

# Workforce Development News

*Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute*

*Tucson, Arizona August 23, 2018*



## Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduates

Back Row left to right:

Philip Munyua, Megan Sauber, Susan Hew, Harin Korala, Charles Boone, Reymundo Chavez

Middle Row left to right:

Amanda Moser, Chelsey Kirby, Ariane Davaul, Denielle Sillik, Tina Romero, Michele Regal, Lisa Steenson, Dena Villareal, Ericka Smith

Front Row left to right:

Ramona Hernandez, Karen Long, Melissa Cruz, Kelly B.A. Mahoney, Cami Southard, Theresa Metz



# Hope

Kelly B.A. Mahoney, CRSS



Depression and other psych issues run on both sides of my family. So it was inevitable that I would end up with some psych issue and/or depression. I was diagnosed with Chronic Depression when I was 14 years old, after my third suicide attempt in six months. But I knew that I had been battling depression long before that moment in my life.

I have spent much of my life battling or recovering from one depression episode/nervous breakdown after another. My moment of hope came after my last nervous breakdown on July 31, 2005, which was the worst I had ever had. Once I recovered from it, I decided that I could not and would not go through another in my lifetime. I

have and continue to take steps every day to ensure that I never have another breakdown. First, I sought treatment for my depression at COPE. Next, I take my medication daily. A couple of years ago, I started to take advantage of one-on-one therapy. When I do hit a rough patch, I immediately call my caseworkers and therapist at COPE so we can deal with the problem at hand right away, before it becomes a major problem/disaster. I also rescued a dog, Padraig, from the Humane Society of Arizona in March 2015 to help with my physical and mental disabilities. He has, without a doubt, been my saving grace from depression! Finally, I have turned to writing books, which I have self-published under a pen name.

I am not 100% recovered. I am and always will be a work in progress, which I hope shows through my literary works. I am very proud of how far I have come in thirty years with my illnesses, acceptance of my life situation due to my illnesses, writing career, and now the certification program to be a Recovery Support Specialist, which I hope will lead me to help others see that having physical and mental illnesses are not a death sentence.

People have often asked me if I had my life to redo over again, knowing everything that would happen in my life, would I? I always respond with a very firm, "No!" This inevitably leads them to ask me why. To which I always say, "Because I am who I am because of the things I endured and survived. I like who I am because of the journey that I was put on by God in 1991, and will continue on until I die!"



# Spark of Hope

Dena Villareal, CRSS



My personal experience of HOPE occurred back in early 2017 on a routine visit with my Case Manager at CODAC. I had only met with her maybe one other time, and we were reviewing my service goals. I think she must have seen that I had resigned myself to a life on disability, of loneliness, segregated from my family and community, as a heroin addict. She turned and looked to me and told me that she too had suffered from a heroin addiction, had

overcome it, and was now at CODAC living a good life, and that she was happy. She told me that she had done it and that I could too. That she saw it in me to overcome these struggles. She told me that she believed in me to work again, and she looked like she actually did believe in me as we were having this conversation.

In my almost ten years in the system, no one had ever, ever come close to talking to me and touching my heart in this way. No one said that they believed in me to do much of anything. I remember during our conversation, and even after I was skeptical, thinking to myself "That's just silliness, she has to say she believes in people, it's part of her job. She couldn't have really meant what she said!" I kept thinking back to things that my Case Manager had said to me, and I remember there was a little spark of hope. I began to think there was a way out of the rut I had been stuck in then for so long. Until that conversation with my Case Manager, I truly did not believe in myself, or in my abilities to come out on the other end of these hurdles of addiction and psychosis. It was after my CM took time out of her day to connect with me, and it was after that meeting that I set off to recover.



# Hope Holds My Hand

Cami Southard, CRSS

HOPE does not put us to shame, because love has been poured into our hearts. When I feel alone, hope holds my hand. When sadness and despair try to take over, hope helps me to stand. When circumstances overwhelm me, hope restores me to be more open-minded, and to look past the moment. Hope gives me courage to be myself. To live in hope is to believe in hope. In 2013, I surrendered to hope; it was all I had left. Hope is the root of my recovery and will be with me every step of the way. Live Large, be thick skinned, sniff out opportunities, be fearless, and keep it cool. HOPE SAVED MY LIFE.



# A Little Bit Brighter

Chelsey Kirby, CRSS

Hope is a big factor in my life, because if I didn't have it I wouldn't be here today.

My experience with hope is knowing I have the strength to keep moving forward. There are some days where it's rough, but having hope makes it a little bit brighter. I know having hope in my life is not the only thing that drives me, but it is a key component. Hope comes in many messages like having someone to talk to, or just a walk down the street. Hope has taught me to put a smile on my face, even if I'm having a bad day. Sometimes putting a smile on can give someone else the hope to keep moving forward.





# I Wasn't Alone

Tina Romero, CRSS



The first time I had my experience of hope was when I had started groups at MCAS (Mothers Caring For Self) thru CODAC. The role it played in my life was very hard. I had my kids removed from me through DCS, and it felt like the hardest thing to do. Having to be alone, not knowing where to go or who to talk to about my addiction. I was full of shame from that. I had been using for many years and never knew that there were places that I could go to for help. It surprises me that I did not know of any groups, rehabs, or even NA meetings, although they have been around for some time now.

At first, I had such a hardened crust of protection over me I didn't want to share my

personal experience with anyone. It wasn't until I heard everyone else's stories that I knew I wasn't alone. I also started therapy sessions, and I would just start talking without asking any questions. Through these sessions, I learned so much about myself and what I needed to work on in life. I also learned things which needed be acknowledged, from how they affected or played a role in my past life. Continuously attending these groups and sessions, I felt for the first time that there was hope. I knew then that I needed more of this support from somewhere outside - groups or NA meetings. I started attending church more often. I guess I needed my spirit to become stronger than what it was.

Throughout this time in my recovery, I had many relapses. There was one time I will never forget. A man from my church had seen me sitting by myself and noticed I appeared distraught, almost as if I was lost. I was already 3 years into the DCS case, and I just could not get it right. He asked if he could pray for me and with me. I've been prayed for many times, but this time sent a big rush through me, and I just broke down and started crying. I gave in to my higher power, and I sought to not give up or give in to my addiction. I continued with all my groups, sessions, church, and most of all family support, which gave me hope that I could overcome my addiction. My hope is to someday help someone who is feeling that there's no way out; giving information on where to go and what to do for their own recovery.



# Hope and Recovery is Possible

Michele Regal, CRSS



I am diagnosed with a Serious Mental Illness, and have been on disability for eight years. I had many personal and professional successes that lasted for several years, but I would become symptomatic with Bi-polar, BPD and substance use, and lose control and burn successes and relationships to the ground. I submitted myself to agencies and psychiatrists, literally asking them to fix me. I'd do everything they told me to, no questions asked. Most recently, they responded with treble psychotropic medications that made me numb and unresponsive. The treatment was as bad as the illness. When I tried to respond to people and situations, I was stunted and unfiltered. I was falling and injuring myself often and my health was poor. I eventually lost my friends,

my family, my employment, my bank accounts, and nearly became homeless. I couldn't manage a thing in my life, and withdrew completely for nearly four years.

One day at an agency appointment I was introduced to someone who was different than others I had met there. We spoke about my experiences and she credibly related similar experiences. She spoke of hope, a word that made me very uncomfortable, because it wasn't tangible. She also spoke of recovery from mental illness, which I had never heard of, but the concept was interesting. She demonstrated hope and recovery in her words and behavior. I hadn't realized that I had uncultivated hope throughout all my destructive behaviors and consequences; that's why I kept trying. I began trying again with degrees of success and I didn't give up, because I developed hope that I could recover from my illnesses.

In the last two years, my life has changed exponentially. I'm not isolating, I'm on one psychotropic medication, I do my best to keep mindful, and I'm stable. I'm nearly finished with an associate degree in social services and am completing a certificate for direct employment as a Recovery Support Specialist. I'm not perfect nor will I ever be, and that's fine. I am a living example that for people with co-occurring mental health diagnosis and substance use, hope and recovery is possible. A mental health diagnosis doesn't define who a person is, it defines the illness. I want to share that message.



# I am Just so Grateful

Therese Metz, CRSS

I would have to say my personal experience of hope was when I had my experience with the Department of Child Safety. I became very discouraged and thought to myself, "If I can't stay sober for my own child, then I never will". I thought that there was absolutely no hope for my future. However, because of that situation, I found myself at a treatment facility called the Haven. It was there that I learned so much about my disease and myself. Why I do the things I do and why I think the way I think. But most of all, that this is something I must do for no one but myself. I learned coping skills, and was given tools to deal with negative thoughts. My life became much more positive, and I feel much more at peace and happy. It has been a very long time since I have had this kind of hope for the future. It is something I know I have to work on every day, but I am just so grateful. My family and friends are so proud of my achievements so far, and that gives me so much encouragement.



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## Hope to be a Mother

Ericka Smith, CRSS

My hope is something that I have been working through for many years. At times I felt that I would 100% fail at being a mother. I felt that I would always be a hopeless mother who had given up. I thought, "What is the point of trying or hoping to be a better mother?" In my mind, I would never have that. My oldest daughter was born on May 25th, 2008. I was 18 and thought, well I can do this, I have some money to buy her things. Then I lost custody of her for domestic violence charges.

My youngest is 5 years of age now. For two years I lost her too, because of my substance use. I finally said "Enough. I am their mother." I wanted to show them that they are more important to me than the drugs or the violence. January 18th, 2017, I had my first day clean from all substances. That was the first day of hope for me. Hope to be a mother.





# Hope

Reymundo Chavez



I was really lost for so many years post government service. While doing my step work I began experiencing hope. Although I experienced a long-term relationship break-up, I continued hanging on to that hope. Someone in my support system planted the seed of me making a good Peer Support Specialist. I wasn't having it. But then on my own, I started doing research and saw that it was a worthy position and goal. So I spoke to people in my support system and they recounted the same idea.

That's when I made a decision. There was a gentleman at the Pima Re-entry Center, Mr. White, who delivered modules, who had significant impact on my recovery. He was a drill instructor in the Army and his style of instruction and overall passion was very hard to dismiss. He rubbed most people the wrong way. I guess they had never been spoken to in a stern authoritative tone. But I got it, and I was won over instantly. I can't say it's easy. There are some days when your mettle is tested. This course has galvanized the hope I have in having a purpose again. I really enjoy being in this program. It's been a LONG time since I have been this happy and motivated. I can also list all the staff at the IHRSS Institute. You have given me hope beyond belief. I thank you!

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# Hope

Beth Elliott, CRSS

It was July, 2011, when I was diagnosed. Finally, an explanation. Something other than I "wasn't trying hard enough". Finally, someone believed me. Someone else finally agreed that there was, in fact, something wrong. And it wasn't my fault.

For the first time in my life, it wasn't my fault. It wasn't me being difficult or me looking for attention. That doctor was the first person to ever tell me yes, there is a problem. No, it's really not in your control. I stopped blaming myself.



# Survivor

Ramona Hernandez, CRSS



Ramona Hernandez - a survivor of being physically, mentally, verbally, and sexually abused by my biological father. Starting at age three or four years old. My current issues are with DID (dissociative

identity disorder), PTSD, OCD, chronic anxiety and panic attacks. As I grew older, I subdued myself with alcohol and substance use. My mother was a victim of homicide, and her boyfriend completed suicide. In October of 1995, I cleaned up after all this occurred.

I have lived through nine years of homelessness and experienced domestic violence at fifteen years of age. I was incarcerated for the first time at 18, and for the last time when I was 49. I have been a felon twice, and received DUIs twice. I did three years of probation for my first felony. I was caught again for meth, and assisted undercover police. I did another year and a half of probation. I paid off probation, and my civil rights were restored.

I have completed all my groups and have remained clean and sober. After this I received my disability, which took five years to obtain. I have continued to seek my own recovery through PSA Art Awakenings, groups through Cope, attended AA, NA, CMA, Exodus Ministry, Cactus Counseling, and Turn Your Life Around. Most of all, my Creator and his Son Lord Jesus Christ. I owe my life to him. And it is a blessing to have my service dog Skyy. Who rescued whom?



# The Sky's The Limit

Melissa Cruz, CRSS



My personal experience of hope began in the Behavioral Services office. I was updating my individual service plan with my awesome case manager Tamara. I discussed with her the hardships that I had recently experienced,

and the need to make some goals that reflected healthy choices for my daughter and I. This occurred last year. I recall inquiring about working in the behavioral health field and the requirements needed. I discovered that I had those requirements - all I needed to do was to meet my goals.

I was so excited for the very first time about my past unhealthy choices, which actually qualified me as a Peer Support Specialist. I received instructions on how to apply by writing letters. I used to think that my life was a waste. But after speaking to Tamara, who gave me hope to make my mess into my message to help other people, I began to see life in a whole new perspective. Today I am so grateful for my sobriety and my future; the sky's the limit. I never thought that I would be a successful, productive part of my community after being through the system and being labeled. A special thank you to Tamara, Beverly and the gang, and everyone at Codac for renewing my hope, and to God.



# Loved and Supported

Lisa Steenson, CRSS



This psychotic break has been very hard on both my family and I. My youngest brother Lance really worked to rally the family. He tried to get everyone on board to understand how bad it was, and gain their understanding and support. For the most part it worked, with the exception of my other brother and his wife; they have both kept their distance during most of it. Until June. They were the ones who found me at the hospital and brought me back from the abyss and to the real world. It was in this moment that I truly felt able to fight this delusional world I am struggling to overcome. To know I am loved and supported by my entire family has been very empowering, and gives me the strength to fight to move on with my life. The key to it for me is that they all love me regardless of the situation, but I am the one solving my own problems.

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## The Meaning of Hope

Constance Fuller, CRSS

Hope is a word that can mean so much or so little to someone. In my mind and personal life, hope is something that has constantly evolved into so many different little meanings that I feel like I have lost the actual definition of the word. If I had to come up with a guess I would have to say Hope is a word that doesn't just have one meaning. It means family, spiritual enlightenment, being able to get up in the morning and get dressed, or waking up next to a person that means the world to you. Hope

is something to look forward to with curiosity, and with each passing day that curiosity just keeps adding up and building on itself. Hope is knowing that I have a purpose in this world and even if I haven't discovered it just yet, eventually I will get there. Hope is a word that keeps changing faces, shapes, colors and sizes. Sometimes having that hope can be terrifying, but it can also be mesmerizing. Hope is being in the moment and willing to take a chance with whatever comes your way.



# Hope

Karen Long, CRSS

After I became homeless and addicted to crack cocaine, I found myself at a crossroads. I had a choice; continue on the path to self-destruction, or get help. I remember crying over a tuna fish sandwich because I was so desperate. Thankfully, I found a detox program that would take me. While I was in detox there came a moment of clarity. It became apparent that my "friends" were using me. Then came a conscious decision to distance myself from my old life; this included separating from my husband. I knew that I could not move forward unless I did. While in detox, some people from California came in for an H & I meeting. As I sat there listening, I saw that they were overcoming the same problems that I had. For the first time I felt hope, because I heard their message and it felt like these folks really had the answer to my problem. It seemed, for once that there were others who were conquering their demons and reaching out to folks like me. When I got out of detox, I did 90 meetings in 90 days and saw a change in myself.



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## Hope is a Wonderful Word

Susan Hew, CRSS

Hope is such a powerful life line. Without hope there is little inspiration to continue on. Having hope makes us feel strong, capable and worthy of esteem.

Hope is tied to faith in God or a greater being. This can also be a man, pet or nature. The main purpose of faith is believing in something or someone who is greater than yourself. Inspiring you to wake up every morning to see the beautiful sunset as God has created it for all of us. It makes me want to try and bring in a new day, new experiences and new hope.

Hope is the reason. Hope is when my daughter died. I had no hope, because I did not care anymore about myself. My only hope was still having one child left in this world. I desperately needed to be loved and to be needed. Through my son's love, I once more began to believe in hope. We hope every day for a miracle.





## For Lawrence

Ariane Davaul, CRSS



Hope came to me one day, when with tears on my face I asked myself "Is this it for my daughter and I?" I had just crawled my way out of the most toxic and turbulent years of my life. I had a history of violent and abusive relationships, piling legal troubles, and pretty heavy alcohol issues. I knew I needed help but didn't know what that looked like.

I started attending groups at COPE. The facilitator was like a bright shiny ray of sunshine. If that's what being sober looked like, then I wanted in! The more I attended class, the more coping skills I developed. I learned ways to change my thinking and to stay positive. I learned that I wasn't alone with my mental health condition and that there was a life of substance for me. He was living proof. When he walked in the room, everyone's faces lit up! His laugh could infect the whole building. Oh the hole I feel in my chest, thinking of how this Friday will be without him.

I found out 4 days ago that my dear friend Lawrence died suddenly from a heart attack while helping his mother do yard work. I cried myself to sleep last night, talking to him. I asked him to sit with me while I slept. I do believe those were the best 6 hours of sleep I've ever had. My experience of Hope was meeting a man who had been through horrible things and still was able to change for the better, and make people around him want to change for the better. I have peace knowing he is in a better place now. This one's for you Lawrence.



# Never Lost Hope

Philip Munyua, CRSS



I was driving a tractor-trailer to Denver when I was pulled over for suspected DUI. Someone following behind me had called the police to complain that I was crossing the center line, or going into the shoulder like I was under the influence. I got tased, handcuffed and arrested. I was taken to the local hospital for drug and alcohol screening, and my truck was towed and impounded. The company I worked for told me that I must resign. My court trial was set for a month later, so I had to stay in a motel in that town for a month. I was charged with reckless driving.

After that ordeal, I ended up in Phoenix at a homeless shelter. Trucking was a closed door after 15 years. I haven't had a stable, full-time job in the past five years. The last time I was in school was to become a truck driver. I went through some tough times and missed opportunities. Now I am back in school training for a new career related to mental health and substance use disorders, where I can help others not lose hope, because I haven't. Maybe by helping others I will continue having hope as others help me back, experiencing the turmoil they have gone through without losing hope, and so on.



# Hope Left In Me

Harin Korala, CRSS

At the time I experienced the feeling of hope, I did not realize that it was hope that I was feeling until I was looking back. It happen in a rehab. I came to the realization that I was a “drug addict”. Now, having more knowledge and better understanding of the subject, I would say it happened when I found out I am a person diagnosed with disease of addiction and substance abuse. I realized, that moment was a turning point in my life. I found out that I was going to have to make a major lifestyle change from then on.

At that moment I felt as if all of my immediate feelings were gone. I felt empty and as if I didn’t know myself. But it was not a complete empty, there was something still inside me and around me. I didn’t know what it was at the time, but now, looking back I would say that was hope left in me. As I looked around I saw my family, counselors and peer support all ready



to give me direction and be support in my new lifestyle, which I became more and more welcome to as time went by.



# Hope

Charles Boone, CRSS



I can't really say just when it was that I actually began to find some hope again in my life. I think I've gradually become more and more hopeful over the last couple of years. But it hasn't been easy getting here! I've been through some pretty intense

therapy - 2 or 3 times a week for over 2 years now. I've also struggled for many years looking for a depression medication that finally, actually seems to help. Still, most days have been filled with plenty of prayer.

Several things that stand out overall would include when I first realized that I could turn some of my pent-up anger into fuel for getting back into the gym. Working out some has not only helped my physical and psychological health, but I've also been able to see, under the direction of an R.S.S. instructor, that even after being almost bed ridden for years, I've still been able to reach some aggressive strength training goals. This has been very encouraging to me! Another notable high point was getting approved to attend the R.S.S. institute. During this training, I have actually become quite a bit more hopeful. That's because I've seen there's a real opportunity to do something extremely important in this world we live in, something I've always enjoyed and get a great deal of satisfaction from. And that something is helping others!

Thank you for the opportunity!



# Recovery is Full of Beautiful Blessings

Amanda Moser, CRSS



My personal experience with hope was when I looked at my son for the first time. At that moment I realized this was my meaning for life. He was the reason I got clean, and it was all so worth it! I now stay

clean for myself. These last almost 3 years have been amazing. God has already blessed me with so much, and I want more. I want to see what else this world has in store for me.

I've lost so many people over the years, and I came close to dying twice myself. So why not me? For some reason God thought I was worth it, that it wasn't my time yet. He saved me and I'm going to find out why. What's my purpose here? I was truly blessed with a second chance at life, so I'm going to live it to my fullest potential. I'm going to make this life worth it, I'm going to make my family proud, and most of all I'm going to be somebody! I was saved, and I'm going to make it my purpose to save others so they can overcome just as I did.

I gain more hope daily being in recovery. Every time I see someone in recovery with a genuine smile on their face. Every time I see parents in recovery, just getting their kids back in their own custody, all from choosing to hold onto hope and staying strong. It gives me hope that anyone can change, gaining back all their true happiness and inner beauty. Recovery is full of beautiful blessings, and that's why for me recovery is full of HOPE.



# Hope and Feeling Inspired

Denielle Sillik, CRSS

For most of my adult life, I had occasional bursts of motivation which were always quickly dampened by my depression. Those bursts became further and fewer between, and at thirty years old I found myself content to just sleep myself to death on the sofa. My story of hope began when I somehow was chosen to participate in a new kind of camp at Camp Wellness. I went because it gave me something to do. But through socializing and feeling healthier physically and mentally, I started to feel good again and I didn't want that feeling to stop. Part of me thought that this was just another fleeting moment of motivation, but for the first time in my life, I was given the tools and support to keep myself going. I applied for and completed culinary training, I got a summer job, and I applied here to the IHRSS institute. For almost a year I've kept myself moving forward, and I'm really proud of myself. I don't intend on stopping anytime soon. My turning point was meeting other peers and feeling inspired to work



on myself, which is why I feel peer support is so important and I definitely want to be part of it. I really feel like I can help motivate and inspire others in their recovery, just like the mentors at Camp Wellness did for me.



# Hope Kept My Heart Beating

Megan Sauber, CRSS



How hope has impacted my life: Before I made the decision to go into treatment, I tried for many years to get sober. Time and time again, I would fail. After so long I found myself in a very dangerous and lonely place. I prayed and begged for a solution because I did not want to give up. Deep down I knew I wanted to change and stop living the way I was living, but I could not stop fighting, hiding or running away from the solution I longed for. My family and boyfriend never lost hope, so when I was ready to get help they were ready to help me. Within 24 hours, my aunt had found me a place to detox. I was dropped off and I never looked back. The past two years that I have been sober has not been a cakewalk. There have been plenty of ups, downs, heartbreak and struggle. But hope kept my heart beating toward something positive. Always guiding me and giving me something to reach for. Even on my darkest of days, hope is what saved me and continues to save me.



*The Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute is administered by the Workforce Development Program in the Department of Family and Community Medicine (DFCM) at the University of Arizona. The Institute is funded by Cenpatico Arizona. Cenpatico Integrated Health of Arizona (Cenpatico) services are funded through a contract with the Arizona Department of Health Services/Division of Behavioral Health Services (ADHS/DBHS) and AHCCCS.*

Workforce  
Development News

**Rita Romero,**  
EDITOR

**Patricia Philbin,**  
DESIGN

*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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## Workforce Development Program

Tucson AZ 85719

(520) 621-1642

Fax (520) 626-7833

## Trainers

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

**Rita Romero,** CRSS, CFSP

**Stephanie Tellez,** CRSS

## Program Director

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

## Administrative Associate

**Vanessa Larios**



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