

READING COALITION AGAINST SUBSTANCE ABUSE- 2011 ANNUAL REPORT

LEADERSHIP

The RCASA Board of Directors met monthly at the Reading Police Department Community Room throughout the year. Board members grappled with complex issues this past year and worked to respond to the changing needs of the community, particularly in light of drug related deaths. Board members served on a variety of workgroups and committees to accomplish critical tasks including data gathering, outreach, and leadership development. Adult and student representatives provided valuable status reports on their projects and initiatives. Coalition leaders appointed the nominating committee to fill vacant slots and recruit members. A report of the roster changes and motions related to by-laws was provided at the 2011 Annual Meeting. We said goodbye to board members that have moved on including Mark Mauriello, Student Representative for high school (graduated, replaced by Kelsie Pace); Tom Guerriero, Pharmacist for Hallmark Health (job transfer), Colleen Seferian, Liaison for Board of Health (new liaison to be appointed), and Mary Scott Wagner, liaison for the Clergy Council (replaced by Jane Duggan).

Executive Board

The Executive Board, comprised of the Town Manager, Police Chief, Superintendent of Schools and RCASA President, met monthly with the RCASA Director to provide guidance. The E-Board was instrumental in leading a 3-part Community Dialogue Series in the fall of 2011.

Data Workgroup

The leaders of the Data Workgroup created pathways for staff to access additional school, police and town data. A key focus for data collection was the 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey's for the middle and high school. Also, process data was captured through a youth focus group and three community dialogue sessions. All data is available on the RCASA section of the Edline site.

Risk Behavior Workgroup

The Risk Behavior Workgroup (RBW) focused on developing ways to educate the school community on multiple risk behaviors including substance abuse. The workgroup working with the School Wellness District Committee and the RCASA Youth Leaders planned the 2nd Annual Health & Wellness Day at the Reading Memorial High School in the spring of 2011. The event was jointly sponsored by the Reading Public Schools and RCASA. More than 1,100 students and 150 staff members participated in the day. There was a variety of staff and student activities (grades 8-12) throughout the day. Some of the local health fair partners included: Winchester Hospital, Burbank YMCA, Families Anonymous, Hallmark Health, Al-Anon, Families Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Reading Health and Wellness District Committee, RMHS Environmental Club, RMHS Gay Straight Alliance, Reading Police Department, Reading Public Health Department, Reading Public School Nurses, Reading Recreation Department, and the Salem State College Physical Education Teacher Education Program.

Students had the option to participate in two important workshops focused on substance abuse prevention. *Melissa Weiksnar, Harvard MBA, Educator and Parent*, shared her personal story

during the 2011 Health & Wellness Day. Melissa conducted workshops for students and shared the devastating impact of opiate addiction that led to the death of her daughter Amelia Caruso. The *Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts* conducted workshops throughout the day on the impact of alcohol and marijuana on the teen brain.

Youth Workgroups

- The *RCASA Youth Crew* comprised of 22 members focused on youth leadership, media campaign development, outreach, and prevention products. In addition to special events, the Youth Crew leaders met every other Sunday for four hours throughout the school year and two afternoons a week during the summer to develop their projects. A key focus was on developing a proposal to ban tobacco in local pharmacies. This proposal was presented to the Board of Health.
- The *RCASA Student Club* comprised of 15 members met every Tuesday at Reading Memorial High School throughout the school year. They conducted a tobacco prevention research project (106 surveys collected) and co-organized the second Health & Wellness Day. The advisors for the club include RCASA Staff, Chair of the Wellness Department and the School Resource Officer (SRO). The results were shared with key stakeholders including the Board of Health.

Collaborative Workgroups

- The *Behavioral Health Task Force* chaired by Dr. Doherty included concerned school leaders, faculty, and RCASA staff. The group met throughout the summer and fall to develop a set of clear recommendations designed to improve Behavioral Health in the district. The results were shared with the community and School Committee.
- The *K-12 Wellness Assessment Review Team* chaired by Tom Zaya and Erica McNamara conducted a thorough review of K-12 health and wellness education offered in the district. The team reviewed current materials & curricula, met with school stakeholders from each school level, explored current research, and reviewed standards based curricula. The co-chairs presented the results to Dr. Doherty. The recommendations were integrated into the school budget process.

COALITION MEMBERSHIP

Membership involvement has increased in all twelve coalition sectors from 293 people in 2008 to 904 people in 2011.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

1. *PTO Presentations:* Avery Stroman, Kelsie Pace, and Ashley Testa joined Tom Zaya, RCASA Board for a special presentation for parents at Parker. Youth leaders shared trends in tobacco products and showed samples of products. Parents were interested in the material and asked questions about youth involvement in the coalition. Ashley Testa and Mark Mauriello joined Erica McNamara and Tom Zaya for a presentation to parents at the high school PTO. They shared data regarding high school age students, explored trends in Other

Tobacco Products (OTPs), discussed parent/child communication and answered questions from the participants.

2. *Parent Series:* Parents participated in the four part parent/adult series. The series was conducted in the spring of 2011 by Marilyn Belmonte of the Burlington Task Force. According to the survey responses the presentation brought to Reading parents/adults in April and May was overwhelmingly successful. Everyone felt the substance abuse prevention information was valuable and the workshop was successful at teaching how to reduce the risk of adolescent substance abuse. "Understanding Marijuana" was the most popular evening presentation, closely followed by "Adolescent Brain Development & Trends in Teen Drug Abuse". "Prescription & Over-The-Counter Medications", "Inhalant Abuse" and "The Progression from Prescription Narcotics to Heroin" were also very popular.
3. *School Events:* All freshman students enrolled in the Decisions Program at RMHS completed the Choose 2 Refuse Program. This program focuses on opiate prevention (using materials from the Essex County District Attorney) taught by RCASA staff and the SRO. More than twelve hundred RMHS students viewed the Improbable Players performance in the spring of 2011. There were two different performances (1-freshman/sophomore; 2- juniors/seniors). The players are a professional acting troupe comprised of adults in recovery from substance abuse. The Red Ribbon Week Observance was first brought to Reading in 2007 by faculty at Joshua Eaton. The 2011 celebration included many student activities to get young children involved. 1000 middle school students from Coolidge and Parker Middle School viewed Improbable Players Performances in November of 2011.
4. *Community Dialogue Series:* Event #1 was held in September of 2011 at the RMHS Fieldhouse. The event featured small group dialogues using the World Café model. Over 200 people participated. Deb Gilburg facilitated the event. Event #2 was held in October of 2011 at the RMHS Performing Arts Center. Highlights included a personal story of addiction shared by Mrs. Goodemote and her daughter Abby. The 2011 Youth Risk Behavior data was presented by the RCASA Director and Tom Zaya. The RCASA Youth Crew shared project presentations including "Dear 16 year old me video"; "Understanding Addiction"; "Environmental Strategies"; and "Social Entrepreneurship". Event #3 was held in mid-October at the RMHS Fieldhouse and featured a panel comprised of the RCASA Director, Chief of Police, and a representative from the Middlesex District Attorney's Office. The panel was moderated by the Town Manager and was followed by audience questions and small group discussions.
5. *Responsible Beverage Service Education:* The RCASA Director conducted the TIPs series for Oye's Restaurant (2 trainings) and the Wine Bunker staff (1 training).

AWARDS

- *Reading Memorial High School Ceremony for Senior Awards, April 2011* - The awards for "Outstanding Youth Leadership" were presented to graduating RCASA youth leaders including Ben Hitchcock, Kevin Gallagher, Mark Mauriello, and Ashlyn Lawrence.
- *Reading Memorial High School Graduation Ceremony, June 2011*- The awards for "Outstanding Contributions to RMHS Health & Wellness" were presented to students by Tom Zaya, Chair of the Wellness Department on behalf of RCASA.
- *President's Volunteer Service Awards, Annual Meeting, October 2011*- The awards were presented by the high school principal and School Committee Chairperson. The RCASA

Student Club earned the Silver Service Award for dedicating 500 hours as a group over the last 2 years. The recipients received a silver pin, a letter from President Obama and a Certificate. Recipients: Emily Ames- Chris Brown- Zachary Camenker- Alexandra Crogan- Erin Cunningham- Katherine DeBenedetto- Robert Devaney- Garrison Doodlesack- Scott Freeman- Kevin Gallagher- Kelleigh Matrullo- Kelsey McCarthy- Kelsey McGinness- Kelsie Pace- Kathryn Reidy- Brian Rubin- Avery Stroman- Ashley Testa- Abigail Vieno & Annie White.

FINANCE

Grants

- U.S. White House ONDCP/SAMHSA CSAP- Drug Free Communities Grant- \$99,957
- Health Resources in Action- Tobacco prevention- \$9,950
- Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety & Security- Alcohol Compliance- \$5,000 (grant awarded to Reading Police Department in conjunction with RCASA).

Fundraising

- Events and TIPs training- \$165

Match funds

- The resources committed to RCASA projects totaled \$155,000 from the town, school and police departments. These resources included the provision of office and meeting space, matrix supervision, and financial oversight.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Twenty-five news updates featuring articles by the Youth Crew and staff were sent to 420 members. Staff prepared a series of Press Releases and also launched a blog on Reading Patch. Local newspapers published 111 RCASA news articles. Reading Community TV aired two RCASA event productions (“Community Conversations” and “Dialogue Series”).

COALITION MILESTONES

- 1) Proposed ban to remove tobacco from local pharmacies
- 2) Implemented anonymous Text a Tip program for residents to report problems
- 3) Strengthened police enforcement to reduce minors’ access to alcohol through compliance checks program (88% pass rate amongst local liquor licensees’)
- 4) Doubled the intake of unwanted prescription medications through the Rx Round Up
- 5) Conducted youth-driven projects on addiction, entrepreneurship, and media
- 6) Collected 2011 Youth Risk Behavior Survey data with new substance use questions
- 7) Brought youth, parents and residents together to discuss substance abuse through the 3-part community dialogue series
- 8) Proposed changes to strengthen the local Health Education and Behavioral Health strategies.