

Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Nogales, June 8, 2017



Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduating Class

Left to Right: Maria Michel, Saulo Vega, Pablo Peña, Clara Ayon, Erik Cruz, Tina Brixen and Esmeralda Neris



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Thank You

The Institute would like to extend our gratitude to Priscilla, Jackie, and Martin from Wellness Connections for taking part in a panel discussion for students at the IHRSSI. They generously shared their inspiring stories of recovery with us, as well as giving insight about what it's like to work as a Peer Support in the community of Nogales. Thank you all for helping us bring back our panel discussions with such great success!



Nogales Wellness Connections Panel

Left to Right: Rita Romero, Martin Felix, Priscilla Ahumada, Jackie Sainz, John Anglin

I Never Looked Back

By Tina Brixen, CRSS



It was in July of 2009 and I was high for yet another long hot summer. I remember the monsoons were rolling in every afternoon, and I would be running

around doing what seemed like the endless hustle of an addict. I was staying on my best friend's couch, which would normally not have bothered me. But it was her boyfriend's house and he did not know we were high; at least that's what we thought.

One night as I was laying there wide awake, a movie came on called "The Pursuit of Happiness". As I watched the movie I cried, realizing how lucky I was to have a family that cared, and a place I could call home where I could feel safe and be loved. In the following weeks I scheduled an intake appointment at La Frontera, and by August I was back on my medications. Step one was complete. Then it was like the movie "Groundhog Day"; I was back on the couch wide awake, and that damn movie came on again. I believe it was a friendly reminder of the goal I had silently set for myself. It was then in September that I said my goodbyes to all of my friends, and I drove the 16 miles to my house and never looked back. And that is my clean date - September 17, 2009.

Prometheus' Gift by Erik Cruz, CRSS

Hope came to me in the form of a friend who refused to give up on me. No matter how bad my depression or my substance use or my psychosis became and regardless of the selfish and self-destructive decisions that I made along the way, she never stopped loving me or supporting me or telling me that I was strong enough. Not only to survive the pain, but strong enough to transform the pain into more strength and ultimately into joy and stability. In my darkest hours, when I felt I could no longer persevere and I felt like all the life and hope and light had drained out of me, forever lost to an abyss of suffering, I held onto my friend's love for me and onto her compassion, forgiveness, and understanding. When I could no longer see the best part of myself, I used her eyes. When I could no longer love myself, I used her heart. When I could no longer imagine a future with me in it, I used her mind. Like Prometheus, she defiantly stole fire from the Gods themselves and bestowed it upon me when I found myself in the heart of darkness, allowing me to reignite my own soul. For that, I will always be grateful to her and I will never give up on myself. I will make it through the storm and I will bask in the joys of life and share them with others.



Hope by Pablo Peña, CRSS

For me the moment I actually felt the true feeling of hope was when I was at my last rehab. I had already been to rehab twice before and had relapsed numerous times, but there was a will that had changed in me this time. I actually found hope that I could really do it after seeing a friend of mine that I used with in the past, and saw that complete abstinence from drugs was possible. We talked and I poured my heart out to him, telling him I was so tired of suffering and wanted to change my life. He told me how he was working at a rehab as a peer support and that his life had changed for the better. He encouraged me to keep fighting and not give up on myself. I remember asking God to help me with my addiction and give me the strength to change. Now I truly believe God sent him to give me hope by showing me that it is possible if I put my life in his hands and do my part. To this day I am grateful and thankful that I haven't lost that hope.



“My Pain is My Strength”

by Esmeralda Neris, CRSS



Thinking of my childhood, all I remember is being lonely and depressed. I cried alone in my room asking God to take me with Him.

When I was about four years old my biological mother abandoned me. About a year later, my father got married. His new wife and her family started mistreating me when they'd come to visit. They would always tell me that I looked just like my biological mother and criticize me for no reason. At eight, I was being sexually molested. Her family threatened to beat me if I told anybody what was happening. My father was always working and never home.

As years went by, things worsened. I kept asking God to take me with Him. Why was I suffering? Why had my mother abandoned me? Why didn't she love me? I was miserable. The only person who was always there for me was my paternal grandmother, who lived in Mexico. I always waited anxiously for summer vacation to visit her because she made me feel welcome, loved, and appreciated. She always spoiled me and protected me.

When I was thirteen years old, I experienced further abuse by a member of my Stepmother's family. Crying, I called my father into my room and told him what had happened, and that this person had been molesting me for a couple years. He seemed concerned, but never called the cops or did anything about it. I felt like he didn't care. From that moment on, our father-daughter bond was broken.

When I was fourteen, my dad kicked me out of the house. With nowhere to go, I left to go to Mexico to be with my grandmother. I was there for about six months before my father came to take me home. I went, but the situation was still abusive. I couldn't live like that, so I went to live with a boyfriend. That was the worst decision I ever made. We lived together for two years. During that time, I had to leave school and work. Again, I didn't have anywhere to go. I couldn't bear the blows as he repeatedly attacked me. I even started looking for my father, hoping he would let me come home.

When I turned seventeen, I met the man who would be the father of my children. We lived together and everything seemed perfect to me. I thought I had escaped my suffering, but I was wrong. When my daughter

“My Pain is My Strength” by Esmeralda Neris, continued...

was born, her father started using drugs and his attitude changed drastically. We had an on-and-off relationship for a couple of years; I really thought he would change. During that time, I become pregnant with my son. Once I gave birth, I gave up on him changing.

In November 2007, I was in the hospital after a near fatal car accident, spending three months in a physical rehabilitation facility. I only saw my children twice in three months. I left the facility to go home and I had to learn how to walk again while taking care of my children. I could not work and support them anymore. It was especially hard because I had to put up with everything my father and his family did to me. Days, months, years went by.

In 2012, I met another man who seemed perfect. My children and I moved in with him, and we decided to marry. Then he started to change, and the story repeated itself. My children worried for my safety; they told my father about the situation. Instead of helping me, he decided to take my children away from me (not legally). I couldn't see them or talk to them. I couldn't get anyone to help me get my children back. I wanted to give up. I felt like disappearing. I had never been without my children for more than a day. In February 2016, I left my husband and came to Nogales, Arizona. I was living in my car. Rosa at Corazon found me a shelter where I could stay.

I start attending peer support meetings and getting involved in a few programs that helped people with depression. Little by little, I started getting help from the Nogales Police department and Legal Aid. My life began to change. People were so supportive, attentive, and concerned about my wellbeing. I could really see that something positive was happening. This is where I started to feel HOPE. It wasn't easy, but in July 2016, with the help of my lawyer, I got my children back. Ever since I've been grateful and thankful for all the support. I have my children with me and I hold on tight to them. I tell them and show them that I will always fight for them. My kids are my motivation and my strength. Sometimes I look back to my car accident and remind myself that God gave me a second chance in life. I have the opportunity to see my children grow up. Even though life is not perfect, we have one another.

I'm currently in a Domestic Violence Shelter in Nogales, Arizona with my children. I am presently enrolled at Pima Community College, Center for Training Department, pursuing the Office Assistant II Certificate. My current Graduation date is August 30th of this year. I believe education is the key to success. I will not stop until I make my dreams come true. With both certificates (CRSS and OAIL) I can start looking for a job. My goal is to get my children out of the shelter and into an apartment. I am committed to working hard to attain all of our dreams.

Mi Suenos Una Realidad, My Dreams Come True

por/by Clara Ayon, CRSS

Esperanza

Desde que escuche que la Universidad de Arizona vendria a Nogales, Arizona, todos los empleados de Wellness Connections me ayudaron para hacer mi suenos una realidad. La primera persona que pensaron fue en mi, eso me lleno de responsabilidad y miedo. Pero gracias a ellos, me siento mucho mejor conmigo misma y con la esperanza de que me puedo recuperar de la deprecion. Esto me abrio las posibilidades de otras oportunidades. Gracias a John y Rita por confiar en mi, y gracias a Erik por su paciencia y apoyo conmigo, y Lorenia.

Hope

Since finding out that the University of Arizona was coming to Nogales, Arizona, all the staff at Wellness Connections helped me to make my dreams come true. The person who they thought of first was me, and it filled me with the feeling of responsibility and fear. But thanks to them, I felt much better about myself, and found the hope that I could recover from my depression. This opened up the possibility of other opportunities. Thank you John and Rita for believing in me, thank you Erik for your patience and for supporting me, and Lorenia.



Encontrar la Esperanza, Finding Hope

por/by Maria Michel, CRSS



Esperanza

Las personas suelen aferrarse a la esperanza cuando se encuentran en una situación complicada, se trata de un recurso que nos ayuda a no caer en la depresión, basados en la idea falsa de que pronto las cosas van a mejorar. Esa confianza actúa como estímulo y aporta fuerzas y tranquilidad, por otro lado cuando se pierde resulta difícil alcanzar la vida se vuelve una ardua batalla contra los obstáculos.

La esperanza proporciona salud emocional en especial en aquellas personas que se encuentran en profundas crisis individuales. Para mí la esperanza surgió cuando llegué a Wellness Connection al sentir el apoyo de las personas que me recibieron con cariño y compasión, les doy las gracias a ellos por la oportunidad de participar en este curso. Gracias John, Rita, Clara, Erik, y a Carmen, mi consejera, y a todos los que participaron para hacer esto una realidad.

Hope

When people face a complicated situation, they want to find hope. It is a resource that can help us to avoid falling into depression, based on the false idea that things will get better. This trust acts as a stimulant to bring in strength and tranquility. When this trust is lost, life becomes more difficult and one can once again find themselves in the hard battle against the obstacles of life.

Hope provides emotional health, especially in those who have encountered a profound crisis. Hope emerged for me when I arrived at Wellness Connections and felt the support of those who welcomed me with warmth and compassion. I thank them for helping me to participate in this training. I give thanks to John, Rita, Clara, Erik, my Counselor Carmen, and all those who helped to make this a reality.

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Workforce
Development News

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UA Workforce Development Program promotes recovery and expanded opportunities for people with mental illness, substance use, and dual diagnosis by employing a collaborative approach to advocacy, service, education, and research.

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