

Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

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Yuma Arizona

Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduates

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Ruben Ornelas

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The Hope that Grabbed Me

By Sharon Kvam

The turning point in my recovery was actually six years into sobriety. I had been doing the work, I actually had been working extra hard because I was laboring under anxiety disorders and did not know this. I thought I was just weak; I didn't know it as a real thing, and that I had been self-medicating the whole time. 30 years' worth, Wow!

Anyway, as I'm sure you can imagine, that time span involved my two daughters' childhoods. I barely got out of my first marriage with my life intact, and during the time I was with my ex I had tried to protect my children from awareness of the way he treated me; I mistakenly thought that I had no right to interfere with their concepts of their father, and therefore their love of their father. I thought that that was something that belonged to them personally, and I had no right to disrupt it. Boy was I wrong. I found out too late that since I had shielded them from the monster that he often was, and would actively not say bad things about him to them or with in their ability to hear, they were left wide open for him to turn them against me.

He decided it was to his advantage to do exactly that, and while I was a runaway mom for a period of six months, he completely indoctrinated them against me, stripping away what respect they did have for me, and doing everything he could to make them hate me. This caused a wound on their development that I will never be able to undo, although I am trying to make up for lost time by helping them to build their self-esteem now. After all, a teenage daughter especially needs

her mother, and she needs to know her as a person, and to be able to see that she is not perfect but that at least she is mostly good, and somewhat wise, and definitely to be respected.

If girls undergoing transition into womanhood disrespect their mothers, or even hate their mothers, then when they inevitably see their mothers in themselves, they will disrespect and hate themselves. I see no other possible outcome for that situation. And unfortunately that is exactly what happened with my girls, and they are still wounded although I am trying to help them as much as I possibly can now.

I'm sure a lot of people think of their non-sober years as wasted time, but the reason I am elaborating on this so much is that it is very important to my turning point. The hope that I did attain came in the form of an ad I saw on the computer. It was to go to college, online, and all of a sudden the word psychology popped into my head. I knew instantly that that was what I needed to do. For one thing, to acquire the tools to try to help my daughters, but also to put those "wasted" years of mine to good use. I knew right then with blazing clarity that if I could attain the skills to work in the field to help other people with substance abuse and, for example, anxiety problems, then it would not have all been a failure. Moreover there was something from the very start of my sobriety: a question as to what drives addictive behavior??--That there had to be something, something underlying it all that was other than

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A New Way of Life

By Taylor Lopez

My turning point of being hopeless to hopeful was when I finally self surrendered and turned myself in to the Marshals. I was told I was going to be getting out that day, I couldn't wait but the time never came. I tried to have my parents' bail me out of jail and they wouldn't, they said they wanted me to stay in there because they knew I was safe and not running the streets.

I had ruined all the important relationships in my life. I lost my condo and two cars. I dropped out of college and threw my life away to heroin. I was to a point where I had just given up I didn't care about anything except my next high and when I would get more. My mom wept constantly and she lost hope too that I would ever

change. I knew it hurt her and it hurt me to see what I was doing to my family but at the time I was selfish and only cared about my addiction and myself.

While I was in jail my attorney recommended drug court and I was accepted. Being accepted into drug court was the best thing that had ever happened to me. The team gave me hope and showed me a new way of life. Through the program I restored many relationships that were broken and I have gained back more than I had before. I couldn't do it alone and I didn't have to, I am so grateful for being given this opportunity to turn my life around at such a young age and be able to help others who feel like there is no way back.

The Hope that Grabbed Me, by Sharon Kvam, continued...

weakness, stupidity, and selfishness, even more than a self-destructiveness. Certainly, the self-destructiveness seemed to be there, but what generated that??

I did not know at the time if anybody else was looking at it this way; in fact I told myself that of course they were, this was not my new brand new, bright idea. But original or not, I decided I had to find out.

There were reasons, there are reasons, and I have always hated when anybody was treated as 'less than.' This also applies to people with substance abuse problems; I had always felt so in my heart, and I guess I sort of set out to prove it. This is the hope that grabbed me. This was my turning point. This is what put me into and has kept me to my new life.





Today I am Hopeful

By Jose Carlos Verduzco

For me being hopeless was a way of life. Having no hope and a feeling of desperation made my life horrible. In 2015 I overdosed on heroin and thanks to the crisis team from C.H.A. I learned that there was help and that it was being offered to me, so I could better myself and not live a life of hopelessness. After that episode

I started to investigate the resources that were in place for a person who suffers from addictions and learned through family support, love, and hope that I could be helped and live a life that I can fulfill with a sense of purpose. Today I am Hopeful, and I can maintain recovery working a program that works for me.

Hope - *"a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen."*

By Jacob Contrabasso

Hope - "a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen."

That is the definition of hope according to Google. What is hope to me? Hope is knowing that everything will be alright. No matter where I've been, done, or said, I can make something of myself. Hope is the negativity I receive for decisions I feel are right. It is the rock I stand on with views over the world at night. The smiles brought upon people's faces to hear the stories of change and see the outcomes. Hope is within me. I stared down the path of desolation with complete comfort. I prayed for an early death like it could be a miracle. I fought to survive. I was introduced to hope when I told my story

of how I came into recovery and was greeted with reactions of likeminded individuals telling me that no matter what I felt like inside, I was human after all. They told me I could change every day until I believed it. Once I believed it I proceeded to take action. Not a day goes by that I don't think about where I came from and look at where I'm going with the goal of bringing others who feel the same way along with me. I believe in the principles of finding hope and I believe I can show anyone in doubt that they can in fact find it too. I want to show someone a life they can live just like someone showed me. That is hope to my once hopeless mind.

Kelly's Story of Hope

By Kelly McKay

Addiction has been a problem in my family long before I was born. My father is an addict and my sister is a recovering addict. My parents separated when I was 5 years old. My mother had to leave for work out of town for a year when I was 10 and I would stay with other family members during the week and my dad's on the weekend. By the time I was in 6th grade my mom came back, things seemed to be all mixed up from then on. It all started coming apart; I never wanted to go to school either. When I would go to my father's I would babysit for my uncle and instead of him paying me he was teaching me how to smoke meth. By this time I was in 7th grade, I've been molested by my uncle and was doing everything I could to be at my dad's and away from my uncle. My uncle had a new born baby and I remember feeling that I should be the one to protect her and there was no way I was going to let anyone do that to her.

My mother had no clue of what was going on with me. I was acting out in the wrong ways and when she did things I didn't like I would just call my dad to come get me until the day came where I had to go to jail for calling my mother a bitch she had no choice but to call the cops on me, I was out of control. I was placed on probation and had some up and downs during that time. At 17, I was still on probation not for relapsing but for fighting with my sister. I ran away from home and had found out I was pregnant with my first son Coy. I tried to start getting my life together at the age of 18 at least that's what I thought at the time. My life was going great; he was my motivation to get my life together. I

held down a job, began thinking about the future, me and Coy's father had a nice apartment and I thought we had it all.

I was a hostess working at Brownies Café for about a year and I got along with a girl that was a co-worker/ friend that was older than me and she had a son the same age as my son, she invited me over one day after work so our kids could play together. I had no clue that she was addicted to any drugs and when I found that out I started to use also. I always tried to keep my life a secret from others. I began hanging out with her after work and my son. I didn't have any coping skills or really any boundaries with her. I would drop anything to help her out at any time of the day. It wasn't long before it triggered my own use and I started coping by smoking weed, drinking alcohol right along the side of her. I was back to using in full affect, once again.

It wasn't till a few years later that I was admitted into the Crossroads Mission Recovery four month program. This program was not like any other program that I have encountered before. It was more spiritual based and at first I thought to myself, "What am I doing here." As time went by I started to realize that I needed this type of program, my spirituality was growing and I was developing a sense of hope in my recovery. In all my years in addiction, I never thought that I would like hearing stories about the Bible or verses that would help me in ways that I can't even explain. The Crossroads Mission and drug court play a significant role in my recovery process, without them, I would have no hope today.





Hopeful for My Future

By Rachelle Alejandre

I can remember being asked multiple times while I was a child “Rachelle what do you want to be when you grow up?” Being a child the possibilities are endless. My answer was always something like a singer/songwriter, and then at other times it was a princess or ballerina. Again remember at only 6 or 7 years old the answer was usually along the lines of your favorite Disney movie, or Super hero.

I am 29 years old and my life is extremely different than what I had imagined when I was a child.

I was raised by both my parents. I have two sisters and one brother. I can honestly say my parents did all they can to make sure as kids we never went without anything we needed. My parents weren't the greatest role models; they were there more physically then emotionally and mentally. My mom was a closet addict and alcoholic and my Dad was an extreme alcoholic. Weekends at our house consist of lots of family, drinking, music, alcohol and always ended with us in our room just listening to our parents fighting and arguing over anything.

Being a child you think of your parents as your protector. I use to think my parents had eyes behind their heads because anytime we were doing something wrong somehow they always knew. So I thought my parents would protect me from my worst nightmare. I hate to admit that I was wrong.

I was molested by one of my cousins from my dad's side of the family. I was only 8 or 9 years old. I remember I was lying on the floor in the room I shared with my older sister and in tears because I felt guilty, I felt my innocence was being taken from me. I hated my parents because I felt how could they know everything but not know that this was happening to me. This happened almost every weekend till I was about 10. Once it stopped I told myself as long as I make myself believe it never happened I will be okay. I put on a fake smile everyday pretending everything was perfect. It wasn't long until I realized I didn't have to pretend anymore I actually found myself smiling and feeling normal again.

I was a mother who was addicted to Meth and the ones who were suffering tremendously were my children. My children never loved me any less the more I used. They made it a goal every day to remind me of how much they loved me just because I held the title of being their mommy. The sad thing is knowing that I was hurting them I still was using and the only reason I have to explain why I did what I did next is because they were in the way of me and my next high.

On February 2, 2014 I put my 4 beautiful children down for a nap kissed them all on the forehead and walked out leaving my children with my parents. I never thought it was possible for someone who lived in a small town their whole life can ever get

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Hopeful for My Future, by Rachelle Alejandre, continued...

lost. But it happened and for 11 months I was lost. I found comfort in doing for other addicts no matter what lengths I had to take and the danger I was putting myself in.

I was using so much and not sleeping or eating I experienced what addicts call an "Amp Out" and this is when you can see and hear everything but no matter how hard you try you can't move your body or say anything or in my case I couldn't scream for help. That night I was raped by two guys. I wanted to die because I knew exactly what was happening and I couldn't protect myself I couldn't fight. I could still hear their voices as they did as they pleased with my body. I was thrown behind the Camel Lot apartment in the ditch. I laid there for what felt like days. I couldn't move but in my mind I can only think about what had just happened. My life was meaning less after that night. The man I married and spent the last 7 years with told me I deserved what had happened because I decided to leave him and he was the only one protecting me from the people he burned or the enemies he had and they used me to get a point across to him. He wouldn't hug or kiss me after that he told me that he couldn't touch me because another man touched me. Every day after that I felt God was making me feel the same way my children felt when they woke up and I was gone. I never felt so unwanted, unloved, I had no reason to wake up I felt dead inside no joy. I was alive walking and breathing but not living. The only place I wanted to be was with my 4 children.

In December I felt I was placed in the right place at the right time with just enough drugs and paraphernalia to put me in jail.

February 17, 2015 I attempted to commit suicide. Using the vent in the jail cell and an Ace bandage wrap I hung myself. I remember looking at myself hanging there motionless not breathing my face was so discolored and veins protruding from my face. I couldn't recognize who I was for so long but for some reason at that moment I seen me and for some reason I felt safe.

I was given a gift that day. A gift so priceless that people die fighting to keep. For some reason I was blessed with a second chance at life to be alive and experience what it feels like to actually live. I have made changes in my life since that day in February. I'm not where I want to be in my life yet but I'm headed down the right path. I now have sole custody of 4 of my 6 children. I am engaged to DeAndre who for some reason since the day we met I knew that he was going to play a huge part in my life. He loves me the broken me my flaws and all. No matter how much I tried to resist and do everything in my power to make my mind believe I didn't deserve him the more my heart would correct me. He continuously stands beside me holding me up at times when I'm unsteady. I don't know why this man loves so much. Fearlessly and carefully without thinking twice he slowly picked up all the pieces to the broken person I was. He is there on days I feel weak and doubt myself just to remind me that I'm stronger that I think because I am

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Doors Were Opened

By Nessa Phillips

When I found myself at my rock bottom, I thought there was nothing more that could be worse. Honestly, my outlook on life was very bleak, just a rough cycle in the grasps of my addiction and depression. I sought a solution to my troubles, yet had no faith that there was one. In the depths of my despair, my prayers were answered and doors were opened. Through the support of my family, and my fellowship

and guidance of my counselors, I've been shown a healthy lifestyle and the road to recovery. I got the opportunity to survive my addictions and defects of character and gainful insight. I was given this chance through my experience to offer hope to those whom are still down that dark road. Thanks to my Higher Power, Crossroads Mission and this Institute for giving me that HOPE.

Hopeful for My Future, by Rachelle Alejandre, continued...

a survivor. He sees the potential in me that I still don't see in myself. He loves my kids as if they were his own. He's my Best Friend, my soul mate. I never imagined I would be able to experience what it feels like to genuinely care about someone and unconditionally love someone other than my kids. He has shown me that just with love alone anything is possible. I am able to love him because he has shown me how to love myself. He taught me how to appreciate even the small things in life that people may take for granted. He is the reason I believe my past doesn't have to direct my future. He gives me reasons

every day why I deserve to be loved. I now know what it feels like to look at him and smile for no reason just knowing that in his eyes I can see my future. He is my Angel that God placed on this earth to save me.

I've forgiven those who hurt me because forgiveness is for me to be able to move on and not carry my past into my future. Not long ago I was able to sit at the ditch behind Camel Lot Apartments and just cry and let go of all the feelings I was holding on to from that night. I'm hopeful for my future, and no longer am I ashamed of my past. I'm proud to say "My name is Rachelle and I'm a grateful recovering addict."

Love, Grace and Hope

By Joanna Maddox

Hello, my name is Joanna; my path in this life has been filled with twists, turns, and switch backs, enough to make your head spin. I have survived through a myriad of abuse, neglect, abandonment and loss. Through manipulation, addiction and self-destructive behavior, mental and sexual abuse from my husbands and psychological abuse from my family.

I have been labeled as a cream puff by my class mates because I haven't done any jail time, although I have found the worst prison anyone can endure is the one inside your own mind. Shoving all of my depression, anxiety, and grief into my own personal Pandora's Box to be able to function and survive. To be "normal" for 40 years, backfired on me spectacularly.

My own brush with mortality came almost two years ago. Renal cancer snuck up on me and proceeded to try to knock out my whole system several times with

abscesses, infections, and setbacks. My doctors kept telling me that even as much as they liked me, they we're afraid to stand next to me in a lightning storm. Flat lining a few times and scaring the hell out of a few nurses that thought that I had left the hospital through the back door, made me realize how much trouble I was in, and how close I was to just giving up. Only the love and grace of my partner and the support, strength, and prayers of my peer counselors and my new family at the intake facilities to got me through.

They made me look at myself through their eyes and showed me that I was loved and needed, and gave me a purpose and strength to fight. To them I will be forever grateful. I will recover so I can share these gifts and skills with other troubled minds and as long as I am able. With love, grace, and hope, I will not only survive but grow and flourish.

Reign of Hope

By Brianna Perry

Stuck in a place of irresponsibility and carelessness, I treaded on. For 5 ½ years I treaded on... Always wanting to quit, but never finding the light to help me stick with it. Tried attempts failed, some miserably and some diluting my sense of hope. Then the surprise, to be honest, getting it was not the first idea I had. Even though I knew it's what I would end

up doing anyway. A week or so passed and I realized, this was my light, this was my hope, and this is what will help me through. For her first, and then for myself... I could. I would. It's been 355 days and that little girl is still my hope, my courage, and my world... My daughter; Kennedy Reign.





Finding Hope

By Bobbie Derrick

I started feeling hope a month ago prior to that I had hurt my feet and had to quit a job because I was in too much pain. I also take medication for being Bipolar but because I have my ups and downs even on meds I tried to wean myself off. I was feeling ok except I realized I couldn't sleep without them. I thought that even if I was up a couple days at the most I would eventually fall asleep. I was not manic in any way or on any drugs that would keep me up I just couldn't sleep after about 2 days I could no longer function I had to call 911 because I was not able to understand what was going on and wasn't able to speak well.

They took me to a Mental Hospital in Phoenix and put me on different medication I developed a shaking side effect because of the new meds and when I was in the hospital they would have to give me meds every night to sleep. To say the least it was not a good experience in the hospital because people were violent and the workers you could see were stressed. I left as soon as I could and went back to my original doctor for my meds I tried to wean myself off of. My feet were still hurting and I got depressed because of my weight gain and not being able to keep my job as a janitor. I also have no support system and do a lot for my dad who is physically disabled.

I eventually broke down crying and called my sister called ACTS and two ladies counseled me and took me to a 24 hour unit for some med changes. The people there wanted to send me back to Phoenix

because they didn't accept Medicare I refused and told them why they didn't seem to believe me. I remember a lady there saying I should go because they could 'title' me I knew they couldn't because I wasn't suicidal. I left this place after 48 hours on new meds I felt a little better because those 2 days were my day off and I wasn't far from home. They also gave me the same type of meds to sleep.

When I left ACTS I got a new doctor she took me off the meds for sleep because she said they would eventually harm me; she eventually took me off all meds except one to help me sleep. I woke up with the room spinning after about three days with this new med. She couldn't help me and advised me to go to a place that specialized in sleep disorders I was fed up in trying afraid because of that med's side effect and after researching on the internet and talking to another doctor about other sleep meds I didn't want to try because of too many horror stories so I went back to my original doctor and now am back on my meds that help me sleep.

Hope started when someone through TLC took me to a RSSI graduation and told me he made \$13.00 an hour. I thought if I'm not on my feet a lot and because I believe that some people might benefit from my own journey I got excited. I prayed to be accepted and after being persistent with my case manager I got into the University Institute. I hope to do well and get a good job with this certificate. Thank You for helping me find hope!

I am Blessed

By Ruben Ornelas

I, Ruben Ornelas, am the oldest of four siblings; one brother and two sisters. My parents were loving parents. We were raised to love and respect everyone no matter what. When I was 25 my father died of a drug overdose, may he rest in peace. My mother, well she is still active in her addiction. So you can imagine the lifestyle I was brought up around. I'm not blaming my parents at all for the choices I have made or the lifestyle I chose to lead. But it is a part of my story. Growing up, the street life and drug addiction was normal to me. So I thought. My father and my uncles were in and out of prison and all were known and well respected. I idolized and looked up to them. I wanted to be what they were, not knowing the consequences that followed.

I started getting into trouble at a young age, joining a gang, abusing drugs, and committing crimes. I was already eager to follow in my family's footsteps. There was only one thing, I was gonna do it better. That all came to an end in the year 2000. I was arrested and did a few months in jail, my first time down as an adult. I was placed on Drug Court. The street life had come to a halt. I managed to complete Drug Court successfully without any sanctions.

During that year of Drug Court, something in me changed. I was introduced to a new way of living. I met a much different type

of crowd; a crowd of people like me, but in recovery. A seed was planted. I wanted what they had.

So began my journey to recovery. I was blessed with many positive things that year. My girlfriend and I were blessed with our first child, a boy, Ruben Jr. I obtained my G.E.D at the Crossroads Mission Education Center where i then began to work as a G.E.D. Instructor. I was being of service and I liked it. I then bought a house, something I never dreamed of doing. I owned two cars, my bills were getting paid on time, and I took family vacations. It was a beautiful life. I was clean and sober five years, God showing me blessings every day. My family now was bigger. It wasn't a family of three any more but of five, two boys and a beautiful daughter.

But I got too comfortable with my recovery and stopped doing a lot of the things that were helping me with my recovery. I started going around old people, places, and things. I figured what the heck, it's been five years, and I'm "RECOVERED". Boy was I wrong! It took me a long time to build up and work for what I got in those five years. I was feeling the effect of not caring and losing focus. I was back to my old ways and my old thinking.

So I figured, I know where I went wrong last time. I was going to take a crack at it again, but this time I went at it harder.

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I am Blessed, by Ruben Ornelas, continued..

I was gonna outsmart everybody. I couldn't hold a job, so I started selling drugs. I started running the streets and committing crimes hanging out with the homies. My priorities were all screwed up. I was losing track of my life. I lived like this for ten years, and in that ten years I lost the most important things that were dear to me: my family, my hope, and my faith. I didn't care anymore.

The life I chose to lead again was chaos. I went and had more kids from a different girl.

That wasn't helping me. Figured maybe getting into another relationship and starting a new family would help. Nope I still wasn't caring. My life was just getting complicated. I needed to go about it a different way.

So I went from the minor leagues to the major leagues. I was now playing with the big boys, hard core criminals. I was where I originally wanted to be. I was making a name for myself and I was gonna get respect one way or another. I didn't have anything else to lose. Everybody knew me as Lucky. And I was living up to my name too. I had respect, I was making money, buying cars, living in luxury. My name was being brought up everywhere. Even the police were hearing about me. I didn't care I was loving it.

Then one day I was picked up for 1st degree murder. Who would have thought I would be facing charges for murder. I

was in jail for a while when my charges were dismissed. I was only picked up because I had been hanging around the wrong crowd. You would think that would of opened my eyes, but it didn't. It only made me more famous, so I thought. It only made me more of a target for police. I tried to be the well-known Lucky that everybody respected and knew, but I couldn't. The lifestyle just wasn't fun anymore.

But I couldn't stop. I had been living the lifestyle for so many years and was so heavy in my addiction that it was impossible for me to stop. I knew if I continued to live the lifestyle I was living I would end up in prison for a very long time. I knew I had to stop. I was already sick and tired of being sick and tired. But i didn't know any way out. I even sought help from friends in recovery and they were all willing to help, but I don't think I was ready. I wanted to stop so bad I even started to pray for God to help me.

Well out of nowhere my house gets raided and I picked up a charge which led me to jail then probation. I thought I was done but I wasn't. I left the lifestyle but I couldn't leave the drug use. I tried to beat probation by manipulating the system. Fake it till you make it. Nope couldn't do it. Probation tested me back to back and I tested positive for meth, twice. I wanted to give up. That wasn't an option in this case. My probation officer gave me 30 days in jail and I wasn't sent to prison.

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Pass Hope On

By Shannon Curtis

It was January 14th, 2016 and I was at one of my lowest points in my life. I was homeless again and I had relapsed once more after having been clean for the previous 4 months. I had gone off all of my psych meds and having schizoaffective disorder since I was a child, I needed those meds in order to function. I was on my way to jump of the bridge in front of the train. I was so tired and ready to give up for good.

On the way I was passing a Catholic Church and my case manager from my agency was driving by and she pulled up beside me and said "Shannon get in the car, I have been looking for you for a

month." She then told me that she had no reason to be on that side of town that day even though that is the church she attends, she felt like God had led her there to me.

She then told me that she had found me housing at the TLCR center a month ago and she took me to the rock so I could get cleaned up and then I went to the place where I would live for the next 10 months. My life has changed drastically since that day and the hope I feel now will help others get their hope back so they too can pass it on too others who feel lost and hopeless.

I am Blessed, by Ruben Ornelas, continued..

Long story short, after being sick and tired of being sick and tired, I am clean and in recovery for nine months. I am doing very well on probation and I don't ever want to go back to that old lifestyle. I've been raising my daughter for almost two years now. I get to see my other kids and have a good relationship with them. My thinking

and way of living is positive. There are a lot of people, old and new, never gave up on me. So now I'm taking classes to become a Certified Recovery Support Specialist so I can help people in recovery. There is hope for everyone because if I can do so can they. You can say I am Lucky, I say I am blessed!

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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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