

Walkabout Barber and Walkabout Beautiful in South Eastern NSW



Final Report

Prepared July 2025

Contributors: Brian Dowd and COORDINARE





Acknowledgement to Country

COORDINARE - South Eastern NSW PHN acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands across which we live and work.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' continuing connection - both physical and spiritual - to land, sea and sky.

About the artwork

This artwork was painted by Walbunja woman Loretta Parsley, a Traditional Custodian of Yuin country with a strong connection to the south east coast of NSW.

The artwork is in the form of a cultural map and depicts the South Eastern NSW PHN region.

The areas in the artwork are defined by local government territories and include 12 places of significance: Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama, Shoalhaven, Jervis Bay, Eurobodalla, Bega Valley, Snowy/Monaro, Queanbeyan, Goulburn/Mulwaree, Yass Valley and Upper Lachlan Shire.

Contents

Introduction.....	3	Media coverage.....	23
Project outcomes.....	5	Reflection from the Walkabout Barber team ..	25
Outcomes: Walkabout Barber services.....	5	Project Management Review.....	26
Outcomes: Service providers.....	6	Final summary.....	27
Client experience measures.....	7		
Providers experience measures.....	10		



Introduction

In May 2025, I partnered with COORDINARE to deliver the Walkabout Barber and Walkabout Beautiful mobile service and Trauma and Recovery service across communities in the region. As a proud Gamilaraay man and someone who has walked a personal journey through trauma, healing, and recovery, I understand the importance of creating culturally safe spaces where our mob can feel seen, heard, and supported.

This initiative is a tried and tested model which brings together barbering, hairdressing, and beauty services with trauma-informed mental health support. Each person who sits in the chair is offered a one-on-one wellbeing check-in — a gentle but important moment to reflect, yarn, and begin healing in a trusted setting. It's about more than a haircut; it's about restoring dignity, hope, and connection.

Beyond the bus, we delivered suicide prevention and trauma recovery workshops for the broader community and service providers, opening up conversations – with both adults and children - that are too often kept in the dark.

COORDINARE's commissioned mental health, suicide prevention, and alcohol and other drug (AOD) providers also joined us on site, ensuring that referral options and support were available to anyone who needed them.

This report provides an overview of the outcomes of the collaboration between Walkabout Barber and COORDINARE.





Project purpose

To deliver a culturally safe, mobile outreach model that combines barbering, beauty services and trauma-informed mental health support to strengthen the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal communities across the region. By creating trusted spaces and integrating clinical and community-led supports, the project aims to reduce stigma, enhance access to care, and promote healing through culturally grounded engagement.

Project objectives

- ▶ Provide culturally safe mental health and wellbeing check-ins through individual interactions during barbering, hairdressing and beauty services.
- ▶ Deliver suicide prevention and trauma recovery workshops for the broader Aboriginal community at each outreach location.
- ▶ Facilitate access to ongoing care by co-locating local Aboriginal service providers and PHN-commissioned mental health, suicide prevention and AOD services alongside the mobile outreach team.
- ▶ Promote awareness and reduce stigma around mental health, suicidality and trauma through strength-based, culturally led community engagement.
- ▶ Empower Aboriginal communities by creating spaces for open conversation, healing and connection that reflect cultural values and lived experience.



Project outcomes

Outcomes: Walkabout Barber services

Location	Barber	Beauty	Hairdresser	Total
Bega	54	38	33	125
Narooma	31	23	19	73
Mogo	41	28	24	93
Nowra	65	35	34	134
Kanahooka	67	34	33	134
Totals	258	158	143	559





Outcomes: Service providers

Measure	Result	Comments
Number of service providers: Bega	2	▶ 2 clinical service providers
Number of service providers: Narooma	8	▶ 4 clinical service providers ▶ 2 elders (smoking ceremony and Welcome) ▶ 1 Aboriginal music performer ▶ 1 Aboriginal food provider
Number of service providers: Mogo	12	▶ 7 clinical service providers ▶ 2 elders (smoking ceremony and Welcome) ▶ 1 Aboriginal community to support the smoking ceremony ▶ 1 Aboriginal music performer ▶ 1 Aboriginal food provider
Number of service providers: Nowra	8	▶ 4 clinical service providers ▶ 1 Aboriginal community for Welcome and smoking ceremony ▶ 3 cultural community organisations
Number of service providers: Kanahooka	4	▶ 2 clinical service providers ▶ 1 elder for Welcome ▶ 1 community organisation food provider

Client experience measures

Bega

25 client surveys completed

Comments

All 25 respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

The service engaged a broad range of community, with the largest group aged 25–34, and 72% identifying as male.

An overwhelming **92% reporting they were “extremely satisfied”** with the experience with one consumer saying **“Too deadly—friendly and easy to talk with. Thanks.”**

Narooma

13 client surveys completed

Comments

90.9% of respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

The service engaged a broad range of community with over 30% aged under 17 and 61.5% of participants identifying as male.

An impressive **100% of respondents who rated the service were “extremely satisfied”** with their experience. Feedback emphasised the importance of safe, respectful spaces, particularly for those who may struggle with anxiety or trust. One consumer said **“My son has social anxiety and Brian and team were exceptional with him and had him talking and smiling. I cannot recommend him enough.”**





Mogo

18 client surveys completed

Comments

All 18 respondents, identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

There was strong participation from children and young people with nearly 45% under 15. 56% identified as female.

An impressive **83% of participants were “extremely satisfied”** with the experience. Feedback highlighted the value of respectful engagement and safe grooming spaces for all ages with one consumer saying, **“Even though he didn’t want his hair cut, the barbers were awesome and Eli soon settled and got his hair done.”**

Nowra

38 client surveys completed

Comments

76.3% of respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

There was strong participation from children and young people—over 39% were under the age of 15. Respondents were mostly male at 55.3%

An overwhelming **97.4% of participants were “extremely satisfied”** with their experience. Feedback highlighted the service was particularly valued for its culturally safe environment and welcoming approach for children and families. One consumer said **“The experience was amazing. Everyone was so welcoming and understanding of my son’s sensory issues.”**

Wollongong

46 client surveys completed

Comments

95.7% of respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

There was strong participation across age groups, with over 28% aged under 15. Respondents were mostly male at 56.8%

An impressive **88.9% of participants were “extremely satisfied”** with their experience, and a further 8.9% were “satisfied.” The service was consistently described as “deadly,” “welcoming,” and “culturally safe,” with one participant noting: **“Lovely staff and extremely culturally safe space.”**





Providers experience measures

Overall, the provider survey responses were very positive, with constructive feedback on how COORDINARE can improve these events in the future. Providers were incredibly grateful for the opportunity to be involved, with one saying:



“Thank you for the opportunity to be involved in this important initiative. It’s clear that events like the Walkabout Barber play a vital role in bringing community together in a culturally safe and supportive way. I encourage continued investment in Aboriginal led outreach and peer support programs that recognise the strength of lived experience. Building stronger partnerships between health services, community organisations, and Elders will help create more holistic and meaningful support for mob. I look forward to seeing how this work grows and would be happy to contribute further in the future.”



Value of Participation (n=9)

100% of respondents found participation in Walkabout Barber worthwhile:

- ▶ 77.8% said it was very worthwhile
- ▶ 11.1% said it was mostly worthwhile
- ▶ 11.1% were neutral

Most Rewarding Aspects (n=9)

- ▶ Connecting with community in a culturally safe, informal setting
- ▶ Seeing increased confidence among youth
- ▶ Collaborating with other service providers
- ▶ Opening meaningful conversations about mental health
- ▶ Observing community pride and healing through shared experience

“The most rewarding aspect was being able to yarn with community in a culturally safe and welcoming environment. It was powerful to see how something as simple as a haircut, paired with genuine connection, opened the door for meaningful conversations around mental health and wellbeing. Working alongside the Walkabout Barber team and other community organisations also reinforced the importance of collaboration when delivering support services in a way that meets people where they’re at - especially in rural and regional areas. It was an uplifting experience to witness the strength, resilience, and openness of community members who showed up, despite the weather, to connect, share stories, and support one another.”



Suggestions for Improvement (n=8)

- ▶ Improved logistics for Elders (e.g. transport, shorter wait times)
- ▶ More promotion and earlier notice to services
- ▶ Expanded reach (e.g. including Moruya)
- ▶ Weather contingency plans and better shelter
- ▶ Opportunities for follow-up with community and providers post-event

Ongoing Need for Aboriginal Community Engagement (n=9)

100% of respondents agreed there is a need for more engagement activities. Suggested future activities included:

- ▶ Elders' lunches and yarning circles
- ▶ Cultural workshops (weaving, painting, dance)
- ▶ Youth leadership and mentoring programs
- ▶ On-Country experiences
- ▶ Family-oriented community days with health promotion

"These are not just activities— they are vital cultural practices that support healing, identity, and resilience."



Unmet Primary Health Needs (n=7)

Providers identified critical unmet needs in their communities, such as:

- ▶ Access to culturally appropriate **mental health and AOD services**
- ▶ Under-resourced **Aboriginal Medical Services**
- ▶ Limited youth programs, chronic disease management, dental and allied health
- ▶ A strong need for **Aboriginal-led, trauma-informed, face-to-face support services**
- ▶ Better outreach, transport and follow-up pathways

"Our people deserve services that not only meet clinical needs but also honour our stories, resilience, and ways of healing."

Inclusion and Cultural Safety (n=9)

100% felt welcomed and included

- ▶ 88.9% strongly agreed
- ▶ 11.1% agreed

Open comments praised the event's warmth and inclusivity:

"Everyone was so welcoming and I felt a sense of belonging."

"Walkabout Barber is a very inclusive event making everyone feel welcome."





Community Response (n-9)

77.8% rated the community response as “very positive”

- ▶ Others noted the weather and limited local promotion may have reduced attendance in some locations

“Many community members who attended really appreciated the opportunity to connect in a culturally safe space. The Walkabout Barber created a relaxed and welcoming environment, which helped open the door for meaningful yarns around mental health and wellbeing. However, the wet weather may have impacted turnout or made it difficult for some people to stay longer and fully engage. With more promotion and dry weather planning next time, I think even more mob would show up and benefit from this kind of event. The service was well received overall — it just needs continued consistency, community involvement, and support to build trust and reach more people.”



Engagement with Community (n-9)

- ▶ 89% engaged with Aboriginal community to at least a moderate extent
- ▶ Memorable moments included yarning with Elders, peer support conversations, and youth interest in leadership

“It was quite amusing... We had heat/ice packs in our care bags for the community. These were very popular, especially for one Elder who continued to come back to our table to ask for more heat packs for the many people within her circle who would benefit from them. Including her cleaner’s husband! I loved that! It showed the intricacies of our community and the level of care our community have for each other. I haven’t witnessed our community come together like that since the 2019 bush fires. It was beautiful to see.”

“One memorable interaction that really stayed with me was when a young man came up after getting his haircut and shared how much it meant to him just to be listened to without judgment. He spoke about feeling isolated and struggling with his mental health, and how having a safe space to yarn and connect made a real difference. That moment reminded me why this work is so important — sometimes, simply being heard and seen by community can be the first step toward healing.”

Engagement with Walkabout Barber Team (n-9)

- ▶ 100% of providers engaged with the Walkabout Barber team to varying extents
- ▶ Feedback praised the team’s professionalism, cultural safety, and respectful approach

“It was a privilege to work alongside the Walkabout Barber team. They demonstrated genuine care, cultural respect, and professionalism throughout the event. Their approach made it easy to build trust quickly with community members, which opened up opportunities for meaningful conversations and support. The team’s commitment to creating a welcoming and culturally safe space was clear and inspiring. It was a great example of how collaboration between services can really enhance community engagement and wellbeing”



Cultural Understanding (n-8)

- ▶ 75% felt the event deepened their understanding of Aboriginal culture either “quite a lot” or “moderately”

“Not being Aboriginal myself, I have been blessed with the opportunity to access some training resources regarding the culture, including (but not limited to) cultural sensitivity training and the Red Dust program. It’s always an amazing opportunity to see this culture alive and thriving and I hope to have many more opportunities to participate in the future. We can never learn too much!”



Support from COORDINARE (n-9)

- ▶ 88.8% felt either very or mostly supported
- ▶ Helpful aspects included clear communication, planning meetings, and on-the-day presence
- ▶ Suggestions for improvement included earlier engagement with services and Elders, better wet-weather planning, and clearer event promotion strategies

“I felt well supported by COORDINARE both before and during the event. Communication was clear, and the team was responsive to any questions or needs that came up. The planning and coordination made it easier for us to focus on engaging with community and delivering support on the day. That said, as with any large event, there are always opportunities to improve logistical support and on the ground resources, especially when weather or unexpected challenges arise. Overall, I appreciated the effort and commitment from COORDINARE to make the event a success.”

“The communication was deadly you guys were awesome leading up to the event thank you that makes us prepping for the day so much easier when there is clear instructions.”

Impact of Brian’s Story (n-6)

- ▶ 100% found Brian’s personal mental health and suicide journey impactful
- ▶ 100% agreed it reduced stigma and opened up space for honest conversations about mental health

“Hearing Brian’s story created a safe space. It deeply impacted our team and encouraged us to seek further training.”



COORDINARE staff experience

Staff feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with all attendees feeling welcomed and included during the events. The Welcome to Country, Smoking Ceremonies, and Brian’s personal story were consistently highlighted as meaningful and impactful.

Staff reported that the events fostered strong connections with both community and service providers, with many reporting a deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture through informal, hands-on experiences.

COORDINARE’s support was praised throughout, with suggestions for future improvements including earlier planning, stronger on-the-day coordination, and wet-weather contingencies.

Below is a detailed summary from the survey.

Experience & Inclusion

- ▶ **100%** felt either *strongly welcomed* or *welcomed* at the events
- ▶ Staff described a strong sense of cultural safety and camaraderie
- ▶ The Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremonies were consistently cited as powerful and meaningful

“It was essential that we had a staff member here to experience this.”

“What a privilege to be welcomed to participate in the day and the event overall.”



Connection & Collaboration

Staff had strong opportunities to connect with:

- ▶ **Other service providers:** 100% agreed or strongly agreed
- ▶ **Community members:** All felt they had at least some meaningful interaction

“It was great to catch up with service providers and community members—lots of positive energy.”

“Conversations I had at the events indicated people were positive, had been following Brian and the Walkabout Barber for some time and were really pleased to see them back in the region.”

“These events are great not only for the organisation but personally as well. I left with the feeling that I had done something that was supportive for someone else in the community. I would happily do this again.”

Cultural Learning

- ▶ **Most staff agreed** that the experience deepened their understanding of Aboriginal culture and values
- ▶ Many highlighted how the informal setting created space for learning through observation and interaction

“The welcome at Nowra was really engaging and I loved hearing Brian’s story during the yarning circle.”

“Smoking Ceremony and Welcome - loved that it had a local context to it Music was great and created a relaxed atmosphere Stand out for me was the weaving. The number of people whether they were providers or local community stopping by to sit and weave was amazing.”

“It reinforces my understanding of how Aboriginal culture connects with each other. This event was another reminder that Aboriginal consumers often prefer engaging with healthcare providers and activities through methods distinct from conventional general practice.”

“A great question! And this is so important. The event came on the back of my doing the cultural training with Errolyn only the week earlier. Show up, listen deeply, and be open to learn.”



Internal support and communication

- ▶ 100% felt mostly or very supported before and during the outreach week
- ▶ Communication, responsiveness, and on-the-ground coordination were all praised

"People seemed happy to line up to wait for a haircut. Perhaps we could have had some activities for kids while they waited - or a system where they could wander the stalls and we could call them when it was their turn."



Brian's Story

- ▶ 100% of those who heard it agreed it was impactful
- ▶ Staff noted it helped to open up conversations around mental health and created a safe space

"Brian's story is powerful and brings in those who might otherwise stay on the edge of events like this."

"Brian's story is a powerful one and is an important reminder of the importance of culture in wellbeing. His explanation of mind, heart and spirit will stay with me, including the impact of the trauma branch across the highway."

"Reemphasising the importance of sharing a personal lived experience story to ground and create space for deeper conversations is important in reducing stigma and building trust. I was very grateful to be a part of the experience."

"The Welcome, the smoking themselves and the powerful story Brian shared even at an individual level, expands on a deeper understanding of Aboriginal culture."

Suggested Improvements







- ▶ Earlier notice and planning with staff and schools to increase engagement
- ▶ More formal coordination roles for COORDINARE staff on the day
- ▶ Enhanced wet-weather planning
- ▶ Designated yarning spaces or follow-up options for community





Media coverage

The Walkabout Barber initiative received strong and positive media attention across the South Coast and Illawarra, with six media features highlighting the program's impact:

	South Coast Register:	Walkabout Barber brings healing to Shoalhaven
	Batemans Bay Post:	Helps men look deadly while having a yarn
	Eden Magnet & Southern Highland News:	Makeovers and mental health yarns for Aboriginal communities
	Region Illawarra:	A new way to talk about mental health in Wollongong
	Southern Highland Times:	This barber in a bus helps men look deadly while sitting down for a yarn
	WIN Television:	Showcasing community engagement



news

Haircuts and chats with a 'shaving grace'

By MARION WILLIAMS

MOB from Bega, Narooma and Mogo came away looking and feeling good with smart haircuts, all the better for yarning with the Walkabout Barber, hairdresser and counsellor Brian Dowd.

On the surface Walkabout Barber offers free haircuts and beard trims, as well as eyebrow waxing, eyelash and eyeliner, men's manicures and treatments, plus a cuppa and a yarn. While deftly wielding scissors and clippers, he is also checking his client's mental health and administering mental first aid where needed.

Camranger man Mr Dowd has been cutting hair for nine years, going on ten, and going on walkabout for seven of those years.

"It is about communicating and connecting with that individual in the chair and doing a mental health first aid check in a simple, private setting," Mr Dowd said. "We are all ears for people to talk about what is happening in their lives."

Lived experience

Talking wasn't always so easy for Mr Dowd. Being brought up "old school" he was told not to show when he was hurt, and certainly not talk about it.

"That tough bravado they carried ended a lot of men's lives," he said.

"But now we are providing them an opportunity to talk. Believe you me, men

comfort them and tell them it is temporary and to take ownership and be the best version of themselves."

For all generations

He said women have led the way in having a debrief while at the hairdresser. Even so, Walkabout Barber welcomes women and children.

"We think this is a whole family approach," Mr Dowd said. "Strong men, strong women, strong young people, walking in the same direction, side by side, no one in front and no one left behind."

It is important to talk to all age groups. "The Elders have so much to teach, the young so much to learn, and the middle-aged have so much to offer," Mr Dowd said. "Middle-aged must do what the Elders say and listen to what the young people have to say, so it can be a hard place to be."

The Walkabout Barber team is helping that middle-aged group to become the next Elders.

"When it is time for us to go, we have to know we did everything we could to make sure the next generation of Elders can do everything they need, not to survive, but to thrive."

Family is a common topic of conversation. Men who cannot see their children as often as they would like talk about the impact that has on them.

Men easily talk about sport and hobbies, sometimes leading them to discuss stress and depression.

"A lot of men still feel they are the providers, so if they are not providing, they feel useless," Mr Dowd said. "We

you have to find that purpose," Mr Dowd said. "It is OK to fall down, just don't stay down too long."

Opening up

Family is a common topic of conversation. Men who cannot see their children as often as they would like talk about the impact that has on them.

Men easily talk about sport and hobbies, sometimes leading them to discuss stress and depression.

"A lot of men still feel they are the providers, so if they are not providing, they feel useless," Mr Dowd said. "We

Walkabout Barber Brian Dowd and COORDINARE Aboriginal Health Consultant Taneka Longbottom in Narooma on May 19. Picture: Marion Williams

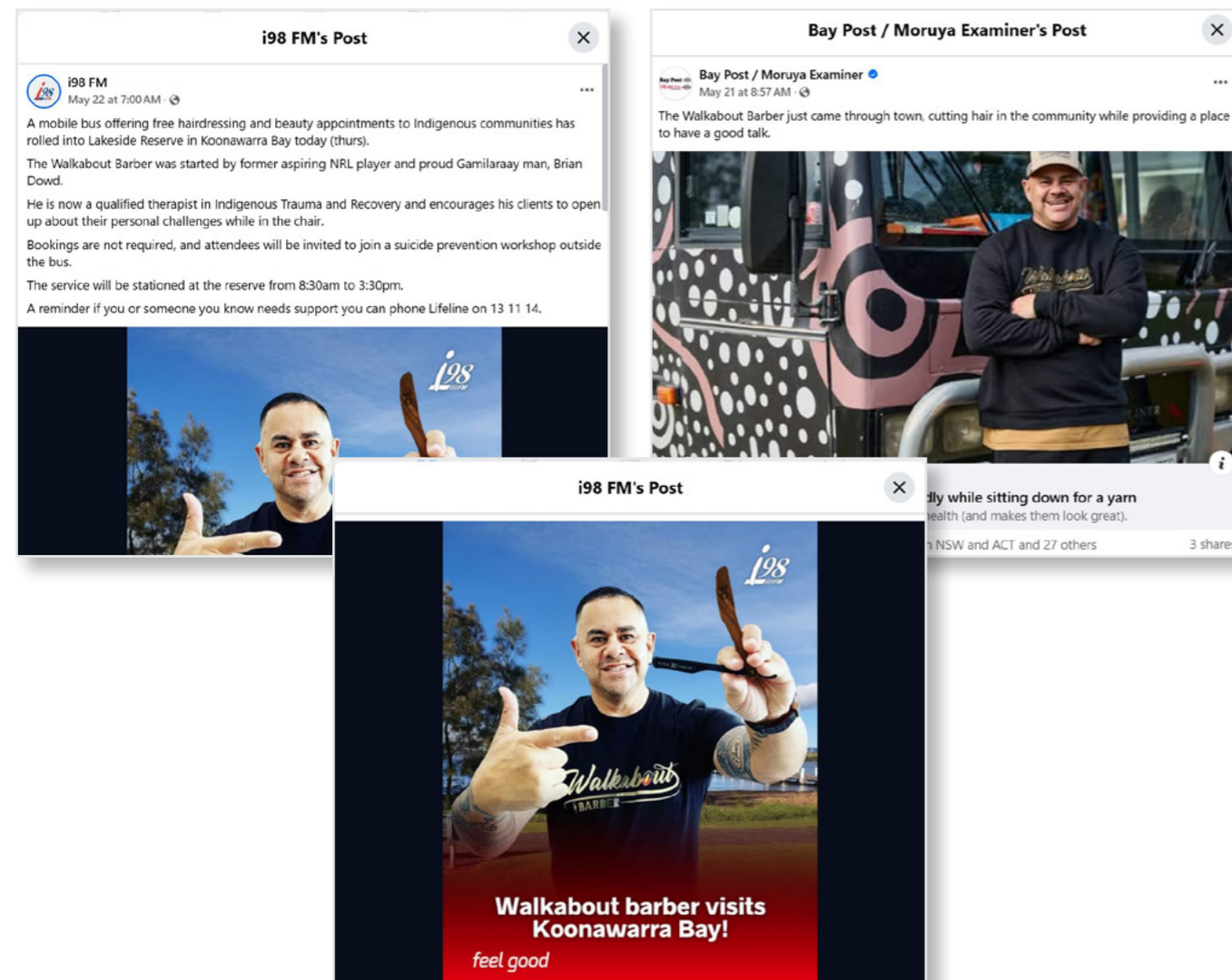


Key themes across media coverage included:

- ▶ **Cultural Connection and Healing:** The articles emphasize the importance of culturally safe spaces provided by the Walkabout Barber, facilitating healing and connection within Aboriginal communities.
- ▶ **Mental Health Awareness:** Several pieces highlight the initiative's role in promoting mental health discussions, particularly among men, through informal settings like barber services.
- ▶ **Community Engagement:** The coverage underscores the positive reception from local communities, noting the accessibility and comfort the mobile services bring to various regions.

The tone of all coverage was overwhelmingly positive, with stories and interviews capturing genuine moments of joy, connection, and cultural pride. Community members were seen smiling in barber chairs, sharing their journeys, and voicing how much it meant to feel **“seen, heard, and valued”**.

This media spotlight not only helped amplify the reach and impact of the program, but also reinforced the value of culturally led, grassroots initiatives in strengthening community wellbeing.



Reflection from the Walkabout Barber team

On behalf his team, Brian Dowd from the Walkabout Barber and Walkabout Beautiful team shared a very positive reflection on their experience delivering services as part of the COORDINARE-funded outreach.

The team rated the overall experience as “very positive”, praising the COORDINARE staff for their strong communication, collaboration, and on-the-ground support. They felt very supported both before and during the trip and highlighted the role of key staff in creating a culturally safe, responsive environment that allowed the team to focus on community engagement.



“All staff members were easy to communicate with, forward-thinking, and worked well as a team with our team to create one positive team.”

The most meaningful part of the experience was connecting with community members—especially those facing vulnerability and social isolation—and offering culturally appropriate care in a welcoming and non-clinical setting. A standout moment was reconnecting with a woman they had met five years earlier, who shared her journey of recovery while receiving services onboard the bus.

“She stated it was so much easier to open up on our bus than going into a clinical space with a counsellor.”

The team felt very comfortable engaging community members and directing them to participate in evaluation activities. They reported a very positive community response, describing the events as powerful, inclusive, and uplifting.

The team strongly recommended the continuation and inclusion of cultural elements such as singing, weaving, artefacts, and food vans at all future events. No suggestions for improvement were made, and the team expressed a strong desire to return to the communities in the future.

“It was amazing being part of the delivery of these events—we would be extremely grateful to revisit all communities in the future.”



A note from Brian Dowd

“Working with COORDINARE has been an amazing experience, especially working with seasoned veterans who were not just knowledgeable in the community sector, but also in the mental health and well-being space. The community response to our visits in Bega Narooma Mogo Nowra Wollongong were amazing, with many community members commenting about the need for a service like ours and how easy it was to be able to access us not only for hair care grooming and beauty services, but also for a yarn to connect with somebody other than their own family or friends which made it easier to talk to a stranger about the issues and also the problems in their life that they are facing.

Media coverage was amazing with newspaper articles, WIN news as well as social media stories being able to be viewed and in real time. It was amazing watching the news and seeing not only our team being interviewed but also locals being interviewed and people sitting in the chair, smiling and also happy that they are not only being heard but they are being seen, and in a world where many people who are vulnerable and who are in need of help often feel like they are not seen or heard so it was amazing to bring this Service and this opportunity to each community where people felt like people and not just a number.

Team Walkabout Barber had an amazing experience on the south coast and every community that we went to we were welcomed with open arms. It was unfortunate that our last day was cut short due to bad weather in Yass; however, it would be amazing if we could revisit Yass in the future and deliver an event for them in their community as they missed out this time around.”



Project Management Review

COORDINARE

What worked	What didn't work	Ways to improve
Lead up meetings, onsite support, coordination of external services who wrapped around our service, provision of food and coffee which made waiting times a lot easier, welcome to country a big positive.	The weather	At this stage everything worked well and all areas were covered with careful planning. Wet weather alternatives would need to be locked in in future.

Logistics

What worked	What didn't work	Ways to improve
Venues were great	Two locations in one day was tricky to navigate around.	Select 5 communities and run 5 full day events in those communities.





Final summary

The Walkabout Barber and Walkabout Beautiful initiative, delivered in partnership with COORDINARE, has had a profound and lasting impact on communities across South Eastern NSW. Over the course of this project, more than **550 services** were delivered across five communities, each one creating a culturally safe, welcoming space for healing, connection, and care.

Through the simple act of sitting in a chair—whether for a haircut, a beauty service, or a yarn—community members experienced moments of dignity, trust, and transformation. These interactions opened doors to mental health conversations, support pathways, and strengthened community connections.

Community feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 100% of clients in some locations rating their experience as “extremely satisfied.” Stories emerged of Elders reconnecting, young people opening up, and families finding comfort in culturally safe services that met them where they were—on their terms.

Service providers and COORDINARE staff alike reflected on the power of this model, noting its ability to reduce stigma, support cultural learning, and facilitate genuine engagement. Importantly, providers and staff felt deeply included and supported, with strong praise for the coordination, communication, and cultural integrity embedded throughout the project.

Media coverage amplified the program’s reach, with six major features and a WIN News segment showcasing how grassroots, culturally-led initiatives can create meaningful impact—both seen and felt—across entire communities.

As Brian Dowd and the Walkabout team reflected, this was not just a service—it was a movement. A movement grounded in lived experience, cultural strength, and community pride.

“In a world where many people who are vulnerable often feel unseen, it was amazing to bring this service to each community where people felt like people—not just a number.”

This project has reaffirmed the value of investing in Aboriginal-led, trauma-informed outreach that brings together culture, care, and connection. The outcomes speak for themselves—and the voices of community make it clear: **this work must continue.**