

# Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Tucson, Arizona November 8, 2018



## Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduates

*Back Row left to right:*

Jerret Larsen, Cara Williamson, Norma McCann, Alexandra Durazo, Fernando Inclan, Mark Villagran

*Middle Row left to right:*

Isaac Banks, Amy Finkelstein, Brandi McCormick, Stephen Hughes, Michael Arinello

*Front Row left to right:*

Ivonne Lopez, Bianca Ramirez, Maria Minichiello



## **Poem**, by Cara Williamson, CRSS

*Little white light burning deep inside  
my soul.*

*Breathing, surviving, growing.*

*Once small and avoidable, trapped beneath the sludge and opaque din  
of joy.*

*Resting in the dark, unable to see past its own shadow.*

*Caught in a net of depression. Trapped inside by fear  
and left to survive on its own.*

*But then*

*A hand of Peace reaches out.*

*A hand of Life and Laughter.*

*A simple gesture but meaning all.*

*Someone, a helper, sent in to save the day.*

*Bringing others to see my light.*

*People who care, people who understand, people who listen.*

*People who see my tiny light but appearing to them as  
a GREAT flame.*

*Then seeking solace in my own mind, knowing I am greater than my head.*

*Greater than my heart. Greater than my diagnosis,  
adding tinder along the way.*

*Suddenly floating, no longer weighed down by  
unhelpful unkind  
thoughts.*

*Floating to the helpers reaching into the great depth, pulling life ashore.*

*Growing flame larger.*

*Knowing I am not alone.*

*Homebound for living and healing.*

*Wanting to be the hand of peace, of life after, of recovery.*

*Reaching and pulling to life and laughter.*

*The light, no longer small.*

**GRAND      GIANT                      INCREASING**

*Embers always finding more to reach, more to catch  
allowing peace to be shared.*

*Igniting joy and love from within.*



# An Extraordinary Life

Cara Williamson, CRSS



FOR RILEY, may you never doubt your individual worth in this world.

Once, there was a girl. She had many feelings. Some were big and some were small. Some lasted only a little while and some lasted a long time. Some of the feelings made her feel light and airy, like a big balloon. Some made her feel heavy, like she was always wearing a big winter coat in the summer. Her parents told her all feelings were good feelings but as she grew up, society told her that wasn't true. This little

girl learned that people didn't like to hear about feelings that were big and heavy. They especially didn't like to hear about those kind of feelings when they lasted a long time. Soon the girl figured out that to keep her friends and keep other people from feeling heavy, she had to only feel light feelings. Always a balloon, never a coat. So that's how she grew up. Years and years passed until one day a very special someone else who understood about her feelings and listened to her feelings' story told her that all her feelings; the fluffy light ones that made her feel warm and tingly AND the hard and heavy ones that made her feel empty and lost; were all okay feelings to have. In fact, all the different kinds of feelings helped the girl see the world in a creative and special way. She was told that not everyone is lucky enough to have all the thoughts and experiences that she had, and that one day she would be able to help so many other people feel not so alone. The little girl, who was by now, a quite big girl, soon learned how to help control her feelings so she could feel airy for a longer time and heavier for a shorter time. She knew what a hard road she had ahead of her, but thanks to that very special person who gave her such a special gift, she wasn't afraid. In fact, she decided to take a class and go to school to learn how to be a very special person who listens and understands how others feel. And in her heart, that big girl knew it was just the beginning to her extraordinary life.



# Hope

Alexandra Durazo, CRSS



Would I say that HOPE came easy for me? Definitely not. A year ago, the word wasn't even in my vocabulary. I was in that deep dark hole, where no one and nothing could reach me. Don't get me wrong, I wanted to get out. But no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't. It was like quicksand, trying to climb out. The harder I climbed, the more I slid deeper and deeper down. I was so depressed and so tired that eventually the darkness became my protector and I didn't want to leave. Leaving meant facing the pain and facing the fact I would probably never see my granddaughter and daughter again.

I could not bear facing that hurt, the hurt that sent me to the darkness to begin with. Every single day, my husband and my son unconditionally stood by me while I sank deeper. While I cried and isolated myself, they never gave up on me. For seven long months they held me up, they encouraged me, they listened to me, and they sat with me. I saw the pain of their faces when they looked at me, and I knew they were worried about me. How could I do this to them? They loved me so much, yet I was letting myself shrink away and stop living. I wanted my life to end when my daughter and granddaughter walked out of our lives. I still have my husband and son. I then realized how much I still had in this world.

Little by little, the quicksand started disappearing and I was able to climb out of my dark hole. I started feeling HOPE that maybe I did have something to live for, maybe I was worthy of being loved. And I started feeling HOPE that maybe, in time, my daughter would realize she missed me and she would come around and bring my granddaughter to see me. Without the unconditional love and support of my husband and my son, I am not sure I would have found HOPE. There are still days when I am very sad, and I need that push to get going, but the darkness doesn't consume me anymore. And I still hold out HOPE that my daughter and granddaughter will be in my life once again.



## Carry On

Mark Villagran, CRSS

Hope to me is being able to have a second lease on life. After being towards the brink of death earlier this year, it definitely broadened my horizon in how I view life. Being able to live again provided me with the belief that life is only 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. Taking each day, including what happens in it, on a daily basis and carrying on from there is definitely what keeps me moving forward. When I began my journey of recovery this year, it was clear to me that in order to further help myself in my prolonged journey, I must assist others in need to expand my toolkit on life. It is more than just taking a course or class, but our shared life experiences and simply listening to someone's problems is truly what can help us further understand one another..



## Courage and Hope to Speak

Jerret Larsen, CRSS

I don't pray for religion, I pray for hope. I pray for the people, like me that can cope. I pray that someday they won't have to smoke, to be able to cope with life as it stands and not as a joke. I pray for the moments a hunger in fear, I pray to God to make them disappear. I ask does god hear? Is he a friend to me? Will I ever achieve this serenity the preacher preaches about so persistently? Or will my desperation embrace insanity. I have felt perpetually stuck in a state of tragedy! Because life keeps happening! Bombs keep dropping, blades keep stabbing, guns keep blasting, but life stops lasting. This war within the states with stakes so high it's amazing, most society remains blind to drugs and stigmas destroying people's lives. It's a problem we all see, but there's only a select few of us with the courage and hope to speak!





# Finding Hope

Amy Finkelstein, CRSS



HOPE means different things to different people. To me HOPE stands for Healing Optimistic Perseverance and Encouragement. I began to experience HOPE when I qualified for Vocational Rehabilitation services. I thought, "Could I possibly start working again?" Then I was told about Camp Wellness.

There I was introduced to a program about building self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth by classes focused around healthy lifestyles. I thought, "Could I improve my self to the point that I experience success again?"

At the end of 2017, after switching agencies, I began to receive services at Banner Whole Health Clinic. My case manager, therapist and psychiatrist helped me to find my inner strength. They encouraged all thought and possibilities that I had about my future. I began to feel that I was getting back what was taken from me. I thought, "Am I really imagining a new outlook on life?" I continued to explore options with my Vocational Rehabilitation coach. I discovered a grant and a program with Pima Community College and Workforce Development called HPOG (Health Professions Opportunity Grant) HOPES (Health careers Opportunities with Personalized Educational Supports). I thought, "Were my dreams becoming a reality?" I was entering a training program that will prepare me to work in a medical facility. I finally found HOPE: Healing from trauma; Optimistic about my future; Perseverance to keep going and strive to be the best me; and Encouragement from my family and others.



# Bring Hope Through My Story

Angelica Allen, CRSS

The dragon snaking its body in fitful curls on my ceiling had fiery red eyes and was less Game of Thrones valor and more Chinese folklore terror. Its tail was barbed, its flicking and flashing obscuring the dim red light from the fire alarm. I was pinned to my bed, too terrified to stand up and turn on the light, just knowing it would attack if I crept out of the covers. I preferred to rest in my paralysis, staring with wide eyes as his head lowered to my level, nostrils puffing rings of smoke into my face as a throaty growl threatened to devour me. Still, I preferred to see dragons over the phantom figures seeking my soul with skeleton fingers from the night before.

The hallucinations of a mixed manic state were riveting. Terrifying. Enticing. During the day I was slaying the dragons of reality by making profound impressions on big-time publishing editors and winning contests at one of the most prestigious writer conferences in the USA. I had gained a notable award, interviews with agents, a self-inflicted scar of DARE on my upper leg with my sharpest pocket knife, a red blazing declaration to the demons on my ceiling, and an impulsive plane ticket purchase at 11 pm for a 6 am flight to San Diego to visit my best friend.

A 9-hour sex marathon, two lines of cocaine, and a night of running on the beach led to the next morning of a mind overwhelmed with anger, confusion, and denial as I grabbed for Dean's screwdrivers to stab into my heart. He tackled me to the bed, wresting the tool from my grasp. I slipped away to lock myself

in the bathroom and he broke down the door, splinters flying, stripping away the razors before I could break them from his shaver. I ran to the kitchen and a moment later he was forcing my mouth open to sweep out the Klonopin like from the mouth of a dog who had snagged the chicken bones from the dinner plate.

Hallucinations. Awards. Cutting. Impulsive spending. Spontaneous travel. Sexcapade. Drugs. Suicidal Ideations.

The rollercoaster ride of bipolar disorder, all captured in a week-long tempest.

The next two days I spent in a stupor, met a surfing Ron Jeremy on the beach when I wandered there to cry, who gave me a sand dollar he had found that I cherish to this day. Dean hardly knew what to do with me.

A week later I was essentially a Maid of Honor at my childhood crush's sister's wedding and planning sweet moments for her and her husband. I pulled the car to the side of the road before reaching the venue, sobbing into my hands, and called Dean. I had explained my exasperation and he knew well how despondent I was to face a world falling apart – again. Again, I was failing. Half of my adult life lay in dusty, jagged ruins encircling the high points.

"50%," he said. "Angel, you can be an amazing, on-point, machine of wonder excelling through life with flying colors, 50% of the time. Then just fight to get back on top when you're down in the lower 50%. But you know you

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# Priceless Trust and Support

Isaac Banks, CRSS

HOPE is like the light at the end of the tunnel. You can't see it, but you know it's there; invisibly hovering around me like my guardian angel, watching my back.

I catch myself saying I hope I can do this, I hope I can do that, when in retrospect, what I should have been saying is I WILL DO THAT!

It's a thin line between wanting something and getting what you want, and all I ever wanted was a hopeful, can do attitude toward sustained recovery.

For me, it is my wife Ivy who made me realize what I had been missing my whole life. My addiction had taken over every aspect of my life. It had sucked all the love and life out of me. I was alone, lost and hopeless. I know now that my behavior was the definition of helplessness.

HOPE. IVY got me to believe again, she gave me HOPE. Without even knowing, having her unconditional support and trust in me is priceless. All she did was believe in me and love me unconditionally.



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## Bring Hope Through My Story, by Angelica Allen, continued...

will always cycle back up. Be present. Be there. Be great for that 50%."

That gave me hope. That was the true moment of hope, as he reframed my words, validated my emotions, and reflected my self-awareness. My bipolar disorder may grind me down, bring me close to the brink, deny me my "supposed to have beens" – but, 50% of the time, I can excel. I can make great things happen. I can build wonderful, lasting impact, and make changes in a world that I can't otherwise control. I can be an example of that excellence to others. I have lived on 4 continents, worked in East

Africa, learned 5 languages, built a soccer club with MLS players, and written 11 novels. I ride dirt bikes, skateboard with my Siberian Husky, explore National Parks, advocate for mental healthcare, play with blowdart guns, am fearless in love, and keep track of my familial tribe of awesome engineers and artists. I have value.

I can bring hope through my story in the storm. Four years after the realization of hope, I still hold to that, because I know, even when I am in the worst places of my illness, I can just wait, just hold on, just DARE and just HOPE and BE BRAVE and I will be back on top before long. I am tenacious. I am strong. I am hopeful.



# Hope: My Guiding Hand, My Driving Force

Brandi McCormick, CRSS



After spending a lifetime making the wrong choices and trying to escape reality, I had become a slave to drug addiction. One wrong turn followed the next on what seemed to be an endless cycle, when finally the inevitable happened. I found myself in

trouble with the law in a big way. It was clear for anyone to see that my life was in total chaos and I had lost all self-control. I had hit rock bottom. As it turns out, rock bottom just so happens to be the very best place addicts can find themselves. I knew if I didn't overcome my addictions and build a new life then I would end up in prison or worse, dead.

With the help of my loving boyfriend, my family, and the entire community of wonderful people at Arizona Rehab Campus (ARC), I took my first steps on a journey towards recovery. I began to have faith in myself during my 49 day stay in rehab. My newly found faith turned into hope. Together, faith and hope became the recipe for self-empowerment which I had never experienced before. Today (one year after rock bottom), that same faith and hope have continued to be the guiding hand and driving force of my recovery. I finally have a life worth living, and I have found so much happiness in it. I am eternally grateful to everyone who has helped me turn my life around. A very special thank you to the team at ARC and to my case worker, Trevor, with ACTS. Without their support I could not have made it this far.



## Alive and Better!

Norma "Tia" McCann, CRSS

My hope began with my first hospitalization (the first of two) and diagnosis of Bipolar/Depression, as well as PTSD. That was 8-10 years ago. Recently I was informed that my diagnosis had been changed to Multiple Personality Disorder with PTSD. In any event, I entered treatment and therapy, which I continue today. During this time I have learned to understand my disease and symptoms, while navigating the behavioral health system and services. I acquired tools, information and medication to maintain and improve my symptoms. I also learned to advocate for programs that I was interested in as well. Start Today and Camp Wellness were the most important for me.

I attended Cycle 23 of the Camp Wellness Program. While attending the program I acquired more tools for life skills and a healthy lifestyle. I used those important tools to get through my battle with two types of cancer simultaneously and my chemotherapy treatment journey. It was a Godsend!

My current lifestyle embodies, and has surpassed what I thought were limitations in my life. I have accomplished some goals since that time. I successfully trained as a Facilitator for a local program sponsored by Pima County Initiative "Ending Poverty



Now", and graduated my 1st class of students Sept 27, 2018. I attended, and will complete the RSS Institute Training Program. I am also currently enrolled and taking classes to enter U of A to earn a Bachelor's Degree in Family Studies to become a Dialectic Behavioral Therapist.

I am very grateful to those who helped me along the way. Titles didn't capture your importance! Thank you all. I am alive and better because of you! Be Blessed.



# Hope is Everything

Bianca Ramirez, CRSS



This four-letter word is more than just a word; it's everything! Hope is defined as a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen. It is one of the most powerful feelings a human can experience because it strengthens the faith and will in a person. Sometimes, it's hard to maintain hope in situations. It can seem like the odds are greatly against you, and you become uncertain that the desired outcome will happen. But in those situations is when hope becomes the most important thing to have.

Unlike most of (maybe all) my peers participating in this program, I'm very new to the behavioral health system. I started receiving services in the late summer of this year. I was very hesitant to seek help for fear of not being heard or being misunderstood, and possibly be given forced treatments that wouldn't work for me. I started going to my appointments, still with reluctance, and wasn't getting the outcome I was expecting. However, my recovery coach saw something in me that I had overlooked. My desire and passion to understand & help people. She suggested I was a good candidate and recommended that I participate in this training program. So I applied for it and began attending.

It was through this training program that I experienced the greatest hope. Over the course of 4 weeks, this program taught me several approaches and methods to help overcome mental health disorders, substance use disorders, and co-occurring disorders. One significant lesson I learned was that hope is essential for recovery - have hope that I will find a method that works for me and that I will get better! Another significant lesson I learned was to advocate for myself - address my concerns to my recovery/treatment team to get the help I want! These lessons became the catalyst to the restoration in my drive for life.

A third lesson that resonated with me immensely was that healing happens in relationships. Being able to hear everyone in class share stories about their experiences, how they advocated for themselves, and about their journeys in recovery was so inspiring to my own

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# I Have Hope

Ivonne Lopez, CRSS

I remember my eyelids being so heavy that I could barely keep my eyes open. I couldn't even tell you when the last time I had a full nights rest was. I don't even remember the last time I sat down to have a meal. Every time I would hear my phone ring, I would feel my jaw clench and the back of my neck would cringe with uncertainty. Was it over? Had I finally plunged to the point of no return? HOPE...Is there still hope for me, hope for the lost and hope for the broken?

YES! Deep inside I heard this whisper, this deep unprecedented tone that just pierced my soul. I could feel it going through me, and the pressure just building up with intensity just waiting to be let out. Louder and louder it got, until there was no mistaking what needed to be done. **STAND UP AND STOP. HOPE.....I WILL KEEP FIGHTING BECAUSE I HAVE HOPE, HOPE THAT IT WILL ALL GET BETTER!**



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## Hope is Everything by Bianca Ramirez, continued...

recovery and instilled strong hope in me. In connecting with my peers and being open with each other about our experiences, I realized that another way my recovery is possible is to connect with other people. I always thought that for me to get better, I had to do it all on my own. But I had very little success in that, because I didn't ask for help, nor did I reach out to others who were experiencing something similar to my experience. As humans, we thrive on the connection with others. And to build a stronger and more collaborative community, we must be willing to open our minds, hearts, and ears to those who need that support.

I am extremely grateful to have been able to participate in this amazing learning opportunity with my peers. Because of this

training program, I learned to have hope. Now I am hopeful that I will apply what I've learned to my own life. I am hopeful that I will have the courage to ask for help when I need it. I am hopeful that I will build and maintain a healthy support system. I am hopeful that I will advocate for myself when necessary. I am hopeful that I will recover. I am hopeful that I will connect on a deeper, genuine level with individuals. I am hopeful that I will support individuals who need support. I am hopeful that I will help provide the resources and tools to individuals to help themselves. I am hopeful that I will become a great Recovery Support Specialist.



# Thankful

Adria Powles, CRSS

When I was 19 years old I landed my first job in behavioral health, where I met Dr. Tena Moyer. On one random day she said “Can you come see me in my office please?” I approached her office with anxiety but sat down with a smile. She asked what I wanted to do with my future, where did I see myself. I was puzzled by the conversation and I really didn’t know the answer to her questions. But then she proceeded to tell me that she believed I could “do more”, and she would pay for me to go to college!

I was a young girl from the south side of Tucson, who was too brown to have friends with blond hair and too white to fit in with the Hispanic girls who spoke Spanish. My dad was spun out in a drug haze until my mid-twenties. I was a teen mother, and at 19 years, my child was already three years of age. I was a college dropout; my family had parted ways with me for making poor choices and my future was very unclear. Therefore, I couldn’t believe what Dr. Tena Moyer was saying to me and I did not want to let her or myself down! Dr. Moyer gave me hope. She gave me hope that I could be somebody. I am thankful for those who want to lift up the people around them and pass on the spirit of hope.



# Paying Forward the Blessings

Stephen Hughes, CRSS

Head injuries, head games, head shops, and headaches were the order of the day by the time those 2 planes flew through the walls of the twin towers; incinerating everything the jet fuel pouring out of their wings encountered. It was a perfect metaphor for my life thus far. Three children and two marriages after a promising youth, my own house was in disarray, and the walls of same were collapsing around me with no end to the carnage in sight. Evidence that the winter of my discontent was rearing its ugly head became clear as crystal as I watched the face of my baby girl in the back windshield of her mother's Buick heading west 1000 miles from our home of several years, now laid waste by Ivan, Dennis, and Katrina, ...Rita having missed by just a few hundred miles.

My options seemed limited as my age began to catch up with the rubble which had become my life.

I gathered what was left into a duffle bag and stepped out of the frying pan and into the fire. My heart laid waste by the absence of my daughter as the depression and the bi-polar disorder kept at bay for decades surfaced like a growing cancer, hiding in the woodwork my entire life, now set free like some leviathan.

I lost all pretense of rational thought. Self-medication became rote activity as I began to lose my self-worth and all esteem I had stored up on my own behalf for accomplishments and abilities now nothing more than hazy untold memories no-one in this new world knew or cared about.

No contact allowed me my with my daughter; as my ex quickly engaged, by way of manipulation, my mother's purse. This relieving her of child support worries with me and therefore alleviating the need to hunt me down and risk the courts ordering Habeus Corpus (present



the body). I had no money for family court as it was, and pursued her through social media, still fledgling at that time, and any free services the legal system offered. My depression grew, I found myself in fits of rage for no reason. New friends were all found at bars and a diet of Vodka, vitamin C, and Cocaine kept me in the Kitchens of Phoenix getting by, until September of 2008. Then the bottom fell out.

I lost the car I had financed to replace the one Katrina dropped a tree on, due to the lack of work coming through the hospitality industries finest staffing agencies. The flow of money in my industry had come to a complete and total standstill for any who had not permanent positions in very stable companies kept aloft by the rich and shameless who frequented them even through the worst of the financial storm ravaging the nation.

Through a series of events including a flight to Alaska where I was swindled out of a month of life by a hotel owner looking for free labor in the Nations time of strife. I boarded a plane in Juneau and found my feet in the warm and dusty historical city of Tucson. Soon after I

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## Paying Forward the Blessings by Stephen Hughes, continued...

was beaten badly while living on the street looking for work, and ended up in hospital for several days.

I was released with minor injuries and determined to put things back on track,.... right after I got a beer to cool my palate in this dry and seemingly cold hearted place. It is how the disease works you. It is how the disease finds your weak spot; twisting the temptation until you grasp for your last practical thought and fail to latch on, falling back each time into the pit from whence your last sober thought may have come, if ever.

Tucson's basic business model didn't offer much help. Devoid of decent housing, honest landlords, and ethical business people working towards a better city for all, Tucson raised new and, seemingly, insurmountable obstacles for my already broken and battered existence. The raping of the land and its population for whatever booty they could garner, Tucson's prominent business community's model depends, in my humble opinion, almost entirely on the government, through food stamp programs, Disability checks, and the 100s of millions in student loan monies pouring into the U of A and surrounding mini schools. Woe was I.

It was in 2009 I found gainful employment with a restaurant in midtown owned by a lady who had been a waitress at the place for many years before getting up the finances and the gumption to buy the place. It was a good fit for a minute, and then I allowed the booze to gain a foothold in my life again. A momentary lapse of reason one might say. My thoughts of getting back together with my daughter had begun to fade and haunt me deeply. The guilt of ceasing to care and finding myself feeling free of responsibility had the dual affect of liberty and prison all at once. I wanted to be

the hero, the movie character who sweeps in with an AK 47 and wipes out the bad guys who stole his kids, I began to develop real and dangerous thoughts and behaviors surrounding the pain and anguish of not knowing where she was and fighting the urge to hurt someone or something because of it. Largely a social creature by nature, my need for companionship had truly taken over my need to be civil. I frequented bars and drank far beyond my capacity daily, throwing caution to the wind, I regularly drove inebriated, often with no insurance, and no conscious understanding of how damaging I could have been with my car.

It was late in 2009 I finally took the step to go to COPE and get evaluated. The results were stunning and fearful. I had no idea there were words with so many letters which could apply to my sanity, or lack of it. I entered a one on one therapy and stuck with it for about 9 months. Robert, my therapist, finally told me his door was open to me any time but that due to the great need, others must be serviced. He said that I had the tools and the strength to pursue recovery if I chose to. He advised me to stay abreast of my disease with groups and meetings and medication and I followed his advice. There were years of hurt, tears, failures and relapses to follow but little by little I would make headway in the mud and crawl closer and closer to dry land where I could then get a grip on the true healing that was to come. Hope had finally made an appearance, and I recognized as a good and strengthening feeling. I spent the next five years working hard on my addictions, my bi-polar issues, and my grief.

In January of 2016 I packed up my dog Tosh, a staple of my recovery, and headed up to the Coconino Forest just east of Flagstaff AZ. It was there that my dog and I engaged the Thoreau philosophy and made our own Walden. The camping was hard at times, the elements bitter through some months, but never as hard as those mornings after had been. For more than

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## Paying Forward the Blessings by Stephen Hughes, continued...

10 months the forest offered us a symphony of soothing wild noises, and silent friends who visited our camp often with no malice or obtuse intention at all. I continued a path of recovery including meetings and groups, slipping in and out of Flagstaff, Payson and Pine. I would drive into Payson or Flagstaff, several times some weeks and receive services from Southwest Behavioral Health. I became a regular at the 8 am AA meeting there on Hwy 89 in Payson, and even did some odd jobs to supplement my SSI and keep our campsite well stocked with the latest mountain man tools. The growth I experience during this adventure was nothing less than phenomenal, a result of many things. The people I had allowed to help shape my future in Tucson, as well as the sheer love that the Lord God has shown me through all this mess. The hedge of protection I have enjoyed against the elements, and the evil of people who would do less than love me and respect my needs. The constant reminders of what is important; and what is not; through the traditions of AA, and readings I have engaged in the Bible, and countless handouts from group facilitators at COPE, and SW Behavioral Health combined to bring sunshine and water to the roots of my recovery, pushing me up from the muck into a new stage of life more healthy and productive than I could ever have imagined.

I left Tosh my 15 lb. Terrier with some lady friends in Payson who adored and needed him greatly, to come back to Tucson in October of 17. His days going quickly by, he needed to settle in where he could sleep under the sheets and get a spa treatment once a month. I am sure he dreams of the forest and the many mysteries and adventures we encountered there. My friends keep me abreast of his

general health and wellbeing, and Facebook with me often. Tosh is like a pig in mud. I miss him, but my thoughts are always joyous when I think of how his life has come full circle through my addictions and then my recovery and being able to get his wild side tested and nurtured in the forest like most domestic animals will never know. He is safe now, and loved, as am I.

Returning to Tucson I made plans to continue paying forward the blessings I have received in my recovery to others. I am involved with Our Place Clubhouse as an active member, and I still attend a group at least once a week down at my new provider: CODAC, another mental health entity here in Tucson. This past winter I took several classes on critical thinking from University of Phoenix and am presently taking a course in business communication and another one in retail management from Gila County CC where tuition is free for people who have reached my ripe old age. I am part of an open forum Bible discussion Sunday mornings where we either meet in person or gather by multiphone technology and Skype to discuss God and praise him for his blessings. It takes all of this to keep me together, but I love every minute of it. There is nothing in this world that would make me want to go back to the old self medication horrors I endured at my own hand, but I know that lurking in the depths of my mind exist the seeds of destruction that only need a drop of vodka or an incoherent path of irrational thought to germinate, and grow into the evil it was and the war it made on my life once again, and in doing so destroy everything I have built. So, I resolve to continue here, in the place of solace, which is my love for self, (non narcissic) God the Almighty, and the friends who keep me honest. I know that doing for others, and giving of myself, my time, my wealth, and my energy, is the only way to stay alive, the only way to keep the monster a bay.



# Life is Only Going To Get Better

Mike "Sunny" Arinello, CRSS

My name is Michael Arinello. I go by Sunny, and I'm 31 years old. This is supposed to be an essay on hope. How it has played a role in my life. When I was first asked to write this paper, I said to myself "This'll be no problem". Then I started thinking "Man, why can I only remember the times I have spent hopeless; I know the drive the desperation of hopelessness has played, but how has hope driven me?" So I started really thinking. Then I came to realize that it was always a combination of hope and hopelessness. I needed the hopelessness in order to have hope. For me it was something that took work. I believe that you cannot truly appreciate the light without the darkness. Therefore, I could not experience hope without the rock bottom. It played a huge role in my recovery. Hope was the only thing that kept me going. There were times I wanted to give up on life. There were times I was ready to accept that I was going to die a drug addict death, but the hope never let me quite give up all the way. The hope in the idea of being happy and having a "normal" life.

Things took a dramatic turn though. In April 2016, I was incarcerated. I was given a two and a half year sentence for violation of probation to the department of corrections. That's when everything changed, and hope took on a whole new meaning. Like "I hope they don't lock the yard down", "I hope my family answers the phone", "I hope I don't get stabbed today.", "I hope I make it home to my family." "I hope nothing happens to my family." In prison, these are all real life fears. Prison is an alternate reality; you are closed off to the world. You only have hope for the next second, minute, hour, day, week, month, then finally year. You hold on to as much human as you can in hopes of not becoming too institutionalized. Then you are free and see the light. Then life hits you.



But I'm lucky; I met someone who showed me that I can love myself. That's what made me want to be sober. Someone believed in me and had enough hope in me that I could be successful. I finally believed it and I knew I could do it. I also knew I wanted to help people. I know there are people who feel like me, who need a little bit of hope. Just someone to say "I understand, I've been there. I know it may not seem like it now but there is hope. It gets better, hang on." I know hope has saved my life and helped me with recovery. I still have hope today that life is only going to get better. I know that it will if I keep on the path I'm on and use the skills I have been taught through not only life, but those I have learned in this amazing Workforce Development Program. I know I want to help people. I want to spread the word of recovery.



# Hope, an Undeniable Force

Maria Minichiello, CRSS



Hope...I struggle daily finding hope when I am deep in my depression. For me hope is like air, water, food, love; necessary to and for my survival. What is attached to hope is an undeniable force in my life, allowing me to place one foot in front of the other, to keep moving forward when one has no desire, strength, or courage. I believe I have not gotten there yet, there are days I feel joyful and then hope springs up and gives me a backbone to face whatever dilemma falls into my path. I know in my heart that my journey is a long one, fraught at times with life's obstacles. But with hope, with love, I will always be able to concentrate and attain whatever goal I am reaching.

***I find hope in the darkest of days,  
and focus in the brightest.***

***I do not judge the universe.***

Dalai Lama



# Workforce Development Program

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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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