

# Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Tucson, March 8 2018



## Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduates

Back Row left to right:

Christy Kitchin, Chico Acuna, Gerardo Avila, Ryan Fetter, Eric Zamorra, Leonard Moores

Middle Row left to right:

Susan Schafle, Lynn Mucklow, Megan Dragony, Michelle Hughes, Lelna Beckner, Javier Rodriguez, Joshua Taylor

Front Row left to right:

Brian Barnett, Pamela "Phoenix" Lipshutz, Amanda Ferdon, Andy Ramon



# The War Was Over and I Had Hope

By Christy Kitchin, CRSS



My name is Christy, and I was born the baby of six kids. My daddy is a retired cattle auctioneer, and my family owns many stockyards across the United States.

From the time I was a little girl it was evident that I had a mental illness; an illness which underlined my life-long love, and commitment to the disease of alcoholism. When a teacher asked for all of the children to get their papers signed at home by our parents, I was the child who sincerely intended to get it signed. However, by the time I got home I was so enthralled with riding horses and 4-wheelers, playing basketball, and swimming, I had totally

forgotten to get my paper signed. The teacher wreaking havoc the next morning about my paper was a consequence I was ready to deal with. Day after day, the paper did not return to school due to all of my adventures and lack of responsibility. The teacher not only took my recess away, but she ultimately involved my parents in the "corrective action". My childhood characterized in making myself the ultimate sacrifice as an adult living with alcoholism.

However, due many extreme traumatic childhood difficulties, I am fairly certain I had undiagnosed Reactive Attachment Disorder. This disorder not only capitalized my young life, but it manifested into other disorders that went undiagnosed. The proof is in the experience. As I developed into an adult, I had multiple barriers; including my alcoholism, and having no one to truly support my lack of knowledge. One day in my darkest hour, I looked to the sky and begged my Heavenly Father to help me; he did just that. My phone rang, and there was a woman who had found my number in an AA book. She talked with me for a couple of hours, and wanted to pick me up and take me to a treatment center. I didn't want to go, so she allowed me to come and stay with her and her husband. They began working the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous with me, and I was able to hang my hat. The war was over and I had hope. I had two people that believed in me...and I believed in myself. This brought forth the future of TRUE recovery for me. I am forever grateful, and I never look back. Only to the future!



# I Would Not Change a Thing

By Gerardo Avila, CRSS



In sharing my experience with hope, I want to express a gratitude to God, who I shall say is my Higher Power. In May 2016, I was released from prison for the fourth time in my career. While I was there, I had a plethora of time to do some serious soul searching. I was involved in AA groups and was part of a ministry. I developed a passion in guiding lost souls, whom in their own minds were doomed and looking for answers. I

knew when I got out I was going to resume my construction business, but I didn't want to do that because of my age and how physically demanding it was. I knew I had to find another industry that I liked and in which I wanted to make a difference.

I was involved with Celebrate Recovery before I went to prison, and had a passion for listening and sharing my downfalls. I found a very receptive audience, and I seemed to have the answers or was able to provide guidance to others, and that was rewarding to me. God spoke to me, and even now I still have a passion for and am very much involved in my recovery and serving others. It has lead me to this class and the desire for gainful employment in this profession. I have been clean and sober for 12 years, and for me that is a miracle in itself. Now with this class and my experience, I have the fundamental tools and support to make a difference, answer my calling, and be a statistic that it does work. My struggles and downfalls had to happen. I would not change a thing, because I would not know what I know now. I will not let it be in vain.

I have seen better days, and I have experienced much worse. I might not have everything I want, but I do have everything I need. I woke up this morning with some aches and pains, but I woke up. My life is far from perfect, but I am blessed.

## I Could Begin to be Happy

By Amanda Ferdon, CRSS

I began to truly feel hope once I put hard work into my recovery. For years, I had felt that being diagnosed with bipolar disorder meant that I just had to accept being unhappy, but I was wrong. Once I learned more about the disorder, I discovered that recovery was not only possible, but it was probable with a good treatment plan. For me that meant I had to be willing to work on myself, which I was. I surrounded myself with a strong support team, found a medication that lessened my symptoms, and began to move forward into a life where I could begin to be happy. Basically, I found hope in the very thing that had once left me feeling hopeless.

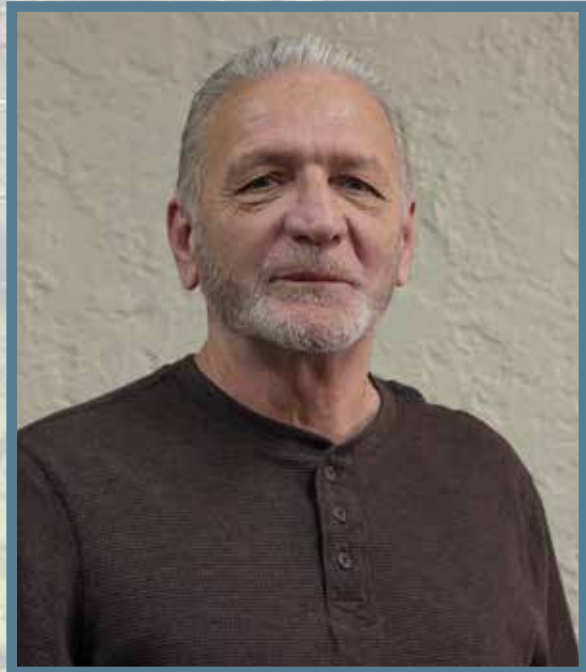


## Honesty and Willingness

By Leonard Moores, CRSS

Hope is the belief that life can be better no matter the odds. Hope allows us to have the self-determination to achieve our goals. Hope brings about honesty and willingness. The ability to be open-minded is brought through hope. The hope for a better world can bring about unimaginable changes.

Hope is a foundation for faith, which gives us our spirituality. Hope in my recovery gives me the inner peace that is necessary to succeed. Hope in a better me has brought me to this wonderful adventure called recovery, and allows me to continue on in this life of constant transition. Thanks to everyone in my present and past life



who gave me shared hope. It is because of the belief in hope that I am able to be where I am today.



# Stop, Turn Around and Go Back

By Javier Rodriguez, CRSS

First and foremost, I want to give all the glory and praise to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Without him, I never would have come this far in my life, in my recovery, and in the way I see hope. Until recently, I battled with the concept of hope throughout my life. Whether I was hopeful or hopeless, and whether I had hope in things or had false hope. Because so many things in my life didn't go the way I hoped for. Things like not getting the job that I had hoped for, when the relationship that I hoped would last forever did not, when I lost the trust and respect of people I hoped I would never lose. My father, after hoping so much that he would come back, died. Myself, after hoping that I could change. Hoping something would be different, and that whatever it is would stop. Hoping I would get better, but I never did.

After all of this, I gave up. I finally lost hope, and started using alcohol as the only coping tool I had left. Neglecting my issues with a mental illness and becoming hopeless, I ran away from home and experienced one of the worst days of my life. I was at my complete bottom, and I asked God to take me. Then he whispered, "Stop. Turn around and go back." From that day on, I became truly hopeful in the Lord and I haven't turned back since.



The kind of hope that I have now will allow me to believe wholeheartedly in my recovery, alongside helping others in their recovery. My higher power can be completely different from your higher power; what matters is that you find true hope inside of it. Hope comes from a power greater than myself, which to me is my Lord Jesus Christ. I will continue to hope and pray for a better tomorrow for people with mental health and substance use issues. God bless.



# I've Never Felt Stronger

By Andy Ramon, CRSS

In the dictionary, hope is defined as a desire accompanied by expectation or belief in fulfillment. I never gave much thought to it but when I hear the word hope I hear happiness and laughter; I see smiles of joy. Now that I think of it, I've been living in hope since the day my life started all over again in recovery. My hope was found with the help of my facilitators, whom I consider role models. They are two of the greatest women I've ever met. They brought light to the darkness that I was living in, and have given me a sense of purpose in my life.

I have never felt stronger, or more of a desire to be myself. I don't consider myself a role model, but I see role models in all those who want recovery, and for those who would want to evoke it. I believe that to be my purpose - to help those people find the role model in themselves. That is



what hope means to me; the belief that we can all be role models if we make that choice to pursue it.

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# There Is Still Hope

By Brian Barnett, CRSS

With my doctors and nurses in a circle around me and shooting furtive glances at each other, each one took turns explaining (or I should say trying to explain) how I was not responding well to the medicines and oxygen they had been using to keep me alive. Knowing that I had just come off a ventilator and out of a coma, I concluded that my death was a certainty. Knowing this, I made peace with my maker and decided that I was going to heaven, albeit through a back channel with no fanfare.

Then the head doctor finished by saying they would try a bronchoscopy to try to identify the killer bug that was causing the pneumonia. What?! They're not giving up. Wait...that means there is still HOPE! A future and a hope; an amazing thought. What wonderments,



what possibilities. I had so many questions. What will I do? How will I live? Will I love or hate? Will I be loved? One thing I know, I will not be ungrateful any longer.



# Something Good From All That Bad

By Susan Schafle, CRSS

I was a hopeless drunk. I had lost everything - my business, my home, and worst of all, my children. I was powerless to alcohol. My life was filled with fear. I wanted to stop drinking, but there was too much despair. I would wake every morning terrified and shaking, desperate for a drink. I asked my father for help, and I spent 34 days in a rehabilitation center. There was a glimmer of hope, but it did not last. Resentments took over and the drinking became even more severe. Hope was out of the question; I had nothing to live for. I was contemplating suicide, and alcohol was taking too long to kill me. I put the gun in my mouth, but could not pull the trigger.

I was finally convinced to apply for AHCCCS and go to CODAC, which where I would go for outpatient treatment. At CODAC, I received physical care as well as mental health care (Integrated Care). My counselor was a seasoned person in recovery from alcoholism, who shared his story and urged me to go to AA. I went to an AA meeting

the next day. I still drank before and after the meetings, but little by little I drank less and less. After a months' worth of meetings, I proudly took my 24 hour. chip. That day was the beginning of hope.

The people in the meeting spoke directly to me. They changed the prescheduled format of the meeting and spent the time showing me that hope was attainable. I became willing to believe. I found a sponsor; it was amazing how similar her story was to mine. She helped me through the 12 steps of AA. Each step brought further hope.

While I was at CODAC, I heard someone talking about a person who was a whiz at formatting resumes. I told him I would like to do something to help other people with addictions. He told me about the RSS Institute. He was a graduate of the Institute, as were many of the CODAC staff. I could not believe something good could come from all that bad. I could work helping others find hope. The classes are amazing. David, Rita, and Stephanie have given me something to build towards. They have overwhelmed me with hope.

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## I Have Choices

By Paul Ornelas, CRSS

I entered treatment early last year. I was physically, mentally, and spiritually broken. Somehow I found the strength to surrender, and found many blessings along the way. One of them was entering the Workforce Development Program. I realized that I had a condition called learned helplessness. This is caused by a denial of choices, and it left me feeling helpless, worthless, and worst of all, hopeless. Hope is the overarching message of recovery, and a blessing I am very grateful for.

Through hope, I learned the possibility of my recovery is 100 percent, and I was able to

grow from that point. I became aware that even though there are usually common denominators, recovery is unique for every individual. Understanding this made it easier for me to accept my issues. I realized that I do have choices, and I have the ability to advocate for myself, which led me to self-empowerment. Thank you to all the staff of Workforce Development for modeling hope, self-empowerment, and assisting me in my journey. I look forward to working with them again in the future.



# The Gift of Sobriety is a Blessing

By Chico Acuna, CRSS

My name is Chico Acuna, and I have struggled with addiction since my early teens. I am now 41 years old. In November 2016, the day before Thanksgiving, my mother took her own life. I became depressed and hopeless. I coped by self-medicating with drugs and alcohol. My family urged me to get help, but I resisted with excuses.

Finally, with no one willing to enable me, and after receiving some tough love, I checked into rehab. With the help of determination and peer support, I reclaimed hope along with the courage to complete my program. I have maintained sobriety, and I give back through a ministry that helps the homeless. I also enrolled in the 10 day Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute, to help me begin a career in which I can help others find hope and recovery in their own lives. The gift of sobriety is a blessing, and I thank God every day.



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# Tomorrow Will Be Even Better

By Lynn Mucklow, CRSS

I am grateful to be able to share a meaningful experience with hope. It was almost exactly a year ago that I was taken into custody as a result of some poor decisions that I had made. Those decisions occurred during my frequent use of meth, a dependency that I seemed unable to quit. My addiction required all of my focus and energy, and left no room for the positive activities that I longed for.

My intervention came as a result of a federal grand jury indictment on four charges. While that case was pending, I was required to complete a residential rehab program. Immediately, I came to understand the power of that intervention. I understood that today my life is better than yesterday, and tomorrow will be even better. Those first steps toward recovery gave me the hope of a better life. Even though the prospect of prison time remains on



the horizon, I have the conviction that..."today is better than yesterday, and tomorrow will be even better".



# Hope and Recovery

By Ryan Fetter, CRSS



Looking back, it seems easier to remember all the times I lost hope, because these were generally the lowest points in my life. I have been in and out of jail, emergency rooms, and finally, a psychiatric hospital. It was a shock, and I had to comply with treatment in order to be released. Once I appeared stable, I could decide if I still wanted to live. Hope and recovery weren't really on my mind; I focused instead on killing time. I was released, but the lifestyle of the hospital persisted. I followed a routine and participated in treatment in order to remain free.

I unconsciously accepted the generally low expectations for someone with a serious mental illness and substance use disorder. My treatment involved taking and adjusting medications, remaining sober, monitoring symptoms, and coping with stressors. The Peer Supports on my team tried to interest me

in different activities, but there was little I cared about, or thought I could successfully achieve. I knew that I wanted to help my family and avoid homelessness and involuntary commitment. This meant that I would need some kind of income, but what could I do. It had been so long since I had worked and I considered myself to be very ill. My life had been reduced to surviving, and now I would have to learn how to live again.

My Peer Supports encouraged me to become an RSS while I worked to figure out the rest. In the process of doing this, I learned about recovery and reexamined my attitudes and beliefs about mental illness. Although I would never have agreed that a defined me, I still internalized much that wasn't helpful. My experiences had emphasized that co-occurring disorders are serious chronic illnesses, which can be managed with the appropriate medications and therapies to maintain a baseline and avoid crisis/relapse. The implicit message was, "Do all this and with whatever time and energy is left, live your life." Crisis prevention and maintenance are important, but putting the disease first gives it far too much power, and leaves you with little to hope for and even less to actually do. We don't say, "As a diabetic who manages their metabolism while coping with blood glucose levels how do you lead a meaningful life?" Should we not live a meaningful life while managing/coping with x, y, z?

In addition to putting my life first, it was important to think differently about recovery. Recovery is not a cure, but an attitude, a way to approach each day. Not everyone may be hopeful for living a life free of symptoms, but most would agree that there is hope to change one's attitudes and actions. My Peer Supports have encouraged me to be persistent and to not give up. If I kept working I would start to figure things out as I went along. It is not always easy. Taking risks and knowing you may fail requires courage. However, recovery is absolutely possible, and hope exists; it's just not always easy to find.



# When Did I Start to Feel Hope?

By Pamela "Phoenix" Lipshutz, CRSS



I have had a lot of false hopes. When I first met my partner of 21 years, she suggested I try taking something for anxiety. Having lived with it all my life, that was my norm. A medical doctor prescribed me medication in the late 1990's. Suddenly I felt the sense of urgency vanish! I cannot describe my elation, feeling it was okay leaving the dishes in the sink. Where was the fire that I had to rush for? After a time, this medication began giving me uncomfortable feelings, so I discontinued it. Over the years I have taken many types of medication for anxiety, depression, PTSD (now called complex PTSD), and OCD. Then I would revisit them after being off for a few years.

At one point, the medication was working so well that I got excited and decided to apply to graduate school. I attended Boston College, majoring in the Psychiatric Clinical Nurse Specialist Program to be a therapist, specializing in Gender Dysphoria and helping individuals with their sexual orientation. I attended 2 out of 3 years of graduate school, but had to withdraw for "medical reasons". I was told that I have a cognitive disorder called Dysexecutive Syndrome. The executive part of my brain doesn't work right. Nurses must have instant recall, and be able to constantly multitask. It was impossible for me to practice as a staff RN. I have also been given the label of non-verbal learning disorder, or Asperger syndrome. It is very hard to describe these things to people, as they are under researched, and thus unusual. I am called high functioning and intelligent, yet cannot hold down a job where I have to switch attention fast, or multitask. Given time to focus, I do fine. My partner and I started a Beeswax candle making company from scratch, and I did very well working alongside her. She did the things I could not. We wrote parameters down and followed them.

The main thing I have learned is that medications can be helpful, but are not the complete solution for me. I've learned that changing my lifestyle is vital. I have to under schedule myself significantly compared to others, in order to avoid getting overwhelmed. I start on projects early to reduce the overwhelming feeling of panic and worry that I won't get things done on time. It's an irrational fear that comes with a pathological anxiety syndrome. Hope comes through for me by trial

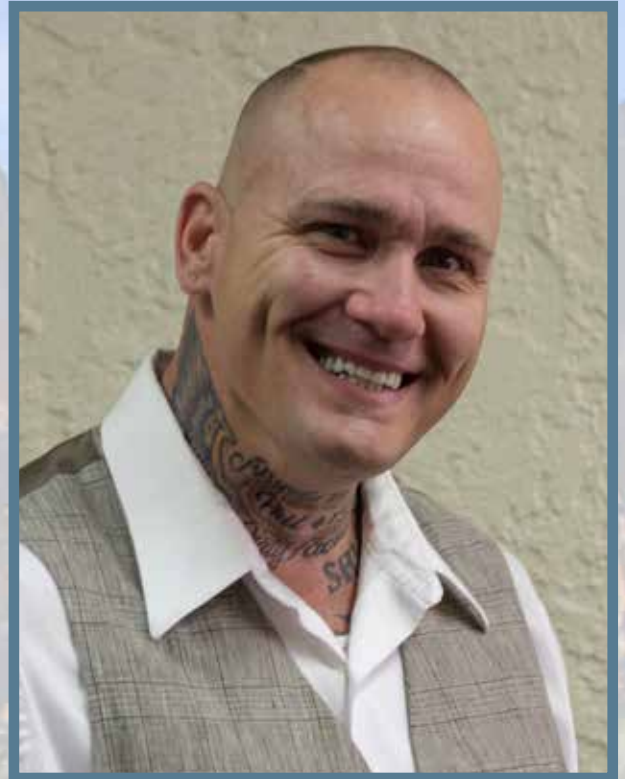


# An Example of Hope and Recovery

By Eric Zamarra, CRSS

On my journey and in my addiction, I ran into some interesting people. There was a fella named Michael. We called him Michael to Stripes, because he had two stripes tattooed on his face. I used with this person, and we used a lot of the same ways together. He disappeared, and the next time I saw him was when I went to my first meeting while I was still homeless. I saw and talked to him, and he told me "I have 2 years clean. This is where I have been."

He was genuinely happy and excited to see me there. I had done meetings before, but it was only for the courts. This time I wanted to do it for myself. When I saw him and what he was doing, how he looked and how far he had come...that in itself was my first example of Hope and Recovery. I thought, if this horrible junkie can do it, I can do it! August 31st was the last time I used. September 1st, 2009 was my first day clean, and I've been clean ever since. His hope and his example were very real to me. He would say, "keep coming back." And I did.



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## When Did I Start to Feel Hope? by Pamela Lipshutz continued...

and error. It is okay to make a mistake. As a Certified Recovery Support Specialist (CRSS), I will be able to use a skill I possess – to listen to others with empathy. I will have to plan around my needs so I can perform effectively. Wisdom and experience has given me hope, by having the courage to try different things out. I learn from these so-called failures and mistakes.

By graduating from this program as a CRSS, I have the new hope of performing this professional endeavor successfully, with the special bonus that people will know I have Mental Illness (an electrochemical brain disorder). This illness (which qualifies me with experiential knowledge) combined with my formal

education as an RN, BSN, has given me a new hope and pride. Yes, I now have pride instead of toxic shame. Though I'll always carry the knowledge of experiencing shame due to the stigma in our society, this pride is something new to me. Who would have thought that my brain disorder would be seen as advantageous? This has become my different success! This is a new reality, created by research that people like me can be successful and happy. My life now has hope again and has new meaning. Thank you to everyone involved, including the universal force. "May the Force" continue to be with us.

"For those who cannot overcome their challenges, one learns to work with them and achieve a different success."



# You Never Know What That Little Bit of Hope Can Lead To!

By Lelna Beckner, CRSS



In April of 2017, I experienced a mental break due to undiagnosed and untreated Post-Partum Depression. The episode was so severe that it resulted in me losing custody of my daughter, and put me under serious criminal charges. The night and day that I spent in the jail on suicide watch seemed like it would never end. I was sure that this was it; this was going to be all that my life summed up to be. However, in the middle of my second night I was released on bail. I thank God for sending the angel who demanded I go to the Crisis Response Center (CRC) for 24 hours before going home, so I could get the help I so desperately needed.

By the time my intake at the CRC was done, it was only a few hours until their wakeup call. But they still gave me some clean scrubs to wear and a little mat to lay on. This may not seem like much, but it meant the world to me. This was the first time since the incident that I was even remotely treated like a human being. On my second day at the CRC, another one of God's angels (the attending psychiatrist) who had been treating me since the first day asked me if I would like to be admitted to the treatment center upstairs. She proceeded to tell me why she thought it would help me; however, there was not an ounce of force in her voice. The decision was all up to me, and her addressing me as someone who actually had a choice gave me the courage to say yes, and to begin my fight to gain my life back.

I stayed at the CRC for nearly two weeks while I worked on getting a stable foundation to base my recovery on. As with anyone who has a brain and a heart, I had my ups and downs. One day during my stay when I was very down, the doctor told me something that has stuck with me, which I repeat to myself on a regular basis. I had been telling her how I felt guilty because I thought I was weak for not being able to stop my depression. She then said to me "Lee, I have high blood pressure. Am I weak because I have to take medication for it every day?" Of course, I said no, it is a medical condition. She then stopped me and said "So is yours! You cannot control the concentrations of the chemicals in your brain, any more than I can control my blood pressure."



# All Was Forgiven

By Joshua Taylor, CRSS

What is hope? Hope to me is the belief that things will get better. That no matter the situation I am in, I can overcome it and move forward. Hope occurred to me while I was incarcerated. At the time I thought that my life was over, that I would never be able to be a “normal” person again. I was going to be labeled forever, and it would hang over my head for the rest of my life. It wasn’t until I discovered Islam that I discovered forgiveness.

I realized that no matter what happened before I found and accepted Allah, all was forgiven. The crimes I had committed, the substances I abused, and the people I had hurt. All was washed away, and I was able to start over with a clean slate. Although I know that other people may continue to label and judge me, I have found the courage to forgive myself. I am not going to judge myself on the few bad things I did, but rather I will look at all the good things I have done. Hope is what keeps me going, as well as the faith that with time, others will also judge me by all the good things that I have done, rather than the few bad things.



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## You Never Know, by Lelna Beckner continued...

She went on to say how there are ways that we can stack the deck in our favor to help our bodies, but we cannot control it by willpower alone. This struck me quite hard, mostly because I had fallen into the trap like many others, of believing that I must have done it to myself and I just merely needed to change my way of thinking, because it was a mental illness.

I will never forget these two events, because they are the two purest moments of hope I have ever known. The first, when I was at the lowest point I had ever been in my life. Someone who is well educated, respected, and held a place of great power believed in me enough to give me a decision that could and has

changed my life entirely. The second, when I was armed with the real truth of the matter, which empowered me to say I am more than this and I can do something about it! Thanks to this hope I found I have been able to turn my life around. My criminal charges have been settled and I am now serving a probation term. I am also (merely a year later) already in partial remission from my depression, and most importantly, I have majority custody of my daughter back. I could not have done any of this had I not found hope in my darkness. I want to encourage every single person in the world to do your best to empower every person you meet, no matter their status. You never know what that little bit of hope can lead to!



# A Much Better Life Was Possible

By Megan Dragony, CRSS



Hope can be an elusive term for me, to this day. I have struggled to write this essay because I felt the assumption was that I should always feel hopeful. That just simply isn't the case. However, I think it is quite normal for someone with a co-occurring mental health diagnosis such as myself. What I can say is that compared to a year ago, I feel more hopeful now than I have for many years. I still have days where depression and hopelessness creep in, but I have a program

of recovery that helps me acknowledge those feelings for what they are, and carry on despite them.

Almost exactly a year ago to this day, I decided I needed to leave my life in the UK and return home to seek inpatient care for my mental health and substance use disorders. At the time I felt quite hopeless, as if I had to give up on the life I had worked so hard for in another country. I now see this as the moment I decided to regain control of my own life, to challenge my persistent feelings of hopelessness and assert that a much better life for myself was possible. It was a moment of resignation - I had to acknowledge that life as I had been living it was no longer working, and that I was headed toward more institutions or even death. But in that resignation, I found hope again.

With the help of my family, I decided to stop attempting to live life solely on my own and ask for help. I surrendered, in short. I acknowledged that I alone did not have the answers. I allowed others to hold, support, and guide me. I had been living a life purely driven by self-will, but the moment I allowed other people into my life again, I felt an ease that I will never forget. We cannot carry this burden alone, as much as I tried to convince myself otherwise. To me, HOPE is having a community around you; someone else who can help you bear the weight of life's struggles. And sometimes it is a daily struggle. But I know that as long as I am not alone, I will continue to grow and thrive.



# Hope and Courage

By Michelle Hughes, CRSS

I am very lucky to have experienced multiple moments and instances of HOPE throughout my ten month journey of sobriety, as well as the defining moment of hope for myself, a month prior to the date I became sober. This was the day I realized I needed to get out of an abusive relationship, and get professional help to assist me with my addictions and unmanaged Bipolar Disorder.

That first glimmer of hope, which gave me courage to begin the process of change I so desperately needed, was ultimately my saving grace. It is the reason I am doing as well as I am in my life now. Although I had to find the initial strength and hope within myself, I had no shortage of loved ones who help and support me every single day. They encourage me every step of the way and remind me that I found it within myself to save myself. Now that I have done so, my hope is to help others on their personal journeys to find hope for themselves.





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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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