

Recovery WORKS

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Ralph's Story

You Are Not a Number



Ralph Romero knows about behavioral health challenges. He has had a lifetime of experience with them. "I've had problems since I was five. I was put into inpatient treatment when I was 14 years old, living in Texas. I couldn't understand why people were always happy.

That was a foreign concept to me."

"I was always anxious. I couldn't sleep. I would only sleep about four hours every night," Romero recalls. Like many in crisis, Ralph turned to drugs and alcohol for relief.

Eventually, Ralph's mental health symptoms and drug-use shattered his entire life. He became distant from loved ones, and began to have legal troubles. He didn't take court mandated therapy seriously, and ignored the techniques and regimens. Ultimately, Ralph lost his family, went to prison, and even attempted suicide.

"The worst came while I was in jail. I found out I lost my son. I didn't care about recovery. I just didn't think it was possible." When he was released from prison in 2008, Ralph had no family and no options. Even though he didn't think it could be successful, Ralph finally decided to give help a chance.

Treatment and therapy helped Ralph build a new life. He recognized that recovery doesn't happen immediately, and that there will be stops and starts along the way. "It didn't take one year to mess up my life, and it took more than one year to fix it. You just have to keep going."

Ralph's illness was identified and he worked diligently toward recovery, sticking to his behavior management guidelines and therapies. As his recovery progressed, he pursued greater opportunities and achieved many successes.

Happy, healthy, and stable, Ralph, now gainfully employed, is working toward his Bachelor's Degree at

Pima Community College. He plans to attend Arizona State University to get his Master's Degree in social work, and he is working to get his Deacon's license. His goal is to provide support and opportunities for the disabled, veterans, and ex-offenders. "Church has been helpful for me. Real helpful. And I volunteer a lot."

Ralph has been honored by La Frontera, Linkages and many other community organizations. However, the accolades are not what Ralph values most about recovery. "The many awards have helped me, but the biggest award I have received is my family in my life. I lost my son, but I'm not going to let that happen with my daughter."

Ralph wants to continue to help those in the community, especially men. "You know, there's no place where men can go and be a dad with their kids. I'd like to help them find some place where that's possible."

Ralph works with many community efforts to address mental health and substance abuse. "I tell people, 'You don't want to get to where I'm at. Get to where you need to be. Get to where you can be healthy and safe.'"

Ralph currently is employed by HOPE Inc. and works with their "Second Chance" program. Additionally, he volunteers with the NAMI of Southern Arizona organization and participates in their Family to Family, Peer to Peer, In Our Own Voice, Teachers and Parents and Ending the Silence programs.

On his own, Ralph works with 12 companies to assist with formerly incarcerated individuals, veterans and people with disabilities to get and retain employment.

"I think the first step for people who are where I was," says Romero, "is to get stable. Get off the substance they are abusing, stay on their meds, and go to the meetings. It's a healing process. It's important for them to know they are not a number. They are someone who matters."

COPE's CLIC Program: COPE Lifestyle Improvement Center (CLIC):



The COPE Lifestyle Improvement Center, or CLIC, is located at 732 N. Stone Avenue near downtown Tucson. The hours of operation are Monday to Friday 10:00 am to 7:00 pm and Saturdays from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm. The COPE Lifestyle Improvement Center serves the community through a calendar of wellness activities that aim to help members balance the body, mind and spirit which promotes a life full of recovery and well-being. CLIC staff work at assisting members in improving their health status by offering classes, groups and one-on-one appointments aimed at addressing chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular concerns. An active combination of health education, mentoring, fun, and wellness options create an environment that fosters a sense of community and support for each person to meet their wellness goals.

CLIC takes pride in offering a friendly environment with positive energy. We have a high energy workout room with a speed bike, a recumbent bike, Elliptical machines, treadmills, rowing machines, free weights, Olympic weight set, and additional workout equipment. The COPE Lifestyle Improvement Center also has a Zen meeting area where members are encouraged to attend one of our multiple yoga, mindfulness or meditation groups. CLIC hosts healthy cooking demo classes in our kitchen area. A computer lab is available from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm Monday through Friday. A snack is served everyday at 3:00 pm.

COPE enrolled members receive a free membership that gives them full access to services at the CLIC site. We believe being healthy is a family affair and encourage our COPE members to bring their family and friends to participate in services with them at no charge. Community memberships can be purchased at a rate of \$3 per day, \$20 per month or \$50 for a three month period. Everyone is welcome at CLIC and we take pride in serving Tucson as a Community Center.



Recovery Story



I remember anger. And I remember wondering about what and who I had become. And I remember the strangulating feeling of having to deal with the law. I remember trying to take my life. Twice.

I can only look back and wonder how I had gotten to that place. I didn't know I had bi-polar 1 and ADHD. The initial episodes, like so many I've heard about, were death defying and straight outta hell. They were time consuming, dragging on for months and without any hope for resolution. To deal with it, I wove a multi-month tapestry of self-induced psychosis and general acting out to compensate for the unknown. I thought I was Jesus Christ incarnate, which is not uncommon from stories I've heard by other fellows with mental illness. Like them, I believed it. I considered my Jesus Christ-ness to be God's gift for all my suffering. I built crosses outside my trailer, saw and heard things constantly and ran away with my deeply affected imagination.

One day, I was facing a felony charge for possession. I was sentenced to probation, and I completed that sentence by getting thrown back in jail for what I will always remember: 42 days, on a 3 1/2 year presumptive. No questions were asked. My attorney turned to me and said, "Leave now. And never show up again in my presence with alcohol on your breath." I figuratively flipped him off. I still wonder about that sentence. They must have known

I was crazy by the fact I had often confided to the Probation Department that I believed I was Jesus Christ. That presumptive sentence of 3 1/2 years was the reality; in some insane way, I was expected to complete a 3 years' probationary term. I somehow spit out a laugh between the tears and fell into a catharsis of insanity, knowing inside I could not complete this challenge. I had been self-medicating and wondered how I could do without the medication in a controlled environment presented by the County Probation Department.

One day, I tried to kill myself with a knife between the ribs and was taken to the hospital and released after a 12-hour hold in the "rubber room" with a hole in the corner to you know what. Sick and tired of this existence, I tried again shortly thereafter, and this time was transported to Flagstaff in the middle of the night to the local Psychiatric Hospital.

It felt like the system wasn't taking me seriously, claiming I was a person with a substance abuse diagnosis and acting out on "on purpose" to gain attention and be placed in the psychiatric units for relief and attention - despite the fact that I exhibited all of the symptoms of bi-polar disorder. I solicited romantic attachment in the units, and enjoyed stirring up the staff with food fights and open intimacy with fellow "inmates." These places were invigorating and so much better than jail, as the food, company, medication, and "guards" were a blessing in my chaotic life.

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ADHS/DBHS Is Looking For Individuals Interested In Serving On A Human Rights Committee

WHAT WE ARE...

- An oversight committee created by the Arizona legislature
- Charged with promoting and protecting the human rights of children and adults enrolled in the public behavioral health system

WHO WE ARE...

Volunteers including:

- Adults who are or have received services in the public behavioral health system
- Parents and/or family members of children and/or adult receiving services
- Professionals in psychology, law, medicine, education, special education, social work, or behavioral health

WHAT WE DO...

- Conduct site visits
- Hear concerns from individuals
- Review reports on accidents, seclusions and restraints
- Make recommendations on improving the behavioral health system

If you are interested in serving on a committee in Maricopa County, Northern or Southern Arizona and would like more information, please contact Yisel Sanchez, ADHS/DBHS Human Rights Committee Coordinator, 602-364-4577 or 1-800-421-2124.

The League of Peers

The League of Peers is an association for individuals working as Peer Supporters in Arizona. The League was started because there was a need for Peer Supporters throughout the state to network and to support each other in efforts to lessen the rate of burnout and reduce job stress by providing a way for Peer Supporters to connect with each other.



As a member of the League of Peers you will receive free training from NAZCARE, including Peer Employment refresher training and Community Service Agency refresher training. We also send out newsletters and articles about issues that are important to Peer Supporters.

If you would like to join the League, please email your contact information to: leagueofpeers@yahoo.com

Recovery Story Continued

So in Flagstaff I spent another year in and out of jail for disorderly conduct, hospitals for psychosis, and Intensive Outpatient Programs for my offenses. In one of my 30-Day programs, I met Dr. Amy Jelliffe, who for the first time in my experience with the system, wondered whether there wasn't something else going on other than alcohol-related substance abuse. This was the beginning of recovery for a number of reasons.

Dr. Jelliffe saw me as a whole person. We spent many hours discussing the present - not the past and not the future. I learned that, horrendous though the recent past had been, it was time to concentrate on what I could do that day, that moment for myself. We also spent close to two years experimenting with various medications and until the right combination worked. Since my awakening that year, I have spent 6 years since working, playing, and socializing mainly with folks who also live with a serious mental illness. By sharing our stories we can learn and laugh with each other. Laughter is my most important "symptom" these days. It lets me know my health meter is on Green.

Learning you have a mental illness can be scary. But most often, the diagnosis can also be liberating as well as self-informing. Over the years since my initial diagnosis, I've come to the understanding that challenges with symptoms will always be there and that it's not something I will grow out of anytime soon.

I also learned that when you have a mental illness, the person engaging in substance abuse and crime is not you. It is a collection of symptoms occupying your skin and acting out to find relief. But, because mental illness is an invisible illness, you are often judged for those behaviors that have little to do with who you really are. Luckily, as NARBHA's Recovery Programs administrator, I am seeing more collaborative programs that are changing the way law enforcement understands mental health and treats people with mental illness.

Words Matter

Words matter; whether we use the term transition, merger, change or evolution, one thing is certain, the Department of Behavioral Health Services is going to look different.

Staff and processes are integrating into AHCCCS at this very moment to provide YOU the member with an opportunity to continue to share your voice and to keep the positive work going.

So what does this mean to your service? You will continue to have the full spectrum of services that you depend on. Having all the expertise under one roof, means increased transparency, streamlined processes and a combined effort to ensure your needs are met for physical and mental well being.

Upcoming Events For Recovery Works

August 27&28, 2015, 8:30 – 5:00 p.m.

FREE Training for ASIST

2 day skills training on suicide intervention
Family Involvement Center
5333 N. 7th Street, A100, Phoenix, AZ 85014
Register by calling 602-288-0155 or email at
pac@familyinvolvementcenter.org

August 28, 2015, 11:00 – 12:30 p.m.

A Taste of Camp Wellness

For individuals enrolled in the public behavioral health system
1030 N. Alvernon Way, Tucson, AZ 85711
RSVP by calling 520-396-2310 or hwcenter@email.arizona.edu

September 12th, 2015, 10 :00 – 3:00 p.m.

FREE Youth Conference for ages 13-21

Lunch will be provided
Phoenix Community College, Osborn Campus
3310 N. 10th Avenue, Phoenix, AZ 85013
Register at <http://rockingadulthood.eventbrite.com>
For more information contact Hayley Winterberg 602-920-9231

September 4, 11, 18 and 25, 2015 – 8:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Peer Support Training for individuals enrolled with Mercy Maricopa (new RBHA)

Marc Community Resources
924 N. Country Club Drive, Mesa, AZ 85201
To register, please contact Audrey.sanders@marccr.com or
480-993-7740

September 15 - October 20, 2015

NAMI Basics free class for parents and caregivers of children with mental illness or behavioral concerns

NAMI Basics offers education and support taught by parents with lived experience of raising their own children with behavioral health concerns. Classes are in Flagstaff on six consecutive Tuesdays from 6pm to 8:30pm. For more information contact 1-800-955-6264 or email info@nami.org

Sunday, September 20, 2015, 8:00 - 10:30am

Rally for the Ride to Awareness

Mental Health America of Arizona hosts a welcome rally for Ride to Awareness bicycle team. Come cheer on the team and help raise awareness about mental illness.
SRP Park 1 East Continental Drive, Tempe.
Register at <http://rallytoride.eventbrite.com>

October 8, 2015, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

FREE event open to public

Voices & Choices Community Conversations: Criminal Justice and Mental Health

Duval Auditorium (Banner University Medical Center)
1501 N. Campbell Ave., Tucson, AZ
Come join the conversation and be part of the solution!
Hosted by the Southern Arizona Peer & Family Coalition,
SouthernAZPeerFamilyCoalition@gmail.com

October 15, 2015 - noon

Peer Supporters INAPS Global Recognition Day

Peer Supporters INAPS is encouraging peer supporters to join in a moment of celebration. The purpose of the celebration is to increase awareness of who peer supporters are, what they do and the many valuable contributions they make to human services.
For more information contact Gladys Christian at
Gladyschristian1@gmail.com

Saturday, October 17th, 2015, 8:30 am

NAMI Valley Walk @ the State Capitol Grounds in Phoenix

This annual family and community event raises awareness about mental illness, stomps out stigma and celebrates hope, resilience and wellness. Dogs are welcome! This year AHCCCS and Arizona Department of Health/Division of Behavioral Health have joined together to create Team Positivity In Action. For information on registering for our team, please contact Susan.Junck@azdhs.gov or Barbara.Lang@azahccs.gov or Yisel.Sanchez@azdhs.gov.

November 13th, 2015

Kickball

Let's play ball!!!!!!

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To submit an article: email your article to DBHSCommunications@azdhs.gov for publication the nearest quarterly issue, pending on space available. Maximum length is 200 words, must be in an editable word document and picture(s) included within the document. By submitting an article you authorize the Editorial Board to edit as appropriate. Bylines or independent writers' names are not included in the publication, instead you can include a link to your website or resources within the article. Thank you!

