For years, even after knowing that I had a substance use disorder, I found myself unable to control my urges. At times I achieved significant periods of sobriety only to succumb to an urge. Over the years I also participated in groups where relapse seemed to be based on guilt and shame. I simply quit going, rather than stand up in a group and say “I relapsed again”. I felt hopeless.

Luckily I stumbled into a behavioral health clinic where I met a Recovery Support Specialist. She was able to guide me to effective tools enabling me to control my urges. I changed the way I acted and reacted, and actually changed the outcomes of situations through self-management. I was empowered to become an expert in my own recovery. At a point in my life where I had not worked in over three years and was lacking goals or motivation, I was given a simple message of hope: “you can do it”. Learning that my RSS was also in recovery and now guiding others in their recovery was an inspiration for me and I decided that I also wanted to become a RSS. I learned that a RSS is not so much a degree of learning as much as it is a degree of caring.

A short year later, I am a Recovery Support Specialist myself. I am so honored to join the company of earlier “agents of change” who are giving of themselves to help change the stigma of mental illness and substance use disorders. We define who we are with our unlimited possibilities. I had no idea how much depth a RSS has, but through the Institute I learned many new tools which will enable me to treat others as they would like to be treated. I learned the importance of using person-first language, the value of listening, the value of empowering others by looking to strengths rather than weaknesses, and the vision that recovery and hope go hand in hand.
News of Note

Angela Dingledine, CRSS resigned from the RSS Newsletter Advisory Committee. She has left CPSA Member Services and is on a new path. We would like to thank Angela for all her help with the Newsletter and wish her the best in her journey.

Good Luck Angela and Keep in Touch

Jeffrey Russ Orchekowsky
December 2, 1971 – March 16, 2009

It is with sadness that we acknowledge the passing of Jeff Orchekowsky, RSS. One of his proudest achievements was graduating from Recovery Support Specialist Institute 16 and the friends he made there. Jeff was a person of charm, love and joy. He searched to find the best in himself and others. Let us remember his life with love and reach out to others with compassion.

Love given is love received, we never run out.

All Recovery Support Specialists (RSS) are invited to a reception on Thursday, May 28, 2009, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at the COPE Mesquite Office, 2435 N. Castro (one block west of Stone, north of Grant). Beth Stoneking, Dan Steffy and Beverly McGuffin will be giving an update on the RSS Institute’s Past, Present, and Future. John McElroy, CRSS, along with the Benchiks will be hosting the event.

Please R.S.V.P. to Aaron Valencia at avalencia@copecommunityservices.org or (520) 792-3293

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Advisory Committee

Kathy Lewis CRSS
John McElroy CRSS
Ken Rogers CRSS
Patricia Porras CRSS
Dan Steffy

Certified Recovery Support Specialists are invited to join the Advisory Committee.

Please call RISE at 520-626-7473 for the date and time of meetings.

Beth C. Stoneking, PhD, MSW, CPRP
Beverly McGuffin, RN, MS, CPRP
BreAnn Currie

Publisher
Editor
Page Designer
During these tough financial times, many people feel they have to push themselves to unhealthy levels in order to succeed. But high-pressure jobs and long hours take a real toll on their immediate and future health. Whether running for president, moving up the corporate ladder, or juggling the family's activities, success may come at a hefty cost.

The 7 worst habits of these workaholics include:

1. Forgetting to relax: Some stress can be good because it keeps you alert and motivated; too much stress, however, will take its toll on your body.
2. Eating on the go: Who has time to sit down for a healthy lunch? But beware of frozen meals, fast, and processed food that can be high in sodium, calories, and fat.
3. Putting off sleep for work: Lack of sleep can cause irritability, difficulty concentrating, memory problems, poor judgment, and obesity.
4. Not making time for exercise: Humans were not designed to sit at desks for 8 hours a day. Exercise has been shown to reduce the risk for nearly every major disease and to help fight anxiety and depression.
5. Working when sick: 3 common-sense reasons to stay home: avoid spreading the infection, you'll be less productive, and you need your rest to get better.
6. Drinking (too much): Moderate alcohol consumption has some proven health benefits, but excessive drinking can lead to alcoholism, liver disease, and some forms of cancer.
7. Skipping annual medical checkups: Depending on age, family history, and lifestyle, a comprehensive medical checkup and special screenings is recommended every 1 to 5 years.

Eventually, something's going to give. If your patients keep burning the candle at both ends, the flame will burn out faster. But, if they maintain a healthy balance, they will be happier and healthier overall.

That's my opinion. I'm Dr George Griffing, Professor of Medicine at St. Louis University and Editor in Chief of Internal Medicine for eMedicine.

Did you know…

Your Recovery Capital is multiplied by increasing your positive health habits.
Important Things to Learn from the Institute
Keri Ferrell, RSS Institute 17

My name is Kari Ferrell and I am a graduate of the 17th Recovery Support Specialist Institute held in Benson. To tell you about all that I learned would take up much more space than I’m allowed in this newsletter. So I’ll tell you about a couple of the most important things that I learned.

One of the main lessons I learned was to listen, listen and listen. This turned out to be a major chore for me. It may sound strange to some that a person has to learn how to listen. Listening is not as easy as you think. People who work in the field of “recovery” are people who have a need to help other people. One of the main things helpful people do is offer advice, right? This seems fairly simple and reasonable until you stop and realize that if you are talking and “offering advice” then you are obviously not listening. While I’ve not mastered the art, I can certainly say, that thanks to the trainers and my classmates and the roll-plays we did, I have made great strides in my ability to listen. Now working with participants I’ve discovered things about them that I didn’t know because I never really listened to them and what they had to say. Rather, I was deciding what I needed to say next to help them, when all they really needed is to be heard.

My relationships with my co-workers, supervisors and participants have greatly improved since completing the RSS Institute. I will be eternally grateful for all that I learned. I will end by telling you the most important thing I learned from the Institute was about me. I discovered that I was not alone and more importantly that it is OK to be me.

Randell T. Snedden
RSS Institute 16 Graduate

The Recovery Support Specialist Institute? WOW! Anyone working in behavioral health could use the skills taught in the Institute to enhance their effectiveness as a helping professional. I learned how powerful hope can be to a person on the road to recovery from mental illness, substance use, or both.

A RSS gave me hope. He is somebody who had over eight years clean and sober, always seemed happy, and was living comfortably. He gave me hope, encouragement, and a lot of support. Hope is what helped me believe that recovery is possible. Hope is the substance that gave me encouragement, belief in myself, belief that I too could recover and live a productive and satisfying life. Hope is the beginning of what, for me, as a person with a co-occurring disorder, has been the driving force in my own recovery and the beginning of fulfilling my dreams for happiness. Hope has carried me through four years of clean and sober living. Hope is what brought me to the Recovery Support Specialist Institute. Hope is the foundation of my recovery, the place where recovery began to take shape. The RSS Institute teaches the tools we can use as peers to give that hope to others as shining examples of what recovery looks like.

The RSS Institute has taught me how to be a professional in a dynamic way that is beneficial, not only those that I serve and support, but also to myself! My thanks to all those that have had a part in creating the RSS Institute and for the opportunity to learn skills to empower my community and myself. My best wishes to the graduates of the Recovery Support Specialist Institute, now and in the future, who have opened their heart to help others.
In Recovery
Michelle “Mishaa” Ramirez, RSS Institute 17

My name is Michelle M. Ramirez and I am in recovery from a substance use disorder. I began drinking at the age of 13 and then graduated to harder drugs ultimately leading to what I thought was the love of my life, heroin. I could not tell you why I began using drugs, for even I do not know the reason.

I could tell you that I come from a father who was drunk and a mother who was addicted, but that would be a lie. Both of my parents were very successful as entrepreneurs and I was the product of a beautiful marriage. I have the privilege of my parents still being together and supporting me through everything I’ve done. I was a child full of hopes and dreams who lost everything to a syringe. I always exceeded in everything I did especially music. I began playing the violin at the age of nine and immediately fell in love with it. I’d hold small concerts for my family in the comfort of my living room and responded well to my father’s criticism; but somehow along the way I just wanted more. I felt completely sheltered. I wanted to break lose, scream obscenities up and down the street without caring about what my dad would think.

Well, I did get to scream obscenities but unfortunately it was in rehab while withdrawing from opiates. Oh the sweet smell of sweat and vomit; how they’ve marked me forever. I never thought I was addicted. You see, an “addict” to me, was a person who lived on the street and asked people for money to supply their dope habit. That wasn’t me! I was a girl with a promising future as a paramedic. I didn’t beg for money, not yet at least.

I don’t remember much about my last high, since I overdosed and woke up in a bath tub filled with ice cubes, but what I can say is that it was the best high in my life, because it led me into the best high of all, the high of 100%, pure, uncut, sobriety. That is what I call priceless.

My journey has been a difficult one but I wouldn’t trade it for the world. I’ve met amazing people along the way whom I love and admire with all my heart. When I first started sobriety I would tell my RSS (Arnold Aguila) “I’m going to take your job”, and I did!!! (Don’t worry he got promoted). He helped me so much along the way and showed me that recovery is worth your while.

The RSS Institute training was a team effort, and like all great teams its foundation is based on Love, Service and Fellowship. Vince Lombardi, the famous coach of the Green Bay Packers, once said: “you don’t have to like everyone in this room, but you have to Love them because they keep showing up.” I imagine those practices were not easy, yet people showed up day after day.

Perhaps recovery is like that too. The fellowship and teamwork are necessary; we cannot do it alone. It is not always fun and easy, but with a little help from our friends we overcome the obstacles—the icy walls of loneliness and fear, together.

The RSS Institute reminded me of this approach to life and recovery. The partnered exercises, the role-playing and the team-like atmosphere all worked together to foster the warmth of recovery. Working together at the RSS Institute as well as in the community, we can help melt those icy walls of loneliness and fear.

Of Warmth and Fellowship
Mike Knust, RSS Institute 17

The RSS Institute training I received recently has reminded me that I, nor anyone, can recover alone. Recovery is a team effort witnessed in the warmth of fellowship. During my late teens and early twenties I loved my lonely world, but when booze and depression turned my smile upside down I felt the aloneness overwhelm me.

It was in recovery, AA, and the company of new friends that the ice of loneliness and fear began to melt. At first, it was only a trickle—a drop or two; slowly the smiles and laughs and hugs began to warm my Spirit. As the days, weeks, months and years have now gone by, I realize the frozen walls around me have melted.

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Recovery Support Specialist Certification Ceremony

February 24, 2009

Standing: Craig Dover, Bill Haymaker, Alan Woods, George Storm, Michael Soto, Michael Knust, David Longoria

Front Row: Rita Reeder, Tina Jones, Michelle “Mishaa” Ramirez, Kari Ferrell

South Eastern Arizona
Graham, Greenlee, Cochise, and Santa Cruz Counties

The Panel
Bud Blanchard, CRSS, SEABHS
Cynthia Aspengren, CRSS, CPSA
Arnoldo Aguila, CRSS, SEABHS