

MASSACHUSETTS BUREAU OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES: “WANDER”

Research shows that reducing stress and practicing mindfulness in youth creates the foundation for better mental health and decision-making. *Wander*, a youth stress-reduction program, is an engaging game experience that combines stunning visuals, rich storytelling, and effective mindfulness techniques that youth can easily incorporate into their daily lives.

The pilot program was a great success delivering on our goals and showing promise for our state-wide rollout. One youth stated, “the game is amazing and I love how it makes me feel about myself.” After 6 weeks of the pilot program, youth showed reduced stress compared to those who did not receive the program; an increased ability to address or manage their own difficult feelings or problems without needing adult intervention; reduced loneliness, sadness, and stress when thinking about their friends; and improved quality of sleep. After one session of playing *Wander* online, youth stress declined by over 33%. A camp instructor shared positive feedback: “I’ve noticed a change in the boys that thought they were too cool to do this. After 4 weeks, one of the more quiet boys is sharing more and talking about affirmations. It’s exciting to see him become more expressive and vulnerable.”