

RESETTLEMENT | Wiradjuri Gawaymbanha-gu Mamalanha

Transcript: Episode 1 | Fire in the Belly

Aunty Dot: There was some opposition, I guess, to Aboriginal people being resettled here. You had little signs for example, with Ashmont you had 'You're now entering Vegemite village'.

Uncle Hewitt: There was high on a pole there 'You are now entering Coon County by Old Man Emu.' And as you got closer into town 'You are now leaving Coon County, by Old Man Emu'. There was many letterbox drops that was brought to our attention marked "KKK. Get out of town. Now!"

Luke Wighton VO: Giddy, I'm Luke Wighton, a Wiradjuri man from Condobolin now living in Wagga Wagga. I'm the host of this podcast series RESETTLEMENT - Wiradjuri Gawaymbanha-gu Mamalanha which means Wiradjuri Welcome to Visitors. It's all about Wagga Wagga's First Nations community.

Before white settlement, we'd been living peacefully and sustainably in this beautiful part of the Country on the Marrambidya Bila - or Murrumbidgee River - for tens of thousands of years.

From the 1830's, colonisation of the Wagga Wagga area began, destroying our Mob through land theft, disease, murder and oppression. Our language and culture were denied, even made illegal. Our children were stolen from their families to be trained as slaves for the colonisers. We were banished to the fringes of society.

But in the early 1970's that changed. The children's homes were closed, the missions were shut down and the size of our population in Wagga Wagga began to grow again - under what was known as the Aboriginal Family Resettlement Scheme. The federal government scheme ran from 1974 until 1986. The aim was to move our mob from the missions and the fringes of smaller remote towns to larger regional areas like Wagga Wagga, with the promise of better services and more opportunities.

This podcast series was a goal of the Wagga Wagga City Council's Reconciliation Action Plan. It has been developed by the Museum of the Riverina in collaboration with our First Nations community.

So, let's get to know some of the proud mob from Wagga Wagga.

Aunty Dot Whyman and Uncle Hewitt Whyman arrived here in 1974.

They were not a resettlement family - but helped countless resettlers as they began to arrive.

Uncle Hewitt Whyman - a Yorta Yorta man and a Vietnam veteran - had been transferred from Sydney to the Kapooka Army Base. He and Aunty Dot had a big role in the ongoing fight for justice for our mob.

Without them, Wagga Wagga would be a very different town.

And even though they're now aged in their 70's, their activism continues. Or as Uncle Hewitt says 'There's still fire in the belly'.

Back in the early days of colonisation in this country, the policy of what was called by the white settlers, 'the Aboriginal Protection Board', was to do everything it could to erase First Nations culture.

[00:03:36] Aunty Dot Whyman: They weren't allowed to speak the language. They weren't allowed to do the dances. They weren't allowed to play their instruments. That affected our old people. They were threatened. You'd often see some, many years ago going away somewhere and doing, doing their own little thing away from non Aboriginal people's eyes. They'd do their own thing.

[00:04:01] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: My father said to me, he was a Wemba Wemba man. He said when he was growing up on Moonahcullah mission and the kids went to, we went to school. He said the parents would run to the windows and open them up and say, the teacher would be speaking English, teaching them English, 'Speak your language, speak your language, speak your language', you know. Through the window. 'Teach them their language'. Um, but it was frowned upon by the, the managers and the people. It affected their rations and whatever. They lost some of their, their, their, uh, Yeah, it was sad.

[00:04:40] Aunty Dot Whyman: Yes, it was so called to be civilised.

But the colonists' attempts to kill our culture failed.

Nowadays there are a growing number of Wiradjuri speakers... thanks to the work of Uncle Stan Grant senior and Professor Dr John Eliot Rutter - who developed a Wiradjuri

Dictionary and the Wiradjuri App, where you can still listen to Uncle Stan pronouncing Wiradjuri words today.

[00:05:06] Aunty Dot Whyman: With the language now, today, it's really good to see, and our young people, and old people, older people, are learning.

[00:05:14] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: You know knowledge can only stay with you, but it needs to be handed down. As we age, we need to hand that down to our young people. I think that's important for them to hear our story so they can have knowledge and they can pass that knowledge down. And that's important. Our knowledge as an old person shouldn't die with us. It's got to be told. What we are informing the podcast, uh, Aunty and I, uh, in my 76th year and her 73rd next month, um, we want to hand our knowledge to others, okay, so that they tell the story, because our elders before us told us the stories and, um, and we're, we're sharing that today.

And Aunty Dot says one example of the sort of stories their local young people need to know about is how Wagga Wagga came to have a high number of services now available to their community.

[00:06:35] Aunty Dot Whyman: Like today, we have our young people, Aboriginal people, thinking that all these services and Aboriginal services are here in Wagga Wagga, but they don't know the background and the fights of how everything came together. Yeah, and they've got to be told and have an awareness of what was there, not just move to a town and saying 'Oh, we've got this service and that service'.

[00:07:04] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: There are Aboriginal people in our mob that use, that are culturally sensitive in what services they use. Be they, you know, be they the dentist, the doctor, um, housing, et cetera. What our mob like to see, and they never saw it when they come here as, as resettled families, they never seen black faces at the counter to say, Aunty, Uncle, or Yeah, can I help you? Where you from? Who's your mob? You never heard that back in 1974. Today you do. Look, when I, when Aunty Dot and I arrived here that, you know, the family resettlement scheme had began. It was called the FRAC committee actually, the Family Resettlement Aboriginal Corporation. Aunty, Aunty, um, um, Dorothy, help me.

[00:07:56] Aunty Dot Whyman: Violet Honeysett.

[00:07:57] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Aunty Violet Honeysett was its first, um, uh, Chairperson. She had a committee around her to work with the then administrator of the program in resettling Aboriginal families in Wagga Wagga. His primary role was to

identify a home. And mainly, the 13 initial families that resettled in Wagga Wagga was resettled in the Ashmont community. And his primary role was to ensure that he introduced the families to the schools so that kids could be enrolled. He introduced them to the Commonwealth Employment Service to find work for their families. And he introduced them to I guess, the, the service and any other service providers that they need to know about, particularly health and other services.

[00:08:47] What was lacking when they first come here was services that were culturally accessible. A lot of the people that came here came from far west New South Wales. They expected that there might be Aboriginal service providers in Wagga Wagga to provide that service to them as well, but at that time, there wasn't. A lot of people from far and remote communities took up the offer to move to, uh, to access better services for themselves and their families. Aunty Dot and I have identified at least 18 Aboriginal families that lived here.

[00:09:21] Aunty Dot Whyman: Or more.

[00:09:22] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Or more, that lived here prior to resettlement. Um, they really identified, uh, but there was no services to provide for them as well.

Aunty Dot's own mother, Aunty Val Weldon, had studied and worked in Sydney for some time. While living in the city, she saw how beneficial Aboriginal services could be for the community and took inspiration from them when she returned to Wagga Wagga.

[00:09:47] Aunty Dot Whyman: Quite a few Aboriginal services began in Sydney. That was the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Aboriginal Preschools, breakfast programs, and housing and health.

[00:10:00] So with that behind her and, you know, that was the aspiration of quite a few Aboriginal people back then of having such services in the country areas, which was hard to come by. And this is what, as I said, we worked, and this local community of Wagga Wagga worked towards having some sort of services for Aboriginal people. And, um, this was the first one that got up and going - due to the late Val Weldon's, her legacy on preschools and health, yes.

Aunty Val Weldon had studied early childhood teaching in Sydney and worked at a pre-school in Redfern. When she returned to Wagga Wagga she wanted to start a childcare centre. But for a long time she was unable to get any funding - so she set up a play group in her own backyard.

[00:10:54] Aunty Dot Whyman: We were successful in obtaining a bus and this is how the children were transported around. There was no funding by the way, so everything was all voluntary.

[00:11:03] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: We had many meetings, and it wasn't only Dot and I and Aunty Val, it was many other people in the community - we were part of the, uh, the battle and the journey to get things done.

[00:11:15] Six years we received our first grant of funding to establish the Long Day Care Centre. And Aunty Dot said earlier about the bus, the state come good with a little 15 seater bus. And we were starting to go places. And people started to say, Hey, we are fair dinkum now. This is who we are, you know, around the community

[00:11:37] Aunty Dot Whyman: Yes, there was some opposition, don't worry. People didn't want to, not a lot, but a handful did not want to see us being radicals, or the organiser, or some community members like Aboriginal people being radicals and starting this black power thing. That type of issue. But, you know, we discussed it all through our, everyone discussed it. And we did have a prominent Archdeacon John Ireland there and he was all for it. And he spoke very much in favour about Aboriginal services. And so people generally started coming around to it then. About the idea.

[00:12:18] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: But somebody had to do it. Somebody had to do it. And I think my radicalism and Aunty Dot's began from our marches in Sydney, the green paper demonstration outside Parliament House, and many other demonstrations that we went to at old Parliament House, back in the day of the tent embassies. Our radicalism began then and there's still a bit of fire in our bellies today.

As a young man, Uncle Hewitt had enlisted in the Australian Army and served in the Vietnam War.

Then in 1977, a year after Uncle Hewitt had left the army, he and Aunty Dot went to work for the Aboriginal Legal Service. When they started, the ALS office wasn't in downtown Wagga Wagga - it was based in their own home.

[00:13:23] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: The Aboriginal Legal Service in Sydney called me up and asked me would I open up a office in Wagga, or would I be interested in becoming a field officer. And I jumped at the opportunity because I put down a lot of my training and discipline after coming out of the Army after eight years that I could do the job. And they said, well, we got no car for you, we got no telephone. You're going to have to work out of your home. And we got nobody to type your notes or anything like that. And

you're going to have to get on the road and hitchhike or get a ride with somebody. I did just that.

Aunty Dot was his unofficial secretary - but she wasn't getting paid. From there, the Aboriginal Legal Service became a vital link to other services for Wagga Wagga's growing mob.

[00:14:09] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: The Aboriginal Family Resettlement Scheme had been, like, maybe 12 or 18 months now effective and, and operating, so I... The Aboriginal Legal Service began at my home in Callaghan Street, Ashmont. And it was 24/7, no telephone, no car. There was many times I got up in the morning and said to my family, I may be home tonight or I may be staying in Deni with some mob or Albury, attending the court and taking instructions for lawyers.

[00:14:39] Aunty Dot Whyman: Eventually after time, funds just came available to have a phone on at home and the phone was going night and day because of people being arrested in, um, the region. It was a large region. And I was acting as the temporary, unpaid, secretary. I eventually put myself through Wagga Tafe and completed a 12 month secretarial course. As Hewie had said that we had encountered not just legal problems at that time, but welfare problems, employment problems, anything. And it was a was one stop.

[00:15:18] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: I think we learned very fast as a one stop shop. We had connected, we had a, we, a big network of, uh, people working in, in other legal firms and lawyers, and we had the Commonwealth Employment Service, Department of Housing, we just learnt really quick. We established our network and we would refer people with respect, and culturally - advising people on the other side that the person coming to see you is an Aboriginal person and they may be culturally challenged.

[00:15:49] Aunty Dot Whyman: We had developed an index of all government offices and whatever other offices were about and contacts to be able to have that at hand to phone regarding any problems. And we had good working relationships with those government offices and other agencies.

[00:16:07] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: And additionally to that, we dealt with a lot of sorry business, during that, the course of, being the only service provider in town, additionally to us providing legal representation to Aboriginal people in the region, in our footprint area, uh, which was, with not enough resources to do that. But referring them and assisting other private practices to make a grant of legal aid to people who really needed it.

[00:16:34] Aunty Dot Whyman: And at that time the employment of Aboriginal people started with different agencies - Social Security as it was known then, not the CES, housing. And Aboriginal people were, women too, were employed and no counter assistants. They weren't doing that. They were sharpening pencils and other small things behind the scenes.

[00:17:00] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: And look, what was noticeable and glaringly noticeable was the lack of Aboriginal people at the counter. Yes. The black faces. That the resettlement families could not relate to and they would come back to the Aboriginal Legal Service and say, Oh, there's no blackfellas down there, Uncle. You know? I can't tell my story in the way I want to tell it. Yep.

[00:17:25] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Aunty Dot and I, when we become fully employed with the service providers in town, and particularly the Aboriginal Legal Service, which we had a lot of interest in, because I think it paved the way for the establishment of other service providers in Wagga Wagga. The drive out of the Aboriginal Legal Service come from the people who were involved with it, because it was a body that had a voice. And it had a strong voice. The strong voice was given to us by the people who supported us. And you know, speak out, speak loud is very important. And we did. We did speak out, we did speak loud.

[00:18:04] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: After getting the role with the Aboriginal Legal Service, I was asked would I like to do the paralegal course at the University of New South Wales Law Faculty, which is a two year, year course to give me, to give me paralegal qualifications that I could work in an Aboriginal legal firm here in Australia or anywhere internationally. And I'm proud to say that I was the dux of that course.

Back then, Uncle Hewitt and Aunty Dot were hopeful as they watched the First Nations population grow in Wagga Wagga.

[00:18:38] Aunty Dot Whyman: It was exciting, even though they weren't all Wiradjuri people, there was a mixture.

[00:18:44] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Aunty Dot's right, you know, the diversity of mobs living in Wagga Wagga come from Kamilaroi, Barkandji, Yorta Yorta, Wiradjuri and Ngiyampaa, you know. So there's a diverse group, a kaleidoscope of mobs here. What I find about that is that, yeah, we stay with mob, we look after mob. We're not as inclusive as we should be, but we must be. The times that we come together and stand as peoples of this nation, as First Nations people, is on NAIDOC week, is on, you know,

Survival Day. We all stand up as a people. The National Apology, the Sorry Days. We all stand up as a peoples. There is no kaleidoscope or division then. We're all together as a people and that's how I like to see our mob.

Our mob had been fighting for land rights since the white invasion began. Finally, in 1983, after passage of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Rights Act, Local and Regional Aboriginal Land Councils came into being.

[00:19:48] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Prior to 1983, there had been a lot of consultations right throughout the region by a group of people known as the Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Group. Not specifically called the Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council, but they were a group who went out voluntarily, out of their own pocket, travelled, stayed on the riverbanks overnight. Had the best fun. They took along all their own families and we had talks in community halls and everything about the proposed Land Rights legislation.

[00:20:21] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: It went to Parliament on, I think it was the 6th of June in the evening. The sun had gone down. It sneaked through Parliament 21 votes to 18. We were outside Parliament House and there was a line of police behind the gate, behind the fence of Parliament House. We were all out the front and protesting about provisions in the legislation that was being talked about inside the Parliament, in the chamber.

[00:20:56] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Aunty Dot and I were at it. The protest got, you know, out of hand a little bit I thought, but in those days, we, we, we were, we were protesting about, yeah, we need to know what's going on about Aboriginal people in New South Wales, particularly about land rights. And the common cry of the day was, 'What do we want? Land rights. What have we got? You know, F all.'

[00:21:24] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Somehow the fence sort of dislodged and fell towards the police. And so 'Oh wow it's a weapon'. A few people grabbed it and ran towards the police. And the police got on the veranda of Parliament House and that was their last line of defence.

[00:21:48] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: The fence fell down somehow. I think there was a lot of people leaning on it, and, once it loosened, people said "Ooh wow" - they went further. But the police inside ended up on the veranda of New South Wales Parliament House as the last last line of defence. And that's when Pat O'Shane came out and sort of said "the legislation's passed. Please go back. So we did".

[00:22.13] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: And protests from that day continued with the Land Rights legislation. I think today it, despite it being reviewed and amended so many times, the Land Rights legislation is not perfect.

[00:22.31] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Yeah, look, I think the Attorney General at the time and it's a Labor government at that time, I think it was Frank Walker and he was the Minister for Housing. He was a minister for

[00:22.41] Aunty Dot Whyman: Aboriginal Affairs.

[00:22.42] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Aboriginal Affairs. And he was the Minister for

[00:22.46] Aunty Dot Whyman: Housing, SHACS.

[00:22.47] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Youth and Community Services. So we call him the Minister for YACS, Shacks and Blacks.

[00:22.52] Aunty Dot Whyman: Yes.

[00:22.53] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Frank Walker, he wasn't a bad wasn't a bad bloke. He would listen, he would listen to you. We brought him out to many community meetings. And one in particular I remember was very large was at Narrandera Sportsground. And it was a really hot summer afternoon and we were under the shed and the heat was sweltering and they were cooking barbecues on this hot day. But he flew in on a plane to Narrandera Airport and came with his entourage, spoke to us, and I give him credit for that, that he took the wishes of the people back to Parliament. But ...

[00:22.32] Aunty Dot Whyman: It's only one man.

[00:22.34] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: And I think... he asked What do you want? We said we want a legislation that, Land Rights legislation, and I think he achieved that, despite many people thinking that it, they had, they had views that it wasn't as strong as...

[00:23.52] Aunty Dot Whyman: It was watered down.

[00:23.53] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: It was watered down. Yeah.

They were upset that the legislation didn't go as far as our mob wanted, but it was a start at Land Rights. Aunty Dot says that the 1983 protest at Parliament House was a great coming together of First Nations mob.

[00:24.12] Aunty Dot Whyman: We had our family there, our children there. And there was people from all over New South Wales fighting for land rights and what was to come. What those decisions would be. It was exciting and curious at the same time,

because it was the first time that Aboriginal people were involved in something for themselves in such a big demonstration. Macquarie Street. It was exciting. To protest together, to defy it, you know, what was going to happen. And a lot of those things are still continuing on today, you know, defying and and not having what they really need.

The Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council became an integral part of the community after the Land Rights Act was passed and Uncle Hewitt was there from the very beginning.

[00:25.10] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: We had a meeting in the, in the, in the, in the little hall on Erambie Mission in Cowra and there were some notable Aboriginal people at that, that are not with us today. So I come fresh out of, out of UNSW with all these things going around in my head.

[00:25.35] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: And I stood up and said we could stand alone as the Wiradjuri Aboriginal Land Council. The Regional, the Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council, they all agreed on that. It was diverse. It was representative of all people right across the region Nobody owned it. The people owned it. And it opened its offices in Wagga Wagga, in Docker Street not long after.

Uncle Hewitt was elected by the Wiradjuri Regional Land Council to be its first representative on the NEWSWOLC - the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council. The first grant under the new land rights act was shared between 14 Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the Wiradjuri region. Uncle Hewitt was excited when he received that first allocation of \$656,000-thousand dollars.

[00:26.26] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: It was given to me in a cheque form at a meeting in Sydney. I had it for two days in my wallet. I brought it home and I couldn't sleep for fear of losing my wallet. I didn't know where to put it. I had to bank it the next day because we had opened the bank account up in the name of the regional land council. I think the first allocation to the land councils was about \$32,000 out of that grant, that first grant.

[00:27.04] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: And out of that they had to have their first meeting, elect their executive of Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and open an account in the name of the community e.g. Wagga Local Aboriginal Land Council, Griffith, Albury, Deniliquin, Moama, Hay. So they all did that. And they elected their representatives for that and their membership.

[00:27.34] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: No people were trained, unfortunately, to access, how to access vacant Crown Lands, how to make a claim for it, how to negotiate the government red tape to do that, either locally, regionally, statewide or, in having knowledge of how to do that. So, you know, apart from becoming Local Aboriginal Land

Councils, the Region (WRALC) played a very important role because it started to engage quality people. Non-Aboriginal people began working for the Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council. You know we had accountants, we had people training the Local Aboriginal Land Councils in administrative skills, going out and training them.

[00:28.28] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: We became, the Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council was the only region in New South Wales that established... it was well established and it became so established that the NSW Aboriginal Land Council began to review its success. Hence they began to remove the responsibilities away from it and back to the state. And that's the status today.

[00:28.55] Aunty Dot Whyman: And because they were becoming too political. We did have field officers and sites officers, all that, but becoming very political, the region reps themselves. And it was working. Amendments came into it by the State Land Council. And we did have that three tier system. But what had happened was the amendment went back to a two tier system. So the Region (WRALC) is still there in name only, but the office is at Queanbeyan. We don't know how many people work in there. We don't know the funding of it all.

[00:29.36] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: We had it all mapped out what we wanted to do. We had good representatives. We had strong Aboriginal people working in the council, as field officers, as sites officers. We even had archaeologists working for us, and smart people, non-Aboriginal people who took us forward, naming one of them, Dr Gaynor Macdonald.

[00:30.03] Luke: How did the Wiradjuri Regional Land Council building come about?

[00:30.07] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: At that time the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Children's Service and the Long Day Care Centre was functioning next door in Docker Street.

[00:30.16] Aunty Dot Whyman: The Aboriginal Development Commission back then, the ADC, and they purchased that two storey building next to the Regional Land Council.

[00:30.25] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: That's when the Aboriginal community began to grow with services. It was a cultural place to go. And they were culturally aware of the mob coming in so that they provide services to them.

[00:30.40] Aunty Dot Whyman: The ADC purchased a two storey building where the long day care centre, ALS, Aboriginal Legal Service, Aboriginal Children's Service were

located. The next door building within the Regional Land council, each land council had contributed.

[00:30:57] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: We thought, well, let's buy the bloody building, but let's all contribute to a day out of our, out of our grant. And we did. We did. So all the local Aboriginal Land Councils, despite the very meagre funds they were getting to operate at the time, I think it was \$1,500 each or \$1,800 each out of the 14 land councils that purchased the building. I think it was \$70,000 it was worth at the time.

[00:31:25] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: It become known as the Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council. And we started to become a landholder. We started to progress and build our structures and hence we made a grant to build accommodation down the back.

[00:31:39] Aunty Dot Whyman: This is how the the units at the back of the Region and the Long Day Care Centre came into being, through this grant.

The first Aboriginal medical service in Wagga Wagga was a dental van – located in Aunty Mary Atkinson's front yard.

[00:31:57] Aunty Dot Whyman: So what happened, because we had contacts here and there, the Redfern dental clinic, or AMS, sent a van down here. And that was operating in Wagga to service Aboriginal people. So that was located in her yard. Then later on it was located at the front of the building in Docker Street.

[00:32:17] Aunty Dot Whyman: We were applying for funds and it was a long time to try and, you know, have funds from Department of Health or New South Wales Health. So our local land council purchased the building in Docker Street, two doors from the preschool, and our local land council bought that on behalf of RIVMED. And RIVMED paid a small rental for it. And that started growing and we received some funds then in time. That was for a dentist, secretary/receptionist and a drug and alcohol worker.

[00:32:55] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: I guess that's where we can say that the birth of RIVMED began was in that house in Docker Street. And then we, uh, we expanded into Trail Street. Then RIVMED began to grow into, um, a big service provider. Then RIVMED started to outgrow Trail street. The current premises is directly opposite our magnificent hospital we have in Wagga Wagga. They have a staff now of nearly, just under 200 people. It provides many services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. But the dentist is still so hard to find.

[00:33:34] Aunty Dot Whyman: Because RIVMED had saved quite a bit of money at that time. And that was over a million dollars, I'm proud to say. And the Department of Health was so pleased with it, they just about matched it and bought the building, the premises now.

[00:33:48] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Dollar for dollar.

[00:33:50] Aunty Dot Whyman: It was able to all have the one services on the one area, and that was the dream of a lot of directors that are now passed on, to have all the services in one place, which they now have.

[00:34:04] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: And I think what RIVMED can be proud of and the Aboriginal community in getting it established here in Wagga Wagga is it is the first AMS in the region.

By 1982, under the Resettlement Scheme, there were hundreds of Aboriginal people living in Wagga Wagga. But that caused a backlash within the local white community.

[00:34:25] Aunty Dot Whyman: There was some opposition I guess to Aboriginal people being resettled here. You had little signs put up outside, you know, the suburbs for example. With Ashmont you had Vegemite, you're now entering Vegemite Village. Another over at, um, Tolland, there was something there. You had that type thing, you know, just don't know who. We just let it go, but we made sure that people heard what we'd seen.

[00:34:54] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: The first 13 families resettled in the Ashmont region, the southern part of, southern end of Wagga Wagga. The Silverlight servo there was high on a pole there 'You are now entering Coon County by Old Man Emu'. And as you got closer into town, uh, near Thomas Brothers now and Wagga Motors, 'You are now leaving Coon County by Old Man Emu'. There was many letterbox drops that was brought to our attention, marked KKK, get out of town now. I think we felt powerless because it was hard to bring to the attention of the authorities that we were concerned about this and you should take, you should take action on it for us.

[00:35:44] Aunty Dot Whyman: And it showed you that discrimination was alive and well. Still hasn't changed today. So, back then, the discrimination was pretty high.

[00:35:54] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Yes. And we had meetings and we were alarmed about it. The old people, the resettled families, their children going to school, children, people playing sport were called out, and we faced that, um, and many families faced

that. A lot of people come to the Aboriginal Legal Service for, for advice and assistance. And we can only refer them. Some matters we could represent them. Uh, but we never ever found the people who were distributing those documents. But, it was pretty obvious and it was pretty open that, you know, it was really out there and it started to play on people.

One of the worst perpetrators of racism against our mob was Wagga Wagga City Councillor, Jim Eldridge.

[00:36:40] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: He brought a a delegation and a party of people in front of the Docker Street building where the Aboriginal Legal Service existed with the Children's Service and the Long Day Care Centre and protested about the presence of Aboriginal people establishing Aboriginal organisations in Wagga Wagga.

[00:37:02] Auntie Dot Whyman: You pitied them. You felt sorry for them. You know, uneducated they were, as we say.

[00:37:09] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Yeah, uneducated. What are we going to do about Jim Eldridge? We had meetings about Jim Eldridge.

In 1993 Councillor Jim Eldridge launched a tirade of racist abuse at Wagga Wagga City Council's Mayoral Reception to mark the International Year of Indigenous People.

Auntie Marianne Atkinson and the Wagga Wagga Aboriginal Action Group made a successful complaint of racial vilification in what became a landmark ruling.

[00:37:37] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Auntie Marianne, she was speaking. Um, Jim Eldridge so rudely interrupted that meeting, um, he was, um, he brought the meeting to a close practically. He was escorted out of the building by the local, local police.

A tribunal found that Eldridge's actions "were insulting and were such as would incite others to have serious contempt for the Aboriginal population".

The decision overwhelmingly established that there is a dividing line between free speech and racially vilifying actions.

[00:38:11] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: He appeared before the court. He had, uh, probably half a dozen of his supporters inside court who tried to disrupt it. Jim Eldridge and his delegation viewed the court as being, I thought, maybe a kangaroo court and started making noise. They were told to remove themselves from the court. By the end of the

day, the chairman of the, the committee found Eldridge in breach. And fined him, and he was to make a public apology. Which he did. And he paid compensation to Aunty Marianne Atkinson. Agreed. Aunty Marianne Atkinson distributed that moneys to the community Aboriginal organisations.

The social life amongst the growing mob in Wagga Wagga was strong.

Sport was one of the big drawcards for people, as well as the Debutante Balls they started organising - which attracted many people from all across the region.

[00:39:22] Aunty Dot Whyman: Wiradjuri Long Day Care Centre were the first organisation to hold, and wanted to hold Deb balls. Meaning, you know, coming of age for those young people and, being, seen as part of his community, part of the non Aboriginal community also. Now, they were held back in '83, '84. The first Deb ball was held at the Police Youth Club. We had a mixture of people from Narrandera, Albury, plus Wagga Wagga. And grew. And they had their partners and we had the training sessions. And we had a couple of the males come in, non Aboriginal, and that was the late Brian Jolley, and he taught the men and the young fellas.

[00:40:04] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: The Pride of Erin.

[00:40:06] Aunty Dot Whyman: Their flowers was in the shape of boomerangs with the red carnations or roses through it.

[00:40:12] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Oh, we had some exciting entertainment, uh, in relation to these three balls. And, and it was exciting to see. But they were presented before the local mayor and, and local elders, the, the, the debutantes, uh, to be accepted into society. We had some great, um, entertainers, like back in the day, and he was big, Roger Knox,

[00:40:51] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: And then when, of course, we had

[00:40:53] Aunty Dot Whyman: The Late Mac Silva. Yes. Ah. That was with the first one. And the Debs were presented to, at that time it was Linda Burney and Margaret Campbell Butt.

It wasn't just deb balls they organised.

Another highlight on the community's annual calendar was Christmas and Black Santa.

[00:41:12] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Come Christmas, we would set up the biggest Christmas tree on Spring Street. Have a Santa Claus. Aunty Val brought this to Wagga. Before she left Sydney, she had a lot of contacts. And two big trucks of toys to give away to all the, to all the community. And we'd sit down at night wrapping presents with people's names on them.

[00:41:36] Aunty Dot Whyman: And the staff at the Long Day Care Centre would also, we'd join them and, um, they'd have a black Santa and just the names and everything on their presents. And we'd um, seek donations from Sydney for all these toys.

[00:41:52] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: It was huge. And Wagga was growing, we practically at that time, what I'm talking about right now is that we practically knew everybody Aboriginal person in Wagga Wagga. If you asked me today, I probably wouldn't be able to. That event, our Christmases, was all about Wagga beginning to grow.

As the community grew through these events that helped bring them together, a particularly important one was sports.

And not surprisingly, the South Sydney Rabbitohs colours made their way to Wagga Wagga's sporting fields and stadiums.

[00:42:24] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: I recall when Brothers Rugby League Football Club was introduced into Wagga and it had the colours of South Sydney. I think a lot of the Aboriginal families that resettled here and others that were already living here were drawn to that. And it like become an Aboriginal footy club. Now, as you would know Luke, Aboriginal people, we love our sport. And this was no different, in all sports. We went to that and, uh, of course, there was a big influx of young Aboriginal men going off then and joining the Brothers Football Club at the time.

[00:43:04] Aunty Dot Whyman: Back in the day, in the '70s, um, late '70s, early '80s, we had, you know, thinking about health and doing exercises and whatever, and we formed basketball teams here.

[00:43:18] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: I think that's why Ashmont Oval is so significant to our mob in Wagga Wagga, where we are with Yandarra Day now, because it was first resettled Ashmont. And what Aunty Dot said about the touch football teams and the basketball teams, that's where we met. That's where we trained and had our little barbies and family would come and watch and just at training. But the Aboriginal touch team that we formed in Wagga, particularly the men, were the first sponsored in the whole of Wagga and uniformed by a builder in town. And he said what colour you want?

We all had a vote on it, it can only be, it only went one way, South Sydney colours. So we ran out, in a first division side too, in touch football in Wagga Wagga, we ran out on the ground and everybody stopped and said, oh my God, who are they? Then, not soon after, like two or three weeks after, they all started running around in sponsored uniforms. We were actually the inaugural football team sponsored in Wagga Wagga.

[00:44:23] Aunty Dot Whyman: We had two basketball teams, all Aboriginal girls, women. I played. And, um, there was a number of us, and we was known as Maleekas, meaning black angels. I won't go there, but anyway, um, we played in the local competition, and that was for our health. And we used to, you know, play once a week in the competition. And we'd have training. Then later, we formed touch football. And the men had the men's touch football, and the women had theirs. And that was the colour also of South Sydney, red and green striped guernseys.

And as I said at the start, age did nothing to stop the fire in Uncle Hewitt's belly.

Uncle Hewitt has sat on the board of the Aboriginal Legal Service since he retired.

And one of the issues he is passionate about is trying to stop the appallingly high jailing rates of Aboriginal children and adults. He says governments must change their lock-em-up policies.

[00:45:22] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: We talk about issues that are impacting on people in the community. Our over representation of youth in the criminal justice system and generally the over representation of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody, both men and women, at a juvenile level and at an adult level. It's unacceptably high and we can do better and the government can do better in bringing these rates down, and finding better, diversionary programs for Aboriginal people, particularly our youth because they're our future.

[00:45:54] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: I already started talking about establishing an Aboriginal cricket club at Ashmont Oval. The other one was an Aboriginal cadet program. There is not one in, in all of the cadets in the tri services in Wagga Wagga, there is not one Aboriginal kid enrolled in them or active in them, or families active in them. So why don't we start our own?

And at the age of 76, Uncle Hewitt still spends much of his time supporting Aboriginal programs at the Kapooka Army Base just outside of Wagga Wagga.

[00:46:29] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: I am an appointed uncle to and the oldest Army Reservist in Australia. And it's something that has followed on from my army career. And I, I'm active out there with the Aboriginal programs and those sort of things we need too, because our youth are gonna be our future. Alright? We need people like Luke, Eddie and others to stand up and start, you know, moving these youth and, and getting them involved. For as long as I can breathe and be involved I will be. And I know Aunty Dot will be. But time has come for us to march on too. Time has come for us to pass our knowledge. And in this podcast, I hope we have done some of that.

[00:47:40] Uncle Hewitt Whyman: Truth and Treaty is not dead. Truth and Treaty is still alive. There is not enough truth telling. That was the failure of our referendum. But there is still hope that Aboriginal people, the truth can be told for our mob, you know. And it will be, because there are young people here that will tell it in going forward.

And we greatly thank you for sharing your stories and knowledge with us and with the whole of our community.