

Liam, 20

InsideOut Institute Champion & University of Newcastle student who struggled with anorexia nervosa from 10 years of age, *DUBBO*

Science and philosophy enthusiast who is currently studying Biomedical Science at the University of Newcastle, Liam, 20, Dubbo, has struggled with anorexia nervosa for the past decade.

Being bullied in and out of school acted as a catalyst for Liam, providing the environment to foster the development of his eating disorder at 10 years of age.

Liam has been admitted to hospital on two occasions, and fortunately is now well on the road to recovery following an arduous battle with anorexia nervosa.

This is Liam's story.

Liam's battle with disordered eating and his body image began at 10 years of age.

As well as being bullied by his fellow school pupils, incredibly, some of Liam's family friends also made harmful comments about his weight and body.

"I used to get bullied a lot at school, especially about my weight. I wasn't a big kid, but they knew the topic was a soft spot for me.

"Those hurtful comments from family friends instilled in me from a very young age, that I wasn't good enough. I started taking that to heart and restricting what I ate," said Liam.

"Even from such an early age, the eating disorder dictated much of my life."

Liam's anorexia escalated and took complete control of Liam's life during his final high school years.

"When the HSC started, so too did the associated stress. I used to cope with that stress by restricting my food intake and exercising excessively.

"I was experiencing a whole new level of stress which escalated my eating disorder," Liam said.

"My anorexia nervosa became all-consuming and obsessive at the time, and I became very unwell. My whole life became about my eating disorder."

Liam lost a staggering amount of weight, during which he collapsed several times, leading to two hospital admissions, totalling 12 weeks in duration between 2015-2016.

"I was so malnourished and my brain felt fried, so I just wasn't functioning right. There was no such thing as logic any more.

"I ended up having to drop out of school because I was so unwell," said Liam.

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“Because I was the only male on the hospital ward at the time, I really felt like I wasn’t meant to be there.

“I mistakenly thought no other men had eating disorders, and that I was the only one. I felt so isolated and alone,” Liam said.

Liam believes it was particularly hard to get help for anorexia nervosa as a male, because it is commonly perceived as an eating disorder that predominantly affects girls and young women.

“I knew something was wrong, but I didn’t think I had an eating disorder. It felt like my masculinity was being questioned.

“Nowadays, no doubt there are many people who share similar feelings, who are not receiving the help they require because they don’t think they are sick, when they really are,” said Liam.

“Eating disorders are not gender-specific. They affect every demographic and every age group. Eating disorders don’t discriminate.”

After relapsing following his first hospital admission, Liam spent another four weeks in hospital. Following his second hospital admission, Liam secured a psychiatrist and allied healthcare professional team that worked with him to propel him on the road to recovery.

“My life feels a million times better now that I’m on my journey toward recovery. I feel like I’ve been let out of jail.

“I feel free, I can make decisions, I can travel and attend university. I feel like I’m getting my life back,” Liam said.

Contrary to what many people may believe, Liam’s eating disorder did not stem from trying to improve his appearance.

“An eating disorder is not just about body image – that’s the manifestation of how we cope with those feelings we have inside ourselves.

“When I started to get very stressed, in order to alleviate that stress, I used restriction of food and excessive exercise to make me feel in control.. Anorexia Nervosa was a control-based thing for me, because I felt I wasn’t in control of anything else in my life,” said Liam.

Liam welcomes the launch of the InsideOut Institute – Australia’s first institute for research and clinical excellence in eating disorders.

“There’s still a long way to go to get information out there about men with eating disorders. Hopefully the InsideOut Institute will make significant headway with this.

“The harder treatment and resources are to access, the less likely men are to ask for help. The process needs to be as simply as possible,” Liam said.

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To coordinate an interview with Liam, please contact Rachel Fergus Media and Public Relations Advisor, University of Sydney +61 478 316 809.