

Recovery Support Specialist News

November 2013
RSS Institute 36

Peer Support: Social Work has Evolved

By John Anglin

I've been an RSS for about four and a half years now, and in that time I learned a great deal about what it means to provide peer support. I have been part of an incredible team that provided support to people in court ordered treatment, I housed some of the city's most vulnerable people experiencing chronic homelessness and have tested hundreds of people for HIV and Hepatitis C all over the state. Returning to school after 20 years, I obtained a degree and won scholarships along the way. My civil rights have been restored and I acquired a level 1 fingerprint clearance. I have often said that being an RSS is one of the most honorable and rewarding things I've ever done, and that has never been truer than it is now, in my current role as a member of a wonderful team that prepares others to go out into the field and do this life saving work.

We are Peer Support, an evolution in this profession. More and more articles are written about the value of peer support and more and more agencies are employing RSS's to enrich their teams. Our value is undeniable. We are a special breed – we've been there and we've done that. Like most people that do this work, we have a passion for helping others, but we are different. What fuels our passion is a need to give back what was given to us. We enter the work force with our diagnoses, histories of addiction and criminal records. So many of us have carried this baggage around wondering who would possibly want us now - "Who would hire someone like me?"

No longer are we ashamed of who we are or where we have been. We know that our diagnoses and our backgrounds translate to experience and knowledge. We support and inspire because we've been supported and inspired. We comfort those that have been beaten and battered because we too have been beaten and battered. We advocate because we know that there is strength in numbers and provide hope where it was lost. With the help of the RSS Institute, we take these skills and we enter the workforce with a renewed sense of purpose. We strengthen the recovery of the people we serve and in the process our recovery grows as well.

Is it easy? No, it isn't. We face constant challenges and in doing so we show our strength and resilience. We prove our worth on a daily basis and turn skeptics into believers. As you may have realized by now, I'm a peer support enthusiast. I believe in what we do. I am a proud member of the RSS community and I am honored to stand beside you all.

**5 New
Pre-Practicum
Trainings!**

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Negative Thoughts to Glimmers of Hope

By Eric Cody

I would like to begin with a quote I heard the other day, "Hope is the only thing stronger than fear." As you begin recovery, you might not have much hope. You might be battling fear among other negative thought processes. As a Recovery Support Specialist it is very important that I never forget how fragile each opportunity is to change one of those negative thoughts to a glimmer of positive hope, showing them that, "Hope is Strength, and the sky is the limit!"



5 New Pre-Practicum Trainings

The Workforce Development Program has designed 5 new supplemental trainings. These trainings have been designed with the goal of building a stronger community of peer support providers. We want to ensure that all RSS's in the local community are marketable to potential employers, and that they are able to succeed in their professional roles.

The trainings address the growing need for additional support in the areas of:

- Documentation
- Boundaries
- Resume Writing and Interview Skills
- Group Facilitation
- Integrated Healthcare

Any and all RSS's are welcome to attend the trainings, as long as you have completed the first two days of the institute. Whether you are new to the field or a seasoned veteran, check out the trainings and pick up some pointers or share some knowledge.

The trainings are being held at Camp Wellness, 1030 N. Alvernon Way. They take place at 8:00 a.m. on Wednesday mornings when there is not an institute taking place. Check the WDP website Schedule to see which training(s) you want to attend:

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

You Have Choices of Who You Want to Be

By Gina Chesler

My messages of hope have come from various people and in many forms throughout my life. Childhood brought me hope, even when beaten and locked in closets. It came invariably through music and the cats and dogs in my life at the time.

When I was in Girl Scouts in the 70's, I had a Girl Scout Leader, Mrs. Mahoney that I will never forget. She always defended me to my foster parents, and always had faith in me--even when I stole from her and her family. She told me I was talented. She accepted me no matter what. Even though I went on to jail and getting myself in a myriad of difficult and trying situations, I always remembered her. The message of hope stuck with me.

A therapist named Rhonda also gave me hope, in somewhat of what might be considered "tough love" form... she asked me, "how long are you going to be a victim of your past? You have choices of who you want to be and where you want to go." That statement filled me with hope, as she was correct. I make choices of where and who I want to be. Nobody is to blame for my choices and actions, and I carry this with me always.



I Have the Best Job in the World!

By Abigail Dambeck

I didn't recognize that how I thought and felt about myself was not "normal" until a few years ago. In fact, most of my life was tied up in fear that someone would find out how much I hated myself. A constant internal question tormented me: "What's wrong with you?!"

My revelation about the truth of who I am and my journey of hope began in November of 2009, when I made the difficult and life-changing decision to resign from teaching, which marked the beginning of a three and a half year road to overcoming depression. I was helped along this road by the constant support and encouragement of

my church, friends, family and counselors. By being honest about past hurts and finding strength to heal and forgive through my relationship with Jesus Christ, I have been given the power to silence the lying voices of shame, self-hatred and fear.

Today, as I serve in the position of recovery coach with COPE Community Services. I can reflect on my past with gratitude because it has become a story of hope that I can share with others walking through similar challenges and pain that I have felt and learned to overcome.

My dream and desire is to continue walking alongside others, providing support to others on their journey to wholeness and healing. I am blessed and am able to say with gratitude, "I have the best job in the world!"



My Hope Comes from Within

By Christine Daughenbaugh

I am a person who has had issues with substance use all of my life. My first brush with hope in recovery was with my alcohol. To learn that I can survive without numbing myself out with the substance of alcohol took time and the 12-step program of AA. But that was not my most significant battle.

Like many people, I discovered I was cross-addicted. My main addiction raised its head after my divorce. I had an addiction to sex and love. With alcohol it was cut and dry. Stop drinking, work the steps and get better. I can't just stop loving; I have to learn to love in a non-addictive way, instead of using people and sex to numb out.

My biggest hope came to me in my very first Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous meeting. There were other people there with the same story. They listened and understood my issues. I was allowed to cry and feel my feelings without being judged. The people in the program loved me until I could learn to love myself. Now that I love myself more I don't need to use sex and love in an addictive way. Now my hope comes from within.



Hope is Belief Followed by Action

By David Campbell

In my life having hope has made the difference between merely surviving and flourishing. Hope is a belief followed by action. Believing in myself got me where I am today. I am clean and sober, have secured a good job, have my children, have a good relationship with my family, and I have my art. Hope is the light at the end of the tunnel that keeps me going.

Hope is belief in something greater than ourselves and greater than our current situation. To have hope connects us with something greater than ourselves. Hope also stirs emotions. Hope can turn our dismay, confusion, and apathy into optimism, excitement, and joy for our life.

To maintain hope is important when helping others and to improve our own lives. It can be easy to lose connection with the powerful inspiration of hope and project our own desires onto ourselves and others.

However this is not always the best way to help. I believe we can serve best when we project the full heart of hope into our lives and others. Hope can promote positive change when we remain pure of intent and focus on believing that our situation can improve; hope that someone will find happiness. It would be easy for me to hope that my children become doctors and engineers to secure their financial success. However, what I really feel is hope that they will be happy, find joy and fulfillment in their work, and be at peace with themselves.

At times we lose hope when we are disillusioned by life. I believe loss of hope can happen when we lose connection to our higher self or a greater ideal. Hope is the knowing that life can be more than our current limiting situation. Hope is not the desire for more; it is the belief in improvement. Hope is envisioning that our highest ideal for someone or ourselves becomes manifest. It is not always possible for us to have this hope in ourselves and others. Sometimes we don't see a way out or have lost connection with that part of us that can affirm positive change. At these times it is the hope and belief others have in us that can carry us through.



A Good Plan for My Future

By Douglas Powers

Hope has played a major role in my recovery from depression, anxiety, grief and loss over the past two years.

These mental health problems were caused by my wife's illness and my financial problems. I began to have hope once I started to receive support and encouragement from members of my support groups. Having my RSS recovery coach talk to me about the possibility of becoming an RSS myself also gave me hope. My family and friends have also been very supportive.

After I survived my suicide attempts, I realized that there must still be some purpose for my life. This gave me hope, especially once I realized that I might be able to be an RSS and help others with their recovery someday.

My feelings of hope gradually increased as I continued with medication and my support groups. Finally, I applied for RSSI training in July of this year, and I was accepted for training in October and November. I have also started applying for RSS and peer support jobs. I am feeling better about myself now and I feel that I have a good plan for my future. I couldn't have done this without being able to have hope for my future and my life. Hope is very important to me. I believe that it can help others recover also.



From Dealin' in Dope to Dealin' in Hope

By Linda Perry

I believe that hope is one of the strongest emotions and conditions a person can experience... especially when, at one time in their lives, they have felt the absence of it.

In August of 2008 I felt hopelessness like I had never experienced before. That day I woke up in the hospital five days after attempting to take my own life. For so long I had been feeling lost and alone. I was so deep down in the spiral of heroin addiction. My drug use had completely bankrupted me in every area of my life. There I sat in a hospital bed frozen in fear. You see, I hadn't planned to ever wake up again! I was petrified of a future that I didn't even want to be a part of.

I recall, vividly, that several staff members of the hospital were confirming to me (by their words, behavior, and actions) what I had already known all along, that I was nothing but a junkie. I felt such shame.

For twelve days I sat in that hospital bed and the reality of how alone I really was hit me like a ton of bricks. Not one friend or family member came to see me... I had alienated everyone I loved from my life and they were done watching me kill myself.

One night during my stay at the hospital I woke to the sound of someone in my room. I turned my head and squinted to see the back of a man. The room was lit only by the TV that was on and he stood there so quietly just watching the TV. He sensed that I had opened my eyes and turned to face me with such a warm smile on his face and said, "Do you feel like talking for a little while?" No judgment... no condemnation... no disgust. I saw in his face that he truly wanted to hear from me and that made all the difference in the world. That day he planted a seed inside me that didn't actually begin to sprout until 8 months later when I finally got clean.

But nonetheless, the seed was planted. He was a social worker at the hospital and he helped change the course of my life. He showed me that there WAS hope for me... that I wasn't just some junkie who was a lost cause.

I knew that once I worked on my own recovery for a while and found some stability in my life, I would try to work in an industry that promotes hope and healing to those so desperately seeking it. I want to let people know that they are not what they do... that there is a whole new way of living and that they can be an active participant in that kind of life. If I can recover from a hopeless condition, then recovery is possible for anyone.

I went from dealin' in dope to dealin' in hope and the benefits are so much better!



A Moment of Light and Hope

By Lawrence Leininger

My personal experience of hope occurred when I was in ICU at St. Joseph's Hospital. It was June in 2012, I had just been taken off a ventilator. I had overdosed on Meth and almost died. I was in so much emotional pain that I cried out to the God of my understanding to help me. I was hurting so bad that I could not go on like that.

I felt at the time that somehow, somehow, things would get better. Later I was talking to a housekeeping lady about my struggles with Meth; why I was in ICU; about God and how I was feeling. She looked at me and said (which I will never forget) that I didn't have to live this way anymore, that God loved me and (I started to cry at this point) that

she had found hope through Narcotics Anonymous. She told me to go to an Narcotics Anonymous meeting as soon as I get out of the hospital. That was the beginning of my journey. That was the moment when the light came on for me.

The miracles in my life continue because of that moment of light and hope. I got diagnosed with PTSD. I had been living with PTSD for years and didn't even know it. I am now getting treatment and my life has opened up to me with endless possibilities. That housekeeper's kind words, taking the time to listen and really hear my voice in order for her to direct me to Narcotics Anonymous changed my life. Those simple words "God loves you and you don't have to live this way anymore" saved my life and gave me hope.

Knowing how that changed my life I want to be able to give others that same hope.



Watch Out World!

By Luis Araiza

My essay on Hope has a thesis with a twist. Since hope is often quoted in the Bible and often given a religious connotation, I refer to some passages, which draw me to a different conclusion than the topic of hope by itself. And that is Faith. Don't get me wrong, hope is and has been a miracle pill for many! It gives back in abundance as we are able, capable and willing to give to others. Thus, there is really no magic about hope. It takes work. Hope comes from getting off your butt and doing something about your life. Sure, the definition says that it is the desire of positive outcomes. However, it ain't gonna happen unless you take charge of your life and change it.



We always see hope by the external results, but "If it don't get to be a part of you, it ain't really hope, it's an illusion." Forgive my lack of proper English but I only want to make my point heard loud and clear. Now, where does faith enter into this discussion? Simple! Faith "moves mountains." If hope is a miracle pill, Faith is the Energy Drink par excellence of Hope. It is the certainty of things to come. It is the "make no mistake about, it's gonna happen in your life, someone else's or in a particular situation."

In order to have faith, hope had to happen first. It is the supreme succession, if you will, of hope. You can call the Big Brother, the super-sizer or whatever, if you have hope, you're all right. If you have Faith, Watch out World! Any questions? Capiche!?

Realizing How Fortunate I Am

By Mitchell Thomas

Three years ago was the lowest point of my life-long struggle with clinical depression. I had been essentially isolated, bed-ridden, and without hope for about a year. Then I was prescribed Ritalin to supplement my antidepressant. The effect of that added medication was immediate, dramatic, and COMPLETELY changed my life. The Ritalin gave me at least an 80% remission from depression symptoms. This marked the start of my recovery and my resumption of hope.

My first hope was that the medication would remain effective over time. It did. The months that followed were amazing and wonderful in that I had never before experienced

life without depression and without substance use. I had always lived with one, the other, or both. It is ironic that the more I became confident that my medications would remain effective the more I began to experience feelings of bitterness and sorrow over the time I lost to depression. Had I received these medications at my diagnosis twenty years ago my life would be radically different now. Twenty years of my life marred by depression and substance use didn't have to be.

This assignment on hope has made me realize that hope is the reason I've been able to mostly push those feelings of bitterness and sorrow over lost time to the side, and to realize how fortunate I am to have had my mental health restored. Hope has allowed me to let the past go and to focus on working hard to make my future what I want it to be. I believe that my medications have opened the door to my recovery, but hope is what drives it.



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Back Row (L to R)

Linda Perry, Doug Powers, Kay Raines, Ryan Basham, David Campbell, Matt Harriman, Thomas Mitchell, Gregory Turner, Craig Bevan

Middle Row (L to R)

Luis Araiza, Kimberly Wright, Therese McCarthy, Catherine C. Biggs, Abigail Dambeck, Eric Cody, Katherine Jones, Suzanne Kennedy, Laura Dow, Lawrence Leninger

Front Row (L to R)

Charlotte Bennett, Gina Chesler, Christine Daughebaugh, Rebecca Olsen, Yesenia Campos, Angelica Elias, Jessica Wells

RSSI Panel of CRSSs



Norma Castaneda



John Anglin



Shanna Moore



Kyle Long

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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.



Graduates, Katherine Jones, Suzanne Kennedy and Luis Araiza

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