

EP07- Shaun Braybrook ACM

Voiceover [00:00:05] This is William and Lonsdale, a podcast about the legal ecosystem in Victoria and the fascinating people and stories that make it tick. Today's guest is Shaun Braybrook. Shaun was born on Wurunjeri land and has strong connections along his maternal grandfather's line. The Kuku Yulanji of North Queensland. Shaun is also the managing director of Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place, which provides Koori men on a community corrections order the opportunity to learn new skills, reconnect or further strengthen their culture and participate in programs that address their offending behavior. When Shaun was growing up, he and his family were often the only Kooris in their suburb, school or workplace, and racism was ever present. But Shaun's mother, Wanda, was a force to be reckoned with, instilling in their children a strong sense of pride in their culture and heritage.

Shaun Braybrook [00:00:52] Yeah mum was a great lady and probably this sums it up well. When me and my sister were young and when going to school, that sort of thing. My sister always tells this story, how she would always see mum hiding behind trees looking at us as we go off to school. She'd wonder why, we'd be at the playground and mum would be looking at us from behind trees, so she was always looking out for us, mum.

Michael Green [00:01:38] Firstly, Sean, we'll start with congratulations, you became a father for the fourth time a week ago today, almost to the hour, I understand. It's a wonderful thing. We all love and celebrate the birth of a new baby. So, congratulations to you and to your partner, Marinda, yet maybe more so to her. The fourth child is a boy, Jarra?

Shaun Braybrook [00:01:58] Yep, that's him. Jarra.

Michael Green [00:01:59] How's he travelling?

Shaun Braybrook [00:01:59] He's doing really well. And I've got to say women are absolutely amazing aren't they, for the birth of children and everything they go through. Just amazing.

Michael Green [00:02:10] How is Marinda after having her fourth child?

Shaun Braybrook [00:02:12] Yeah. She's doing really well. Probably the hardest thing is getting her to slow down a little bit. Take a step back and have a bit of a rest. She's home from hospital, and Jarra's home and doing really well. And she's getting back into the groove of everything, in the swing. So, she's doing really well.

Michael Green [00:02:32] Having four young children, that is a real job.

Shaun Braybrook [00:02:34] Yeah.

Michael Green [00:02:35] So, Sean, you were born in Williamstown, grew up in Melton in the late 60s and the 70s. At that time, Melton was not the busy, bustling, growing suburb it is now. It was more like a little country town on the edge of Melbourne. Your family was the only Koori family in the area. What was it like growing up and going to school in that environment?

Shaun Braybrook [00:03:03] Melton was like we said, it was it was a small place. There was only eight thousand people there when we grew up. It had its ups and downs. It was it was really good. It was good to grow up in that small community, especially surrounded by family and that, and lots of things to do as kids and that as well. Lots of park area and paddocks and all that sort of stuff that we used to muck around in that. Being the only Koori family there was a little bit tough as well. You know, especially going through school, bit of racism and things like that.

Michael Green [00:03:32] So, I mean, I guess its sort of a sink or swim situation, either you learn to cope and you maybe grow a bit of a tougher outer skin or...

Shaun Braybrook [00:03:40] Yeah, it's sort of, it's probably come more apparent to me later on in life when you go through school, when you face some of them in the playgrounds and things like that, being a young Koori kid, and you get teased and you get taunted and throughout school and that. But really, as you grow up and you start to know, some of the name calling in schools and that sort of thing, you don't really nail it is being racism because of the fact that, you know, how did these kids know these things? How do they know to call me abo had they know how to call me boong. And as you grow up and get a bit older, you realize that it was a real racist sort of thing. Wasn't just kids playing in the playground just stirring or just picking on someone you know? There's a real racial overtones.

Michael Green [00:04:24] From there you went to the TAFE at Melton. You really enjoyed that because you were able to work with the hands, something which you were good at doing. And then in year ten, you left school. You're 16 at the time to start a plumbing apprenticeship in Footscray.

Shaun Braybrook [00:04:39] Yeah, it was it was really good. It was the tech school was a great place. You know, you learn a lot through trades, really, really felt that real connection, being able to use your hands. You know, as Aboriginal people, we see things we fix things and using the hands was something really good for me and really enjoyed that. That plumbing apprenticeship was an Aboriginal apprentice program through DETE at the time, and they took young Aboriginal kids and give them apprenticeships and helped them through that apprenticeship. So I was lucky enough to win the plumbing one and ended up at the ammunition factory in Footscray, which is a really, really great job for me through that time.

Michael Green [00:05:14] Sean, even though plumbing was a great opportunity and you loved it because it was working with your hands, something you're good at it wasn't all plain sailing. It had its difficulties as well. How did things work out in that apprenticeship for you?

Shaun Braybrook [00:05:29] It was a fantastic opportunity, but it did have its challenges. And being a young Koori kid in the ammunition factory at the time, there was over 119 apprentices or something like that. And most of them were fitter and turners, and painters, some carpenters. And there was one little Koori kid that was apprentice plumber at the time in there. So it did have its challenges. And probably, to sum it up a little bit, the first day I actually worked there, I got dropped off, mum dropped me off at the front gate and I went into work and the foreman took me up and took me into the room where I'd be working out the back through the paint shop and the carpenter's shop in the plumbing shop out the back. And here the men were standing in there, circled around having a chat. When I walked in, I felt as if there was something being said about me, like being talked

about. And then the tradesmen introduced me. He said, "oh, here's our newest apprentice he'll be really good on the on the practical stuff, but not so good on the theory stuff". And that was my introduction to the world of plumbing. So, I really had really mixed feelings about it, and the men, they were all alright. I'd always remember going home from work that day and sort of having a chat to mum and about whether or not it was the right place for me. Then later on, a couple weeks later down the track, one of the tradesmen actually turned to me and said to me "oh, Shaun, remember when you first walked into the ammunition factory and we were having that meeting?" I said, yes. He goes, "Well, we were having a meeting saying how we didn't want a little Aboriginal kid working for us". He goes, "but you're not a bad kid you're alright aren't you. You do alright don't you?". So, we really, really grew up with a thick skin. But definitely through that whole time, Mum was a real force and we'd shared lots of that stuff with mum.

Michael Green [00:07:09] She does come across a remarkable person, your mother, in her wisdom and her depth of knowledge and her view of the Australian community as it was at that time, and being able to see beyond it and being able to see what was important for her children. She strikes me as a remarkable person. So, you worked as a plumber until your mid 20s looking for a change. An issue comes up again, your mom. She was working for VACSL at the time, the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Ltd, and she saw a job at the Bert Williams Center in Thornbury as a youth worker. And this brought you in touch with the Criminal justice system for the first time. And you felt like it to be something worth trying.

Shaun Braybrook [00:07:59] Yeah, that's right. Once again, it was mum again, I was tracking along and already finished me plumbing apprenticeship against great odds and was well supported because it was an Aboriginal program that had seen me become a licensed plumber and worked through that. And then Mum presented me this other opportunity here of this other job. And at the time I was a little bit sick of plumbing, crawling under houses and doing all the plumbing stuff that you do. So, I ended up taking the job on in the Aboriginal Youth Support Unit as a youth worker, which was a fantastic job. I couldn't believe that they paid you for it. Being a youth worker, I was setting up football programs and me and my brother even founded a Koori triathlon squad through this whole time. But the thing I really took away from that job and the things that I really love about it was how my life experiences as a young fella growing up, sharing them with our younger generation and the younger kids that were coming through at that time and connecting with and understand and their struggles, that was a real warning part of the job.

Michael Green [00:09:02] Any particular people or young men, maybe, I guess more than women stick in your mind?

Shaun Braybrook [00:09:07] Great stories, lots of great success stories. And fellas that we worked with, and some sad ones as well in that time. But these three brothers, they were fantastic young men and they're only really young at that time. One was 12 and the other one was 11, another one was about eight. And we actually come in contact with them through... It was actually DHS at the time that put the Aboriginal Youth Support Unit on to them and asked us if we could locate these young men, the three boys, their mum had been in jail, they went into foster home a little bit backwards and forwards. Then when their mum would come out of jail, they reconnected with their mother and was living with their mother in some really terrible things were happening with the mother's boyfriend. The mother actually got put back into custody. DHS were worried about the fellas, the young men, couldn't locate them. So, they come and contacted us to see if we could locate them. So, we actually went around their house one day and all the house was boarded up,

locked, locks changed and all that sort of stuff. And the next day I went back there early in the morning, here's the young boys, they were climbing in and out of the back window, going home at the night time. We end up getting them into our Aboriginal hostel at the time and looking after them and formed some really great friendships with them young men and helped them through that really difficult time in their life where they really needed that structuring guidance from a family and strong figures in their life. This wasn't just a short-term thing. This was over many years, I had the young boys come out and stay at my house on weekends and let them join in my life a little bit as well.

Michael Green [00:10:39] So, Sean, after being a youth worker with the Burt Williams Center in Thornbury, your next role is as an Aboriginal liaison officer at Port Phillip Prison. How did that come about?

Shaun Braybrook [00:10:53] So Port Phillip had youth unit within there. And I'd visited that a number of times and gone in and seen the fellas and did different things like that. So I knew about the prison situation as well. Then at the time, Phil Egan had had the prison been a private prison, had contacted him, asked him to look at running an indigenous program. So how do they get indigenous workers working in the prison? The prison made contact with me if I'd come in and work inside a prison. At the time, I said no. I said, no I don't think I want to work in a maximum-security prison, wasn't sort of high on the agenda. But through Phil's influence and the prisons influence as well, they got me to come into the prison. We went into the Koori Education Unit and invited up all the inmates at the time, all the Aboriginal inmates. Quite obviously, I knew a lot of them growing up in the community, knowing the community, working as a youth worker, and knowing families and all that sort of stuff. So we sat down that time. We had a really honest chat with all the fellas inside the prison. And I thought to myself, well, maybe there is something I can do. Maybe I can help in this area. So that started my journey off in Port Phillip prison. I went on and worked at Port Phillip Prison for the next five years as the Aboriginal liaison worker inside the prison.

Shaun Braybrook [00:12:10] We brought in Healing Programs, a program called the ACIP program, Aboriginal Cultural Immersion Program that ran inside the prison as well. That really helps men understand culture and understand their identity and really start them on a cultural journey, which is great, a great program. And then also a program called the Marumali Program. And the Marumali Program is a healing program and it looks at transgenerational trauma. So trauma that's been passed down for the Stolen Generation and Generations on. And so you might not have been removed. But what's the effects of that still on your family today? So it looks at that still runs today within the prison, creating change and helping men.

Michael Green [00:12:54] And you had the idea to broadcast community radio program?

Shaun Braybrook [00:13:00] Now that was a fantastic idea. it was it the first year that I worked in a prison as well. Port Phillip Prison, being a private prison, were really open to the concept of Aboriginal programs and what we could do so we can implement a lot of cultural stuff within the prison at the time as well. The big NAIDOC celebration that still runs now is coming up to its 20th year now at Port Phillip Prison, they still run a T-shirt competition where the fellas all designed a painting. Then they get to pick it and it goes on their prison T-shirt. Then we had this idea, I had this idea about broadcasting live from inside a prison. In the prison situation they're the forgotten people, people that we lock up are the forgotten people. So my theory was, let's bring the outside in. Let's try and get services to come in. Let's try and get people to come in to help support people. So when they transition out the gap's not as big, and the radio station took it to the next level. So

Kelvin Anderson, he was a director at the time in the prison. So I went in then and like I said, I'd only been in the job about six months and I walked into the director's office and said, "How you going Kelvin, I've got an idea for you". And he goes, "What's that, Shaun?" I said, "Any chance of bringing a radio station in live and broadcast from inside the prison?" And I thought, he's going to kick me out the office and say that it's his silly idea. Move on. But he really liked the idea, really liked the concept, and really challenged me to take it further and to find out a lot more. So with close work with some of the prison staff in there at the time, some of the programs people and also 3CR the community radio station and Kutcha Edwards. And we actually got the radio in there and got it up and broadcasting from inside the maximum-security prison. Now it broadcasts across the whole prison system through NAIDOC, its 18th year. And it's just grown from that little idea into this big one now.

Michael Green [00:14:49] And can guys in prison to communicate with their family outside through the program?

Shaun Braybrook [00:14:54] They have interviews in the prison so that they would sit here like we're doing now, talking, talking over the microphone, Kutcha will interview them and have discussions about prison life, have discussions about family send cheerios to family members, really important for Aboriginal people to maintain that connection to their community and to their family. And this the prison broadcast is one of the best things that enables them to do that, gives them this sense of worth and that they're not forgotten. And gives them that will to go on.

Michael Green [00:15:25] Sean, who was Kutcha Edwards?

Shaun Braybrook [00:15:27] Kutcha Edwards is, he's an icon within the Aboriginal community he's a singer songwriter, activist, everything, all round great bloke, legend. And been involved in all community radio stations and all that for a long time.

Michael Green [00:15:42] And yet even with that wonderful program and that really engaging human thing that you started and still run, you said that Port Phillip prison was the toughest job you've had. Why was that?

Shaun Braybrook [00:15:55] Here I was, an Aboriginal man, really strong in his identity, strong and his culture and strong within the Aboriginal community. A lot of people knew me at the time. And here I was working in maximum security prison that had this big security arm. You talk about a lot of the issues and problems with Aboriginal people, and here's this system that always seemed to do that. So for me, as an Aboriginal man working inside that system, being able to navigate up that middle path, community on one side and the big infrastructure of a big correctional system on the other side.

Michael Green [00:16:30] Because you wouldn't, as an Aboriginal man, you couldn't be effective with the Aboriginal men in prison if you're identified as a part of the system, the big correctional system.

Shaun Braybrook [00:16:40] Yeah.

Michael Green [00:16:41] You had to be identified as one of them for helping them navigate their way through that system.

Shaun Braybrook [00:16:47] Exactly right. Now, there are lots of challenges that we see now for Aboriginal people working across the system and that as well. And something that I'm really passionate about is supporting the Aboriginal people within the work, doing the job. In my time across the prison some of the really big changes, the NAIDOC events, and showcasing culture with inside the prison really start to change attitudes at the time.

Michael Green [00:17:09] Change attitudes of the Aboriginal men within the prison, plus attitudes of the people who are a part of the system, part of the prison system. Change attitudes on both sides?

Shaun Braybrook [00:17:22] Yeah, definitely 100 per percent sure that these showcasing a culture and the cultural understanding and the cultural knowledge that I was able to pass on to management supervisors and even officers and that as well around Aboriginal people and getting them to understand us as well, really, I believe, made a difference at the time I worked for the prison system.

Michael Green [00:17:47] So from Port Phillip, you go on to Corrections Victoria in your life in the law. And you worked there for three years as the as a program manager or programs manager. Was this exclusively with Koori people as well?

Shaun Braybrook [00:18:00] Yep. So I was employed in, it was called the Indigenous Service and Policy Unit at the time. So I was employed within there as a programs manager across that. Virtually my job was to implement the things that we were doing at Port Phillip Prison across the cross the main prison and really support some of the Aboriginal workers with inside the prisons as well that were starting to work. There was a whole lot of new prisons coming on at the time. So we had the Ravenhall that was built, the new Ravenhall Correctional Facility. So there was a real induction of new officers coming on at the time. So we developed a cultural awareness package that was delivered to all correctional staff across the corrections system. Me and a fella by the name of Adrian Scalfore, we implemented that program and we would deliver it to new officers coming on and really give them a good cultural understanding of Aboriginal people that are going to come before them with inside the prison system.

Michael Green [00:19:00] What did the package contain? What was it you taught them which did educate them?

Shaun Braybrook [00:19:06] So there's a couple of classic things. Yes, we took people on a journey through history and we looked at history. Probably one of the key things through history is the 1967 referendum. You know, Aboriginal people prior to that were classed as flora and fauna. And it wasn't to that that Aboriginal people were counted in the census and were classed as citizens.

Michael Green [00:19:25] Exactly. And were not citizens of Australia.

Shaun Braybrook [00:19:27] Yeah, that's right. Look, lots of things that we started off with, with the cultural awareness training that we delivered to all new staff across the system, was to make sure that if you're working for the Department of Justice to understand what the Department of Justice expects you to do within that for Aboriginal people. And I'll share this story with you, one time a prison staff, I got a phone call up and the prison staff said, "oh, Sean, you need to come up here. We've got a lady that's trying to come in the prison. She reckons she's this fella's mother." So I said, "well who is it" I said, "yeah, well, it is his mother". And the prison staff said, "well, no, it can't be Shaun because

we just took this fella to the funeral last week of his mother". No one knew what was going on straight away. But to be able to explain how Aboriginal family structure and how Aboriginal families are built up of more than one mother and more than one father. Social mothers and social fathers and to explain that across a prison system had a really profound effect. Now, across this system, we look at that, the cultural connection. And if that cultural connection is proven, then the people will go to the funerals as well, to family members. So they're the sorts of things that we looked at. The staff took a real lot away from it as well. It's really great to be able to share that. And these are people that hadn't thought about Aboriginal people at all a lot. I really believe it makes a big impact across the system. And we also wanted to tick off on a lot of the myths around about Aboriginal people, how we all get four wheel drives and all that sort of stuff. I'm still waiting for mine. So if it's out there. It's out there.

Michael Green [00:21:05] You'll need one with four kids.

Shaun Braybrook [00:21:05] Yeah.

Michael Green [00:21:10] As I understand it, when you started at Corrections Victoria, there were seven Koori people within Corrections Victoria. Now there's over 200. That's correct?

Shaun Braybrook [00:21:22] Yeah.

Michael Green [00:21:23] And therefore, there's a I'm assuming, a far greater understanding of Koori cultural issues, and far greater respect for both Koori staff and also Koori inmates in the system?

Shaun Braybrook [00:21:36] Yep. I believe so. I believe that we're heading in the right direction. I think we're still a little way to go for the system to fully understand and embrace Koori culture and Koori understanding. But I believe that the steps are being made and in the right direction. Back then when I, when I was employed, there was seven of us across the justice system and now there is over 200. We've got traineeships as well. We've even got some lawyers now as well and even some magistrates as well that are doing a great job. And we're really starting to see the fruits of that and all that can be related back to the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement. And that's where a lot of this has been born from in and grows from as well. Fantastic document. Encourage people to get out and read it, it's in phase four now, we're up to phase four of the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. But back at the time, it highlights the royal commission, the recommendations from the royal commission.

Michael Green [00:22:33] Of the deaths in custody?

Shaun Braybrook [00:22:35] The deaths in custody yes. And it picks up on the recommendations and this is the Victoria's response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and is created real lots of great opportunities that Aboriginal people working across or working within government and working across a correctional system as well.

Voiceover [00:22:57] William and Lonsdale is brought to you by Greens List, one of the leading multidisciplinary barristers lists in Australia. Greens List believe in promoting conversation around the ideas and issues that shape not only our legal system but our wider community.

Michael Green [00:23:17] So, Sean, you've had a very rich career in the law in a phase of all of really our criminal justice system with Corrections Victoria, Port Phillip Prison, Burt Williams Center, and now you move on to the Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place in Gippsland, you're the general manager of that, you live on the property with your family. It's been going now for about 11 years. What is it and how did it come about?

[00:23:42] Yeah, it's a fantastic project. And that's not because on because I'm the manager as well I suppose. The way that Wulgunggo Ngalu came about is actually from the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. So we're a key initiative from the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement. One of the things that we looked at really early on in is we've got to stop Aboriginal people from going into the prison system, and that'll stop all the impacts of incarceration and everything else that goes on in that. So Wulgunggo Ngalu was formed and was formed as a diversion program. In 2006 I was appointed as one of the co-managers on that, and our job was to look at the program development, what we're going to run, how we're going to run it, and then also look at building the infrastructure in place as well. So that was way back in 2006 when that kicked off, became operational in 2008.

Michael Green [00:24:32] The Learning Center is near Yarram in Gippsland. But there was earlier a false start with Seymour up in the north east of Victoria. What happened there?

Shaun Braybrook [00:24:42] Yeah, it was very early on that Seymour was marked as the place for Wulgunggo Ngalu to be built, which we actually purchased a property and it was called Mount Teneriffe. So was at the back of Seymour, the community down in Seymour didn't want an Aboriginal facility built in their backyard and were very successful at seeing the program be removed out of there. So Wron Wron, the old Wron Wron prison was earmarked as a place for it to move to down in Yarram. So then that grew legs. So Seymour didn't want us. The community were very strategic, successful. Would you say racist? Would you say are uninformed? Whatever it was, they achieved their goal about having the place removed. So the decision was made for the program to be moved in consultation, I must say, with the Aboriginal community. The government at the time said that forum decided to move the place to the old side of the Wron Wron prison. And that's where Wulgunggo Ngalu is now, and that's where we've built.

Michael Green [00:25:47] So but again, I understand there was maybe some community unrest about it. The Yarram community might have been so sure about having a facility in their region. How did you deal with that?

Shaun Braybrook [00:26:00] Well, we'd learned a lot from Seymour. We'd learn a lot about the whole time across Seymour and what had happened and what had taken place. Then when we moved down to the old Wron Wron prison, we started to hear all the same noises. So a lot of the same arguments that people didn't want an Aboriginal facility built in their backyard. So through the Aboriginal Justice Agreement, some key people ran the place at a time. Really great decision makers from the government that were sitting around at the table. And the Aboriginal community, is we come up with this idea that we'd win this on the ground instead of following the traditional way, is listening to people. Yes. Thank you very much. We understand what you're saying, but we're building this place. Yes. Thank you very much. You're concerns this. Yes. But we're building the place. We got out, made ourselves available to the whole community. Brought them along on the journey, listening to people and listened to their concerns. The other key part, too, was first we formed the Aboriginal Community Advisory Group. So we brought the Aboriginal

community along around across Gippsland as well so we also formed a community advisory group made up of non-Aboriginal people from around the area. These were people that were not necessarily supportive of Wulgunggo Ngalu through that community advisory group we were really able to understand the community concerns, and really answered back to the concerns of the community, on a personal level, and at a really informative level as well, and really understand the issues and the problems. And that was the real key to the success. Now, you wouldn't think that we went through that. Yeah. The community is right behind us. We have great, fantastic links with the community. The work that we do Wulgunggo Ngalu the community supports us 100 per cent and we really changed attitudes. Through that whole process. As an Aboriginal man, you sort of, you get to think you start the process, often you think, jeez, there's a lot of racist people around, but really what it was, a lot of people were just ignorant, didn't really understand what we were trying to do. Didn't understand Aboriginal people and bring them people along on the journey. It's a fantastic place now Yarram, supports us well, the surrounding district, the surrounding community are really good and it's a really great place for us to be.

Michael Green [00:28:17] Now, Sean, tell us what Wulgunggo Ngalu does for people. What it's role is, it's only men I think isn't it? Who are on community corrections orders.

Shaun Braybrook [00:28:27] Yep

Michael Green [00:28:28] So rather than them, stay at home and go out into the community and do their hundred hours of community work, whatever it might be, they can come and do it in an intensive period I guess, shorter period, maybe a few months at a learning place.

Shaun Braybrook [00:28:42] Yep.

Michael Green [00:28:42] So can you just maybe flesh it out for us, how it all works out?

Shaun Braybrook [00:28:46] Well, I really want to get this message out as well. Wulgunggo Ngalu is a fantastic initiative. Yes, we have born from the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. Yes. We've brought the community along with us and the Aboriginal community as well. Yes we're built on the old Wron Wron prison, but we're not a prison and we don't represent a prison. What we actually did is we actually bulldozed that prison to the ground. So the prison isn't there anymore. We kept a couple of sheds in that and things like that because they're good. But that's real important for us to paint this picture and understand it. When we did that, we also got an Aboriginal architect, Dillon Kombumerri at the time, and he will walk the site with the traditional owners from the area, the elders from the area. So when he walked this site, he got his inspiration from local indigenous bird, the Blue Wren. So that's what all our buildings are modeled on, the Blue Wren and really replicates that as well. And I really love when people come down and have a look and I get to show them that and paint that picture for them. And then also a traditional way of life as well. The Aboriginal architect had this design and brought it through as well. Where we caught the heart of Wulgunggo Ngalu is a fireplace, a traditional way of life is there's a fireplace in the middle. That's where we do all our business and all our working. So we're talking about traditional way of life. Back in a traditional setting in what would say black Australia is, people would walk out a country to come to big ceremonies, corroborees, ceremonies, important meetings, whatever it may be. People would walk out of country and we'd always meet around a fire, and we do our business. So that's where we do our business at Wulgunggo Ngalu. The three main buildings are there. Then over night time, meetings might go for three or four days

corroborees, whatever it may be. People move away to sleep. So our accommodation units where our men sleep are actually moved away from that area. It's a little bit of a fair distance down a little bit of a hill where the men go and sleep. So that represents that culture, that way of life. The other key part to it is that it's really open, you know, if people are thinking prison, you think containment, you think they you think that, well, we're not a prison, and the whole place is open no matter where you stand at Wulgunggo Ngalu you can see through the place you get this culture. One of the other key features to it, is right in the center of Wulgunggo Ngalu, we've got the fire. But then there's a diamond set of seats that surround the fire. The reason that a diamond is important is in Gunaikurnai country. In Gunaikurnai paintings, the symbol of a diamond represents man. So that sits right in the heart of Wulgunggo Ngalu, a men's facility for Aboriginal men, the cultural overlay, the blue wren, the connection back to culture, the cultural overlay really makes it a special place for Aboriginal men to come down and heal.

[00:31:41] Who's eligible for Wulgunggo Ngalu? Is Aboriginal Men on a Community Corrections Order. You have to be over the age of 18. Our youngest, quite obviously, is 18 and the oldest fellow I've had, there's been 62. It's very important for us to have older men come through the program and work as well. We play a key role in that as well in that older man's journey. The commitment is we ask commitment for three months. The maximum time is we say six months. But we have had fellas that have stayed longer. And that's really because they've been achieving things and doing really well within the program. So let me explain a little bit more. If you work in a cultural setting, a therapeutic approach, if you get three months out of someone working in that, at the end of that three months the thoughts and change are real. So the men are really contemplating change and connecting to their order and looking to move through that. The six months being a time period where we don't want men to become dependent on us. So we're not an institution and Wulgunggo Ngalu is part of a journey. Come down, connect you culture, connect your identity and then move on. Sometimes we have men that might have multiple turns at Wulgunggo Ngalu. We've got a young fella there at the moment when I say Young is 28 now. We first engaged with him about four years ago and through this journey he's come back and he stayed a couple of times at Wulgunggo Ngalu, he's been on a corrections order two years, corrections order for over four years for noncompliance. Not being able to complete that order. Lots of reasons for that. I can tell you because on the 2nd of December, this young man not only completes his his order and moves away from corrections, he also regains his driver's license and will no longer be in contact with the justice system, and free to go and live his life and that through the journey he's been on. Fantastic young man and done a really great job within the program and really working well. But yes, it's been a bit of a challenge for him to get to that point, to move on the things that we do at Wulgunggo Ngalu, we always say that there's three parts to it. The first one is we have to look at their correctional orders. So every component to the correction order you can do at Wulgunggo Ngalu that might involve drug and alcohol counselling, might involve anger management, community work, especially now coming up to bushfire season, we have to get the place ready to ensure that we're we're safe round bushfires. So lots of work that we do around that. The second part is what we call program and education, and living skills. So Federation TAFE come in and run programs for us.

Michael Green [00:34:19] Shaun that's a TAFE down in Gippsland is it?

Shaun Braybrook [00:34:20] Yep, various campuses across Gippsland, and they'll come in and they'll run certificate programs for us. White cards, we do traffic management, we do safe food handling, level two first aid, use of power tools. So all these certificates. Why? Because then they give the fellas a certificate and gets them job ready. The living skill part

about it as well is the men over night time. Two men in the place will cook for everyone in the place. And that's a roster that changes.

Michael Green [00:34:48] When you say everyone, how many people are there at any one time?

[00:34:51] Well, we can have up to 18. So usually a number for us is anywhere from about 12 to 14. We've currently got 15 in the program now. And the voluntary nature of that sees men come and go a little bit, so that's usually a good number. The living skill component is we want to teach men living skills. So that's that cooking component that I just spoke about. Sometimes it's as simple as showing a man how to turn on a washing machine. Hang your clothes on line, clean your bedroom, making sure that they're looking after themselves. And then the health component in that as well, making sure that men are addressing their health issues as well. But the key to us and the thing that makes us different, because people probably saying, yeah, that's a normal place, if your gonna run a place you'd want them to. Yeah. The thing that makes us different is our cultural component. We teach dance. So we have what we call the Wulgunggo Ngalu dances that we teach. And we got permission from the local elders down there to be able to dance out of country. We run a program called The Track Not Taken. What that program does is that takes fellas on a journey through time. So goes back to what we call black Australia. So before settlement of Australia, or before invasion of Australia and talks about the cultural protocols and the cultural understanding and really gives Aboriginal men a good understanding of your Aboriginal identity, and then looks at the wrongs of yesterday and addresses that wrongs of yesterday and goes through a journey around that and unlocks some of that anger and puts the blame in the places that it should be around government policy and the wrongs in that. What happened to your nan? What happened to your grandfather? What happened is it's not your fault you don't speak your grandfather's tongue, yeah? So really puts him at ease with that. But then the cultural protocol to that is moving forward. Now it's your responsibility to pass on the knowledge. That's where a lot of our success comes from. Is that real strengthening of cultural identity and what it means to be an Aboriginal man in today's society.

Michael Green [00:36:52] Just to finish off today, Sean. There are congratulations in order. You were mentioned in the Queen's Birthday honors list in June this year, which a great honor. I mean, I'm not sure where the queen actually sits in terms of indigenous history of Australia, but he will help put that bit to one side. You received the prestigious Australian Corrections Medal, an ACM. What's that mean to you to be recognized by... What can I say? The government of Australia of for the last 200 years.

Shaun Braybrook [00:37:17] Yeah. Fantastic honor. Feel really privileged to have that, and for my work across the correctional system to be recognized in that. So really feel humble, really proud of what we've achieved as well. One thing I also want to add is that's a bit of a personal award as well. Wulgunggo Ngalu also in 2010, we won the International Corrections and Prisons Association's award and that that was real testimony to the staff and to the team that I have a Wulgunggo Ngalu for us to win that. So then when you put all them things that I talked about together and to be honored in the Queen's Birthday honors, I really feel humbled for the work that I've done and for the work that we've been able to achieve for our Aboriginal community, for Aboriginal people.

Michael Green [00:38:06] Shaun, thank you. It is a wonderful journey you've taken us on today in educating us about your life within the law and our criminal justice system and

what's being done to try to improve that system in it's dealings with Aboriginal men. Thank you very much.

Shaun Braybrook [00:38:25] Thank you, Michael.

Voiceover [00:38:28] As always, show notes, some useful links. And a transcript of today's episode can be found at [Greenslist.com.au/podcast](https://greenslist.com.au/podcast). This week, we also have some beautiful photos of Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place, including many of the important cultural touchstones Sean talked about in this episode. We're keen to know what you think, so please reach out by all the usual channels. Let us know the questions you'd like us to ask, topics you'd like explored our ideas for future guests. If you're enjoying Lives in the Law, please tell your networks and subscribe, rate and review the show. It really helps others find out about us. Our show is produced by me Catherine Green, recorded and mixed by Alex Macfarlane, who also wrote and performed all the music for the series. We are coming to you this week and every week from the iconic County Court of Victoria on the corner of William and Lonsdale Streets in our beautiful city of Melbourne. We acknowledge The Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging. There is no doubt that conversations about justice have been taking place on this land for thousands of years, and we are privileged to continue this discussion here today.