

Time To ReBuild S4 Ep3 Stephen Leane

[00:00:00] **Mick:** Mark Wilson.

[00:00:01] **Mark:** Mick Cronin.

[00:00:03] **Mick:** Good to be back season four.

[00:00:05] **Mark:** Season four. Yes, absolutely. Had a, had a little break, shorter break than the others, but uh, now it's good. Get straight back into it.

[00:00:11] **Mick:** That's great. And look, I'm really excited about our guest today and where we, as we've done previously, Mark spoke a lot to the young people; a lot of people that are in custodial, we've talked to a lot of the people that are doing programs and services. But we thought today that we would, um, go, go to the other side a little bit and get a different perspective and reflection on, you know, how we can do things better. Today. We have Stephen Leane.

[00:00:39] **Mick:** Steven, currently is the Road Safety Camera, Commissioner (for Victoria), and deputy president of the police registration and services board. He was appointed to ESTA (Emergency Services, Telecommunication Authority -or 000 Emergency for Victoria, Australia) board for three years commencing in September, 2020. In October of 2021, Steven stepped in as [00:01:00] the interim CEO of ESTA in order to guide the organization through a difficult time; recall delays to the 000 service in Victoria.

[00:01:08] **Mick:** Stephen was a sworn member of Victoria police for 40 years before retiring in December, 2019. During his career in policing, Stephen walked in many frontline operation roles, as well as corporate support areas. He retired from Victoria Police as an Assistant Commissioner, a rank he held for more than six years.

[00:01:27] **Mick:** He held several command roles, including professional standards, road policing, with much of his time spent as the Regional Commander for the Northwest Metro region. Stephen holds a bachelor of laws, graduate diploma of legal practice, and a master of education, is a graduate of the Australian Institute of company directors. And also, as I said before, a member of the ESTA financial committee. Steven welcome to Time to ReBuild.

[00:01:54] **Stephen:** Yeah. Thanks for, it's nice to be here. It sounds like, um, I'm glad you said 40 years. I'm tired listening to all [00:02:00] those things. I don't know where I got the time to fit them all in.

[00:02:03] **Mick:** Well, it's a, it's a, yeah it's a, you know, a lot you've got in there. So I'm really looking forward to unpacking a little bit of this today. So I suppose what would be really good for us, Stephen and our listeners, will be just to, you know, be interesting to take it back to, you know, when you decided or when you decided, yeah, maybe when you decided to go in that path towards police and, and a little bit of background where you came, like we grew up and so forth as well. And what led you to, uh, to getting into the police force and then we can probably take it from there to 40 years.

[00:02:34] **Stephen:** Yeah, not a problem. Um, well, I suppose if you, if we, particularly, because this is about young people and families and where you come from, so I'm one of, uh, I was one of eight kids, so good Irish Catholic family based in the Southeast suburbs of Melbourne.

[00:02:48] **Stephen:** Um, sadly dad passed away when I was about seven, um, left mom with seven of us still at home. So it was a busy house. Um, like we were lucky that I was up a hard worker and a brick [00:03:00] layer and built our own house- so unlike a lot of the kids that, uh, you know, your listeners are working with and the kids that are listening - um, we had secure housing security, which is really, which is really critical today for the families. Um, but in the 1970s, when I was in high school, I was one of the younger ones in the family. But in the 1970s, the world was different as far as how you got a job. Um, they used to be a thing called the public service exam. So you know people used to be able to go and do an exam and they'd end up in what was, you know, they would end up in the Board of Works (Public utility board) that used to look after water or the SEC, (State Electricity Commission, the government owned electricity supplier of Victoria) when we owned electricity. And so we had all these state-owned organizations, so there was a pathway there. Um, a lot of people, you know, the military from where I went to school with a boys school, went into that.

[00:03:44] **Stephen:** Um, apprenticeships was, was really the flavor of the day. Sort of a third of young men probably went into apprenticeships and did trades. Um, and the police force was one of those. So you sort of floated towards, you know, probably a half of the year [00:04:00] twelves went to university in those days, which is, you know, we're trying to get more and more kids into uni. Uh, but in the 1970s, it was wasn't as many as it's going out, it wasn't accepted that you needed to do that in order to progress in your life.

[00:04:13] **Stephen:** Um, so policing came, one of my best mates was interested. He sat the exam and I thought, oh, that was pretty good. I had a cousin who was, uh, a police officer. He was probably about 10 years old. I mean, I, you know, he was a bit of a villain actually used to live with my grandma down the street cause he was a country kid. Um, and I remember when I was about five, if we used to play-up at dinner, he used to handcuff us to mom's ironing board out the back room so that we would, so we'd stop making noise. So that was my first introduction though, introduction to, to the cops, I suppose, but he was a wonderful fella and um, a big influence on, you know, doing the right thing and doing those sorts of things. Yeah, I went along just decided I'd, I'd probably give it a go. I always had a sort of a five-year plan. I'll do it and see how it works out. So as you said, um, went and did a few things. It leads on to different jobs and all of a sudden you turn [00:05:00] around and find yourself you've done 40 years and, and you managed to be in charge of a whole bunch of other police who are doing really cool things, um, helping out community.

[00:05:08] **Mick:** And that's it, it's incredible. Like yeah. As you say, you go from that and then yeah, 40 years later, you're looking back on it going, whoah! You know what I mean? And back then was it was, you know, placing when you went to go into the police force. Was it, it, was it a difficult task to get in? And was it seen back then really as a, you know, a very honorable job and a great profession to get into or was, you know, cause I would love to see that now and then maybe reflect a little bit what it would be like now today.

[00:05:35] **Stephen:** Uh, I think in those days when I just sort of described it, there was a, there was a lot of, uh, I think from families sort of like mine, where I grew up, and the type of people that I grew up with - having some sort of job security was really important, which I'll say that, you know, the public service. So people used to get a job for life.

[00:05:53] **Mick:** Yeah.

[00:05:54] **Stephen:** You know, and again, you know, we talk about young people now, even if they go to uni, they may do two or three [00:06:00] different courses that are completely different from the one that they started with 12 or 15 careers before they get to the end of 40 years of work life. So life was different than so, so there was a lot of job security about policing.

[00:06:13] **Stephen:** It was considered, it was considered a good thing to do. Um, but certainly it was really positive from, um, commodity. It was, you know, it still came with. You know, just, you know, some disadvantages in the

other young other kids, I went to school with, went off and did other things. Some of them, you know, might've knocked off cars in the middle of the night and stuff like that and got caught and, um, drugs were still around.

[00:06:35] **Stephen:** So you had to stay away from drugs. If you're in the police force, drink and driving was just starting to be an issue. And it's hard to believe now, probably the age group of many of the people listening. Can't couldn't believe that people used to drink and drive and there wasn't, you wouldn't get pulled up and given a breath test.

[00:06:49] **Stephen:** So it was a different world. We didn't have mobile phones. We didn't, nobody had like, say there was no such thing as a video recorder in people's back pockets. Um, most pubs shut at [00:07:00] 10 o'clock pretty much. Um, so that it was a different world, um, you know, in the early 1980s.

[00:07:06] **Mick:** So what you're saying is a pretty handy gig back then, was it?

[00:07:09] **Stephen:** Well, some of it, I suppose, for some of my mates, some of my mates in the police force used to call it a great adventure, you know, like you're very young. I joined when I was 18 and you're able to do that then. Uh, they give you the keys to a really fast car. They give you lights and sirens. So you could go quick in with a chase, you know, we'd have police pursuits and cars would crash all sorts of things would happen. So stuff that doesn't happen now, uh, there's a lot, there's a lot of safety, which is good. You know, I lost a lot of colleagues over the years in policing that were killed in, in police pursuits and car crashes. And you know, it, wasn't a cool thing. So, um, but when you're in your early twenties, like some of your listeners, if they, if you get to your early twenties, there's still that sense of adventure when you're a young man.

[00:07:53] **Stephen:** Um, so, so for me, I suppose I still grew up in, I was still growing up in policing and, um, part of it was part of, it was like [00:08:00] a boy's own adventure, you know, what are we going to do now? And, you know, you're working night shift and everybody's swiping and doing all sorts of things like that. And every now and then you'd have a bit of fun.

[00:08:09] **Stephen:** Um, and you had to have a bit of fun because on the other side, you know, you're dealing with issues that other people didn't see, which I think is policing. That's the important I've talked to young place. I think that's a really important thing that they do is that for 99% of the community, they just want to go to go to work, come home, raise a family, have a partner, you know, have a good life, go to bed, feel safe, get up the next morning, like nothing happened. The job of police is to if the last place a visible to all those people,

the better, because it happens in the background and it means that you've been good at your job and in life is safe and the community is safe. And we all move on.

[00:08:47] **Mick:** Policing back then, you know through them decades. How difficult is it now? Do you feel that the, the, the layers of it to it now and what you have to face? How significantly different [00:09:00] is it gone through them year and was there a kind of a point where, you know, it really shifted where, you know, it became a job, where it was really challenging, really hard, and at times quite dangerous and quite hard to do because crime was rising.

[00:09:17] **Stephen:** So I think that, I think that for me, the naivety stopped in the late eighties, it was probably 85' onwards, um, the naivety of policing stopped. And for a couple of reasons, um, uh, crime changed a bit, uh, like heavy gang crime who were doing armed robberies, things like that were shooting police. So I don't need to go in that space, but people probably recall, um, we had some incidents where we had, um, placed, placed murdered on the job.

[00:09:47] **Stephen:** Um, we had the Russell street bombing and Angela Tayler, who was actually a close friend of mine died at Russell straight. Um, and then we also had those issues. You know, we were driving too fast. We were having chases with, we were [00:10:00] starting to have a bit of an arms race with, uh, you know, we were shooting people, um, more than we should have. We weren't thinking about our own safety. So it was, you know, too many cops were sorta like wired up walking into town, deciding that they stopped things here. And then, so the late eighties, I think culturally in police really shifted. Really really shifted. So the safety of police, you know, don't rush in and use proper techniques.

[00:10:27] **Stephen:** They trained us in a whole lot of things at the time being young cops, we thought we were just junk, but they actually kept people alive and they made you have a safe. And they also made sure that the person that you were trying to deal with with safe as well, you know, we're dealing with mentally ill people. And we only had one response and that was a firearm or an, a pair of handcuffs and a baton. And that was it. Um, so things, things had to shift. So I think from that perspective, it was from the late eighties onwards, the world changed. And obviously as soon as, and, and the layers got, got more complex for police about accountability.

[00:10:58] **Stephen:** But, um, as soon [00:11:00] as you know, like I said, the mobile phone, as soon as you have to assume that everybody's videotaping

everything you do. We're all presuming your audio taping what I'm doing today. So careful what you say. There's a rule, there's a rule with senior polices, if there's a microphone. You assume it's on, don't assume it's not for police out in the street. Now people have, you know, there's CCTV cameras in people's houses in shops everywhere. We've got a police with nowadays, the police wear their own, um, um, video recording equipment. There's video recorded, pointing footmen in their cars and everybody, they deal with got a mobile phone. And quite often they just pull it out and start recording as soon as they get pulled up for a traffic ticket.

[00:11:39] **Stephen:** So the world's really - you know, from the boy's own adventure of the nineteen - early 1980s, when I was a young man, you know, driving around when pubs were still shutting, only people out were villains or, you know, drunk driving that shouldn't be driving on the road. You're trying to get off the road to today. It's a really, it's a really complex environment.

[00:11:57] **Stephen:** So picking their way through it is, [00:12:00] is really hard and trying to start a career. Um, I think I really, I I'm amazed by how quickly they can become professional in that environment. And I reflect if, you know, it's a different world than it was three decades later, maybe in the, not in the last decade, but I wonder how well I would have gone with it.

[00:12:22] **Mark:** So where were you first stationed? Uh, when you started off?

[00:12:26] **Stephen:** So we moved around when, when we came, when I came in through the early eighties, they moved you around for a little while. And then my first permanent station was at Collingwood Police Station. I spent three years there, um, was a great place, uh, little, little place out in the back of that Collingwood town hall.

[00:12:41] **Stephen:** It's still there. It's still really hard to find, there used to be a court next door. So in those days too, the magistrates' courts were local. So we'd have the police station was there. We had our own court. Uh, the Justice of the Peace still sat on the magistrate's court. So they were local people, three justices used to sit at the court upstairs in the number two [00:13:00] court.

[00:13:00] **Stephen:** Um, so we had, uh, you know, and we were in a network of stations. So our little network joined up. Uh wasn't wasn't a division. I think they called it something else then. So it was calling with, uh, Richmond and Fitzroy. We were pretty much the three stations together work closely together. So you got to know everybody and every night there'd be a night shift van from each of the three stations. And you're the only ones on you're the only ones

there. So yeah, you had to help each other out and know what each other was doing and, and do stuff like that. So it was a, it was a great learning place.

[00:13:31] **Mick:** And did you find that, um, just trying to see, was there a sense of community as well back then? Like, you know, you kind of knew the people that were causing trouble?

[00:13:41] **Stephen:** Uh, then yeah, easily. I mean, I don't know if people know that right now, we're at - what do they call it? Icon Park? Which is the (AFL) Carlton footy ground. So Collingwood's were still playing football at Victoria Park that was in Collingwood Police Station's patch. So there'd be a football game at Collingwood IVIG park on a Saturday afternoon, and we'd be [00:14:00] responsible for policing it. So that was, you know, we had our own police station and our own footy clubs I had was that, um, but you know, just trying to make your point, you got to know who was here in the zoo and where they were, and. And, you know, often, um, some of our, uh, keener people who are going to be detectives, you know, more senior to me that they'd see someone in the crowd from one of the locals, I actually was on a warrant. That's what I demonstrated. Did you know people? Yeah. It got to the point, every, every Collingwood football game and there was somebody who was wanted, um, as well as doing the public order stuff. There'd be somebody that we're trying to make sure that we get, as soon as they're out in the back of the stand, we want to grab them and, um, and, and pull them away. So that, so it was local. It was, uh, yeah,

[00:14:43] **Mick:** Just making it clear. It's just Collingwood! Everything other football club was not offending..

[00:14:49] **Stephen:** Yeah, I'm sure it didn't happen at Carlton!

[00:14:50] **Stephen:** We're really playing into the Collingwood stereotypes.

[00:14:53] **Mick:** We went straight in there! Fascinating though, when you think about, um, just going back a little bit, [00:15:00] resources like, you know, today what you need now, you know, to cause if you look at the, what you mentioned, we made a really good point. You look at the everyone's can film in the phone. Like, I'm sure it's a, it's a help in some times to solve stuff. And it's a hindrance sometimes when you're trying to walk through stuff for police. But I'm also keen, I'm also interested as well in, in resources that are needed now, compared to back then, like you just look at again, we talk layers, it must be really difficult these days - sorry, I should have - I'll reframe that - Is it difficult these days? To get more people to enter the police force and to have the

resources you need to, you know, um, tackle the crime that's that's happening these days at the levels it's happening?

[00:15:48] **Stephen:** Uh, I don't know if it's difficult, there's still a lot of people who are applying. Um, so I'm two years old, (2 years retired from the Police force) so I'm not speaking on behalf of Victoria police anymore, but Victoria police, before I left, went through a massive recruitment, [00:16:00] right. So government bought a lot of new cops and put them in. So, and PSOs, we all know about train stations. I think the difficulty is probably, um, trying to get a diverse community into policing. Yeah. Um, you know, as I've already described myself on the so on, you know, Irish, Catholic family, so obviously I was a middle aged white, gray haired man. That's who I am. Um, and, and I reflected when I joined policing, I reflected the group that joined. So, uh, it's more and more diverse now, but trying to get diversity, I think is yeah, is, is still, still difficult. Not, not impossible. There are, you know, there's a lot of success stories with, um, you know, African Australians who are now joining policing. So that's great. Um, and then, and there's some cultural groups that don't value our policing as a profession because of where they grew up in the world. You know, if you grew up in a communist country, or dictatorship, uh, you know, and that's part of the hard part of policing is trying to get [00:17:00] people from the community to actually trust that that police can actually help them.

[00:17:04] **Mick:** It's important too, isn't it? Cause they can cut through a little bit and pleasing to me is very, it would be, I can imagine very different in a sense that you really need to be able to - the communication skills and your ability to talk and the ability to cut through a little bit of that and, and, and, you know, and deal with issues. I'm not saying that it was 'old school' back then, but probably I would imagine correct me if I'm wrong. You would need to have a lot more of them skills today, or am I wrong in saying that it was, it was always like that you always had to be able to speak to people and so forth and be able to art. Do you think there's more of a need now because the communities are so diverse and a little bit volatile at times?

[00:17:44] **Stephen:** I think the skills are the same, but I think that you have to have, I think modern policing needs to understand the differences in community and be, and be aware of it and respectful of it. Yeah. You know, so, so some, you [00:18:00] know, some cultural in some cultures you don't wear shoes inside the house. So what do the police do when they turn up with their giant boots on, you know, when they're, when they're there, because they, you know, on an operation, you know, they have to arrest somebody, then they have to wear all their gear and do that. But if you're there to actually have a

conversation and get the trust of a mother, about how you can help their son or daughter, how do you be respectful and still wear your police boots? So that's, you know, it's, it's a perverse description of it. But I, I would probably put it a different way too, is, is that, you know, when everything that you've got, you know, we'd give police now walk around, you know, like Robocop, you know, like, you know, they've got, if you see them, they've got all these vests on. And, um, with that, just about everybody getting a taser download, I've talked about it on all sorts of different equipment. And then there's a, if you look in the legislative, um, regime within Victoria about all the different acts and regulations and that you need, then [00:19:00] there's, you know, 27 different full posts, binders of different stuff that police could use to for powers.

[00:19:07] **Stephen:** Um, but at the end of the day, they're probably police probably haven't used those things for less than 5% of their time. The other 95% of the time is actually just having a chat to somebody and trying to solve a problem. The actual execution of powers, you know, to actually have to arrest somebody. Is, you know, but it does happen, but the best, you know, the best way to describe it is if you can get someone to agree to come along and get jumped in the car and come with you, they may technically be under arrest. But if, as long as it's a deal between you and that person and they're calm and they know that that's, that they can, they can trust that, you know, they've done the wrong thing and they're going to have to cop it, but they're not going to arch up and they're not going to fight and they're not going to. And I think the cops are good bloke or a good girl, and they're decent. And that then that's a win. And that's [00:20:00] for police that's every day. They want to be that day.

[00:20:02] **Mick:** Yeah. It's a, it's a great insight. Um, we see, and I suppose media, and I suppose, you know, programs on TV and all that plays this part in it as well, but just what you're picking up, what you said there, like that 5%, you know, what I mean is that is, is using the powers and the rest is, is really you being a person. It's you, it's humanity. It's chatting to someone who's trying to get them to trust you. And to understand that it is a kind of a, an arrangement of deal that you're kind of trying to walk with them to do for a good outcome for both sides in a bad situation.

[00:20:33] **Stephen:** Yeah. And policing is a deal. It's a deal between community and police. Uh, there was a bloke called Robert Peel who, who set up policing in England and it's a model. And he had this saying is that, you know, policing are the police and the police are our community or, community are the police, and the police are our community. And, and he had his whole bunch of rules around, you know, philosophy around policing, but essentially police can't operate [00:21:00] without the support of the community. And so if

we reflect for a minute, you know, as we listening, if we reflect to the America and some of those cities where the police look like they're doing a military incursion into their own cities to try and take control. Like, that's not policing, they've lost, they've lost support of their communities. I mean, even some of those cities in America, they're talking about getting rid of police and replacing them with something else. I've lost so much confidence in their place. They're gonna, they're gonna, they're gonna move them out.

[00:21:31] **Stephen:** So policing is, is, is only, it's not, it's not imposed on community. It's part it's. It's like a, where I started a little while ago. It's that thing where 95% of people don't want to talk about police, see the police or ever think about the police. They might like a cop show on TV and talk about CSI and do other things, but their interactions, they don't want, they don't need an interaction with police.

[00:21:54] **Stephen:** They just liked the idea that they're there. And if they call, I like them to come. If [00:22:00] something serious happens, they want them to come. Or if the garden name's been stolen off the front porch, they want them to come to, they want them to deal with those issues because that's that feeling of safety.

[00:22:08] **Mick:** So that's, Mark who usually makes them calls.

[00:22:09] **Stephen:** He's got a collection collection of gnomes in your back yard,

[00:22:12] **Mick:** He does. And I'm glad we bringing it up because we're going to be doing an episode on that, pretty soon down the line Stephen so we can bring you back for that one.

[00:22:19] **Mick:** But moving forward then into this community and what you're speaking about, you know, about how you can be your part in the community as well. And you did a lot of work in the Western suburbs and probably at a time when there was a lot of, um, focus on the young African community offending. And I think it probably would have been back when that apex word, 'the gang' was you know, when everything was splashed everywhere and you were leading the force at that stage, you were, you were in that in them regions and you were working with these communities.

[00:22:55] **Mick:** How did you go, I'm really interested in that. How did you go about changing the narrative [00:23:00] in that, in that area, and the space with this community? Because really everything that we were listening to in hearing

was doom and gloom was hardcore, it was violent, and it was, it was like out of control. And here you are trying to walk in that community and make a, you know, a positive impact.

[00:23:17] **Stephen:** Yeah. And it was hard. And I suppose, um, there's a lot to unpack and unpick around it. And if we think about some of the things that happened not too long ago, I mean the Moomba youth riot, remember that Federation square. And then we think about park full, um, youth detention centers with kids on the roof being locked in their cells for hours, you know, breaking through ceilings and doing all sorts of drama. Um, and then the apex and other ones. So I probably I'll give you a description about how probably we from the region where I was started to unpack and think through what we could do, that was different.

[00:23:54] **Stephen:** So, so the Moomba stuff, we actually put some excellent investigators and detectives and a [00:24:00] whole bunch of other police into actually find out who the kids were that were caused the trouble. So we took so policing and also at once, I don't, I don't think I need to go back to it afterwards. Um, we've talked a lot about policing, but police do have to make people accountable for what they do, because that's the expectation of community.

[00:24:18] **Stephen:** So if you do the wrong thing, then you'd need to be accountable. So that's the job of police.. So we went out there thereafter during Moomba and we went out, um, and found all these kids and, um, charged the ones that we had to identify them was quite difficult. You know, as I talked about this CCTV everywhere, so it took a while, but they were held, held to account.

[00:24:40] **Stephen:** What we did with them then was what, what happens? What do you, what do you do with those kids now that you've got them? Um, so, so we actually did a deal with the children's court, chief magistrate around what we could do with them. So, so they actually dealt with them as a block. So, so we moved those kids, the ones who, you know, some of them, you know, [00:25:00] but listeners and the young people are listening, know that in a high state of agitation that young people do things they wouldn't do on any other day. And while the community was in uproar about what they saw on the TV about Moomba and other things is, is that kid on a different day is a different person. And the person that the community wants that kid to be is the kid, you know, on the good day, not the bad day. So we spent a lot of time trying to think for now that we've caught these kids, what do we do with them?

[00:25:30] **Stephen:** So we actually spent a lot of time working with the children's court to find solutions to, and we fast-tracked and they, and, you know, cause for all young people, the longer you leave it between the time that you've done something in the time that you've held accountable, it makes no sense. So if you wait six months and then let them walk around the community and then go, okay, you're going into youth detention for three months. The relationship between the behavior that they did in their psyche and what you're doing to them now, it doesn't matter. It just doesn't make [00:26:00] sense because it's too far away. It just feels like, um, communities being vindictive and reinforces those stereotypes about all, you know, all cops are bad. Uh, all old people, you know, over 20 don't know what they're talking about, you know, it's their generation, what they do they know, and there's no opportunities for us and they're keeping us out of what they're doing. And, um, so it just, it reinforces the negativity in their psyche. So we worked a lot to try and deal with those kids.

[00:26:29] **Stephen:** What we found, and I was probably attuned to it coming from a family of eight. What we found with these, with the young kids coming from new communities in the Western and the Northern suburbs is they came from big families. And so when we went to visit, you know, parents and often was a single mom, and that, you know, as I've described, you know, you can be successful coming from a family with one parent, um, you know, with a whole bunch of kids in the house. So it is possible to be successful. Um, but what we found the influence that they were influencing [00:27:00] the next siblings down. So, we've got a lot of police who work in proactive policing at that stage, and they still do wonderful jobs. Now work with youth, you know, work with YMCAs, all sorts of different people to help our kids. So these kids hadn't come up on the, on the, on the visibility of anybody yet, but we, we we decided that they were high risk and they were high risk because their you know older brother was about to go to into Parkville for Moomba ride or apex gang robbery or something. And these kids were following them around. So we started to think through how we could work with the whole family and support the parent or the parents and support all the other kids and help keep the kids in school and do all those sorts of things.

[00:27:48] **Stephen:** So we un so we unpacked and broadened it right out from a policing point of view is to move into things that we'd never moved into before and start to join people around a table around what, [00:28:00] you know, what could we do to actually support this family. Um, we'll deal with the kid. Who's done the wrong thing and we'll work with, you know, with, uh, youth corrections and hopefully.

[00:28:13] **Stephen:** That kid will get through their sentence, if that's what they're going to do, or get them through the children's court and get an outcome, a disposition, and then they can work on what they're doing. But at the same time, we need to work on the other kids because they were just following them around and they were the next ones in.

[00:28:28] **Stephen:** And we saw that in a lot of places over the years. I've seen that as we saw that at Collingwood. And you talk about when I was a Constable at Collingwood, the younger brothers or the bigger brothers, you know, where's, your brother is in jail. What are you doing? What are you, why are you out in the middle of the night stealing from factories?

[00:28:43] **Stephen:** Well, it's a learned behavior or it's a respected behavior within that family. So you can't unpick that, but what you can do is do your best. So we turn it on its head and try to think about what else we could do. Um, so we did, we had a lot of thinking like that. [00:29:00] We had, um, Graham Ashton was the chief commissioner at the time.

[00:29:03] **Stephen:** And while I had a fair bit to do, he sort of gave me the job as youth portfolio for the state, which was great. Um, something, you know, you always give someone busy, some more work to do. So we ran. Um, so we ran, we call them chief commissioners summit. So we ran two post-moment. Um, one was, I think it was 16 and 17 or 17, 7, 818, trying to think of, I think modern 1718, 20 17 and 18.

[00:29:28] **Stephen:** First one, we got a whole we got a whole a lot of people, we used, uh, a big room at the MCG, we had about 120 people in the room.

[00:29:37] **Mick:** I was there.

[00:29:38] **Stephen:** You were there.

[00:29:38] **Mick:** I was there.

[00:29:39] **Stephen:** Yeah.

[00:29:39] **Mick:** Yeah.

[00:29:40] **Stephen:** So, um, but we wanted to do it. Don't know, hopefully I'll say what I was trying to do and see if I was there. So, so we didn't want to go in there and tell young people what they, what we should do for them.

[00:29:55] **Stephen:** So we actually had a forum of young people before we went in and I [00:30:00] wasn't even allowed near it. So we Brendan, uh, uh, from the Salvos, Brendan Knotel major, Brandon Knotel, um, gave us a free access to his work street. Found a lot of young people, we got a facilitator, a cool guy. I came in facilitator came in, um, and we got, we got them together and the idea was we'd get them in the room and tell us their story.

[00:30:21] **Stephen:** But at the end of it, that is, we decided that it wasn't good for them to sit in a room full of gray hair, middle age, people do gooders or whoever else. So they actually did, it did, uh, a series of videos, um, and it was a presentation. So we, we ran the first forum in three phases. The first was, was to get for the room to get an understanding from young people. What it's like in the current environment for young people from their own words which was great. We actually ended up with a table of young people, managed to get there. And some social workers who sat with them. I think there might've been two tables, but the next thing was when we understood that [00:31:00] the next thing, the next phase of the discussion was what could we do?

[00:31:04] **Stephen:** And being police are very action-orientated because, you know, we, that's what we do every day. We come to a problem, we solve it. We move on to the next one. Cause there's somebody else with a problem down the street, you can't spend forever on things. So it's a bit of a habit of being action orientated. So the end was what can we actually do?

[00:31:22] **Stephen:** And so get the room, get the people in the room to commit to stuff. So, um, I thought it was successful. Oh, I'm about to hear from Mick about whether it was or not. But, but, but we, we wanted to learn for people like me to learn and to see what we could do and listen to young people and ask them and consider what we could do. That was different. So you were there, Mick, what did you think?

[00:31:44] **Mick:** Well, think firstly, I think the approach was, was exactly right. What you said, like the important thing, I think of anything that was having the young people's voices and having their perspective. And I think what was really good about that was that there was [00:32:00] a step back in a sense from the police to say, we, as you said, in your words, we want to hear from you.

[00:32:07] **Mick:** We want to understand, and then we want to create the solutions you might take on things like that. It's so hard to do something like that in whatever period of time we had that day. Yeah. But the step and what

you can say and what you can show and demonstrate is that we take this seriously and we're looking at doing this differently.

[00:32:26] **Mick:** And I think that message on that day for someone like myself who was coming in there as a, uh, I would say at that stage as an organizational leader in the space of, of trying to, you know, we were doing all the work at that stage. So we were already years into it. We would walk in under, on the frontline with these young people.

[00:32:46] **Mick:** I dunno if you remember, I, there was a lot of people that spoke at that day and from different tables and all that, and he could hear the difference of where their organizations were, but there was a lot of desperation in, in, in, in areas because they were felt like they [00:33:00] were overwhelmed and under resourced as well.

[00:33:03] **Mick:** So I think in that space, it was really cool. It was really important. But when you do something like that, it opens the floor to that. And then you have to try and say, well, hang on, hang on. We can't fix everything now, but this is the first stage it's what comes after that and how it was seen after that as well.

[00:33:22] **Mick:** And I remember being said, it was, you mentioned it was more there's more than and it was one more with employment. I was at that one as well. Cause that's the field that we were in and the catering and that one was on that day. If I was, what I reflected on was it was again, a great step. The only issue on that day, was there needed to have loads more employers in that room and they needed to be speaking and hearing cause that's what we needed to get across it.

[00:33:47] **Mick:** But the videos you did were really good, the young people's was really good and very impressive because it's very hard thing to do to get your people to speak as well. And I just thought it was a really great base where it brought everyone together and we all know each other, but we also met [00:34:00] new people.

[00:34:00] **Mick:** But I think what was really important was the messages. And that was coming coming from that was we're stepping back and we're listening. I think more of that needs to happen. I don't think it consistently continues to happen. So from there we had to so much, where does it go from there where it splinters out into other groups, or we continue to have these kinds of summits and at a bigger level, or we actually reduce some small into community levels.

[00:34:25] **Mick:** That's my take on it. If they had bought I thought at the time, it was really, really important what you said.

[00:34:32] **Stephen:** Yeah. So if I come back to one of your first questions is how do you change the community narrative around. Uh, negativity against young people and youth crime and, and different groups in, in, you know, different ethnic groups and in community and how they're seen - so Mick I think, think you can't, you can't I, as a senior police officer, I, I tried, but I was, I was always very neutral when I did a lot of media interviews. Um, always [00:35:00] led with the line that I led with here is that of all police is to hold young people to account, if they do the wrong thing and you'll hear a senior police still say that stuff, but you have to work in the background.

[00:35:10] **Stephen:** So while I was neutral, I think what I could do is actually work in the background and make a difference so that we could generate change and actually go to those communities with as many people as we could muster from us broadest cross-section of communities, we could so that we could start changing their perspective of what was happening to them.

[00:35:31] **Stephen:** Because if you imagine, if you're, um, and I've spoke to some, uh, South Sudanese, single mothers with big families is that they were beside themselves. They didn't, they didn't feel personally comfortable walking down the street for what people were, how people would look at them. They didn't feel comfortable in the supermarket when they went to buy something and they didn't feel comfortable on public transport. Um, and they had their kids going to school and, you know, the older one in trouble, the next one [00:36:00] getting, you know, not coming home when they should be and not in place trouble yet or not the we in the world. And then the younger ones, you know, trying to keep them focused. So how do we, what do we do as a community and how to, you know, so it's not, uh, so that, so these are not policing strict policing problems.

[00:36:18] **Stephen:** These are not in the 5% of rules and powers and other things. These are in the 95% about community. So from a policing perspective, we took the perspective that we could actually change the narrative in the long-term, as long as we took enough people along, to do enough things, and and engage enough people to try and listen and understand what the real problems were.

[00:36:41] **Stephen:** So we flipped our approach to understanding that it's not just police that can fix it. So it's not that we can't police our way out of this problem.

[00:36:53] **Stephen:** Yeah, it's there's other problems police can't place their way out of either their complex community issues. Um, [00:37:00] and then, but we actively from a senior leadership point of view and pushed it right through is we needed to work collaboratively with as many people as we could.

[00:37:08] **Stephen:** So if you have people recall, but we had a bad summer with, um, African gangs. Again, I think they, you know, they were down the beach, Port Phillip um, all sorts of drama. And what had I think it was 2020 that the years of might've been 2017 going into 2018. So that Christmas going into new year that year, um, there was all sorts of drama about what we could do, but what, what we had was, um, we'd got to the point with a lot of young people. We'd got where they are in school. They were connected and they had a summer holiday period, and they'd got a bit wayward. And I think that's about all it was, you know, we had a hot summer, the kids had worked out how to catch the tram, the train, and the tram all the way down to St Kilda and now we're having a great time.

[00:37:50] **Stephen:** Um, trouble was, it turns out there was hundreds of them. But, they just wanted to go to the beach and have a good time there, their principal position when they started it, wasn't to go and cause [00:38:00] trouble will be with they wanted to go to the beach, like every other Melbourne Melbournian to go, you know, uh, go and have a good time, like enjoy Melbourne. That's what they've come to this family, brought them to this country so they can have that freedom to do those things. So they start, they started there didn't quite end up where it needed to be, but you know, that that happens in the world, but we'll sort it out. So we, so we've jumped at a little bit. We jumped forward a little bit of that, um, and took some actions there.

[00:38:27] **Stephen:** We worked at where the high risk schools were across, across Melbourne. And we pushed in and actually set up decided that we'd help the principals of those schools because you know, some of those summits, we talked to school principals about what they could do, and that was still, it was still in the back of my mind and we hadn't solved it.

[00:38:46] **Stephen:** So we, we found that 16 to 20 schools. And we actually, because, you know, I was invited to a meeting with the acting premier of the day, I think, and a whole bunch of other cabinet ministers. And now we'll go around the room trying to [00:39:00] think, what are we going to do? What are we going to do? And what are you going to do, Stephen?

[00:39:02] **Stephen:** Well, it's up to me now. Okay. How about come back to your point, Mick it about how do you bring it together? So there's an old saying

about it. You know, it takes a village to raise a child. Really. Melbourne's a huge metropolitan, you know, metropolis, you know, 4 million people. It's four and a half million people or whatever it is, Victoria, 6 million people.

[00:39:24] **Stephen:** It's not a country town. So it stops, it stops acting like a country town. So in a country town, a school principal knows the kids knows the footy coach knows the soccer coach, the netball coach, you know, um, they see the kids down the street, they know their, their kids because now every kid in the school and is that everybody in this town goes to school somewhere. Um, so all those sort of things. So if things become really disconnected in a metropolis and, and they get, and people will listen to this particular youth workers and others know the disconnect between young people and community, but there's also a disconnect. [00:40:00] At the people who want to solve it. So there's a disconnect between the department of education. There's a disconnect between Victoria police. There's a disconnect between, you know, department of health and human services, as it was, then there's a disconnect between the children's court and what they're doing. There's a disconnect between youth corrections. There's a disconnect between the department responsible for employment, you know there's all these things, there's a disconnect. So we actually forced all those government departments under the leadership of one of the secretaries of one of the departments to actually start working together. Um, for, for a period of time, we did it. We, we did a sprint for three months and our objective was to get the kids back into school.

[00:40:42] **Stephen:** And there's three, three critical things for young people that they need in their lives. You know, the lesson from Stephen, uh, over this time is - One, you need to be in school training or some, some sort of employment. Um, so a combination of those. So school and a [00:41:00] part-time job, uh, you know, a job with an apprenticeship where you go to school or you're in full-time employment, but all, everybody on the world, even retired people, you know, 40, 40 year veteran cops need to be busy. Otherwise I'll get myself into trouble. We all need to be doing something because we need to be engaged. And it needs to be meaningful. And it needs to lead somewhere. You know, not some, you know, some basket-weaving course, you need to do a course at TAFE. That's going to lead you to a next skill. It's gonna lead you to the next skill that gets you, the job and the job that you want to do. So we need to do that. The other thing you need to do is you need to be involved in community somewhere. Uh, and a lot of the work YMCA does is about, I mean, think about, you know, gymnasiums and stuff. It's about you do a physical activity or a music activity or dance activity, but you do it with other people who are doing it the same.

[00:41:51] **Stephen:** We're not forcing people into the room, but you do, the purpose of it is you'll learn from each other. And you also have some senior, you know, some [00:42:00] leaders in the room, which at whatever stage of life they're in, but they're leaders in the room because they're influences. Um, and it's about you know, modifying behaviors. Cause you gotta behave in a certain way. When you're in a dance class, you can't, you know, you can do free dance, I suppose. But if you're doing hip hop and you want to do a particular dance and you want to do it as a group, then you've got to comply with the group. Otherwise it's not a good dance. If you want to play music, you got to play the same music otherwise. And that's, and that's a discipline that, you know, we don't tell young people you're doing this because you're learning discipline. It's, it's a discipline we learn as a community and it follows out. So yeah. So if you're not, so for young people, they have to be engaged in something like that. And the third thing they have to do is they have to have somebody in their life that they don't want to disappoint, that doesn't want to see them and get straightened out.

[00:42:48] **Stephen:** So, you know, I often. For listeners who are a bit older, think about when they see a police car, when they drive down the street, the first thing they do is check their speed and make sure they're not speeding. If they've had a few drinks [00:43:00] and they're out at night, the first thing they do is straighten up and try and look as sober as they can and walk.

[00:43:04] **Stephen:** And that's it, you know, that's, that's a way to describe about human behavior. When you see somebody that you think, oh my God, I better be on my best behavior here. I'll do it. So if we jump to another one, if we've, as we grew up around this table over some of the listeners, if there was a like, you know, like my, my cousin who used to handcuff me to the, to the ironing board, like there was nothing I would want to do in my life to disappoint him.

[00:43:28] **Mick:** Yeah.

[00:43:29] **Stephen:** Um, and so, so you got to have somebody in your life, you don't want to disappoint and you gotta have a, you know, in a village, you have a number of people that you don't want to disappoint. And for the young people that were running at those times, and now they got lost, you know, they weren't going home.

[00:43:43] **Stephen:** The only ones that I didn't want to disappoint was, you know, the gang leader or the group leader they were with. So we had to break that cycle. So we decided, you know, long story short, get back to it. We

changed the way we did things from a government [00:44:00] point of view by actually forcing these government, um, senior officials to stop working in there silo.

[00:44:10] **Mark:** Yeah.

[00:44:10] **Stephen:** And to stop, they were delivered there, you know, they, you know, cause they said to me, oh, we're delivering all these programs and we don't have time to do this other stuff and we don't have the budget for this. And I say, yes you do. No, we don't. Yeah, you do. So you're your really senior. You can do it.

[00:44:25] **Stephen:** You can say, what about police? How you can do this. Oh, I get to do it now. I'm the assistant commissioner. I can just say, yeah, we're going to, as long as we do most of it, I've got a little bit of discretion. I can just say we're going to do a different

[00:44:35] **Mark:** yeah.

[00:44:35] **Stephen:** And get my people to do a different, you know, and we, and we worked through the principles because some of the principles, so some of the simple things that I had was the kids in their uniforms and they couldn't come to certain schools without the right, you know, Mm, so they weren't going to come back to school.

[00:44:49] **Stephen:** So, so often the really complex things are often really simple. Like, you know, oh, there's this kid, we can't get this kid back into school. And if we don't get them to schools if he hasn't got a uniform. So we had the right [00:45:00] people around the room, we turned to them in this big meeting go, how do we get this kid, a uniform, uh, uh, you know, senior government official goes.. Uh, we've got a fund. Good. Can you make that happen? Yeah. Okay. Action item. You'll do that. Move on next. You know, move on. So, so there's lots of ways to solve things. I think, I think we overcomplicate. We are, I think we over-engineer the solution sometimes without thinking about what the problem was. Um, I can give you the simplest example of when policing solve a problem.

[00:45:30] **Stephen:** We had a McDonald's store, no offense to McDonald's. It's not anything about it, but they kept, you know, they re they complain early on, about youth hanging around. doing this, doing that, they wouldn't buy stuff, they just be around and they put off customers and it was out in the Western suburbs. So one of my inspectors who was in working with me is great community

engagement person went out there and had a look, and he stood there and talked to the manager for 20 minutes about his problem.

[00:45:54] **Stephen:** And then he said to the manager, do you know, you've got no, um, African Australians working for you. [00:46:00] And he goes, oh yeah, I go so he's so actually worked with them and work with local youth leaders and promoted. Cause the kids didn't want to work there because they didn't know how they, then they didn't think they'd get a job because they didn't see anybody like them behind the jump.

[00:46:15] **Stephen:** You know, serving burgers and cheer. So, so the African kids would come in, they have no respect because they didn't see anybody behind the counter who worked, you know, they didn't think that if they behave, I might get a job there too one day, or that's my friend's sister or my friend's cousin, or, you know, or I know that, you know, my auntie knows that girl or that boy.

[00:46:37] **Stephen:** So we actually had to spend a lot of time with them trying to find kids that they could do to work in McDonald's. And then the other thing we did was, um, people, you know, McDonald's has free wifi. So this, this is, you know, for kids who don't have, you know, um, phone plans that they've got a phone, um, free wifi.

[00:46:57] **Stephen:** It's really cool. You know, like, so [00:47:00] when it, so the local, one of the local cops really simple went, you know, went back one day and said when it really gets starts to get out of control you just turn off your wifi and tell him the wifi was out. And so they just used to shut the wifi down. The kids used to go, oh, okay.

[00:47:14] **Stephen:** And then the crowd would disperse and they'd slow down and everything would calm and then about an hour later, they turn the wifi back on. All right. Yeah. So if we want to send 12 police guys and OC spray, all this sort of stuff, or what, if you just turn the wifi off just before it starts to build up and then it'll, they'll solve it themselves and wander off and do something.

[00:47:36] **Stephen:** Cause it's not, what are you going to do hanging around then you can't check things on your phone.

[00:47:40] **Mark:** Yeah. I think it's a really good point that you brought up with the different departments, not communicating with each other previously, because I can say that if they're not, if they're not communicating with each

other and they're running their own course, you're going to have, you know, one depart.

[00:47:55] **Mark:** Disciplining a young person and then another department also disciplining [00:48:00] people aren't communicating with each other and it's not spread out. Um, you can see the disengagement with services.

[00:48:07] **Stephen:** Yeah, I think, and I think, cause the loss of the government so complex, you know, you can waste effort and time to, um, and money, um, by, by doing really legitimate things that are really worthwhile.

[00:48:23] **Stephen:** Uh, but for that, for that moment or that week, it needed to be something else.

[00:48:27] **Mark:** Yeah. Yeah.

[00:48:28] **Mick:** Yeah.

[00:48:28] **Stephen:** And that's that and, and, you know, complex and the most complex young people often have, you know, multidiscipline team support. Yeah. Yeah. If you think about that really complex kids in Parkville, um, there's, there's lots of different agencies that will come together to help them and develop a plan and do all sorts of things.

[00:48:49] **Stephen:** But for the other kids who are just kids who just need help, um, they don't get that support. And so we, we probably tried to just put together the multidiscipline team that, that [00:49:00] listen, but we did it through the lens of school because education was really important. And, and we gave it a go. What if we get these kids back in school and engaged, will that solve our problem?

[00:49:10] **Stephen:** And pretty much everybody said, well, it'll go a long way to it. Cause at least if they start presenting with issues, the principals got a chance to see them. And understand what they're doing and then we can intervene.. So, so you know, it's, I think, I think it's still running. It's still running in a fashion.

[00:49:27] **Stephen:** Um, but, you know, we had to play with all sorts of deal with all sorts of issues around privacy and sharing information. And, um, but it was a bit, I dunno, people, there's a kid's game when I was a kid, a card game called go fish.

[00:49:41] **Mark:** Yep.

[00:49:41] **Stephen:** And it was when you've got a card the same, you say, go fish. It was, we put the operational people together from all the different agencies and the schools, and, you know, privacy said they couldn't actually exchange information, but they knew who the kids were.

[00:49:55] **Mick:** Yeah.

[00:49:55] **Stephen:** So it was, it was like a game of go fish. And I had very senior bureaucrats [00:50:00] that, you know, in government go, oh yeah, we have to get privacy, this and privacy that, and by the time I'd walked in the door, they knew they'd seen each other at different things. They'd seen each other outside court. They knew exactly which kids they were dealing with.

[00:50:14] **Stephen:** Um, and so we had to work through some how we break down some of the barriers of sharing information so that we can help these kids. So

[00:50:22] **Mick:** I think it said, I think a lot of the work that you're talking about in the civil war to the African communities and, and going back even to the summits and all that, like a lot of this stuff for me always comes, comes back to the same for us in the work that we do,

[00:50:35] **Mick:** if you look at it from a co-design lense where you're, you know, actually asking what are people, questions and how you can, you know, make change, but for the young people as well, they just need to see, I suppose, consistency follow-up action. And then that builds the trust because, you know, going back to what you were even saying, Mark about, you know, authority and, you know, you know, to a lot of young people, we, work with are used to [00:51:00] disappointing people or made to feel that the disappointed people, um, but I think as well, that puts up the guard but I think that's for me is, is how everything works in their approach is if, if there's an action, if there's a follow on, if the young people can see more than just that initial point.

[00:51:16] **Mick:** Cause they, they, all, everyone gets an initial point. Whether you're meeting with a police officer, whether you are meeting with us as a, you know, support, um, organization trying to get you to employment, you know, their first thing is, what you're going to get me a job? Hell, you're not going to give me a job then probably in their minds is, "you're not going to get a job." And we were like, well, hang on. Let's not talk about the job. Let's talk first of all, about the pathway. through. You know, and then finally they get the job and

then that changes and then it changes for that. And then they become the advocates for us. So going back to that summer, as well as you talk for us, what was good there is the voice is of the young people. We can talk all day on the work we do when we put a young person up who can actually articulate that to either [00:52:00] an employer or to a, you know, a room full of CEOs or whatever it is. It cuts straight true because it's lived experience, but it's also trusted experience. If they did it for me. You can feel it, come out of them, talk about it, that I think breaks down a lot quicker, than myself and Mark and even you Stephen even that go around the room, how many times have you spoken at things? How many times we've spoken? We spoke at things and I always say, sometimes you just need to get that cut through, which is why things like the that summer and things like that engagement and bringing the community and having young people that are, you know, advocates in there, strong leaders in there coming up makes a massive, massive difference.

[00:52:38] **Mick:** Goes back to your McDonald's point. It goes back to being able to talk to, you know, engaging elders and people like that who can actually then work with the families as well and educate you as well. So I think it's a really important point.

[00:52:49] **Mick:** I wanted to chat a little bit about what we have here, um, for longer, just, um, just in regards to policing itself, like [00:53:00] you have done an incredible job over the 40 years, you've worked with lots of teams, lots of people as a police, lots of circumstances.

[00:53:08] **Mick:** Like if you look back at some of the big incidents that you've been in, you would have been involved with, he was 2017. You would have been involved in the Bourke street tragedy. Now what I always think with police as well, people see one side of, of policing, which is, you know, authority side, the side and you need to do your job, but there's also a sort of side where you have to work through what you are dealing with and how you're working through situations.

[00:53:29] **Mick:** And that to me is fascinating. Um, when something like that happens and you're dealing with that, I know you did a lot of great work after that, about what we do in there moments when something like that happens or anything else. How do you train or how are you trained to be able to work under that severe heightened kind of pressure?

[00:53:48] **Mick:** If it is there under a situation that's, you know, has all the eyes on it and is volatile and tragedy are all in involved in it is, are the police today, really trained to be able to handle [00:54:00] that in a calm situation on the

outside when inside it's, it's, it's hard to keep in track. I'm just, I'm just fascinated by how you approach things like that and how police and teams approach stuff like that and are able to walk through it calmly if they can, and to, uh, to a positive outcome, if they can, within, within something that's so tragic or so challenging.

[00:54:23] **Stephen:** Um, I probably reflected on it more over the last couple of years since I left the police, I think. Um, and, and some of the things I've thought about in the first year after I finished, um, about, I think it probably took me 12 months to recover from 40 years of policing. And, um, to be honest, and I've said this to a lot of police groups, um, before I left and after I think when I talk to people is, um, there's no doubt, 40 years, I'm a different person and I'm affected by what's happened in 40 years of policing.

[00:54:54] **Stephen:** So there's certain things that I, um, affected me and I noticed, um, [00:55:00] I was, I was less, uh, not less, became more sympathetic to things that I saw in the first 12 months after leaving policing than I was when I was in it. So when I see a sad story on the news about some poor family, that's lost their mother, or in probably to survive in policing, you just put that out of your mind. You say that that's a, that's a matter for somebody else to worry about. That's not my job at the moment. I've got to be stoic and, you know, have a bit and put on a professional face and move forward. So I think, um, uh, there's a little bit of me that's probably not as empathetic and as sympathetic as I probably would like to think I would be.

[00:55:42] **Stephen:** And I've learnt that difference in the last couple of years, because there's some things now that I think more like that wouldn't have effected - that I wouldn't have thought that way two years ago, because my mindset was police, you know, everyday I get up go be a police officer and survive. Um, I don't know if there's, I [00:56:00] mean, there's a lot of work in policing to try and get people ready when they come through the academy and they get them, you know, part of surviving through the recruitment and the academy piece is they put them in higher stress situations. See how they go.

[00:56:14] **Stephen:** There's a lot of support for them. Peer support is really, really huge as far as their own peers, as, as a network and a support network to go and talk to people. A lot of psychologists, a lot of, um, mental health support, mental health training. So there's a lot of investment in the modern policing, which is good, I think right across the country, not just in Victoria, that's really good.

[00:56:37] **Stephen:** Uh, for policing, I think you have to be suited for it too. I've talked to a lot of young police that were really troubled by it, and I would often have a conversation about, do you think you're just not suited to it? Do you think you'd be happier if you just went and did something else?

[00:56:52] **Mark:** Yeah.

[00:56:53] **Stephen:** Cause a and some of them particularly being maybe 10 or 15 years, um, couldn't imagine what else they [00:57:00] would do. And I sort of had a conversation about, but what you're doing might be killing you, you know, like in the long-term it's, you know, you end up with you end up with health impacts from mental health issues in not just a mental health, but you end up in physical health issues.

[00:57:14] **Stephen:** If you persist. And you haven't, you're not happy at home and you're not happy. So the first thing in life, you should be happy. And if you're not happy doing it, you should go and do something else. So I used to counsel a lot of young police and older police too. It's about time to go. Um, and when I retired, compared to some of my colleagues, I left early. Some of my assistant commissioner colleagues had done more time than me and I still rolling around, you know? And they said, why are you leaving for us? Well, 40 years is probably enough. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:57:41] **Mark:** So you made that decision yourself. You didn't have someone tap you on the shoulder and say,

[00:57:45] **Stephen:** No, no, no. I do know that people were surprised I went..

[00:57:48] **Stephen:** Yeah. Um, I wanted to go and do something else. I went straight into school. I was going to try and work out what I did when I was going to do when I grow up. So I'm still trying to work that out.

[00:57:56] **Mick:** A podcast mate, [00:58:00] and you're trying to solve these massive crimes about garden gnomes. I can give you some insights on who that is too.

[00:58:09] **Stephen:** So, yeah, so there's a lot of, there's a lot of things to unpack around that. I think stoicism is really important for policing. You see that when you see that professional face, and I think the, you know, I get a chance to watch the news much more than I do it.

[00:58:20] **Stephen:** If you remember that, that really awful issue with the balloon accident, you know, the jumping castles is Tassie, and the two police women from, um, Tazzy, you know, giving each other a hug, you know, like, uh, it does, it does happen. You don't see it, but it is needed to, you know, the police are just people. Uh, things will affect will affect them.

[00:58:46] **Stephen:** And I remember you talk about Bourke Street. I mean, I was the command, you know, state commander control for Bourke Street, straight after, straight after it happened. I think I did a 12 hour shift or something in the control room, but if I I'm happy to be honest [00:59:00] here with the world, is that about 45 minutes or maybe a 90 minutes in, so you can imagine a big police controller and, you know, there's all sorts of people.

[00:59:10] **Stephen:** There's chief commissioners and premiers and all sorts of people asking questions coming through and you're in, you're trying to be in charge and you're getting everything set up. And at one stage there, I actually just stopped. I physically force myself to stop and stand still and breathe for two minutes just to read, just to get myself and get my head right.

[00:59:31] **Stephen:** And it was all happening around me. I got everything moving and everything was happening, you know, that all the resources were coming and the national narratives, the state responses, and then requests from national, how they could help. And cause you know, ambulance was here and everything else was running, but um, to cope as well, you asked how do you cope?

[00:59:49] **Stephen:** Well, I've got to the point where I learnt to actually occasionally you just have to stop and I stopped and breathe, you know, took two minutes to myself, had a breath and physically focused on [01:00:00] lowering my pulse rag. Yeah. Cause it, cause it was rushing. And so, so while the face was, you know, it's like the dark, you know, uh, well the face and everything was happening.

[01:00:09] **Stephen:** I dunno what my pulse rate was, but I'm sure it was over a hundred. So I just thought I'd just lower the pulse rate. So that's, that's an example of maybe, but I think for all police, it's about, if I can use that term is they, they've got to find ways in which they can lower their pulse rate. And if you can't, then you can't survive, cos it does get really tough.

[01:00:32] **Mick:** It's amazing. Thank you for sharing that insight as well, because the reason why I asked that I can really look at, you know, tragedies and, you know, you look at the news and you look at all that. And I, I felt the

same as defense counsel, the police. I looked at that and go, I think people don't see it. Sometimes they don't understand that they're the first responders sometimes to absolutely stuff like an, and they're human beings, they're parents, they're sons and daughters, you know, [01:01:00] brothers and sisters. And they have to see and, and not just see, but they have to work in it. They don't get a chance to walk towards something and step back, you know, most of the time they walk into something and have to continue walking in.

[01:01:13] **Mick:** So I just think it is some people, you know, that gets missed sometimes. I don't think at all, not, not a lot. I think people generally see the great wall, but I just think sometimes it gets a little bit missed because. Uh, I think it's, that's one part of what I look at now and go, God, that that will be how, how do you continue to show up the day out the week after whatever I did and continue to be able to put that in and how do you separate from it and what does it do to you as a person, you know, in your home life, in, in, in everything else?

[01:01:39] **Mick:** Cause I'm sure it has, it has an effect and obviously there's resources around it to support and counseling and all of that as well. But it's, um, it's, it's an honorable thing to do. And it's something that, I mean, people, you know, really, you know, need to take a step back ourselves sometimes and take two minutes to understand what police do on a daily basis and other emergency services, of course, [01:02:00] but what your police force do you on a daily basis to, to help people in very bad positions.

[01:02:07] **Mick:** Yeah. So, um, before we finish what we is, Steven. Solutions like what time as it reflecting like 40 years you've done. And you've been across a lot of different areas and you've talked a bit about it today, but how you engage with communities as well. Like. Where do you see the opportunities? And I mean, opportunities, cause there's not the problems we don't talk with promising solutions.

[01:02:30] **Mick:** Where do you see the opportunities going forward for the police force and working with youth in particular? Where do you see some really good opportunities? Or maybe some areas that we, some teams, maybe some gaps that are missing?

[01:02:43] **Stephen:** Well, on reflection, I think for me, the opportunities are, is, is the police can't do it by themselves. And there's still some that feel like that they're the youth, you know, police officer and now have their group of kids playing basketball and do other things. I [01:03:00] think, I think please still need to do that. But I think what we've probably demonstrated with the crew

that I've managed to work with over the last couple years before I retired is that one of the things police do really well is rally support around an issue.

[01:03:12] **Stephen:** And they're really good at leadership and they're probably really, probably good at, uh, Nudging or pushing, um, some people who probably need to be nudged and pushed. And they're also really good at opening doors. You know, you talk about employment and you know, like they, the know inspector police can go and talk to the manager of McDonald's and say, oh, you know, you know, but the youth worker can't do that.

[01:03:39] **Stephen:** They can, but they ask him, probably ask if they want fries with it or something like that. So police get away with a lot of stuff. They underestimate, what they can do and what they can do is really influence others to get involved. And I think, and be leaders and think through things and challenge.

[01:03:56] **Stephen:** Uh, you know, someone like me comes on this and I talked to other [01:04:00] things. If I talk in a different way, it really challenges. It really can. I can challenge people's thinking it might, I won't challenge young people's thinking and youth workers who much in, in, it might not challenge theirs, but I can challenge the secretary of the department.

[01:04:12] **Stephen:** I can challenge the mayor. I can challenge to see, uh, the council or, you know, I can, you know, senior place and, you know, you know, articulate police officers can challenge thinking. So I think the future of policing for me, um, if, you know, as they're heading towards that and, uh, the legacy, hopefully I've left some of it behind it continues is do the doing of policing, but also.

[01:04:36] **Stephen:** Um, for now also understand how you can bring other people together to solve a problem. You know, the idea of having the chief commissioner, having a summit on youth, like one earth, would you do that? Why would the - you're responsible for locking them up? Why would you have a summit, you know, like what would the cops do that? It's because the chief commissioner is a really important person. If he declares, he's going to have a summit people turn up.

[01:04:57] **Mick:** Yeah. Yeah. And it would [01:05:00] be crazy if I didn't ask this question. Um, and I know you've got asked lots of tough questions, your life by lots of people as well - But, is there a future of a blue light discos?

[01:05:11] **Stephen:** I think there is, but I don't think it's for young people.

[01:05:15] **Stephen:** There's a blue ribbon. There's a balloon light. The blue light foundation actually run, do a whole lot of youth work. Now they do, but their biggest fundraiser outside COVID when I can have it happen is a blue light disco where people in their thirties, forties, fifties, instead of a ball, I have a blue light discount and it gets sold out DJ gig.

[01:05:38] **Stephen:** um, No, they do it. It's a really, it's a really successful event. If you get a chance to patronage it, if it gets back on this year, might say, no, you can, you can promote it, but it gets sold out. So, so the, and they call it the blue light disco. So everybody that ever went to one....

[01:05:53] **Mick:** So wasn't such a crazy question.

[01:05:57] **Stephen:** So, um, and it's a good way. So yeah, [01:06:00] people are there at Google, Google, the blue. And there's a blue light foundation. I think they call themselves now. I should know. I apologize to them. Yeah.

[01:06:06] **Mick:** And we did some work with them with the YMCA around that, like way back years ago, at youth service as well. It's just funny. I just always hear it when I came to like, obviously I'm not from Australia, but when, you know, blue light discos as is, everyone knows Blue Light Discos, its an historical thing.

[01:06:22] **Mick:** I always found it very humorous when people would talk about them, you know? And the police from the disco. I don't think it would have went down in Ireland, but you know what I mean? But anyway, we'll see, we'll see.

[01:06:31] **Mick:** Last question, ask it, Dave, when it comes on, when you were younger, a young kid or whatever, growing up, um, what did you want to be?

[01:06:42] **Stephen:** Uh, I really wanted to be a lawyer, I think. I like to argue about things and I like language and articulation and hopefully the outcome of the podcast. People agree that, uh, and I, and from a CDC, I actually did. I did my law degree, my mature age student in my [01:07:00] thirties. I think I finished when I was four.

[01:07:01] **Stephen:** And then could have gone into, uh, and I did, I've done a lot of legal stuff. I've, I've been admitted to practice, but I haven't got a practicing certificate. So I ended up just staying in cops and I did law. I did legal things in the background, legal policy and government policy, but I think I wanted to be a lawyer.

[01:07:18] **Stephen:** So I managed to be a place prosecutor. So that was good fun. Um, and I don't know, maybe, you know, who knows one day I might be retired down the Bush somewhere and there'd be a little lawyers practice somewhere that wants an old cop. Who's a lawyer to come in and represent kids at the magistrate's court or the, you know, the DUI or something on there one day a week.

[01:07:37] **Stephen:** You never know. But, um, but that's what I wanted to be. And then, so yeah, I ended up being a cop, but yeah, who knows from here where I go. Um, you know, as we talked about, I'm trying to, we're trying to sort out the issues with the triple zero service in Victoria. So uh, we'll get that back in track. And then hopefully later this year, I can leave that behind and go do something else.

[01:07:54] **Mick:** Big challenge that?

[01:07:55] **Stephen:** Ah it's huge. Yeah. Yeah. It's huge. Same deal. They're just like cops, you know, there's [01:08:00] police, fire and ambulance, but the call takers and dispatchers, you know, like people ring up in all sorts of trauma. They're just wonderful. They're doing a wonderful job.

[01:08:08] **Mick:** Incredible job. And that's been hard. That's one of the things where you see TV shows like send a picture of one part of stuff, and you go that's not really that realistic, is it really? One of the things that, that, that emergency services, even, I know it's not obviously in Australia, it was in England as well, but when you get to listen to them calls and you get to listen, how that, how, and I remember seeing people on their first day of work or whatever, and they get these calls and how they walk through.

[01:08:33] **Mick:** To support the person on the other end of the line, who they can't have any eye contact with they can't have any, you know, even contact way. It's just talking them out of, uh, you know, some talking to them, true something that's tragic, like, like that's really challenging for them in that long it's it's incredible that service.

[01:08:51] **Stephen:** Yeah. Yeah. And I, that the ambulance called takers are first, my first day I went in as the interim CEO and I was standing at the back of the control room and a woman was [01:09:00] on the phone when the operators call-takers was on the phone. And I just stood there for a minute think, oh, I should wander around and say a lot of people.

[01:09:06] **Stephen:** And I could hear her say, now, can you reach down between your legs? And can you feel the baby's head? And I thought, oh my God morning, it's an average coffee rule. It's an average day. But yeah. Yeah. They deliver babies and, uh, and describe how to do CPR. That's incredible. Yeah. They save lives over the phone.

[01:09:25] **Mick:** So talking to young kids to them, to CPR, talking to people who've, you know what a parent has collapsed. Yeah. Nothing but respect that.

[01:09:32] **Stephen:** Yeah. So we'll work through it, so yeah, I'll, I'll finish there. We're working through the service, but the service issues is not about the people that work there. It's about people like me now, trying to make sure we get as much resource to them as we can.

[01:09:43] **Stephen:** And as you probably heard, I'm not backwards in coming forward. So now having a bit of a chat to government, what they can do on their..

[01:09:49] **Mick:** What's your time, what's your timeframes? And what way do you think you're looking at? Like, to be able to get it to where you feel is the, you know, where it should be?

[01:09:56] **Stephen:** Uh, we'll work away. Uh, we're not far, we're not far
[01:10:00] away, probably three months. I think we'll be able to get our head above the water, but it's a two year recovery process to get enough resources in this. I'm talking to government invest a lot more. Pretty sure they'll do it. We'll see how the Podcast, hopefully the podcast comes out.

[01:10:15] **Mick:** We know a few people in government. We'll give you a nudge for you.

[01:10:20] **Mick:** Thank you so much. Um, for today. It's been so interesting and educational to speak to you. I know we've gone around a lot of different topics as well, but, um, just brilliant. Thank you for coming in and sharing that with us.. And you know what - thank you for the forty years that you've given to Victoria and, you know, and Melbourne in particular and for your services, because it's not, you know, you might say, I, you know, you sit there and you speak articulately about it and all that.

[01:10:47] **Mick:** And you, you know, you're obviously doing great things now and all that, but it had to be challenging. You've had to seen stuff and been through stuff and not stressful situations as well. So, um, just want to say

massive thank you [01:11:00] for everything that you've given and what you're continuing to do as well for us. And as well Stephen, it has been an absolute pleasure having you on the podcast.

[01:11:06] **Stephen:** Yeah, no, thanks. No, it's, it's been a privilege to, to do what I do. And it's been a privilege to talk to you two today. It's been great.

[01:11:14] **Mick:** Thanks mate.

[01:11:14] **Mark:** Thanks a lot.