

#86 (MATT BLAND)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reducing crime features, conversations with influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers.

Matt Bland is the Chief Operating Officer of the Society of Evidence-Based Policing and an associate professor with the University of Cambridge. We talk about his background as a police analyst, the national intelligence model, and the state of evidence-based policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is Reducing Crime, and I'm your host, Jerry Ratcliffe. Now, before we dive into this month's episode, just a reminder that you can find me on Facebook: search for reducing crime, and on Instagram, where I'm at [reducingcrime_](https://www.instagram.com/reducingcrime_/) with an underscore (https://www.instagram.com/reducingcrime_/), that's reducingcrime_. Every few days, I drop a sub-90-second video reel thingy, whatever they're calling them these days, with snippets of policing and public safety research and ideas. 90 seconds every few days as an investment in your education? Perhaps to get an idea that could help you and your agency? And it's free? bargain.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. This month I sat down and chatted with a marvelous Dr. Matt Bland. Well, it was in a fancy dining room in a hotel in Cambridge, so to be more accurate, the gentleman took morning tea. Matt spent a decade and a half with Norfolk and Suffolk constabularies in the UK, in a range of intelligence and crime analysis roles during which time he studied on the University of Cambridge Institute of Criminology's MST in Applied Criminology and Police Management course. Subsequently, he undertook his PhD research at Cambridge and joined the faculty as a full-time lecturer In December, 2019. Last year, he took up the role of Chief Operating Officer of the Society of Evidence-Based Policing. Armed with his PhD from Cambridge, he has published a slew of academic journal articles, co-authored three books, and continues to hold a number of consultation positions across policing. We talk about his role as an analyst within the national intelligence model and the state of evidence-based policing, and at one point, somehow, I managed to drag us onto how many divorces are obligatory to be a serious organized crime detective.

I'm not sure how the hell I got there during the recording. Sorry about the espresso machine noise every now and again>

And just before we start, I never thought I'd have to say this, but no dogs were harmed in the making of this episode. Well, at least not by Matt or myself. Why do I have to say that? Well, listen on friends. Listen on...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because you've got this gig now with the society. You are the first employee of the Society of Evidence-Based Policing, and you really have almost carte blanche to say, okay, what are we going to do with this

Matt Bland:

Within reason? Yeah, but that's probably one of the reasons I was interested in the job in the first place, because it's a little working for a startup business where you are sometimes quite literally working out of your garage and working all the hours.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Have you got beanbag chairs around the garage?

Matt Bland:

Not yet. Okay. It's early days. Yeah. There's a little bit of that kind of what we're starting out here, so what's this blank piece of paper look like and what would we want to do? The danger of that is too much stuff and then end up not doing some of it well, because you've kind of taken on too much. There's that sort of balance between keeping everybody on board and not making yourself this kind of black hole at the center of the universe because you are the one who's worrying about it all the time.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. Everybody else is a volunteer. Everybody else, and they're all pretty much working in policing or related fields, right?

Matt Bland:

Yeah. I mean academia,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, they've got loads of free time, so don't worry about that,

Matt Bland:

But they're all busy

Jerry Ratcliffe:

People. Yeah.

Matt Bland:

I've got to choose to prioritize the things that you really want to keep afloat, so it's just learning to operate in that environment where it exists as a voluntary organization that's in its DNA. It needs to be that because I think that's its unique thing. It has one foot inside policing and one foot outside policing, so it's a bit freer than say, NGO non-governmental organization might be because SEBP doesn't have to toe government policy. It could say this report that contradicts the evidence.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think this is for all the evidence-based policing societies, that one foot in one foot out, because you have to also respect the fact that people work in these organizations, where they can't be too outrageous, otherwise it gets problematic.

Matt Bland:

Absolutely. Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's career limiting.

Matt Bland:

Well, we try and change that, I guess. Yes, absolutely. You can't be antagonistic for the sake of being antagonistic, but if you're going to be evidence-based, you've got to be able to stand up and say, No, hang on a minute, that contradicts this. Or look, do you know there's an evidence gap here? You're basing policy on where there's nothing there. We're not in that space at the moment. I think that's a vision for the future.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It also helps that you really know your way around what you want to do because you've been involved in policing since you as a youngster, really in your early twenties, weren't you?

Matt Bland:

22, yes. With a terrible haircut.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm sorry. Are you saying that this one you have right now is an improvement?

Matt Bland:

Yes, I Am. There's a bit less of it, but yes, it's an improvement I think.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What did you do before you joined the job?

Matt Bland:

Straight out of school, I went to work for a cruise line as a trainee, so I stood on docks and answered telephones and occasionally went on cruise ships. The target market was decidedly retirees, so it was a bit of a surreal experience

Jerry Ratcliffe:

World in any way sexy like cruise ships should

Matt Bland:

Be. It really isn't. It really isn't. They used to give us cruises for 10 pounds a night, though, so that was quite a good holiday if you didn't mind. Sort of dinner at 4.30 in the afternoon.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. Always soft food.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Absolutely. So yes, I did that and that's when I worked out was quite good with a spreadsheet and then saw a job in the paper that paid a lot better than the cruise line.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Hold on a minute. You found that there was a job in the police that actually paid better than something else?

Matt Bland:

Yeah,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Those are the heady days.

Matt Bland:

That's how Bad travel probably still is, to be honest, and then went from that industrial state doing spreadsheets to another industrial state doing spreadsheets, but for this time, for the home office, I was very young when I started in policing. What was that job? It was information officer in the uk. They have to put these annual data at Tell I got, I've fallen asleep already. They're a statutory legal returns. They have to put in to the government to document how many people they've shot, how many crimes there are, et cetera, et cetera. Was this for Suffolk Police? Yeah, this was for Suffolk Police.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Did they shoot anybody?

Matt Bland:

No. They shot some cows.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Seriously?

Matt Bland:

Probably. Yeah. No, we did have a bull. It was a rogue bull. It got retrieved to the playing field out the back of headquarters and the firearms officers had to shoot it. Yeah,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was probably their career highlight, wasn't it?

Matt Bland:

It's a big day. Yeah, it was a big day. Yeah, so I was in charge of overseeing those spreadsheets. We had the most antiquated systems. I was bored of a job in about two months, and I think I spent most of my time designing some sort of spreadsheet based cricket game to play and occupying myself during the day, and then when the national intelligence model got ramped up in this country, this is a different time in policing completely. It was like, well, here's a big load of funding to go and recruit a bunch of new posts, and I was in the right place at the right time to go into the intelligence world.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The push for intelligence that policing happened just suddenly, didn't it? That was around 94, 95.

Matt Bland:

It was a bit later. I think it was probably about 2002 three before it really started to pick up speed at sort critical mass space. When the national intelligence model, the NIM as it was called then, I mean it was very prescriptive. There's lots of guidance around, you've got to have strategic assessments, tactical assessments. There's these nine analytical techniques, and you need to have an intelligence manager and a principal intelligence analyst who's going to be head of profession and make analysts this thing in policing, which they hadn't been up to that point.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What did you take away from that?

Matt Bland:

Policing wasn't ready for analysis.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Was it frustrating?

Matt Bland:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was incredibly drive me to distraction type, frustrating. Here were these manuals, what analysis should be? The reality was incredibly Different.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There are clearly links to evidence-based peace leak, fuck me, jet lag, evidence-based policing that relates to problem oriented policing, intelligence led policing. All of these are much more data-driven, information informed.

Matt Bland:

Somebody's killing a dog. I think

Jerry Ratcliffe:

well is just before lunchtime.

Poor little thing. They're killing it slowly. You didn't foresee this issue coming did, but we'll go to this place where they kill dogs.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, it'll be much better.

Matt Bland:

Suffolk wasn't ready for it. Obviously. It's difficult to talk about what other places were like, but no, Suffolk wasn't ready for it. Officers on the ground knew best. I remember a superintendent saying to me, perhaps we just don't have enough crime for this stuff. We could get through the daily sheets in 45 minutes, and they were quite well across it. I was in one the smallest, most provincial parts of the country if it had been in Met big urban area might've been a bit different

Jerry Ratcliffe:

When we started with intelligence led policing. Do you think the gap was that the operational side just didn't see the value in it?

Matt Bland:

I think in pockets they did. I remember turning up on VCU and it was me and two others who'd just been recruited and going into a meeting with the district superintendent and saying, okay, well, we've prepared a draft tactical assessment for you, and so they sort of looked at me and said, well, what is that? I've never heard. We were sort of parachuted in and nobody was aware that we were coming case of a nationally driven change, codes of practice and doctrine sensor,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which you were all familiar with.

Matt Bland:

That's what you've been trained On. Perfect. Here's a manual. This is what you want us to do. We're ready, let's go. And then you get into the office and everybody, especially the legacy staff who were there before, sort of look at you and go, the fuck are you? And there was me, so 23 seasoned, experienced cops going, yeah, no. There'll be analysts listening to this going, yes, that was what happened to me as well.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes. What did you think of the national intelligence model when it first came out? Did it make sense?

Matt Bland:

Yeah, I think so.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Does it still make Sense?

Matt Bland:

Yeah, it could be overly prescriptive. I think that was some of the problem. It got adapted as time went on. Anything in UK policing, it gets done 43 subtly different ways just immediately, but the principles, they're pretty solid around strategic coordination, tactical coordination. The difficulty was dropping it just into intelligence. That was often the conversation we'd have is, well, intelligence says this, performance says this.

Well, hang on a minute. Those two things should be coming together strategically to be joined up. So there's some silo thinking around it, but a lot of it's common sense. You simulate the data to assess your threats. There's hot places. Some people, it's all consistent with evidence-based policing. The data might be subtly different. You're talking about qualitative stuff, you've got to assess the provenance and you've got to make inference-based judgments, which is perhaps the other way around, but it's pretty much the same thing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How did you get into evidence-based policing from there?

Matt Bland:

I got passed over for promotion. It's probably not surprising given that I had such a bad attitude not being accepted.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You Were not a great poker player then?

Matt Bland:

No, no, no. I think it was quite clear that I was frustrated with what we were doing, but I'd become principal analyst and then we were sort of going through this period of merging and there was a higher up job that I didn't get, which was no

problem. The person who came in was great. It was really nice to work for a boss who was like, okay, this is what we're going to do. This is analysis. I'm bought in at a senior level and going to do it. This opportunity to come here to Cambridge came up. I mean HAL days, the force funded 50% of it. College policing funded the other 50%. Go and do this master's six weeks a year, come to Cambridge, sit in a classroom and learn, and that was really my first contact with evidence-based policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you were one of the earlier students in the masters in, was an MST in

Matt Bland:

Applied Criminology and police management,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Applied criminology and police management. Yeah,

Matt Bland:

There are a few ahead of me, Alex Murray and people there were a couple of years ahead of me.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you enjoyed that time when you came here?

Matt Bland:

Of course. I mean for me it felt like I was cheating because I was coming here with cops who were then having to learn how to work with data there, and I'm thinking, look, I've been doing this for the last 10 years, so not using research methods, not doing it in the way that evidence-based policing was taught specifically. And it sort of gave me lots of ways to sort of connect this to the theory and other research that was out there, and I just wasn't connected to that at all. But when it came to actively doing the research, I was like, great, this is my bag.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Your data background helped you in that regard. So that's the areas where the cops were struggling. What areas did you struggle in that for? The cops went, oh yeah, we got this.

Matt Bland:

I mean this. In the reality of it, you'd read a study and go, wow, that's brilliant. This is a great study. And then cops would go, but that's not going to work. Here's why we couldn't apply that in this context. You talk about ride-alongs and there's real truth in that. When you are an analyst and you sort of de facto in an office, you're putting recommendations into your products, you've never carried those actions out, you've never been and done a hotspot. Patrol felt what that feels like to be in a high violence area. You've never kicked somebody's door in, you've never tried to be polite to somebody while you're stopping searching them and they're swearing at you and calling you every name under the sun. So it was

really kind of educational to spend downtime with cops and just talk to the fat with them about these different ideas. And I always remember that paper that Larry published following up on domestic violence experiments 25 years later,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is Larry Sherman.

Matt Bland:

This is Larry Sherman, And saying, oh, this is really interesting and cops going, but you're never going to be able to do anything with this. Here's all the reasons why that's incredibly helpful. You can't really put a value on that kind of lens.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It is handy having people around, operational people as a bit of a bullshit detector.

Matt Bland:

Yeah, definitely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That being said, I still think people underestimate, certainly working in American policing, there's a tendency to think if it's not from the US at least or from round here, it's probably not applicable, but I think there's still a lot of value in British police learning what American police are doing and vice versa.

Matt Bland:

Yeah, for sure. And Mark Evans said on this podcast, policing is, policing is different in the nuances and the administrative constructs, but the problems are inherently the same. Problems that there heart, this is one of the most difficult things with evidence-based policing is the fact that there are so many shades of gray. You can look at something like hotspot policing where there's this rich evidence base. It is going to be different in its application from London to New York to the rural areas. You can't sort of pick something up and then just drop it in and know exactly what effect it's going to have. And evidence-based policing is never going to be that. It's more of a structure around which to determine what you're going to do. It's like the form guide at the races. Where are you going to put your money? And it's sort of informing you about where your money might be best placed but might need to adjust for the conditions in your track that day.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I actually like that analogy because it is always, to some degree, a little bit of a gamble. There are horses that we know are more than likely to come in and horses that we know are already lame and borderline ready for the bolt. You never know which of them is going to be really worth where the money is going to be.

Matt Bland:

Nope. It's different every time where there's different grounds, different. I'll take this metaphor way too fast, so let's just stop

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There. Are there hurdles in the way or the weather conditions? Yeah, but I think it's even a good analogy in that you think how much the leader is, they're essentially the jockey, the police leader who's running the operation. Do they give a damn? Are they educated about it? Do they learn about it or are they just going through the motions?

Matt Bland:

Yes, the implementer, if we're going to do the analogy thing, let's try and channel it. Yeah. I think in that analogy, the implementer is the jockey because they can make a difference to the horse. It might be a 1% marginal gain, but they can make that difference. The people placing the bets of the politicians, the commissioners, the chief executives in the organization because they're picking the jockeys and they're picking the horses that they're going to back. The thing is it's never a sure thing. The form guide can be constructed in different ways. There might be some actually, this is just a really bad set of odds because the evidence behind it, it's really flimsy

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Or

Matt Bland:

There's not a lot there. There's a lot of guesswork that's going, we've never seen this horse before. We've never seen this horse on this type of track. And the thing with evidence at the moment is there are so many different permutations. Crime problems are changing all the time. The interventions is changing all the time. So trying to just keep up with that and do that in a rigorous way is a massive challenge. We need to be more accepting of broader ranges of evidence. We can't be shy of level three studies before and after with a comparison group.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh yeah, I think they're great.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Chuck 'em in there. If They're all you've got, they're great. Better than nothing, let's use it. I think people have done a little bit of a disservice to evidence-based policing by tying it too closely to randomized trials. And I think people are finding that they're not thinking that they should be advertising their study as much. It's not a randomized trial. And I keep telling people, no, it's great because right now in that area, it's better than what we have.

Matt Bland:

And I think it's a little of an incorrect criticism. EBP is about randomized control trials in its most pure form. You might say, well look, that's one of the strongest forms of evidence. But like I say, there's so many shades of gray and it's not

about that or nothing. That's all of that is incredibly complex. We do want RCTs and we do want quasi experiments. We don't want to piss off the experimental criminology community because a BP needs them. But at the same time, it needs to be open-minded about less rigorous evidence because this is practice

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And I think there's a lot of stuff at lower levels that is still really, really interesting and we can learn from it. So you graduated with your MST from Cambridge University. That's a considerable achievement and went back to Suffolk. And what was it like now that you had even more knowledge?

Matt Bland:

I think for me personally, I enjoy my job a lot more because I'd seen something different, sort of refreshed me a bit in terms of a new sort of perspective on policing. And certainly it had the connections. You do make great connections with other people who go here as well. That had given me another sort of insight into how policing works. That was good. I think my research didn't really catch on back at home in the force, but I'll always remember Larry writing to me, Larry Sherman writing to me and saying, this is a fantastic dissertation. And I think that was probably the first time somebody had said to me, you're really good at this. And Barack Ariel, who was my supervisor, said to me, come do a PhD and you had me at Hello.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm There

Matt Bland:

I'm there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And then you got a job here.

Matt Bland:

So I took redundancy from policing 2018 and went to work for Larry Sherman's company, the Cambridge Center for evidence-based policing. And that's when a vacancy came up here and then I jumped over to come here. The timing very fortuitous.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You taught for some time and you're still involved here in the MST at Cambridge?

Matt Bland:

Yeah, I still have two days a week

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Increasingly in the United States, there are PhD programs, there are master's programs in police leadership that are starting to grow. As you're aware, I'll be running the master's program in applied criminology and police leadership at the University of Pennsylvania. What is the role that they fill? Because you've obviously had years of experience of that here.

Matt Bland:

Well, it's really hard to quantify the value of it in terms of, I think it's almost too high to be able to put a value on because, so we are pulling together the conference agenda, national Evidence-Based Policing conference later this year. And we are saying, okay, who do we want to speak here? And you can sort of come up with the academic names and say, we want Jerry Ratcliffe, we want Barak. We want these big names. But what the community of practice wants is to hear from other practitioners who've done the research, have been there, seen this multi-headed beast that is academia and tamed it and come back to

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Work. Right? Show me somebody that looks like me who has been successful at this.

Matt Bland:

And the MST does that. It produces them in numbers. And we are now starting to see where's the next trache of these academics coming from, these trailblazers that you can sort of hold up and we can all name the recent ones, Stacey Rothwell, Dan Whitten, who's around last year, Tina Wall, these people who they're doing the circuit now and they're talking about the research they did here and what they've done when they've taken it back to work. And then you can sort of see the trail from that to, well, crikey, that's rapid video response. That's a national policy. Well, yeah, that started with Stacey's thesis here. So how do you value that?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And they are making a difference and they have to make a difference because certainly in the US side, government funding for this kind of thing has dropped off significantly. I think also a chunk here in the uk. So evidence-based policing won't survive unless there's homegrown talent, people in policing doing this work.

Matt Bland:

100%. It's terrible to say that you have to sell it, but you do have to sell it because people in policing are so busy and they've got problems to solve, left, right, and center. So you have to explain to them what's the benefit of you investing your time in doing an evaluation or sending somebody to go and get the skills to be able to do that. And if you can't show them case studies from very recent memory, it's so much harder to sell.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So what's the pitch? How do you sell evidence-based policing?

Matt Bland:

The pitch is, I mean this sounds incredibly cheesy, but how do you justify not doing this if you are type for resource, is your type for money a type for time? How are you justifying placing those limited resources into something that you don't have an idea about whether it's going to pay off or not,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But how do you then overcome what you ran into when you first arrived in Suffolk, which was, yeah, we know what we're doing. We don't need this.

Matt Bland:

Really. That's my answer to that

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Really. But that's what you go with in this. I can't imagine you as a 23-year-old not making friends with that approach. Well, I'm not sure I took that approach then with age comes with wisdom and just a small amount of how fuck it

Matt Bland:

With age comes, I don't give a fuck anymore. I think it's not black and white between you've got to do things the evidence-based way or you've got to do it professional judgment way in policing. You're always going to be using professional judgment. It's a professional judgment job.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes.

Matt Bland:

But are you going to sit there and say, I don't need to know what anybody else ever tried and what the outcome was because I know best that kind of macho bullshit. This is 2025, like everybody's working with data and artificial intelligence is everywhere. Let's get real about it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Data is essentially more of a scientific approach. There's a great quote I like by Neil Degross Tyson, which is, that's the great thing about science is it's true whether or not you believe it.

Matt Bland:

Yeah. Look, we're talking about social science a lot of the time here, so who knows.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. Well he also says about social sciences, it's harder than hard science because social science involves humans and humans and nonlinear,

Matt Bland:

Well, not just they're nonlinear, but how the hell do you measure half the things they do? So again, are you telling me that it's just your judgment that's going to crack that?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But then you do run into people who are threatened by science and the data because they don't understand it. And you talked about cops coming on the MST as their first exploring really into the data and all that side of things they'd argue is it's not my opinion, it's my experience and experience. People perceive experience to be much more valuable than just I have an opinion.

Matt Bland:

Of course.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And this is where I think analysts have to be very careful about converting their analysis into something that is readable and understandable to their decision makers. Because otherwise I don't understand this and I'll defer to my experience because I've got 30 years doing this and you haven't.

Matt Bland:

And who wouldn't do that when your arse is on the line? I don't think evidence-based policing should or can argue for anything different based means it contributes to policing. It's not like it dictates it will never really be in that position. I don't think that's ever achievable or even actually part of the mission.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I see all of this as not replacing your experience as a commander, but enhancing it.

Matt Bland:

Indeed,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's about helping you make better decisions, but it's not about making the decision easier.

Matt Bland:

My master's dissertation, it was on domestic abuse records and it was 36,000 or something over a five year period. The way Larry Sherman talked about it at the time was what cop can read 36,000 records and tell you what the trends are none. But that doesn't mean that everything in those records is the universal truth because that's not true. They're still just records. But why wouldn't you want to know what they say? Because that might help you. I totally understand why people were threatened by it and absolutely everybody in the societies of evidence-based policing and the other agencies that are trying to push forward this agenda need to be really cognizant of that at the heart rigorous

methodology and that sort of the scientific approach. That's what we're about. But you don't have to be absolutely puritanical about it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The purest approach is never going to win over people.

Matt Bland:

No, no.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you mentioned moving forward this agenda. What is the agenda?

Matt Bland:

My confession about the society is that I wasn't really involved in it until they gave me an employment contract, which is interesting because I was involved in evidence-based policing and I've sort of reflected

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Deeply involved in, I mean,

Matt Bland:

Yeah, I've reflected on that a lot. And I think my conclusion is that it's not there for people who are deeply involved in evidence-based policing. First and foremost, when I had spoke to Alex Murray, the founder about it, he sort of said, how did this get started? He said he sat in a room in here in Cambridge listening to Larry Sherman, and he thought, how the hell have I not come across all this stuff in my career before? I dunno what rank he was, but he wasn't just starting his career. And he said, I didn't want other people to be in that situation. I wanted there to be some group that could put this out there and spread the word.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So it's not about more preaching to the choir then?

Matt Bland:

No, no, it's the opposite. It's about trying to tell people there is a choir at all and why don't you come and join in? There is another level to it. It's not just about well come and join the society and be in a cool club and you can have a badge. We want people to get some value out of it so they can use their society membership to access research or understand the principles or meet people who can help them do those things or learn more about specific topics. Because one thing I do know from being in the choir is that when you've got a problem and you say, okay, what does the evidence say about this problem? Unless there's a systematic review on it, it's really difficult. You have a really specialist set of skills to either go out and find that and then interpret it. That's really difficult. And the society has a role to play there,

not to usurp others that are out there doing this very well, global policing database, college of policing, but to try and signpost and amplify and make things more accessible to people who've got 60 seconds to understand something.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So what's the vision? Where's next?

Matt Bland:

Well, we've created this place on our website called a members hub, where only members can get into it, but it's free. So just join up and you can get in there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes. Why would you not want to join something that's free that gives you access to all these resources, but yeah.

Matt Bland:

Yeah. But that's the idea. We want it to be too good to be true to. So people come and join in and then access free training, access and call digital tools that will help you talk to Crime reduction toolkit. Go on a community forum and if you've got a problem with fly tipping in your neighborhood, real micro problem, post it up there and find six other people who've also got the same problem so you can compare notes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because all these resources are useful wherever you are in the world.

Matt Bland:

Yeah, I mean, we are UK focused, so we are unapologetically UK focused when we write about topics. We're not going to explain what UK conventions are. For a global audience, it's

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Easy to,

Matt Bland:

That anybody can come and join in. Yeah. Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think you're absolutely right. I think these days, if you dunno evidence-based policing, you don't dunno. Policing.

Matt Bland:

Yeah, there's an argument that, I mean, in this country, every new officer is now getting a whole module in it and having to do an assignment on it. So it's becoming part of the fabric. And you wouldn't have imagined saying that 20 years ago.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

People ask me what groups I like to do teaching and training with, and it's always more experienced people because I think people in their first five years of policing want to do some of the stuff you were talking about earlier, driving fast cars and kicking indoors. And I kind of like it when people are later in their career when they're, well, shit, I've done that for five years. Is this all there is? Is there something else that has more longevity to it? And find those people who are looking for something else. Do you know what the experience has been giving this training to people who are brand new, have no experience of the job?

Matt Bland:

I mean it's a mix and they are doing the job as they're going, but

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They're still very shiny

Matt Bland:

And new. They're still very new. I mean, I think it's important to talk to that group of people about this subject early so they don't realize how things are. We don't

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Go 20 years and then discover it.

Matt Bland:

Absolutely. Certainly. And talk to people and they say, look, some of these projects that people are working on, student officers are working on their own evidence-based policing research, small steps level, but they're saying they're really good and actually they've got value for their organizations in terms of taking them up to managerial level and say, look, people are giving some real implied thought to these things.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. I mean not every one of them is going to land, but if you get one or two that's better than you had nothing before, people are starting to practice,

Matt Bland:

Get the muscle memory from what it is, but then think the feedback I'm learning is they're going into the workplace, the radio's going furiously and they're not getting the opportunity to put this into practice. But that's just anecdotal. Look, that's level, level zero on the Radcliffe scales. I think it's a big deal that we've got the opportunity to talk to people at the start of their careers about evidence-based policing. And I think then the challenge comes to put that infrastructure in place so that they've got something to pick up when they're at that fourth year, fifth year from recognize some of the key terms. They've got some of the grounding,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's not coming at them.

Matt Bland:

It's not the hell is this, this is all completely new to me. So we've got to do that the other end of the scale because executive leaders will be giving them how are we setting that up and joining those dots up in between. But how fantastic that this is even a thing in UK policing that I think is quite an achievement.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What about some of the new stuff? My Instagram feed is full of AI and crypto and that probably tells you something about my algorithm. I'm not telling you some of the other shit that turns up in it and there's all this new world. Is that a place where there's a role for the societies of event space

Matt Bland:

Policing? Yeah, definitely. I mean, AI is the wild west when it comes to the policing sector at the moment. It's just people making land grabs left, right and center. And I'm involved at the moment with an evaluation of live facial recognition, which is a tool which has been around for a few years. It's evolving all the time. How on earth are we making proportionate decisions without information about the effectiveness of these types of tools? So evidence-based policing comes even more important. That's kind of been the roadmap to navigate that kind of chaos. But it's so fast. That concern is when you talk about the people who can do specialist evaluations, it's a small community. Most people know each other. We go to the same event several times a year, and you kind of build that network out. It's probably less than a hundred people,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which puts the field in a very vulnerable place.

Matt Bland:

It does. And also the imperative on broadening that network and upskilling the practitioners around even recognizing the need for some of these things.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And I think you are right that we have to have more of the academic community involved in all of this kind of work. I'm not sure what it's like here, but a lot of academic departments in the US where you've got criminology and criminal justice departments where more people have abolished in their profile than are studying policing. And policing is the biggest part of the criminal justice system. So I'm not sure that we can rely on academia to move things forward. So the fact that you're bringing in practitioners even in these kinds of areas and academics is really important.

Matt Bland:

I hesitate to say this because I've been in rooms with the medical community and talked about medicine being the goal. I don't think it's not the goal, but it's a good model. It's a good model in the sense that it's normalized. The conversation around evidence is normalized. They might not agree, but they're used to having that conversation. They're used to it being a factor in their practice, and they can do that at practitioner level. Yeah, I think that's a great ambition. You ask me, what does a society want to do? I suppose it's that you get to a place where in 20 years time or whenever you stop and talk to a cop and they can converse about why are you doing that? Oh, well, here's the research behind why we do

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That. And for me, I think at the other level, it's also, it would be great to be able to just walk into executive policing leadership rooms with a new idea and it just becomes normalized to say, okay, so we're going to pilot this first. And you start to use the language around how to set up a reasonably robust, doesn't have to be randomized, but a reasonably robust trial. And everybody gets why and is already on board. You don't have to do the cell

Matt Bland:

Before it's happened.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes, we did this citywide. Thanks very much. I'm leaving the room at that point.

Matt Bland:

Yeah,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm doing this across the whole of the city. I wish you wouldn't. Please don't. Yeah, absolutely. Let's trial it first as you're moving forward, what's getting you excited?

Matt Bland:

The job for me is trying to build SEBP UK into a bigger operation. I mean, that's taken me to some really interesting scenarios. I was on a conference last week that we were sponsoring with one of the regional organized crime units and trying to talk about the benefits of evaluation to a room full of detectives drizzled, seriously organized crime detectives.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's obligatory. Be beyond at least your third marriage just to be in the room, isn't it?

Matt Bland:

Couldn't comment. I'm a bit worried that I'm on my second marriage, so no, we won't go there. But I think that's an interesting thing and an interesting test for evidence-based policing to take it into new parts of policing and say, how

does this look for you? That's really cool. And I sort of enjoy having those conversations and saying, okay, let's think about this. Beyond the sort of normal conversations around, okay, how does this work in a neighborhood policing setting? Because we've trodden those boards many times. They're important

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Hugely. But

Matt Bland:

Policing is broader than that. We need to go out

Jerry Ratcliffe:

In September, there's going to be a national evidence-based policing conference. Tell me about that.

Matt Bland:

That's the 10th and 11th of September up at Jason Roach's house. Not Intellectual house, but the University of Huddersfield.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You know what? I think he secretly owns a ton of cash. I bet we just do it his gaff. Okay, so if we can't all squeeze into Roche's house, this will be at the University of Huddersfield in September.

Matt Bland:

Yeah, that's right. So we were keen to go north again in that vein of trying to take EBP to new communities. And we're badging this as the national EBP conference for the first time. It's been the Society of Evidence-Based Policing Conference for the last 12 years, and we're going to launch the National Evidence-Based Policing Awards at the same time. So we're looking forward to that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Great. So if people want to find out more information, where do they go?

Matt Bland:

[Www.cbppolicedoukcbppolice.uk](http://www.cbppolicedoukcbppolice.uk).

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Fantastic. Well, we've managed to drag out morning coffee now till, I think it's a beer and lunchtime.

Matt Bland:

Fantastic. Alright.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Cheers mate.

This has been episode 86 of Reducing Crime Recorded in Cambridge and April, 2020. At reducingcrime.com you can find episode transcripts and if you are an instructor and DM me, I will send multiple choice questions for every episode. Subscribe at Spotify, SoundCloud, apple, or wherever. Otherwise, I'll take your dog to a Cambridge Hotel Tea Room.

Be safe and best of luck.