



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF MEDICINE TUCSON

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Family & Community Medicine

November 21, 2019

Integrated Healthcare
**Recovery Support
Specialist Institute**

Tucson, AZ

GRADUATES



Back row left to right: Tyler Smith, Paige Bhat, Michael Montijo, Marshall Miller, Charles Frey, Kevin Purry, Stacey Monge, Antonio Guerrero

Middle row left to right: Alexis VerMilyea, Jasmine Kramer, Juan Aguilar, Dawn Freyholtz, Frances Mendoza, Beth Salcido, Randi Rodriguez, Nasara Shea-Horne, Oscar Astorga

Sitting left to right: Janell Jenkins, Danielle Bergeron, Bobbie Belliveau, Christiana Vance

Give Back What Has Been So Freely Given to Me

Jasmine Kramer, CRSS*

My personal experience of Hope has come in two parts. My first time to experience a feeling of hope was when I opened my eyes to the people that were sitting next to me in AA. I had been going for a while, but only because my family forced me if I wanted a place to stay. When I had my moment of clarity and when I decided to get sober, I finally opened my eyes. I looked around and saw all these happy, smiling, well-dressed, teeth-brushed, hair and makeup done, happy normal people, and that gave me hope. But if I did what they did, I would get what they got. I wanted to have the serenity that they had. So with the gift of desperation, I gave up and gave in to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous and will be celebrating 3 years of sobriety on December 1st.

The second experience was a phone call from my mom, while I was in Palo Verde after a serious suicide attempt. My family had spoken to a therapist who helped them understand what having borderline and bipolar is like, and my mom said finally that they believed and understood me. I felt like a weight was lifted off my shoulders. My family finally saw that I wasn't just someone with

bad behavior who made bad decisions. There was actually something going on in my brain that wasn't like theirs, and my reality was different from theirs. They finally got that to the fullest extent that they possibly could, not having a mental illness themselves. I felt hope at that moment that I could get better. I hadn't sought help because I didn't think my family would approve, and finally when they understood about mental illness they encouraged me to take my meds and to see a therapist, and were more understanding of who I am and how my brain works.

I truly believe that my alcoholism is so intertwined with my mental illness and I'm fully aware that I was self-medicating. Because my family didn't believe in psych meds, I felt guilty taking them, even as an adult. I would start them and then go off them quickly because of the guilt. When my family finally accepted mental illness and that their daughter was mentally ill, and when I accepted that I was an alcoholic and that there was a solution, it was a turning point. My problems were identified and I found out that recovery



is possible. I felt like because I'm beating the odds, I can help others to do the same. I am someone who wants to die most days out of the week. The fact that I have a program that gets me out of bed to give back to others, medications to take that help me, and a therapist who is amazing, is just amazing. Mental illness and alcoholism don't have to limit our lives. Some of our lives are cut horribly short, but those of us who live have a responsibility to give back to those who are still suffering. Since discovering these two things about my alcoholism and mental health issues, and believing that recovery is possible, I have found what I feel like is my true calling in life, which is to give back what has been so freely given to me: a solution.

*This person represents herself and not Alcoholics Anonymous.



A Weight Had Been Lifted And I Could Breathe Again

Stacey Monge, CRSS

March 5th, 2017 was my turning point. That will forever be the date that is in my memory of when I regained HOPE. Hope and faith that I could get my life back. It was the day I realized how much I had lost as I let my life disintegrate right before my eyes. March 5th was the day my life changed forever. On that day, I was arrested, taken to jail and my car impounded. It was at that moment I lost everything I had. I had been living in my car and now I had lost that. In that moment, I had to take a good look at what I had allowed to happen to my life because of my addiction to drugs.

Because of that night and my criminal charges, I was court ordered to treatment, which was the best thing that

could have ever happened. At Community Bridges Inc. where I was to receive treatment, I met with my intake coordinator Pam. When I sat with Pam for the first time, I simply felt like I had no energy left. I was tired and overwhelmed with the struggles of drug addiction and homelessness. I felt like my generally optimistic spirit was near death. Pam assured me that help was available to me if I was ready to receive it. I remember like it was yesterday, how I felt when she said that to me. It was like a weight had been lifted and I could breathe again. Pam was there to remind me I was never alone.

I am proud to say that I have now been clean for over a year. I worked hard to prove that I was someone worth having hope for.

Pam had said in the beginning that she hoped the best for me and she had faith that I could achieve anything. It was now up to me to prove it to myself. It was with my determination and the undying support of my mom and dad for which I owe the greatest thanks and love, that I am here today and getting ready to graduate as a Certified Recovery Support Specialist from the University of Arizona Workforce Development Program. And I have continued hope for now and in the journey ahead.

Given the Right Tools and Guidance

Paige Bhat, CRSS

I feel like my moment of hope occurred when I started to really take into account what my therapist had been conveying to me for 3 years. I had a major distrust with males and anyone with authority. I had been through many caseworkers, therapists, doctors, and judges; everything would change constantly. It was extremely difficult to connect with anyone, especially those who had never went through any of the situations I had been put through. I felt as though I'd never get out of this loop I had fallen into. The turning point for me was when I lost my two children. I felt broken, hopeless, and worthless. I fell into a deep depression and began to lose control completely, I felt like I had lost my mind. My lawyers, case manager, and a few support people encouraged me to take a break and work on myself. I went to stay with my aunt for a while where I felt calm and comfortable. To me, my aunt is everything and she's extremely wise. While there, she worked through my feelings with me, helped me see things in a better light, gave me encouragement and reminded

me that I can't lose myself because I still had my daughter who needed me too.

It was hard to push on. It was a chore just to be alive at that point. That was until I was assigned my therapist, who worked endlessly with me to build a trusting relationship. He really worked with me on reframing things in a more positive aspect, and forgiving myself. He had immense hope for me, and gave me lots of encouragement. He never pretended to act as if he knew what I'd been through; he was very real and had a true passion for his field of work. It sounds terrible, but I felt I lost the most precious people close to me in order to learn a greater lesson. I felt I gained the ability to take accountability for myself and actions, stop the same patterns I had gone through, and I learned to be a more empathetic, compassionate person and parent. My children also gained a couple of amazing parents too. As much as I love and miss them, luckily they were adopted by two parents who love them just as much as I do.



Another thing I learned was that I want to be the person I needed when I was growing up. In the end, the judge I had also began to have hope for me and that spread throughout the entire court case. The lawyers, therapists, review board, and everyone saw that I had been encouraged, I had been given hope to become a better person and parent, and I was given resources and assistance. They saw that it was possible to change your life, given the right tools and guidance.



Much Needed Positive Energy and Smiles

Oscar Astorga, CRSS

My name is Oscar Astorga. I have been through so many ups and downs in my life. They created a super huge hole that I dug myself in economically, physically, emotionally and mentally. While I was down there many thoughts, in particular evil ones roamed my mind. They gave me a sense of hopelessness, uncertainty, insecurity, fear and exhaustion. One day I had a moment with myself while I was withdrawing; I was struggling, hurting and wondering where this life was going to take me. That was really scary! However, my mother always believed in me and stayed on top of me saying I should go and seek professional help. She said "Son, give yourself a chance to succeed. Stop destroying and sabotaging your life." After

multiple times of trying to quit my substance use disorder on my own, I never did. I always failed. It always got the best of me, and I hated it. It was destroying me, as well as my family and everything I believed in.

Everything I owned was starting to disappear; people didn't want to be around me. I decide to seek help at Cope. I do have to admit, I was lucky to have family and friends to push me. In addition to that, my recovery agency and my recovery coach, amongst other people like a nurse practitioner. They believed in me and helped me get past my withdrawals, work on my recovery, and suggested me going to a 12-step program. There I met more people who were in the struggle, living on the streets and being discriminated by society in certain ways. I went to rehab for three months, willingly. I was tired of being tired; I stuck with my recovery and I felt this beautiful feeling inside of me to change and

succeed. To be a good person and help somebody. I brought so much positivity to the rehab center. That main coordinator offered me a job the day of my graduation, and it was such a moving moment. The day I graduated, it felt great because a week prior to that I had lost a dear friend who was in the same rehab with me. My graduation brought much needed positive energy and smiles. I decided to become a Recovery Support Specialist and understand a little bit more. I am so grateful for this opportunity to become an RSS. I am super excited and I can't wait to get out there in the field, and help people change the world. One person at a time, one thought at a time. I'm ready for the task at hand; I have my testimony, I know what it feels like. I feel I can be a great tool in supporting people with substance use disorder and mental illnesses.

Hope For a Good Life

Janell Jenkins, CRSS

Most of my time in Arizona, I was either homeless or in prison. I got out of prison on June 10, 2019, and was dropped off at the Bellevue apartments through Old Pueblo. I was given my own apartment. For the first time in a very long time, I had hope. My life recovery coach Kelly gave me a chance to be the person I long to be. She helped me see that I can

help others, as I have always wanted to. I have no desire to use; I only hope for a good life and the chance to help others just like me. I know I can show others like me that there is always hope, and that I am proof of it. Now after 9 1/2 years my daughter is with me, I am married to an amazing sober man, and I have my own place.



Thanks to Kelly and my family, I will be able to get a job that feeds my soul.



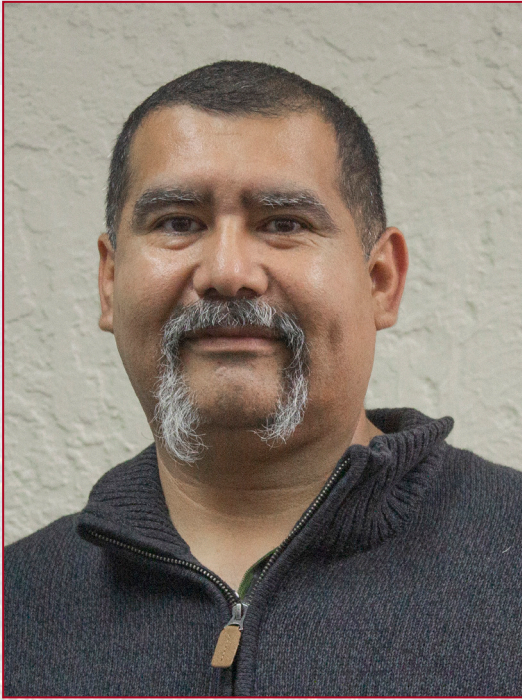
Courage to Do What I Do Today

Bobbie Belliveau, CRSS

My personal experience with hope happened on the day I was standing in the line at a

church. I was waiting there for a food box because I was homeless, and had gotten breakfast and coffee. In the line was a woman I cherished very much, my lost sister Flo. We had lost contact for many years. We met when I was eleven. She asked what I was doing there and I replied that I was homeless. She walked over to my niece's car, then turned

around and came back. She told me to grab my stuff, and that "you're going home with me." Being able to have her as support meant the world to me. She gave the encouragement I needed to push forward to be my best. I feel she gave the courage to do what I am doing today. I am not my illness. I will not let it define me. I am positive. I rose above my illnesses.



Hope Played Major Role in My Recovery

Antonio Guerrero, CRSS

Hope found me about one year into my last prison sentence. I remember that at the time, my outlook was that no one really cared and that I was just another cog in the system. Hope played a major role in my recovery. Toward the end of my two and a half year sentence, my thinking and attitude toward the system and society was anger, and that no one cared. Also, that I was just another number or a statistic. To get out of the monotony of prison life I went to a class

4 transition into society from prison. Hope came in the form of a man named Johnny. At the start before he said anything, he mentioned that he was there to give back what someone gave to him. That was hope.

At that time, I had no faith or spirituality. But it became the turning point that I needed to change my direction and thinking. Hope was the kick-start I needed to move me toward recovery. His story about how he used the tools given to him, to achieve balance in his

life by changing his habits and his environment and adding a support structure became my hope. If he could do it, I could do it. Today I stand before you 12 years sober, leaning very heavily on my faith, family, and support structure. I, like Johnny did some years ago, simply want to give to someone what was given to me - and that's hope.

The Importance of Hope

Beth Salcido, CRSS



We never celebrated Christmas when I was younger. All the Christmas lights and the spirit of Christmas lights, for me was depressing. On Sundays, the neighbors would stare or criticize us, because we did not have any religious beliefs, so therefore there was no HOPE. The negativity stayed in my soul for a long time, so I

became very bitter. I have more knowledge now thanks to the people that have taught me how important it is to work hard and to find hope, not hopelessness.

Programs like Camp Wellness and NAMI have helped me learn this. In addition, a good friend of mine who had trust and faith in me was my turning point. Recovery is not only a word

you use from using drugs, but also from where our family tree originated - that would be our ancestors. My main goals for this assignment are to be able to check myself from assuming thinking aloud, and not to react to them. My family has given me the awareness to believe in myself, and the people I love.



A Validating Shield

Christiana Vance, CRSS

In the ancient pre-Roman days, the Greeks viewed hope as being just as dangerous and undesirable as a plague. In modern times, hope has become more closely associated

to miracles and long shots. For me, I have found hope to be more relatable to validation and relief. When you walk into a doctor's office for the first time, and as soon as they introduce themselves, they begin to ask you questions and tell you things about yourself you had not thought were important enough to share with anyone. You start to wonder if they are clairvoyant, or your paranoia wonders if Big Brother is really watching you. When

they explain that your physical appearance alone allowed them to start a diagnosis and the rest was just running thru the diagnostic checklist, you feel that relief. Then you realize you can finally let go of all stress from the negativity thrown at you. An actual professional has validated that you are not just a lazy, unmotivated leech. You have hope. Now, hope is your shield against unhelpful words and opinions.

Support and Hope

Nasara Shea-Horne, CRSS

Living with a mental illness has not been easy. However, I am lucky to have a good support system and hope. I experienced small moments of hope throughout my life. The first time I experienced hope and felt like my life was getting better was after my second stay at the hospital. During this time, I got stable on the right

medication, and after I got out my friends and family were surrounding me. I found a behavioral health institution that aided me in getting services, and set me up with support groups and employment. Sometimes the hardest point in our recovery can become better with a little bit of support and hope.



Hope to Instill Inspiration in Those Who Need It

Charles Frey, CRSS



My story of hope began a long time ago, in the form of encouragement from my mother. She would always seem to have just the right words to say to make me feel better, or give me the courage and strength to get me through the hard times as a child. Later on, as time progressed, my hope began to fade. I began to start seeing how the world really was through my own eyes. It

seemed bleak and miserable, as my own bad choices started to carve out a different picture and leave me with no hope. At this point I was bottling things up inside because all the “normal people” I talked to just couldn’t relate. I was depressed and I didn’t know where to turn.

I began to talk to those who have been through what I have and they became like my mother did, back when I was

a kid. Once again I could hold my head up and feel my hope rise in me, though their own personal stories. I am so grateful for those people, and I now look to pay it forward and make a difference in people’s lives as an RSS (Recovery Support Specialist). I am truly thankful for the RSS institute and I have the HOPE that I too can instill some of my inspiration in those who need it.



Continued Hope

Marshall Miller, CRSS

When I was eighteen, I had the most traumatic event of my life. Ever since my first psychotic episode, I have battled for all that I have. A couple of college degrees later, and several more episodes have taught me that this is indeed a battle for recovery, a battle to continue hope. Only one major element sticks out to me that made me feel hope again. My introduction and work in the court ordered system

with my first Recovery Coach. This change first happened in 2015. My recovery coach was dedicated and continued to go above and beyond to help me recover and hope again. Giving me tools and help as necessary. This was definitively a turning point, in that my coach made me realize that people all over the place struggle with mental illness, and revealing that they too suffered from one. This perspective made me then look

beyond the illness to all the potential I have, and made me eager to strive to better myself and help others along the way. My Recovery Coach is in all actuality the main reason I am currently in this program, which makes me feel needed again.

Newfound Quality of Life

Michael Montijo, CRSS



My experience with hope came in my most desperate moments. A time when I had given up on myself. I had let my quality of life diminish to a level that at one point, I believe was too far removed and tainted with too much shame. Active addiction fueled by my misery. A seemingly hopeless abyss, inescapable until hope showed its face, like a match lit in a dark room. Hope pushed its

way into my life in the form of my brother Joseph. He sent out, hell-bent on convincing me that I mattered to someone. That my life had meaning, and that he wasn't going to stand by and let me rot away believing otherwise. It was then, when I stood after laying down for so long. I began to take steps toward the recovery I know today. I have experienced obstacles along the way, and

the challenges are still many. With the support of my family, my program, and an ever-expanding network of peers, I am able to reap the benefits of this newfound quality of life.

I have been given a great gift, and now I feel it is my turn to pass it along to the next person trying to find their way in the dark.

From the Dark to the Light

Frances Mendoza, CRSS

For sixteen years, I was brutally abused by the father of my four children. I was scared to leave after spending two thirds of my life with him, but through prayer, I decided one day to tell him to leave. I was twenty-nine years old. He came back in the middle of the night and viciously attacked me with knives. I turned to meth to help me cope. I reached a turning point when Family Drug Court placed me in a treatment center.

They taught me how to take my medications, as well as other life skills. I began to have hope at that time. The RSS workers helped me, and I believe that my support network and taking my medications took me from the dark to the light. After I got completely sober, I hoped for my kids back. The judge returned them to me in 2017. Getting a job and my children back was the highlight for me. I learned how to pay bills and



supply food. I didn't want to be on drugs anymore. I turned myself around, and now I am a functional member of society. I strive to pass on to others what others have passed on to me - hope.



During my time in the military, I often struggled with depression, anxiety, and lack

Hope For a Better Future

Tyler Smith, CRSS

of sleep that affected my daily life. I never sought out professional help or other treatments as it was "frowned upon" in certain career fields in the military. I was in a very bad spot in life until I entered the medical board process that would eventually lead to my medical retirement from the Air Force. During this process, I

came into contact with two of the best doctors I have ever known. This is when I experienced HOPE for a better future. They got me to agree to start taking antidepressant medications, which helped me out tremendously. I was finally able to be happy, control anxiety, and actually get quality sleep.



From Feeling Hopeless to Finding My Hope

Alexis VerMilyea, CRSS

My addiction was a dark place that I was stuck in for years. Just self-medicating so I would not feel various forms of trauma that had occurred throughout my life. It was a place I wanted to escape for a long time, but I didn't know how. I didn't know who I was anymore or what I was even capable of. I knew there was a strong woman inside but my addiction made me weak. I was just lost. I think I always had hope deep down, but it was covered in so

many layers of darkness that I hadn't felt it in a long time. In fact, I felt the exact opposite - helpless. After my kids were taken by DCS and I was sitting in detox lost and helpless, I met David.

Hearing his story and everything he had overcome blew me away. It lit a spark inside me, and from that point on I knew that I could get through this, and I also knew that I wanted to be a "David" for someone else. He inspired me, helped me to realize that

my story can touch someone, to help them know they are not alone and they can get their lives, children and families back. If I can help just one person, what a reward that would be. Like I said, I think I always had hope, it was just covered. Meeting David helped ignite something inside of me early on in my recovery that helped me from feeling helpless, to finding my hope and knowing I can do this!



The Gift of Hope

Kevin Purry, CRSS

To me, hope is that little spark, the driving force in all our lives. I discovered hope when I was in UMC renal clinic in 2002. That was right after a traumatic event that caused my PTSD. For

me it was hope that didn't let me give up on myself. Hope showed me that I am here, I am relevant, and I am loved. Hope showed me that all the things I've been through and will go through isn't for my benefit, but for the benefit of that lost soul who believes that they can't survive or get past what they're currently going through. Hope has turned my experiences into a map for others to follow, to use as an example that life does continue after trauma,

and that life is worth living. It also demonstrates the true strength of the human spirit to continue. It has taught me that even though I've been through what I've been through, I still deserve to have a good life. I still deserve to be loved and respected, and I don't have to use drugs or alcohol or be labeled a mentally ill person to be a relevant human being in the world. That is the greatest gift that hope has given me.

Best Place Possible

Danielle Bergeron, CRSS

I have been lost for the last 20 years. I have hated myself and others, suffered from self-helplessness, and abused my body and mind. My journey of hope was gradual, with lots of ups and downs. But with the

dedication of my family, my doctors, and friends, I am now in the best place possible, and eager to get others to THEIR best places possible.





On a Path That Leads Onward and Upward

Juan Aguilar, CRSS

The past six years have been very difficult for me. I fell into a depression and during that time, I got hooked on meth and started to self-medicate with it. I got into a lot of trouble with the law, and turned myself in when I violated my probation. That was a turning point for me. If I messed up anymore, I would be doing 3-5 years in prison. I went to three different agencies to learn how to cope with my addiction and it was required, per court order. I

took IOP, Road to Recovery, Recovery Unlimited and MRT classes. During that time, I had a breakthrough with my therapist at CODAC who helped me overcome some triggers and guided me to live and manage my depression. Once the weight of the depression was off my shoulders, I started to see my goals and dreams more clearly and began working to make them my reality. As of today I am performing an opera piece, which has been

a dream of mine. I am also furthering my education by getting certified as a RSS; I have always wanted to go back to school. I am now doing what I have always wanted with the help of my family, friends, and peer support. Thanks to those who have given me hope, I am on a path that leads onward and upward.

The Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute is administered by the Workforce Development Program in the Department of Family and Community Medicine (DFCM) at the University of Arizona. The Institute is funded by Arizona Complete Health and Banner University Family Care. Arizona Complete Health services are funded through a contract with the Arizona Department of Health Services/Division of Behavioral Health Services (ADHS/DBHS) and AHCCCS.

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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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