

Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Tucson, September 28, 2017



Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduating Class

Back Row (left to right): Jennifer Schultz De La Rosa, Sandra Islas, Fred Gartrell, Salvador Couturier, Joy Grey, Isaac Evans, Markeeta Trujillo, Matthew Harrington

Middle Row (left to right): Danielle Rider, Ginger Lyon, Leslie Parades, Katrina Smith, Kimberly Hinkel-Dawson, Lupita "Thumbelina" Pineda

Front Row Sitting (left to right): Lydia Tarin, Ricky Gray



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A Seed of Hope Turned into Action

by Jennifer Schultz De La Rosa, WDP Evaluation Associate



It has been my great honor to participate in the Institute as the new Evaluation Associate for the Workforce Development Program and I was so pleased to be invited to write my own story of hope. My first upswing of hope for a better life came about a decade ago. I knew that frequently my behavior didn't reflect well on me, but I didn't have a good sense of how to change this. I finally

stumbled upon a simple equation: I acted poorly whenever I experienced pain that exceeded my coping resources. This was happening more often than I would have liked because: (1) I am sensitive by nature and prone to experience pain (2) my coping skills (at that time) were underdeveloped; almost non-existent.

This insight, that success in relationships is more about skills than personality, really changed things up for me. All of a sudden, rather than viewing myself as inherently defective, I understood that I just needed better skills/tools to help navigate my relationships more effectively. The most hopeful part, to me, was that skills can be developed with practice! This seed of hope turned into action, slowly over a period of several years.

I wanted to figure out which relationships would be worth trying to improve by developing my skill at navigating them, and which relationships weren't worth the attempt (because honestly some of my relationships didn't have much to recommend them in the first place). It was a soul-searching experience, trying to decide which relationships were which! I ended the relationships that needed it, and for those relationships that were worth my effort, I worked hard to develop my ability to navigate them more effectively. Profound positive changes resulted! It was so worth it to carefully mend what had been wrong in these dynamics, and also to rebuild a capacity for healthy connection within myself. I'm not finished building these skills yet, but I feel I'm well on my way.

Treason Plays!

by Katrina Smith, CRSS

As an adolescent, I was given a diagnosis and put on medication. I always remember having hope for a shot at a normal life, as I grew up watching my biological dad manage mental illness and his recovery. On the other hand, I also watched mental illness destroy the lives of many of my family members, which caused me to begin losing hope.

My recovery began in my mid 20's after my stepfather completed suicide. He had never sought help prior. This event rocked my world and it was difficult for me to pick my feet back up. Then, last year my biological dad completed suicide after 30 years of stability. This event shattered my world. The difference between my stepfather and biological dad is that one never had hope, and the other lost hope. This realization was a turning point in my recovery. I was determined to not become another devastating statistic in my family and not let mental illness define me. Hope became the foundation to my recovery. I greet every morning with hope so that each day I can be the best version of me for myself and my family.



Self Reflection and Acceptance

by Danielle Rider, CRSS

When I looked in the mirror I saw no life, no soul; just chains that I had been bound by. From every pain, hurt, stigma, derailment, and experience. It was the turning point of recognition and clarity. I had found acceptance and self reflection. In my life, I dedicated myself to Christ. This enabled me to see myself for the true hero I really am. My restoration to accepting a new light, and a new chance for a renewed purpose.



Hope Found a Way Into My Soul

by Fred Gartrell, CRSS



Hope is an almost nameless emotion that carried me through the difficult times in my life. It allowed me to stay strong when confronted by addiction and mental illness. Hope gave me the courage to push forward even when I was alone. When I met others facing similar or even worse challenges than I, the concept of hope came to mind through association with my peers. Even when dealing with hopelessness, hope still found a way into my soul.

Hope set my soul on fire when the coldness of despair threatened to take my life. That fire was a burning desire to say no in the face of pain and suffering of my mental illness. My heart was heavy, but the hope of a better life remained in my mind. I was not always hopeful, but hope was the means by which I could carry on against traumatic challenges. In life hope gives us the courage to continue when we doubt ourselves. Without hope, there is no faith, dreams, or positive outlook for a better tomorrow. For me, hope is everything. It is the starting point to recovery.



Hope Occured Gradually

by Ginger Lyon, CRSS

Merriam-Webster Dictionary's definitions of 'hope' are: "To cherish a desire with anticipation," and "To desire with expectation of obtainment or fulfillment."

Hope occurred gradually for me in my life. Slowly I looked around and saw that the fog had cleared and I could see a road that led to a clear sky. I saw the support I have received from my family, friends, and doctors, which lead me to this road I am now traveling. I see things happening in my life and my recovery that are positive and healthy. These were things that in the past, I feared I would never obtain. I cannot pinpoint an exact moment I felt this hope consume me, but I feel it now. Slowly, gradually, from the ashes rose a phoenix. I feel I can accomplish anything, and look forward to the road ahead.



Hope

by Lydia Tarin, CRSS

I personally did not have one single experience in my life that started my recovery. My recovery was a result of multiple relapses from substance use. Of course, my recovery having been the result of multiple relapses, there were many people and incidents involved in that. I had many incidents in which people helped guide me toward my sobriety. All of my experiences with substance use and my years in recovery have given me the knowledge and the desire to help others in their recovery with substance use, trauma, and mental illness.

Hope

by Leslie Parades, CRSS

I am a person who believes in Jesus Christ, so I try to have hope in every situation. But when I was at the hospital, I felt anxious and I needed to be positive and have hope that I would get out recovered and stable. I remember when everyone was leaving and I felt stuck there. It was boring there and I had begun to feel anxious.

I used to stare through the window at the city, just wanting to be outside like a normal person. I used to talk to the doctor and ask him when I would get out, and he would say soon or within so many days, and that gave me hope. I was hoping and praying everything would be ok and that I would get out soon. Hope helped me get through each day until I was discharged from the hospital.

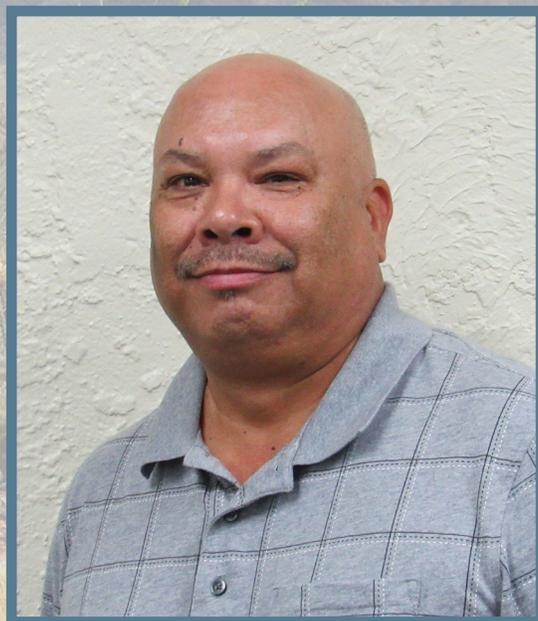


I Received Hope

by Ricky Gray, CRSS

What opened my eyes and gave me hope was the day I was released from prison in 1993. I was incarcerated in 1980, when I was just 18 years old. During that time, my life never changed. I had no conscious, no feelings; I just didn't care. This is what I made my lifestyle - I got involved in prison politics. I saw people dying, screaming for their life.

I was acquitted in 1987 for deadly assault on a prisoner. A jury trial in Florence found me not guilty. I never expect to see the streets again; finally, in 1993 my sentence came up. I couldn't believe I was going home. That is when I made a decision and I received hope. Being a RSS is something I wanted to do, maybe working with youngsters. If I could lead just one person in the right direction, I would know that I'm doing the right thing, and this is the job for me.



Hope

by Joy Grey, CRSS

I have had a goal in the last twenty years or so to become more than a person with a mental illness. I have never defined myself as such. I have a diagnosis of Major Depression, and I was deep in a hole. My mind was foggy, but there was a moment when I realized that I could get better.

My therapist had encouraged me to begin walking in my neighborhood. This was extremely difficult for me. I had isolated myself and was in poor physical condition. I also knew that I was so very, very tired of living my life with depression ruling me.

At first I walked to the mailbox for a week. Then the next week to the corner, then one entire block, then one and a half blocks, etc. After approximately five weeks I could walk the three blocks to the park. My health and mobility vastly improved. But that wasn't the critical change. The critical change was that my mind was no longer foggy. It was soon after that I began pursuing my Associate Degree.



Making My dream Come True

by Kimberly Hinkel-Dawson, CRSS

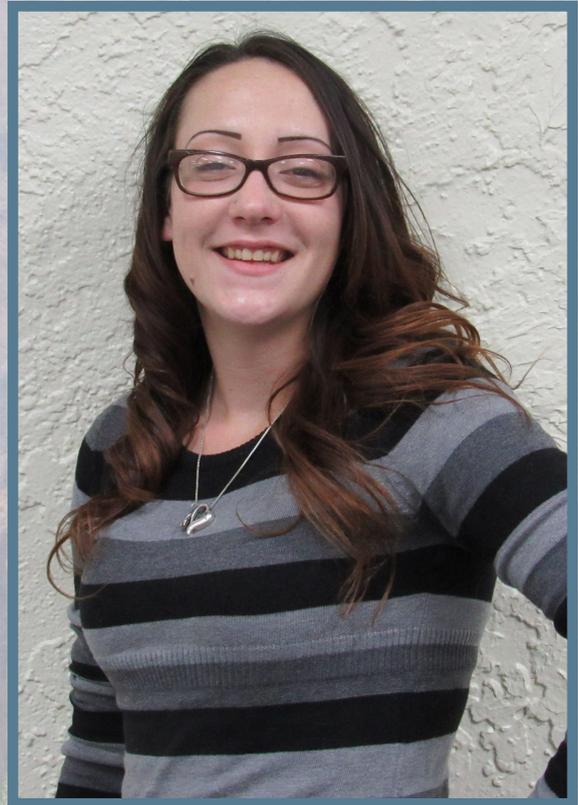
My name is Kimberly, and I am 26 years old. I have been in recovery for close to 5 years now, after suffering from a substance use disorder that lasted for just about 4 years. I lost everything. I lost trust of my family, lost friends that I had grown up with, and could not hold a job without thinking about doing the worst to make sure I would not get "sick".

At the time, I thought I had everything going for me. I had my own place, 3 vehicles, and was engaged. I thought I was living a life full of happiness. Until the drug completely consumed me, and my body became dependent on medication. For the longest time I kept my dependence problem to myself and tried my hardest to be a "functioning addict". It wasn't long however, before I ended up committing crimes secretly (still not letting anyone know that I needed help) to make sure that I had food on the table, as well as enough money to supply my habit.

After a while, I realized that I truly needed help, so I reached out. I reached out to my mom to have an intervention with my ex-fiancé. I admitted my problem and that it had gotten out of control. I tried so hard to continue going to work without the medication my body had depended on for so long, but I could not do it. As an active caregiver, I had access to the medication my body was screaming for. Slowly but surely, I started taking patient's medications for my own purposes. But I could only take so much without it being noticeable.

That's when it started getting worse. I started stealing things to pawn for money so I could continue hiding my addiction. I gained access to personal checks and started writing checks out to myself. The law started looking for me, and I went on the run for close to a year. I couldn't work because I was in hiding. My ex's father moved in with us, and he had substance use issues as well. He decided robbing banks would get us everything that we needed. That went on for about 3 months before we were finally caught and arrested. THANK GOD.

I finally realized it was time to change my life. I was given resources by pretrial to help me get off the drug, and I used them. I took it all as a joke to start with. I was placed on probation and kept dropping dirty, and my probation officer had enough of me. He put me back in jail and was trying to send



me to prison. With the last bit of hope I had for freedom, I wrote an honest and heartfelt letter to the judge asking for a second chance at life. For the first time in years, I stayed clean for over a week! I loved the feeling. I loved being able to wake up and not need anything to get up and get going.

I got my second chance, and was court ordered into a 3-month treatment program and sentenced to IPS (intensive probation). It was not easy to complete it without a single violation, but I did it! After my time was up in the halfway house, I became a house manager to see what it was like working in the field. I fell in love, and I immediately realized that being a Peer Support Specialist was my true passion. It took me a while, but I got the courage to enroll myself back into a clinic and do what I needed to do to make my dream come true.

I Found Hope

by Matthew Harrington, CRSS



My personal experience of hope involves my mental health journey and my experience in the mental healthcare system. It began when I was diagnosed and officially “labeled” with a Serious Mental Illness, in January 2009. At that point, my symptoms had not only become concerning to me, but to the people around me. I could not recognize hope at that time; however, through the process of my recovery I was able to see how much of an important role hope played. It helped me navigate through all the new experiences I was going through. Hope gave me something to strive toward. I began hopeless and scared,

and I did not know what to make of what I was feeling and going through.

I sought advice from my family and doctors, which led me to local agencies for treatment and support that was directed towards people like myself. That was the beginning of the road to recovery for me. In the beginning I faced hospitalization, doctors, and medication (which involved lots of trial and error). Most frightening at the time was that I felt like I was now part of an entirely new world. Through all of this, I continued to have hope deep down. I was confused and wanted to feel better and know what was happening. I began seeking proper help understanding my diagnoses, while always keeping an openness to work with and learn from others within my newly formed support team.

It was very challenging at first to understand the difference between having faith and having hope. I decided to take an active role in my recovery, which involved learning on my own about my diagnoses, my medications and their effects, where to find others going through similar situations, and a plan to help me keep close track of my recovery and progress. I began rebuilding some of my confidence and took an active effort in the recovery process from all aspects. I started seeing things a little more clearly.

I had truly begun to feel hope when I realized that I should not have to feel like I had lost my identity in the process of dealing and coping with my mental health diagnoses. I can't take all the credit; without the hospitalizations, the doctors, the medications, and all those experiences, I would have never been motivated to pursue knowledge by myself and for myself. Hope eventually reinstated the confidence that I had lost. The recovery

[continued on next page](#)

Legacy of Hope

by Sandra Islas, CRSS

The essence of life; I could not live a life of hope without having peace deep inside my heart, because life is unpredictable, and difficult at times. It was also very hard for me to keep up my faith during the most critical times in my life. Losing my grandkids was a huge devastation to me. My demons came out of hiding and I went back to my addiction for 6 months, finally getting sober when I found hope and moved on.

I started going to Codac and attending classes, which have been very helpful. I also began learning skills, which I still use today. Through my Peer Support, I learned about this program. The Institute has had an impact on my life, and I met some great acquaintances who now help me along my recovery. I am very blessed and grateful for them. As long as I am breathing, I have aspirations of hope, faith, and understanding of the sole purpose of life.



I Found Hope, by Matthew Harrington, continued...

process gave me tools to find the drive to be able to make decisions, and to objectively analyze my mental health and decide what is best for me, all while working closely with a licensed professional.

Everyone along the way, from behavioral health techs in the hospital, many different doctors, and my family played a role in helping me find hope towards recovery. The impact of hope taught me that the least

expected things can happen at the least expected times in my life, and I hold the ability to figure out a way to cope and get through this new lifestyle, as well as future struggles. It has made me more open to education and most importantly, has given me a true passion and desire to help others in any way I can. Learning that however bad my life may have seemed while going through my journey, there was something that I could do to take control of it - I found hope in all of it.

Hope, a Second Chance

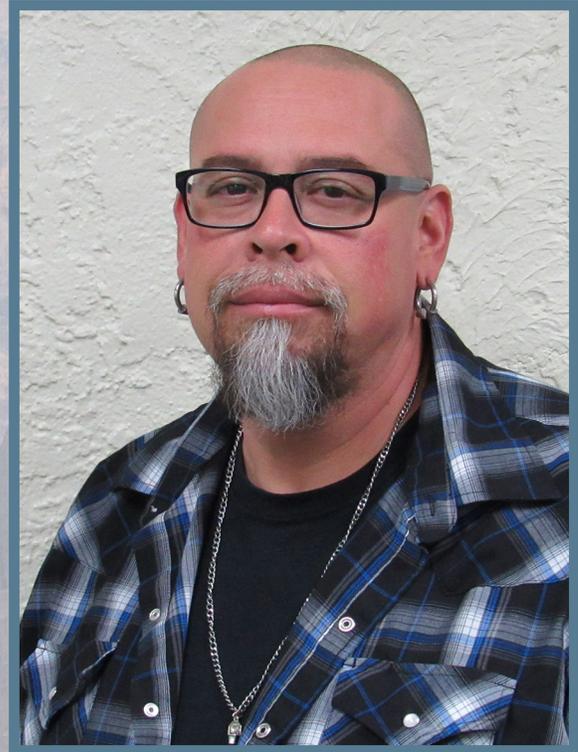
by Salvador Couturier, CRSS

The word hope is my definition of a second chance for my valued life.

After blaming different people, places, and things for destroying everything in my life, I got tired of being tired. Finally, acceptance kicked in and I recognized that I had a problem with alcohol and drug use. I admitted myself into a six-month treatment facility, where I then began to identify my disease. I learned very helpful coping skills, practiced mindfulness, and shared my thoughts with a therapist.

Working the program to the best of my ability, I began to find my purpose in helping myself and becoming able to help my peers. In speaking with staff and other peers, I learned that I was an inspiration because I lead by example. Everyone noticed I was working my program and advocating for myself on a daily basis.

After graduating from the program, I was working full time, going to my AA groups, and still finding time to support my peers in the treatment program. Having the opportunity to go through this program to become a Recovery Support Specialist is so amazing and rewarding to me. I will forever be grateful for the experience of a lifetime. I have the utmost



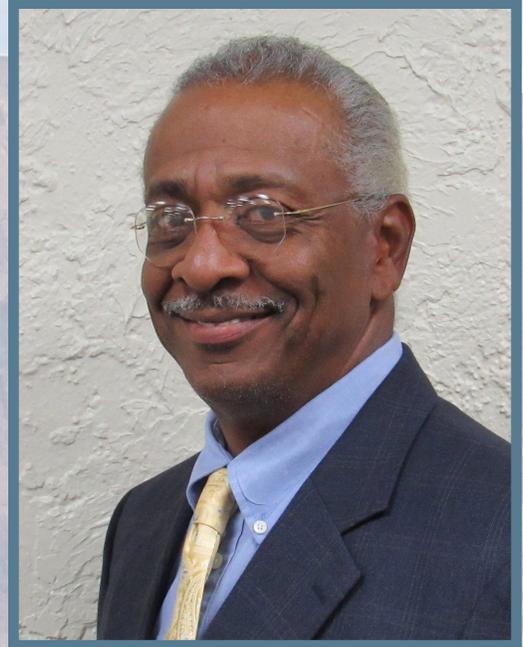
confidence and understanding that I will be the best Recovery Support Specialist that I can possibly be. Helping others is my way to help myself in my journey of recovery.

Seek Hope for a Change

by Isaac Evans, CRSS

In the beginning of April 2012 I was in a very depressed state in my life. I would say the turning point at this time was when I began to question my interest to seek hope for change. The change was regarding the consumption of medication (as ordered for post pain recovery), which was not being utilized for pain management.

My mistake was turning it into a must take med for mental stress. My manipulation of the medical system for a quick cure was a big mistake. Due to my physical healing reaching the completion stage, and my non acceptance of this addiction, my mental issues became a concern. The only way for me to recover was to get an education in the recovery process, which was necessary in order to participate completely. It is a life-long education for successful living.



Discovering God's Love

by Thumbelina Pineda, CRSS

I was raised Catholic and as a spiritual person. I never actually took it seriously when I was growing up, until I discovered for my own self what having faith really is. For me, having faith is having hope. I have to believe in myself in order for me to have hope. For me to be able to do that is how I know God has always been present, and has been there for me in both good and bad moments. Ever since I discovered God's love, my faith has grown much more, as well as my hope.

Since I was hospitalized, I never lost hope; I knew that I had to go through what I did in order to grow more spiritual. I believe that we all live in a spiritual war, where we have to fight evil every single day to continue with life. That's me, fighting the evil to continue with my journey, but never losing the faith or hope that will help me accomplish all my dreams in life. I have a purpose in this life, and my dream is to be a missionary! I will have to fight hard to reach it, but I know walking with God I will get to the mountain summit!



Proof That There is Hope

by Markeeta Trujillo, CRSS



I discovered hope when I was in jail in 2015, where I discovered the perfect rehab for me. The Miracle Center is a faith-based transitional housing program, where I learned many tools for entering into the world without the use of substances. Through that program, I became a part of a family I never thought I deserved. It was the place where I found my recovery and where I was shown proof that there is hope; this is where I had the chance to experience it firsthand for myself.

Hope for me is having something to look forward to and having enough faith in myself to push on toward what I am trying to achieve. That is why I chose to be a part of this Institute. I want to provide hope for others that are still lost and have never experienced it. My goal, and my hope now, is to allow people to have the same opportunity as I did and be able to put their hope in someone. My hope is to be that person to the best of my ability, for people to see that there is a way to regain their sobriety goals through my experience, and the hardship that I've endured to find myself again.

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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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