

# Workforce Development News

*Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute*

*Tucson, Arizona December 21, 2017*



## Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduates

Back Row left to right:

Cynthia Millican , Tawni Terman, Fatima Sahraoui, Myndi Barclay, Bianca Marquez, Shannon Smith,  
Ramon Caceres JR, Jose Fimbres

Front Row left to right:

Jason Johnston, DeAnne Dwight, Kathleen McCarthy, Sarah Hamilton, Ann Love



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# Experience, Strength, and Hope

By Jason Johnston, CRSS



"There are limits to the human body and the human mind. Tolerances that you can't push beyond."<sup>1</sup> Our spirit says that we can live beyond what we are capable of. I had been pushed to those limits and beyond, and on March 28, 2017, I found myself sleeping on a cardboard box by a train track, just across the street from a detox facility. I was escaping violence, running from pain, and hiding from the all too grim reality that I was not well. 28 years of hard drinking and rampant homelessness had rendered my body weak and my mind feeble.

"You cannot swim for new horizons until you have courage to lose sight of the shore."<sup>2</sup> I'll not inundate you with the poor choices I've made to arrive at that turning point in my life. I will say, for me, obtaining sobriety was as

difficult as finding a needle in a haystack. Do you know how you find a needle in a haystack? You use a magnet. With the right tools, even the most daunting task can be realized. After repeated attempts to seek help at the detox center, I was referred to a residential treatment facility that gave me the tools to cope with the underlying problems that were causing me to continue my self-destructive behavior. As my body began to heal and my thinking became clearer, I was able to envision a life free from bondage and hope became possible.

"Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering 'it will be happier.'"<sup>3</sup>

Many of the counselors and therapists I worked with at the facility had been in recovery themselves. My interactions with them helped boost my self-esteem and my self-efficacy. The love of my family, the strength of my spirit, and the wisdom of my supports have fostered in me a new and resilient sense of hope and optimism for a future of which I never could have dreamed.

"Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul and sings the tune without the words and never stops at all."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Battlestar Galactica

<sup>2</sup> William Faulkner

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson

<sup>4</sup> Emily Dickinson

# Soaring with Hope

By Fatima Sahraoui, CRSS



Hope was instilled into my life at a young age. Growing up, I was a high achiever and always reached my goals. I could not have accomplished all that I did without the hope that I had. In 2014, that hope had seemed to fly away. I was introduced into the mental health system and my experiences were not welcoming. I also held the very stigma that the world seems to have in my very own heart. All my goals and aspirations seemed to be lost in the dark, as I was completely lost in the dark myself. Losing all hope is a terrifying place to be emotionally, and without it my life was crumbling. Thankfully I had a couple of people who believed in me and my recovery.

I am beyond blessed to have my mother as my number one cheerleader. She crawled down to the depths of despair just to sit by me and hold my hand. For hope may have flew out of my mind, but it had never escaped hers. In 2016, I moved across the country and was introduced to a completely new set of mental health professionals. To my surprise, they had hope in my recovery. It was not until moving to Arizona that I recovered all hope for getting through my diagnosis.

All of a sudden, what seemed like a death sentence was actually a gift given to me. By having a supportive team of doctors and a loving mother, I was able to believe in myself once more. The RSS Institute was mentioned to me and all hope came rushing back. I can help people with similar experiences? This question would save my life and be the turning point in my recovery journey. My experience in recovery could be used to help those in similar situations.

Having HOPE is such a major part in the recovery process, and without it I would not be here today. I now have my goals back; they may not be the same but they are the very goals that are meant for me. I believe in myself and I believe in others. I will continue my journey and soar way above the expectations of my diagnosis. Someday, I will be writing articles about the mental health field and hope in recovery as a PhD. This goal would not be possible without hope.

# HOPE!

By Bianca Marquez, CRSS

Believe it or not, my personal experience of HOPE occurred in the loneliest, coldest, saddest time of my life. It was Dec.12, 2016 and I was literally at my worst and had no goals of which to speak. All I wanted was to be listened to a little, understood a lot, and loved infinitely. One day while on shift at a shelter, I saw the sun shining outside and in through the window. I was mesmerized, and found myself day-dreaming. When I snapped out of it, I took a sort of life inventory: where I've been, where I was at, and where I could've been. It was an extremely scary realization.

I realized what horror I had been saved from. I found myself grateful to Our Father above for His loving me, protecting me, and guiding me to this safe place I was now in. And just like that, in walked HOPE! I started having thoughts that spoke of life – fancy that! Suddenly, a job was a possibility. A peaceful longing to call my own was right around the corner, and true love and happiness were making their way towards me in that very moment. All I needed to do



was to let go and let GOD. To trust Him and all He asked of me. To NEVER quit trying for what I believe I am worth. So, keep hope alive - it works wonders!

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## A Direction I Choose

By Myndi Barclay, CRSS

Hope is my light at the end of a very long, dark tunnel. Hope is the strength I grab and feast upon. Hope is a smile, looking forward to my future. Hope is my faith, believing and knowing everything will be good, when everything seems bad. It is a direction I choose. To have purpose and breathe my passion. It is me looking ahead and not back. Hope is the vision and the voice in my head that is louder than the one which tells me that I am not well. It is me loving and believing in myself and others, and turning my weaknesses into strengths. Hope fuels my desire to chase my dreams. It is living in the moment, being thankful,



and always assuming the best. Hope is my sunshine on a cloudy day. Hope is delicious. Hope. This is my reality.

# I See Hope There

By Shannon Smith, CRSS

As long as I can remember, being a person with co-occurring disorders has been a struggle. I have been in and out of all the systems one can think of. Behavioral Health as well as Substance Use facilities, both inpatient and outpatient. I have gone willingly, and I have been petitioned by courts. I have been to jail and prison, both as a juvenile and as an adult. I have been on medications to address both my mental health diagnosis, and to deplete substance cravings.

In the end (or shall I say, my new beginning), what it took was another person. Someone who had not necessarily been in my shoes, but who had her own experience that taught her the only way a person can recover is to have hope that there is something better. Who understood that I have a choice to grasp onto that hope and make a difference in my life, and someday the lives of others.

I have been in recovery from substances for over four and a half years. As for my mental health diagnosis, it has been a little over 2 years. I experienced the hope that there was something better for both issues in different ways. Both sensations of hope had one thing in common, and that was - I have a choice in all that I do. With that choice, I can do anything. I can be better.

My recovery from substance use occurred before I met the woman who showed me the hope I know now. The turning point happened in prison. I put the last mind-altering substance in my body on July 4, 2013. I had the overwhelming sensation that I was better than



what I was doing, and that I could continue to be better. There was still hope for me if I just stopped. There was no divine intervention, no "aha" moment. I just chose to stop that day. Many opportunities have arisen both while I was still inside and since I have been out. My desire to use left me that day. Knowing that I choose the hope of a better future everyday by refraining from substance use provides a sense of empowerment that sustains me every day.

As for the mental health diagnosis I had been labeled with, this is where the woman I met in prison comes in. She facilitated an inmate-run self-help group. The basis of the group is that anyone can "Be the Change". The course

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# When My Hope Began

By Ann Love, CRSS

The day my hope began was when I stepped into this Recovery Support Specialist training. I see it as a stepping stone to finding my way back, to regain the confidence to challenge myself that I once possessed. I realize that I won't be able to return to my previous career of 30 years, nor do I want to. I have to keep an open mind about my future. I'm on a journey of rediscovering myself while I continue in my recovery.

I am going to focus on what makes me happy and stop trying to heal everyone else around me. I never realized what led me to do the things I did and feel the way I felt. I thought I was doing well, but in fact, I was pretty sick. I was putting on a happy face and playing the game as best I could. When my life imploded a year and a half ago, I thought my only escape was to die. Now that I have found the assistance I need in my recovery, I am looking forward to beginning my new life. Hope is the catalyst I needed. There is nowhere to go but up!



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## I See Hope There

By Shannon Smith continued

was not an assignment/learning type of experience. It basically asked the questions "Why?"; and "Why not?" I was able to take a deep look inside of me and see the person I was meant to be, not the diagnosis I had identified as my whole life. I was given hope that there is something better for everything in life. That something better comes with having a choice. A choice in my treatment, a choice to speak, and a choice to do something

different. My life was no longer a dead end, or a medicated, dark tunnel.

Today, I see hope in everything I do. As long as I am a person and not a diagnosis, things can only improve from here. I have a choice to either allow my diagnosis to define me, or use it to better myself. I can make a difference even if it is with one person, or just myself. Yes, I have my imperfections, but that's me. I love who I am now. I hope that I can share this hope with others as it was so freely shared with me.

# Writing about Hope Begets Hope

By Sarah Hamilton, CRSS

Just as the volunteer, who begins their journey under the impression that they are the giver, and reflects on the experience of being the recipient...Hope. It's funny that way - it runs deep through the "First Shall Be Last and Last Shall be First" concept.

My mother and her four children, giving of ourselves...

We started in the steeple; up the rickety, dust covered winding stairs that crowned the old small town border church. It was the most impressive building in town, but the steeple was small and lonely. Mom said that's because it was so close to heaven - the small and humble path to heaven. We started that year by sorting the donated clothing. Some so old and tattered, as if they were decades old, but much of it still nicer than our own. We kept at it, week after week. Joseph was really just a toddler, and a joyful playmate for us big sisters to drag around. We got curious. "Hey mamma, what kind of little girl is going to get these pretty church shoes?" We would make up stories, thinking of all the happy poor people getting the hidden treasures in the steeple.

Soon, we outgrew the steeple and had to take over the church basement. We had clothing, toys, and diapers - mom went around in her old blue station wagon collecting everything we needed. When we were in school, she would drive over the border to Mexico weekly, and pick up a carload of bread and assorted food donations. Turns out our little town didn't really like looking over to see their neighbor's needs. But the thought of poor Mexico; well, they



always ended up with a surplus. We then would drive all over our town's poorest neighborhoods (like tin-town Saganaw), with little tin shacks leaning crooked with old wooden porches, that propped proud but broken people; whom the mining industry had left sick and forgotten. We felt ashamed that our house was not crooked, that first visit. We felt shame that we had a car. We were actually driving around in a car that "God had instructed" this acquaintance of my mother to give to us. Maybe she saw mamma borrowing \$10 and a bicycle to go and buy Joseph's diapers. Whatever it was, she saw us - the invisible people.

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## Writing about Hope Begets Hope by Sarah Hamilton continued

One rainy weekend night, my sisters and I were complaining. Homework, and school, and “Why Us, mamma?” None of the fancy ladies from church with the big houses ever goes “Why does it always have to be us? Plus mama, the line is under the E and...”

“Enough! The colder it is and more tired we are, it makes the blessing THAT MUCH BIGGER! So get in the car, or stay home and do the dishes. Plus, those people aren’t welcome in Tin Town. I don’t care how much bread and blankets you bring ‘em, they detest pity and just feel all the more invisible. But we bring the blessing and the HOPE.” Moreover, “many are called, but few are chosen”. She always had inspirational and motivational catch phrases, which to us kids equated chores/work. We quickly loaded up some food and jackets for a Wednesday night emergency. My mom didn’t always give us the back story, but this was a tragedy where the parents had died and now the aunt had taken the kids, and had her own (something like 6 or 8 kids); definitely the invisible people.

When the door opened, the woman gratefully and tearfully accepted our hope. Close behind stood her niece,

the mean and scary head of the 8th grade bullies; her compadres were the reason a sixth grader like me never rode the bus. I wanted to run and hide in the car, but mama loaded up my arms and pushed me to the door. The terror of the 8th grade opened her arms as I handed her that ‘steeple treasure’. I muttered fearfully “I am sorry your parents are dead.” I fearlessly took the bus home from school with the peaceful notion that I had been a big part of something very special. As if I had received the quiet blessing, by jumping in mamas hope wagon that rainy night.

I lost hope many times over the years. But once it gets you, like mama’s little sayings, it’s really ingrained in the spirit of me. “Many are called, but few are chosen”. My mother, Jane Hamilton, was left with 4 kids and not a penny. She literally was the embodiment of the phrase “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall see god”. I am so glad to have this story of hope today. These are the sort of stories that never leave my side, thankfully. I pluck them out when I am down, as hope begets hope.

Sarah Hamilton on Reflections of Hope



# Hope

By DeAnne Dwight, CRSS

Before recovery, life used to just happen to me. Looking back, personally, I had no hope. I could only see the problems, fears, losses, and anger right in front of me. I could not see the colors of the mountains or the trees or see the light from the sun, it was just darkness all around me. Sitting in a room full of people feeling isolated and lonely. I felt hopeless; stuck in the continuous cycle of wishing tomorrow would be better.

Getting clean was only the beginning. I didn't necessarily find hope. It came first from someone who didn't give up on me. She showed me that I had hope inside me all along. Her husband would tell me that my hope was something for my faith to grab hold of. My hope became a stepping stone in the process of recovery. I realized that the darkness was only a little portion of the big picture, just a spot on the mountain, or a leaf on the tree. Hope started crowding out doubts about who I was, what I was capable of, and about my future. First I volunteered, then I worked a small part time job which led to a job I thought I could never do again.

Each time I was willing to do something scary or new, it led to the next thing, and the next thing. It seemed my willingness and hope were connected. Have hope, be willing to try,



succeed, have hope, be willing to try, succeed; over and over. I realized that a new continuous cycle had emerged one task at a time, one fear at a time, and one day at a time. Hope had won. I was living life. It has been a long time since either of those people have been in my life, but I try to do daily for someone else what they did for me. Don't give up on them, walk with them as they find the hope that is within them. Hope is what I cling to daily, but not too tightly that I can't share it with someone else.

# My Reason for Hope

By Jose Fimbres, CRSS



My name is Joseph Fimbres and I would like to share with you a bit about why I have hope today. I had a substance use disorder for eight years. I was addicted to crack cocaine, marijuana, and tobacco. I grew up without a father in my life, so I never had any proper guidance. I started out running the streets and gangbanging at a very young age. Being locked up from time to time was the norm for me.

I was in my madness for 32 years. I went from being a child at the age of 9 who was simply curious about these substances, to recreational use for many years, and then into full blown addiction at 25 years old. I needed a change! I was dying on the inside and I knew it. I was ashamed of what I had become. It was hard for me to ask for help, because then people would know I had a substance use problem, and everybody would see the real me. For many years, I would not allow people to get too close to me and I would only open up to a chosen few.

In 2009, I was arrested for some serious charges and was looking at some significant time. I was never a religious person; I knew of God, but never knew God personally. I tried other things but they never really worked for me. I needed a change, and this was it! On October 29, 2009, I rededicated my life back to Jesus and chose to follow Him the rest of my days. With His help and guidance, and with people from my church along with Celebrate Recovery, I have been clean and sober for over 8 years now. I am also in leadership at my church, I run faith based 12 step recovery groups, and I also mentor and sponsor other men in their recovery. My hope has been restored; I am now alive and living, not just existing anymore. I have purpose.

# I Believe in Hope

By Kathleen McCarthy, CRSS

When I started to believe in hope, I first had to embrace acceptance. I self-admitted into Yavapai Rehab. For me this was a do or die situation. I had never before been so honest and open about my own treatment and recovery to anyone. I had been holding on to so much in my past, it was like peeling an onion. As soon as I allowed it and became vulnerable and open to the help that was being offered, I felt extremely hopeful.

Every day I felt as if more was being lifted from my shoulders and just thrown away. This played a huge part in my journey. I started to see and feel again. I started practicing the tools I was learning in class, and they were working! I was repairing some of the relationships I had damaged. There were many people involved in this process, and I knew I had to change some of my relationships to become a healthier me. This was hard for me, but my life was worth it.



That was definitely my turning point. I believe in hope on a daily basis, and that I can give hope to someone in need.

# Hope for Me

By Sheri Swinney, CRSS

I have had a very long life of suffering from my addictions to drugs and alcohol, along with mental illness that was misdiagnosed for well over 40 years. I have been in nine rehabs, every time seeking hope - that hope that I could quit once and for all. None of that worked, and I was stuck in a battle I could not fight alone. I experienced physical, mental and financial abuse for years, but I never gave up on hope. After losing everything near and dear to me, and being tossed out of my home because of my addiction and undiagnosed mental illness, I finally found out there was a place for me to recover using spirituality, hope and forgiveness.

That place was the Gospel Rescue Mission. I was able to get away from a cycle of self-

harm and violence. I learned that there was really hope for me when I felt hopeless and helpless. After 19 months of solid abstinence from any substance, I was finally able to get a proper diagnosis and was released from my bondage of helplessness and hopelessness.

Through all of these experiences, I have learned great skills and knowledge of what hope really is to me. Now I am going to graduate from the RSS training course taught by the U of A Workforce Development Program, and eventually graduate from the Life Recovery Program at the Gospel Rescue Mission. With these tools I will finally be truly free; I can be me, the beautiful me that God created. I am so blessed and full of new hope for my exciting future!

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# The Seed of Hope

By Cynthia Millican, CRSS



I remember clearly the day I was handed hope. I was utterly hopeless, resigned to a life of darkness and pain. I did not see a way through. I could find nothing in my life to appreciate. I

stumbled in to my behavioral health agency crying and told them, "I cant stop using." Two remarkably young women came out to the almost deserted lobby, and showed that they cared about me. Before I left the lobby that day, I had a very basic plan to get me through the night, the warm line number, and someone who cared that I got better. The next day I got a well visit and an invitation to come in for groups.

All I needed was a start. I can't say that I never used again. I can say that the seed of hope never died. Today my life is good. I have three years of sobriety, my child I had given up hope of ever seeing again, and a promising start at being part of society. My sponsor in CMA is younger than the amount of time I spent in active addiction. Just like those women in the lobby, age has nothing to do with caring about a person. I thank God for these women every day. It may just be possible that the hope I hand someone one day will be a turning point from despair into a good life.

# My personal experience with HOPE

By Tawni Terman, CRSS



I thought that writing about my experience with hope would be easy to put into words. However, I found myself struggling. This article is going to express what I am hopeful for now, when I was once a person who had no hope at all.

I think that is because I experience hope every single day. The drive to keep my sobriety for 22 months now. Hope is what I see when I look at all three of my children, whom I once lost for a long time due to my addiction. When I look my loved ones in the eye, hope and pride is what I see, no longer fear and worry. I no longer feel hopeless or hope I will not wake up the next morning. Instead, I am hopeful as to what the next day will bring.

I look forward to sharing my experience with others. All the bad and all the good. Proving from my experience, and inspiring the hope in others that recovery IS possible. To grasp onto any little glimmer of hope that pops up when you so badly want to give up and give in. That small amount of hope that at times seems so far away, may take you places you would not think possible. Just hold on to it.

Once a hopeless dope fiend, now a dopeless hope fiend. I find myself using the word hope a lot when describing my recovery. Having hope is what provided me with the drive to change my life in a positive way. Even when it seemed so incredibly far away, I found hope - maybe even long before I realized it. without it, I wouldn't be where I am today.

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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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