

# Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Marana, July 12, 2018



## Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduating Class

*Back Row (Left to Right): Brandon Garner, Maria Birdsong, Bonnie Poe, Robyn Hardy, Heather Ford, Priscilla Tamez, Samantha Robbins, Arthur Rosas, Brian Thompson*

*Front Row (Left to Right): Abra Ferguson, Ema Gallego, Lora Davidson*



# My Journey to Discover Hope

By Abra Ferguson, CRSS



Growing up, I lived a life of disappointment, which developed into hopelessness. My mom had me at 16 years old, and from the beginning my family saw little hope for me being raised by her. My grandmother, however, saw hope and took over as my main caregiver. But in 2001 she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, which was terminal. At nine years old I watched my grandmother, my only hope for a normal life, painfully slip away as she died in hospice. That day I lost all hope and I knew my life was about to get much worse. And it did.

My mom had 4 more children, me being the oldest. I was a primary caretaker for my siblings. My mom moved us to Phoenix (I dreaded that city) where we all lived in a one bedroom apartment. I had no desire for friends, family or anything, all I wanted was to not be a burden, and at times, wished I was never born. When I was 12 my siblings and I were taken into CPS, where I

was lied to and separated from my siblings. By then I had no trust or hope in anyone or anything. Taking away my freedom was the last straw and after a big fiasco with 12 year-old me calling up my case manager and fighting the system for 3 weeks, my case manager expedited my case. All 5 of us were taken to my aunt back in my home, Tucson. I had hope again but the struggles continued.

By that time I was already so depressed nothing would pull me out of it. I wanted to sleep all day and started taking Benadryl just to knock myself out. One day I overdosed and ended up in a Behavioral Health facility for 3 weeks. There they took away all my freedom and insisted I was trying to commit suicide. But that was not the case; I told them I was depressed and just wanted to sleep. I still wanted to live and have the freedom to go outside. When my aunt came for visitation and saw the facility, she understood the suffering that place gave me and tried to get me out. They told her she had signed over her rights to them and they would release me on their own terms. I was trapped there for another week and a half. After this, my aunt kept me caged in the house, but I didn't care anymore.

Until I was diagnosed with ADHD and prescribed Vyvanse. This was my gateway drug. Suddenly I had chemically induced motivation. I was interested in school and doing well. I started showing goats in 4-h and started smoking marijuana on occasion and wanting to party and have fun like I saw just about every other kid who enjoyed high school doing. I thought "This is it! I want to make friends. I can finally live my normal life as a teenager!" But my aunt didn't let that happen. There was a lot of emotional abuse and I would cry and shake as she yelled terrible things at me, like how I was a disgrace. As I cried and shook, she would yell "Keep shaking, cry all you want! You did this to yourself!" She snapped my phone in half and threatened to send me back to another mental hospital if I ran away or did anything "stupid".

continued on next page...

## My Journey to Discover Hope, by Abra Ferguson, continued...

So for eight months at 16 years old I sat in my room, taking Vyvanse and doing my own research on things I was interested in, such as animal behavior, nature, society, geography etc. While inside sadness and resentment built towards my aunt for taking away my last chance for a childhood. I finished high school with straight A's, and with no Vyvanse/Adderall. My aunt was so resentful of me she didn't even show up to my graduation, but she was always looking for me. I didn't touch my facebook or own a phone for 7 years, became afraid to go to the store, to doctors, to get my license, to do almost anything besides play with my dogs and go on hikes where no one could find me. I was afraid to ever see her again. Her temper and lack of empathy scared me, and I had no idea what that anger could turn into if confronted in public, social media or on the phone. I couldn't handle it anymore and hid from everything for 8 years.

While I was with my now ex-boyfriend, I lost hope when I couldn't manage to make myself get a job, because I was too afraid. He became frustrated with me and sometimes abusive. I drank vodka and smoked marijuana almost every day. I felt my anxiety and panic attacks had complete control over me. I finally got the courage to go to the doctor, who is the sweetest, most understanding, and helpful person I've ever met. She did extensive blood work on me and found many nutrient

deficiencies. She set up a vitamin regime and told me to try to go outside every day. After two months of vitamins, exercise and a healthy meal regime, I felt better. So much better, I said "Why don't we all go to the Desert Museum?" So my boyfriend, his mom, his uncle and I all went to the museum where I felt better than I had in over 10 years. That's when I felt hope like never before. For the first time in eight years, I felt motivation. Not the kind induced by Adderall or Vyvanse, but the real kind, the kind that came from hope and passion. It was like a new dawn and I wanted to start doing something I was truly passionate about to maintain this motivation. That's when I decided to start volunteering at Pima Animal Care Center, which was one of the best decisions I ever made. I stopped drinking heavily because I would rather wake up at 7am to go help the dogs, instead of waking up puking my guts out every morning. I found that helping rehabilitate the dogs actually rehabilitated me. With this experience, I learned that by having hope you can discover your passion. When you find your passion, you experience motivation. Then the cycle continues, and hope becomes clearer. Partaking in my passion created more motivation to continue on and begin to build the life I had always dreamed of, and now, hope for.

# My Vision of Hope

by Lora Davidson, CRSS

I was always “the strong one”. I was only strong because that was all I allowed anyone to see. Never complain, never let them see you cry, never show that you’re hurt. I lost my control over “never”. I lost my control over my life. I lost my sense of identity, my career, and my happiness because of health and pain issues. The darkness was all-consuming, and I didn’t think I would see the light again.

I found myself walking alone in the middle of July in the Arizona desert, clinging to one thought - “I have to get help”. I found my way to MHC Behavioral Health. My last hope to regain my SELF. I am so grateful to the staff at MHC for showing me that I was still needed in this world. No matter what I felt about myself, my story could inspire someone else to have hope. I can be helpful, fulfill my passion of being of service to others, regain my self-esteem, and love myself and all that I am capable of! The RSS Institute has helped me recover the dream of serving others.



---

# My Hope Moment

by Brian Thompson, CRSS

I have lived with anxiety since I was a teenager. I lived without a diagnosis into my forties. In the summer of 2006 I started having more problems with anxiety. The problems started being two days a week, and at the end it was daily. At this time in life, I had a boyfriend whose mother was a retired psychiatric nurse. I thought I would have to be checked into a mental health center; in the past, this was procedure. On one of the days when I was having a panic attack, she came to me with a number to a health center that took on new patients right away. The next day I had an appointment and went to talk to the doctor about the feeling I was having. He diagnosed me with anxiety, and put me on a medication that helped me greatly. At this point, I did not feel hopeless anymore.



# This Acquisition of Hope

by Brandon Garner, CRSS

At a time when it seemed almost impossible to fathom the possibility of conquering my addiction, I remained deeply amidst the grasp of darkness and despair, nearly succumbing to defeat. I felt overwhelmed by an internal transition, which had a total different feeling, and held an inverse process of thinking. Unbeknownst to me was that this element I felt was the missing ingredient that would relinquish the clutches of self-destruction and chaos. This spark (which continues to be a source of inspiration) also represents the genesis of my life away from self-destruction, as well as the creator of a new one that is filled with purpose and direction. Prior to this awakening, I had been clinging to what I refer to as an unsatisfactory existence, marked by countless disappointments and the waste of tremendous potential.

I finally came to a realization that forever changed my life. This was when I became aware that I was experiencing the power of HOPE. Had I not had this epiphany and focused my efforts towards a drastic change in my life, I feel that I would have been forever lost. The day I felt this life-changing event was on my fourth day in attendance of a 30 day in-patient treatment at the regional parole office. I was "volun-told" to attend because of a positive drug test. With the alternative being to return to prison for the duration of my sentence, I chose to accept treatment although I did not think it would be effective. My instructor said, "You aren't powerless over anything" when answering a question someone asked in reference to the 12 step philosophy. Something immediately clicked inside of me, and I rushed to share this insight with my fiancée as soon as I possibly could. She is my main supporter and a great factor, alongside my children, for even wanting to pursue a path towards recovery. Her opinion is held in the highest regard to me. Upon speaking with her, I felt something was different.



There was a newfound level of belief that I could hear in her voice, which instilled a level of confidence I had never possessed before. Equipped with this newly found inspiration, complimented by sheer dedication, I began an alternate pathway. One with promise towards a new beginning and a better life. With this acquisition of hope, I developed a new sense of being along with a heightened sense of awareness. This allowed me to press forward and embrace my past, utilizing it as a learning experience rather than allowing it to define me. By not accepting the labels generated by stigma as my identity, I developed an ability that had previously eluded me. These stereotypes and labels carry a tremendous amount of negativity, which had spawned an immense degree of self-loathing that almost completely deterred me from the truth. The truth is that recovery is not only real, but it is completely possible to attain if you have the hope and drive to seek it. Since then, I have used this as a solid foundation to fuel my journey with a new sense of purpose, and dedication to the everyday progression of my recovery!

# That Spark of Hope

by Maria Birdsong, CRSS



Without hope there is no chance to ever make a transition into recovery. My addiction had returned full swing 4 years ago after my divorce; I relapsed after 10 years of sobriety. I wasn't taking care of my mental issues at the time, which led to me self-medicating. I thought I found my new sense of hope when I met my current fiancé Brandon, as we had so many plans for the future. I thought that it was going to be easy for us to get clean together, but reality proved to have different plans. Instead we began a down a path that introduced co-addiction to our lives. For the next two years, we aspired to get better but continually found ourselves on opposite sides of the spectrum when it came time to get clean. Slowly my hope began to slip away from me,

and our future together seemed to be nothing more than just a false reality. He had gone to jail a few times, and was eventually ripped away from me a final time to go to prison.

Each time we were separated, I was certain I was going to get clean and thought that when he was released we could finally find our hope. Three times this happened and yet sobriety was not maintained. After he came home from prison, he was forced to attend a 30 day program after he had dropped dirty. It was after this that I noticed a huge change in him, and began to feel that we were going to have success. He had a revelation when in treatment after his instructor said "You aren't powerless over anything". When I saw how much he changed I felt that spark of hope beginning to return to me. This was the confidence in his recovery that I had never seen in him but always longed for. It was the most amazing feeling I have ever felt. From that moment on I knew that we were going to be okay. All of the negative comments regarding how slim the chances are for people in addiction to remain sober together no longer worried me.

I entered into recovery with my children, my lover, and my future children as my reason for wanting to change. Although they are my world, I would not be able to remain vigilant in my journey had I not wanted this transition for myself. Knowing my life is no longer out of control and no longer plagued by disappointment, isolation and depression, my belief in hope is made that much stronger. Now I aim to dedicate myself towards helping those who are struggling see that there is always a possibility of change as long as you have hope in your life!

# A Phoenix Rising

by Samantha Robbins, CRSS



Throughout my life there has been a vast sea of uncertainty and tragedy. This seems to be a reoccurring theme. For me recovery has been a lifelong factor, whether it be from emotional struggles or substance abuse. The tricky thing is getting up after each setback and not giving up. I never had a word for what kept me going, it was something that I just thought I had to do. It took me 25 years of my life to realize that this word was HOPE.

That four letter word, hope, was my driving factor in life. I wanted to die after my car accident which resulted in my friends dying. My one tiny mistake cost them their lives. Why was I here when they weren't? Their faces haunted me. I could not escape from the "what ifs" or the "whys"; it repeated over and over again. The only thing I knew was that I could not give up. It was better to only have two people gone and not three. I

wanted to give their death meaning, and that meant to keep going and living. Doing the best that I could, in order to hope that they were proud of me. There it was: I HOPED they would be proud of me.

Now, what is life without a few ups and downs. There are times that we cannot control the actions of others. Even though I had the drive to do my best, I am not perfect. I met a very charismatic gentleman who offered me all the things that had been denied to me growing up. A man who would love me and not hit me. This gentleman turned out to be a wolf in sheep's clothing. Substance abuse became a factor as well as infidelity. One night was all it took. One night. A call for help. My drug use and mental illness were exposed for all to see. My children were taken and I was left feeling broken, both physically and mentally. All I wanted were my sons, but DCS told me that I needed to be "fixed" before I could have them, and that they hoped I would achieve this.

There it is again - that word, hope. Now, who would have thought that I would be grateful for DCS coming into my life? They were able to point me to the right direction of where to go for help. The services provided to me made me realize that I am not a creature with mental illness, or a drug addict. I am a person. I am not my diagnosis. I have been shown that I am strong, beautiful and intelligent. I hoped I would do right by my children and myself. I got my children back in record time, according to DCS. Without hope, none of this would have been achieved. It plays the most vital role in my recovery.

Now I have the opportunity to help others through my struggles. I want to give them the hope they need to succeed. By simply hoping, I have shown that I am a phoenix rising out of the ashes after crashing and burning. I refuse to do anything else but soar above and beyond, and I hope that others get to be apart if it.

# A New Beginning

by Bonnie Poe, CRSS

In 2010 I was living in Ohio, in a bad situation. My sister was living in Arizona and she talked me into moving to Tucson. By the time I arrived in Arizona and got settled, my sister had taken her life. I did not know anyone in Arizona and felt very vulnerable, but then I met some really good people. Especially my neighbors Butch and Lola, who became like family to me. Then in 2015 so many things went so wrong in my life, all at once. Without getting into all the details, this is kind of how it went: my youngest brother was found dead at 44, then I lost my beloved Frosty (my Chihuahua of 9 years), then my mother, then someone so close to me she was like my child. After that, I lost my husband.

I fell into a state of despair, depression, uncontrollable crying, and complete hopelessness. I was afraid and alone. I had lost everyone I had loved and known. I just could not even manage getting out of bed, or any daily activities or normal functions. Then my good friends Butch and Lola got me to Marana Healthcare and over to Behavioral Health, and that was the turning point for me. As I began to seek counseling and found the right medications, I slowly began to recover and grow. I began to see a new beginning and the hope for a new chapter in my life, even though it has been a very painful journey to get to and accept where I am today.





# Bringing Change and Hope

by Ema Gallego, CRSS



I was in a courtroom facing 12.5 years in prison, feeling defeated and hopeless. Struggling with my addiction and my mental state, surviving each day, letting my loved ones down. Not complying with the legal system. It was a very dark time for me. I had a desire in my heart for change. Something better, anything better, even if I didn't know what that looked like. Not even a vision, just a desire for it to be better. Prosecutors, probation department, police department and family members. Feeling like everything was against me. I had to have faith that no matter what was to happen I would be okay.

With my life in the judge's hands, I was given an opportunity to enroll in a treatment facility. This would help me address my issues and to eventually become a productive member of society. I went above and beyond the court system's expectations of me. I learned more about myself, and my strengths and abilities. I began to believe for the first time. I became a better person because of hope and faith. Someone believing in me gave me the hope for a better life. I have had my struggles and obstacle still, but I have hope today. I am not hopeless.

I continue to work on my recovery and self-worth each day, with the hope of making the world a better place by being a role model to others and the next generation. Each of us can bring change and hope, just by having a desire in our hearts. This is my personal experience of hope.

# The Flame Grew

by Heather Ford, CRSS

I was living in Virginia Beach all alone. I didn't know anyone there. I knew I needed to remove myself from toxic situations and people, and so I isolated myself. One night lying in bed at the shelter I decided to reach out to family. My father came immediately and put me in a recovery program. I saw a glimmer of hope with that. He then brought my kids to see me, and the flame grew.

I eventually reached out to my high school sweetheart. He is my rock, my stability, and best friend. The flame is growing every single day. Sometimes in small ways. Sometimes in larger ones, but it is growing. I am proud to have the opportunity to work with others in their recovery.



---

# Hope and Healing

by Gabrielle Van Der Zee, CRSS

I didn't start to heal until I found hope. I needed to understand my illness and read how other people cope with similar issues. Once I saw that it was possible, I started to see a small glimmer of hope. Then, I turned to God. I needed to hold on to and believe in someone or something that loved me and forgave me when I couldn't.

The glimmer became a ray of hope.

Armed with a little hope, I started to challenge myself to do things that gave me panic attacks; going to places alone, braving big crowds, meeting new people, and forcing myself to keep plans and

be social when all I wanted to do was hide in my room. After I proved to myself that I could do it, the skies opened up and I allowed myself to hope with reckless abandon.

Now, I have more panic-free days, I laugh more freely, and even though things aren't perfect (by any stretch of the imagination), I have faith that everything is going to be okay.

Once hope was flowing freely through every cell of my body, I got mad at myself for becoming a slave to my anxiety and depression. I want to help people find their peace, to teach them to learn from my mistakes and find hope. Because with hope, all things are possible!

# No Matter What Life Puts Before Me

by Arthur Rosas, CRSS

In the beginning, my long journey of hope for my future and myself was a difficult one. I have been through many trials and tribulations in my life. I did not know anything about mental illness, and never quite understood what was happening in my head. As an adolescent and into early adulthood, there were times that I put myself into situations because I just never felt right. As drugs and alcohol entered my life, I felt better about myself. I never realized I was just self-medicating myself to stop the pain of always thinking I was different.

When my uncle passed away in a horrible motorcycle accident in 2004, I took it very hard. Growing up without a father, my uncle played a vital role in my life as a father figure. Then, after three years passed, and my mother succumbed to her illness of scleroderma. That was the last part of my life that meant any type of true love. After

the passing of my mom, I knew it was time for a change in my life. I began to receive help for my situation.

Overnight, I stopped all drugs and alcohol. I knew I was going to have to step up and fill an important role in my family. Over the years that passed, I began to believe in myself. I have a son to set an example for; to show that a person who had many flaws in their past could change, and make a future out of their life. The hope I have for myself has driven me to become educated on how to love myself again, and be that person I know I am capable of being in life. No matter what life puts before me I am aware that if I use the skills I've learned while being in recovery, I will take it in stride and hopefully come out a better man.

# Hope For The Best

by Priscilla Tamez, CRSS



I never knew how much you could really depend on the word HOPE. So many people have always told me the phrase, "always hope for the best". Well, I had given up on hope, and pretty much everything and everyone. Last October, I was let go from my job as a caregiver due to losing my fingerprint clearance card, and was no longer able to work. In 2014 I was arrested, and have a felony on my record. Since I was now unemployed, I decided to file for unemployment. However, I was denied and could not find a job to save my life. It felt like I finally hit rock bottom. I had no income coming in, and my probation officer was on my back almost every day about me not working and not paying my probation fines. She even told me that if I wasn't in compliance that she might have to put me back in jail, but every day I was being told "hope for the best".

At this point, I pretty much threw hope out the window because I didn't know what else to do. I ended up filing an appeal on my unemployment. My girlfriend had also suggested to me to go back to school, as she is always pushing me to try to better myself. I took that step and went to Brookline College to try the medical assistant program. I figured that this was the next best thing to working as a caregiver. However, in December of last year, I ended up having a stroke and was in the hospital for a few weeks. I had to stop going to school until I was better. I became very depressed and gave up on my recovery. I was ready to knock out anyone who told me not to give up on hope.

In February I did end up going back to school, but I had found it was much harder for me. Since having my stroke, it was hard for me to concentrate and to remember certain things. It made all my exams very hard for me, and I ended up failing out of Brookline. After that I started to come to Marana Health Care for my depression and anxiety. I started seeing a counselor and I met with my recovery coach Shanna Moore. Once I started seeing them, and also having my mom be there for me and be by my side, I started to see that there was hope for me after all. My recovery coach had mentioned the RSS program to me, and told me how it really helped her. I decided to give it a try. So here I am taking this class to become a Recovery Support Specialist and trying to help others who need support. Now I can say that I do have 100% hope and that all I went through was just a life lesson. Thanks to my girlfriend, my close friends, my mom, and the wonderful people here at Marana. I know that I made the best decision ever in my life taking the RSS program. When life doesn't go the way you planned, never give up on HOPE. Because just like how everyone says, "ALWAYS HOPE FOR THE BEST".

The Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute is administered by the Workforce Development Program in the Department of Family and Community Medicine (DFCM) at the University of Arizona. The Institute is funded by Cenpatico Arizona. Cenpatico Behavioral Health of Arizona (Cenpatico) services are funded through a contract with the Arizona Department of Health Services/Division of Behavioral Health Services (ADHS/DBHS) and AHCCCS.

---

Workforce  
Development News

---

**Rita Romero**  
EDITOR

**Patricia Philbin,**  
DESIGN

---

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.

---

**wdp** | **workforce  
development  
program**

## **Make sure you get your next issue!**

If your contact information has changed, or you would like to be removed from this list or you have any questions or comments please contact UA Workforce Development Program at:

[fcm-wdp@email.arizona.edu](mailto:fcm-wdp@email.arizona.edu)

Visit Our Website at:

<http://www.fcm.arizona.edu/workforce-development-program>

## **Workforce Development Program**

1450 North Cherry Avenue #203, Tucson AZ 85719

(520) 626-7473

Fax (520) 626-7833

---

## **Trainers**

**David E. Delawder**, CRSS, CPRP

**Rita Romero**, CRSS, CFSP

**Stephanie Tellez**, CRSS

---

## **Program Director**

**Beverly McGuffin**, RN, MSN, CPRP

## **Administrative Associate**

**Vanessa Larios**



COLLEGE  
OF MEDICINE  
Department of Family  
& Community Medicine

