

Tell Us Something BHERO GOOD

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– Geoff Gaukler, Mental Health Coordinator - Grand Forks Public Schools

PROGRAM

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION FOR TRAUMA IN SCHOOLS (CBITS)

SCHOOL

Valley Middle School
Grand Forks Public Schools

COLLABORATOR

Community Violence
Intervention Center (CVIC)

INCEPTION

Since 2001, CBITS has been implemented widely across the United States and abroad, in countries such as Australia, China, and Japan.

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICE: Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) is a school-based intervention designed to reduce symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and behavioral problems, and to improve functioning, grades and attendance, peer and parent support, and coping skills for student in grades 5-12. Delivered by school personnel or as a collaboration between school personnel and a trained behavioral health professional over the course of 10 sessions, this model is used to teach students six cognitive-behavioral techniques: education about reactions to trauma, relaxation training, cognitive therapy, real life exposure, stress or trauma exposure, and social problem-solving.

COST: School personnel can receive CBITS training in virtual and in-person formats, though live training with a Certified CBITS Trainer has the greatest impact. CBITS also offers a free, self-paced virtual training on its website, along with live virtual or in-person training options for a cost of \$4,000 attributed to a 12-hour live training conducted over multiple days with a group of up to 15 trainees.

IMPLEMENTATION JOURNEY— ALL ABOUT VALLEY MIDDLE SCHOOL

ENROLLMENT
570+

PROGRAM PARTNERS SINCE
2020

STUDENTS SERVED (SO FAR!)
6

Geoff Gaukler, Mental Health Coordinator for Grand Forks Public Schools, was approached by the Community Violence Intervention Center (CVIC) in 2020 with an exciting opportunity to implement a new in-school intervention for students impacted by trauma. The program, CBITS, is intended to eliminate barriers to accessing treatment, such as transportation, cost, and out-of-school time.

“It’s a shared philosophy amongst all of our school mental health staff here in Grand Forks that our job is to try and remove those barriers,” Gaukler said. “Youth are six times more likely to complete evidence-based treatment if it’s offered in a school, rather than in another community setting. So when CVIC called me, it was a no-brainer.”

When Gaukler brought the idea to district administrators, counselors, and social workers, it immediately caught the attention of Dawn Kriewald, LSW at Valley Middle School.

“We have an ever-changing population, with a lot of socio-economic disparity and high-risk students. It’s also a huge school of more than 570 students in sixth through eighth grade,” Kriewald said. “So it was an opportunity that I jumped on right away.”

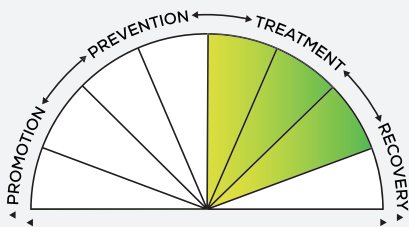
Plans were set in motion; interested schools were identified, and a Certified CBITS Trainer from California was scheduled to travel to North Dakota to lead district mental health professionals in training. Then COVID-19 hit, and like most best-laid plans in 2020, the training was postponed.





BH CONTINUUM OF CARE

This case study features CBITS as a Treatment option within Behavioral Health Continuum of Care; however, this programming may span additional portions of the Continuum depending on its use.



B-HERO'S MISSION

is to engage K-12 Behavioral Health Resource Coordinators in training, technical assistance, and opportunities to facilitate connections.



B-HERO Technical Assistance Center is a collaborative effort between Central Regional Education Association and the Department of Human Services, Behavioral Health Division.

In the very last weeks of the 2019-2020 school year, the district was able to participate in a virtual training. In total, 10 social workers, school psychologists, therapists, and counselors were trained in CBITS. Despite the obstacles put in place by COVID-19, Valley Middle School was able to implement CBITS the following semester.

Kriewald worked with her team at Valley to identify 25 students who were most likely to benefit from CBITS. From there, they were required to obtain consent from the students' parents. In the end, they screened 16 students, and selected six with the highest needs.

Trained mental health professionals can choose to lead a CBITS group on their own or co-facilitate with a representative from an outside agency such as CVIC—like youth therapist Emily Stremick.

“Schools can definitely implement CBITS themselves, but there are benefits to partnering with an agency,” Stremick said. “We [at CVIC] are specifically trained to help children who have been exposed to violence. We bring additional knowledge, skills, and training.”

Following the CBITS training, facilitators lead students through a different lesson each week on topics such as healthy coping skills and the physical and mental effects of trauma.

“We tend to think that we need to protect young people by not talking to them about hard things. That’s why CBITS is so great, it gives students the opportunity to share and process their experiences in a safe and supportive space,” Stremick said. “It’s important for students to understand that they are not having these feelings because they did something wrong or because they are bad, but because they experienced something traumatic. CBITS is conducted in a group setting where the adolescents can learn from one another, which I think is really powerful.”

SUCCESS STORY

So far, only those previously selected six students at Valley Middle School have been directly impacted by CBITS; however, the program has already had a ripple effect across the district and beyond.

“Some of it is the content of the lessons themselves, but there’s also the sense of belonging that comes along with participating in this program. It helps kids realize they’re not alone,” Gaukler said. “So many of our other counselors throughout the district now want to be trained in CBITS. The excitement is there to bring it to as many students as possible.”

Those relationships have a lasting impact on students. When one of Kriewald’s group members transferred to a neighboring district at the end of the 2020-2021 school year, the rest of the students insisted that she still be allowed to participate in the group.

“She’s already been back now this fall,” Kriewald said. “She does not go to school here anymore, but she has asked about how she could bring this to her school.”

GET INVOLVED

While CVIC works specifically within the greater-Grand Forks community, districts interested in implementing CBITS with access to local agencies are encouraged to partner for additional support from trained professionals. Visit cbitsprogram.org to learn more about the CBITS program and to schedule a live or virtual training session.