

The state Department of Mental Health is taking a new approach to educating the public, with hopes it will help more people that need assistance get it and break down stigmas associated with the mentally ill. Starting this month, the Department of Mental Health will hold “mental health first aid training” courses in Jefferson City. Dottie Mullikin says the plan is to bring in regular citizens from around the state to the trainings who can take these skills back into their communities back home. “They do not learn how to become a therapist or to become a counselor, that’s not what this course is for, any more than if you take a regular fist aid course you don’t become a physician. You simply learn how to provide immediate assistance and support until the person can get to a professional,” Mullikin said. For example, the trainings teach you how to talk to someone who is depressed or may be considering suicide to help identify when they may need to seek professional help. At the same time, Mullikin hopes those that take the 12-hour course can help spread awareness and possibly break down stigmas. She says one in four Americans will be diagnosed with a mental illness in their lifetime.

The state education department will try again for some big education money from the federal government although it finished near the bottom in the first round of the competition. The Obama administration has set aside more than 4.3-billion dollars to give to states with comprehensive reform plans for schools. Missouri, one of 40 states to enter the Race to the Top in the first round, finished 33rd. Only two states were pronounced winners. They are splitting 600-million dollars. Missouri hopes to polish its application and lift itself into the top 15 in round two, hoping to get some of that money. Department spokesman Jim Morris says the money is worth chasing in these tight economic times. Morris says five special teams have been formed of educators from throughout the state to strengthen Missouri’s next application which is due June first. Some states disappointed with their reviews from round one indicate they might not apply for round two. Morris says Missouri considers the criticisms from round one as valuable insights into what it needs to do to improve its chances.