



Case for Support

Libero (LEE-behr-roh): liberated, unconstrained, free. (Italian)

Introduction

Libero Network Society is a BC registered incorporated not-for-profit organization (#S—0062089) founded in 2010 by Lauren Bersaglio. We are an online peer support network offering community, resources, and encouragement to those living with mental health conditions.

Our Mission is to champion mental health and foster community so those living with mental health conditions can know they aren't alone and that freedom is possible. Our Vision is for a world free from stigma, where no one feels ashamed of or alone in their struggles.

We accomplish our mission through our online magazine and community. Through our magazine and online community, we cover a variety of topics ranging from managing anxiety and overcoming depression to recovering from eating disorders and advocating self-love and positive body image. Our articles and videos are created by people who live with mental health conditions for people living with mental health conditions.

Our Pillars: Hope, Love, Freedom

We believe offering support is about spreading hope:

We believe every journey begins with hope. Recognizing hope exists is the first step towards freedom. By creating a platform for people to share their own stories, our goal is to show hope available to everyone. Hope is what keeps us moving forward, trusting there are better things to come.

By fostering community, we promote love:

Love is essential: both love of self and love of others. So often what holds us back is a lack of self-acceptance, a lack of belief we deserve better. In order to break free, we must learn to love ourselves and show love to others. It is through love that we realize we are worthy of so much more.

Our goal is to break down stigma so we can live and walk in freedom:

Everything we do points towards freedom. We have hope for freedom, and love is what gets us there. We do not believe freedom is found only through "full recovery" or no longer living with mental health struggles. We believe freedom is found when we break through the walls of secrecy and shame that kept us trapped so we can own our stories, let go of shame, and begin to thrive.

How We Started

Libero began in 2010 when our Founder Lauren Bersaglio shared her story on Facebook and it went viral. Lauren's story includes struggles with an eating disorder, self-harm, and depression, which kept her trapped for many years. As others read and related to Lauren's story, they wanted to share theirs, too, and be a part of the community she was building. Over the years, as more joined the community and shared their stories, Libero expanded and grew into the thriving online magazine and community it is today.

Our Community

Libero's Community is made up of individuals who are living with or have lived with mental health struggles. Members in our community are in various stages of their own personal journeys. Some are years beyond first reaching out for help and journeying towards mental wellness, while others are in the early stages of first coming out about their struggles and seeking support.

Our community is entirely online and spans the globe. Currently, we reach over 10,000 people through our social media channels and each month, on average, our online magazine receives over 1,200 visitors and 2,000 page views.

Though our community is open to all ages, the majority are aged 25-34 and live in North America, with the primary cities being Vancouver and Toronto.

Our Projects

We have several key projects that help us achieve our Mission:

- 1. Online Magazine:** Our online magazine offers peer support through articles and videos created by people living with mental health conditions for people who also live with similar conditions. We also share articles that offer support and information to loved ones of those living with mental health conditions.
- 2. "Free From" Project:** Our "Free From" project allows members from the Libero community to share their stories and celebrate their own progress while also encouraging others who can relate to their journeys. This project allows community members to take part in two ways: (1) They can submit their "Free From _____" story to our magazine (2) They can post a "Free From _____" photo on social media. In both cases, the individual fills in the blank after "Free From," stating in their own words what they are "Free From." We have seen the blank filled in with phrases like "Lies" "Fear" "Depression" "Anorexia" "Self-Harm" "Suicidal Thoughts" "Society's Beauty Standards" "The Labels of Depression" and many more.

- 3. Ask An Expert Column:** Our Ask an Expert Column consists of a team of medical professionals (therapists, dietitians, nurses, etc.) who volunteer their time by answering anonymous questions submitted by the Libero Community. The answers are then published in articles on our site, so others can also benefit and learn from the answers.
- 4. #LiberoChampions:** Our hashtag is used for our own social media posts and for posts from the Libero Community. This hashtag connects our followers with one another and with our content. Members from the Libero Community can share their own journeys on social media using this hashtag and we use the hashtag when we post on our accounts.
- 5. Public Speaking and Events:** Our Founder Lauren Bersaglio does Public Speaking and has shared with hundreds of young people, offering them encouragement through her own story. She also speaks in professional settings, offering information on supporting those who are living with mental health conditions. In addition, we attend events locally where we have a photo booth so attendees can take their own “Free From” photos and access print resources so they can learn more about our projects.
- 6. #StopFitspiration:** Our #StopFitspiration project is a movement primarily based on Instagram and the Stopfitspiration column on our magazine. The goal of this project is to raise awareness for the harmful and addictive behaviours promoted by “Fitspo/Fitspiration” (“Fitness Inspiration”) content and to offer alternatives by teaching more balanced approaches to exercise and health.

How We Help

According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, peer support is an *“important contributor to recovery.”*

The Commission defines peer support as: *“a supportive relationship between people who have a lived experience in common. The peer support worker provides emotional and social support to others who share a common experience.... Peer support programs work by offering people support, encouragement, and hope that recovery is possible. Peer support considers the wellness of the whole person and focuses on health and recovery rather than illness and disability, in order to assist people in finding their own path to recovery. There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to peer support. It can take many different forms and be offered wherever people need it, whether in peer-run organizations, workplaces, schools, or healthcare settings. Peer support is intended to complement traditional clinical care and vice versa.”*

We offer peer support to members of our community on a daily basis through our articles and online community. We also give those who are ready to take steps towards mental health the opportunity to have a voice and celebrate their newfound freedom by sharing their stories with the rest of the Libero Community.

While we don’t view ourselves as a replacement for professional help, we value ourselves as a supplement to it. Our magazine has over 9 years worth of articles and is accessible 24/7. In

addition, our Ask an Expert column is there for those who may have questions about mental health but are not yet ready to reach out for support. Submitting a question to our column anonymously may very well be their first step towards mental wellness and seeking help.

What Our Community is Saying

We are constantly receiving messages from members of the Libero Community thanking us for the work we do and sharing how the Libero Community has helped them on their own journey.

Below are just a few of the messages we've received thanking us for our work:

(We value the privacy of our community; therefore, we've kept these comments anonymous.)

"Thanks so much for creating a way to encourage healthy living without shame."

-Facebook commenter

"Thank you Libero Network for all you do in adding to the conversation about mental health and recovery!! You have been a relatable spark of hope in my own recovery."

-Community member

"I went to Lauren Bersaglio's depression Real Talk. It really helped me a lot. Thank you for your courage, Lauren!" -Twitter user

"You have already inspired me to give up my addiction to exercise and start loving myself and my body unconditionally. I seriously cannot thank you enough." -Instagram Commenter

"Lauren, I loved the topic you covered around depression as I have gone through a lot in my life and your session has changed my life." -Instagram Commenter

Why Libero Needs Your Support

The Mental Health Commission of Canada acknowledges the problematic lack of funding and support for peer support initiatives. They state: *"But despite evidence of the benefits, for both individuals and families, peer support programs have yet to receive the focus, funding, and attention needed....Peer support initiatives can have a great impact on a person's journey of recovery. The relationship forged between the peer supporter and the person with a mental health problem or illness can help improve quality of life as well as reduce the need for hospitalization."*

As a grassroots not-for-profit organization, we rely on donations and sponsorships to continue growing our peer support network and to help keep our projects running.

Without funding, Libero and its community could not exist. If we didn't exist, then the thousands of members of our present community along with any future members would not have access to the support and community we provide on a daily basis.

Where Your Support Goes

Expanding our community

We expand our community by attending local events (such as mental health fairs), distributing print materials (brochures, information cards, etc), and marketing online (to reach more who can benefit from our community).

Keeping our projects running

We like to say that we are a nonprofit, but our hosting company isn't. We rely on donated funds to keep our website running, secure, and up-to-date. We also require funding to ensure we have the technology needed to produce videos and manage our social media accounts.

Ongoing organizational costs

As a registered nonprofit, we have ongoing costs associated with running our business. These costs include annual registration fees and at-home office expenses. In addition, our Founder Lauren Bersaglio and our contributors currently volunteer their time to Libero. However, to sustain future growth, the goal is to offer modest reimbursement for time spent to both our Founder and those in assisting roles.

Training tools

It is important that we occasionally attend training seminars and purchase online courses and training tools to stay up-to-date on the latest trends and technologies and to learn how to grow and thrive in an ever-changing online market.

Launching new projects

In the future, we would love to expand our projects so we can reach more people in new and exciting ways. A couple of the projects on the horizon are launching a podcast and creating print and downloadable versions of our magazine. We also hope to create an app that will make connecting with Libero's community and content even easier.

Please consider supporting our work so we can continue championing mental health and celebrating freedom for years to come!

To donate online, please visit: liberomagazine.com/donate

To donate directly, please call: 778-241-4248 or email: lauren@liberonetwork.com

Thank you for your consideration!