

# Recovery Support Specialist News

May 2014  
RSS Institute 39

## Vocational Rehabilitation Students Welcomed

We were delighted to have two students that came to the Recovery Support Specialist Institute from a referral through Vocational Rehabilitation. We look forward to serving others who may come through the VR system.

## Institute Panel Members from 2005 to 2014

Thank you for sharing your inspiration over the years

|                   |                       |                   |                        |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Albert Regain     | Gary McGinnis         | Mike Harvey       | Steve Conn             |
| Angela Dingleline | Geoff Kabat           | Monique J. Roybal | Terrance Watkins       |
| Arnoldo Aguila    | Gordon Brooks         | Norma Castaneda   | Theresa Files          |
| Brenda Morris     | Jeanne Bishop         | Pam Riggs         | Thomas Halm            |
| Bud Blanchard     | John Anglin           | Patricia Porras   | Tippy Atkins-Haumesser |
| Christina Jasberg | John McElroy          | Robert Arbuckle   | Tonika Talton          |
| Cynthia Aspengren | Julie Croteau         | Rudy Trinidad     | Valerie Garmon         |
| Fernando Duran    | Karen Reynolds        | Shanna Moore      | Wanda Black            |
| Floyd Linton      | Kyle Long             | Sheldon Cowles    | Will Tilley            |
| Fred Ortega       | Lyle Ford             | Sonia Salcido     | Yvonne Portillo        |
| Gabie Davenport   | Michelle "Mimi" Price | Sonya Sova        |                        |

### Here are some comments from the students on the CRSS panel:

*"WOW – Very emotional – very inspiring – gave me a feel for what I will be hearing as a CRSS. Very hard to keep a poker face, I want to sob right now. Thank you for this opportunity – keep this program going it is much needed."*

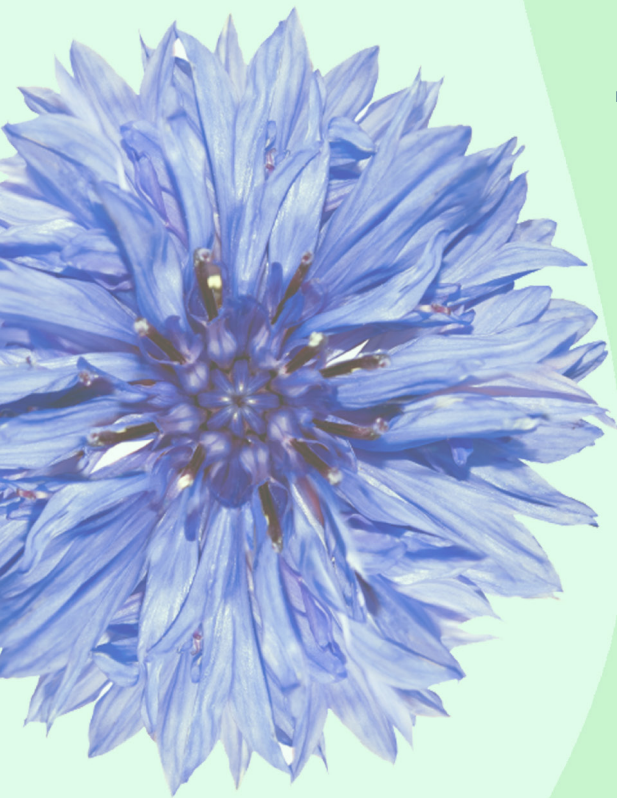
*"J. hats off to you for a job well done! This is one of many reasons why I chose to be in this field; S. Very encouraging in the sense that there's nothing impossible and there is HOPE in all of us!; N. Being able to find yourself in confusion and uncertainty is awesome!; K. very good job and is an inspiration that this is possible even for me."*

*"That people in higher positions might suffer from mental illness and succeed in life still. It's amazing. "*

*"Everyone has a unique story about recovery. Be patient learn what you can, be passionate, help others obtain a normal life. Good things will come to those who wait. Housing first makes so much sense. I'll take that back to my agency. Good success stories!!"*

*"Being an RSS is rewarding, worthwhile and can be frustrating, too. Incredible brave and wonderful people, hope personified!"*

*"We never know what someone has been through. Don't judge and be patient and share hope. Loved the panel, thank you for sharing you stories of Hope."*



# I Am Proud of Who I Am Becoming

By Hiede Lott, CRSS



My journey into hope began five years ago, when I stopped using drugs and re-entered counseling. I slowly began to believe in myself and to trust others who also believe in me. I learned that having a mental illness does not define who I am. I take better care of myself now. I set goals and meet them. I give my best in attitude and effort to everything I do. Hope enables me to accept that some days my best will be better than others and be okay with that. It also demands that I strive to reach my highest potential and do what I can to help others who want to reach theirs. Hope gives me the courage to say, "I am Hiede and I have a mental illness. I am proud of who I am becoming and what I have achieved."

*Hiede is one of two students that came to the Recovery Support Specialist Institute from a referral through Vocational Rehabilitation. We were delighted to have her attend and become certified in peer support. We look forward to serving others who may come from **Our Place Clubhouse** and **DKA** through the VR system.*

# Today, Recovery is Hope

By Betty Wainwright, CRSS

The definition of hope is a feeling that what is wanted will happen; a desire accompanied by an expectation. For me today, recovery is hope. Although throughout the majority of my lifetime, hope was nonexistent. The progression of the disease of addiction and my depression brought me to an overwhelming level of despair and hopelessness. I came into recovery with the belief that there was something terribly wrong with me, that I was the problem. I was full of guilt and shame because of my disease and unhealthy choices I had made.

My recovery began in 2000 in the Haven. I was exposed for the first time to others in recovery who shared their experience, strength and hope. I came to realize that recovery was entirely possible for me. I began to see that change was possible. I began to take responsibility for myself. I began attending 12 step meetings and found the support I needed for my recovery. I learned more about the disease of addiction and the tools necessary to continue on this journey. For me, it was necessary to completely surrender and have acceptance.

I truly believe that recovery is 100% possible. I believe that it is only by the grace of God and the empowerment I've received through numerous resources that I am still alive and clean today. I have hope and faith that I am becoming the woman that God intended me to be. I have been given the opportunity to inspire hope in others and empower them with resources that they need on their own journey. I am truly grateful for the gift of recovery because it has given me a second chance and a new perspective on life.



# Keeping Hope Alive

By Pam Strong, CRSS

Here I am again, trying to write an essay about hope. This is my second try. It's been hard to write about something that can be so elusive for me. Last night before I went to bed, I hoped, even believed, I would wake up feeling good today. Instead I woke up in tears and anxious.

Some days are like that, tearful; perhaps morphing for a time into peace and energy, then later drifting back to listlessness, unable to complete ordinary tasks. Earlier this year, I was given a medication that literally lifted all depression! This had never happened before; it was a miracle. Within 30 days, the affect disappeared. You may have heard about a concept regarding inconsistent reward. Applied to myself, there have been more downs than ups. It's the ups that keep me alive.

A difficult component of my mental health condition is a severe emotional reaction to perceived disapproval or criticism. I can remember this happening as far back as four years old. This has had major negative consequences for me. During this training, I was triggered more than once. At times, it has been hard to stay the course. Yet, one of the times I was triggered, I was able to interrupt the shame cycle using Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) skills. Considering I started learning these skills in January, this is a small victory.

So there it is—inconsistent reward—which, for me, has kept hope alive.

You ask if there was a turning point during my recovery efforts. Certainly there was a turning point for recovery from alcoholism. It was 1996 and, yet again, I was trying to get sober. I had attended a few AA meetings and was pretty sure it wasn't going to help. Making a last-ditch effort, I decided to try something I REALLY didn't want to, namely, allow myself to experience the discomfort of being around AA people after the meeting.

So there I was, on a spring day in April, sitting on the building steps after a meeting. I felt so uncomfortable I'd bet hairs were standing up on the back of my neck. Nonetheless, there I was, trying to hold a conversation with other folks who obviously felt as awkward as me. A man walked up to me and addressed me by my first name. I had no idea who he was until he introduced himself. Jeff had been my first serious relationship, 24 years previously—a relationship riddled



*continued on next page*

# As Long As There is Breath In Your Body

By Clarise Langley, CRSS

“As long as there is breath in your body, there is HOPE.”

A year and a half ago if someone had asked me what hope meant to me I would have probably said something along the lines of, “Why have hope when it only leads to disappointment.” or “Hope is an illusion we create to make ourselves feel better.” I was broken, traumatized and so comfortable in the role of “victim” that hope seemed like a luxury and not a reality. While in residential drug and alcohol treatment, one of the assignments we were given was to write an autobiography. For me this was no easy task. The memories were beyond painful and the trauma that I wrote about experiencing would come back and trigger my PTSD, which would leave me curled up in a ball in the corner paralyzed with fear. It was too hard, to agonizing and yet I knew I had to let this darkness out of me or I was going to die. I had an amazing peer mentor who suggested that I approach the autobiography a different way. She suggested that I think and write about where in my story I had experienced hope. I put my life on paper. All of my pain, trauma, secrets, regrets and shame in black and white and I was able to see how hope had not only carried me through the darkest times, HOPE literally saved my life. I may have been helpless, desperate and sick but that little spark of hope is what kept me breathing.



## *Keeping Hope Alive, (Pam Strong) continued from page 3*

by drinking and fighting. He had been sober 15 years. He looked so healthy, almost vibrant, very unlike me. My eyes were as baggy as my shirt. Jeff took time out of his life for the next six months, connecting me to his sober friends and favorite meetings. When he could see I was beginning to be attracted to him, he gently headed me off. He was the quintessence of peer support. His efforts lead me to sustained sobriety. I participated in service work as General Service Representative

(GSR) and as District Secretary. After that, I worked as a professional in the substance abuse field. The name of the agency I worked for, believe it or not, was Turning Point.

I'm thankful to be sober. As for depression, if another word for hope is perseverance, I am a poster child for hope. After 45 years of therapy and medications leading to inconsistent recovery, I have reason to believe I will continue to make progress.

# A Turning Point in My Life

By Cleven Doty, CRSS

In 2006 January 6th I was sentenced to 3 years in a Georgia Correctional Facility. I was caught with a lot of marijuana that I was going to sell. I also smoked it on a daily basis. I never thought that I had a problem until I was incarcerated. I had a lot of time to reflect on my life and what got me into this situation. I missed my son's birthdays and first tackle football games. I really started to notice what things I took for granted when I was free. I never thought I would go 3 years without seeing my children and family, eating good home cooked meals and the touch of a woman! I recognized that I wasn't only hurting myself but everyone around me was affected.

I was released from prison in 2009 March 9th. I knew I had to make some changes in my life beginning with the friends I use to associate with. I had to look for a job and that was very difficult with a felony on my record. I was hired at Sam Levitz furniture store and worked there for 3 years. I met my soon to be wife upon my release and she was very supportive in my recovery. I married her in 2010 now everything was falling into place. In 2011 we had a baby girl and this pregnancy was very different than the others because I was more focused and more mature. I knew that I had more responsibilities and I needed to be a more positive role model for my children. This was definitely a "turning point" in my life.

While working at Sam Levitz, I was making good money but there was still a void in my life. I never sold furniture before but I was very good at it. I really didn't like working weekends because I never had time to spend with my family. That was very important to me because of the time I already spent away while incarcerated. I wanted to make sure that my kids didn't get involved in drugs, gangs or bad decisions they could make with my absence. I was starting to



question myself, "Is this what I really want to do"? I felt I wanted to serve people in a different way. What better way than Behavioral Health! If I could help a person get off drugs or give peer support to a member just to help a person have a better quality of life that would be great!

I started working at CODAC in February and it feels great to help someone achieve things that they normally couldn't do on their own and to show people resources so they can live independently! I enrolled in the RSS Institute and this course has been very helpful, providing me with the tools to do a more effective job in serving our members.

# My Vision

By Damian Bernard, CRSS

For me, hope came in a six by nine cell in the Pima County Jail. I had been arrested yet again, on warrant charges which I had failed to deal with for the last two years. This time though was different. The state of Arizona was also coming after me for two hundred dollars worth of stolen property, I had pawned one day when I was really dope sick, and it was my only way to get well. I knew at the time it was a mistake, but when your in the terrible throes of opiate withdrawal, getting high is the only thing that matters at all. I was finally beaten. Life had taken all the wind from my sails. I was a broken man, who couldn't even look at himself in the mirror anymore. I was raised Christian, but had turned my back on God, when I watched my father waste away from lung cancer and die when I was eleven years old. I was one of those prayer yellers when I was dangling off a cliff, and in times of dire need. Looking back I know now that He always answered my prayers in one way or another.

This time though I didn't ask to get away with it, I prayed only for mercy. I admitted to Him that I had done these wrong things and deserved punishment. Possibly He could touch their hearts and let it not be more than I could bare. At the time of my arrest I was facing thirty years in prison because the state wanted to stack all of these offenses on top of each other to make the sentence as harsh as possible. Later I found out that the day I said that prayer somehow a plea agreement was reached in which I would only have to do three years of probation and no prison time. I was released back onto the streets with about sixty days of sobriety. During my jail time I had found a fellow inmate willing to sponsor me and get me started on A.A.'s twelve steps, and I believe that once I had a strong enough footing God let me back out into the world.

This is my story of hope. Some call it coincidence, I call it God.



## It Started With Hope

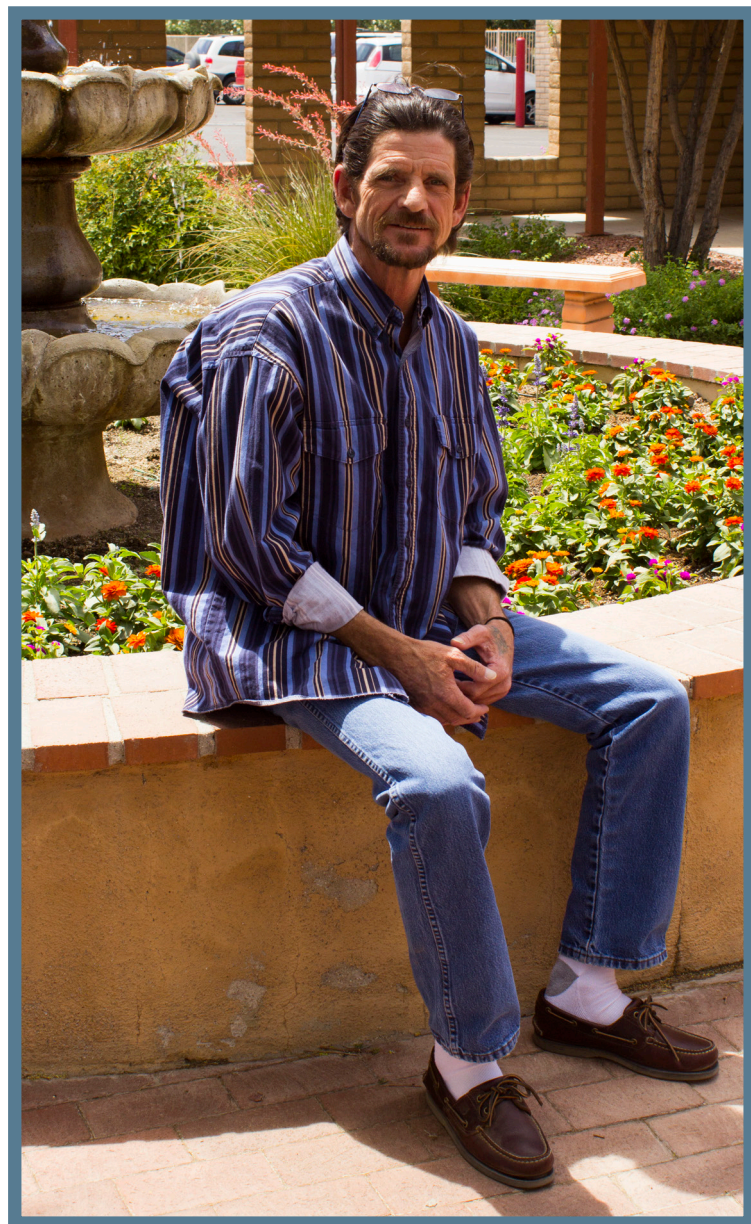
By Doug Stover, CRSS

I remember sitting in this little camp trailer that I was living in at the time, feeling horrible. I hated my life; where I was living; things that I had been doing; and most of all hating myself. I had been on a down hill slide for almost 20 years. I had some drugs with me so I got "High" or tried, but still I felt just as down and disgusted. I was looking at myself in the mirror on the bathroom door wondering how I had gotten to this point. I said a prayer asking God to help me, and when I looked back up at the mirror I was thinking "your better than this".

I called my sister and told her I needed to do something about my drug habit. She said "That's a good idea and I have nothing but faith in you". That if I would try I could beat this addiction that had beaten me down for such a long time. I hung up the phone and for the first time in a very long time I had HOPE. My sister came and picked me up, and while I was waiting for her I got rid of all the paraphernalia I had in my trailer. I stayed at her house so that I would be safe until I could get into The Salvation Army ARC.

I took the hope that I had with me and tried to share it with everyone I encountered. I still carry it just as strong today, almost 3 years later and I'm still clean and sober.

It started with HOPE, turned to faith and then a love for myself that I have never known before.





# With Only Hope To Go On

By Raymond Soto, CRSS

Hope has many meanings but for myself it was when I decided to change my life. I hit bottom. By this I mean, I was homeless, my wife was expecting, I had no money or job, no drugs for my habit, and I was mad at the world for what I perceived was their problem not my own.

My wife told me to call around to churches. I had one call me back and I thought I was going to play my game on them. Boy was I wrong. The Pastor and the secretary threw it right back in my face. After a stern talking too, they gave me something I never had and that was hope that there was a chance for a better life for myself. Having hope gave me a desire and a motivation I never had before. Nowhere to turn, I only had hope to go on.

Involved with CPS (child protective services) I was in the fight of my life, they told me that I would never get my son back. I tried to commit suicide. In the hospital, I received a phone call thinking it was my brother, he told me "Go get your son."

Hope is all I could go on and from that point everything was different. I looked at the glass through a different set of eyes. Having hope I saw chances I never had before. Hope gave me fight and a drive to succeed. I saw hope for the very first time crystal clear. I went back to my mental health provider, despite my upbringing and big ego, and begged for help hoping that they would hear my cry. I truly saw and felt hope and that is the path I was to be on from this day forward.



# There Is Hope

By Ricardo Escobar, CRSS

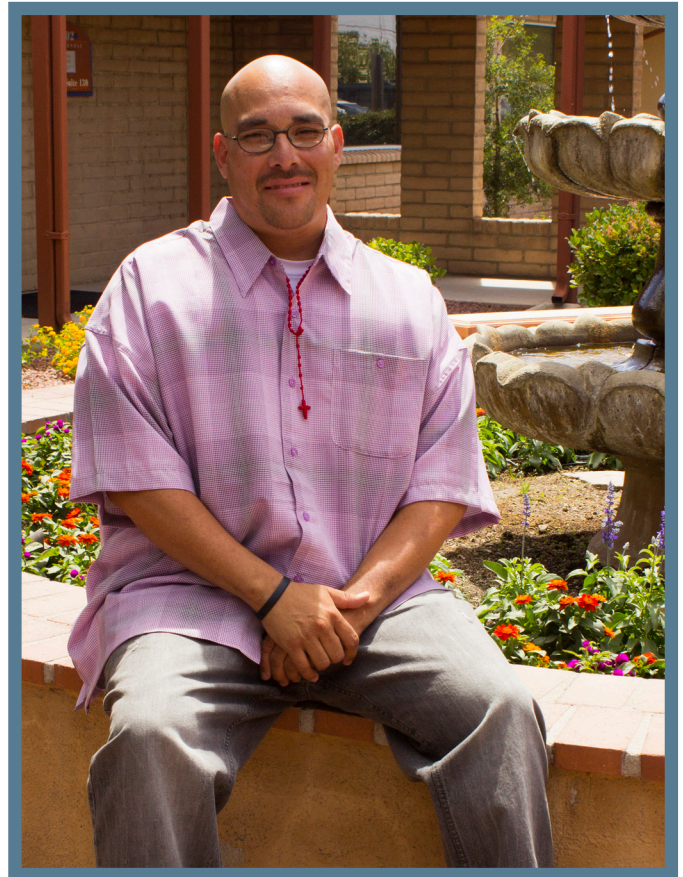
I have hoped for good, but evil came instead, I have hoped for light, but darkness came. (Job 30:26)

Hope is a very powerful tool that helped me to push forward in the pressures that daily life brought, with every step that I took. This precious gift could have helped me overcome my troubles, but instead Hope destroyed my world and threw what was left into a world of destruction.

Hope can be a very destructive force by taking everything that is good and using it for bad. As a young child I grew up in a household that was filled with fear, so while hoping for relief from the arguing, the beatings, and the bad language, all the while I was thinking and believing in my heart that if I wasn't ever born this would never be happening. So I started to shut down, slowing giving up, and not caring for myself. All the while thinking and acting destructively before I could realize the truth. I was now an adult and had destroyed the Hope that once was. Instead of stopping my destructive attitude I continued to rebel because now my thoughts were filled with anger and despair, that I had truly messed up my life and there was nothing better than to continue to live the only way I knew how: to continue to live in fear of what I knew rather than to Hope to work for a better tomorrow and fail.

That moment when I decided to pull myself together and say "No more will I have No Hope" and the little glimmer of Hope that was deep down in the fiber of who I was started to flicker, because of that something, that someone that said "I don't care where you been or what you've done, I'll be here for you, To help you up, To shine my light so you may stand, To not do it for you but to show you that I understand and to show you there is HOPE!"

Then Hope was turned into something so exciting and precious that can only be explained as the darkness is no more. Even after I had fallen so many times, failed at



so many things, cried a million tears, and or everything else I could possibly imagine Hope lifted me out of destruction and into the light!

*When I feel most alone, Hope holds my hand  
When sadness buckles me, Hope helps me stand  
When circumstances overwhelm me, Hope restores my energy  
When chores numb and bore me, Hope glorifies them  
When I fear self-revelation, Hope gives me courage to be myself  
To live in Hope is to believe in light when it is dark,  
In Beauty when ugliness abound,  
In peace when conflict reigns, In love when hatred marches.  
May I never stop Hoping!*

-Unknown-

# To Live Without Hope Is To Cease To Live (Fyodor Dostoevsky)

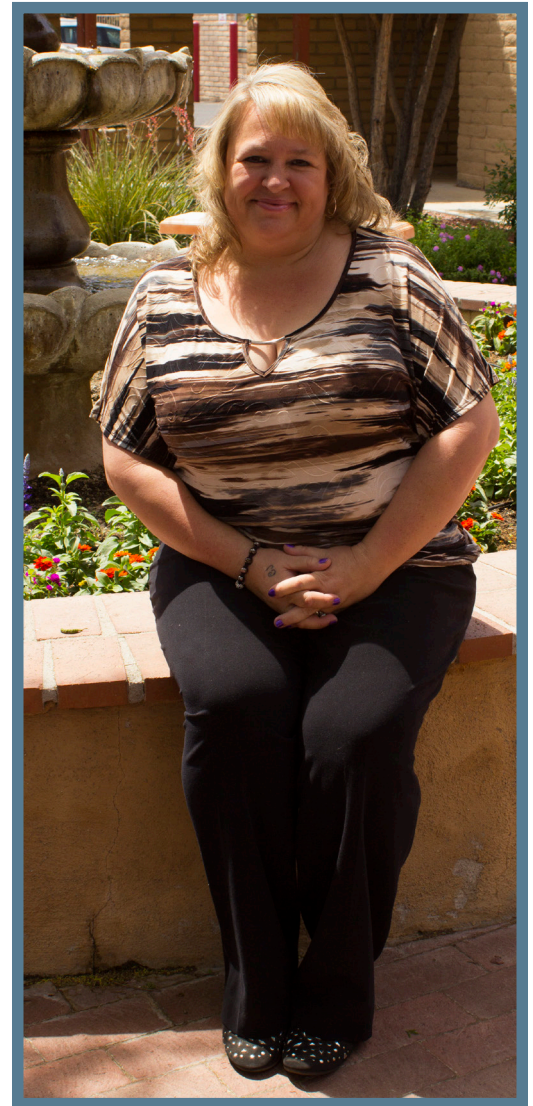
By Tracey Meyer, CRSS

My journey of hope began on April, 1st 2008. After living in my storage unit for several days I had reached my bottom. I had had enough. I lost all my friends, family and my self but most importantly I had lost my hope for any kind of future. My addiction had got the best of me. I had let it win. I knew if I would have stayed in the storage unit I would have died. I did not want to die.

I got on the bus and went to Compass Detox at 2:00 in the afternoon. I was checked into Compass and they had tested me for drugs and alcohol. They told me I was positive for Methamphetamine. That was no surprise to me. However, they also told me I was pregnant. "Pregnant?" I said. From that moment on I made a decision to not use again. I knew I could not put anything in my body that would hurt my baby. This was a turning point for me. This baby saved my life. I was given an opportunity to be a great mom.

I was released from detox 7 days later. I went to stay with my parents but could only be there until I got accepted into a halfway house. CPSA had given me a recovery plan to follow and in my recovery plan was a Meth IOP class at La Frontera that I attended 3 days a week for 4 hours. It was an intense program. I started to really succeed in this program. I met some new friends and one of them asked me to come to church with him. He spoke of this recovery church called the SOBER Project. I attended my first service in May of 2008. My boyfriend and I started going regularly.

On August, 17th 2008 we got married at the SOBER Project. On November 15th 2008 our little miracle was born. A 12 lb. baby boy named Caleb. Here was my opportunity to have hope for a bright future. To give hope and gain hope. I was a stay at home mom for about 9 months then started to get bored and thought about going back to my old ways. All the tools I had learned in my programs I used and they saved me. All the coping skills from La Frontera and all the praying and using my higher power has saved me. I began to pray and use my tools every day. I decided I needed something to fill my time, something to keep me busy. The next week I enrolled at Brown Mackie College and started working towards a degree in Criminal Justice. No one expected me to graduate with honors. I proved them all wrong, I even proved myself wrong. I have a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice and I graduated at the top of my class with a 3.8 GPA. I felt so proud of myself that I accomplished one of my goals.



*continued on next page*

# Hope

By Ronnie Green, CRSS

My personal experience with hope began when I found out I was going to be a father. I had lived, up to that point, with a serious mental illness that kept me experiencing a “normal” life. It was at that point that I was determined to do whatever I could, so that I may be a functional and complete parent to my child. The day my son was born, I no longer allowed my illness to dictate my behavior and actions.

That day was when my recovery truly began with my son and hope being the catalyst.



*To Live Without Hope Is To Cease To Live , (Tracey Meyer) continued from page 11*

I started volunteering with Family Drug court as a volunteer RSS in July of 2013. I loved being there and applied for a job. One of the conditions to be employed there is to be a certified RSS. I applied two times to attend the RSS institute. I got denied both times. I finally made it after I accepted that I had an anxiety disorder and needed help from La Frontera. I

never gave up. I held onto the hope that one day I would be an RSS. I always had the substance abuse background but not the knowledge of how to help someone the proper way. If I am not there to offer hope to the hopeless then who will be?

Hope deferred makes the heart sick but a desire fulfilled is the tree of life. (Proverbs 13:12)

# Giving Back To My Community

By Susan Acuna, CRSS

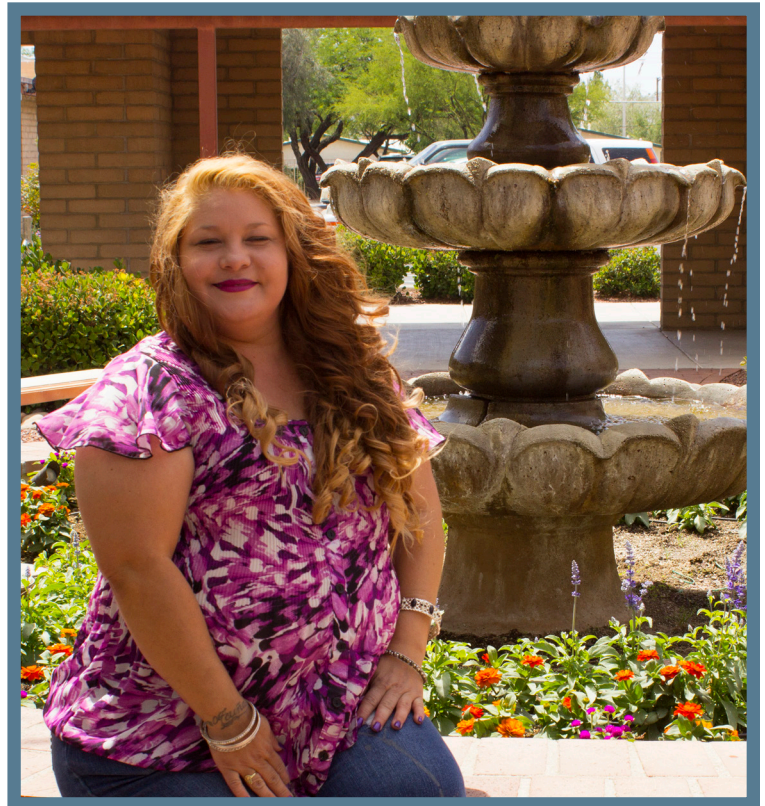
The definition of hope is: the state which promotes the desire of positive outcomes related to events and circumstances in one's life or in the world.

I have hope in all aspects in my life. It is something I have always had, and will always continue to have in my future.

When I was at the Pima County Jail in July 2013, I realized that I should not drink and drive ever again. This was my second DUI, and it could have been a lot worse. I thank God it wasn't, this helped begin my recovery. Now that the police were involved it was so much more serious. This was a turning point in my life because I got charged twice for doing something I did for so many years and never had any consequences.

I am still working on my internal challenges, like forgiveness to myself, my mind wanting alcohol and the fun memories that I have when I would cruise with my home girls, and family. While struggling with the External challenges like being a Felon, all the fees I have, and still owe, having gone to jail, no Driver's License, breathalyzer, fees for one year when I get a car, it is harder to get any job, need screening, and housing opportunities.

I do have a lot of support from church members, friends, and family. This is awesome. They are still there for me even after my wrong choices. This helps my self-esteem be positive. I know all my negative actions were also because of my culture and past trauma, like physical, mental, sexual abuse, and domestic violence, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Depression, and Attention Deficit Hyper Disorder (ADHD). I now am allowing my system to change instead of feeling like a victim with stigma.



I can increase my awareness and knowledge by using all the resources and help I can. This way I can take personal responsibility for my actions and change them now to positive. Getting more education, self-advocacy and getting what I want in a calm manner that is good for me. My self-determination, self-direction, and positive life goals, as well as paths to these goals will be lead with my strengths. This all coincides with me helping and giving back to my community and being a Recovery Support Specialist so I can help people with their individual crisis the best I can with the resources I have. This is one of my hopes at this time, that I can be a successful Recovery Support Specialist.

# Recovery Support Specialist Institute 39



*Back Row (L to R)*

Raymond Soto, Clarise Langley, Damian Benard, Cleven Jamaine Doty, Michael Kennedy, Ricardo Escobar,

*Middle Row (L to R)*

Susan Acuna, Charmagne Hohl, Gregory Hourscht, George Velasco, James Gardner, Douglas Stover, Ronnie Green

*Front Row (L to R)*

Pamela Strong, Jessica Perkins, Melissa Shaw, Tracey Meyer, Doreen Scherf, Betty Wainwright, Hiede Lott, Micquette Nichoelle

## RSSI Panel of CRSSs

**Norma Castaneda**, CRSS/Case Manager, BHT, Vida Nueva, Pasadera Behavioral Health

**John Anglin**, CRSS, Employment Specialist, University of Arizona

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

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

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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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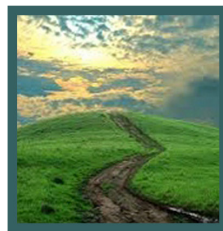
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