you'll be directly helping ReBuild and create employment opportunities. And in doing so, ensuring that as many stories as possible, having a positive ending.

[00:19:13] **Advertisement:** Yeah, mate, don't worry about this last bit. Just get the grazing boards. So please visit www.rebuild.org.au next time you want to buy with a purpose or purpose.

[00:19:27] **Mark:** And that leads us into the next question. What does the prison offer?

[00:19:32] **Noah:** Um, well, to put it into a specific LGBT lens -For me, I think that prison can really offer that in some regard, there's so much conflict out there, you know, in the world of, of different opposing ideologies, about culture, about sexuality and gender, but in prison, they, all people are able to co-exist. They might not agree on something and they might not necessarily have shared the same interest or shared the same views, but certainly, [00:20:00] you're allowed to, you're able to co-exist with people with opposing views, with opposing ideologies, opposing perspectives on life. And through that, I actually feel like I've learnt a lot from different people through their lived experiences. And I think that's one thing that we don't do on the outside. We don't look back

beside us, you know, ahead of us, to see what they're doing and learning from that experience, we tend to be very introspective in the outside to see ourselves in our journey, but we don't tend to look externally at what's happened with other people, what other people are doing. Um, and I think because we're so stuck in our sort of small social circles, we're so infatuated by that, you know, by our friends, by our families, that we don't look at the broader sort of unit of community. But here you don't have your friends or your family to rely on, you have the broader community to rely on. And I think that's a really great lesson that we can learn from. And I think that for me, came from being part of the LGBT community in prison. Um, I also think that social acceptance pardon me of LGBT [00:21:00] community has, can come from different ways. We imagine social acceptance as, um, Pardon me as people accepting or tolerating the LGBT community, but we don't necessarily look at it as coexisting. You know, we can't convince everybody to accept the cultures that are inherent within the LGBT community, but for me, social acceptance can also come from just coexisting and you know, you didn't have to kind of agree on every single aspect of life, every single aspect of culture. But I think that's one thing that I learned in prison that you can still accept someone. You might not agree with them, but you just co-exist. And I think we don't do that enough. We try to kind of convert everybody in the community for whatever our cause might be.

[00:21:42] **Mick:** That's it. And we've had that before with different cultures, in the same way about that coexistence. And I think, again, it's the myth of that you know, everyone is segregated and everyone is in their little cliques and all that. Certainly people have, you know, um, they, they are drawn to other people and I'm sure that will be with [00:22:00] LGBT as well, but yeah. What I think it's that coexistence. And what you're saying is, is super important for people to understand. And that's what I really, um, learn a lot from in Ravenhall here in the prison and, and in how GEO go about it and, and, and how the state are looking at going about it is in regards to that, you know, they're, they're putting, they're giving you a platform, they're giving you, um, you know, an opportunity, um, to come together, but also to educate, but also learn and co-exist in the right way and not, not really have it as you're over here and you're over there. How do we, how do we, how do we coexist? How do we educate and how do we teach people in here?

[00:22:40] **Noah:** Absolutely.

[00:22:40] **Mick:** And as I keep saying, That doesn't exist so much in the community. If we try, we probably think, we like to think we do, but no, we're so far apart in some ways. Tell me a little bit more about, um, you mentioned with with GEO as well with the LGBT, um, [00:23:00] do you have, do you

have, like, is it, um, the kind of, uh, you come together with a group there's, you know, can anyone can come in at any stage? And how does that, how does it work? Like, is it a weekly, every, is it, does it like every day or whatever? I'm really keen to, to break that down a bit.

[00:23:14] **Noah:** So it's a monthly support group. Um, it's run by an LGBT staff member. Um, who also works in the rehabilitation education team here at Ravenhall and he's fantastic. Um, but we meet once a month and people can come and go as they like, you know, they're not forced to go, it's voluntary, but it's a really great opportunity to support each other. Um, just like other minority groups in the community here, we're able to support each other, have conversations, bring up our own different problems that have arised from being in prison and collectively try and create suggestions and solutions to kind of solving those personal problems we're going through. And I think you can't necessarily get that with, um, other members of society because they don't really understand what it's like to be an LGBT. But having a person who was an LGBT [00:24:00] person have that conversation with you, you're able to share those ideas and through that kind of collaboration, um, you feel, and you walk out of that session, that, that support group experience feeling a bit more comfortable that someone out there is thinking about you, that someone out there has your back. And certainly that, um, you know, makes me feel, feel very secure and very safe in a community like Ravenhall, um, There's obviously a lot more we can do in saying that. But what we're thinking of doing, and what's going to be happening in the future. Just like everything else COVID has sort of put a stop to our future.

[00:24:37] **Noah:** But one of the things that we're going to look at in the future is kind of emulating that support group in the community post release. Um, we know through research that the LGBT communities are incarcerated disproportionately, they face, um, homelessness, disproportionately, they face drug and alcohol problems at rates higher than those in the heterosexual setting. And so certainly there's a space here for growth that needs to be addressed. [00:25:00] Um, and we'd love to emulate that outside. Um, it's already hard. From what people tell me getting out of prison. It's very difficult. But imagine getting out of prison as an LGBT person where your family may not have, might not accept you.

[00:25:14] **Noah:** You may not have a home to go to. Um, it's even more complicated when you are a transgender person where it's hard for you to get a job. It's hard for you to enter the legitimate economy. Um, and so there's a lot of problems here, but there's not a lot of services because there's not. This kind of

conversation, this discourse hasn't really been attracted by politicians, governments, and it's only recently really that our society has accepted it.

[00:25:40] **Noah:** And so it's going to take some time to kind of get this social support and social services that come along with it. Um, but as I said, this is an experience right here that the community is learning from in prison. Um, and I hope that we're able to expand on that in the future.

[00:25:57] **Mick:** You've just articulated that so [00:26:00] well. Like, and you make so much, it makes so much sense. Sounds very simple. And the way you do it, with but, it's such a gap in what you said and the layers and the layers that are in front of the LGBT community, coming from a prison, from a person coming from prison, as you say, if they are identifying as trans, like just the different layers that, that puts on to being able to actually reintegrate and go back into community and have a, have a good chance of surviving. That's right. That's exactly right.

[00:26:33] **Mark:** And you kind of touched on it before with people coming into prison and then kind of coming out while they're in here. Um, I guess that wouldn't have the pressure of family and friends, if that was pressure to them and they feel much safer. So, and that sounds really important as well. Would you say if, is there a connection. I know you've done the research and all this sort of stuff. Would there be connection with risk taking behavior and holding in something like that?

[00:26:59] **Noah:** Absolutely. I [00:27:00] mean, I think when we look at risk taking behavior and how it manifests in terms of our behavior or our actions that that looks like drug taking, for example, or, um, high levels of alcohol consumption or domestic family violence.

[00:27:14] **Noah:** That these are sort of, I guess, suppressive mechanisms or coping mechanisms, if you want to call it that, that hide, that internal insecurity that people have. And certainly a great example of this is, you know, in the seventies and eighties where the LGBT community was really pushed aside and marginalized people went to bars and clubs. That was their main places to feel safe, but bars and clubs, aren't exactly the safest or most healthiest place for you to develop connections. You know, it's high in the bead. You take drugs, drink alcohol. And as a result of that, people went to bars and clubs and drank copious amounts of alcohol to drown their sorrows, and drown their difficulties in life. And they came out with drug addictions with alcohol alcoholism. Because that was the only [00:28:00] way they felt safe and secure, and that was the only way for them to connect with community. They continue to do it. And that

perpetuated and still today in some aspects of the world, that still continues. But really if you look at it from a, you know, a psychological perspective or a sociological perspective, um, these are reactions to the strains that come out as a result of being a gay person or a lesbian or a transsexual person, uh, or a queer person. And you suppress those insecurities, those behaviors that you don't think people desire or people want to prescribe to you because it goes against the social norms that we dictate in our upbringing. Um, and then. You drink alcohol, you take drugs, you participate in risky sexual behavior and all these things, or you self-harm to suppress those emotions continually and pervasively. And that then affects all sorts of parts of your life. You can't get a job [00:29:00] because you, you know, you can't, you can't go to work cause you're drunk half the time. You can't form healthy relationships with people because you don't know where to find them. You don't know how to do all of these things. Only really allow you to go back and commit crime. And it's just continual revolving door. The cycle of I'm going to go commit crime, because it's the only way I know thing I know how to do. There's this theory, it's called retreatism and people who take drugs and alcohol tend to retreat to the underground economy to try and feel connection because they've lost their family, they've lost other aspects of their healthy life that they retreat back to it. And I think that's a really great way to capture how risk taking behavior, sexuality, and commonality kind of correlate. Um, and I think that's really sad, but when you look at the policy responses or the intervention or the clinical intervention and responses to these problems, there's none. There's absolutely none. As I said, this support group is the only thing that currently happens for this [00:30:00] space. And is that enough? No, it's not, but it's a great step. But what I'd really like to see is more policy, more intervention. Um, I mean, you know, if you look at the link between, um, indigenous Australians and LGBT communities, their rate of recidivism and re-offending and the the social factors that caused this, are actually very similar. And of course, I understand why you know the, indigenous populations receive so much support, but I think we can also translate that to the LGBT community, but at the moment there's none. And I think that's the way to go.

[00:30:33] **Mark:** And being so low in support and everything. Would you relate that back to I guess studies and, and money getting poured into like the research.

[00:30:43] **Noah:** Absolutely. There's very little research. And in fact, in I'm currently writing research about, um, LGBT and domestic family violence. And there's very little research that talks about domestic family violence, perpetration, which is so it's such a big ticket item at the moment, you know, for, for the [00:31:00] feminist movement, but for the LGBT community, there's very little research funded into it. And I think the primary reason is, it's

relatively new, but also the LGBT community, once again, is hidden in this, um, this conversation. I mean, for example, when you look at the most recent landmark, um, Victorian Royal commission into family violence -persistently the LGBT community kept saying, why are we not part of this? Why are we not? Why are we not as salient as women are when we're really are in the same boat? You know, we've been consistently pervasively, um, harassed and, and violence is so, um, high within our populations. Um, and I think that comes down to a lack of research, a lack of funding for these research that drives policy and government policy. But I think if we funnel and provide some research, some understanding as to the causation, the perpetration, the victimization of, for example, domestic family violence from the LGBT community is, or just a [00:32:00] broader, broader LGBT conversation that can then translate to social movement and government action and so forth. But I think we have to get back to our roots and let's study it. Let's understand it. Let's talk about it. Let's create policy.

[00:32:12] **Mick:** Um, and, and it sounds like, yeah, you know, you need to keep amplifying that voice. Yeah. Yeah. Yes. Maybe it's your voice. I'm feeling it might be your voice. um, Going back to yourself. Yeah. So, you know, obviously you're, you know, in prison as well. What are you learning about yourself? And I'm really interested in how you ended up here. Yeah. And, and how you were fulfilling trying to fulfill your life style or the perception of your lifestyle. Absolutely. more so. And what do you look back on that now? And do you like, I'm interested here. When you look back on that now, do you see, what was that? What was I doing there?

[00:32:52] **Noah:** There was no value..that's the first thing I'm going to say.

[00:32:53] **Mick:** Can you, can you, can you look at it now and go, what was I thinking? Well, you can understand it like, you know, at that time where you were, [00:33:00] but now I'm being a little bit more wiser, a little bit more, you know, the older and having time to reflect. Do you see that and go, what was going on there?

[00:33:08] **Noah:** Absolutely.

[00:33:08] **Mick:** And the second part of it was like, what have you learned? What are you, what are stuff, have you been learning about yourself while you've been incarcerated?

[00:33:15] **Noah:** For me? I think when I think about it, I understand why I was doing it. I get it, you know, I completely understand it. But now when I sort of

looked back retrospectively, there was really no value to my life. I was just living prodding along, but there was, I had no sense of purpose and meaning, and I think. In the oddest way possible, prison gave me that. I don't think anyone could ever say that I went to prison and found my sense of value, purpose, and meaning, but prison gave me that. In saying that I don't think this would have been possible if I wasn't at Ravenhall where, you know, um, the inside exchange program, um, existed where I was able to have the opportunity to explore how I fitted into this kind of, um, [00:34:00] pathway. Um, But when I really looked back in my life, I don't regret it because obviously it's given me this, this very odd way of finding a future. But at the same time you feel that sort of, um, you feel that I can't explain it. You feel this, this emotion that it's so wrong and it's, so it was so stupid and, and cowardly. Um, but at the same time, Coming into prison, I think I've learned that I'm a lot more patient. I have a lot more motivation to, to do what I need to do. I have a lot more empathy than I thought I did. And I certainly allowed me to see different perspectives of how life can, can look like when you grew up in a family that is so motivated that, you know, they all went to uni and had amazing professional careers. You're sort of on this singular pathway to what life needs to look like. You need to go to university, get a job, have a family and succeed that that's really the basic ingredients of a successful life or a [00:35:00] good life rather. But coming into prison, those goals have certainly changed those perceptions of what life needs to look like has changed dramatically. And I've been able to gain that through the men in prison; learning from their stories. What, what, what makes them tick? What makes them excited? But also to see that they've gone through some really deep crap and really some hard stuff that I would have never thought people went through, especially in a place like Australia, but you learn that they do and they have, and you feel more understanding. The reason why they can't write isn't because they were lazy at school. It's probably because they didn't go to school because they were too busy doing other things because no one fed them. The moms were too high. They're too busy, getting high on drugs or getting drunk or whatever these reasons were. And you feel a lot more understanding as to why that person can't write or read or can't speak articulately, but on the outside and not coming to prison, I would have thought, "that guy is just an idiot. What a lazy prick." [00:36:00] Yeah. But coming into prison, that's completely changed my thinking. And one of the things that I, I kind of really think about is when I think of intelligence prior to prison, I think of going to uni, getting a really great ATAR, or getting a really great score in university and getting high distinctions. Coming into prison, for me, intelligence is different. You know, this, this, this assumption or this kind of, um, perception of what intelligence looks like prior to prison is so different. It's so culturally loaded, you know, from based on what we're taught, but coming here for me, intelligence can look like can, can, can manifest and can become in different ways. And men here have a lot of intelligence just in different ways that we

don't tend to see as being intelligent or valuable in the community. And I think that's the biggest lesson I learned that I can, I would have never learned. I'll never come across. Had I not come to prison.

[00:36:52] **Mick:** Well said it's like, um, it's like, you've just gained, what's referred to as worldviews. Yes. Yeah. So you see things through other
[00:37:00] people's eyes. You don't judge. You put them, you put yourself in the views of what, how they go about and what their lives have been like. And instead of, instead of saying, well, you're like this because of this, you're not, you kind of understand what's got them to that place. Absolutely. And then you kind of, yeah, you can, you can have empathy towards them.

[00:37:17] **Noah:** Absolutely.

[00:37:18] **Mick:** It's really well said. And it's fascinating insight.

[00:37:21] **Noah:** Thank you.

[00:37:21] **Noah:** Now that you have been on this kind of, I'll use the word 'journey' but like you've, you know, you've learned all this about yourself. Well, but unfortunately you've learned it in prison.

[00:37:30] **Noah:** Yes. Yeah.

[00:37:32] **Mark:** You took the hard road,

[00:37:34] **Mick:** You took the very hard road, but there's something into something in it. Isn't it like that. And that's really gonna that, that, that our listeners and hopefully people listening to this podcast will we'll get that, you know? And when people come to prison and all that, it's not, it is not a great place. Yes. And, there's reasons why they've ended up here as well. But it doesn't have to be, it can be what you make of it and offer yourself meaning that you can get what you want from it in different ways. So, and it sounds like you've done that [00:38:00] and.

[00:38:02] **Noah:** And that's exactly it for me. And you've used the word "unfortunately" I came to prison, but, um, you know I'll disagree with you on that because I don't think it's unfortunate at all. I think that we think of prison as a really bad, horrible place, but we don't have to think about it as a really bad and horrible place. It can be a learning experience, a place of growth, and it can be a fortunate place to end up. I know that sounds really odd for most people listening, but it doesn't have to be this horrible conception in our mind because

it isn't, um, it can be a place where people can grow and learn. It can be a place where people can learn skills that can be in turn, be used in our community to further our community, to further our society. And I think we have to start there. It's to change that language. And I really don't, I mean, look, I would rather be out - I'll be honest - but I don't see my experience as being an unfortunate. And I think I'd really love the listeners out there to understand and reconceptualize that idea of prison in their [00:39:00] mind as a place of punishment, because it doesn't have to be a place of punishment.

[00:39:04] **Mick:** I think that's a great, I think you're a so, right. You know, it's well, really well said. And so how long, more like is it? Really interested in your prison? Like how, what are you looking at and lengthwise of, you know, um, what you're facing time-wise in prison and really interested to see, you spoke a little bit about it, but you know, what's your future aspirations of, you know, building towards that and also, and hopefully back into the community.

[00:39:31] **Noah:** So, um, I'm still in remand, and because of COVID-19, everything's just been slower in the courts. Um, but in saying that, uh, my release date shouldn't be too far, um, sometime this year possibly, or maybe early next year. That would take me to somewhere near the two year mark of being in prison, which I think is enough, you know, to learn and to grow, and to kind of invest.

[00:39:52] **Mark:** Done enough growing

[00:39:53] **Noah:** Yeah I've done enough growing.

[00:39:55] **Mick:** You don't want to do an extra, an extra course, no?

[00:39:57] **Noah:** Um, in terms of [00:40:00] aspiration, you know, currently I'm working towards a degree and learning about the criminal justice system and sociology. And I'd really love for the future, to take the lived experience as an LGBT person, um, being in prison and taking that into the world of academia and doing research and starting that movement and starting that conversation and advocating for all these things that I learnt whilst being in prison and kind of molding the sort of theoretical perspectives I've learned from uni that I'm doing now, and the lived experience that I experienced myself and putting that together. And I think that will really provide me a voice and give me insight, a platform, um, to further my work that I've been doing here at Ravenhall. And certainly, you know, that, that that's an interest point of mine is to go into academia, teach the future practitioners of the criminal justice system to be more kind, to be more compassionate, to have a much more a, to have a

worldview that I gained, [00:41:00] um, that, you know, I gained through being in prison, with a hope that the prison system for them or the criminal justice system broadly for them can be humanized. And I think that's something that we don't do enough of. And that's really my goal. And the hope to advocate for intervention specific, um, initiatives, um, for the LGBTQ community in prison, post release and prevention mechanisms that prevents LGBT people from being intertwined with the current justice system in the first place. But that requires research and that requires work. And that's where I think I'm going to exert my energies into.

[00:41:38] **Mick:** Well, you can say, you know, you can honestly say that the LGBT people in the community and in, in a custodia setting are very kind of lucky to have such a passionate advocate with someone that's got really taken a step back and really can see how you can make change. I've got no doubt, you know, that you're going to get to where you need to go. And you know [00:42:00] it's always such a pleasure speaking to you. And we always learn so much and I Mark would probably be the same. I could talk to you all day because there was so much from you, and you're always so giving with that as well, but really appreciate that.

[00:42:11] **Mick:** And, um, and I can see. Um, I can see in the future, you know, crossing paths with you in the community, or seeing your name somewhere around something, or, you know, sitting in a, in a forum or a conference and seeing you speak at it because you know, you really do have everything that it takes to be that, that, that voice of that movement. So I wish you the best and I'm going to be a very keen and spectator.

[00:42:37] **Noah:** Thank you. I mean, if I, if I could say one thing to your, to your listeners, I think. If they can do one thing whilst listening to this podcast, is to just have an open mind, just open your mind and give me a minute of your time. And maybe I might change your perspective. Um, and in saying that also everyone else, you know, speaking on this podcast, um, [00:43:00] and I think they'll come out of that minute, um, with a changed perspective, a different perspective.

[00:43:06] **Mark:** Yeah, absolutely. Well said, you know, and, um, Well done on your journey, you know, there's, there's, there's a few ways you can go about prison and, uh, and I think you've done, you've done a really good job. So, um, just continue doing the work you're doing, and you don't need me to say that, but, uh, but you're doing a great job, um, and really leading the way for the community in here. So, um, thank you so much for coming on the show today.

[00:43:32] **Mick:** You don't get off that easy though.

[00:43:33] **Mark:** Oh, shouldn't have got, almost got away with it.

[00:43:38] **Mick:** Almost got away with it. I did nearly forgot. We haven't recorded in a while. That's why. Um, but I ask everyone to come in and really interested to get your answer on this one. So when you were, um, when you were a kid, when you were younger, what did you want to be?

[00:43:50] **Noah:** I wanted to be a lawyer. So I'm not too far from it, am I? Just on the other side.

[00:43:56] **Mick:** And now what you've rocked him with two folders. When he came into the [00:44:00] window, I said, "Mark, we're in for it today. he's got too folders. He's researched, he's ready to go."

[00:44:05] **Noah:** Yeah, I wanted to be a lawyer, either a musician or a lawyer. So very polar opposites. Um, but I don't think I ended up too far from law. Some were in the lowest and the wrong side of it.

[00:44:15] **Mick:** You're in the wrong side, but I think you're trying to move to the other side.

[00:44:20] **Noah:** Absolutely.

[00:44:21] **Mark:** Just getting the work experience experience.

[00:44:23] **Noah:** Yes.

[00:44:25] **Mick:** Well, thanks again, mate. We look, um, really appreciate your time. Um, and, uh, yeah, look forward to probably speaking to you again at some stage. Thank you very much. Yeah. Thanks now.

[00:44:32] **Mark:** Thanks.

[00:44:43] **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 list of services that may help, at [YMCA rebuild.org.au](http://YMCArebuild.org.au). Under the podcast tab. This podcast was produced by Mick Cronin and Mark [00:45:00] Wilson. Editing done by Mark Wilson.