

# Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Tucson, April 27, 2017



## Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduating Class

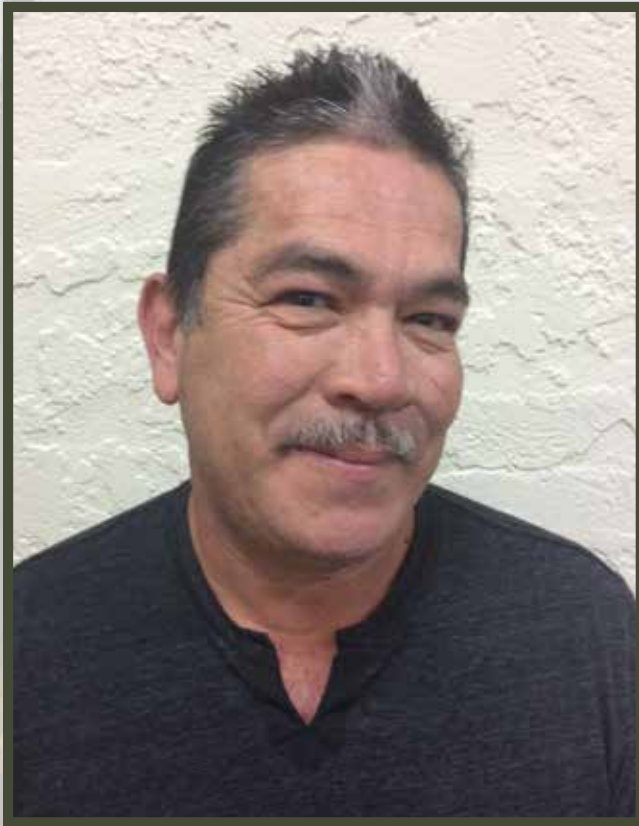
*Back Row (Left to Right): Sergio Murguia, Habib Moutran, Armando Ramirez, Andrew Thomas, Rae Henderson, Jonathan Rivera, Daniel Gamez, Rene Esquivel*

*Front Row (Left to Right): Alex Quinonez, Carol Vandersloot, Genevieve Bravo, Nicholas Capanear, Melanie Trujillo, Angelina Carter, Seana Kelly, John Robinkoff, Stephen Romans*



# Shared Experience Gave Me Hope

By Alex Quinonez, CRSS



Before I enrolled in this class, I ran into an old friend of mine. We used to go the same church in our younger days. Little did we know that we were living with a form of mental illness that the church was ill

equipped to help us cope with. We both left the church and went on living our lives. Recently, I ran into him at the same old church for a bible conference being held there, and I began to explain my health conditions and my recovery.

I explained to him that I couldn't perform my work as an aircraft mechanic or as a nurse due to my criminal history. I told him that I felt hopeless, and I wanted to live but just didn't know what to do. His face lit up and he began to share his life journey with me. He had suffered in many ways that were the same or similar to my own struggles. He told me of a training that he had received, the RSSI training. He said that his life had been forever changed for the better. While he was talking about this, I felt a spring of hope well up inside me and I began to tear up. I took his advice and re-enrolled in the behavioral health system. I explained to my case manager what I was told and she agreed that this would be wonderful for me. It took me over a year to begin the training and it has been each and every day, a journey of the resurrection of hope in my life.

# Hope Got Me Through the Door

by Andrew Thomas, CRSS

For me it was Nov.15, 2015. I had been through so much over the last 30 years, I was desperate. I felt alone, but I did know I had to do something. Hope gave me the courage to get myself into a detox center and then into treatment. Hope gave me the courage to believe that a program of recovery through Alcoholics Anonymous was what I needed. Hope helped me to do whatever I had to do to be free. This program tells us that before we are half way through, we will know a new freedom and a new happiness. Then I had to put some action behind that hope by working on it one day at a time.



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# One More Day

by Armando Ramirez, CRSS

My name is Armando R., and I have suffered from Addiction and Depression for 28 years. I had just experienced another episode of my addiction and I could not deal with the insanity any more. I found myself lost, desperate and alone. I just wanted the voices and the physical cravings to stop. I wanted to die but I was afraid to kill myself, so I went to a Detox center for help. I was experiencing a moment of brokenness and desperation, so I agreed go to a treatment center for low to no income individuals.

There I found myself alone and depressed. I became irritable, restless and discontent. It was my disease telling me to run, like it had many times in the past. That is when I looked back and realized that I had 8 days clean, and a glimmer of hope set in. Maybe, just maybe, I could stay for just one more day and not run. I told myself that I could leave tomorrow.

Today I have 9 months clean, I completed my stay at a treatment center, I am employed, I live in a men's sober living environment, and I have attended the Certified Recovery Support Specialist Institute. But most importantly, I have hope for one more day of recovery and for one more day of living life.



# I Was Stuck, but Hope Gave Me a Way Out!

by Nicholas Capanear, CRSS

In April 2011 I was lost and stuck, and I knew if I didn't do something soon I would surely die in prison. Out of absolute desperation and fear of this inevitable path I was on, my inner voice hounded me to do what I needed to do. I was convinced that my active addiction and depression were mostly environmental and geological. I had absolute HOPE that if I were to get accepted into the M.E.T.H. program located at Santa Rita unit (Tucson Complex), I would be able to start the recovery process which I desperately desired.

I was accepted into the M.E.T.H. program in July 2011. After arriving, I woke up the following morning and instantly noticed all of my stress symptoms were disappearing. This then turned into a greater sense of HOPE that I was in the right place for recovery. I have a couple of people to thank for the guidance and HOPE for my recovery process. One in particular is Geno, a fellow "Lifer" and a lifelong friend who was responsible for showing me the benefits of the M.E.T.H. program and sobriety, as well as paving the way for my acceptance into the program.

Going to sleep and waking up sober daily secured my HOPE of sustaining sobriety. I realized I no longer had to be a person with an active addiction or co-occurring disorders, as I had been in the past. I had become a person who continued to follow the directions of my counselors and willingly participated in every program afforded to me. While at Santa Rita unit, I took part in



group big book readings and 12 step recovery programs, regular A.A. & N.A. meetings, the completion of the Men's Education Treatment and Health program, and becoming a peer facilitator for A.A. & N.A..

Now with nearly 6 years of absolute sobriety I have established myself as Peer Support, a volunteer leader, and a compassionate listener. I realize that listening is the most important role in any given person's recovery. My experience in maintaining HOPE means that I have the confidence within myself to further educate, participate and be an advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves.

# From Hopeless to Hopeful

by Carol Vandersloot, CRSS



I was at a point in my life where my thoughts about dying exceeded my thoughts about living. Nothing relieved my feelings of despair, failure, and hopelessness. At night my dreams were of release from the pain I felt, and my waking moments were consumed with how I could

escape my mental dungeon. My numerous attempts at suicide had been unsuccessful, but this morning I was sure my plan was foolproof. I gathered the tools I needed and headed for a park.

I mixed alcohol with a coke, drank it, swallowed a bottle of Xanax, and cut my arms, wrists, and stomach with a razor blade. My last conscious thought was of the soft grass, peaceful setting, and the realization that death was coming. Sometime early the next morning I became aware that I was in a hospital. An ICU nurse told me a park employee had found me, called 911 and that I was rushed to the hospital. I remember thinking, "How dare he interfere".

Once again I had failed. Why? Out of my despair came a voice telling me "I am saving you for something better." I did not understand, but I had the thought "Great, more pain and suffering". But it was my last suicide attempt. Somehow knowing someone cared enough to intervene affected me. I was never able to thank the man in the park, but I will forever be thankful he had the courage to act on my behalf. I finally felt hope for my future, and I believe I can be that "someone" in the life of another person who is struggling. My role may be just to listen to someone's story and provide support and encouragement.

# Recovery is My Hope

by Daniel Gamez, CRSS

Hope is a very powerful thing to me and in my training as a CRSS. My hope is to be a blessing to the clients that I will come into contact with. What makes me qualified as a CRSS is my life in recovery. The 26 years that I served in prison has prepared me for the ins, outs, ups and downs I've had to encounter. It's not me, but Christ who lives within, that will receive all the credit. "Having faith is believing in the things I hope for, and the things I can't see". Everything I have experienced while being here with the instructors John, Stephanie, and Beverly has been such a blessing. I have learned so much, and I am beyond grateful to have been able to be a part of this team. The light of hope that I first saw was on January 5th 2016. It came in the form of being pulled over by law enforcement. I was taken to jail, and put out of my comfort zone. If it wasn't for that police officer, I would have made decisions that I would have regretted for the rest of my life. Instead, God had a different plan for me, and here I am.



# Working Gave Me Hope

by Genevieve Bravo, CRSS

Working at The Primavera Foundation gave me a new lease on life. It gave me back my dignity and confidence. The staff and my coworkers were very caring and empathetic. It made me feel good that I could work and people could depend on me. It was a turning point for me because I was productive, and it made me feel good.

Working made me feel more in control of myself, and boosted my self-esteem. Being productive helps with my mental illness because it allows me to build stamina. I felt better mentally, therefore I was able to focus. It helped me to not feel so hopeless. It gave me hope and the resilience I needed. It gave me the ambition to want to achieve more.



# My Moment of Hope

by Seana Kelly, CRSS

Hope became a realization for me in November 2009, when I finally made the decision to seek help and figure out what was happening to me emotionally. After reaching out and getting diagnosed, I had hope of feeling “normal” again and of being able to move forward with my life. To be able to continue with all the things that are important to me - work, school, relationships with family and friends, and the chance of a healthy relationship with a boyfriend. I had hope now that my family might be able to understand and possibly relate to the things I had been struggling with, things that I hadn’t been sure of what they were myself.

I am lucky to have a best friend and a former boss who cared enough about me to help me seek out the resources to receive behavioral health services. They were both helpful and supportive in assisting me to take that first step towards finding the help I needed at SAMHC. This point in time was a turning point in my life which has helped me to have hope, and has helped me expand my role as a person with a mental illness. I have been able to live my life and be a stable and productive person, as well as be able to handle my mental illness in a better way.

If it wasn’t for my support system at the time of my diagnosis, I’m not sure where I would



be currently. Being able to have hope is also how I was able to apply for and attend this class. I have come a long way since 2009. I have been able to live by myself and be more financially responsible since 2010, as well as becoming independent and self-sufficient.

# Hope

by Jonathan Rivera, CRSS



Hope is very elusive and strange, and an awkward thing to find. Most people do not have it. That is what I told myself growing up. I realized that some things made me feel good, and so I would hope for those things. Little did I know they would soon send me on a journey I would never forget. My hope was simply for acceptance; what I didn't realize is that I didn't even accept myself. I was rejected as a child many times. I sexually, physically, and emotionally abused. I began to believe that I was unacceptable to all, and if you did accept me it was because you wanted something from me.

What had seemed to be a 20-year endless cycle of unacceptance and rejection from others turned out to be rejection of myself. What was I scared of inside me, what would happen if they knew, and who could possibly love me after that? In 2006 I was told that I would need to stop polluting my body with chemicals, because my mental health symptoms were very complicated and not easy to identify. I did so for a brief time.

In 2008 I was diagnosed with Schizoaffective disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Severe PTSD, Chemical Dependency, and 10 second onset of Panic. I spent endless nights researching these illnesses and monitoring my symptoms. I was finally able find some relief after an amazing self-discovery. I learned that my audio hallucinations were distortions from a chemical imbalance in my inner ear. That somehow when my ear received vibrations like the sound of someone's voice and sent them to the chemicals in my brain, there was a mix up and I wasn't getting the right message. I also learned why I became good at reading lips, body language, and facial expressions so well.

It was right then that I began to feel a sense hope. I thought I might be able to fix things. Since then I have attended many self-help groups, classes, seminars, and trainings on substance use and mental health and wellness. I read many books, articles, and short stories on living with a serious mental illness. After entering recovery on March 5th, 2014, I have accepted my mental illness and continue to hope for acceptance as I humbly accept others. I am still learning to love myself, and I found out that I am a compassionate, gentle, sensitive human with hope for all of us.



# Letter of Hope

by Stephen Romans, CRSS

I was sitting alone in the smoking area at the Pima Reentry Center (PRC). I had begun taking my antidepressants again for the umpteenth time. I was getting ready for a psych evaluation for an S.M.I. determination. I had a moment of clarity, what I call my AHA! moment. I realized I have bipolar disorder! I had been around it all my life.

Seeing people who refused to accept help and refused to believe their diagnosis. Suddenly, I knew that was me! I'm that guy! Once I accepted that booze wasn't the problem, it was just how I dealt with my actual problem, there was such an incredible peace that came over me. I looked back at my childhood and it was so clear why I started drinking and getting high. I have been in recovery before, but now I am treating the cause and not the symptom.



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## "Hope For Me"

by Rene Esquivel, CRSS

I had come to a point in my life where I could no longer function as a human being. I struggled to do even the simplest of tasks. I was stuck in my drug addiction.

When I was young, the world was mine. Now as I had grown older, I found I had become useless. In my life I had developed many skills, but now I could not keep up with my life.

I held a loaded 9mm in my mouth, crying, because I realized my entire life added up to nothing. I had no reason to live. I had never married, never had children, no career, no retirement, no reason to get out of bed. I was so ready to pull the trigger. I could almost smell the gun powder of my freedom.

At that moment, my higher power spoke to me in a loving voice, as he always did. He told me, "One more time." I took the gun out of my mouth. I didn't like the taste of metal. I knew what he meant. Take that energy I used to get high, and put the same effort into getting help. Do all I can to get help, and never stop. Right then my heart felt a glimmer of hope. My higher power would take care of all my



needs and I could concentrate on getting better. The better I felt, the more I realized that I would find my true happiness in helping others.

# Hope is Most Valuable!

by Sergio Murguia, CRSS

My experience with hope is related to recovery. It happened at age 32 when I started attending a 12 step program for emotions, and after living with a behavioral condition that impeded me from living a normal life since I was a child. I didn't know I was different. I hid my feelings and doubts for fear of rejection or being deemed crazy. I tried the 12 step program not because I liked it or had hope, but because I didn't think there was an answer for me.

After a few weeks of attending meetings, I started realizing the similarities of life experiences among the people whom were already declared members, and myself. It almost sounded as if they had prepared an act to convince me. Later I learned how many people had that same thought. I think that was the first time I had experienced hope as an adult, and in a way that really made a difference. Today, more than 25 years after that experience, I see that hope is something that happens mostly after facing life challenges with the personal capacity to manage them.

Hope might be the most valuable feeling when I am feeling beaten up by circumstances, or even by the regular sense of helplessness that I have carried since childhood. It is knowing that things will be all right regardless of the outcome. It is the belief like the one I had for the first time at age 32 - that the best times were yet to come, and that now I can testify to and for myself that it has been so.





## A Hope and a Future

by Rae Henderson, CRSS

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."(Jeremiah 29:11 NLT)

I was raised in a small town named Hope, by my Granny who would sing and pray as she did household chores. She never passed up an opportunity to remind me that if I had Jesus, I had hope.

After struggling with depression, a diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder, and a 12 year battle with methamphetamines, I decided that it was time to change. I cut all ties with the drug world, and four months later after hitting rock bottom, I petitioned myself in order to get the help and medications that I needed. At that time, I learned that there is an agency in town called Hope Inc., and I knew I was in the right place. I chose to get the help I needed. I have chosen to stay sober for 17 months. And I've returned to my first love, Jesus.

Thank you, Granny.



## Hope

by Habib Moutran, CRSS

Hope became a reality when the legal system gave me the opportunity to rehabilitate my substance use disorders. As a result, I came to the realization that "rock bottoms" come in different forms. My loss of freedom, overdose, loss of work - none of it was enough for me to stop and get the help I needed. The way I was living my life had become my "normal".

This went on until I was in the predicament of losing my children due to my addiction. That was my rock bottom, my moment of despair, that with time turned into hope. I was given an opportunity to begin my road to recovery, to begin a new life, and recover what I had lost over time. This road led me to where I am today by the grace of God. It is a road that I look forward to faithfully and full of hope, this opportunity to help others.

# Hope Gave Me a Fighting Chance

by John Robinkoff, CRSS

In the beginning, there was this driving mechanism, behind the shadows of my mental illness and episodes of drug use. I tried resolving the issues that existed in my chaotic life. Then I was sent to prison. That was when I found out that I have a mental illness. I was given medication. The medication began working, and I started noticing a difference in my life. It was there that I felt I still had a fighting chance: HOPE. To me it was a great breakthrough. It was then that I realized why I was using street drugs. At that point I noticed I had more control of my life. Today, I continue to move ahead.



# Hope is the Determination to Change for the Better

by Melanie Trujillo, CRSS

I had my daughter at 18 years old, earned my bachelor's degree, had a job, a house, and a car. I thought I had control. I was hiding my addiction, self-medicating to treat Bipolar disorder. In 2012, I lost everything. I gave birth in jail and spent 2 years in prison. This was followed by intensive probation; now standard probation for 5 years.

I hurt those I love the most, especially my daughter. I knew that I had to change for my family. Despite all of my challenges, I have a lot of motivation and perseverance toward the goal of getting my daughter back. I'm patiently waiting, doing the right thing with the hope and belief that one day all my hard work will pay off, and my family will be reunited.



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Workforce  
Development News

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**Rita Romero**  
EDITOR

**Patricia Philbin,**  
DESIGN

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

Visit Our Website at:

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

## **Workforce Development Program**

1450 North Cherry Avenue #203, Tucson AZ 85719

(520) 626-7473

Fax (520) 626-7833

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### **Trainers**

**John Anglin**, LSAT, CRSS

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

**Rita Romero**, CRSS, CFSP

**Stephanie Tellez**, CRSS

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### **Program Director**

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

### **Administrative Associate**

**Vanessa Larios**

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