

Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Marana, November 16, 2017



Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduating Class

Back Row (L to R): Salvatore Bruno, Jason Clark, Desiree Cullum, John Sorem

Middle Row (L to R): Brandi Wilson, Kerith Nuhn, Susan McWilliams, Amanda Bradley

Front Row (L to R): Julie Zirbel, Liza Granger, Aimee Marley, Beth Guzman, Amanda Pond



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Hope

By Julie Zirbel, CRSS



Four years ago, I lost my father and my fiancé on the same day - my birthday. Over time, this dual trauma caused me to spiral into a deep depression, and awaken a somewhat dormant but serious 30-year sugar and flour food addiction. I tried to laugh it off by forming a Mod Squad like trio of like-minded people living in addiction, affectionately named "Three Addicts on a Tear." We would get together a few times a year allegedly to support each other, but all we really did was enable each other, exacerbating matters.

Adding to the misery was a career that began disappearing before my eyes - primarily driven by age discrimination and other factors. My brain registered this as more loss in my life. Suddenly, I couldn't even distract myself with work. I was no longer being invited to the dance. No longer being recruited by corporations or awarded assignments

in my own small business, terrifying thoughts of becoming a bag lady with no safety net started imposing on my ability to sleep, and even function. I spent many months attempting to figure out a path forward. To no avail, I steeped in deep depression.

One day at my primary care doctor's office, I pulled out my AHCCCS card and realized for the first time, it included behavioral health coverage. I had long ago given up my regular therapist due to cost. This was a turning point that led to my first thread of HOPE. Through Marana Healthcare, I had the great fortune of being connected with Mary Strasser, a boss therapist, whom I've been working with for almost a year. She introduced me to Rose Souza, a gutsy employment counselor, who recommended I look into RSSI because of my expressed passion for health and wellness. This led to meeting Sharon Mikrut, Employment Services Coordinator, a resourceful and inspiring advocate. She shared her time and recommended me for the next RSSI training. I also was assigned Gretchen Dupuis, a dynamo case manager. She helped with paperwork and is a big proponent of the RSSI program.

I feel so fortunate to have such powerful and great women working to help me. First to emotionally survive. Now, with the support of RSSI certification, to begin to thrive. What's great about this is the work is actually in the area I feel most passionate about - addiction support; having walked that road for 30 frustrating years. Because of Mary Strasser, I have also recently discovered Bright Line Eating. This program has also given me a huge amount of hope by putting automaticity into my eating life, restarting my dopamine receptors by controlling my insulin levels so they no longer block my leptin signals in my brain. This has been a HUGE factor in providing hope for a happy, thin and free future.

A More Positive Environment

by Amanda Pond, CRSS

I had graduated from college and wasn't sure what I was going to do next, when I realized that I needed to get help for depression. I began seeing a new therapist at MHC and had a breakthrough after some time of speaking with her. I felt hope for the first time that I could actually learn how to check all of my negative thoughts and feelings and be less hard on myself. I had to learn how to devote more time to self-care and practice being more aware and in control of my thoughts and behavior. I had doubted for a long time that I would be able to achieve my goals because of my overwhelming depression. Now I am taking steps forward by creating a more positive environment for myself and focusing on learning and growing more as a person.



I Did It!

by Aimee Marley, CRSS

My story of hope began as a little girl. I was told I was different for as long as I can remember. Trying to find my place and purpose in the world, while living in a dictatorship, did not settle well with me. As you can imagine, a little girl who fought all the way with anyone who tried to tell me anything other than what I wanted to hear. Not listening to my elders did not work. For my family, the result was frustration, anger, and disappointment. My life quickly turned into statements such as, "What are we going to do with her?", "What is wrong with her?" and, "Why won't she change?". I carried a lot of guilt, not being the daughter who succeeded and had positive stories to tell other family and friends. My barrier of communication made improvement seem impossible, leaving me more frustrated, angry, and feeling I was a disappointment. I found coping mechanisms in risky behaviors, alcohol, and drugs. My mother emancipated me, I dropped out of High School, and was in and out of trouble with law enforcement. I remember thinking to myself "This is what you wanted. No one to tell you what to do or how to live your life". Even in the cruel, unforgiving, lonely world at the age of 17, I found hope for the first time. I thought "I can do this," – and I did. I found the resources to help me with housing, food, clothing, and a bus pass to get to the charter high school. I graduated a year early in 2001 with my diploma. The school even paid for me to go for a semester at Pima Community College (which I passed). For the first time in my life I could say, "I did it! I succeeded!", and no one can take that away from me.



Hope Into a Reality

Brandi Wilson, CRSS



My personal experience with hope came about during my last relapse in August of 2016. I was on probation and in an inpatient treatment center called the Gospel Rescue Mission. After 70 days of sobriety and maintaining medications regularly for the first time in a long time, I relapsed and brought alcohol onto the property. I was on probation at the time for a DUI so I was immediately sent to

jail. I was aware that I had a co-occurring disorder, however, I did not fully understand the consequences of not acknowledging the detrimental effects of my disorders. I spent 31 days in the Pima County Jail. As my sentencing date drew closer for the probation violation, my mom and I began to urge The Gospel Rescue Mission to give me one more chance, as I was facing 2 years in prison. As fate would have it I was assigned a different public defender (My last one was not really passionate about my case) and the Gospel Rescue Mission allowed me to return. They even gave me a family room so my son could come with me too. The judge granted me another chance, and I'll be honest with you, I had little hope at that time. I had not been given my medications in jail and experienced withdrawals so my perspective on things going my way was bleak. When the judge said I would be released back to the treatment center I had a glimmer of hope, but only where my physical freedom was concerned. True hope came when I was baptized and gave my shortcomings to a power greater than myself. I came to the realization that I didn't have to live with the stigma of alcoholism and mental illness, so I embraced it, owned it, and took the necessary steps to move forward. I turned hope into a reality! I cannot change my past. But I have, without a doubt, become aware, knowledgeable, and capable of sharing my hope with others. Help them find their own HOPE!

Spirit and Truth

by Desiree Cullum, CRSS

My personal experience of hope came about when Jesus showed me he was real. I was facing bogus charges brought about by a friend I tried to help. To make a long story short, Jesus came down in spirit and the truth was revealed – I was innocent of the drug trafficking charge. I walked out of jail that very day. I asked Him to show me how to walk with him even after I was released. He gave me his spirit, the comforter, and I began to hear his voice and I have chosen to follow his instructions. Yes, I mixed up the voices that were at war inside my heart and mind, but as time passed I learned to listen to the positive voice. Today I walk in spirit and truth. I am that child again, only this time Jesus is my teacher and I am his student. Only he can save me, and through his love he is fixing me. That's why I feel RSS is the right road he chose for me to venture onto. I have learned a lot from this class and I have been putting this into action, evaluating areas that I need to improve.



Hope and the Future

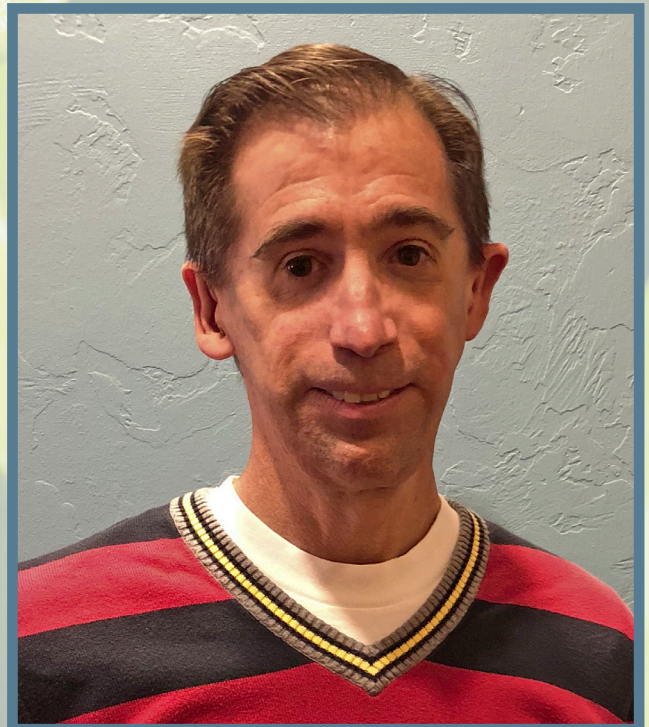
by Jason Clark, CRSS

It has been a long, gradual process going on for seven years. I would make significant strides forward, then regress considerably at different times. I knew there was hope, I just had great difficulty on how to find it.

Hope played a big role in my journey of recovery. Identifying hope helped me through life altering events, some which take significant time to process. In addition, hope enabled me to learn about and understand my mental illness.

I've been fortunate to have family and friends offer their support and concern for my wellbeing. In the end, I knew it was up to me.

The turning point for me was realizing that I have a future. That I will be able to pick up where I left off, being mentally and physically stronger through this experience. Another aspect is that I can recognize the warning signs if they reappear. I fully believe there is hope in sustained recovery.



Every Small Victory

by Liza Granger, CRSS



In my experience, hope never came to me in any particular “ah-ha moment”. Hope occurred in a gradual change, alongside all of my efforts to make my life better and to use my experiences to help others. When I feel hopeful, I’m usually looking at my past to see how far I’ve come and how much I’ve changed. When I experience hope in the present, I see work and purpose for the greater good. I now consider myself an active participant in this concept, instead of a passive person without drive. When I look ahead I see hope in a better future, where the disconnect I used to feel from others turn into a community, and where everyone acknowledges each other’s strengths.

My real turning point occurs every day, with every small victory. I have my friends and family supporting me, and they give me hope and motivation to be all I can be and achieve my dreams. Hope helped me during my recovery because I consider it the antithesis of my disorder. To me, the opposite of depression and anxiety IS hope.

A Whole New World of Hope

by Susan McWilliams, CRSS



My personal experience of hope occurred about a year ago. I attempted suicide for the second time. My son in law found me, and we talked for a long time. Later that same night, he called the police on me. The Police took me to the hospital, then to Sonora Health against my will.

At first I was angry with my son in law for calling the police, but now I’m grateful. Sonora Health was my personal bottom. Being placed there against my will was embarrassing. It was also a blessing, because it got me in the behavioral health system for the first time. I had no idea of the help available to me. This help has lead me to a whole new world of hope. Through the people at MHC, I have realized I am not worthless. Instead, I feel hopeful for the first time in many years.

Give it the Old College Try

by Kerith Nuhn, CRSS

The intention of this assignment is to inform readers of what hope is for me, but that has proven a difficult task. Hope is often defined as a desire accompanied by expectation or belief in fulfillment- typically for a positive outcome. While my personal definition is more or less the same, it typically involves an acquired sense of purpose or meaning; however, I haven't quite found that. It's difficult to discuss a concept that I've not been acquainted with beyond situations like hoping to not fail a class. I have subsequently found myself at a loss for words while writing this assignment.

At this point in my life, I find myself merely living for the sake of others; simply existing without any true driving force or real interest save for a couple of small hobbies. It's hard to detail how hope has influenced my life when I feel I'm still at square one - merely going through the motions because I cognitively know it's something I should be doing, even if I don't want to. Like going to the grocery store, but apply it to everything, even basic tasks.

I realize that (a whole paragraph in) I still haven't fulfilled the objective of my assignment, so in order to avoid leaving off on an unnecessarily bleak note, I will say this much: if there's anything I learned during the RSSI course, it's that the possibility of recovery is 100%. Perhaps that alone indicates that I may not feel like this for the rest of my life, and that others in a similar boat don't have to accept an endless, hollow void as their life forever. The only thing to do at this point is give it the old college try. Why not, right?



Gratitude and Hope

by Salvatore Bruno, CRSS

My personal experience of hope is a continuous expression of what feels like a part of my very existence.

Pat Deegan in "Recovery as a Journey of the Heart," describes it this way: "Hope is not just a nice sounding euphemism; hope and biological life are inextricably intertwined." I accept her view and continue to find evidence to support it. My recovery begins with others who are kind, loving, compassionate, educated and experienced! I sense the path they are on. I want to follow them, listening and taking direction. I was once told to be grateful and write a gratitude list - this is an example of following the path. As it turns out, gratitude boosts the neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin, in addition to increasing neuron density, which results in increased emotional intelligence. These studies by neurologists at UC Davis prove the relationship of physiology and emotions. Hope has the same positive effects.

Countless times in recovery, I have consulted others who have become a valued inner-circle. This group has my best interest at heart regarding the Steps. The hope I have placed in the Steps has proven paramount in my recovery. Daily, I rely on acknowledging a power greater than my own, whose compassion, love, kindness and generosity create a center for evolving spiritual growth. Many people in recovery come to a higher power concept of their own making and understanding. This may include nature, a group, or any other idea.



Carl Jung displayed a Latin inscription above the door of his office which read, "Whether called upon or not, God is present." When asked in an interview if he believed in God, he said "NO! I know God!" My hope includes an awareness that I am personally responsible to educate, advocate, and recognize the importance of social and spiritual support.

I am grateful to those at Marana Healthcare, who teach and share their experience to further my own education in this field.

A Future Worth Hanging Around For

by John Sorem, CRSS



Life has been an eventful and enriching journey, full of successes and hardships. I had considered myself as hopeful, but didn't experience hope until 2004. I was living at Breakthrough, a halfway house in Kansas. It was six months into my first stab at recovery. I had a crappy job, and court for my second DUI was on the horizon.

Breakthrough needed a fire escape to meet code, and my father and I raised the funds. I was the proof that the program worked, and he was my witness. In the wake of our victory, I came to believe some key truths about myself. First, that I can live and thrive while being sober. Second, that I have the power to create positive change. And lastly, my success proves that recovery is possible.

These new beliefs fostered personal hope. Gaining that hope was the turning point in my recovery, because it enabled me to see a promising future. A future worth hanging around for.

Hope

by Beth Guzman, CRSS



Hope, for me, started when I was about 24 years old. I remember praying for God to help me with my addiction, and I ended up in jail and then prison. I remember I said "I will never use again". Well, I didn't learn that time around, but the second time, sure enough. I asked God for help and, lo and behold, prison again. This time I was determined to get help, I was ready to change. I was free. I was incarcerated but finally free. That's when I discovered there was hope for me. Not just disparity and drug addiction, but real hope. I was able to breathe and eat and think and be happy and cry and be angry – I was able to feel. Good or bad, that's progress and that's hope.

Hope is Powerful

by Amanda Bradley, CRSS

I wasn't sure what to write for this assignment. Between my particular psychology, the necessary brevity, the years and years since I've thought about this, and my prolonged academic inactivity, it seemed like (no pun intended) too much to hope for. I googled "hope quotes" to mine for inspiration and I saw a lot of what you'd expect: light and airy inspirational quotes over images of soft sunrises and cottony clouds - "hopes floats" - and I knew what I wanted to say.

Hope is powerful, and it's heavy. It's not always a pretty, pleasant thing. For me, hope is inextricable from anger, frustration and fear, and I don't think those feelings are at odds. The belief that things can change for the better comes with the acknowledgment that things aren't great now. Just as there are infinite opportunities for change, there are infinite reasons to be angry with the ways things are. But I can't dig into that anger without also having hope for the future. Positivity that packs a punch.

The more we are connected with each other, the more we are able to communicate, to read about people's experiences in their own words, to speak and be heard, to hear others, and to endeavor to understand the things they can't put into words, the less anger and frustration and fear there'll be. For now, those feelings keep me striving towards betterment, a future where I am handling my personal problems and doing all I can for others. Hope hurts because it means opening my eyes to injustice, and my heart to disappointment. It's a burden and a blessing, and a reason to live and to try.



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Workforce
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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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