

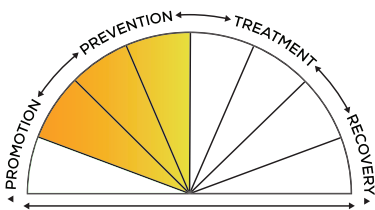
STUDENT-CENTERED Support **BHERO**

PROGRAM: **EMPOWERU**

COST: Cost of enrollment in the EmpowerU coursework is \$390 per student.

STUDENTS SERVED: Since launching in Minnesota in 2018, EmpowerU has been used by thousands of students across the country. Within just six months of the 2021-22 school year, over 85 students across 11 districts in North Dakota were enrolled in EmpowerU.

CREATION + IMPLEMENTATION JOURNEY



BH CONTINUUM OF CARE

This profile features EmpowerU as a Prevention program within the Behavioral Health Continuum of Care.



“We’re a course about personal empowerment and resilience. We teach students that despite their difficult and uncontrollable circumstances, the things they can learn to control are their thoughts, their reactions to experiences, and their next step forward.”

–KATIE DORN, CO-FOUNDER AND CEO - EMPOWERU

DESCRIPTION OF SERVICE: EmpowerU is a highly personalized, self-paced online non-academic essential skill-development program designed to fill a gap by providing a Tier 2 support. By pairing interactive daily lessons with one-on-one support from online experts in adolescent mental health, EmpowerU equips students with the skills to build persistence, resilience, and success.

As a high school counselor, Katie Dorn saw first-hand the gaps that exist in providing support to students experiencing depression, anxiety, trauma, and other non-academic barriers to school success.

Dorn served students with the highest level of need through Tier 3 support, intensive individualized interventions. But for students requiring Tier 2 non-academic support, it was primarily delivered in group settings. What little individualized support these students received came in the form of 504 plans, which provide students a “Band Aid” solution to their problems rather than teaching them the skills they needed to manage their difficulties.

“Every student deserves individualized attention. Why aren’t we intervening earlier and getting the skills and support to students so that they are successful?” Dorn would ask herself.

In her third year as a school counselor, Dorn had 400 students on her caseload. About 10 percent of her students struggled with academic and non-academic barriers to success—like anxiety, depression, ADHD or trauma—and they all leaned on Dorn for support.

“I just felt frustrated because I did not have time in my day to meet with all of them and give them the tools they needed,” Dorn said.

As an entrepreneur, Dorn saw not an obstacle, but an opportunity. She identified 40 students who had the same open period in their school day and worked to create a study hall for them. Over the course of 30 days, Dorn delivered instruction and developed a short lesson that included a daily calming strategy, informational video related to a non-academic essential skill, and questions for self-reflection. Each day, students would share their responses with Dorn through a shared Google Doc, and she would connect with each of them individually through Google Chat.

By the end of the 30 days, grades and attendance had improved, and Dorn could see drastic attitude shifts in the students who had participated in the intervention. The combination of skill development, support, and daily accountability worked—and an early iteration of EmpowerU was born.

In 2015, Dorn joined forces with a group of clinicians from diverse fields to share her experience and create a more effective, scalable way to deliver mental health services to young people. They spent three years developing their bold new approach, and in 2018, EmpowerU was launched.

“It started with a small group of students when I was a school counselor, just kind of playing around with this concept,” Dorn said. “Now here we are a decade later with an integrated solution that can easily be implemented at the school level to provide that support that I wished I had when I was a school counselor.”

EmpowerU’s curriculum is delivered through a series of short, self-paced online lessons that students can complete during a built-in time in their day. Lessons focus on non-academic essential skills such as critical thinking, adaptability, and perseverance. Students are paired with a highly trained clinician who serves as a coach, delivering daily robust and highly personalized feedback that helps students apply what they learn to their life and goals each day.

“These are universal concepts that we could all use, but delivered in a highly personal way that feels really life changing to students,” Dorn said.

As a goal-oriented program, EmpowerU requires students to complete an assessment upon enrollment to gauge where they are at as a baseline measure. With the help of their mentor, students reflect on their answers and set a goal to work toward in key areas of development.

“It’s designed to deliver support and skills in one blended solution that takes students who are languishing in avoidance, lack of motivation, ADHD, anxiety, depression, any non-academic barrier to success, and provide them with a hope and the path to do better so that they can persist and be the person they want to be,” Dorn said.

In addition to the lessons themselves, student enrollment fees include access to all student data for school personnel, including a student’s final report. Schools can also view each student’s course dashboard to view their progress and communicate with their coach.

“It’s really a partnership between us and the schools,” Dorn said. “This is a good, easy way to get our course in students’ hands, especially in rural districts that are under-resourced.”

SUCCESS STORY

At the summation of the course, students re-engage with initial assessment to measure their progress. These assessments compare their achievements to the goals they set at the beginning of the course. The impact of the program is perhaps best shown through the words of the students themselves. One North Dakota student wrote:

“This course opened me up and taught me several different, healthy techniques. When I’m feeling anxious or stressed. It showed me how to use my inner coach more than my inner critic. I really enjoy this course. I appreciated all the feedback I got from the instructor. I also like all the relevant information I learned, and then I’ll continue to use the rest of my life.”



GET INVOLVED

Schools interested in implementing EmpowerU are encouraged to contact Betsy Bahn with EmpowerU.

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