

# Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Tucson, July 20, 2017



## Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduating Class

*Back Row (left to right): Scott Lumbard, Enrique Ornelas, Jose Arriaga, Radford Whitsitt, Robin Witt, Michael Ochoa*

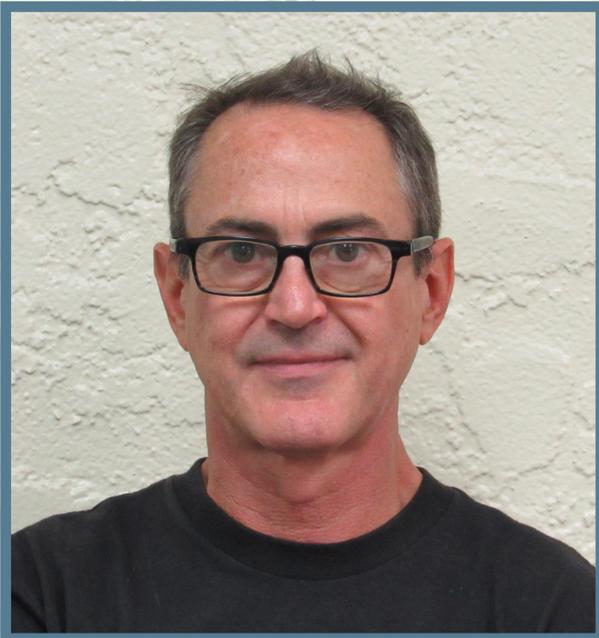
*Middle Row (left to right): Kevin Ducote, Jody Cavanaugh, Austin Frame III, Michael Lebovitz, Ashley Holmes*

*Front Row Sitting (left to right): Renee Kemp, Sonya Wingfield, Anthony Lucas*



# A Story of Hope

by Corbin 'Austin' Frame III, CRSS



When I was so deep in my own experience of the black hole that is depression, and I felt totally hopeless about my life, I called CODAC and said "I need help ... now! I can't continue to deal with this on my own any longer."

Hope came for me in that moment, as someone listened to me and heard what I was saying. They said they could and would help me, and to come over and meet with their recovery team. I went, they listened and helped, and I realized then that I did not have to go it alone, and that I was not alone. Someone was there to support, help, comfort and believe in me. That person cared, and they understood that recovery was not only possible, but to be expected!

I learned that there were options, resources, places and people available, and that I needed to become proactive and use them in ways that would benefit me and my unique needs. I needed to reach out and know that it was okay to ask for help. I did, and I received help from many different places and people, especially Peers who had been through their own recovery process.

There was an end in sight to my quiet suffering, and I began to imagine and believe in my future again.

Like the old hymn goes "I was sinking deep in 'pain,' ever to rise no more ... when nothing else would help, Hope (and love) lifted me", out of my black hole of hopelessness and over the hump towards recovery.

Support = Hope = Healing = Recovery

PS: I Heart Art Awakenings!

# Hope, Always Available to Me From Within

by Scott Lumbard, CRSS

I am a person in recovery from many years of PTSD, major depression and alcoholism; I have been sober for six years. I am also by nature a Lone Wolf, one who feels vitality in solitude and enjoys learning life all by myself, especially in spiritual matters. However, I am infinitely grateful that one of my most intense and life-changing experiences of hope occurred with the help of other people in recovery.

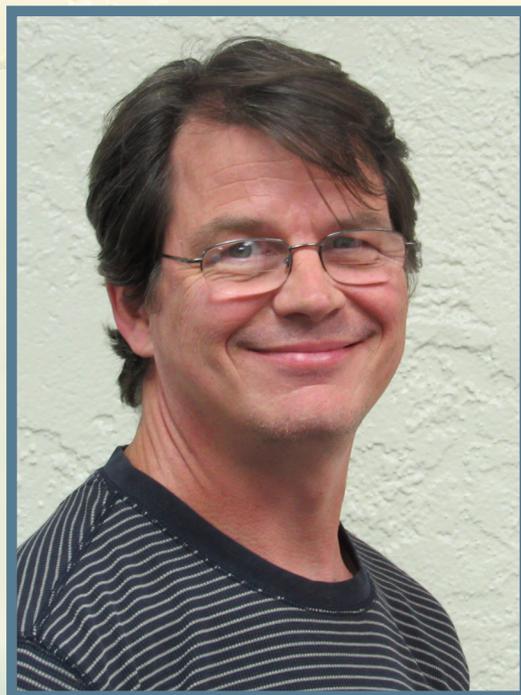
It happened on a Sunday, the day I got out of the Lark detox facility in Tucson. Luckily while I was in detox, my sister had infiltrated my apartment and dumped my last pint of brandy. As I walked to my A.A. meeting, I felt like an old bar rag, freshly wrung out, floating along like a ghost in the Sonoran sunlight. My thirst for alcohol was remorseless; my head felt like a dark swollen thundercloud, roiling with both sudden cravings and sudden fears of alcohol. My skin was still sticky from the last of the brandy oozing from my pores. I figured I had a fifty-fifty chance of staying sober that night.

In the meeting room, I remember thinking that the soothing bluish-violet pastel of the walls was the kind of softly glowing color that prisons use to keep the inmates calm. I introduced myself, let everyone know where I was—five days dry, in despair, etc. I had been to over one thousand A.A. meetings in the past. I had quit drinking and relapsed so many times...

Then I listened as best as I could to my sober fellows.

And then "it" happened; a woman with one year of sobriety uttered something so simple and quiet in meaning that I could actually understand it. She said, "I believe that the best days of your life are ahead of you."

Something hard and icy in my chest broke and started welling out of my eyes and flowing down the back of my neck when that woman took that beautiful risk, offering her personal hope for me. With those few words, she taught me that hope



is immediate, infectious, connective, and always available to me from within.

And "it" has kept on happening ever since. "It" meaning not only my own self-perpetuating hope, but also the continuous "miracle" that people in A.A. talk about, the miracle that happens when the psychological obsession for alcohol has been "lifted". I have never desired a drink since Sarah's utterance. That miracle, that sweet loss and lifting, began as a gift of hope that I could never have given myself.

# My Victories Have Grown

by Jody Cavanaugh, CRSS



If I had been asked to relate a personal experience of hope five years ago, you would see a blank page. At that time hope seemed like a remote and almost forgotten concept. Trust is a component of hope; at the time I was sadly lacking in both.

I can't recall the exact moment when I began to have hope again. There was no "Eureka! I've got it.". I was merely going through the motions of existence; primarily occupied with bare survival and dark thoughts.

A chance encounter with a homeless outreach social worker planted the first seed of hope, by her treating me with dignity and respect. She was the first of several people involved in my recovery journey who believed in me and held hope for me until I was ready to embrace it for myself.

My first major turning point was three years ago when I achieved stable housing. It was a bare and empty place, but it was mine. After an extended period of involuntary homelessness, it was sheer luxury to simply have some privacy and access to utilities.

Slowly, my victories have grown. I now have a terrific apartment and have established new and meaningful friendships. I've also adopted two cats, successfully completed work adjustment with Vocational Rehabilitation, and been free of psychiatric medication for two years.

I still have the occasional bad day, but I try to remind myself not to get discouraged or frustrated. Nothing truly worthwhile is easy, but like the effect of a stone dropped into a still pool, the ripples of hope spread outwards.



## Change is Possible

by Anthony Lucas, CRSS

Hope began for me when I went to the CDV. When I was there they got me to think about the things that I had been doing, and they helped me get over the things I had done. This helped me to see that change was possible, and that I could do better than I was doing; it gave me the tools to better myself. That is why I wanted to become a CRSS - to help others. They were able to help me get to where I'm at today - with a job, family back in my life, and getting better every day. If I could help just one person like I got help, it would mean the world to me.



## Hope Back in My Life

by Robin Witt, CRSS

Hope is like a breath of fresh air. It gives your life back to you. Three years ago, I was about to give up. Then I started attending a program called PSA Art Awakenings. The Peer Supports there gave me the tools to get hope back into my life. Now I have so much hope, that I just want to share the feeling. That's why I want to become a Recovery Support Specialist. To help others to get hope back into their life.

## Love for Life

by Ashley Holmes, CRSS

My recovery began the moment that I regained hope. It was in that moment that I said goodbye to the pervasive sense of helplessness, passivity, loss of control, pessimism, guilt, shame, self-blame and depression that had been crippling me. I made the decision to not give up, when giving up was the easiest option. Hope lifted me up by refreshing my mind with a profound sense of self, love for life, and ability to function. For me, hope is my ability to smile, love, and laugh. My hope has given me the opportunity to live life to the fullest.



## Hold On, Pain Ends

by Anonymous

I've learned that the definition of hope is as individual and varied as recovery. My own relationship with hope has been a tenuous one.

I am acutely aware of circumstances that left me hopeless, as well as the consequent setback or even deterioration of my recovery. However, I've rarely had an obvious sense of being hopeful. There were no moments where the clouds parted and the choir sang. There were no pivotal incidents or personal awakenings that brought hope alive.

In a lifetime of continual struggle, I think hope by necessity became something omnipresent on some level. Familiarity made the presence of hope unrecognizable, but its absence very clear.

Hope and recovery are intertwined. For me the aspects of one are required for the other: positivity, gratitude, stability, options, individual

choice, and belief in a future. As I rebuild my life I'm always aware that the assistance I rely on for stability, thus hope and recovery, can be cut or denied at any time; housing, food, hygiene items, clothing, medical treatment, mental health services, transportation to attend appointments, and recovery-specific financial assistance.

Without the independence to provide my own stability, this leaves me in a position of cautious optimism rather than confident hope. Once again I may not be aware of a clear or ever-present sense of hope, but I draw on my past experience to push toward progress. In essence, my hope is the equation of perseverance coupled with a leap (or step) of faith. My recovery is dependent on the perseverance to Hold On, the faith that Pain Ends.

# My Life is Now a Blessing

by Jose Arriaga, CRSS

It was a few years back and I was having a problem with drugs and alcohol. I started drinking to cope with the diverse problems with which I was living. The drinking led to substance use; cocaine and marijuana. My consumption became the priority in my life. I was driven by the belief that I needed these substances to live and to be able to cope with my life.

While I was in my addiction, my wife became ill and I wasn't there for her. My sickness continued in spite of my wife's state of health. In my heart and in the back of my mind, I knew that my wife needed me more than ever. I knew that my situation had to change. It was so unhealthy - to myself, and to my loving wife and family.

Change came when I became humble and asked for help. I admit that it wasn't an overnight process. It took a lot, but most of all, it took love for myself. Step by step, I admitted that I needed help and began seeking it out. Counseling helped get my mental state in balance. It was really freeing to let go of pains and hurts that I had held onto for so many years.

My life is now a blessing, not a burden to my wife and others. I feel great about this, and about myself as well. I've come a long way and I feel the need to help others live a better life. My recovery is so very important to me. And I understand that I decide what "my recovery" looks like.



I feel so good about this new journey I'm embarking on. No matter where the path leads me, I know that I will take with me my sober state. It will help me overcome any obstacle or experience, no matter how terrible. It can help edify oneself, and in turn be a building block to help others.

Blessings, best wishes to you all, and peace.

# Escaping My Prison

by Michael Lebovitz, CRSS

I remember this book I read once, called *How to Escape Your Prison*, by Gregory L. Little. In this book, it suggests that you open your mind to the realization that there are all kinds of prisons. Not all have walls, bars and fences. Some people are imprisoned in their jobs, trapped by poverty, and others by their desire for drugs and alcohol and other addictions.

My addiction was my prison. The compulsiveness of needing to have it, the hardship to control it despite the obvious harmful consequences, was destroying me financially, in work, my relationships, and my physical and emotional health.

Nobody ever knew. I kept it a secret so I had nobody to ask me "Where is your stopping point?", or to suggest any kind of treatment plan. I was on my own, thinking I could manage this alone, even after the courts gave me a pass the first time. "Don't do it again," the judge warned. But I did, and I was given the maximum sentence.

The question of this brief essay stands at "When did my personal experience of hope occur?"

For me it was my time out in prison. Prison saved my life. It is that simple. Prison gave me the outlet for treatment. It started with Self-Management and Recovery Training (SMART) for 19 months. After that I had to wait a good amount of years to start cognitive behavioral treatment which went on for two and a half years. Of course, in the latter treatment I was completely in pre-contemplation, unaware of my problem. I didn't even want to sign up for it... someone did that for me.

Prison was the turning point that made me aware that I needed to change. Entitlement and thinking I was above the law was out. Personal responsibility, accountability, and empathy for those I hurt helped me climb a ladder. It did not



give assurance that relapse wasn't possible, but at least now I am working toward my goals in the right way, living for today. Taking it one day at a time and giving myself credit for HOW FAR I HAVE COME.

To close this brief essay, I will share one of my favorite quotes.

"Even though there are days I wish I could change some things that happened in the past, there's a reason the rear-view mirror is so small and the windshield is so big. Where you're headed is much more important than what you left behind."

# Hope and Recovery are There for All

by Michael Ochoa, CRSS



“Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey toward it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us.”

Until now, my mental health recovery has been an exercise in having no hope. I did not believe in hope or have the expectation of becoming healthy again, or of being able to set and sustain a path towards recovery. Hope in my recovery, as I write this, has been indispensable to my wellbeing throughout all the challenges I faced this past year. Hope has helped me move away from the terror of loss of who I am and state of low spirits, and given me courage to pursue recovery. The

foundation of my recovery has been built upon that hope.

Hope started first for me with despair. There I was again last year, lying in bed and petrified to move, facing doom. I was lonely, depressed, and felt that I would not recover. In fact, perhaps I did not want to recover. I reflected back on my previous episodes of depression and anxiety. Neither my brain nor body understood how I had gotten out of bed and showered, and made those first steps of recovery the previous time. It had been so difficult, and I felt no desire to put myself through another hell. As a result, I lost employment and was perhaps looking at something that would worsen my position in my life; being homeless and truly not looking at any chance of hope.

But then it came, a ring on my phone. It had rung several times the past few days, but I had not looked at first because I felt there was no solution. But this day I mustered the energy and opened my eyes. There it was, a first glimpse of hope. My sister was calling me. The person who had guided me before and helped me through despair and again to the light of recovery. I wondered if I could put her through another hell of her big brother reaching out to her once again. Wasn't I the one who was supposed to protect his little sister? But I answered, and she immediately knew her big brother was looking at the one challenge he had yet to defeat. “Michael, I'm coming down (from Georgia) and together we will get you the assistance you truly need. Pills alone will not be your only source of recovery this time!”

My dear little sister Mary was coming full charge with hope. She believed in me and knew that this time I would have a better chance to be the big brother who was full of confidence and zeal, and could finally conquer this.

continued on next page

# Real Recovery is Possible

by Kevin Ducote, CRSS

I began to have hope that a peaceful, stable, and productive life was possible for me in the fall of 2014. I was properly diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder after many years of adventure with misdiagnosis, and medication trial and error. It played a major role in my recovery from substance use and behavioral health challenges.

I had the good fortune of meeting a Behavioral Health counselor who was very perceptive, and recognized that I had not been accurately diagnosed. She instilled in me the belief that real recovery was possible for a person like myself, who had struggled my entire life to find my place in the world. She set me on the path to building a new, self-directed life for myself and opened my eyes to the possibility of realizing my full potential as a human being.



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## Hope and Recovery are There for All, by Michael Ochoa, continued...

Hope led me to a group of individuals, who like me, had suffered immensely and their own hope had led them to recovery. They said to me "Hope, Michael. There is a treatment for you. Just don't give up and there is a chance for recovery which you did not dream existed."

The wonderful thing about hope is that it promises a future reward. It has rewarded me with the opportunity to help others with

their own recovery. I will no longer live in despair but with a love, acceptance, and understanding that hope and recovery are there for all. Do not let anyone tell you there is no hope! Sometimes, a little spark is all you need to start a huge fire. Hope will cast that shadow of gloom and hopelessness behind you.

"Let your hopes, not your hurts, shape your future."

# Hope is Helping Me Find Myself

by Sonya Wingfield, CRSS

My experience with hope came in a process. I have lived with a dual diagnosis for many years, going up and down like a roller coaster. Through my struggles I lost everything, including myself. About 3 years ago I became tired. I was tired of my broken heart, my broken soul; the loss and the constant struggle. I wanted off the streets and I wanted my life back.

For so long I wasn't understood; I was judged. I was told to snap out of it, to get over it, and that I was doing it for attention. Through this I became ashamed of myself. I decided to switch agencies and start being honest about what I was feeling. Slowly I started building my team. I'm so blessed with the team I have now. They encourage me and most importantly, they listen to me.

I started making changes. I started surrounding myself with positive people who love me for who I am and support me. My children, as well as my fiancé, show me unconditional love. He as well displayed strength. I grasped onto this and slowly I started seeing growth in myself. I want to live a self-directed life. Through all of this I realized that I was not alone, and I wanted to give back to others so they don't feel alone.

I started the institute and I thought okay, I will learn new techniques that I can use in this field. But something amazing happened; it impacted



me more than I could have imagined. I'm now applying this to myself and I'm more hopeful than I ever been. I finally know what I want to do with my life, and I even have a plan. Hope is helping me find myself. I would like to give special thanks to Glenn, Brandyn and Sierra for always being there for me and not turning your backs on me.

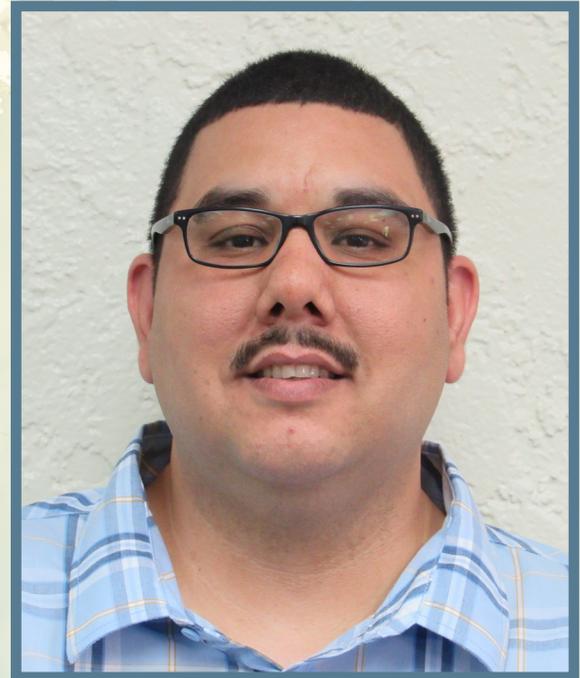
# Happier Than Ever

by Enrique Ornelas, CRSS

I would like to tell you about the time I started to feel like I had hope for a healthy recovery from my substance use. I was on my way back to prison for the third time, and because of that, I decided to enter myself into an outpatient program run through La Frontera. When I entered myself it wasn't because I was ready to start my recovery. I actually did it just to look good in the eyes of the judge that was going to sentence me.

The two facilitators that led the groups were amazing. I began to realize that they were my biggest supporters outside of my family, and that's what I needed at the time. Someone that understood exactly what I was going through, giving me the tools that I needed to go forward with my recovery. While I was in this program getting educated, I found myself becoming very fond of the facilitators and interested in their careers. I was very excited to be so confident in my desired career path. The program was a twelve-week program, but I was not able to finish it because I had to carry out my sentence in prison.

The week I got out of prison, I entered myself back into the program at La Frontera. I also enrolled myself at Pima Community College to work on an associate degree in social services. I was so terrified of school, and for that matter, change. I now have a couple of semesters left for my associate degree, and I'm happier than ever for where my life is now and where it is headed in the future.



# There is ALWAYS Hope

by Renee Kemp, CRSS



I knew that I was going to be ok when I no longer looked at myself as a victim of domestic violence, but instead as a survivor. I had taken my power back, after being criticized and ridiculed for defending myself in an abusive relationship. I discovered that I wasn't the only one who had done this.

This wasn't a badge of shame, but one of hope in regards to regaining some sort of normalcy in my life. And it happened. Bit by bit, piece by piece, I began to put it together. I was able to talk about what happened and not be ashamed of what I did. I was able to look at my daughters and talk to them about what happened, and keep my composure for them. I started to develop relationships with others who shared my type of pain and in return, I found even more strength and the ability to look at myself and say, "You've got this".

I was shocked and amazed at the support that followed this. I had strangers reaching out to me because they had heard my story and wanted to know how I was doing. They too had been survivors of domestic violence, and were very familiar with what I had endured. There is ALWAYS hope. Never forget that. When you can keep going in your darkest hours, you've won!

# Hope is For Real !

by Radford Whitsitt, CRSS

Hope began this year in February when I was homeless. I was going into the end of winter, drinking again and on the street. Under the urging of my caseworker Sean Dupont, I decided to go to detox. Afterwards at Cope Community Services, I got a referral to attend Yavapai, a 6-month transitional recovery rehab program.

Starting at an early age, I have dealt with depression, hearing voices, and seeing things; a result of being an individual with schizoaffective disorder. I have severe PTSD, being a combat veteran after 8 years as a Long Range Recon Patrol (L.R.R.P.) 75th regiment U.S. Army Ranger. My past inspired in me, mentally and physically, the hope to take part in this intensive inpatient recovery program. The program covers Thinking for Change, Seeking Safety, Healthy Relationships, Men's group in recovery, DBT skills, substance abuse recovery and education, AA, NA, S.M.A.R.T., Mindfulness, and Anger Management. All of these tools have helped instill hope in me.

Taking these classes and starting a foundation in recovery with new friends at Yavapai and AA has helped me successfully apply coping skills to my life. It has really made an impact on me emotionally, spiritually, and to my physical wellbeing. It has given me the hope to confront my mental illness. This turning point of hope in my recovery has helped me to realize that hope is for real! I can recover!



I can make a difference in myself, and in another person's life. I can share, live, and make a reality my experience, strength, and hope! To really believe the possibility of recovery is 100%! That I really can instill hope in others! Hope is a reality in my life today, and it will be for the rest of my life in recovery! Hope has expanded my horizons. My future is as a person with 100% hope in my recovery! Thanks to hope, recovery is a beautiful bridge, and it is always going to be there!

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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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