

Mind Body Awareness Project 2014

Founded in 2000, MBA is an Oakland-based, 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is to help youth transform harmful behavior and live meaningful lives through mindfulness meditation and emotional awareness. While most development intervention and rehabilitation programs for at-risk youth focus on increasing external assets, MBA focuses on the development of internal assets—youth development from the inside out (i.e., increased self-esteem, self-regulation skills, enhanced emotional management). MBA has been recognized for its innovation and efforts in the field of mindfulness for high-risk adolescents. Our services are based upon a proprietary synthesis from best practices in meditation, group-process modalities, and social and emotional learning models. Through a combination of groundbreaking direct service, extensive research, advocacy and coalition building, capacity building and training of youth service providers, we are working to create a world where all young people thrive. Since our founding, MBA has touched the lives of over 5,000 youth in 4 counties.

MBA's programs are categorized into 3 departments (Probation, School-Based, and Community-Based):

1) Probation Services - MBA currently delivers mindfulness-based rehabilitation classes to youth at the Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center. Out of all the counties that make up the Bay Area, Alameda County incarcerates the most youth offenders and almost 50% reside in the city of Oakland. MBA is one of five agencies that partners with the county to provide special services to the incarcerated youth and we are the only agency at the juvenile hall facility that focuses on mindfulness-based programming.

2) School-Based Services - MBA currently has a formal partnership with the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) Alcohol, Tobacco, and Drug Prevention and Intervention (TUPE) Program, a state government-funded, comprehensive program provided by the District through a collaboration of community-based organizations. The collaborative was designed to ensure that students graduate by receiving support for their academic and social-emotional growth, health and well-being, college and career readiness, and school engagement and attendance. MBA delivers mindfulness-based life-skills to youth at two OUSD continuation high schools: Community Day School and Dewey.

3) Community-Based Services - One of MBA's long-term goals is to perpetuate a "continuity of care" model, wherein youth who traverse the criminal justice system receive mindfulness-based services while incarcerated, at home, in their communities, and in school. MBA believes that by continually expanding our presence in the communities where our high-risk youth reside, we will be better able to provide a continuity of service that will contribute to the decrease in the cycle of recidivism.

In partnership with the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), MBA will deliver mindfulness-based and emotional literacy classes with an emphasis on substance abuse awareness to Oakland's high-risk and formerly incarcerated youth at four Title 1 continuation high schools. From their program participation, youth will gain valuable life skills to reduce stress, increase feelings of calmness, develop positive coping skills, improve their decision-making skills, and expand their knowledge in substance abuse awareness.

To help youth reach their fullest potential and become contributing members of their families and communities, MBA's Mindfulness Services for High-Risk Adolescents program gives youth access to transformational tools and competencies in a language and through metaphors relevant to their own experience. MBA's work addresses two issues that are prevalent among our at-risk youth and directly impact their educational progress, mental health and violence prevention.

The efficacy of meditation and mindfulness practices in mental health treatment has been well documented and is widely used. MBA's proven rehabilitation model is based on our belief that mental health through mindfulness can be cultivated. Our program treats existing mental health issues plaguing at-risk and incarcerated youth and can prevent further development of mental health problems resulting from on-going violence, abuse and trauma certain to continue without effective methods of intervention. Our unique solution offers safety and the opportunity to cultivate psychological and emotional health that is freely, equally and immediately available.

MBA works towards preventing the continuation of the cycles of trauma and violence in at-risk youths' schools, communities, and homes. We address the issue of violence prevention from the inside out and understand that once the violence stops inside a person, it stops in their lives. As youth gain insight into the real needs and experience driving their violent behavior they are better equipped to stop the cycles of violence in their lives.

Both of these issues, mental health and violence prevention, directly impact low-income and high-risk students' academic success. MBA recognizes that the social and emotional aspects of each student are the driving forces in each student's ability to learn and that through the benefits of mindfulness, youth can gain the ability to maintain the attention necessary for classroom learning. MBA understands that by helping youth to experience the legitimate needs underlying their behavior, they are empowered to make the distinction between what they need and how they express it, and to build self-esteem around their own innate intelligence and values. MBA's extensively researched 10-module curriculum specifically addresses the top 10 challenges expressed by high-risk and incarcerated youth today, in a safe and contained environment and in a language they can respect and understand.