

#59 (MARK EVANS)

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Reducing Crime features conversations with influential thinkers in the police service and leading crime and policing researchers. Mark Evans OBE has a decade of working at the executive level of the New Zealand police and is currently their executive lead for future policing. In a previous career, he reinvigorated crime and intelligence analysis in the police service of Northern Ireland. We discuss what he's learned about change in innovation in policing in large agencies.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm Jerry Ratcliffe, and this is Reducing Crime.

Mark Evans, OBE is the Executive Lead for Future Policing with the New Zealand Police, and has been a member of their executive team since 2011. He is the chair of the independent advisory board at the Royal New Zealand Police College and has an operational portfolio focused on fair and equitable policing outcomes, evidence-based policing, and the future use of new technologies. He was also the New Zealand Police lead for their response to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the terrorist attacks on two mosques in Christchurch on 15th March 2019. Prior to moving to New Zealand, he worked in numerous positions in Northern Ireland, culminating as the Director of Analytical Services for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. For his efforts, he was awarded an OBE – that is he was named an Officer of the Order of the British Empire – in 2006 for services to policing.

An innovator in the education and practice of evidence-based policing, he has an MBA from Manchester Business School, was inducted into the Hall of Fame at the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy at George Mason University last year, is a Visiting Professor at University College London, and is Vice President of the Australia and New Zealand Society of Evidence Based Policing.

Good grief. I don't think this guy ever sleeps.

REDUCING CRIME PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

We caught up one February morning at a central London coffee house. It's a good place for, let's just say, off-campus meetings. So I'm not going to reveal the location, but please bear with a little background noise in the proximity of the coffee machine. It was a chilly morning, so I wasn't going to interfere with the baristas working their magic. As you join us, I was just explaining to Mark why I wrote my latest book, *Evidence-Based Policing: The Basics*. Yes, a shameless plug and its on Amazon, and the goal of making the book accessible to frontline policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

For me, a chunk of it is about just demystifying evidence-based policing...

Mark Evans:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's horrible because if you listen to academics, of course, what they want to demonstrate half the time in their presentations, how clever they are or how hard they worked, and then you look at police officers who want to get into this going, "I can't do this." And of course, they can.

Mark Evans:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We just have to set realistic goals for what it is it. You may not win the Stockholm Prize because you're not doing a non-linear multi-level model. But you know what, if you get a control area and a target area and you try something in that area and you've got a comparable area just doing business as usual, you are doing evidence-based policing. If you're reading the literature, using it, you know, are doing evidence-based policing.

Mark Evans:

So we set up a center and then the challenge I think is around how you make it relevant to frontline policing. And we can over complicate things in ways that make it really difficult for people, or you can talk to people in a language and do things that it's undeniably the case that it's made a difference to the way that we police. But you have to make it relevant because the people who deliver the service of policing are the frontline officers and the sergeants who decide what we're going to do today.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The sergeant is such a role in policing, isn't it? The sergeant, you can come up with the best project in light, if you get the sergeant's buy in, it could be fantastic.

Mark Evans:

Yeah. Well, I think the sections, beat constables, and they look to their sergeant, as in that, that sergeant is critical.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Absolutely.

Mark Evans:

He or she.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Absolutely.

Mark Evans:

In terms of probably their career pathways, to be honest.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Very much.

Mark Evans:

And in the sergeant indicates to them what's important today, where we're going to go, how we're going to police...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And what we care about.

Mark Evans:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes. And what we care about, and that's very much an interesting signal. It must be quite a change moving to policing in New Zealand because it just has so many more different cultural elements to it that make it very different than your previous experience involved in policing in Northern Ireland.

Mark Evans:

So we've established a really eminent panel of community academic experts to work alongside the police as part of our understanding policing delivery program. And many of those individuals have grown up through really interesting work in the community, whether it's in the health field, the education field, or some of them actually in the margins of policing. But all of their expertise is helping us think through actually how we get some positive change if needed, in the way that indigenous communities perceive the policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But you didn't start in policing, you started over in the 'secret squirrel' side, didn't you?

Mark Evans:

Well, I did international relations at university and had no idea what I wanted to do, other than travel, actually.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The people that used to scare me at university were the 19-year-olds who absolutely knew what they wanted to do. Those people are terrifying.

Mark Evans:

Yeah, yeah. You're right. Yeah, and life's not really like that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No.

Mark Evans:

Actually, so I left and became an accountant in Bristol, actually in the west of England. And to say I hated it and wasn't very good at it would be an understatement. So anyway, it led to me making different choices and I ended up working for defense intelligence actually in the Ministry of Defense.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Not an oxymoron The old ones are the best.

Mark Evans:

And to be honest, they gave me really good training and sent me not quite all over the world, but to places I was really interested in. And yeah, did some fascinating stuff in the Middle East and South Asia. Really learned, I think about how intelligence works, how to rate effectively, how to work with decision makers. And particularly I think how to use intelligence when things aren't going so well and people badly need advice, insights, that are going to help them make a better decision.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's interesting that the first thing you highlight is the importance of good writing.

Mark Evans:

The ability to write precisely, to come to a conclusion, to actually have an opinion, and to construct an argument that leads you to the conclusion, I've discovered is a skill that not everybody has.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So especially with people coming up nowadays, it's not just sending somebody a shit emoji?

Mark Evans:

The ability to construct an argument is critically important, and I don't think that's really changed. I tend to spend my days now as I'm more of a decision maker than a technical person, and I don't really have time to read more than a couple of pages. I really need to know what people think so that I can compare and contrast it with my perspective and then use it to hopefully make a better decision, which seems to me to be what it's all about.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right, but isn't that the antithesis of how universities teach people how to write?

Mark Evans:

It would appear that that's a different sort of skill to the traditional research looking depth, provide all the perspectives and then come to a view end, not necessarily write in such a way that you expect somebody to take action on it. And it's that action pace that I think makes intelligence and the work of evidence based policing different to the work and research that's done at a university. So I tell people, "We are not a university." There's a place for academic studies and it's valuable, and research does inform and guide a lot of what we do, but it's not what you are paid to do in your day job.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Change to thank your decision makers comes back to our discussion to some degree about the value of sergeants. I'm constantly surprised at the naivety of a lot of academics who complain that nobody pays attention to their research, but they don't actually interact with the decision makers or the frontline at all. They never go on ride alongs, they never go on police meetings. They just sit remotely, download some data, write some academic journal article in the Bangladeshi Journal of Sheep Stealing and Criminology, and then complain that nobody uses their work. The naivety is astounding.

Mark Evans:

Well, I've been fortunate that people like yourself, Gloria Laycock, who came to Belfast when I was working there and ran a session with, they were then area commanders, about burglary.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Mark Evans:

And this was in 1998, I think it was. And frankly, opened my eyes to what an academic who understands policing and wants to work with frontline officers can actually do for you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Mark Evans:

And it made a big difference. She spoke in a language that people understood. There were some really practical ideas in it. So it's about understanding the culture and landing an argument in an environment where people say, "I actually understand this and I think it'll make a difference."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Mark Evans:

And actually it did.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes. Well, we jumped a little bit. What made the move from defense intelligence? Tell me how you got from there to working in Ireland, oh sorry, working in Northern Ireland?

Mark Evans:

Yeah, Northern Ireland. Yeah. The Northern Ireland office was setting up this unit, so in the mid 1990s, fair to say that Belfast was a bit of a wash with terrorist money on the Republican and the Loyalists side, and a unit was set up to try and take some of the money out of the paramilitaries. So me, together with a smallish team, were given some specific powers to invite people in and require them to answer questions.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're wording this delightfully.

Mark Evans:

And I think we made a little bit of a difference. Professionally, it was a fascinating time and I think we created some space to allow a conversation around what became the Good Friday Agreement.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's true.

Mark Evans:

And it taught me a lot about the importance of really good intelligence to guide investigations to the right people in the right place.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What was that move to go from military intelligence and from national security work when you started to see more and more about what was involved in policing? Police intelligence work, the decision making an environment around security and intelligence is very different than policing.

Mark Evans:

It's a little bit of an unusual pathway, I think for people to choose, I think it was the Northern Ireland environment, it seemed like a logical thing at the time because I got asked to extend the work that we were involved in to organize crime, for example.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What was your impression of frontline policing delivery day-to-day policing delivery in Northern Ireland at the time?

Mark Evans:

It was tough.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They transitioned from being the role, the Royal Ulster Constabulary to being the Police Service of Northern Ireland, though going through a lot of change, which seems normal for policing every day now.

Mark Evans:

Yeah. Well, of course the organization, it was the badge, it was the uniform, it was the structure, it was the lead. I mean, pretty much everything changed. I think the organization, for a number of years actually, was under enormous pressure and there was a lot of different views and opinions about whether it was the right thing to do. And it was obviously part of the changes around the Good Friday Agreement, and changes to policing were seen as an important contribution to lasting peace. So I was always immensely impressed with the ability of police officers to go about their day-to-day business and do their best for communities even in the face of what was going on.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's funny, we both had some experiences in different parts of the world around policing and if you can go in different places everywhere from Denmark, to El Salvador, to Northern Ireland to New Zealand, and there are always things you can find that are very, very different, but so often it's the frontline dealing with the same stuff. The circumstances might be a bit different, but they're still dealing with burglaries and vehicle thefts and...

Mark Evans:

Yeah, it's my experience, the policing is broadly similar.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Mark Evans:

There's only so many ways to break into a house and thump people, and police officers around the world are dealing with human beings. Policing is policing I think.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because people are people.

Mark Evans:

Yeah, yeah. I think so. Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You took on the role then of heading up analysis for the police service of Northern Ireland.

Mark Evans:

Yeah, so we set up an analysis center and created really a capability with analyst supporting everything from terrorist murder investigations, through to community policing, and heavily intelligence problem orientated.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

When you were in the police service in Northern Ireland, if I'd become a commander of an area, basic area commander, what sort of training would I get before? Would I get much training before or...?

Mark Evans:

In my experience, we don't really educate commanders or decision makers around how to use, so...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is fascinating.

Mark Evans:

Yup.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I've worried about this a lot, because so much of policing is reflective of, "You are good at an individual role. You're going to deal with an individual case." You might become a detective, and then you're clearing individual cases, or if you're on patrol, you're going and dealing with an individual domestic, an individual burglary. You're dealing with individual cases, and then suddenly career-wise, you get in a position where you are in charge of crime prevention strategy for an area of fifty or a hundred thousand people, and it's not about individual cases, it's all about broad strategy and you have no experience to get there.

Mark Evans:

And I think that's one of the things around the education of middle and senior police leaders that I think we haven't spent collectively enough time on. There's a lot of discussion around what we should teach leaders and how we educate people in the sorts of things that matter when you get to middle and senior management. So I think it's not a technical thing we need to be teaching people. I think you've got staff who can do that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Mark Evans:

It's about educating people, but how to make use of how to ask the right questions. I mean, I think books written in plain English that help people understand these things.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, that was kind of the goal of my book, *Reducing Crime: A Companion for Police Leaders*, because even in there I've got how to ask good and bad questions at CompStat.

Mark Evans:

Yeah, yeah. I think there is a need for more academics who are out in the field and can translate some of this stuff, and so that it becomes part of the education of a senior police leader. We try and turn intelligence evidence into action through tasking and coordination. And actually running a good meeting which has got insights, ideas for action, and then decisions around how to resource the problem. It's sort of a simple thing, but we don't teach people how to do that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

None of that.

Mark Evans:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How long were you in Northern Ireland for?

Mark Evans:

1993 to 2007.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's a chunk of time.

Mark Evans:

Quite a long time. Yeah, yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What precipitated the move to New Zealand?

Mark Evans:

Well, I guess I think you and I met actually at a conference in Wellington and I remember, and looked quite nice, and I had a long weekend and I remember standing next to the Pacific and thinking, "This seems like quite a nice place to be." Anyway, I'd stayed in touch with a few people, and they emailed me asking for advice about a head of intelligence position, and I sent a job description back and more in jest, to be honest. At the bottom of the email it said, "If you're thinking about advertising this internationally, let me know." It seemed like a good professional opportunity and a chance to do something different, and that's what I did really.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you've been there how long now?

Mark Evans:

Since 2000 and... Well, permanent since 2008.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You started as the first national manager for intelligence.

Mark Evans:

Yeah. So there wasn't a national manager and New Zealand was due to host the Rugby World Cup, and we'd been involved in a number of some Five Eyes meetings, and that sort of...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

To stress, that Five Eyes are the collaboration of five intelligence countries that work together, which is the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Mark Evans:

That's right. Yep. Established after the second World War, actually. Yeah, I started as the first national manager. I was then lucky enough to be appointed as the director of intelligence, so I had a larger group. And I set up the New Zealand Police National Intelligence Center. It was a very small capability when I arrived there and we extended the reach of intelligence across all of the districts and created a national system. Used to be really quite localized with no national standards.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There were 12 districts in New Zealand, and you set it up so that you had an intelligence manager in each district, who was also high in the hierarchy, so very close to the district commander.

Mark Evans:

Well, inspectors, or civilian equivalence, reasonably senior middle managers who had the ability to influence decision making. And that seemed to be quite an important...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because you can't influence decisions unless you've got a seat at the big table.

Mark Evans:

You need to be around the table. Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Mark Evans:

It remains an ongoing challenge, even in the intelligence field, to have enough operational staff with the right experience to fill some of these roles. So I'm not suggesting that the problem's solved, but the structure exists, I think whereby that influences are brought to bear at the table.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is that what you work on first? Is structure more important than thinking about the skill sets?

Mark Evans:

I always think it's most important to get the right people, frankly, in what you want. I think of people who are interested in changing things, probably in a particular way, a little bit of courage to tell people they might be wrong. I remember in Belfast once, standing up in front of a room full of detectives, there would've been 200 people in the room, and the assistant commissioner I worked for in the day, stood up, and almost the first thing he said to the room was, "If Mark's not making you feel uncomfortable at least some of the time, he's not doing his job properly."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Blimey.

Mark Evans:

Which I still remember to this day and...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What an intro, there you go. Stoney silence time.

Mark Evans:

Yeah, and the room was silent, but I think he was right. And I also think that when people reflected on it, they kind of understood what he meant and it became the subject of some good-natured discussions. And there's a way to make people feel slightly uncomfortable without embarrassing them or making them feel inadequate.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Most of the time I make myself feel inadequate.

Mark Evans:

I always think it's about asking good questions. And my experience is policing is very good at learning from other people. So somebody tries something, it goes quite well, I'll have some of that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes.

Mark Evans:

We'll try it here, and actually we're going to do it better. So I always feel in policing, showing people, demonstrating, and allowing people to see the results is the best way without forcing people to do stuff. And if it works, people will adopt it, right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you finding some value then in New Zealand pushing evidence based policing now?

Mark Evans:

Yeah, so more recently, as part of a program I worked for called Policing Excellence, The Future, the previous police commissioner, he had an idea of taking sort of insights to the next level, if I can put it that way. We'd had some contact with a range of academics...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And that wasn't too depressing?

Mark Evans:

Some of it was good, some of it was good. Hey, to be fair, he sort of had a vision without really knowing how to bring it to life. So we discussed how we would do that, and the idea of an evidence-based policing center was born and there was no money.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Never is.

Mark Evans:

Yeah. So what I set about doing really, was to try and bring a bit of a vision to life by repurposing resource we already had, and then extending and improving the relevance of some of the research. So we had a research capability for some time, but what we tried to do was to bring this together and then focusing on specific things that we thought would make a difference to frontline policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you've already had a research capability within New Zealand policing, that was a normal thing?

Mark Evans:

Well, we had a few researchers I think that were doing specific pieces of work in individual units.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Mark Evans:

Arguably interesting and useful, but not necessarily designed to influence mainstream policing, if I can put it that way. Enough to deal with a particular problem. And if we needed to look in detail, we would've gone to a university and asked somebody to look at something for 12 months and then write a report and come back. And there's still a place for that, but it's not what the philosophy of the center is about, which is very much trying to be evidence informed and driven, but to do that in a way that's relevant to frontline policing in a time skill that's appropriate and in a way that engages people. So it's a little bit different in the sense of having that operational mindset.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. You've been working in New Zealand, which has historically had a very low crime rate. So what your concerns are, are not just about crime, but also in terms of thinking about police legitimacy, trust and confidence. How do these things mesh with that traditional perspective of dealing with crime and disorder?

Mark Evans:

It is interesting. The crime rate I think is one measure probably, and reported crime to the police is arguably not the best measure of crime in the community, and it's something that we've thought quite a lot about.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And what's better?

Mark Evans:

Well, I think you combine that with public sentiment surveys. There's a New Zealand Crime and Victim survey that's done annually that replicates what's done in England and Wales, and it probably paints a more complete picture of total crime.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So many places I go to have no community surveys that are reliable indicators of sentiment in the slightest.

Mark Evans:

Yeah, yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They're missing a whole spectrum of knowledge then.

Mark Evans:

Well, I know that police data is highly dependent on the way in which we choose to collect what our priorities are. So perversely, the harder you work on drugs, the more of a drug problem you've got.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Of course, yeah.

Mark Evans:

But that's lost in the statistics. We may have a relatively low crime rate, but we've got a gang problem that's become much more significant in recent years.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Really?

Mark Evans:

We have a child homicide rate that's really not where it should be. And I think between New Zealand and Australia, we've probably got the world's most profitable drug market for some types of drugs. So we've got problems and challenges like other people, and I think the way that policing responds, and the need for policing to be seen, to be responding in a professional purposeful way, is the same as it was in Belfast and is the same as in other parts of the world, I think.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But a lot of these are also complicated by the issue of demographics in terms of race and indigenous or first nation peoples. That's got to factor into that discussion about police legitimacy and trust and confidence, right?

Mark Evans:

So the indigenous population, the Māori population in New Zealand, is significantly all represented in the criminal justice statistics. And also if you do look at the citizen surveys, the trust and confidence in policing amongst indigenous Māori population is lower, significantly lower, than it is for and white European New Zealanders, for example. So I think we all acknowledge there's work that needs to be done. And probably the more significant initiative in that respect, it's something that we've set up called Understanding Policing Delivery.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And that's its formal name?

Mark Evans:

That's the formal name of the program. And was born really out the conversation that took place in New Zealand, as it did in many other parts of the world after George Floyd, and concerns about the fairness and equity of the delivery of policing services. So the program is set out to focus on three specific questions, at least initially. Who we stop and speak to, the use of force and against whom, and police charging decisions.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, right. Because in New Zealand it's the police that make the decisions to run the prosecution.

Mark Evans:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There isn't a separate prosecution service.

Mark Evans:

So we take advice from the crime prosecution service, but equivalent, but police decide who to charge. And then, so we've got quite a lot of discretion and choice in some areas, and we've been working quite hard for what we might call lower level crime, to find alternatives to the formal criminal justice system.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Honestly, that's been very much a police-led initiative to do that.

Mark Evans:

My Māori Pacific Ethnic Services Deputy Commissioner colleague has been working with the community really for 20 years probably on a program to look at alternative resolutions for lower-level offending that requires less than six months.

Waitstaff:

Should I feed you? Any tea, coffee?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Actually, a cup of tea would be great, please.

Waitstaff:

We do Earl Gray, English Breakfast, lemon and ginger. We do have wings.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Of course you do. You do it all, but I'm very basic. Just a breakfast tea with some milk, please.

Waitstaff:

Yes, yes, yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Thank you.

Mark Evans:

I'll have another one of these, please. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Waitstaff:

It's a pleasure, okay?

Mark Evans:

Where were we? I've forgotten.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Talking about your deputy.

Mark Evans:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, building a program called Te Pae Oranga Iwi Community Panels.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What's the relationship between Māori and Iwi?

Mark Evans:

Maori is the indigenous people and Iwi is the tribe. So you would belong to an Iwi, which is your tribe.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, so there's multiple Iwis, but you're all part of the Māori people?

Mark Evans:

Yeah, yeah. Below Iwi, the Tapu, which is the sort of subset of a tribe. So I think we're now up to 34, 35 panels around the country. Anybody can appear before them. So although they were born out of the work within the Māori population, it's not exclusively and so anybody can end up, in the right circumstances, appearing before one of these panels. And what they are attempting to do is to take a more holistic view of the person.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That sounds like a good thing for everybody.

Mark Evans:

Everybody, yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Mark Evans:

Did you know that policing often deals with people on the worst day of their life?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Mark Evans:

And often an individual has had cruel life experiences, maybe health problems or education problems or homelessness problems, a whole range of different things, and what we're trying to do through this, understanding policing delivery work, is to take our view around how can policing, what levers does policing have, to deal with some of these issues?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think what also people fail to appreciate is that there's also a strain on police who are forever dealing with people who are on the worst day of their lives. It just gets exhausting after a while. And if we can find ways to root people out of that, that's why I tell people, "I used to love foot patrol", because on foot patrol you met everybody. Whereas soon as I got in the car, the only people I met were people who were stressed. They were either the victim in crime or they were the suspect in crime. All you meet every day is people on their worst day of their lives. So if we can change that around, it's actually going to help policing, right?

Mark Evans:

Yeah. Police is at the sharp end of this and sometimes the choices that we've got lead us down a particular pathway. What we're trying to do with the research is first of all, find out frankly, because there's all sorts of reports and opinions and perspectives. Actually nobody's worked with the police to understand the issue. That's probably the first thing. And the second really important thing is, I am sure that we will find examples, individual examples, probably problematic and challenging.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We're going to get it wrong. It's going to happen.

Mark Evans:

But this is about systemic issues. This is about whether our policies and procedures lead to particular outcomes for some communities.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm just astounded to hear that there are communities and organizations out there that want to tell you how to do your job without asking you about it.

Mark Evans:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm shocked. I'm shocked.

Mark Evans:

I think it's a feature of policing, isn't it?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Mark Evans:

Everybody's got a view.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm shocked to find gambling going on in this place. In terms of refocusing what the delivery of policing is, because the central tentative is trying to explain to people, as you said earlier, who gets stopped, the charging decisions. How much of that involves working with people who've just got strong opinions before they even understand policing at all?

Mark Evans:

We got work to do. So our own staff need to have confidence in what we're doing because they are delivering the service of policing and they need to feel confident that they can tell us what's happening so that if we need to improve things and change things, we can. And they have confidence that we're not going to pick individuals and hold them accountable, when actually it's a leadership problem and a system problem.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Mark Evans:

And the community probably needs confidence that we're serious about the work. We have deliberately set out to talk about fairness and equity. Now there are lots of other labels that people want to put on some of these things, but I have a difficulty in believing that fair and equitable policing isn't something we should all strive for. And what we're trying to do is work with an independent panel and a police frontline operational advisory group together to try and identify where the opportunities are, agree on the language, and help everybody understand what this is about.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, you've got a whole committee set up of just frontline cops? How much are they in conflict? Because there's often been, or perceived to be a conflict, between management policing and frontline policing, and they're often at loggerheads with each other.

Mark Evans:

So the model was purposeful and deliberate, in terms of saying the way policing is delivered depends on, I think we talked about it earlier, frontline sergeants and constables.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Huge, huge.

Mark Evans:

And they are the people who ultimately will come into contact with the community and make choices. So this frontline group, and we've got, I think now 32 individuals who've been nominated and volunteered.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Not voluntold.

Mark Evans:

Not voluntold. They want to be part of it. And what's been interesting is we've had a number of joint meetings between frontline police staff in this community panel. And it'd be fair to say that the early meetings, there was a level of uncertainty and possibly a little bit of tension. As they work together, it's been quite interesting to see the common interests which have emerged.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I love your choice of language, possibly a little tension. As a master of understatement, I can just imagine there was blood on the floor, but yeah.

Mark Evans:

I don't think there was blood on the floor, but I think people were concerned about what the other side was...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Forthcoming changes, yeah.

Mark Evans:

And so a group of academics, as you know for frontline police staff, can sometimes seem a bit intimidating, can't it? And they're concerned they'll talk a language that... And I'm not really like that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I don't know, I wouldn't describe them as intimidating. And generally I'll say a group of, I don't know what the collective term is, but when I see a group of academics, I think it's a confusion of academics.

Mark Evans:

I think the idea really is to allow that exchange of ideas.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But all of this has to be implemented, and I think implementing change in policing is incredibly difficult. Implementing real change. Yeah, you've brought change in Northern Ireland, you've brought change in New Zealand. How have you found success where a lot of other people have failed?

Mark Evans:

I think for me, implementation is by far and away the most poorly understood and least well thought through area of what we do.

Waitstaff:

[inaudible 00:30:49].

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Thank you very much indeed.

Waitstaff:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Cheers.

Mark Evans:

So we design a great plan and spend 90% of our time on the planning and 10% on the implementation.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And was it General Von Moltke said, "No plan survives contact with the enemy."

Mark Evans:

That's right. So what I find myself doing really in my career frankly, is spending much more time with decision makers on implementation and allowing other people to work up the detail of the plans. I find myself sitting often in multiple meetings for long periods of time with decision makers, implementers, and helping them understand how to do this

on the ground. And that's the piece I think in most of the ratings and most of the research that we seem to miss. And you'll find implementation is very context specific. For example, we've tried to replicate some of the experiments on repeat victimization, that have been done in the US and the UK and New Zealand, and it doesn't work in quite the same way.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right, but the theory is sound.

Mark Evans:

The theory is sane, but the context and the environment are often different. Everybody might be committed to the plan, but then events happen and the ability to deploy staff to the same location for the amount of time that we need them to be there to prove the hypothesis, gets undermined because something else happens. And so instead of acknowledging that, what we do is sort of pretend that we're really doing the things that we're not, and then something fails. It's not because it was a poor plan, but the implementation hasn't been right, but we don't really understand it. There's something around implementation sayings I think that's quite important in a policing sense.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So it's not just a matter of sitting in the headquarters writing a memo and then have this naive expectation that people in the field are implementing your grandiose ideas.

Mark Evans:

In my experience, that almost never happens.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, the memo happens.

Mark Evans:

The memo gets sent.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh yeah.

Mark Evans:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And then we think that the job's done.

Mark Evans:

Yeah. Yeah. I think you have to be incredibly persistent. It's hard work. It can be exhausting, but when it goes well, my word is it rewarding.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That involves getting out of the office, doesn't it? And involves getting out of headquarters.

Mark Evans:

Absolutely. Absolutely. Walking the ground. And some of my best and most challenging experiences have been sitting in front of groups of frontline staff in debating the why with them. To get change, in my view, people have to understand the why.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes, and they buy into it.

Mark Evans:

And they buy into it, and is often a little bit of a how as well, right? Yes. Okay. I understand why. I don't really have the tools to know how. So there's a bit of that. But fronting those conversations, which are almost always quite difficult to begin with, because people naturally want to understand why what they're currently doing needs to change. "For good or bad, this is what we do, and now you want me to do something different, tell me why."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes. Even in those circumstances where they're not happy with how it's being currently done, but you are bringing something new and that involves some sense of risk.

Mark Evans:

Yeah, Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This goes back as far as Machiavelli and his writing about people are just not being invested in the new order of things, but being invested in the old way, even if it wasn't perfect.

Mark Evans:

That's right. And what I have found is if you listen to staff, they will tell you what's working and what's not. The worst thing to do is to listen and then push on and do what you were going to do anyway.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've been there through a whole range of things now in New Zealand, the Christchurch terrorist attack in 2019 with the Royal Commission as well. What was it like working and policing through it? What were the lessons you picked up from those areas?

Mark Evans:

So Christchurch was a tragic event. So an individual, who we have collectively chosen never to use the person's name, murdered 51 people at two mosques in Christchurch and injured 40 other people. So in one of the particularly significant features of the event, it was livestreamed, so the individual attacked individuals with weaponry and broadcasted live using a camera on a helmet. And so it was widely disseminated across the internet on all sorts of websites. And it became notorious really as a terrorist act because of that, as well as the tragic number of people that were killed.

The policing response was one of the most impressive I've been involved in, and two frontline constables in Christchurch arrested the offender within 17 minutes. And so the immediate response was very impressive. Clearly in the days and weeks after that event, there was a lot of concern about whether there could be other events. And so I was the executive lead for our intelligence work in the days and months afterwards. And it was incredibly challenging, I have to say, dealing with the volume of information. The need to tear down any potential other risky individuals. And my recollection is, is one of the most challenging six or eight weeks of my professional life I have to say.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because there was just so much there. So much gone.

Mark Evans:

There's so much information.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I've written this before. We used to be information poor, we're not information rich, but knowledge poor. Trying to figure out from that massive information, what are the parts?

Mark Evans:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That are significant. That's the biggest challenge of the 21st century.

Mark Evans:

So if you don't know something, you can legitimately say, "We didn't know" It's much more difficult to explain something if you have a piece of information in your system, but you fail to identify, "What's the significance of it?" Because if and

when things go wrong, and somebody reviews, you had information, you could have done something, you didn't, and that's a problem. Well, I think I've spent my professional life doing is, is trying to reduce and manage risk and to ensure that we've got good systems and processes to maximize the value of every piece of relevant information. And that requires good systems, but mainly it requires good people.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We've talked about the intelligence side, we've talked about the data side. All of that leads us to your moving forward, I think more than just about anywhere else I've been to in terms of bringing evidence-based policing. What's the receptivity you've had for evidence-based policing?

Mark Evans:

So, I think to be fair, the organization's probably had 10 or 12 years of thinking about using information in positive ways. So the organization's philosophy has been around prevention first, that's required more of our data-driven insights approach. And we've done quite a lot on problem solving. I won't pretend that we've embedded it, but we've got district commanders who many of them are familiar with the principles. So as an organization...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, they've done more than just tick a box in a promotion exam.

Mark Evans:

Yeah. Well, I mean think we've got a number of commanders who are active supporters in the trade and stuff, and I think honest enough with themselves in the organization to know when it's worked and then to acknowledge when it hasn't.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Mark Evans:

So it does require a level of maturity. And I don't think you can simply launch into, "Today we're going to be evidence based." Like it or not, you need to go through a maturity conversation, I think. Probably the single more significant piece of work that the center has done, as an evaluation on our new staff safety model, our tactical response model, which is multifaceted, but at the outset we set out to evaluate the impact of the changes that we were making around equipment and training and systems and processes. And the operational lead assistant commissioner worked with the evidence-based policing center on the design of that to ensure that the center evaluated the results. Now, I'm not suggesting there wasn't a level of healthy tension.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There's good corporate speak right off the bat there.

Mark Evans:

Healthy tension.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Healthy tension.

Mark Evans:

We had an evidence-based policing center, sorry, Evidence-Based Policing Global Society's conference.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes.

Mark Evans:

One of the presentations was a joint presentation between the operational staff involved in that staff safety tactical response model, and the team of researchers that have worked on it. Really interesting session. It's online. Fascinating conversation, I think.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

If I'm working in a mid to large police department and I don't really have much knowledge or an evidence-based policing capacity or center, what would you say to me? What's the selling point? Why should I?

Mark Evans:

I would say most people are in that position, frankly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Mark Evans:

I mean, people have got a day job and actually it seems a bit discretionary, doesn't it, in some respects?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

A bit esoteric and academic.

Mark Evans:

Yeah. Yeah, that's fine. You do that because I've got a job to do here. For me, I can honestly say that I don't think policing has ever been under more scrutiny than it is today. I think it's critically important that we police in a way, because policing by consent as a model requires policing to have the support of communities to be successful. So while we're doing our day job, we really do need to understand I think, the things that matter. So interestingly, we have policing by consent in our strategic plan. It's not well understood. So a random example I can tell you of staff in a typical district,

probably 20% of them might have heard of it. And interestingly, of the people that had heard of it, most of them thought policing by consent had been developed by the current police commissioner.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Wow.

Mark Evans:

Cause it was in our plan now,

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Now, no sense of the history of democratic policing?

Mark Evans:

So for me, there's something we have to do to raise the level of understanding and awareness about some of these things. And so I would say that the way we police and understanding some of those elements that give the community confidence in policing is really important for everybody. And in terms of what to do and to read, there are some good recent publications that I'm looking at too.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Marvelous.

Mark Evans:

Book on Evidence Based Policing: The Basics. I understand it tells you all about this now.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Now you know there's no way I can cut this out, right?

Mark Evans:

It's a really good, and I'm not just saying this, I think you wrote a previous book on intelligence led policing, and dare I say, I think I endorsed it. I think I have a comment on the back of it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's your mistake.

Mark Evans:

Essential read, I think.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's your mistake.

Mark Evans:

So, I do think there's a role for academics working with practitioners to get that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Now I have to buy your lunch. Oh, bloody hell.

Mark Evans:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Mark Evans:

Look, I just think everybody should be given access on this sort of material.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So now after that plug, I suppose I'm going to buy you lunch, but for spending a bit of time with us this morning. Cheers, mate. Thanks very much.

Mark Evans:

Thank you very much. Nice talking to you, Jerry.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was episode 59 of Reducing Crime, recorded in London in February 2023. Follow @_ReducingCrime on Twitter for new episodes, or @Jerry_Ratcliffe for my personal random ramblings. And consider subscribing at Spotify, SoundCloud, Apple, or wherever why don't you? If you teach, you can DM me for transcripts or an Excel spreadsheet with multiple choice questions for every episode.

Be safe and best of luck.