

# Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Marana, April 28, 2017



## Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduating Class

*Back Row (Left to Right): Joseph LaCava, Todd Crouch, Tristen Brown, Heather Spencer, Wayne Bonaime, Sherri Lea Miller, LeWayne Zespy, Marleya Illig, Eric Camacho, Sheryl Lynn, Thomas Mercado*

*Front Row (Left to Right): Mary Quinones, Charles Liebrecht, Petra Leon*



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# My Testament of Hope

## Learning How to Live After the Loss of Our Son

By Wayne Bonaime, CRSS



My recovery started on January 19, 2014 right here at Marana Health Care, Building B. My wife went through intake and I took her to her scheduled orientation. I was allowed to sit in as a courtesy. However, it did not take the leader, Shanna from Marana, any time to see that I was in desperate need of help. In fact, she immediately walked me across the hall to set me up with a case manager, and processed my own intake.

You see, on November 21, 2013, life as I knew it changed forever. My 22-year-old baby boy had been killed and his body left in one of the sheds on my property. I found him on the morning of the 22nd. When I landed at MBHC two months

later, I was a wreck! I was not eating. I had not slept in weeks, and when sleep did come, I would wake up trembling and/or screaming. I was not suicidal, but my existence was my own version of the walking dead.

The people here at MBHC, and their cool set up have been my saving grace. Nancy Petcash handled case management for both my wife and I, working diligently with me. In no time, we had a crisis plan and I was armed with a mountain of services to start the long journey of recovery and hope. My marathon journey back to the living had begun. I spent another two long months getting through my dark days.

I had transportation set up to get me to and from receiving services. I was set up with a medication doctor that I did not want... But what do I know? The meds got me to sleep one night at a time, they helped me get through the panic attacks, and the lost days turned into lost afternoons. I got set up with employment services, and Lorrae Weber held my hand as we put together a dynamite resume. I got a fast track application for vocational rehabilitation, and two years later that program put some voices in my head! I received hearing aids, and I did not have to guess at what was said anymore, or ask my wife to translate for me.

The resume was pivotal in landing me a job, which I kept for two and a half years. Just working was a big part

## My Testament of Hope, by Wayne Bonaime, continued...

of my recovery. Also, I had a therapist, Vic Perrot, added to my dream team. I get impatient, and the man of few words is there to tell me it's a process. And so I vent, I plan, and I look for my still lost give a darn. And the message is quietly delivered.

In November of 2015, two years AD (After Dustin; my son Dustin Troy Shaffer), I was working, going to meetings, and facing every day with my wife at my side. The dark days were like ancient history, but I was still a ghost. I spent another six to eight months in this mode of functioning but not really living, and then I decided to radically change my outlook on life after Dustin. Please don't take my next statement literally as I say "I decided to kill me!" It's just that three and a half years had passed after my son's death, and I had yet to feel whole. So I decided to accept that a big part of me died with my son, and why not let it go?

Sometime in early spring 2016, I had a rebirth of sorts. This new part of me embraces life and cherishes the dawn of every new day. This man knows too well how quickly everything he knows can change. He is grateful for today, values

tomorrow, and has hope for the future. This new mindset was monumental in allowing me to join the living and get back to the business of living life and attempting to love every minute of it.

Currently I am choking on a big slice of "Humble Pie." I intended this essay to be a sort of victory lap after reflecting on the long and winding road I just traveled. I had a vision of being recovered at some point. I believed that being healed was around the next corner. I would reach the finish line and the process would be complete. I learned in writing this essay that I will always be recovering. Last week, I had a bad day that came out of nowhere. I unexpectedly found some of his BMX and Lacrosse gear, and it triggered a lost afternoon and the roughest day I've had in at least six months. Writing the essay took several extra days because I did not think I would be so emotionally exhausted at this stage of my recovery. I have to admit that I will never fully recover from this loss. However; I find I am okay with that. Maybe this is another testament to the unique special person that was my Dustin!!!

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# My Vision of Hope

by Tristen Brown, CRSS

My vision of hope came at a very painful price. Hope for me began on August 28, 2016, when my stepdad called the cops on my son's father and I for a very loud fight. Long story short - I ended up spending the night in jail. I was so angry for "what everyone did to me", that I didn't take time to think about what I was doing to myself and everyone around me.

When I got home DCS stopped by my house and told me that I am no longer able to see my kids and again, I thought this was everyone else's fault but mine. So on August 29, 2016 I decided I was no longer going to use and I was going to fight like hell to get my kids back. Somewhere along the way I started taking responsibility for what I did and started seeing things in a new light. I have come a long way in the last 7 ½ months but I have not done this alone. There are so many people on my side today, more than ever before, but if it was not for my stepdad where would I be today? Jim, you are my vision of HOPE!



# We Can Recover Together!

by Eric Camacho, CRSS

I think my personal experience of hope was after I stopped working at my old job a few months ago. I was experiencing a great amount of anxiety and I suffered every day. I had to quit and pursue other opportunities. I had stopped working only a week before I met with my recovery coach, and it was suggested that I take this class and get certified to become a CRSS.

I feel that I can listen to others about whatever they are facing in life. We can recover together! I believe in helping others. I am helping myself by making it a win-win situation. I have hope that getting a job in this field will give me peace and fill a void that I have been missing in my life.



# An Experience of Hope

by Thomas Mercado, CRSS

It is the 20th of August 2013 sometime after 10:00pm. In a solitary confinement cell under medical and suicide watch with nothing more than a hole in the ground to relieve myself and a scribed metal sheet bolted to a wall witnessing what has become of me...there I stood. "I'm afraid man, am I dead? I think I overdosed the other night. Not to mention I've been in a blackout and don't remember what happened or why I'm here...". It begins to speak, "You've gone too far, you've broken your mind. There is no rehabilitating you; Invalid. You have destroyed your life. You have lost your Soul."

Under the dim lit darkness of this pit. A skeletal figure stares in the metal mirror; silhouettes of bruises and dried scabs riddle his body, as the faint scent of death lay thick on this beaten stranger. His manic wild eyes blaze a fear that can only be compared to a nasty spell of sleep paralysis over me. "No, stop, I can't think. I can't breathe. I am dying...I am on fire! Oh my GOD...I'm burning!" It goes on for what feels like an eternity. The cold cement floor, the sound of sickness echoing in this ward. He cries uncontrollably (thinking the pain is more manageable if I see myself in the 3rd person). It plays over and over in his head..." you've gone too far; you've broken your mind...". As he lay there...his spirit dying.

There is nothing now, nowhere left to hide, nowhere left to run. Catatonia; suddenly silence comes in swiftly and sits so heavy; one would think they went deaf. "You don't have to..." Surrendering me. "You don't have to..." It owns me. A moment of clarity. As it fell from the bottom of my being and whispered into the ear of the universe. "I can't live like this anymore."

## AN EXPERIENCE OF HOPE

"My Dear Atlas, how long has the weight of this world laid on those weary shoulders? Haven't you lost interest in the conquer and gained longing to



be freed? What is your willingness? How can you turn your will unto me?"

BE honest. Live Clean.

It was the only thing I had never truly done to the best of my ability.

Hope is a star. For me it was a star in a galaxy of emptiness. It ignited the faith that restored the sanity in me. When everything I knew was lost, when I had absolutely nothing left, hope found me. Maybe it found me... to help it find you.

My name is Tommy. I used drugs for over 20 years of my life. In that time I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, depression, the list went on and on. The medication list was extensive and exhausting. Institutionalized, on and off the streets; hopelessness plagued my life. Suicidal ideation and a habit for self-endangerment. I was on a painful path for a very long time. In all honesty, this story was very "real" for me. It was the turning point in my recovery. It was my spiritual awakening, one of many I was to have on this journey of Life.

# My Experience of Hope

by LeWayne Zespy, CRSS



I always wanted to be the dad for him that I never had. I hoped and tried to practice modeling the behavior I didn't see growing up. He wanted to be in Scouts, so I volunteered as a Scoutmaster of his troop for eight years. He

wanted to join little league. So, I was going to be the best assistant coach ever!

I remember - it was the bottom of the ninth and bases were loaded; they were down by three and my son was up to bat. I did everything a good dad does. I yelled words of encouragement. "Keep your eye on the ball! You got this!" He struck out.

I knew he would feel the pain of letting his team mates down; probably shame, sorrow, sadness, guilt and regret. He sat down next to me. I said, "Dilan, I know how you must be feeling. You did your best and I am so proud of you." I told him everything I would have wanted to hear from my own dad. I asked him how he felt. This is what a good father does, I reasoned. I'll never forget when he took off his helmet, looked me square in the eye and said, "Dad! It was only a baseball game!" And he smiled at me.

It was that moment that gave me hope - to realize that my son's experiences were not my experiences. He has love and support. He has a father who loves him unconditionally. The trauma and abuse that I had experienced growing up wasn't his; PTSD wasn't his, it was mine. He graduated High School, is an Eagle Scout, and today he works as a machinist doing what he loves to do.

# There is Hope

by Heather Spencer, CRSS



There was hope December of 2002. I had found a loving home, and I would no longer live in foster home after foster home. I was adopted 5 years later, and lost my hope that I would ever see my

biological family again, and I was left to worry about what would happen to my brother. I felt unloved by my biological family, and unsure I would even fit in with this new family.

This was the start of my recovery. I was trying to understand why my parents didn't want me, why my brother couldn't live with us, and wondering if anyone would love me. We moved a few times so I struggled making friends, and hope was found again when I found a boyfriend online. That was crushed when my adoptive parent didn't approve, and that put an even bigger wedge in our relationship. I found hope when I could pack up and go see him, and we did eventually marry. I worked on my recovery and hope all throughout that relationship, which ended in February of last year.

After this relationship ended, my strong support systems of my mother figure and brother figure made me realize that: 1. I am not my illness, 2. I don't need the people or events in my past affecting my future, and 3. There is hope for a future with my fiancée and a family I can make and provide for. I am in a place in my recovery where I know who my supports are, what stresses me out and how to avoid that, and most importantly, help other people find their hope. Many people have come and gone in my recovery, but I know who is here to stay and keep me on track. And that is the important thing.

# Hope Never Dies

by Charles Liebrecht, CRSS

Hope is to want something to happen or become true. Hope is also the desire for a positive action for the best results in one's life; for example, a desire to achieve and maintain sobriety. Hope is also the realization that we can recover 100% due to a positive outlook on life as we know and understand it. There is also a manifestation in our brain that knows that this is a good outcome of happiness and fortune, whether it is a home, or a well-paying job to support ourselves in times of struggle. Hope is a good thing. Maybe the best of things. And no good thing ever dies.



# Hope is My Cornerstone

by Sherri Lea Miller, CRSS

I think I've always carried hope within myself, even if I wasn't capable of recognizing it. For decades my undiagnosed and untreated mental illnesses muted any feelings of hope I carried within myself. It wasn't a word in my vocabulary. But exist, it did. Thankfully, at age 50, after suffering a traumatic event, I finally committed to seeking treatment. Having hope that I could experience happiness, wellness, and possible recovery, made that commitment even stronger.

I have relied on hope to see me through the pain that came with therapy. Because I recognize hope now, I have set goals for myself, surrounded myself with supportive people, and realized my dream of becoming a CRSS. Hope is the cornerstone to my recovery and life. It guides me forward and lifts me up when I stumble. As long as I have hope, anything is possible.





# Knowledge of Hope

by Joseph LaCava, CRSS



Bouncing back from years of seemingly hopeless substance abuse and mental health issues has been one of the hardest things I have ever done. I was able to find hope for my recovery through educating myself about the resiliency of the human brain, and its ability to regain its capacity to function. In my 7 month IOP class at Marana Health Center I came to understand something called neuroplasticity. My basic understanding of the brain had not included this, so once I learned of it, I invested more time in educating myself on how my brain would eventually heal from the majority of damage I had put it through during my active addiction.

Knowing that the brain is able to heal, and eventually come back to homeostasis gave me hope and allowed me to continue staying clean, even when I would experience strange and difficult feelings during my sobriety. Once I hit the 18-month clean mark I felt a noticeable difference in both how my brain seemed to function, and also in how I was able to understand and retain knowledge. It is through further education and understanding of these neurological principals that I am able to find hope for my personal recovery on a daily basis.

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# Hope for Recovery

by Sheryl Lynn, CRSS

As a person who identified with my mental illnesses, I attended the orientation for the Recovery Support Specialist Institute, knowing that I would never really be well enough to complete an eighty-four-hour class. I found myself captivated by the life story of one of the presenters who told of how he had found the class so transformative, he worked to become a trainer for the class. I wanted that transformation for myself and began to hope that I too, providing I could complete the class, would find myself transformed.

And I have.



# Hope for a Better Life

by Todd Crouch, CRSS

My father's wife passed away in 2012, and he is considered 100% disabled. I came to Arizona to be with my father and help take care of him. I discovered in my time out here that I have a medical condition that has caused me a lot of pain and embarrassment, as well as other problems. The condition has caused me to go through a very depressing time in my life.

I came to Marana Health Center for help with my depression, and that is where things in my life seem to have taken a better turn. I have been given the help and hope for a better life. This hope is not just for myself, but to be able to help others improve their life and to understand the needs and wants of others. There is much more that I could add, but will leave it at this. I hope to continue my education and development in this field of work.



# How My Kids Gave Me Hope

by Petra Leon, CRSS

I have many physical issues going hand in hand with my behavioral health condition. I have three boys in my life, and two still live at home. One night several years ago, I was in my room crying. This was because at the time, I didn't feel that I had much of a support system. That night I couldn't keep them from hearing the sadness and frustration like usual.

My youngest boy, who had just started school, walked into my room with his brother and asked me what was wrong. I told them why I was crying and the youngest said something to me that I don't think he fully understood the importance of at the time. He told me that I could count on him and his brother to support me no matter what, in whatever way that they could. At that moment I couldn't have been happier with my kids if I tried. With those words they did what no one older than them seemed to be able to do for me - gave me the hope to try harder. To this day I try not to give up hope if a new situation pops up with my physical or mental health, because I remember that my boys are on my side.



# The Hero In Me

by Marleya Illig, CRSS



As I write this essay, I am 45 months clean from heroin. It is also 45 months that I've been on consistent meds for my mental health conditions. It seems like life hit me with a double whammy; history of mental illness from both sides of my

parents, and a father who spent many years with an addiction to drugs and alcohol. I had long lived with mental illness before I began self-medicating with drugs and alcohol. But once I found heroin, that was my love.

I was swimming in a murky abyss, with no way to get out. At one point, I thought I would be an active drug user forever. But I always had a little something in the back of my heart and mind... Hope. It was always, "If this happens, I will quit... On this day, I will quit." I was hoping to get clean when I turned 23. Somehow, that hope was one that flourished, because I got clean a month before turning 24. In my sobriety, there is enormous hope that I will stay clean. I have now made it nearly 4 years since my last drug use.

Somehow, despite all that I have been through, my hope never wavered. Now I hope that my story will be a comfort and inspiration to others to have hope for themselves that they can recover as well. To quote Crazy Pete from one of my favorite childhood movies *Now And Then*, "Things will happen in your life that you can't stop, but that's no reason to shut out the world. There's a purpose for the good and for the bad."

# This Is What I Need To Do

by Mary Quinones, CRSS



The past five years I have been in a very dark place full of despair, hopelessness, and regret. Although I have tried to lift myself out of the

darkness of depression and PTSD it was not until February 7, 2017 that I saw my first rays of light. I have been working my way to physical and emotional balance since January 2016. My journey through my pain and the paths that Marana Health has provided me has brought me to my destination of HOPE.

I met with Rose in employment services with the goal of getting a job. Any job would do. I am overqualified for most of the menial jobs that are offered to me at this time. Call Centers are brutal to the Psyche and the body. During our meeting, Rose mentioned the RSS Program as an afterthought. My heart and my mind jumped to life. This is what I need to do!

My weeks of training with Family and Community Medicine with the U of A has been enlightening and empowering. I am blessed to have had this experience as I have so much more in my life today than I did when I began: tools, friends, and knowledge (personal and professional). Today as I was shopping for plants at the local hardware store I saw a rock with a flower painted on it and the word HOPE. It now sits in my garden.

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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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