



Impact Report

2021-2023



Note from our Founder



Kamakshi
Malhotra

Highlights

600+

students covered through
20+ workshops across 4 states

3000+

As I reflect on the past two years, I am filled with a sense of both humility and pride. Our journey at Freed, dedicated to starting dialogue around eating disorders in India, has been anything but easy. We faced obstacles and setbacks, but also achieved significant milestones that have allowed us to make a tangible impact on the lives of those struggling with eating disorders in our country.

Since the beginning, we have remained grounded in our commitment to breaking the silence around these fast-spreading, and often unnoticed, mental illnesses. Last year, we tirelessly worked towards raising awareness, creating and collecting resources for support, and building an organisation that truly cares about inclusion, representation, and equity.

I am especially proud to have been able to reach many more people this year who were suffering in silence, and connect them with the help they deserve.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the goals we have been able to accomplish over the last 2 years. Through inspiring stories and compelling data, we have been able to harness the true power of sharing. Continuous dedicated effort and unwavering commitment to the cause has been the driving force behind our steady progress.

But we realise our work has only just started and there are still countless individuals and communities in need. As we prepare for the year ahead, I feel determined to continue chipping away the stigma, correct the lack of understanding of the subject and provide support to anyone who reaches out. We remain on a mission to touch more lives and make a lasting impact in the field of eating disorders in India.

I am grateful for the support of our team, advisors, volunteers, partners, and supporters who share our passion and commitment to this cause. I am especially grateful to our donors who have believed in me, our team and our platform. Thank you for standing by Freed in this journey to make a difference. Together, we can empower many Indians to accept and respect their bodies.

With heartfelt gratitude,
Kamakshi Malhotra

active online community
members and ambassadors

1000+

participants of India's first socio-
cultural ED research study

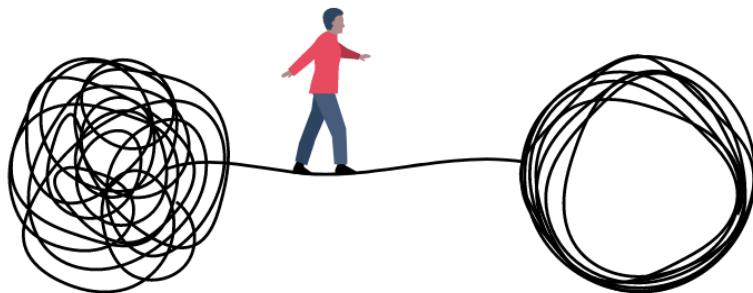
About us

We are Freed; a non-profit organisation on a mission to promote awareness, intervention, and action towards eating disorders, and body image concerns in India. Eating disorders are serious physical and mental health concerns that if not addressed can lead to far more serious health consequences. While they are better understood in Western societies, in India there is lower awareness and support options range from non-existent to extremely limited. Freed steps in to bridge the gap to provide a safe stigma-free environment and a support structure for people for prevention, cure, education, and intervention.



How we developed

Freed was born from our founder, Kamakshi Malhotra's own lived experience navigating anorexia nervosa. During her journey of recovery, she saw and understood not just her own pain points, but also those of other stakeholders involved in the process. She also reached out to professionals such as psychologists, nutritionists, and psychiatrists, who had experience in addressing eating disorders in India to form a hypothesis around the kind of support ecosystem we needed to build.





Mission

Freed is on a mission to be a trusted, stigma-free platform for anyone with any body image and/or disordered eating-related concerns. We firmly believe that having open conversations can go a long way in breaking the social stigma and normalising discourse around eating disorders and other mental health illnesses.

Vision

Freed's vision is to create personal and cultural paradigm shifts by driving conversations, internal reflection and action around eating disorders.

While speaking to people, we often get faced with the question "but eating disorders?" "isn't this a western problem?" or "is this the best use of your time and resources?"

And our response always is,

YES! Let us paint you a realistic picture.

"I turned to the only thing I had control of: Food. With the ease of food delivery services, I had food, almost every night. Then, with a sudden feeling of guilt washing over me, I would



Add to this, the rapid rise in unrestricted access to mobile internet and social media content, along with growing discontent with our bodies and common social body shaming people of all ages have to deal with.

Beauty ideals are changing rapidly in response to idealized images on social media

Up to **81%** adolescents have **body image concerns**

Source: Sasi RV, Maran K. 2012

Over **45%** believe in an "ideal body" based on content they consume online

Source: Grogan S. 2016



had access to food 24x7 without ever leaving home. I would order large amounts of food and then force myself to throw up. This was a vicious cycle." - Vinay, living with bulimia

Freed exists to throw light on this very important issue and give those suffering in silence, a voice and platform.

Our philosophy is simple yet powerful and built on the strength of 3 pillars.



Focused awareness generation

to introduce the right vocabulary, break down stigma, and create spaces for dialogue.



Capacity & ecosystem building

to provide support to individuals and families affected by eating disorders or related concerns.



Evidence-based research

to solidify the fundamental realities on which we base our organisation's hypothesis and work.

"I think freed is doing a phenomenal job by shining light on eating disorders in India. As a healthcare professional, I've had a good experience working with freed. They are extremely efficient in connecting clients with professionals in time."

Ishita Bhatia
(Nutritionist, Freed directory)

"We are really grateful for this wonderful session at our place. In this era of self doubt, your workshop plays a booster to us. We hope people start embracing their bodies, their shapes and the way they look"

Team Freakonomics,
Gargi Delhi University

"The projects that Freed has ideated and implemented, cover all areas- ranging from research, community outreach and awareness initiatives to clinical aspects as well. Freed is attempting to fill a very large and underserved gap in the field, and they are doing so with utmost passion and dedication. It has been a pleasure being associated with the organization."

Shachi Dalal (Clinical Psychologist & ED specialist, Freed Directory)

Our Impact

HELPLINE:

21

Trained
volunteers

1682

Hours on the
call floor

KNOWLEDGE CENTRE:

1027

Participants in
sociocultural study

12

ED survivors for
focus groups

FELLOWSHIP:

12

Fellows from
2 Batches

85

hours of
training

"After 8 months of Fellowship, I explored various aspects of mental health, self care and I have evolved as a person because I have increased my expertise and my skill set in conducting workshops and public speaking. I have grown more confident than I was before."

Amritha Jacobs, Freed Fellow Batch 2

AWARENESS WORKSHOPS:

617

People
impacted

13

Sessions

"It was a great session. It was my first group session but being a part of this group I felt FREED to share. I hope you guys organize more and more such safe spaces. I would love to be a part of these."

Lovisht Chawla,
Workshop Participant

DIRECTORY:

15

Professionals
onboarded

16

People started their
recovery from ED

DIGITAL OUTREACH:

2168

Active
Community

5549

People
Reached

"It has been a wonderful journey and I have learnt so much professionally as well as personally. The role initially had been quite challenging to know that we would be talking to a stranger and be a reflective listener. But I think the way we have been trained and the way the entire process helped us to be that person in that moment of need was very very helpful."

Rashi Sanghvi, Freed Fellow Batch 1

Lessons learnt along the way

1. Helpline:

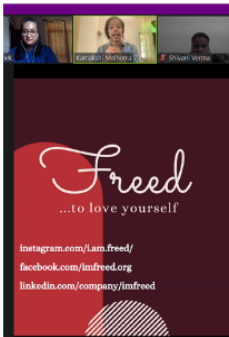
Our helpline, Freed Care, was created to serve as a single destination to address questions around eating disorders and serve as a safe space for dialogue and help-seeking via professionals and/or resources listed on our website. The leadership team at Freed received several direct calls for help from individuals or loved ones severely impacted by EDs. Some of these individuals were reluctant to call the helpline due to challenges of anonymity, accessibility and convenience. Our internal audit also revealed that those that did call, sought generic information, self-management, and often a diagnosis.

We understood these needs and took appropriate steps to redesign and organize information on our website, built resources and published them for open access. We also created a chatbot, REED, which helps individuals navigate available resources easily. REED went live on 1st April 2023. Our future plans include having a guidance counsellor on board, who will serve as the first point of contact for mental health first-aid for those in need of help for severe eating disorder-related concerns.

The chatbot has had great initial success, but it is still early days. Our key focus is to continually assess and improve the efficacy of our services and make the changes necessary to serve the evolving needs of our audience. In the coming year, our aim is to make REED more accessible and inclusive. We hope that REED helps individuals overcome barriers to help-seeking.



2. The Freed Fellowship:



We evaluated our fellowship program outcomes and made a significant change, moving from accepting bachelor's level psychology students to exclusively master's level students for our program. We found that while we were successful in providing knowledge supplemented by practical experience, the bachelor's level students were not able to fully benefit from the complexities of the program. Our second batch comprising master's level psychology students was better able to grasp the diverse complexity of the material and apply it to practical settings, resulting in stronger outcomes. The third cohort of the Freed Fellowship went live on 20th March 2023 with 11 master's level psychology students. Going forward, we will continue to evaluate other ways to improve the overall effectiveness of the program. Our aim is to have trained at least 30 students by the end of 2023.

Fellowship key competencies:



3. Initiating conversations on eating disorders:

We found that a lack of awareness or understanding of eating disorders is a huge barrier to seeking help. While people experience feelings of shame or embarrassment in seeking help for concerns around eating disorders, engaging in open-ended conversations on the subject can help reduce the stigma around it and encourage them to seek support. Additionally, by providing help-seeking information and resources, we have been able to raise awareness and educate our participants about the symptoms and consequences of eating disorders.

A key learning for us was the need to simplify our messaging to make it more relatable. As emotional eating, disordered eating, and body image issues often precede more severe forms of eating disorders, we included each of these topics to create experiential workshops via effective delivery methods. The change in messaging was more easily accepted. We are taking a proactive approach towards promoting overall health and well-being in addressing these topics. In 2022, we covered more than 1000 individuals in our offline and online awareness generations programs covering participants across 5 states. In 2023, our aim is to develop workshops as a follow-up series to build on the first sessions and include 2500 individuals in our workshop.



4. Research:

One of the most difficult learnings for Freed has been the fact that eating disorders are a growing concern in India but there is a dearth of research documenting the same. Due to this, there is a lack of evidence-based interventions and culturally contextualised modules to understand Indian eating patterns. Upon conducting a literature review, we found that there was limited research published in India, which was also written from a clinical and biased perspective.

From here on, our team made the collective decision to conduct research wherein lived experiences would be documented in order to highlight the socioeconomic and cultural experiences to understand eating disorders in India. However, when we began our outreach efforts to document these narratives of lived experiences, we had to confront the harsh realities of stigma, denial and underdiagnosis to a large degree in India. We then switched gears to incorporate a more quantitative approach to understand and document eating disorder patterns first. We piloted the Eating Attitude Test - 26, SCOFF and SDE. This was met with limitations in terms of scope and cultural gaps. To this, the researchers re-strategized to widen the research scope of collecting eating patterns by shifting to disordered eating. We used the DEAS scale and successfully collected information from more than 1100 adults across diverse socio-cultural groups in India.



2023 Outlook

- Creating an ecosystem of support through collaboration and partnerships:

While our focus was on providing help, resources, and an ecosystem of support to individuals, our efforts towards collaboration and partnerships with organisations working in the same space were lower. Eating disorders are not exclusive to one socio-cultural-economic strata. Hence, collaboration and partnership efforts are necessary for leveraging strengths, resources, avoiding duplicating efforts, and reaching a broader audience.

- Mapping in-patient facilities:

Finding an in-patient facility that offers treatment for eating disorders in India continues to be a significant challenge for us. We can only imagine how challenging and disabling it must be for people living or struggling with these disorders must feel. To not know where to seek help from or have limited options available is a barrier to well-being. Therefore, our key action area is to map out the in-patient facilities in India that specialize in the treatment of eating disorders. By focusing on this critical issue, we aim to provide a comprehensive list of facilities that can help increase access to care for those in need.



- **Building Credibility :**

Amongst our greatest challenges in advocating for social change is a lack of trust amongst the people most affected. This year, our goal is to work on building credibility for our platform through several efforts - research publications, partnerships with larger organizations, celebration of success stories etc. - in order to become the a one-stop-shop for all things related to disordered eating in India. Everyone should be able to get good quality and easily accessible support through our website and other media handles.

- **Leveraging virtual platforms:**

While we have worked to provide a steady flow of services and information for mass awareness through our virtual platforms, the goal is to grow bigger and talk louder! This year, we have several new initiatives planned that will allow us to reach more people, and amplify our message through our community. These include i) a round table conference ii) more stories of people with lived experiences with eating disorders, and iii) online support groups to provide community support



Faces of Freed



Kamakshi Malhotra

CEO & Founder



Dr. Mahek Singh

Head of Operations



Sanika Tillway

Head of Communication



Sanjana Jain

Research Lead & Facilitator



Chetna Chauhan

Visual Artist



Tanmay Banerjee

Manager of Program



Friends of Freed

“ The unwavering commitment and deep empathy for individuals living with Eating Disorders resonate in every action, thought, and future plan of FREED. I am truly inspired by the real-life stories of change and the remarkable team behind FREED. Without a doubt, FREED will generate a ripple effect, fostering safe spaces for those in their journey with Eating Disorders to seek support. I am truly humbled to be considered one of the cherished Friends of FREED, and to contribute to this noble cause.

Upahar Pramanik, SDMC Trust ”

“ I had an excellent experience working with Freed. I believe they are making a significant impact in the field of eating disorder awareness and would highly recommend them to anyone looking to get involved in eating disorder awareness or seeking support and resources related to this cause. Thank you for the important work you do!

Naba Farooqui ”

“ Seeing the work Freed is doing brings me nothing but joy. I wish I had access to resources like these when I first realized that I have an eating disorder. Freed is normalizing conversations around disordered eating, educating people and providing much needed resources to help people feel less alienated and come out stronger at the other end of things. It's so important to have a safe space where you feel accepted for who you are and validated for what you're going through. Freed is creating this environment for countless people across the country.

Prerna Suri, Graduate student ”



Initiating conversations on Eating Disorders

Connect with us:

