

A report on Reading's Mental Health First Aid Grant



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# Project AWARE 2014-2016 Report

by

Erica McNamara, MPH  
Local Mental Health First Aid Coordinator  
Reading Public Schools

## FUNDING OVERVIEW 1 | ONE

The [Reading Public Schools](#) obtained a [Now Is The Time-Project Advancing Wellness and Resiliency Education \(AWARE\)](#) federal grant in the amount of \$100,000 from the U.S. Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration. The grant was written and implemented by Erica McNamara, MPH under the supervision of John Doherty, Superintendent of Reading Public Schools.



## PROJECT CONTACT INFO | TWO

Erica McNamara served as the Project Director for the entire project period from 2014-2016. She dedicated 20% of her time to this project.

Contact information:

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[Reading Public Schools](#)—Local Education Agency

Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness & Resilience in Education)

Grantee#: 1H79SM061993-02

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The Project Director worked under the guidance of the Dr. John Doherty, Superintendent of Schools. She worked closely with Martha Sybert (2014-2015) and Gail Dowd (2016), School Finance Administrators and Sharon Angstrom (2014-2016), Town Accountant on fiscal matters.



## PROJECT SUMMARY 2 | THREE

The [Reading Public Schools](#) located in Reading, Massachusetts successfully implemented their “Now is the Time” Project AWARE Local Educational Agency Grant through a variety of capacity building and training activities. John Doherty, EdD, the Superintendent of Reading Public Schools, provided effective leadership to ensure the team met our benchmarks throughout the two-year project period including credentialing 9 local instructors, certifying 608 adults in [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#), [Mental Health First Aid](#), and [Mental Health First Aid for Public Safety](#) and connecting 290 youth to community-based mental health services.

The Reading Public Schools serves 4,407 school-aged students in nine schools including one preschool, five elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school. Dr. Doherty worked closely with the School Principals to coordinate the professional development calendar and provided oversight of the Project Director. The Reading Public Schools District leaders worked closely with the [Reading Coalition Against Substance Abuse \(RCASA\)](#), police, and town personnel to achieve grant goals.

Erica McNamara, MPH, Certified Prevention Specialist served as the Project Director. She organized 37 training courses, monitored certification, enhanced pathways to mental health referral; and facilitated 31 courses in the youth, adult and public safety modules. She benefited from the National Council on Behavioral Health Instructor training and technical assistance from Margaret Weiser, Government Project Officer. She participated in the webinars provided by the National Council and SAMHSA. She worked with personnel and community partners to execute the project.



*"I wanted to tell you how impressed I am with you, and your presentation of the Mental Health Course. Your knowledge, understanding and insight of the material is extremely well presented, and your compassion really shows. It is a wonderful program for you to have organized, I am sure it requires an incredible amount of time, and planning on your part. I'm happy to have been able to take part in this course, and I appreciate your work in putting it together."*

*– Reading Parent*

Goals & Output		
Goal	Approach	Actual Output
<b>Year 1</b>		
<b>1. Increase local mental health literacy</b>	Credential 6 instructors	Ten credentialed instructors
	Provide training to certify 272 first aiders	277 school and town personnel certified as Youth MHFA <i>287 total first aid certified</i>
<b>Year 1</b>		
<b>2. Build local capacity</b>	Respond to the behavioral health issues of school-aged children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly coordination with school climate grant coordinator</li> <li>• Referral Resource Lists disseminated at training and available online</li> <li>• Referral Tracking System Survey approved (200 referrals)</li> <li>• Behavioral Health Provider’s Networking Event hosted</li> <li>• Grant progress presentations conducted for School Principals, School Committee and local partners throughout the grant period.</li> <li>• Monthly Instructors meetings and online dashboard posts used to enhance communication and coordination.</li> <li>• First Aiders Newsletter disseminated.</li> <li>• First Aiders training evaluations and additional comments for system-wide or school level improvements shared with Supt. of Schools for strategic planning purposes.</li> </ul>
<b>Year 2</b>		
<b>1. Increase mental health literacy in Reading, MA by credentialing 2 more instructors to conduct YMHFA &amp; MHFA training</b>	Credential 2 instructors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 instructor credentialed in Mental Health First Aid (adult) in Nov. 2015 in order to offer law enforcement module. Two officers (existing Youth Instructors) were trained in July of 2016. Three instructors were needed to offer trainings to three shifts of first responders.</li> </ul>
	Provide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training was conducted throughout Year 2 including 21 classes certifying over 300 adults. Certificates were issued as planned. Staff also conducted an audit of all participants in the project to ensure consent, sign-in,</li> </ul>

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**in Year 2 for 312 school personnel, first responders, faith leaders, parents, youth workers, and community leaders who interact with school aged youth, ages 12+.**

training to certify 297 first aiders

evaluation and certificate were on file. Adjustments were made to class scheduling to accommodate instructor credentialing.

**2. Build local capacity**

Respond to the behavioral health issues of school-aged children

We used many tools to build capacity:

- Monthly instructors meetings and online dashboard posts used to enhance communication and coordination.
  - Weekly coordination with school climate grant coordinator
  - Referral Resource Lists disseminated at training and available online
  - Referral Tracking System Survey (90 referrals)
  - Grant progress presentations conducted for School Committee and local partners throughout the grant period.
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**YEAR 1 | PROGRESS**

In Year 1, we focused on getting our project team running and certifying school personnel in Youth Mental Health First Aid. The instructor certification process included two components 1) Instructor Certification in the Youth Course Module (5 days of training); 2) Minor adjustments to address MA laws, school protocol, resource sheet and referral promotion tracking. With the support of the School District Leaders, the Project



Director scheduled courses, arranged for substitute coverage, and arranged for instructors to prep for course delivery. By teaching 15 courses throughout the first year, our instructors became confident in delivering the Informed Consent, teaching the youth module and collecting evaluations.

The Project Director centralized evaluation entry through her office for all instructors to ensure data was entered efficiently. She maintained all course files and the certification database. In Year 1, the Project Director worked with Sara Burd, School Climate Grant Director to develop a Behavioral Health Response Flowchart for school referrals. Instructors disseminated the flowchart at all Youth Mental Health First Aid trainings. The flowchart ensured that all school staff received the same information about the protocol. Course participants commented that the flowchart and instructor's explanation helped them to understand their role as a first aider within their school setting. This approach alleviated many concerns and helped school staff understand the flowchart illustrated how the school community worked together to help a student and that no one adult was solely responsible. The result was 180 students were referred to services, 95% of students referred to in-school counseling, outpatient services, and 5% benefitted from mobile crisis stabilization services.

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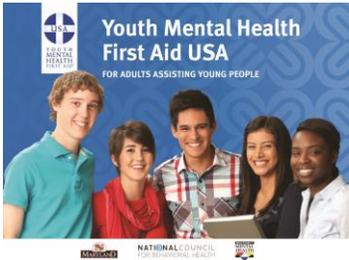
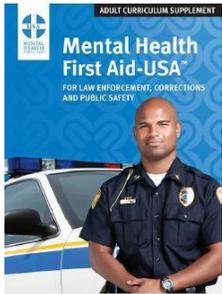
## YEAR 2 | PROGRESS

In Year 2, the Project Director, School Resource Officer, Detective and Behavioral Health Administrator attended additional training so they could teach other course modules. The instructor certification process for Mental Health First Aid included two major components 1) Instructor Certification in the Adult Course Module (3 days of training), 2) Minor adjustments to address MA laws, school/community protocol, resource sheet and referral promotion tracking (adjustments to teaching adult oriented content, addressing parents of young adults/college students in the course and other). The rationale for instructor training in this course module was twofold, first to satisfy the requirement to move on to the next phase of the public safety instructor process and second to offer courses for parents of young adults.

In Year 2, the instructor certification process to teach the Public Safety course required three key components and was a more extensive process. The components included: 1) Instructor Certification in the Adult Course Module; 2) Online Law Enforcement webinar training and exam to enable Public Safety course badge (and to order the Public Safety Course Supplement); and 3) Major adaptation of the Public Safety Supplement to address MA laws, jurisdiction issues, and officer safety.

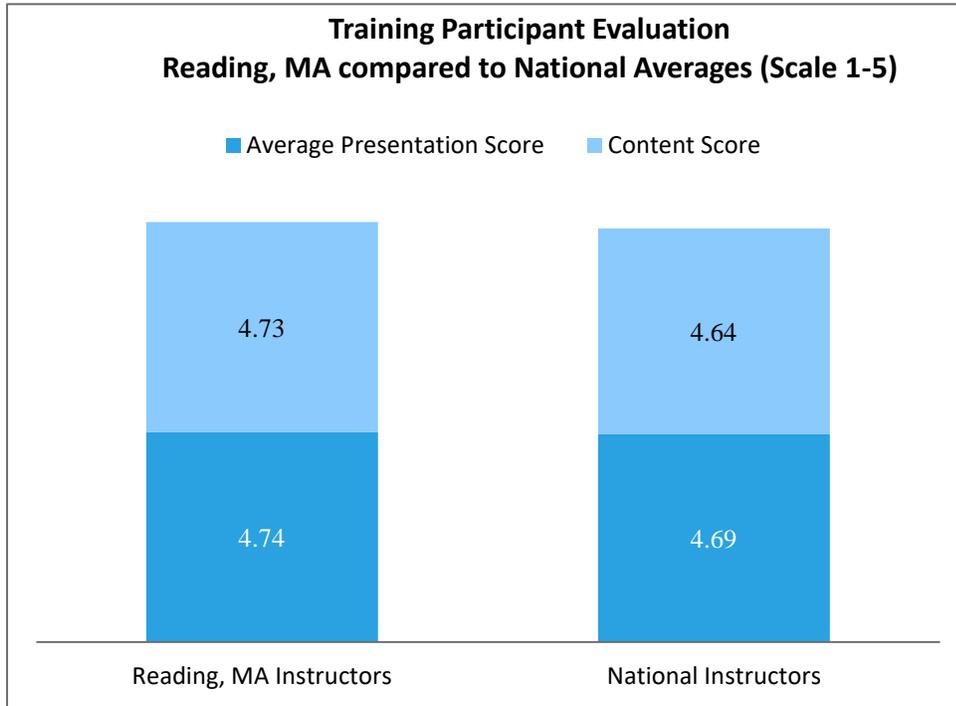
Throughout Years 1 and 2, the Project Director met with the instructors often to keep the team moving. Initially, all of the instructors had concerns about the material after their instructor trainings. To address these issues, the Project Director answered questions, sought advice from the Project Officer, reviewed course modules in detail, connected with Project AWARE grantees in Massachusetts, and worked with the Mental Health Association of Maryland and the National Council on Behavioral Health. Overall, our instructors delivered quality instruction to 37 groups over two years.

See below for a breakdown of modules offered and number of classes delivered:

Courses Provided by Module Type 2015-2016		
33 Youth Classes Offered	2 Adult Classes Offered	2 Public Safety Classes Offered
		

To understand the profile of our course participants, the Project Director analyzed the evaluation results for participant demographics, course content delivery and instructor performance results. According to training participant evaluations, 77% of those trained reported their gender as female, 16% male and 7% no response. Three participants suggested an alternative gender category for future demographic

requests. The largest reported age range amongst training participants was 25-44 year olds, which represented 43% of all participants followed by 45-59 year olds (39%), 60-81 year olds (8%), 19-24 year olds (3%) and 7% did not identify their age range. The largest reported race was Caucasian (97%), followed by Hispanic (1%), Native American (1%), Asian American (1%), and .5% Black. The reported race for training participants does reflect the town census demographics. Four participants suggested a multi-racial category for the evaluation form. Participants rated their instructors highly as depicted in the figure below:



**A final time line reflecting actual program implementation**

Course Module	Instructor	Co-Instructor	Date
Youth	McNamara	Burd	2/27/15
Youth	McNamara	Zaya	4/16/15
Youth	McNamara	Burd	5/13/15
Youth	McNamara	Kyritsis	5/27/15
Youth	McNamara	Brett	5/29/15
Youth	McNamara	Burd	6/2/15
Youth	McNamara	Burd	6/4/15
Youth	Hagopian	Zaya	6/12/15
Youth	McNamara	Hagopian	6/16/15
Youth	McNamara	Brett	6/18/15
Youth	McNamara	Hooper	6/26/15

Youth	McNamara	Burd	7/8/15
Youth	McNamara	n/a	8/25/15
Youth	Burd	Kyritsis	8/27/15
Youth	McNamara	n/a	8/27/15
Youth	Halloran	Hooper	10/13/15
Youth	Kyritsis	Brett	10/13/15
Youth	McNamara	Burd	11/20/15
Youth	Muolo	McNamara	12/9/15
Youth	Muolo	McNamara	12/16/15
Youth	Hooper	Hagopian	12/18/15
Youth	Muolo	McNamara	12/22/15
Youth	McNamara	McNamara	3/23/16
Adult	McNamara	n/a	3/26/16
Youth	McNamara	Burd	3/29/16
Youth	McNamara	n/a	4/26/16
Youth	Kyritsis	Brett	5/6/16
Youth	McNamara	n/a	5/13/16
Youth	McNamara	Burd	6/2/16
Youth	McNamara	Burd	6/3/16
Youth	McNamara	Burd	8/25/16
Public Safety	McNamara	Muolo	9/9/16
Youth	McNamara	Burd	9/28/16
Public Safety	McNamara	Halloran	9/30/16
Youth	McNamara	Burd	10/25/16
Youth	McNamara	n/a	11/5/16
Adult	McNamara	n/a	11/19/16

#### ENTIRE GRANT PERIOD | PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

We increased awareness of mental health amongst school-age youth and school personnel by promoting the project throughout the district. Certified first aiders including classroom teachers, paraprofessionals and administrators talked to students in their classes. The Guidance Department, School Psychologists, School Nurses and School Social Workers educated students on how Youth Mental Health First Aid worked. Wellness educators discussed the project in grade 9 and 11 health classes. We used a variety of strategies to get the word out about our project including one on one conversations, group presentations, press releases, online materials, multi-media, and websites. We partnered with the Reading Adult Community Education Department to

advertise courses for community members. In Year 2, the Program Director taught a 3-night Youth Mental Health First Aid course that engaged our largest parent class. Additionally, the Program Director taught four Saturday courses certifying adults in the youth and adult modules of Mental Health First Aid. The community education courses included both parents of young adults, grandparents, service providers, and local clergy.

As indicated on our evaluation plan, we track basic data points. Each participant completed a course evaluation. The Project Director entered these evaluations into the National Council database and issued certificates. We set up a local database to track cumulative data from each course evaluation question.

Here is a sample of evaluation feedback for our instructors from course participants:

*Having the instructor discuss the concept first, then practicing it was very helpful and will be very usable in the future.*

*I appreciated how the instructor brought the perspective of the District's goals and objectives to this training in a thoughtful, sensitive manner.*

*Very helpful- opened my eyes to the realities of mental health...and how I can help*

*It was a great course that provided practical solution when talking/screening kids that may have mental health issues.*

*Great to have LICSW who works with high school students be part of presentation.*

*The instructor's knowledge of the topic is exceptional.*

*The instructor's calming presentation style was great for this topic. Her knowledge base is outstanding.*

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*The program was great with helpful information delivered in an engaging way. Both instructors were well prepared.*

*I liked the team approach and thought both instructors spoke slowly and clearly- thoughtful with audience and material.*

*The course was great. It reaffirmed some of my current practice and gave me new information and conversations to consider.*

*Instructor was supportive in listening to questions without judgment or minimizing my concerns*

*Instructor's honesty and humor was appreciated, explaining process for reporting was beneficial*

*Amazing background knowledge and full understanding of mental illness was incredible*

The Project Director also received emails thanking the instructors for the course:

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*"Youth Mental Health First Aid is a great introduction to mental health issues in children and teens. I think it would be great for coaches or chaperones or anyone who volunteers with teens. Maybe it's not your kid but his or her friend who drops a hint and this course will help you consider if the friend needs help rather than just letting the hint go by -- or telling your child to keep away from that kid."*

*—First Aider, Participant in Night Classes, March 2016*

*“One of the strengths of the course was that it was simple and easy for non-clinicians to understand. The instructors also stressed attending a mental health first aid course does not mean you play the role of the clinician and that the clinicians should be contacted and youth referred as we were taught.”*

*-First Aider, School Staff, Spring 2015*

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#### ENTIRE GRANT PERIOD | PROGRAM CHALLENGES

Our biggest challenge was getting instructors eligible for public safety courses. Credentialing in the adult course was mandatory to access the law enforcement webinar and the necessary public safety designation to order materials. Finding the expedited training slots for first responders was a challenge because only 2-4 people are accepted for each instructor course.

Matching the availability of police officers to potential national trainings was a challenge. There were fewer adult instructor courses compared to youth instructor courses offered by the National Council. For example, the Program Director was credentialed in the adult course in the first quarter of Year 2. However, we could not get Officer Muolo or Officer Halloran credentialed until the last quarter of Year 2, which delayed our ability to teach the public safety courses until September.

We also could not review or order the specific public safety course materials and book supplement until we completed the in-person training and webinar. The adult material was very different from the youth course and required a lot of prep work to make it happen. Thus, we delayed the training for first responders.

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#### ENTIRE GRANT PERIOD | PROGRAM SUSTAINABILITY

We planned for sustainability in Year 1 by investing in more instructors being trained. This approach worked because we were able to coordinate in-state training with other Massachusetts grantees (for a similar fee to our budget projection). We wanted to be able to offer any

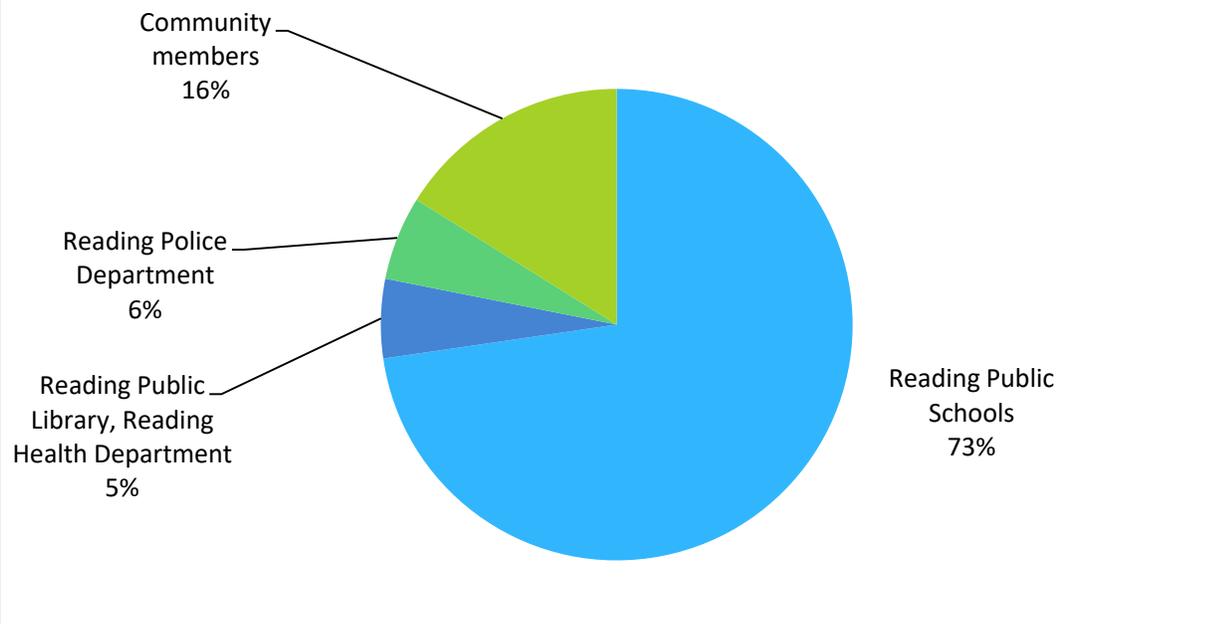
new school staff training in the years following the end of the grant period and having a deeper bench of qualified instructors made more sense. We integrated Youth Mental Health First Aid training into all new staff orientations (re-certification is planned for previously trained staff). Six other school districts approached our team of instructors to see about having their staff trained once our grant was over. We developed a fee structure to offer training to neighboring districts in the future with trainings already lined up for 2017. We integrated additional elements of sustainability into both our School and Community Behavioral Health Strategic Plans. These elements included a percentage of instructors being trained in multiple course modules.

**ENTIRE GRANT PERIOD | INSTRUCTOR & TRAINING BREAKDOWNS**

**Number Certified as Instructors**

Reading Public Schools* (including Program Coordinator) (One additional School Social Worker participated in Instructor training in January 2015 but chose to step down from the instruction team due to an increased caseload in March of 2015).	7
Reading Police Department	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>

**First Aiders by Affiliation**

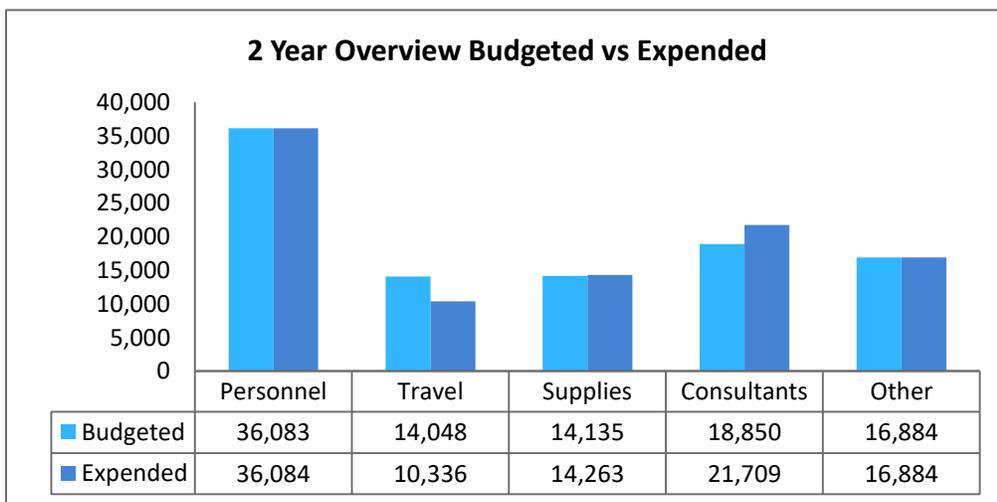


### Number Certified as First Aiders by Affiliation

Reading Public Schools	442
Reading Public Library, Reading Health Department	33
Reading Police Department	35
Community members including parents, grandparents, YMCA, Clergy, Service Providers & residents	98
<b>Total</b>	<b>608</b>

### USE OF GRANT FUNDS | FOUR

We tracked expenses by each grant line item in our town financial system (MUNIS). On a weekly basis, staff monitors project spending. There have been no changes to in-kind funding and/or support. We made minor adjustments within the 25% guideline to manage our spending throughout the 2-year project period. In Year 1, we had higher spending in contract costs since we increased the number of instructors to be trained from 6 to 10 but had lower costs in the 'out of state travel' line item. We had higher 'in state travel' versus "out of state travel" since the staff were able to attend training in Massachusetts. We also adjusted the 'substitute coverage' in the OTHER funds line item within the 25% guideline to accommodate the change in our training timeline. In the first quarter of Year 2, within the supplies line item, we ordered a large quantity of manuals since they were 50% off and included free shipping.



## MEDIA ARTICLES/POSTINGS

Boston Globe, highlights district work on social and emotional well-being  
<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/01/05/mass-schools-focus-well-being/m4d2GADYQEor4qApNf8JQM/story.html>

Boston Globe, Northwest Weekly. Brief mention promoting trainings  
<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/regionals/north/2016/02/25/reading-offer-mental-health-first-aid-courses/3MxqJTULBtB5OPSJXXSgL/story.html>

Reading Patch, online news daily  
<http://patch.com/massachusetts/reading/mental-health-first-aid-courses-offered-0>

Reading Community TV (local cable access)- Project Director interviewed by Kevin Vendt on Community Connections Show, First Aid Grant Highlights shared at School Committee tapings.

Reading Daily Times Chronicle, Press Release  
[Reading Adds 10 Instructors to Mental Health First Aid Team](#), [Reading Training Dates](#)

Reading Daily Times Chronicle Spotlight Column by David Maroney, Reporter  
[Reading Puts Mental Health First Aid Into Practice](#)