

Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Sierra Vista, June 20, 2017



Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduating Class

*Back Row (left to right): Donald Watton, Della Schomber, John Oleary, "Scarecrow" Daniel Stultz,
Marisa Cope-Harvey, Omar Saiz,*

Middle Row (left to right): Katharine Holcomb, Rochelle Billings, Kayla Reed, Sherry Ourso, James Groover

Front Row Sitting (left to right): Ricky Bradford, Ruanda Dolak, Brandy Gehris



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Hope, A New Starting Place

by Donald Watton, CRSS



I will start and say that hope has been present and absent in some way shape or form and in varying degrees throughout my life. So for this epistle, I will start with my most recent state of hopelessness I feel must be addressed and understood to fully understand hope. A spiritual death had occurred as a result of a relationship failure and job loss due to an untreated self-medicated co-occurring disorder. I was a failure again. Complete and utter incomprehensible demoralization had occurred and there was nothing left. The Dark

side had returned deeper than ever before and suicide became a viable option. Physical death would finally meet spiritual death to a completion. My fourth attempt. I figured it out this time 60 Restoril and 259 Tylenol PM would do it or so I thought. I woke up in the hospital bed, ventilated and on a dialysis machine. I thought to myself, 'Oh Shit', I'm still alive. I was overwhelmed. Who is going to take care of me? Thoughts of death ran rapid and I knew I couldn't live this way anymore. Why did they save me? I deserve to die, I wanted to die. After 16 days of hospitalization, I was released. My mind was consumed with thoughts of the damage I had done to my body. This time, the consequences were significant and irreversible. I thought there had to be a better way. Hope ever so small entered into my mind, I knew I needed something different.

The day I was discharged from the hospital I was met by three very close friends. Mike Dohm who is the very epitome of Hope, Sister Green, and Brother Green. These three people stay with me 24 hours a day until funding and an entrance date could be arranged to enter Homes of Grace, a 90 day faith-based recovery facility. This was my turning point. God had entered as never before and hope came alive in me again. Spirituality was the key that unlocked the door. I opened it, faithfully and determined. I knew the opportunity was finally in place to align mind body and spirit. A new starting point had arrived and the unique ability that I possess to give this precious gift away called hope overwhelmed me. Christ now is the center of my being. I wake with Christ and I died with Christ. With Him I am everything and without him I am nothing.

In closing I'll say this, hope is something that requires maintenance to keep. I believe in the holistic approach to keep hope alive and I believe that I cannot give something away that I don't have.

Hope

by Brandy Gehris, CRSS

Hope is a four letter word I had given up on years ago. I made decisions in my life that had very negative consequences and I was left with nothing, especially hope. After twenty-five years of bad decisions, a light bulb went off. I knew if I wanted better, I needed to want hope. After 6 months of living on the streets in a tent, I was hopeless. I thought to myself there has to be a better way to live. I gave up everything I had, not that it was much, and boarded a plane at 4 am on December 1st 2015. I arrived in Tucson Arizona where my mother was. She picked me up and from that moment, I realized that my mother was my angel. The look on her face made me cry. She still had hope for me. As time went on, one day at a time, I discovered the amount of services available to me. I started the programs day to day, group to group, and started to see the light. I found an amazing chicken that is one of my strongest supports. I guess hope came back when I started to believe in myself. Hope is a four letter word I can no longer live without.



12 steps in Action

by James Groover I, CRSS

I was hopeless. I tried everything but I couldn't stop drinking and using. I thought I would always be miserable. I got really sick and almost died from pancreatitis and spent 10 days in the hospital. From there I went straight to a treatment center that was recommended to me. I woke up in a treatment center that was really nice. One of the first things that happened was a group meeting where people shared their stories and when it was over they said the Serenity prayer. We had another meeting after that called an AA meeting. We read out of this book called the Big Book and it was really interesting so I bought one. I had some free time and I began to read. This is when it hit me that there were other people just like me and I could relate to what I was reading. I got hope from what I was reading, that I wasn't alone and that maybe I could stop drinking and using. I really got into the Big Book and the steps. I got a sponsor and began putting the 12 steps into action.



Making a Difference

by Della Schomber, CRSS

I believe I have purpose in my life, now more than ever. My purpose is to help others. God has given me several second chances in life. Surviving events that should have killed me. In 1998, I survived a suicide attempt. I jumped 2 1/2 stories hoping to end my life. I had numerous broken bones, chest tubes, and had to have multiple surgeries. I didn't learn anything from that experience and the partying continued. I kept putting myself in life and death situations. At the time didn't feel like I deserved to live. Recently I served time in prison and had time to clean the cob webs out of my head. I now feel encouraged and have come to the realization that I am a miracle. Having 1.5 years clean and sober, I was able to learn how to walk again, literally. I feel that God has humbled me and kept me alive for a reason. It's based on a deep assurance and a firm confidence about what the future holds. It's a firm faith and complete trust in God. Hope is like an anchor that keeps me steady through all circumstances in life. I want to live now not just to get by, but to be a woman of integrity and make a difference in this world. I have a lot in common with other people affected by mental health issues and past addiction problems. I feel so positive and optimistic and these RSS classes have given me hope in many ways. I feel I can be an asset to a behavioral health facility and hope to be able to apply myself and work with others in making a difference.





I Am Not Alone

by Marisa Cope-Harvey, CRSS

My personal experience of hope began about six months ago, when my primary care doctor referred me to ACTS which is now Assurance Health and Wellness. I met my therapist Lisa Salicina, she helped me make great progress over the next six months and that was my turning point. That's when I started taking charge of my mental illness. It was my turning point because it explained my diagnosis and set me on the right path. She also validated what I was feeling, telling me that what I was feeling was perfectly normal for what I'd been through. She told me I wasn't alone.



There is Always Hope

by "Scarecrow" Daniel Stultz, CRSS

January 3rd, 2016 - tired of the way I'm living. I can't even make rent because I'm drinking my paychecks away. Fast forward 6 months and I'm lost, feeling like there's no way out. Feeling that I'm destined to a life of pain and despair. I moved to Bisbee and entered a homeless shelter. I met a man with more compassion and understanding than anyone I've ever known. His name is Tony Bedolla. His welcoming spirit instantly put my mind at ease. With his guidance and support, he has shown me that there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and it's not an oncoming train. He saw in me what I could not see in myself. He has taught me truth and accountability. Truth with how I treat people, and accountability for my own actions.

I know now that I'm ready to go forth and share what I have learned with other people as they find their own path of recovery, and help them to achieve their full potential. Will I ever reach Tony's level? There is always hope!

Some Make it Look Easy

by Ricky Bradford, CRSS

My first personal experience of hope occurred May of 2007 when I created S.M.I.L.E. (Some Make It Look Easy). The role S.M.I.L.E. played in my journey of recovery was manifesting a universal message from a thought to an action. S.M.I.L.E. is formed from pain, struggle, perseverance, and focus.

This turning point proved to me that being a person that lives with mental health issues, I can use cognitive thought to balance my emotional imbalances and create a message that people of all colors, shapes, and sizes can relate to an embrace. With imagination and creativity, if one practices continuously he/she can achieve their personal goals.



Being Happy in My Recovery

by John Oleary, CRSS

My Hope had honestly nothing to do with my recovery. It does however, have everything to do with me being happy in my recovery. You see, I have four felonies, all having to do with drugs. This has been like a persistent sense of doom hanging over me. The fear of never having a career, but simply being stuck in a dead end job, miserable, and never fulfilling my sense of purpose in the world was demoralizing and painful. At a Narcotics Anonymous meeting, I was discussing with a friend of mine, my hopes and aspirations for my future and she told me about Peer Support training. She received this at SEABHS and

got a job in the behavioral health field. She also told me that my mistakes in the past would not be held against me and more likely be seen as an asset. This was a miracle. I could work in a field which I am passionate about. I could have a job where I could be successful and would support me financially and could be a great career and not just a job. Not to mention being happy doing. Now with this new found hope of being happy as I go off to work each day, being able to provide for my love ones, I am Hopeful!

Thank you for this amazing opportunity, I really do appreciate it.

Hope, My Anchor

by Ruanda Dolak, CRSS

I was thirty-six years old. Depression had dogged my heels since I was sixteen, always making me feel as though I were walking through treacle, enveloped by a fog which separated me from others in my world. I had suffered post-partum depression twice, and been hospitalized twice for depression. During the second hospitalization, a neuropsychiatrist was on my treatment team because I also have a seizure disorder. They wanted to keep an eye on that while they tweaked medication I had been on since the age of eighteen, with no noticeable difference in symptoms.

I doggedly pursued wellness. I wasn't going to let this thing kill me, no matter how many times I felt like curling into a corner, going to sleep and never waking again. But back to this neuropsychiatrist; he listened to symptoms and asked some questions to which I was responding with a resounding "Yes!". He finally looked up at me from his notes and said, "Mrs. Dolak, I believe what you are suffering from is a mental illness known as manic-depression. It's serious, yes, but very treatable." At last! The monster had a name!

He started me immediately on a course of medications, and referred me to a Cognitive Behavioral Therapist. When I encountered CBT, I recognized that there was hope. Recovery was possible, and I could be proactive in doing something about it. Since then, my journey towards mental wellness has sometimes been three steps forward, two steps back. But I always have held onto that dim beacon of light through the fogs, knowing they would pass,



and that I would survive them. I have endured physical illness, betrayal, raising three children living with mentally illness, and my husband's cancer without losing my tight grip on that one word: Hope. It is my life preserver, and my anchor, when tossed by the storms of my illness. Today, I have a small plaque with the word "Hope" firmly screwed into the wood of my fireplace mantel. It is my life's mantra.

I Can Still Move Forward

by Kayla Reed, CRSS

When I first started into my recovery I didn't think I would be where I am today. When I first had trauma in my life, I didn't know how to handle it. When I got older I turned to mind altering substances so I didn't have to think about what I had gone through. I just wanted to feel numb. I thought to myself, this is what my life was going to be like, and I will never be able to go back to the life I once knew. These thoughts took me to a dark place mentally and physically. I was dying. I just gave up on the thought of something else. One day I was just done. I was done living that lifestyle. I was done depending on a substance that had taken over my life. I didn't know what I needed to do to make it stop, to end this life I was living. I had been incarcerated and was on probation. I thought that I was going to have to go to prison to save my life. My family didn't want that for me, and I didn't want it for myself. I didn't want to leave my daughter without a mother for years and miss out on her life. I just wanted help... but had no hope that I was going to get it. My probation officer gave me a chance that I never thought I was going to get. She told me if I put myself in detox and went to rehab that she wasn't going to put me back in jail. Now I had hope. I went to rehab and completed it successfully. While I was in there, I learned so much. I absorbed everything in that I needed to in order to do what I want with my life. While I was in that rehab, I learned that I could become a peer support. I had always wanted to help people, but I didn't think I would be able to because of my felonies, but they told me that doesn't matter, and again I had hope. Hope that if I continue to do the step work, go to classes, I too can be the person that could save someone's life, like they saved mine. They showed me that even with what happened in my past, I can still move



forward. I am a person with dual diagnosis, I am a person with bipolar disorder, and a person with a substance use disorder, and I'm a person in recovery. I am moving forward with my life in a positive way. Now I have hope for so many people, people with any type of disorder, that they will recover, because this woman today with a dual diagnosis and co-occurring disorders is going to recover, 100%.

I've Accomplished My Goal Which is HOPE!

by Rochelle Billings, CRSS



When I think of HOPE, I think of it as a state of mind that believes and desires a positive outcome for situations in my life. I found my HOPE moment when I reached out for help, and admitted myself into the psychiatric ward for two weeks last year. I wasn't sure what to expect, but I knew that I couldn't continue living my life that way any longer. I can

remember that empty feeling I dealt with on a daily basis. I just wanted to have a normal life. I was able to focus on having faith in my Dr. and the treatment team that I was assigned to. I got to meet with her on a daily basis to go over my symptoms so we could work together on getting my medication adjusted. All I could think about was chasing my anxiety around thinking what If she's not able to find something that works for me, and I continue feeling like this. After all, I had spent many years going to see a psychiatrist and therapist and nothing seemed to work. I got acclimated to my daily routine in the hospital. I went to all the groups, and activities. I knew that getting my medication adjusted was just a small portion of the problem. I was diagnosed with depressive disorder, and anxiety. I tried different medications to see what was helping. I remember the side effects of one was having me feel high, and spacey but after a few days, I was truly beginning to feel the difference. I continued those medications for the remainder of my treatment. I feel like I've met my angel because she was able to get me adjusted in a short time, and I've been searching for that over the years, and nothing worked. I walked out of that facility feeling like I've accomplished my goal which is HOPE! I've been able to maintain my recovery with the use of my medications, therapy, attending classes, and using peer support.

Real Life Hope

by Sherry Ourso, CRSS

The event where hope turned my life around was when I found out I was pregnant.

I was 41 years old and caring for my father who was dying of cancer. I had gotten sober to take care of him. I was not at all sure how I was going to cope with his inevitable death without turning to drugs. It was then that I found out I was pregnant with my little peanut, my son Timothy.

Prior to this I had been in a deep depression for a number of years. I thought I had lost my chance at having children and wondered what value my life had without a family of my own. My age, 4 miscarriages and a tubal ligation left me with one scarred fallopian tube and a 2% chance of ever getting pregnant. I had resigned myself to the reality of never having children. Then life gave me living, breathing, real life HOPE.

I now had a reason to remain on the path of recovery, no matter what hardship was before me.

Belief that this was meant to be and hope as a mother gave me reason to start my life anew.

Not only do I have a son to raise, I also have a father in Heaven to make proud. His amazing example as a father would lead my way.

I have HOPE for his future, therefore I strive.

I have HOPE to keep my father alive in spirit, therefore I live with all the virtues and morals he taught me.

I have HOPE for EVERYONE, therefore I choose to live my life as an example of what recovery can be and what HOPE can do.

Bringing Hope to Others

by Katharine Holcomb, CRSS

When I was 14 years old, I received my first mental illness diagnosis. This began a 30-year journey through the mental health field that had left me exhausted, frustrated and hopeless. Hope was never a part of my recovery. Ever. In fact, recovery was never part of my recovery. Throughout the thirty years of talk therapy and medication, with little improvement, I would ask "isn't there more I can be doing?" which was answered with "like what?" I believed the mental health industry should somehow be able to create a model that was more effective; after all, the definition of insanity is continuing to do the same thing while expecting a different outcome. Ironic that I, the crazy one, was the only person that could see this.

Hope came to me during the second day of the RSS class. I began to see that I had a choice to make; to wallow in self-pity or to move on. I had become strangled by 'learned helplessness' but I was surrounded by empathetic peers and facilitators that had battled their own demons and had learned how to slay them. The literature described an alternative means of dealing with mental illness and substance use disorder and finally I had my answer to my question of "shouldn't there be more?" It was the first time that recovery and hope were discussed, and the new model made sense. I finally became hopeful and excited about the future and saw the opportunities unfolding before me.

I have always wondered why I was born to suffer from a mental illness. Long ago, I thought that if I could overcome my mental health issues, I could help bring hope to others struggling with similar issues. Now, finally I can.



My Inspiration is Hope

by Omar Saiz CRSS

Let me start by introducing myself. My name is Jose Omar Saiz and I am 41 years old. My inspiration is Hope. I am here in this world thanks to God almighty who gave me a second opportunity and a purpose for myself and others. I was in a situation that was very critical and scary, and I believe I am still alive for a reason. What I gained out of my experience was that it brought my family and loved ones closer together and united. Everyday our bonds continue to grow and I thank each one of my family and friends who have shown positive support toward me. I can honestly say that for a time, I was Hopeless. Due to my circumstances, I knew I would have a tough time obtaining employment like I use to have, working with people with special needs and in the behavioral health field. It's my passion and now with some assistance from family and friends I am able to attend trainings and am connected with resources I didn't even know existed. This brought a very bright light to my eyes and mind and I am willing to take the next steps to wellness and recovery. There is hope for everyone. Throughout these courses I have learned a lot of information and tools that I can apply personally and professionally. I am also blessed to have the chance to continue to strive



to better myself in all areas. The most important thing that I have come to know, is that the possibility of recovering is 100 Percent for all people and all situations. Every single day I feel more motivated with plenty of Hope. Choosing the right path will be rewarding for each one of us because we are not alone.

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**Workforce
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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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