

2020

annual report





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mission: to enable access to quality mental health care in low-resource contexts through design and collaboration with local leaders and organizations.



vision: mental health liberation led by the world's vulnerable communities

about brio

Brio exists because mental health and wellbeing are a formidable challenge—and indispensable resource—in the march toward global human flourishing. Since 2018, we have worked in a consultative and collaborative capacity to help local impact organizations define what it means to thrive in their contexts, design programs to promote further thriving with vulnerable members of society, and demonstrate the effectiveness of these programs. We work not only to address suffering related to mental illness but to build enduring capabilities most valued by local leaders, community members and participants.

These capacities afford a person the inner strength and behavioral skills to bounce back from crisis, pursue new opportunities, and support the healing of those around them.

While models of scaling up specific treatments or increasing the number of mental health professionals have their role in addressing the treatment gap, we believe in the combined power of community members, trusted organizations, and existing social support programs to increase culturally-contextualized forms of emotional strength and resilience. **Our emphasis on community-driven leadership, design, and development reflects what our growing number of partners tell us frequently: mental health and wellbeing are as much about physical health as they are about human dignity, civic participation, and finding personal meaning every day.** As Brio, we are building a body of work that demonstrates not only the many ways to increase wellbeing and resilience with vulnerable populations (thus reducing the need for treatment), but also that expressions of this flourishing can be as diverse as humanity itself.



our partnership principles

1. We combine psychological expertise and clinical experience with human-centered design to address problems in low- resource contexts.
2. We fine-tune our strategies, processes, and tools across partnerships, and we customize our support & services to our participants' needs.
3. We leverage a 2-to-5-year time horizon for partnership growth, evaluation, refinement, and long-term impact.
4. We work with leaders embedded in local communities to design for community participation and ownership. Initiatives are created to last beyond Brio's involvement.
5. We address key components of a functioning mental health system— treatment, prevention & promotion, and capacity building— with an emphasis on prevention and promotion as a means of reducing overall need.



letter from the executive director

Dear friends,

2020 tested the convictions and commitments of every enterprise— large or small, young or mature, for-profit or nonprofit or somewhere in between. At a financial level, how each enterprise fared is discernible: some closed for good, others pivoted and survived, and still others are doing better than ever. Yet when it comes to mission, values, and the qualities that we hope define our legacy, performance is less easily assessed. In this swirl of ambiguity, compromise and self-protection are all too tempting. For those serving in contexts characterized by risk and vulnerability, Covid-19 compounded hardship to magnitudes previously unimaginable.

I've often spoken of the honor it is to walk with Brio's global partners— some of the bravest people I know. As Covid-19 ravaged their communities, and lockdowns crushed livelihoods, they continued to show up to serve (masks on, physically distanced). They fed their neighbors, cared for families, and rallied their teams' creativity to build new ways of increasing community wellbeing. In the most acute moments of crisis, we were able to help them raise emergency funding, strategize their next steps, and support their own recovery and restoration. As the pandemic progressed, we launched new partnerships and projects, which I am thrilled to share in the pages that follow. Throughout this chaotic year, one thing remained clear: if we did it all over again, I would still tie Brio's future to these leaders and communities. No doubt about that.

Navigating the pandemic as a fledgling organization has its challenges, yet we grew and learned so much in 2020. We started the year with two existing partnerships (Ecuador and Mexico), and closed with six active partners across three continents (new in Peru, India, and Malaysia). In August, we published our Mental Health Design Toolkit, an open-source set of 19 tools and processes for creating mental health programs in low-resource contexts. In response to Covid-19, we offered live training on stress management and resilience tailored to fellow social entrepreneurs and social justice leaders through nonprofit networks and universities. And in mid-2020, we received our official designation as a tax-exempt organization from the IRS, making it possible for supporters like you to join us in this great adventure.

Yet the roster of activities that mark our progress— and the impact we can demonstrate through evaluation— only capture part of the story. Anyone working with vulnerable communities knows that a mere fraction of their efforts bear fruit in the end. This was another year where corruption destroyed collaboration, participants died or disappeared, and some partners came close to shutting their doors forever. I don't say this to be sensational, but to acknowledge that the story behind the scenes is frequently more grim than the highlight reel that characterizes all too many impact narratives. In these moments, we return to our values, which remind us that while we drive toward impact, we tether ourselves to practicing faithfulness, courage, and hope.

And perhaps this is the most remarkable truth about a challenging year: **everything that we have stood for, the compassionate healing and resilience we pursue with our partners, the postures we take in offering services and support, are unchanged.** What we have gained are more insights, more practices, and more fellow sojourners to build this movement together. Mental health and wellbeing are at greater risk now, demanding no less than our best work and our deepest hope for humanity. We are so grateful for your accompaniment.

With courage,



Daisy Rosales
Co-founder and Executive Director



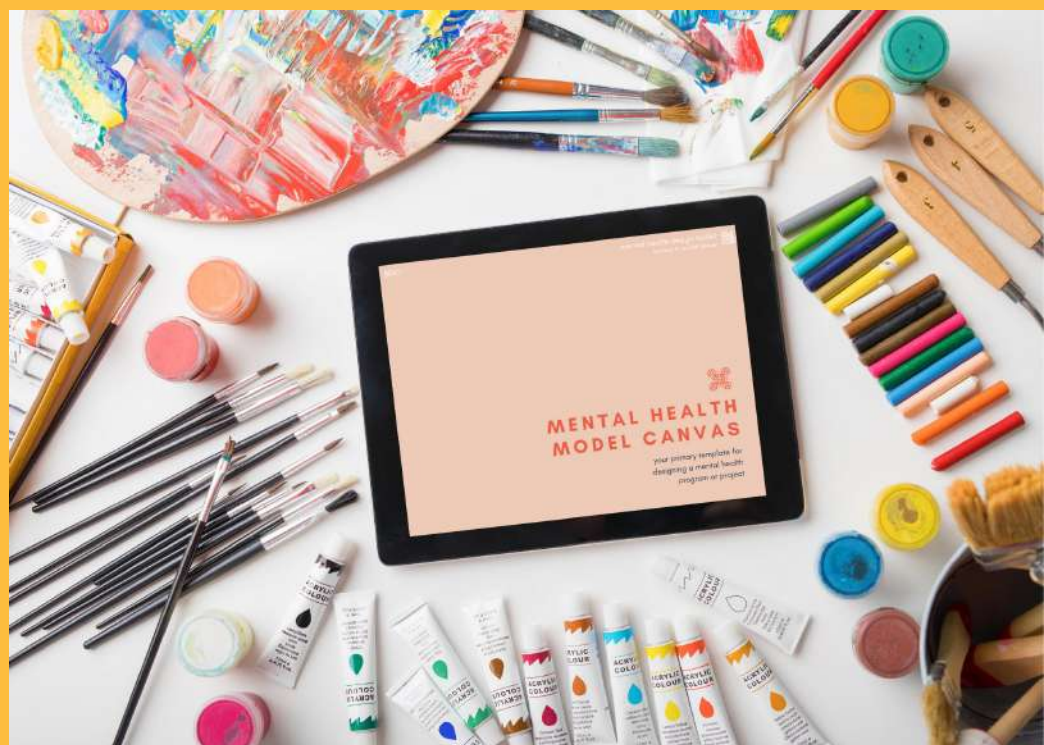


overview of the year

In August 2020, Brio turned two years old. Two years since we started the journey with our pilot partnership in Ecuador, our hypothesis that local impact organizations can contribute powerfully to global mental health has become a testimony. **By the end of the year, Brio's partnership model continued to serve leaders and organizations reaching thousands in low-resource areas in Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, India, and Malaysia.**

Our ability to scale our consultative and collaborative support this year was due in part to the demands of virtual work during the pandemic. In January, we entered Acumen's global community through the Rockefeller Foundation - Acumen social enterprise accelerator, leading to increased interest in our partnership program among Acumen Fellows in South Asia. This resulted in our program's expansion to a new region, connecting through extensive virtual dialogue, interviews, co-design sessions and visits, thanks to technologies that have made work possible around the world.

Through these new and existing collaborations, Brio's services and resources expanded dramatically. We increased our offerings in co-design processes, impact definition and evaluation, team resilience building, and appropriate integration of cultural elements into programming. **With the support of Yale University and the Rockefeller Foundation, we published our Mental Health Design Toolkit, reaching 800+ practitioners in 15+ countries within the first month of launch.**





We are also honored with the diversity of communities and program participants with whom we now collaborate, highlighting the importance of our extensive emphasis on trust-building and accompaniment. **Together with our partners, we are delighted to serve and design programs alongside indigenous, tribal, and refugee communities, whose thriving is defined as much by the uniqueness of their stories as it is by conventional mental health metrics.** In a world that has largely ignored the nuances of these identities, we uphold their trust with utmost care and dedication.

This year, we expanded our evaluative capacities despite the programmatic disruptions of the pandemic. As part of a needs assessment with our partners in Mexico, we helped to deploy a contextualized version of the WHODAS, mapping the impact of trauma and burnout onto the disability assessment schedule. We discovered that 90% of participants experienced at least some disability as a result of their experiences of and proximity to human rights abuse. We also completed a developmental evaluation of the new wellbeing program we created with our partners in India for teachers in rural tribal areas. The promising results demonstrated statistically significant improvements in emotional regulation, linked to higher levels of workplace balance, reduced stress, increased coping behaviors, and deeper connections in relationships.

In 2021, the projects we began building in the previous year will launch in local communities, expand to new participants, and undergo thoughtful evaluation. **This multi-year process requires patience and creativity as we progress from identifying needs and defining mental wellbeing, to designing effective programs, to training and implementation, to evaluating for improvement.** Meanwhile, we plan to expand our team, making it possible to serve our growing pipeline of exciting potential partners. Even as we continue to face the realities of the pandemic and virtual collaboration, 2021 promises to be a year of accelerated learning and impact.

partnerships at a glance

Mexico City, Mexico

Partner: [Casa Xitla](#)

Emphasis: Human rights defenders in Mexico voice some of society's most brutal challenges, including disappearances and torture. Since 2019, Casa Xitla has offered a refuge for a network of defenders to receive holistic care and burnout prevention support. Due to the challenges of Covid-19 in Mexico, the cohort we aimed to support was unable to complete the program as planned. However, qualitative feedback at the end of 2020 demonstrates the resilience built through the progress they did make, and we are hopeful that the program will continue in the future. Partnership in 2020: needs assessment, deep listening

Quito, Ecuador

Partners: [Casa Victoria](#), [Quito Eterno](#)

Emphasis: Indigenous communities remain some of the most marginalized in Ecuador, while economic realities force increasing numbers to move to urban areas. Covid-19 magnified the existing communal and individual challenges, faced particularly by indigenous youth. Together with Casa Victoria and Quito Eterno, we launched a project to design a program that leverages communal identity, cultural education, and narrative therapy practices to promote personal resilience with teenagers who identify as indigenous. This program will be delivered in a socially distanced manner. Partnership in 2020: deep listening, needs assessment, initial design, community participation, fund development

Lima, Peru

Partner: [Yunta](#)

Emphasis: Yunta offers a mentorship program for youth in low-resource areas in Lima, driven by a volunteer model. The program builds personal important developmental qualities that include emotional regulation, self-awareness and self-efficacy. Due to Peru's strict lockdown, our focus this year will be to support the transition of this program into a safe and productive virtual format, while designing an effective evaluation system to ascertain the ways in which participants are developing over the course of the program. Partnership in 2020: deep listening, initial design, community participation, evaluation design

Udaipur, India

Partner: [Kshamtalaya Foundation](#)

Emphasis: Kshamtalaya reimagines education as a holistic growth and development process for children and their communities in rural areas.

Embedded in this vision is helping students and educators increase practices that enhance their flourishing, civic engagement, and sense of purpose. In addition to co-designing a 21-day wellbeing audio program at the height of the pandemic, we are working with Kshamtalaya to develop appropriate definitions and scales for understanding the transformation they witness in the communities where they serve. Further, we are supporting the team's broader strategic goals in developing a culture that reflects their values and the impact they hope to have.

Partnership in 2020: community participation, deep listening, complete design, team assessment, developmental evaluation, capacity building

India

Partner: [Acumen Fellows 2019 Cohort](#)

Emphasis: The Acumen Fellows program aims to cultivate moral leadership among the most promising individuals in social change and poverty alleviation. Through our work with Kshamtalaya (above), Fellow and founder Vivek Kumar invited Brio to work with his Cohort to design wellbeing spaces where they might accompany each other through the challenges of leadership beyond the Fellowship experience. After extensive interviews with members of the Cohort, Brio is excited to co-create a pilot of the wellbeing spaces in 2021, with the aim of cultivating continued mutual accompaniment and support in the coming months.

Partnership in 2020: deep listening, initial design, qualitative analysis

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Partner: [Humankind Foundation](#)

Emphasis: Humankind leverages the power of volunteerism in Malaysia to implement evidence-based therapeutic interventions for local organizations serving low-income families and refugee communities. While our partnership began in November 2020, our emphasis will be to support the process of their development as a local trainer and provider of brief interventions. Due to Covid-19, their current work focuses on crisis support for children and arts-based therapy. In 2021, we envision an expansion of understanding how to contextualize and match appropriate interventions to the most vulnerable populations in Kuala Lumpur and beyond.

Partnership in 2020: deep listening, strategic orientation, project support

our global reach to date:

7

Local impact organizations supported through deep partnership and capacity building

3000+

Total participants and direct recipients of care through partnerships

1000+

Total recipients of training through workshops & resources



Impact story: India

Rajasthan: Integrating contextualized wellbeing practices in education during Covid-19

Since 2016, Kshamtalaya Foundation has worked to reimagine education with children and communities in rural areas of Rajasthan. Founder Vivek Kumar, Acumen Fellow 2019, shares the vision of creating **“spaces where children get a chance to exercise their freedom”**—through the celebration of learning and exploration, practicing wellbeing, and involving families and stakeholders in the process of schooling. Through the years, the Kshamtalaya team has emphasized the role of the entire community ecosystem, including the educators who teach and staff local schools. This resonates with Brio’s approach to mental health as not only an individual experience but a community-owned reality, leading to an exciting partnership that launched in 2020.

Our first project with Kshamtalaya was to design ***Hausla*, a 21-day wellbeing program for the educators in the communities where they serve, in light of the immense stress and uncertainty of pandemic lockdowns.**

The wellbeing program consists of short, approachable audio segments that feature a relatable story or parable, thematic lesson, and simple wellbeing practice. The goal was to offer a low-tech, culturally-approachable program that could be shared through radio in a context where wellbeing content may be new.

"Our hope for the Hausla program is that participants will be empowered to regulate their emotions, develop resiliency skills to navigate the uncertain times in life, and increase ability to connect with the community beyond their inner circle." - Pooja Singh, Design Team Lead

Brio supported the team through mental health design sessions, modeling potential program structures and themes, and reviewing the content Kshamtalaya created. In addition, we helped to identify simple ways to understand how the program improved important wellbeing outcomes defined by the team. After surveying participants and conducting a simple statistical analysis, **we found that participating educators reported noticeably more ability to describe their emotions, an increase in coping behaviors, an increased sense of balance at work, lower levels of stress, closer relationships, and a heightened ability to monitor and regulate their emotions.**

"It helps me calm down and gives a direction to self-awareness, acceptance and confidence."

The most important and powerful finding from our analysis is that the program appears to successfully contribute to a **statistically significant increase in emotion regulation**. This further appears to have secondary benefits of being able to be less overwhelmed by stress even during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. These preliminary findings from just the first wave of pilot program participants points to the promise of the program in offering core skills to assist educators in more effectively navigating a meaningful, but stressful, vocation.

We are incredibly proud of Kshamtalaya for not only creating an exemplary program with exciting preliminary results, but also sharing the program with growing numbers of educator networks. In 2021, we anticipate scaling the wellbeing program to hundreds more educators in surrounding communities through partnerships with local schools and civil society organizations.



participant responses

“Hausla has become an important part of my life, my day seems incomplete if I don’t listen to Hausla.”

“In a day full of chaos of outer world, Hausla gives me time to settle down within. These stories motivate me to identify my own strengths.”

“Everybody has their own individual qualities and characteristics... better is to acknowledge it, accept it and polish areas where one needs to improve.”

“By the time I reached 4th day of practice I saw immense transformation in me, I could calmly sit and meditate making a choice to disengage with the distractions.”



partnership reflections

"Brio's core strength lies in designing inquiry driven processes. At the heart of this partnership lies empathy in design. This has really helped us to leverage the expertise they bring to align with the local needs and the context. Our partnership has been driven by the local needs of the community. The experience of working with them has been so enriching that they not only focus on designing programs but also simultaneously building capabilities of the team. Their approach integrates solving for the present while integrating long term thinking and solution. Working with them has been such a rich experience as they blend inclusion and efficiency so well. We as a team are extremely grateful to be working with Daisy and Aaron and looking forward to our continued partnership." - Vivek, Founder

"Brio has been a significant support for us as a mentor, as a thinking partner that not only listens but helps you in pushing your own boundaries, and provides with a safe space to design possibilities to create transforming realities for communities." - Pallavi, Operations Lead

"Brio helps you feel so empowered and reinforces your believe in [your] organisation more and more. The space they provide to think and flourish is full of love and comfort. It is the space where you and your organisation is nurtured." - Pooja, Design Team Lead

*images and quotes shared by courtesy of Kshamtalaya.





the journey ahead

In the next several years, we at Brio aim to grow our body of work in global mental health through partnerships with remarkable organizations serving vulnerable communities around the world.

We will refine each practice within Brio's consultative approach:

- deep empathetic listening to understand participant needs and goals
- defining mental health and wellbeing through a combination of global standards and local contexts
- co-designing programs and resources with partner teams for engaged local ownership
- enhancing partner sustainability and strength through capacity building
- creating approachable developmental and summative evaluation strategies to understand impact and improve programs

Our collaborative approach has, and will continue to, demonstrate the power and potential of local organizations, as well as the benefits of promoting mental health at the community level. In doing so, we aim to attract more capital to the global mental health space, particularly toward local leaders and organizations building enduring capabilities that engender resilience in the face of life's immense challenges.

We exist for compassionate healing. Join us on this journey toward collaborative human flourishing by visiting startbrio.org/support-brio

with gratitude

Co-founders

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Aaron Rosales, PhD, Director of Mental Health

Board of Directors

Jennifer Guerra Aldana

Jihye Gyde

Jasmine Park

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