

## How to Make a Referral to Higher Ground

Higher Ground welcomes self-referrals.

Health, social and legal professionals wishing to make a referral to Higher Ground should note that our admission criteria require residents to be over 20 years of age, have a primary diagnosis of alcohol or other drug dependence, an interest in 12 Step recovery and a drug-free status on admission.

Referrals or self referrals can be made by telephoning Kathy Mildon on 09-834 0042 for a pre-admission assessment appointment on weekdays between 8.30am and 4.00pm.

Assessments in prisons, detox facilities or hospital can be arranged. Applicants who have outstanding legal charges are considered on a case by case basis. If required, Higher Ground can organise a medical detox through referral to the Auckland Regional Alcohol and Drug Services.

## Making a Donation

Higher Ground is a registered Charitable Trust. Donations over \$5.00 are tax deductible and may be sent direct to Higher Ground. Higher Ground is dependent on charitable donations for the continuation of its programme.

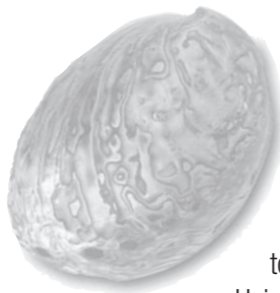
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# Finding Beauty Within



*Two important components have been incorporated into Higher Ground's Maori programme.*

One is an achievement ceremony for graduates. It is held in the Higher Ground garden at the poupou - a carved upright post telling of the journey from addiction to recovery.

Using traditional story telling, the person moving on from Higher Ground is entrusted with a paua shell. The paua - rough on the outside with a brilliant interior - is a physical symbol of where the client has come from to Higher Ground to fill their inner void with beauty.

This is given in return for a commitment to be accountable to peers, and to attend 12-Step meetings (90/90) and should they pick up and use drugs to return the paua to the ocean.

The programme's other powerful component is a weekend Marae visit or Marae wananga at Puatahi Marae on the Kaipara Harbour every 10 weeks. Higher Ground senior Maori group peers and After Care clients may attend, along with members of 12-Step Fellowships. They are joined by the Rongo Ātea Youth Treatment programme from Hamilton, young people 14 to 17 years who are just stepping into recovery.

The weekend, supported by whanau from the Marae, provides experience of Maori protocol and tikanga, 12-Step meetings, a hangi, cultural workshops and recreation. It creates a community of like-minded people on a journey of recovery, says Ra. "I feel Higher Ground has really arrived with this Marae Noho."

We hope you have enjoyed this issue of the Higher Ground News. If you do not wish to remain on our mailing list, or are incorrectly listed, please write to HGDRT, PO Box 45 192, Te Atatu Peninsula, Waitakere, 0610. For further information about the Higher Ground rehabilitation programme phone Programme Director, Stuart Anderson 09-834 0017 or fax 09-834 0018 email hgdrtr@xtra.co.nz www.higherground.org.nz

# HIGHER GROUND

DRUG REHABILITATION TRUST

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# NEWS

## Too Young, Too Hard, Too Fast ...

**Within six months of starting to use methamphetamine he was admitted to a psychiatric unit, afraid he might never be sane again. He was just nineteen years old. Now two years drug-free, this is a Higher Ground graduate's anonymous story.**

*"I sit staring vacantly over the apartment complex, sipping a glass of scotch listening to my friend. Emma's going on about some guy and how he's so mean to her and she doesn't know what to do. As usual, I couldn't really care less and dish out cynical remarks. My phone rings. I look at it and see it's Josh. He's been out of sorts lately so I decide to answer. He sounds shaken but I think I'm just reading into it too much. After a confusing conversation where he seems not to be telling me something, he asks, as if he would be imposing, if he can join us. I tell him to come over and pour myself some more scotch. "See you soon brother". I hang up and turn to Emma with what must have been a puzzled look because she asks what's up. I explain and we carry on talking shit.*

*Ten minutes and a joint go by and my phone rings again. This time it's Mum...*

"I was brought up in a typical dysfunctional family. I had one older sister and two fairly messed-up parents. We were living in Wellington and my parents had started a very successful advertising company. This of course meant there wasn't a lot of time for us, so my sister and I were spoilt and mostly raised by nannies and TV.

When I was five I followed my father up the driveway, screaming for him not to leave and knowing that he wasn't coming back. Things at home weren't so good. I sought refuge in friends, TV and fantasy until I was 10 and started smoking cigarettes and occasionally drinking alcohol.

When I was 11 my family moved to

Auckland. Before I started my new school I tried marijuana for the first time. I was in heaven. All of life's problems melted away and I knew why people took drugs, why Mum and Dad took drugs. They felt good!

I spent the next two years adapting to Auckland. I was a shy kid, constantly in my head and feeling different. By the time I was 14 and at high school I had met a few people who were similar to me and also liked getting out-of-it. I rekindled my love of alcohol and marijuana.

By the time I was 15 I was using a lot more and had developed a taste for prescription pills, mostly sleeping pills and downers I found on the top shelf of the kitchen cupboard. Things seemed to be okay. I was meeting new people, partying on the weekend and had a girlfriend or two. I was fairly happy on the surface.

When I was 16 I stopped caring about school altogether, was smoking pot every day, getting trashed on the weekend and taking a lot of pills. By the end of the school year I had started getting into harder drugs like acid, ecstasy, mushrooms and speed. I started selling marijuana to support my habit, then other drugs too.

I ended up changing schools and being sent to counselling at Community Alcohol and Drug Services. I left school and moved out of home for about six months. I was using anything and everything that came my way, lost a lot of weight and ended up having to see a psychiatrist.

My friend Luke had helped me to clean up a bit. We just drank and smoked a bit of pot, which was okay in my mind. Luke was mainly a heavy drinker and a pot smoker. He went into a depressive psychosis and the doctors told him, "get off the drugs, go to the gym," which he did, and "everything will be okay," but it wasn't. Two and half weeks later he was dead. It was 12 days before my 18th birthday when I got Mum's call telling me about Luke.

After Luke committed suicide, things got worse for me very quickly. I was trying to fill a hole that had always been there, it just seemed to get deeper after Luke died and harder to fill.

I got a job as a courier, which was short-lived because I was using too much and figured I could make more money selling drugs. I was introduced to methamphetamine and it was stronger, faster, easier to use, more addictive.

I was using P, pot, booze and downers every day and acid a few times a week. After six months I got arrested twice in one week and was committed to a hospital psychiatric unit.

I was discharged a month later on a high, on medication, and quickly started using other drugs again. But then something broke in my mind. It was like I couldn't think, I was feeling paranoid, anxious, delusional, empty - but all that was beneath the surface and I was not really there. Basically I went into a depressive psychosis, which was what had happened to Luke.

The rest of my life was a mess but it was my mind that got me. I couldn't function, my sister had to babysit me a lot of the time, I was aware of it but there was just no more functional thought. I was worried I would never be sane again.

I ended up going to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting with a family friend. About two years earlier my Dad had dragged me to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting which I thought was a joke - I thought that these people just needed to sort their shit out and cut down a bit. (Dad got sober when I was eight. Mum's drug use seemed mostly to keep up with him and she had stopped when Dad left home.)

"My life has been better than I could ever have imagined ... I am happier than I have ever been"

Going to N.A. was different though. This time I was desperate. I would do anything to not feel the way I did. The meeting stopped me using that day, I went to another meeting the next day and the next day, got rid of my drugs, hid away and managed to stop using.

There was something about the people in that meeting that made me think that things could get better. So I kept going. But it seemed the longer I was drug-free the worse I felt. After a month I heard about Higher Ground, and another month later I was a resident.

I was empty, tired, angry, scared and I seriously needed help. The next four months were amazing. Not necessarily in a "wow, isn't life wonderful" kind of way, but looking back I am so glad I went there.

For the first two months I barely said anything, but people around me were smiling, talking and seemed happy, I could feel a sense of community and love, which I hadn't felt or been a part of for a long time.

Someone told me to pray: I almost smacked them. Then they said to me, "what have you got to lose?" So I did. And it helped. There was no flash of light, no singing angels, just a subtle shift that made me feel like I might just be all right. The therapy groups were pretty intense, and I felt like a kid being the youngest one there but they taught me more about myself than I could have ever imagined. I learnt about the disease of addiction, about why I did the things and thought the way I did. I started to get to know myself. I had been a chameleon for so long I had lost who I was. I started to be human again.

My family supported me, visiting me every week and coming for my family group which was the foundation for rebuilding those relationships. I'm so grateful for this because other people at Higher Ground no longer had family in their life.

I had gone in wanting to just not feel the way I did, nothing more. I left with confidence and, most surprisingly without the obsession to use drugs. That's not to say I haven't wanted to every now and then. But I know where that's going to take me.

Since then my life has been better than I could ever have imagined. I am at university; I have a part-time job; I have relationships with my whole family; some old friendships are back; I have new people in my life who don't want anything from me apart from friendship.

And I am happier than I have ever been and it all started with Higher Ground. I was shown the way to a better life and I took direction. I go to N.A. and A.A. meetings regularly, work the 12-Steps, do service in the Fellowship and have a sponsor.

I work hard at my recovery but the rewards are far greater than I would have dared hoped for in my drug using. I am free today. You can be too. "

# Cultural Balance In A Therapeutic Community

Higher Ground's Maori group has gone from strength to strength with about 50% of all residents electing to attend the full-day programme.

"I think it's a winning combination now," says Higher Ground's cultural advisor Rawiri Pene (Ngapuhi, Ngati Maniapoto, Ngati Haua, Ngati Tuwharetoa).

There is a responsibility on mainstream programmes to provide for Maori in recovery, explains Higher Ground's director Stuart Anderson. Some Maori choose mainstream programmes like Higher Ground instead of kaupapa Maori programmes, because they do not identify with their cultural heritage, he says.

Ra believes the way Higher Ground's Maori programme has developed has gone a long way towards providing for the needs of Maori clients. "The last thing I want to do is detract from the primary purpose which is recovery," he says.

"At the moment it is operating wonderfully well. In earlier times it was all grow, grow, grow. In the past year I feel we've arrived at a place complementary to the mainstream."

Ra has led the whanau-based programme for the past six years. Two years ago it expanded from an hour and a half each week, to a full-day programme.

It covers basic Te Reo or Maori language, one-to-one cultural counsel, wairuatanga or spirituality, and recovery and whanau-focused kapahaka performance. The final group of the day is open to the whole community, which builds unity.

Clients who choose not to go to

*"For the first time I connected. I felt accepted by Ra and all the people in the group and I had the chance to become more Maori, more culturally connected. I learned waiata, haka, mihi, and all these things gave me a whole lot of self-confidence."*

*"It's been a real eye-opener for me. It's made a big difference. I think it was a great help to my recovery to be part of a therapeutic community with a strong Maori component. It's opened my eyes to my Maori side, something's that's been missing in my life."*

*"I was embarrassed that I might go into Maori group and not know where I was from or what to do, but they were always encouraging, it was always about participation."*

Maori group attend spirituality group, and do education and written work.

Maori group is deeply therapeutic and supports the therapeutic community. "The spiritual aspect of the experience during that day is based on the client's ability to express openly and freely and access what is out of their normal ways of thinking and being.

"When they shift the focus for that moment, it allows them to discover a sense of being-ness and open-ness through the H.O.W. of the 12-Step programme - honesty, open-mindedness and willingness to step into another whole dimension with another language and spirituality. Especially for Maori this builds self-esteem."

Some Maori choose to focus on other parts of their recovery and do not

attend the group. "Non-Maori who attend are looking for a different approach to spirituality and have the desire to learn what is native to this land, I guess."

Director Stuart Anderson says there has been a steady increase of Maori attending the programme over the years. This has seen a movement from 20% to 25% in attendance at Higher Ground. The Maori programme improves completion rates for Maori as well as the opportunity to connect back to their culture.

"I believe this has a lot to do with the mana of Ra and his ability to communicate with every person."

Ra is an ordained pastor who is also a recovering addict 18 years drug-free. He first started as cultural advisor at the Taha Maori programme at Queen Mary Hospital at Hanmer Springs in 1992.

For residents, Maori group provides a welcome change at the end of a week's work. "Come Friday, they discover their voice and they look forward to it," says Ra. "Yes of course they want more, being addicts they want more."

"But I don't think expanding further into the mainstream programme is the way to go. Higher Ground has to be structured to be effective as a therapeutic community. The clients need to get their healing first and their recovery well-founded and solid.

"What we are doing is planting a seed. We are giving them a cultural experience that they can then grow and develop should they chose to when they move on."

"He iti he pounamu."