

Workforce Development News

Integrated Healthcare Recovery Support Specialist Institute

Tucson, Arizona July 11, 2019



Certified Peer Support Specialist Graduates

Standing left to right: Debra Hughes, Shannon Muklebust, Erica Morales, Valerie Haven, Les Hatcher, Scott Johnson, Melanie Kruger, Edward McQuade, Laylana Hoffman, Ricardo Hernandez Jr, Brittany Franck, Tyler Goetz, Belinda Beeler, Sarah Rodriguez, Benjamin Penniston

Sitting left to right: Aimee Vasile, Kerry Chappell, Jessica Sandau

Hope

Anonymous, CRSS

My life has always been full of extreme highs and lows, something I had become accustomed to and learned to deal with in extremely unhealthy ways. I had spent most of it high off marijuana and prescribed Xanax pills, trying to cope with my uncontrollable feelings, overwhelming thoughts, and irrational rage-filled outbursts. Being handed a Borderline Personality Disorder diagnosis with very little actual help towards healing, I had felt lost and alone most of my life – unable to maintain healthy boundaries and relationships with people. Instead, in my late twenties I developed a relationship with cocaine and pills of all kinds, and occasionally even harder substances.

I never thought I was addicted at all, but two or three years into daily cocaine use, I realized I wasn't having fun anymore. My rage was greatly intensified and my issues with anxiety were severely out of control. I was having mental breakdowns almost every day and nothing made me happy; I didn't recognize myself in the mirror. I was someone else, someone I hated.

Then my dog died. Even writing this now, my heart aches with pain and regret over her loss. I had her for thirteen years, since she was just six weeks old. She was my best friend, my companion through the many ups and downs in my life, the million moves and states we changed, the only being in the universe that had ever shown me unconditional love. I had wasted the last three years of her life being on drugs and not fully enjoying my time with her, not even

spending enough time with her. Now she was just gone – time I could never ever get back.

I put her down in the Emergency room in the middle of the night on October 3rd, 2017 and went home utterly devastated – a feeling that still traumatizes me to this day. I decided in that moment of darkness that I wouldn't do drugs ever again. There would be no more cocaine or pills to numb the pain of my life and my losses. I would feel this loss, every miserable second of it because my pet deserved no less from me. I wanted to be present, fully alive to honor her memory. In her death, my little love saved my life just as she had done many times before through my hardest times. I would not let her down.

Her loss was my turning point. I just quit everything and didn't look back. I bought self-help books, books on meditation and Buddhism, books on spirituality and psychology. I spent a year reading, taking notes and finding myself, understanding myself, and most importantly forgiving myself for all of the pain I had caused in the world and to myself. It was the single hardest year of my life, and one of the most difficult lessons I had ever learned, but I'm okay now and it's really all thanks to her for loving me the way she did.

Hope

Aimee Vasile, CRSS



Hope is what I experienced in August of 2018. It came in the form of a person, my Recovery Coach Casey Nigor at Codac. I had just been through the worst unfortunate series of events that I had ever experienced; it was my rock

bottom. I overdosed on August 11, and barely made it through. As soon as I came to, I left the hospital against medical advice (big mistake), and the next day went into a 3 day psychosis that landed me at TMC and Palo Verde for 3 days. I can't even remember who it was that picked me up from the hospital and drove me to Codac. But when Casey came and took me into her office, I felt hope for the first time in a long time! I was barely in a coherent state of mind but she could read my behavior and she could understand everything I was telling her. Thinking back, it is just amazing to me how intuitive Casey is and how well she "got" me. Casey got me into rehab at Las Amigas, and it changed my life. Today I will have 11 months clean; in 9 days, I'm planning my 1 year clean celebration. I have my own place and car, my kids and I have an amazing relationship, my marriage of 20 years is better than ever and I'm about to graduate from the IHRSS Institute on July 11th. It's all because of the hope that I found that day in Casey's office.

Hope on My Mind

Tyler Goetz, CRSS

I wake up and go to bed with hope on my mind. It can make a person's day and change their life. Today, hope is embodied in all aspects of my life. It's the extra push to get me where I need to go in my troubling times, but I didn't always have hope. When I was in a rural town in Northeastern New Mexico trying to detox, bursting into seizures with severe hallucinations in freezing temperatures, I found my long-lost friend, hope. I came to the realization that if I could make it through this detox alive, I could help others going through the same situation. Being hopeful is who I am, and the actions I take make what I hope for a reality.



Character + Faith = Hope

Les Hatcher, CRSS

I started drinking alcohol when I was approximately 14 years of age. Initially, drinking gave me a sense of hope. This kind of hope is a false kind of hope. False because the path that drinking alcohol led me down was a path of serious health problems, a seriously damaged career, and destroyed relationships, as well as financial problems that cost me a heavy price. I was a hopeless alcoholic who could not stop drinking. I found real HOPE, when I turned to AA meetings, CR Groups, halfway houses and VA substance abuse programs, to help me overcome my alcohol addiction. I have been sober for over 3 years because of the faith that I have of holding onto HOPE, a byproduct of Jesus Christ.

The formula is: Suffering is overcome by Persistence. Persistence builds Character. Character + Faith = HOPE



Personal Recovery, Turning point of Hope

Kerry Chappell, CRSS



It was as if I was here, living and breathing but not at the same time. I still feel this way, but I am doing my best to get out of a very dark and dismal place. I'm letting go of anger, intense pain and pity for myself because of all the horrible events I've been through.

Many hospitalizations, since the age of 18, a lot with traumatic events entwined in them, that I try not to think about. Sometimes, sleep is an issue, with strange nightmares and

restless insomnia. I want to go beyond all the diagnoses, and my "turning point" of hope was when I was sick of being sick. I finally said yes to going to some groups again in my home state of Massachusetts, after sleeping my days and nights away overmedicated on thorazine in a group home. A peer support reached out to me while I was in the hospital, and I finally agreed to go to groups after the hospital stay. Also, at the group over the weekend there my hope was renewed in other people who were dealing with similar issues. Then the final realization and the utter complete tiredness of being "sick", and wanting so desperately to be a part of my daughter's life in this reality, this world, not my own- that was absorbed with only my pain. Finally, I was and am ready to come back into the actual world. Everyone else's, my community, my loved ones, friends, and my daughter's, most of all. Out of the painful, somber world I've been surrounded by too long; I am done with that. I want to return to humanity with peace and the powerful strength of love in my heart.

A Renewed Faith in a Brighter Future

Benjamin Penniston, CRSS



In the closing weeks of 2016, I opened a book gifted to me from the personal library of one of the most successful, inspiring men I know. I had ignored it for years, overlooking its worn, cloth cover and equally drab title. Sipping my last bag of green tea on a December evening, there was a moment where I felt a marked shift in my thoughts, feelings, and perhaps most importantly my attitude regarding recovery. Less than two chapters in, I folded the book on my lap and felt my eyes well up. I allowed myself a minute to reflect before continuing to read half of it that night.

The words in those opening chapters began to illuminate the possibility of healing, growth, and personal fulfillment in a way I had not considered before. For a number of bleak

years, I'd been hoping to be "cured" from mental illness in the same way a vaccine might wipe out a virus. As I continued turning the pages of Reality Therapy however, the challenge presented to me was not to find a cure for my mental health symptoms, but rather to improve my ability to meet my needs in spite of them. It isn't a self-help book by design, and is rather geared toward clinicians. I think in some ways this was helpful for me because the text wasn't instructing me personally on how to initiate and maintain the process of improving my life. I believe this allowed me to reflect on the included practical examples more objectively than I might have compared to reading (yet another) standard self-help publication. Whatever it was, I found the approach striking. More importantly, it sounded feasible. In practicing Reality Therapy, the labels of various mental illnesses are all but dismissed in favor of terms such as "irresponsibility". Although I initially found this notion difficult to utilize, it was helpful because it dispelled the hopelessness I had become so accustomed to. I feel it is worth noting here that some of the content is dated; particularly when it refers to homosexuality as an included example of behavior to be corrected. Knowing a few individuals of this orientation far more directed, successful, or dare I say- "responsible" than myself, I fought the urge to rip a few pages out. In its entirety however, I had found sufficient value to forgive a few lines of ignorance from half a century ago and decided to leave the book unharmed.

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Hope: Events Will Turn Out For the Best

Shannon Muklebust, CRSS

The definition of hope: the feeling that what is wanted can be had, or that events will turn out for the best. I had never taken the time to look up the word hope. After reading all the ways hope has been defined, I started to think back for times in my life that I experienced hope. I couldn't remember... or was it because I never realized it? Better yet, recognize the feeling of hope. Especially when I spent most of my life in fear, discouragement, and negativity. That was my turning point, after reading the definition. Being in the RSS program, I have gained HOPE, and learned how to apply hope in my everyday life. To have ambition, gain confidence, and know how to maintain positivity. Here's hope to the future, because I've gotten through the past.



Renewed Faith in a Brighter Future, by Benjamin Penniston, continued...

Reading this text brought to light that my focus needn't be solely fixated on understanding the past, nor upon proving theories to explain my troubling symptoms. Such musings can last a lifetime without producing meaningful effect. Instead, my potential to live a quality life was suggested as not merely possible, but likely, if I learned to meet my needs while releasing some attachments to learned helplessness. I found a unique sense of inspiration from the lack of technical jargon in exchange for clear-cut objectives. While I will not argue that labeling particular groups of symptoms is entirely useless regarding some aspects of treatment (perhaps most notably when prescribing medications), they can have a profound, even detrimental effect

on the outlook of someone yearning to live beyond the implied confines of a definition. The label for the group of symptoms I continue to live with daily is recognized as a mental illness; that has not changed. Instead, what has changed is the way I am able to view myself as an entity separate from that label. I soon began to have renewed faith in a brighter future- something I'd long given up on.

Six weeks after opening this book, I found myself at an interview, and walked out with a full time job after nearly two nervous decades of reluctant/intermittent employment. Two and a half years ago, I sat down at Thanksgiving feeling grateful someone was feeding me. A week later, I was so hungry that I couldn't fall asleep...

So I read a book.

My Hope to Recovery

Melanie Kruger, CRSS



My hope occurred in 2018 during a one on one session with my psychologist; this introduced me to a different type of therapy called EMDR. It gave me hope due to feeling like I was in more control of my mind and body. EMDR played a big role in my journey to

recovery; by learning the skills to cope when I was in a stressful situation, which would trigger a panic attack. I would do the EMDR coping skills I had learned; my mind and body would slowly start to become calm. I was in control once again.

In the process of me learning these skills, my support team including my psychologist, psychiatrist, family, and also my friends. My support team helped by walking me through the process for using EMDR coping skills, and by listening to me when I told them what my boundaries are. By doing so, it caused me to have hope back in my life. I didn't feel trapped anymore. I didn't feel panic when leaving my bedroom. I started to truly look forward to re-entering society. I have the skills to help me stay in control of my own body and mind, if an episode of panic occurs. Now I have done all the hard work of learning and using the skills of the EMDR process in my daily life routine. I have seen more doors open for me and my future, which I thought I had lost many years earlier.

Hope is a Beautiful Feeling

Sarah Rodriguez, CRSS

My personal experience of hope didn't happen at one particular time or instance. I have held onto hope from the beginning. I believe hope is what fed my soul all these years, it is why I have kept on going. Through my journey of recovery, holding onto hope has been a necessity. It is a genuine beautiful feeling, and for me is very therapeutic. My family never gave up on me, anytime I asked for help it was there. I knew that I didn't belong homeless and I knew I deserved to be treating myself better and living a better life. The turning point for me in realizing that expanding my horizons beyond that of a person with a substance use disorder was a realistic possibility, was when I was able to gain back the self-worth and self-love I didn't have before. I've always hoped to be better than what I was. Now each day I get to do that.



Hope

Valerie Haven, CRSS

When I was deep in my depression and anxiety, I did not have any hope. My first glimmer of hope happened when I finally decided to get help for myself. I had panic attacks and severe anxiety that made me unable to leave my home and even my bed at times. It became very debilitating, which spiraled me into depression. The day I went into my first appointment I felt that there were people there who really understood. These people were Peer Support workers. I didn't realize at first what they were, but they were very supportive and kind. They listened and made me feel validated. When I found out they had lived a life similar to mine with their own mental health issues, it made me feel hope. It made me feel that I could overcome and be strong just like they did. I never forgot that first feeling of hope, and now I want to be able to give it to someone else.



Works of Hope

Brittany Franck, CRSS



Hope is making your bed each morning
facing life on your feet
even if for mere seconds.
Hanging a painting on the wall
just in case beauty has not forgotten you
even when you have.
Hope cares for a plant
when you could care less.
And rebuilds after each quake
even while living on a fault line.
Finds a way to the sink
to wash a dish—
hope knows a dish is never just a dish
a bed never just a bed.

Hope is taking a walk
despite the darkness
weighing down on each limb
searching for anything—a bird, a cloud—
to pull you back into life.
Writing a letter, making a call—
launching an anchor in this world
even while pleading to disappear off the edge.
Hope is paving over the road of bleak prognoses
with defiance.
When breathing becomes a choice
and heartbeats must be willed
this is where the work of hope happens.
Hope is not dreamt up from an armchair
but is doing—a powerful four-letter verb.
It is pulling, pushing, clawing, gasping,
shouting,
listening, opening, striving, stumbling,
defying, surrendering, daring,
b e i n g.
A way of being human that is
extraordinary, outrageous,
beautiful—
and declaring that this beautiful mind,
this way of being human
belongs, too, in this world.

Surviving on Hope

Erica Morales, CRSS

My name is Erica Nadine Morales and I am 31 years old. A single mother of two beautiful children.

I am a woman living with Co-Occurring Disorders. I have been sexually abused as a child, physically and mentally abused as an adult. I come from a family where my own Mother was abusing drugs with me and my two younger sisters. Where I come from that was normal, that was everyday life for us. Until one day it truly hit me deep down, and I hit my rock bottom. Seeing my sisters, niece, and nephews suffering. My younger siblings are like my children; I grew up always taking care of them. I thought to myself, how could I be abusing drugs with them? I had more questions than I did answers. Looking at my children, it hit me like a ton of bricks. How can I truly face my kids, especially my daughter? She looks at me like I am her super hero. In her eyes, I could do no wrong. Could I repeat what my mother had done to us? The answer was NO! I could never do that to my children. That was my turning point in my life, and I swore I would change.

That day I got down on my knees and I asked, begged my lord with all my heart to help me, to heal me, and to give me strength. For I knew my battle had just begun. From that day on I sobered up, I stopped cold turkey with no help of my own. I didn't know all of the resources that were available to me. With temptation at my back door, I had my Mother dangling drugs in front of my face! I felt like she was mocking me. I told her I was done with drugs and I was clean at that time. She could never remember because she continued to ask me repeatedly, but by then it didn't matter anymore. I couldn't believe how strong I was.



Because of God in my life I had a glimmer of hope. To be able to live with my whole family doing drugs, to be surrounded by it day after day. After a while it started taking a toll on me; I grew depressed seeing men and woman going in and out of my home like it was a trap house! Having to take care of my children and my niece and nephews, making sure they were safe at night.

I was going through so much at that time that I lost it, I couldn't handle my living situation! I had a mental melt down! My mother called the police on me and had me arrested while the police officers beat me, trying to calm me down. I was taken to the CRC, because they said I was hallucinating and was on drugs! I was diagnosed with Bipolar Schizophrenia. I was placed in a mental institution where I was

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Recovery is 100% Possible

Jessica Sandau, CRSS



Hope was not something I could even describe or say I possessed. I was diagnosed With Anti-Social Personality Disorder and anxiety brought on with PTSD in 2005 after losing my daughter. I became addicted to meth and heroin, anything to ease the pain. I endured more pain and trauma, which I could have avoided if I had not self-medicated. I hurt the people who mattered most, mainly my children. I couldn't stop, I didn't know how. In September of 2018, I was arrested once again for possession. That day was the start of a second chance. I was in jail, then released to rehab, and have now learned how to cope with my mental illness and drug addiction. I've learned a lot along the way; some days are harder than others. I am proof that "Recovery is 100% possible". I am ten months sober and I am learning how to forgive myself, in that I am forgiving others.

Surviving on Hope by Erica Morales, continued...

in and out for 3 months. I felt a new low in my life; it felt like I hit rock bottom. I was so lost and broken I could not see my way out, but I never lost hope! I never stopped praying to my Lord.

I was court ordered treatment for a year, while I was still living at home. I struggled tremendously but I made it and I completed my court ordered treatment. Then six months later, I relapsed. I ended up back at the CRC. That's where I met Nick Teratino. The only person that took interest in me. He saw how broken I was. He visited me, he heard my cries and felt my pain. He changed my life! He is now my friend and Case Manager. He took the time to help me to better me just by caring for me. I appreciate him in every way. I knew that

day what I wanted to be in this life. It was my mission to follow in his footsteps.

God shone his beautiful light on me. My aunt Sandra took me in with my two children. She loves me and cares for my children and I. Thanks to her, I have the mother I always needed and wanted. Because of her, my children and I are not homeless!

I am so grateful to God that he sent me these special people in my life; with my Lord and my aunt and Nick by my side, my son and daughter actually have a chance to make it in this world. I've had hope for so long that I can't believe how far I have come.

The First and Most Important Key Tag

Edward McQuade, CRSS



I am a person with co-occurring disorders of bipolar II and substance use. This combination often led me through hypomania and dumped me into a deep depression where I was using, dangerously on the brink of

suicide. This is where I was just over a year ago. I knew I was slowly killing myself with drugs, and at that point I recognized how truly desperate my life had become. At a Narcotics Anonymous meeting when key tags were being offered out, they offered the first and most important key tag, the white newcomer's key tag. It was explained that white was the international color of surrender. My action of hope was my act of surrender by picking up the white newcomer's key tag at that NA meeting. This was when I began to surrender my addiction and my disease to a power greater than myself. Today I celebrated one year clean from all drugs. This clean time has allowed me to address my underlying mental health issues. I have made great progress in restoring the unmanageability of my life, and I am becoming more proficient at managing the symptoms of my bipolar disorder. I am grateful to be clean today; without it my recovery would not be possible.

I Turned the Tides

Scott Johnson, CRSS



My personal experience with hope is a lengthy one; comprised of several periods in my life, important people that never failed to love me, and various profound revelations. It's a journey that had begun before the telling of this story and perhaps far before I had even realized it.

It was the beginning of summer here in Tucson and I had just been released from an approximate two week stay at Palo Verde Hospital, an inpatient mental health and substance abuse facility. I was staying at a person's house that I had met there during my time in hopes that we could use each other as a support system. At first things were good and we both sought sober activities, stayed on our medications and were there for the others counsel. However, it was not long before we were both drinking again and I had moved a girl

in out of my need for intimacy. It turns out she was a person who had her own problems with substances. Not long after her arrival, I began smoking meth and occasionally used cocaine to keep up with her. Looking back now, with a sober and more educated mind, it's evident that she most likely had suffered some sort of sexual trauma in her past as well as having a substance use disorder.

My involvement with people not conducive to a sober, mentally healthy lifestyle lead to me drinking and driving. I had just finished a fifth of vodka when my roommate finally passed out. I decided to answer the texts I been receiving all day from the girl I was involved with. She was away for the day with a former friend of hers and they had been sending me provocative pictures. I hopped in the truck and headed out to meet them, with no forethought, concerns for the law, my own safety or others, or the amount of gas in the vehicle's tank. After the vehicle had sputtered and died on the side of the road, I fell asleep. Not knowing how much time had passed, I was awakened by a Sheriff's Deputy who had stopped to perform a "Safety Check", as the vehicle was at such an awkward angle. There was no fighting it, I was clearly busted. That night I was taken to the county jail, and several months later on my way for another stay in prison. While there, I had realized that I had reached rock bottom again. With this came the revelation that my family had always been there to try and help me and that every way I had tried to help myself on

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No Day Better Than Today

Laylana Hoffman, CRSS

Hope can easily be defined as a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen. Nevertheless, it can mean something different to everyone. My own personal experience of hope came sometime last year after my final DUI. I felt somewhat hopeless, but with some soul searching and self-care, I found a new me. I've always thought of my daughter as my reason for living, but my own personal quality of living wasn't so great. As of today, I feel I have grown into a better woman who has hope for my future and I know I must take every day one by one. Today I am setting a better example for my children. No matter how hard you've strayed from your path you can always find your way back, and there's no day better than today. My journey of hope has really reaffirmed to me that we always have a choice. I am hopeful that one day I'll make my children proud and I can be an admirable role model.



I Turned the Tides by Scott Johnson, continued...

my own simply wasn't working. It was time to humble myself and listen to the people that had loved me all along. It was time to listen to someone other than myself.

I turned the tides. The lens through which I had looked at life had been cleared. With the help of one hundred and twenty plus meetings in one hundred and twenty days, reassuring letters from home and a regimented schedule, I began to restructure my cognitive thinking and redefine my decision-making skills. I

was now having a more positive outlook on my future and sought to learn more about myself and the world around me. I had seen myself at the heights and depths of life, and knew that I was capable of so much more. Knowing that, and the belief that I can be well and happy again, was my hope. It was through ways that I had never fully sought before that I would attain it. It was through the attaining of knowledge and the love of my family that I continue to thrive and grow today.

My Hope Letter

Ricardo Hernandez Jr, CRSS



My hope letter starts off February 2nd, the day I died in St. Mary's emergency room. That was the day that I actually started my sobriety without even realizing it. I didn't know that I

had died and I didn't know why I woke up in the hospital. Since that day I have not had the urge or craving for any type of narcotics. I feel that with everything I went through throughout my life, all the struggle and things I had to go through on my own gave me the strength to persevere through my sobriety and to make my life better. Now it's to the point where I'm actually getting to live life. My hope with this class is to be able to reach one person to help them, just like someone helped me. I hope that I can go above and beyond what is necessary for this job as a Recovery Support Specialist, to help a person realize that they're worth the time and effort that no one has ever given them before. I truly feel that I've grown as a person taking this class and that I will be able to achieve my goals. Once I reach that goal, I will set the next goal to help others. As long as I'm allowed to give back what I was given, which was hope and a sense of self-worth. Thank you to whoever is reading this. My name is Ricardo Hernandez and this is my hope letter.

I Feel So Blessed

Debra Hughes, CRSS

I feel so grateful to be writing this article. A few years ago, it was difficult for me just to leave my house. Depression had taken over my life and left me a shell of the person I used to be. I began slowly, and with the support of family and friends gradually ventured out more and more. I enrolled in College courses and began using public transportation to get to school. I earned good grades, and this helped me to build my self-esteem. I have continued to grow emotionally, and spiritually. I now have a "Yes I can" attitude. I now have hope where before I felt hopeless.

The Recovery Support Specialist training has been a pivotal stepping-stone in my personal journey of recovery. I now know that recovery is 100% possible. I look forward to what the future holds for me. I wake up each day with a new sense of empowerment. I smile more often. I have an attitude of gratitude. I feel so blessed to have been given this wonderful opportunity in my life. Thank you to all of you at Workforce Development. I couldn't have done it without you!

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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.

Workforce Development Program

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