

Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Tucson, Arizona September 27, 2018



Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduates

Back Row left to right:

Gustavo Castro, Darlene Martin, Julio Luque, Bryan Hamilton, Eric Matrecito, Terrie Anders-Malsbury, Amanda Sampsel

Front Row left to right:

Lorraine Bowen, Michael Ruybalid, Tanya Bell

I Took a Deep Breath for the First Time

Darlene "Annie" Martin, CRSS



My very first experience of hope came in January 1992. I was 25 years old and sitting in Parkwood Mental Hospital's locked unit after yet another suicide attempt. Someone had recommended that I call Dr. Robert White, and he just happened to be the on-call doctor at the hospital that day. I spent close to 4 weeks in the hospital and during that time, my mother and step-father came down to Atlanta for a family session. My mother told Dr. White that I was just a liar and a thief and she didn't really know what was wrong with me, because in her eyes I had "the perfect childhood".

This coming from the woman whom when I called and told her I was in a psychiatric hospital she said, "That's not my problem" and hung up on me.

I had been told my whole life up until that point that I was just a "bad" person and I should go live in a church. I truly had no idea that mental illness and/or substance abuse and an eating disorder were what ailed me. Through all the chaos and abuse that was my childhood, I was ostracized by my own family. For the first time in 25 years someone said to me, "You aren't crazy...obviously there were problems in your life. Because a young woman who had a "perfect" childhood doesn't end up in a Psychiatric Ward after several suicide attempts." I think I took a deep breath for the first time in my life. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. No one had ever stood on my side and said those things to me. Dr. White saved my life that day. I don't know that I thought I could recover from anything at that point, but I had hope that I wasn't going to spend the rest of my life wanting to die like I had the first 25 years. Having a mental illness and substance use disorder were a relief to me because they could be treated. You couldn't fix "bad", and I had been convinced that I was bad to the very core.

You Always Have a Chance

Bryan Hamilton, CRSS



Tough times happen to all of us. No matter how strong or powerful or confident we are, tough times will come; viciously forcing their might on us, causing us to crumble. As mighty as we may feel one day, we might feel just as lost and scared the next. I know from experience. I don't say this to cause fear, I say it because it's the truth. The hardest part of tough times is not to lose hope.

It's hard to have hope in the midst of a struggle. I remember the day things changed in my life - my wife and I had already lost everything, and we were living under the bridge by the train tracks. We were so defeated, broken, and hopeless. So strung out from our addiction. My wife looked at me deeply in the eyes with pain so intense, and asked me "Do you want to go to detox?" I felt so helpless. My addiction was screaming NO in my head, and my frail aching body was just begging for a break. She had asked this question so many times before, only making me upset and causing us to argue. This time though, I hesitantly said yes, I was so tired and broken.

It took all day to figure out how and where, but we got to the detox still feeling there was no hope in sight. When the intake process was done and both my wife and I decided to go outside and wait, I was laying on the ground with my wife staring into her eyes, and I finally felt hope. The amazing thing about life (and I'm never going to understand how) is that as long as you're breathing, you still have a chance. I don't care whether you think it's God, the Universe, or a couple of alien civilizations playing games with us, you always have a chance.

Hope

Amanda Sampsel, CRSS

I have found hope during several pivotal moments throughout the course of my recovery. The moment that stands out most was at Salvation Army. After months of feeling like no one had been listening and getting the runaround from various agencies around town, I finally had a case manager that really heard me and was willing to help me accomplish my goals, not someone else's. It was then that I began to feel empowered to believe in myself and my ability to accomplish anything I set my mind to again.



Hope, Share It With The World

Gustavo Castro, CRSS

It's something I am not willing to lose; I couldn't even lose it if I wanted to. It is part of the reason for living. Yes, it's true that I too have had wishes of death and moments of despair, but it is HOPE that keeps me going on in search of better days to come.

Some people say that we can't know for sure if it exists, for we are not able to see HOPE. But I know that we all have experienced it from time to time. Like when we get that job we really want, being able to see that loved one we haven't seen for a while, staying out of prison or healing from an illness.

I wish to grow mine to the point that I'm able to share it with the world for everyone to see, or at least feel and know it truly exists... a glimpse of faith.



Born By Hope

Eric Matrecito, CRSS



Hope - when did it occur? It occurred from the day I was born. Hope has always been on my side. As long as I can remember, family members have always told me that I was lucky to have been born a healthy baby. I was told my mother had two miscarriages before I was born, and they struggled to conceive for 7 years following their last miscarriage. They weren't having any luck, and they felt hopeless and like they weren't going to be able to have children. Around this time, my mother's mother got sick and

passed away from complications from a brain tumor. Before she passed away, she told my mother that if something happened to her after the brain surgery, that she would send my mother a gift from heaven. Shortly after my grandmother died, my mother found out she was pregnant with a baby boy - me. I believe my grandmother gave my mother "hope", and that's why I was born. As I sit here and write this essay about hope, I think that I was born by "hope".

Throughout my life I have seen hope in the eyes of my friends and family as they have prayed for me during difficult moments of my life. For example, when I was shot five times and had to be resuscitated back to life, I felt hopeful that I would overcome the pain and live a normal life. In 2016, I suffered another setback when my leg was injured in a motorcycle accident and had to be amputated. At that time I felt hopeful that I would be able to walk again. As a result of the trauma I suffered, I struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder, severe anxiety and substance use disorder. Still, I was hopeful that my life would get better.

The word Hope to me is a beautiful and very deep word. I understand that sometimes people may lose hope or struggle to see hope for their future, but it is always there. Hope for me is a word that I love and could never say greater things about, and I will never lose hope for all my life.

Inspire Hope

Julio Luque, CRSS



The reason I am in this institute, and the entire reason I am even able to talk about this experience is because someone gave me the very first glimmer of hope about four months ago. I was in a very dark place; a frequent heroin user, and at that moment incarcerated at Pima County Jail. I was told

I was going to face a very dark and dismal future upon re-entry into the “real world”. I was told that there would be no jobs for a felon with my legal history, or someone with my past substance use.

Without expecting it, I had a visit from the person I would later refer to as my guardian angel. Her name is Sonia, and she talked to me about my battle with addiction and about resources for treatment after my release from jail. She spoke to me as a person, not a criminal or a drug addict, as so many people had done before. She spoke to me about my true life goals and the true reason as to why I used drugs. With her help I was released to residential rehab, and received treatment for my substance use disorder and the underlying reasons for using. I was able to complete the program successfully. I then decided to follow my dreams and become someone else’s “guardian angel” by using my story and experience to help those who were like me. I want to inspire hope in the people suffering just like I had, and use my negative experiences as a source of strength and inspiration.

Everything I Loved, Still There!

Michael Ruybalid, CRSS

My personal experience of hope did not begin until October 19, 2017. I was incarcerated in County Jail on my eighth felony charge. I had a wife with nowhere to go, stuck living with other people who were living with addiction. I knew I was in major trouble and the future of my family was in jeopardy.

It was at this moment I knew that I did not want to lose everything that ever meant anything to me. I started taking NA (Narcotics Anonymous) classes in jail and studying the bible. As I worked the twelve steps in NA and got closer to God, I had to come face to face with feelings and emotions that I had never had to deal with before. Wow - that was a life changer for me.

Shortly after, I ended up in prison for the first time in my life. I continued to attend the NA classes and work the steps. I continued to go to bible services, and positive changes were a continual progression in my life. By the time I got out of prison, my sobriety was stronger than ever! I am sorry to say that I



have lost many things, but I am happy to announce that everything I loved was still there for me when I got out! Thanks GOD!

Win Back My Life for Good

Terrie Anders-Malsbury, CRSS



17 years ago, I was diagnosed with Bipolar I disorder. I also am a person with a co-occurring disorder, as I mixed Oxycodone and Alcohol to numb symptoms of PTSD. My first experience with the Behavioral Health system in Tucson was with another agency that I stopped going to, and that first 15 years with this particular agency was very dissatisfying to me in many ways. I know that the caregivers there were doing their best to help me, but I never seemed to get any better. I was basically catatonic at home and sat on the couch all day. Every day became like the next. My Psychiatrist at the facility told me that I had to take 13 different psychiatric medications to control my

disorder. I felt helpless, and doomed to a life of never getting any better. One day my Psychiatrist told me that this was the best I was ever going to get, and that I should apply for Social Security Disability. He promised to write everything in my charts up along with all the hospital stays, and that he felt I would get it for certain. I went through the lengthy, personally demoralizing task of filling out all the forms that Social Security Disability sent to me. Filling the paper work out made me feel as though I was my diagnosis. I looked my diagnosis up and studied it and I felt sicker than ever; it made things for me even worse. By then I had given up all hope of ever having a normal life and being a contributing member of society. My self-esteem was in the trash and getting worse by the minute.

This series of events soon led back to one of 12 hospitalizations. I still was not getting any better even taking the medications prescribed for me. So many of them made me physically ill. The Doctor tried me on just about every drug he could prescribe, to no avail. This scenario went on for 14 more years at the same agency, though in the end I had a wonderful N.P. who did my med reviews. Still nothing ever got any better. I was either feeling extremely manic or extremely suicidal; I was quickly giving up all hope.

At the urging of a close friend, I decided to make a break and change agencies. That single action seems so far away now and unimportant to many looking in from the outside, but I swear to you that is where I found HOPE. I called Marana Behavioral Health. I scheduled an appointment with a Behavioral Health N.P., named Martin Benyangai. I was so thrilled at all of the positive things I was hearing in the community about MHC, and excited to get myself out of this dangerous rut of sitting on the couch all day. Martin wasn't the one who finally prescribed

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Grateful

Tanya Bell, CRSS

There have been times where my hope has flowed within me and spilled out joyously unto others. Then there are those other times. The times where my hope was just a dimly lit flicker inside of me, shrouded by the darkness of shame and guilt. Finding it has never been easy for me. Seeing the good inside of myself seems to stem only from what I feel is a true accomplishment. The simple decision to stop taking opiates made me hopeful. The decision to get off methadone brightened that flicker even more. Getting off methadone and having people who support me made that flame burn just a little more brightly. While there are still days where my hope seems to be playing a game of hide and seek, those days are becoming fewer and farther between. I couldn't be more grateful.



Win Back My Life for Good continued... by Terrie Anders-Malsbury, CRSS

the winning combination of medications for me, but he did diagnose me correctly, finally! He also suggested I see a Therapist. I had tried them at the other agency to no avail, but this time I was in it to win my life back for good. The other most pivotal point came when I met my new Therapist, Mary Strasser. I loved her within the first 3 minutes of talking with her. Mary and I have a special bond and I trust her with my life. She alone led me to the Recovery Support Specialist Institute in Tucson. Thank you Mary, I love you so much for taking such good care of me. The other clinician I must mention is the loveliest person ever, Serah Mugai, N.P. She has been prescribing and reviewing my meds with me for quite a while now and was the one clinician that paid attention to all my drug allergies and side effects to different meds.

I don't believe that there is a pill which is a silver bullet for my diagnosis, but having a new set of eyes on my issues was what brought me to where

I am today. I am happy, and in recovery from being a person with co-existing disorders. Now I am in a classroom where I am getting closer to being the Terrie of my dreams. My dream job is about to be a reality and I am so grateful to so many people. My clinicians, the lovely people I have mentioned, my Instructors Dave, Rita and Steph, my classmates in the R.S.S. program, and my family. Without their support and unconditional love, none of my dreams or recovery would have been possible. Thank you all. I could never have been able to make my dreams of helping others like myself without all of you.

Hope

Lorraine Bowen, CRSS

I cannot define hope for you. I cannot give you hope wrapped up like a present in a fancy box.

But I can show you how I live hope.

Come. I can keep you company when you talk about the loneliness sitting beside you at the kitchen table each night. About how it makes you question the value of your life.

Together we can reaffirm the value of just being. And honor your gifts and strength.

I can listen. Your story is as important as mine. As important as anyone else who is spinning through space on this planet.

We can be together in a time of need. You will have your answers and I can learn from them.

I live my hope in hearing from you. Thank you for the opportunity to live among my peers.

Thank you for teaching me the way of a Recovery Support Specialist.

Hope was modeled for me when I sat nervously beside my RSS. Now I will nervously await your arrival. And when you tell your story, hope will be there. Strong and patient.

And you will find it too, at the kitchen table, lighting up the night.



The Miracle Happened

Donald Redd, CRSS

My journey began 12 years ago following open-heart surgery. At age 36, I was told that my right ascending coronary artery was 99% blocked. We had only been in Tucson a few years via transplant from outside Chicago. My boys were young and I was terrified. I survived the surgery, and was given a second chance at life. Sadly, I became addicted to opioid prescription medication. That demon took control of my life for the better part of 10 years. Hope seemed lost and my family was losing me. I had not left the couch in 5 years. I lost my career, but my family fought for me when I could not.

One Sunday morning my wife showed me a documentary called "Hooked on Prescription Drugs" produced by Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism, where our oldest son is a student. In this documentary, I saw myself and heard amazing stories of recovery. Brock Bevell, an officer with the Mesa Police Department told his story. He was run over during a pursuit and required many surgeries and became "hooked" on prescription drugs. Brock got well and started Blue Vase Recovery Center in Show Low, Arizona.

I found his number and called. Brock answered (if you knew Brock, you would know he never answers his cell phone). Then the miracle

happened. He asked how soon I could get there. I was on my way the next morning. Blue Vase Recovery Center and the people there saved my life for the second time. The amazing Bevell family poured love into me that I couldn't find for myself. I never used again.

What I wasn't prepared for was post recovery. Who would give me another chance? I wanted to go back to work, but my career was gone and I had to reinvent myself. I was sober but terribly depressed. My wife, Rhonda had encouraged me to go back to the Banner Whole Health Clinic and talk to someone. Hope was back in play. Wil Hall suggested I enroll in the Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute. Wil had seen the Public Service Announcements I had recorded for the Governor's Office of Youth, Faith and Family. Wil knew I was ready to help others, and so did I! This was the third time Hope was front and center. I knew I was ready to share my struggles and story with others. I made the decision that I had to help those suffering from the same substance use and behavioral health issues that I battle on a daily basis. My faith was always solid, but I wasn't listening to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Workforce Development Program

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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

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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.