

Recovery Support Specialist News

June 2014
RSS Institute 40

The first Integrated Healthcare Institute in Arizona for Certified Peer Support Specialists

The Workforce Development Program leads the state in providing certified peer support specialists an Integrated Healthcare Institute (IHI), creating a workforce that can move easily between behavioral health and physical health. By building on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the peer training program the IHI education will enable peers to be hired in newly created positions in integrated health. Please see our website for more information.

www.fcm.arizona.edu/workforce-development-program

Graduates of the First Integrated Healthcare Institute held at Camp Wellness



Back row left to right: Tim (trainer), Kajuan, Rebecca, Connie, Cheryl, Paris
Front row left to right: Christina, Rita, Julie, Michele, Paige, John (trainer)

Learned Hopefulness

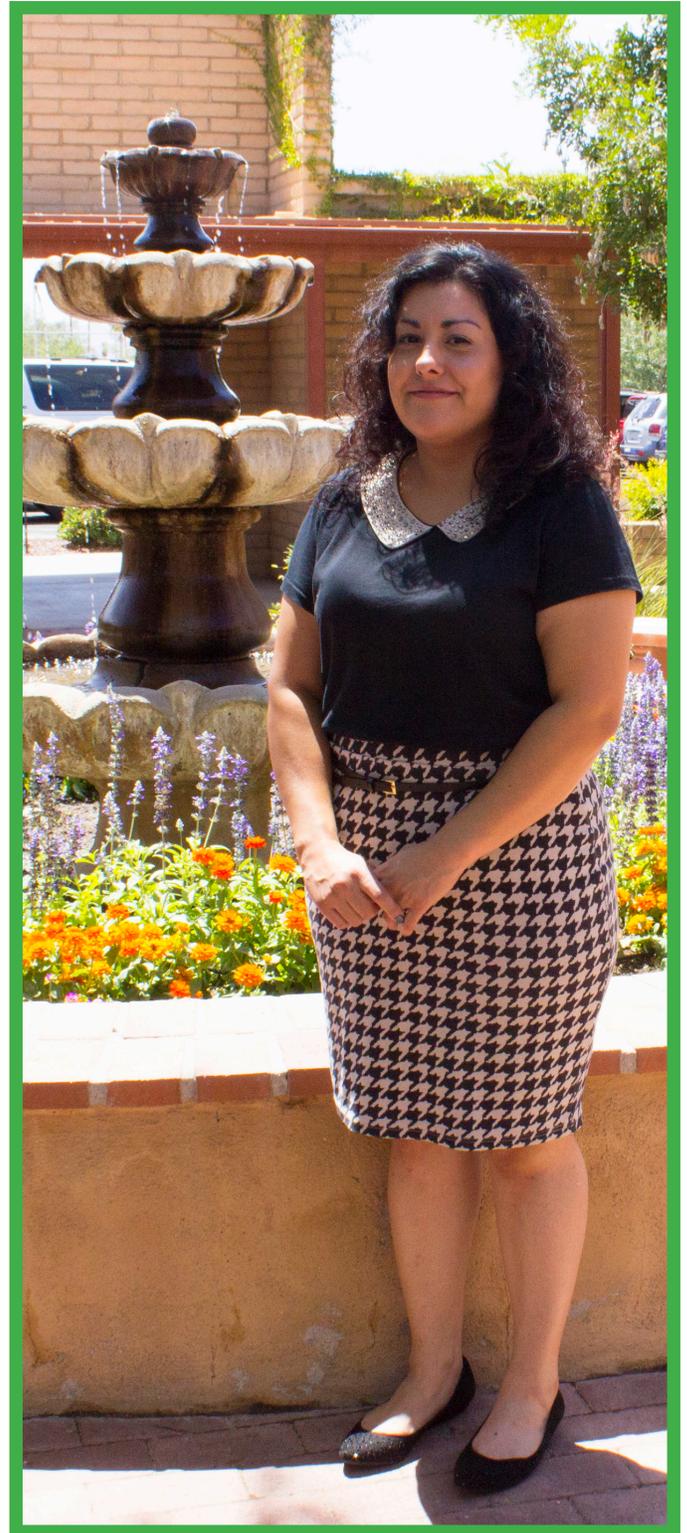
By Rita Romero, CRSS

I believe that hope springs from meaningful connections with others. Hope abounds when you reach out to others to share your own struggles and dreams, and they reach back to share their own with you. My own story involves a lengthy cast of characters, with each person playing an important and unique role. It has taken a community of individuals to help me shape my vision of recovery, including family, friends and more than a few Recovery Support Specialists.

As a person who has navigated the behavioral health “system” for many years, I had begun to think of myself as a broken, helpless person. I was in my late twenties and I had already lost hope of a career, healthy relationship or maintaining any kind of personal responsibility for myself in the future. I wouldn’t speak to my worst enemy the way I was speaking to myself on a daily basis. I figured I had dug a hole so deep that I would never be able to get myself out.

After yet another long period of darkness in my life, I decided to take one last shot at making a change. On the stipulation that I attend some groups at my behavioral health provider, I was able to begin individual therapy. I was lucky enough to see a woman who was patient and kind, and who took the time to ask me insightful questions and treated me with respect. She helped me reexamine my problems and realize there were things I could work on and improve. She was the first person to really help open my eyes to how my low self-worth was damaging my life.

As I grew a bit more confident, I felt ready to take on a new challenge. It was at this time that I decided to check out a program through the University of Arizona’s Health and Wellness Center, called Camp Wellness. I never could have imagined the opportunities I would be granted when I walked into this wonderful program. Camp Wellness is where I first learned what “RSS” means, and what these great people do. The concept of “peer support” was new to me, but it didn’t take long for me to open my heart



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Learned Hopefulness, (Rita Romero) continued from page 2

to this community of talented, compassionate and unique “mentors”. I couldn’t believe that these people had similar types of backgrounds to me. They were some of the most amazing folks I had ever met. How could they have anything in common with me?!

I loved Camp Wellness and all of the challenges and fun I was having there, so I decided to continue on at the program as a volunteer. Having the opportunity each day to work with the mentors I admire and aspire to be like is a blessing. I am encouraged and praised for my successes, and my mistakes are never held against me. I have always felt that I was being supported and accepted wholeheartedly. I started to use the way I was being treated there as a model for how I should treat myself. It didn’t happen overnight, but I did begin to feel differently about myself. This allowed me to set goals without experiencing the usual crippling fear of failure. And the more goals I set, the more I accomplished.

Gradually I began to see that my outlook had totally shifted. It still feels a little strange to say, but I truly have faith in myself now. For the first time in ages, I feel strong, intelligent and capable. And I believe that recovery is real and attainable for EVERYONE. I will keep pushing forward in order to make my life purposeful, not only for myself but for others. My volunteer work has allowed me to support individuals who are on their own unique journeys of recovery. It is so wonderful to be part of such a positive and inspiring community. It has changed my life and it has made me strive for those things I thought I would never attain in my lifetime - a career, loving relationships, and independence. Occasionally I feel as if I am thrashing about, still struggling against “flare ups” of depression or other issues. But now, I realize that these struggles are more like hurdles than brick walls. I look toward my future, and I see endless possibilities.

Dash of Hope

By Eric Dryden Brown, CRSS

Feeling hopeless with nothing to live for is not where I wanted to begin my life. I was not left with much to look forward to after living as a person with co-occurring disorders. I found the rock-bottom of rock-bottom. Now I know the inside of four mental hospitals, three residential treatment programs, countless halfway houses and homeless shelters, and the inside of a jail cell. I have spent hundreds of hours occupying a seat in anonymous -ism meetings. As a person diagnosed with schizoaffective and substance abuse disorders, I have felt pinnacle-highs and abyssal-lows.

There came a time when every thing I had learned, everything I had tried, everyone who tried to help me; I let them down, and seemed to fail in life and I assumed I was hopeless. I knew a lot of failure and a lot of heartbreak but I also knew that I was still alive and that there must be a reason for that. I was alive, I was in jail, I had lost everything, and I wasn't the only one.

I felt empty but there was still a small spark in my heart. I found that there were things that could make that spark in my heart glow brighter. I call those things that can brighten your heart, HOPE. It doesn't take much just a dash, a little hope can go a long way. I found enormous HOPE in a short letter from my dad. I got great bursts of HOPE in a small meeting room where people came together to celebrate their spirituality. I found that I enjoyed receiving HOPE and that I was capable of giving HOPE to others.

A person who today I consider to be a good friend used to visit me in jail. He is a peer mentor in the Criminal Justice Peer Mentorship Program through the agency Community Partnership Care Coordination. During the first visits when Sam came to



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A Brighter Day

By Manuel Urquidez, CRSS

At an early age I started running the streets, acting out, running away from home thinking and believing that being in a gang and going to prison to earn your stripes was the coolest thing ever but instead I ended up losing family and friends to the prison system and to gang violence. It seems like all my life I've been going through some kind of ugly negative situation, even before I became a teen, I remember struggling with HOPE and my freedom. I was always thinking negative, in and out of jail and prison and if I was out I was on probation.

When I did earn my freedom to be out I would be in some kind of counseling to help me cope with any issue I had going on in my life, but I had no HOPE what so ever! Back then I would've promised you that I had no intentions of being alive after the age of 18 because I was sure that I would have died by gang violence or in prison

After going to prison the second time I started to see a repeated cycle. I started to think that if I keep this up my kids are going to be visiting me in prison as they grow up. From that point on I started to have faith in myself, eventually I got out of prison and started to take life seriously and got back into counseling.

I started to change but still felt like I hadn't found HOPE yet. I was taking two steps forward and four



steps backwards getting and losing jobs every month, not being able to keep a job because of my background.

I felt like I ran out of jobs and ran out of plans until one day I ran into an old friend and he gave me HOPE, he once was the same kind of person I used to be and he changed his whole life around. That whole day became brighter. I found HOPE and went back to school and became a licensed barber. With HOPE I will become more. I will give HOPE to those who were like I used to be and thought that HOPE was just another myth, but HOPE is real and HOPE is one of the best things you will come across.

Dash of Hope, (Eric Dryden Brown) continued from page 4

visit me in jail I told him that I think I had found a way to thrive and it seemed like others had found it too. New life was waiting for me and there was a whole world full of other people who had HOPE in their hearts. Sam told me it was true, that it had worked for him. Living with a purpose is possible no matter where you are

and a new life can spring from any heart with just a dash of HOPE.

Today I believe in doing the things that give a person HOPE. Today I believe in the awesome power of HOPE. Today my life shines bright on opportunities and the people around me because I have found HOPE.

Hope on My Horizon

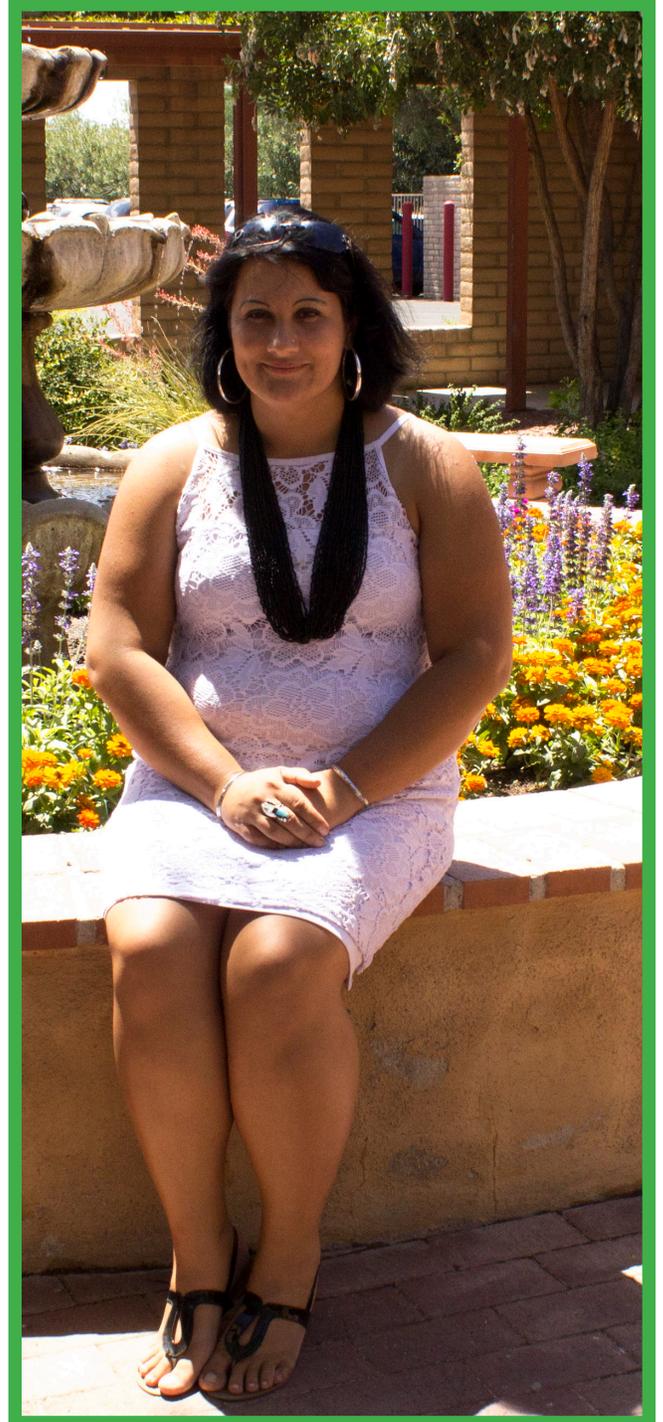
By Amanda Hilsabeck-Urcia, CRSS

Living with several different diagnoses, I never wanted anyone to know. I craved to be normal (whatever that is...) and felt the stigma and shame once people found out about my illnesses. I was hiding behind the illusion that my triggers and symptoms weren't noticeable or could somehow be overlooked with some sort of explanation.

I was hospitalized on and off for years starting when I was 14 years old. Living in Wisconsin where I was working on my high school diploma, the help was dismal at best. I was going to community colleges off and on since 2004 and found solace, and a new found confidence the closer I came to completing my associates' degree. I received 3 different certificates: Psychology and Human Relations; Social and Human Services; and Cultural and Social Services. However, I felt alone and in the dark when it came to hiding my illnesses.

Not until my severe episode in 2010 did I realize help was possible - that recovery was possible. The outpatient program at CODAC helped give me insight to my triggers, proper medication and group therapy. I felt compassion and a new form of sincere understanding. As time passed and I started my journey to recovery a Recovery Coach who had believed in me and suggested that with my new found insight and self-discipline I could also help others by listening and utilizing coping skills and other resources available at CODAC and other behavioral organizations.

Hope has always been on my horizon. Hope that my family would change or that some miracle breakthrough would happen in science and the medical field but that day never came. Change needed to start with me. I know now that all the different emotions I



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That Crazy Balloon

By Laurie Hebert, CRSS

I think hope comes in bits and pieces. It startles you out of a numbing existence like the loud crackle or pop of a blazing campfire that awakens a fixed empty stare. The spark exists in fleeting moments of light, vision, and joy.

One of my most memorable moments of hope came about in an ordinary way during a routine day. I stood in front of the mirror brushing my teeth when the reflection of something outside the window caught my eye. It was a brightly colored hot air balloon. Words fail to describe the heart pounding excitement I felt at the sight of that balloon. It was pure joy, happiness, and hope occurring in a matter of seconds. The feeling was unfamiliar to me and at the time I remember thinking, "If a silly balloon can trigger that kind of emotion, what other incredible things am I missing beyond that window?"

I've made a lot of long overdue changes in my life since then. I've enjoyed many other moments like this both alone and with important people whose paths I've been blessed to share for a time. That crazy



balloon picked me up and helped propel me into a life of greater independence, accomplishments, and pride. There were scary times, but because of this and other experiences of hope, I found new strength and courage and began to trust that I could make my way. Whenever I feel discouraged, I remember times of hope and encouragement, and the feelings of renewal and gratitude inspire me over and over again.

Hope on My Horizon , (Amanda Hilsabeck-Urcia) continued from page 6

felt were felt by others as well. With help from several Recovery Coaches, I learned that I can change, and that I am not a slave to my illnesses. I am Amanda M. Hilsabeck-Urcia, a woman with great achievements and many more to come in my future.

The journey to recovery is different for all who crave it and may be long, however, one can achieve almost anything. With my faith and hope, I'm getting

closer to my goals and am doing it one step at a time. The change is possible for anyone who has experienced the loneliness and heart break that illness often brings. All one needs is to follow their insight, medications (if prescribed), and have a healthy support team along with the knowledge that recovery from substance use or an mental illness begins with a little bit of faith, trust and hope.

The Most Important Tool for Recovery: Hope

By Aimee Worthen, CRSS

I remember it so perfectly: I was with my parents, who had picked me up without notice from my college dorm room, and called my place of work to tell them it was a family emergency and they did not know when I would return. My parents told me that my older sister, who had recently been diagnosed with schizophrenia (she was diagnosed in 2000 and this occurrence was in 2002), had stolen my mom's car and a little bit of cash and had been missing for 3 days. We were terrified by the possibilities. Eventually we found her in Bakersfield, California where apparently she had been found in an almond orchard, severely dehydrated, disoriented, and completely naked. She had been having delusions that she was Joan of Arc and that she was receiving messages from Jesus.

On the ride home from the long stay at the terrible hospital with terrible staff who treated my sister like she was a bomb about to explode, my sister said something that tore my heart in two. She looked at me with tears running down her face and said "I don't want to be schizophrenic," (she had already defined herself as such from all of the labels given to her by uneducated mental health professionals). At that time however, I had no hope for her recovery. Sure I educated myself about her disease, and I tried in vain to educate those around me. I was appalled by the mental healthcare system as well as the courts and how uninformed their staff were about mental illness. Really, if you want to get down to it, I was disgusted with how antiquated the subject of mental illness was in my own community. I too have experienced some of these issues with my own mental illness and drug addiction. However, I thought differently then and I felt as though my depression/anxiety and schizophrenia were apples and oranges. I still felt like my mental illness/drug abuse was so far away from my sister's diagnosis and though I could picture my recovery, I could never

picture recovery in my sister's future. My mother did not immediately understand the disease and all of its complications like I did, but she immediately advocated for my sister in every way she could. She learned how to do internet searches so she could find anything out there that may be of assistance to my sister. When I expressed my doubts about recovery as a possibility for my sister's disease, my mother would get very serious and say "what do we have if we don't have hope? You never know what can happen." And my mom kept up her hope even when my sister was wrongly convicted of a felony and ended up in prison for three years. (Instead of sending her to Arizona State Hospital (ASH) which the judge decided against even after watching my sister stare off blankly for hours and start to laugh uncontrollably for no reason in the courtroom.)

It has been about twelve years since that drive to California, and my sister has recovered. Not fully, but drastically. She only takes two medications (she used to take over fifteen), she is living in a level two facility with CPES and is allowed many freedoms and she is happy. She is attending a gym twice a week, and this is her second year taking classes at Pima College where she has received an A in every class so far! I am ashamed to say that I never thought this possible; I am ashamed that I did not believe in her. But I am not ashamed to say that I am proud of my big sister and I look up to her in many ways. She gives me hope. She gives me hope that I can recover even further. I now believe that how far a peer recovers will directly depend on how much hope he/she has that such a thing can happen. My sister now checks on me at least once a week to see how I am! Because of her I have recently lost 40 lbs (which I may or may not be gaining back). I now have one of the most important tools for recovery: hope.

Blessings Built on Hope

By Sharon Antone, CRSS

My personal experience with Hope began on October 27, 2012. I was sent to a treatment center called New Directions. Before going to New Directions my life was unmanageable, I was hopeless and felt that there was nowhere to turn. I came from a very dysfunctional family and grew up with alcoholic parents and family. As a child, I dealt with situations such as neglect, domestic violence and CPS. Due to all the pain and situations I went through I turned to alcohol and drugs to numb myself and take it all away. I was a troubled teen, started to use drugs when I was 13 years old and my addiction escalated as I got older. I put my family through so much pain, I pushed away the ones that loved me the most. The splitting of my parents had a big effect on me. The discipline wasn't there anymore like it was when my dad was around. In time, life went on and I grew older still using to get me through. It was the only way I knew how to manage life at the time. My addiction drove me to my bottom from losing cars, losing jobs, dysfunction in my family, domestic violence, involvement with the law, getting a DUI charge. A lot of this I didn't want to deal with so my addiction allowed me to pay no attention to it and block it out along with everything else I was going through.

The turning point for me was when I was tired of all the pain and hopelessness that I was feeling, tired of being at the bottom and not knowing where to turn. Tired of the feeling of not getting anywhere, so lonely and full of anger and not caring what happened to me. I came to realize that all the trouble that I created wasn't going to go away by itself and I had to take action. It hurt to see that everyone around me was just like me, to see my family and friends into drugs and alcohol and someone had to break the cycle. I was tired of seeing the hurt I caused within my family and I know there had to be a better way to live without the alcohol and drugs. I just didn't know where to start.



When entering the program of New Directions it was then that hope became alive. I got the treatment that I needed. It helped me to dig deep into my heart for answers and was able to dig out all of the issues that I held deep inside for so long and got an understanding of why I was filled with so much pain and anger. I got involved with AA and along with that got a sponsor to support me, went to meetings, which I continue to do today and enjoy. I do service work and most importantly what I learned to do is listen. I am willing, open-minded today and life is good. I have met so many people who care and support me in so many ways and love me for me and are there for me. My family is supportive and is still there for me no matter what we've been through. They are very happy that I am a different person today and happy to see the change in me. Today I have healthy relationships and I have a job that I've had for over a year. I've taken care of court issues and I am reliable and trustworthy today. All these blessings have been built on hope, that at the very beginning of my sobriety, I was hopeless and thought I would never get this far.

Deliverable to CPSA contracts from November 2012 to June 2014

| Institute Number | Dates | Number of Students | Scholarships |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| FY13 | | | |
| RSSI #31 | November 15, 2012 | 23 | 10 |
| RSSI #32 | February 28, 2013 | 19 | 5 |
| RSSI #33 | May 30, 2013 | 23 | 11 |
| RSSI #34 | June 27, 2013 | 24 | 7 |
| | TOTAL | <u>89</u> | <u>33</u> |
| FY14 | | | |
| RSSI #35 | August 29, 2013 | 20 | 8 |
| RSSI #36 | November 19, 2013 | 25 | 7 |
| RSSI #37 | February 20, 2014 | 23 | 7 |
| RSSI #38 | March 27, 2014 | 19 | 4 |
| RSSI #39 | May 22, 2014 | 21 | 7 |
| RSSI #40 | June 19, 2014 | 13 | 1 |
| | TOTAL | <u>121</u> | <u>34</u> |
| RSSI Veterans | September 27, 2013 | 11 | (Pro bono) 11 |
| | TOTALS FOR FY13 AND 14 | <u>221</u> | <u>78</u> |

Recovery Support Specialist Institute 40



Back Row (L to R)

Amanda Hilsabeck-Urcia, Elaine Lepisto-Reppe-Lewis, Jacqueline Araiza, Manuel Urquidez Jr., Eric Dryden Brown, Sharon Antone

Front Row (L to R)

Laurie Hebert, Stephanie Missouri, Kathy Whelan, Rita Romero, Linda Lawson, Michelle Dryden

Not pictured: Aimee Worthen

RSSI Panel of CRSSs

Karen Reynolds, CRSS, CODAC

Gordon Brooks, CRSS, La Frontera

Kyle Long, Recovery Coach II, MSW, CRSS, CODAC

Shanna Moore, CRSS, BHT/Housing Liaison, Marana Health Center

The 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 the Community Partnership of Southern Arizona (CPSA). CPSA receives funding from the Arizona Department of Health Services/ Division of Behavioral Health Services (ADHS/ DBHS), Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).



COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

of Southern Arizona

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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.

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:

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Be Sure To Visit Our New Website at:

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

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Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Family & Community Medicine
"Healthy Families, Healthy Communities"

