

# Workforce Development News

## Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Tucson, Arizona April 7, 2016



## Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduates

Back Row left to right:

Antonio Arciniega, Steve Deasy, Margarita Velarde, Stephanie Tirrell, Bill Goodman,  
Ronald Hannigan, Terroni 'Ron' Smith, Mark Teissedre

Front Row left to right:

William 'Paul' Payne, Deseri Glass, Judith Crandall, Jo Ann Soto, Robin Adams, Tammy Ross,  
Liliane Willis (Armstrong)

# Recovery Begins With Hope

Bill Goodman

There was a time in my life where hope was becoming increasingly tenuous. This pattern had been ongoing for several years, with periods of time where simply functioning on a daily basis was the best I could do. When even this became too much, I came to a juncture where the decision was mine – to carry-on being a shell of the person I once was or to seek help.

I chose the latter, and soon after entering the Crisis Recovery Center in May of 2015 I was very fortunate to meet two people who rekindled the hope I once held dear. They both introduced themselves as Recovery Support Specialists. They both in turn shared some of their history with me, and patiently listened while I did the same. They seemed to be genuinely interested in why I was there, and asked me what I wanted most in life.

As I sat there I couldn't believe that a scant 48 hours earlier I was ready to crawl back into a bottle and hope for the end. I wasn't new to recovery, nor was I quite sure what path would reveal itself to me as I started. Yet as I sought an answer to that question, a single thought came to mind; Recovery begins with hope.



Soon after our encounter I questioned why I couldn't someday occupy the same role as those folks: To meet someone at what they believe may be their low point; to be willing and able to listen; to let them know there is hope and to share with them that they need not feel alone as they begin their journey of recovery.

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# I Have Hope

Tammy Ross

I had given up, I had developed a life in which I felt I had no choices. I would get high until I lost my mind and ended up in every hospital in town. I was destroyed from cancer and drug addiction and bad relationships. I would pray everyday and I thought God had left me. I hated myself. The doctors and staff saved my life. I felt I didn't deserve love or anything good because of the mistakes I've made. This program has given me hope of recovery and choices. I have support and am getting education. I know I am responsible and am determined to seek Recovery. I have hope and have never been so happy.



# Feeling of YES!

Deseri Glass



The word HOPE is viewed and defined differently to different people. For me the word HOPE is an emotion, a mindset, a belief, a motivation. No matter what a person maybe going through HOPE is what look to for a feeling of confidence, a feeling of "yes" there is a light at the end of the tunnel. It has been said that "HOPE is important because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today." HOPE is so very powerful, so powerful it can make the dying feel comfort leaving this world, their loved ones, and the life they've built. HOPE that they will be in a better place, that one day they will see and be with their loved ones again. I truly believe and feel everyone needs HOPE, everything we do consists of HOPE. You can do incredible things in life when you have enough HOPE.

# The Triumphs of Life

Jaqueline Ruiz

A mother, a sister, friend, a women, daughter, the rock that holds my family together...I am a women of many titles, and I have never given much thought to where my beliefs in hope came from until I became in need to be broken wide open. These labels weighed heavy on me. They carried so much weight in my heart, I became tired overwhelmed and lost.

I decided I would give my choice to this idea "A greater me". I wanted all my pieces to be broken and spread out so that way I can slowly piece myself together, skipping no steps, I felt alive for the first time. The pain, sadness, loneliness at 33 years old with four young children I quickly realized I had no hope. Somehow, somewhere down the line I had let it go.

With this awareness I gave all of me back to "me". I started asking those tough questions; Why were drugs more important to you? What was so bad you had to turn to drugs? Did you even think about us?? Did you think of yourself? Where you alone? Did you feel alone? Was there something I could've done?

The guilt; Was it me? Did I miss something, is it my fault? Could I have done better to help you? Questioning my position out loud gave me belief and planted the seed of hope. I gave the air to my situation and my family. I was able to breath again and we faced each other with compassionate hearts, and vibrant minds to strengthen our family. Doing what I feared most set me free and opening my heart to hope. Education and trusting to rebuild our lives is our great new beginning.

I was give a smile once and I've kept it in my heart and wake up to it everyday "you gave a lost father hope, you never left my side" -Kevin Kerr father to my children best friends in my heart my family member. This is what I take to new faces in search of hope through out behavioral health system. I believe 100% in you and each one of our recovery journeys.

My hope comes from Wars of the heart, triumphs of life in all of the little moments in between. I have taken my life back this is my story's beginning.

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## I Have Hope

Robin Adams

My HOPE occurred when they found the right medication for me. With the proper medication the voices were less frequent and I could think more clearly. I have accepted Jesus Christ to dwell in my heart and I changed to a vegan diet. I've been a vegan for five years and have been taking Barley Max which promotes faster healing in the body. For almost two years I have not heard the voices and my provider lowered my medication from 4mg to 3mg. I have hope.



# Hope is Empowering

Joann Soto



I have finally been able to put my life on a solid footing. Fortunately, I've had a good foundation in my relationship with God. The trust I ultimately have in a higher power has guided me through many paths. The RSS Institute has been a path that is putting things together in a focused way by allowing me to have hope.

I am grateful for the support from my case manager at COPE for getting me involved in the RSS Institute. On this path, all that has come before has been a stepping stone to the ultimate hope that no matter what, life can get better.

I can finally forgive myself for all the mistakes I have made in the past. I can move forward to a better place. Through the knowledge and education that I have received and am receiving I can not only help myself, but I can help others as well.

It has not been an easy life that I have led. At 16 I tried suicide and failed. I have been through many hard knocks since. There has been therapy, medication, and self medication - but ultimately knowing that I am not alone is for me a bright and shining light. Yes, there is hope. Hope is encouraging - it is also empowering. Hope has gotten me to where I am now and it allows me to be there to share with others. It allows me to be of service to others who need help.

Life has shown me that everyone needs help once in a while, and if I can I will help - even if it is only through hope. We can all have hope and help others find HOPE.

# Hope, Meaning and Purpose

Judy Crandall



Three years ago I was arrested, yet again, and convicted on a drug possession charge. Although this can be a huge barrier to employment, in many ways it was the best thing that ever happened to me because I finally came to terms with my addiction and mental illness. I reached out to Narcotics Anonymous (NA) and simultaneously transferred from the agency that had been providing my services. I made the decision that for the first time in my life I was going to get clean – really clean (no meds)—and figure out what was really going on. It has been a long process.

When I first found recovery three years ago, hope was the only thing I had. I had been abusing substances my entire life. I also had a mental illness since age 12, when I was first put on medication because I was deemed “an incorrigible child”. Unfortunately, throughout my entire journey in the behavioral health system, my doctor or provider would change

every six months to a year. The new provider would change my diagnosis and medications. Sometimes things would briefly get better, but nothing really worked for me. My life was a complete disaster. I had hope, however, that with the right kind of help, I could overcome these things and perhaps even finally “get it right.” I had no experience living life without drugs, at least psychiatric medication, but since I felt like such a dismal failure, I was willing to give it a chance.

I began working the program of NA, got a sponsor and began working the steps. I stayed on prescription drugs for the next year, however, and finally realized that these medications were as much a part of the problem as the street drugs ever were. My new provider gave me the opportunity to detox from everything in order to figure it out. That detox from psych meds was the most painful experience of my entire life and seemed as if it would never end. I was physically sick for approximately ten months, anxiety driven and could not sleep for another six to eight months after that. I still had hope, however, based on constant reassurance from other people in addiction, that my life could and would get better.

Recently, everything has changed. I take no meds. I have been clean for two years, and my psychiatric and substance use issues have been resolved. I no longer suffer from extreme anxiety and although I am a little more intense than I would prefer to be, I have hope that in time this will change as well.

My life today looks so much different than it ever has before: I am able to maintain healthy, meaningful

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# Hope

Mark Teissedre

Dictionary.com defines hope as the feeling that what is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best. In my story hope can be defined as a spiritual experience, because when I first felt hope, it changed me. You see when I was using and still in my addiction, I was okay with the fact that I would be a junkie forever, and that things were never going to change. Even after I stopped using it took me quite a while to establish hope and to be able to tap into that hope when I needed too. For me in early recovery hope came in the form of other people believing in me when I couldn't believe in myself or just didn't think I could do it. When I wanted to give up because things were getting too painful or hard, they were able to identify changes in me that I couldn't necessarily see in myself just quite yet. If it wasn't for these people in my life I honestly don't know if I would still be clean.



## Hope, Meaning and Purpose, by Judy Crandall, continued...

relationships; I maintain healthy boundaries and respect the boundaries of others; I am employable and have a job; I have my own home (which I pay for); I try to remain physically active; and I am accepted and sometimes even admired because of my recovery. Recovery is the center of my life and I have renewed hope, on a daily basis, that if I continue doing what I'm doing, stay positive, optimistic, and continue to expect nothing but the best from myself, my life will continue to progress. I will be able to eventually find meaningful employment and I will

continue to transform.

I also want to say that, since entering the IHRSSI, I have even more hope for my future than I had before. I have learned so much, both in NA and now in the Institute, and it is my greatest desire to be able to share these skills and the entire process with others living with addiction and those individuals trying to recover from mental illness. This would provide me with the utmost meaning and purpose. So thank you Beverly, John and Tim. What I've experienced here has changed my life.

# Family of Recovery

Liliane Armstrong



Hope has never been an often used word until I became part of this newfound family – The family of Recovery. I am in recovery not just from a substance use disorder, but from my innermost demons as well.

My recovery birthday... October 9th, 2015. That was the day that my whole life changed. Addiction has always been a part of my life as my father had severe alcoholism for as long as I can remember. Mom and I have been alone from the time I was 6 years old, and I am eternally grateful for that difficult decision that my mother made so long ago. She taught me

very early on in life that I needed to be strong, have faith in myself and to fight for what I believe in.

Back to the here and now... I found out late February of this year that a very good friend of mine had lost his battle with addiction and that he had no one to talk to. I want to make sure that no other family has to go through that horrific tragedy. Being a part of this Institute has taught me that I can be a listening ear for anyone battling demons, whether they are physical or mental, can make a world of difference. The Institute has given me the skills and tools to bring the overarching message of recovery to others like my friend that may not have anyone else to confide in. There is HOPE! There is someone out there that believes in a 100% chance of a full recovery from their illness. I want to be a part of the HOPE movement and I know that everyone will be successful if they know that there are others out there going through the same thing.

So my HOPE experience and strength have all come from the fellowship of others going through similar things that I have been through... mental abuse, physical abuse and most importantly, my substance use. I now know that I am not my illness although my illness is a part of me. I no longer identify myself as my illness, but instead I identify with it and work on myself. I am in recovery and it is a lifetime process. For that process to continue I must work it on a daily basis.



# I'm Proud Of Who I Am

Margarita Velarde



I have continuously been struggling to overcome many obstacles in my life. I finally realized that God has a purpose in life for me. When I went to complete my intake to COPE they referred me to Assurance. I was so happy to find out about the RSS program and it has given me more of a reason to change my life and at the same time be able to help others who are having the same struggles.

With the help of good friends at Assurance and their support I was able to register in my wellness groups and eventually was able to complete the RSS program. I'm so glad to know that the circumstances that I have put myself in, although not good ones, have taught me a lesson and probably I would not be where I'm at had it not been for my mistakes. Now I can be an example for other people. Where there is a will there is a way.

We all make mistakes – it's what we do about them that makes a difference. I learned with the help of Assurance that everyone could have a second chance to better themselves, that there is HOPE in all of us, we've just got to work through our hurt to find that little bit of light. Assurance has given me a second chance to life and I plan to take advantage of all they have to offer me. I want people to know there are people that really care about us and don't see us as addicts but as humans that just got lost for a while but we were able to find our way back. To become a Peer Specialist, to be able to help others, to show them I'm here and I will listen without judgement, means the world to me. I can say that for the first time in my life I'm proud of who I am. I am not ashamed anymore of my past because my past has made me grow spiritually stronger and now I will be known as Margarita Velarde, Peer Support Specialist!

# 100% Possibility of Recovery

Antonio Arciniega

My realization that there was hope for me to do something with my life other than sell and use drugs came to me when I met Chris and Sonia from COPE.

About 1-2 weeks prior to meeting Chris and Sonia, I was laying in bed asking my Lord and savior " what can I do with my life? I am a felon that knows how to sell drugs, I want out, I want to help people!". Shortly thereafter I was in a class in country jail with Chris and Sonia, at the end of class I approached them and mentioned my concerns to them. They then proceeded to inform me about the Recovery Support Specialist program. That is the moment that my life changed and I had hope to do something with my life that was positive, beneficial to my self and also gives me the opportunity to work with and help others. I had to patiently wait until I finished my time, but once I did I was diligent about pursuing and achieving my goal to attend and complete the RSS training. Thanks to this program and the people that run it, I am further along in my own recovery and it is my hope to find employment in the mental health/



substance abuse field so that I may utilize my life experiences to instill hope in other individuals that want a way out or who want to recover but are not yet aware that there is hope and a 100% possibility of recovery.

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# Light At The End Of The Tunnel

Stephanie Tirrell



To best explain my journey of finding hope, and the transformation my life underwent as a direct result of discovering that hope, I need to illustrate my journey: where my addiction took me and the time that hope played in helping me pull myself out of those depths.

In 2010 I was a single mother going to school part time and working the other part, with my own apartment and my son Dominic who was 2 at the time. Having left Dominic's father about a year before, I had started dating Skyler. Skyler was the sweetest man I'd ever met. I had never been treated so well in my life. He complimented me, helped around the house, cooked dinner for all of us if I was busy with homework and helped watch Dom if I had to work. Skyler worked out of town on the housing developments outside Wilcox, so he'd be up there a few days a week. We would all drive up on Sunday's

to drop him off, usually having Sunday dinner with his family and then he'd come back down on Wednesdays and spend the rest of the week with us.

May 10th 2010 was Memorial Day, a Monday he had off for the holiday. For some reason I decided to leave Dominic with my mom for the evening, Skyler and I would make the trip alone. We were almost to our exit when traffic started to slow, quickly coming to a complete stop in a long line of cars stopped due to an accident on the exit we were supposed to get off. We were sitting for about a minute when I looked in my rearview mirror and thought to myself, wow that car is coming awfully fast.... I glanced in my side mirror and BAM. A car rear-ended us going 80mph. we slammed into the semi in front of us. There were 3ft of skid marks behind the other drivers car, so he had no chance of stopping in time. Skyler was unconscious within 5 minutes and dead within an hour. His seatbelt broke his rib which punctured his liver. I came out relatively fine physically considering the severity of the crash. But, my life fell apart. I lost my job because I was injured and couldn't work, lost my scholarships to school because I stopped going, I couldn't pay for my apartment so I lost it as well. My son went to live with his father because I was just a mess... The only relief from the emotional turmoil I could find was in the pain killers I'd been prescribed. After about a year the pills turned into heroin... Heroin led me to Meth and needles...and I found myself living on the streets. The only thing that helped get me through the day was the prospect of another fix. I didn't care about the cost, I'd do anything for that relief... Which at that point wasn't even Relief it was just

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# Hope

Ronald Hannigan



Once I was able to give myself to God and stop doing things my way, I was able to actually participate in the programs I was attending. As I trusted in God, and the system put in front of me, I began to build on my faith. Once that foundation was being built I started to have HOPE. I am feeling more at peace as I am witnessing all the pieces of my life come together. I am breaking through personal barriers I never thought possible. As a result of all this, my faith and hope for the future has grown along with me. I now have a whole new perspective on life. I have found, and am building on, my true core beliefs and values, and I am growing in my personal integrity.

I would like to thank all of you involved in the RSS Institute for helping me move forward and grow in my recovery, my career and my life. It is people like you who inspire me to keep going and have Hope for myself, to help others in my life and those in my future as well.

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## Light at the end of the Tunnel, by Stephanie Tirrell, continued...

trying to not be sick. I remember being so lost and lonely and utterly hopeless. I didn't see a way out.

It took me almost 6 years of misery to finally discover a light at the end of this hideous tunnel I'd been stuck in. It started with NA meeting where I'd meet these people who were so happy and full of life and clean! I didn't see how that could be possible, being happy without drugs... Hmm, suspicious to say the least. But I continued to attend even

though it was just too hard for me to remain clean. I finally decided to check myself into a treatment center at the beginning of last year. That's where I found the most hope... I learned skills that seemed practical and logical and that hope turned into a real chance at staying clean.

My life goal is to work in a place to help people who are struggling, in the same position that I was, and to help them find that hope that saved me.

# I'm Grateful for this Opportunity

Steve Deasy

Hope has seemed watery for me – sometimes the tide is in, sometimes it is out. In some deep part of myself there has been a constant drip, drip, drip of hope, slowly dissolving the rock barriers of my life. Sometimes, however, the water on the surface has been absent - a desert. I needed to walk out of the desert of despair where I was lost and seek out the water of hope. I needed to drink it in fully, immerse myself in it, and share it with others to truly know the nourishment of hope.

My path hadn't included much interaction with traditional health support of any kind. I was mostly stable, but very stuck. I'd had a few crises, and the intensity and duration of each crisis seemed to be increasing. I have had many contributing factors to the issues I confront - heredity, biology, cumulative injuries - and my health on all fronts seemed to be in decline. I was losing my connection to hope. For the first time I wondered if I could handle all this, or if I even wanted to. That scared me. It was time to ask for help.

I'm grateful that I chose to interact with behavioral health providers. Although they call me "low maintenance", the care offered to me has been a great benefit. I'm not so stuck, I'm much more stable and I see a path to recover even more.

I feel my real opening to the hope of recovery came in the opportunity given to me to join this training for Certified Recovery Support Specialists



with U of A. The support from instructors and participants, the wealth of information, and the focus on personal empowerment and hope has been transformative for me. I've witnessed this transformation in others in our group as well.

I've had many revelations since joining the training: recovery is possible; this is just the stuff I have and we all have our own stuff; I am at my best when I am in service to others; release myself from stigma; and much more. I'm grateful for this opportunity to heal myself, to learn how countless others have healed, and to carry the message of hope to others in need.

# Crying Tears of Joy

Terroni 'Ron' Smith



This morning about 11:30, I will be voted onto the Human Rights Committee for People Recovering from Mental Illness. This is a big deal to me even if the other sitting members can't tell by my demeanor. About 25 years ago, I 'Kinda' had an emotional breakdown. I was attending Arizona State University and working as a staff member at the Arizona Boys Ranch. In that broken emotional state, I made some very poor choices that led to more poor choices. My life took on a life of its own and spiraled out of control.

I found myself homeless, eating out of trash cans and sleeping in shelters. My mom rescued me a few times and I would mimic having a job and coping for a year or so, only to become homeless again when I exhausted her patience and mercy. I behaved this way for 20 years. In 2013, I found myself in the emergency room on the verge of death. Two surgeries and a few bags of antibiotics later, I recovered physically.

I thought, "The eternal spirit has given me a second chance. What will I do with it?" I decided to recover mentally and emotionally as well. So as I reminisce on my journey, I am not regretting the hardships I have been through. I don't mourn the lost opportunities for wealth and success. Today, I am crying tears of joy. I cherish every moment that has made up the story of Ron. And, I thank all those who willingly or unwillingly crashed into to me as I stumbled and bumbled my way here. Recovery is another word for "LIVING".

*"Oh creator of all things, help me. For this day I go into the world naked and alone, and without your hand to guide me I will wander far from the path which leads to success and happiness."*

*THE SALESMAN'S PRAYER,  
Og Mandino*

# The Beginning of Hope

Paul Payne



Hope, for me, happened on 6/8/2004, when the detective from the Phoenix Police department slammed me onto the top of his car. With the heat from the engine burning my face, he told me I was a career criminal at the age of 33. He also stated that every time I left

my house I committed a felony. As I sat in the back of the cop car the detective's turned on the heater to make my day even more miserable.

I was strung out on drugs in a bad way. I was at my very rock bottom. I actually gave a sigh of relief to be arrested – no more running from the detectives, nobody I knew liked me, I lied, I cheated & I stole from everybody to support my drug habit. My thought process was, "I am going to prison for the fourth time, having violated my previous three paroles, this will be the seventh time I will be getting out of prison with nothing but the clothes on my back."

So I sat contemplating what just happened and everything they just said to me. I didn't want to be that person they were talking about. Then it hit me – I was really upset, not with the police, but myself. I thought there had to be a change and I knew the commitment it would take. I made a vow to myself, and that was "I am never using drugs intravenously ever again". That day was the beginning of Hope for me.

Today is April 7th 2016. I've stayed out of prison and the vow that I made with myself stands to this day. Recovery is 100% possible.

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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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