

An Open Letter to the Community from RCASA



Dear community members,

On behalf of the RCASA Youth Crew, Student Club, Board of Directors and staff, we would like to address concerns that have been raised in light of recent events. We were all greatly saddened to learn of the deaths of Joseph Ronan and Christopher Fischer. These events have brought many troubling issues to the forefront. We would like to thank all of the residents that have reached out to RCASA over the past few weeks.

When tragedies such as these deaths occur, it can raise legitimate fear and concern throughout our community. Unfortunately, the intersection of substance abuse and violence is a major challenge that our town and many other communities across the country face.

However, our community has made a significant investment in addressing these issues over the last 6 years. We would like to share more about the Reading Coalition Against Substance Abuse (RCASA).

Our group was founded to address our community problem that youth in Reading, MA are using alcohol, drugs, and tobacco early, frequently and heavily, RCASA focuses on 7 [Community Change Strategies](#) ranging from information-sharing to policy development.

From 2005-2007, volunteers worked diligently to conduct a needs assessment, develop a plan, and secure grant funds. A grant from the [White House of National Drug Control Policy](#) was awarded in the winter of 2007 to focus on substance abuse prevention for young people (12-18 years

old). The first staff member was hired in January of 2008. Leaders developed a 5 year [Strategic Plan](#) with the input of the community.

We have 4 leadership groups associated with the coalition:

- 1) The [RCASA Board of Directors](#) was founded in 2006. The board meets monthly at the police department. The group is comprised of 21 members representing 12-plus community sectors including: school, health, law enforcement, town government, youth, parents, business, behavioral health, and pharmacy.
- 2) The Executive Board, comprised of the Town Manager, Police Chief, Superintendent and RCASA President, meets bi-weekly with the RCASA Director to provide guidance.
- 3) The [RCASA Youth Crew](#) was founded in 2008. This youth-driven leadership team focuses on community projects that challenge, inspire and change community perceptions about substance abuse.
- 4) The [RCASA Student Club](#) was founded by Youth Crew leaders in 2009 to build a school-specific movement around substance abuse prevention.

As a coalition, we have...

- Coordinated [Bi-Annual Community Dialogues](#) on substance abuse topics;
- Reviewed town policies and recommended changes for Alcohol & Tobacco Compliance;
- Strengthened [police enforcement](#) to reduce minors' access to alcohol;
- Coordinated an [Opiate Prevention Series](#);
- Advocated for the breathalyzer policy at school dances; and a town by-law to prohibit public consumption of marijuana;
- Conducted youth-driven outreach at school and community events including Red Ribbon Week, Friends and Family Day, Old Towne Reading Faire, Wellness, and State House i.e. [Kick Butts Day](#) events;
- Trained over 60 local sellers and servers of alcohol on "Responsible Beverage Service".

Key Accomplishments:

- 5,000 individuals have been reached through prevention workshops for parents, faculty, faith leaders, and youth including the [Improbable Players](#);
- 3,500 [slICE Cards](#) with emergency info disseminated to teens;
- 4,500 surveys and/or evaluations were added to the RCASA [community needs assessment](#) and shared at the 2010 Annual Event;
- 6 [Enviro Scans](#) were conducted including photographic evidence of underage drinking and drug use;
- 125 youth leaders were recruited and trained to work on coalition projects;
- 90 press releases and/or news articles were generated;
- 12 quarterly [newsletters](#) were created by youth leaders;
- 2 [Health & Wellness Day](#) events reached over 2,440 students and faculty;
- 8 in-service trainings were conducted for school nurses and faculty;
- 900 students completed RMHS [Choose 2 Refuse Program](#) focused on opiate prevention (using materials from the Essex County District Attorney);
- 3,000 bottles were turned in via [RCASA Reading Rx Round Up](#);
- 8 parent trainings were offered on substance use by field experts.

We leverage our resources through partnerships with the following groups in the region, state and nation: White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, U.S. Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, CADCA National Coalition Institute, Middlesex Partnerships for Youth/Middlesex D.A.'s Office, Northeast Center for Healthy Communities, Mass Youth Against Tobacco "The 84 Movement", Mass Forum for Healthy Communities, MA Dept. of Public Health Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, National Enforcing Underage Drinking Laws, MA Alcohol Beverage Control Commission, Northeast DEA Office, and Sara Grinnell, RCASA Independent Evaluator.

In order to tackle this complex community issue, we need more active involvement and conversation between concerned adults, parents, teens, and community residents

We invite you to participate in two important events:

1. [Community Dialogue on Substance Abuse Prevention](#) at the RMHS Fieldhouse on Wed. 9/21/11 from 7:00-9:00 p.m.
2. RCASA Annual Meeting & Leadership Summit at RMHS on Thurs. 10/6/11 from 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Do you have information to share?

- Any suspicious substance abuse activity, please text a tip to **847411** (type READINGPD in message box) or send a [web tip](#)
- If you have been affected by substance abuse, we invite you to share your experiences with [staff](#), board members or through participation in RCASA events.

Do you want to share a suggestion?

Stop by our booth at the upcoming Reading Fall Street Faire in downtown Reading to meet the RCASA Youth Crew on Sunday Sept. 11, 2011, 12-5 p.m.

Do you want to know more about our coalition?

[RCASA Edline Page](#)

<http://www.edline.net/pages/ReadingPublicSchools/Community/RCASA>

Our Edline Page is open to the public and contains a great deal of helpful information and resources.

[RCASA Facebook](#)

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Reading-Coalition-Against-Substance-Abuse/112950365451238>

Our Facebook Fan Page is a great place to visit for updates and sharing of news.

[Town Website](#)

<http://www.ci.reading.ma.us/Pages/index>

Our town page has basic information on our coalition.

Do you need info on accessing substance abuse resources?

[RCASA Resource Lists](#)

<http://www.edline.net/pages/ReadingPublicSchools/Community/RCASA/RCASA Resource Lists>

Sincerely,

Amy Vendt, President, RCASA Board of Directors

Chief James Cormier, Reading Police, RCASA Executive Board

Peter Hechenbleikner, Town Manager, RCASA Executive Board

Dr. John Doherty, Superintendent of Schools, RCASA Executive Board

Ashley Testa, RCASA, President of Student Club

Kelsie Pace, RCASA Youth Crew, RCASA Board of Directors