

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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On-going Journey

It has been a long journey, not unlike recovery, with ups and downs. We have maintained our philosophy, stuck to our core business and adapted our programme accordingly, through continued review, consumer feedback and research.

We are proud of what we offer, however recognise that regretfully we can't be of help to all.

We feel blessed by the wonderful generosity of many people who have assisted us to shape our programme. Without team spirit, the Board's commitment, dedicated leadership of our Director, our staff and volunteers, and of course

the funding contracts we rely on, we couldn't achieve what we do today.

Courage to Change

Lastly and most importantly I want to acknowledge the courage of so many of the residents past and present. Your desire to turn your life around, move to a higher ground and make a difference, not only for yourself, but your families, children and the community in which you live has to be commended.

We love that you keep in touch, and seeing your life changes inspires us to keep doing what we do.

Yes as a society we need to provide hope and opportunity. And yes, addicts can and do recover.



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

Showing Up For Life

At 24, she had dedicated 10 years to drug use and felt as if she had nothing left inside. Now two years drug-free, a Higher Ground graduate's anonymous story.

"Sugar. That's where it all started for me. Bulk buying and trading one cent lollies had me rolling in pocket money and when I ran out I stole more from Mum's purse. To escape my family's unhappiness, I would put on my yellow running away dress, pack up my loot and take off to the beach. I would eat until the lollies were gone; run riot; then come crashing down in tearful tantrums.

My other escape was in a book. I found comfort in isolation, away from pressure to be something or someone I didn't feel comfortable with. Both my parents were athletic and sporting and wanted that for me too. I never felt good enough unless I was the best.

My parents did their best. They worked together in a lucrative business, but it was under stress, my father was drinking and slowly their marriage disintegrated. Nothing was ever spoken about and for me the tension was unbearable.

They divorced when I was 12 and I used that to resent my parents and as justification for my behaviour. I was regularly smoking, buying 10-packs or stealing Mum's. My little sister and I secretly sought oblivion on the garage roof, puffing away and drinking the rocket-fuel which I creatively concocted

from the liquor cabinet and disguised in my school drink bottle.

At high school I established myself as a "bad girl", wagging classes, wearing Doc Marten boots and Nirvana tee shirts over my uniform surrounded by a small gang of misfits. It was an incredibly unhappy time shuttling back and forth between parents. My sister and I rebelled and didn't feel we fitted in anywhere.

I began wagging school and smoking pot at lunchtimes, drinking during the day and wearing lots of black eyeliner. I stole off my parents to fund weekends staying at friends' houses, sneaking out to get drunk and hang out with older boys.

I tried LSD and within six months was regularly taking it along with butane, nitrous oxide and magic mushrooms. We hung out in town, committing petty crimes to buy foils (marijuana) and forty ounces of spirits each day. I was hardly going to school and dropped out at 16 to party.

Usually the youngest person in the crowd, I spent a lot of energy developing masks which hid my fear of not being cool enough and not being liked or accepted. My personality changed according to who I was with, which I thought was an asset. I

feel sad now thinking about that little girl who was too afraid to be her.

I was always up for a party, an adventure. I felt a constant need to prove myself; I wanted to keep up with the boys and often landed in trouble. I smoked and drank more than I could handle and passed out in strange places. I had no idea what I was doing, and with whom.

At 17, I was running out of money and options. I saw an advertisement in the paper for "ladies" and believing I had no other choice I downed half a bottle of Cointreau and went for the interview. Scared and drunk I pulled out a fake ID and secured a job at my first massage parlor. I hated myself.

On the first night I made \$900, enough to pay my debts twice. Greed took over and each night I found a new reason to go back. Within a week I was introduced to speed (amphetamine) and discovered that mixing it with alcohol made me feel bullet-proof. I could do things I would never have done straight and for the next six months I did just that. Before long I couldn't work without drugs.

I met my first junkie boyfriend. He told me I was too good to be working there and

offered me a job as driver in his dial-a-bud business. I took up the offer, ferrying marijuana and pills around town by day and partying by night.

I couldn't give up amphetamines and used valium to take the edge off and help me sleep. One day I was looking for money in my boyfriend's briefcase and found some used syringes. Shocked but excited I convinced him to inject me.

We didn't have any clean needles but he told me it was safe if he boiled them. I got sick from that first shot but it didn't stop me from having another. Morphine became my drug of choice. A few months later I discovered I had contracted Hepatitis C.

That relationship ended badly, a familiar pattern, hurt or be hurt, the defensive strategy of the rest of my active addiction.

At 18 I became a bartender. I was regularly smoking methamphetamine, and taking ecstasy when I could get it, once again in a work environment where I had to use drugs to show up and show up to use drugs.

The next couple of years were a blur. I drank and drugged, forgetting what I had done by the following day, sleeping only periodically. I transferred from drug to drug, moved house and job every six months.

My parents were in despair. I hated to be with family, it was too real and I usually embarrassed them. I only rang my Dad for money. He says now that he had given up hope. They expected I would end up dead or in jail.

I literally flipped a coin and took off to Sydney arriving with \$200 which was gone by the morning. I stayed with a girl friend, two addicts feeding off each other for a couple of years. It was all love, hate, prostitution, degradation, despair, drama, trauma, revenge, violence, sickness and jealousy.

I was shooting up crystal meth, cocaine and heroin. I needed a gram to get out of bed and I was down to 49kgs. I did anything for the next shot. The more dangerous the better. I was so detached that the only emotion I felt clearly was fear. I started to realize how bad I was after my second overdose.

Then the drugs stopped working. No matter what I took I couldn't escape the feelings of self-hatred. I moved to out-of-the-way motels in several failed attempts to quit drugs.

Every week I got sicker and sadder. I was living with a sugar daddy at the beach, going into town for a week at a time, returning for more money and a jealous argument. He was a professional gambler, and part of a major drug syndicate which I was unaware of.

One night I fought with him and stormed out. I was in a taxi, sobbing and nearly hysterical when the driver turned around and asked me what was wrong.

I made recovery my main focus and weathered the return of my feelings.

Something inside me burst. By the time we reached my dealer's house he knew the whole shameful truth.

During that confession I saw clearly what I was doing to myself. When he looked into my eyes and said "why don't you just go home?" I listened.

Thirteen days later I was in Higher Ground. I had come home, finally. To heal.

Suddenly I was drug free, lucid and living with 24 others, a total shock. The staff had seen my arrogant false confidence before.

I found out I was just an addict, that I wasn't a bad person, just a sick person trying to get well. When I gravitated towards the men, I was presented with a contract to bond with the women. My buddy and I shared a room and she constantly supported me to stay. She was my first female friend in recovery and we remain close.

Once I opened up in therapy groups,

I was able to let go of some of the deep shame about my past and begin to get emotionally honest. That's what changed for me. I had never known such truth. It was incredibly humbling to get real about who I really was and to feel accepted within that.

Mum and Dad came to family groups and had the chance to tell me how it had been for them. My ego deflated enough to realize I wasn't actually the centre of the universe. I began to feel guilt and remorse. I began to grieve, finally, for the little girl who had been so hurt and alone.

My treatment seemed to go quite fast. I had conflict with the other residents at times but I learned how to stay. We kept each other sane some days and I forged bonds I had never experienced before.

I graduated in July 2005. It was amazing to have actually finished something. I was told to live at a support house, go to 12-Step meetings, choose a Fellowship and make it my home – so I did. I was told to stay away from the men and thank God I managed to. I cried and ate my way through the first six months. I had found a sponsor in Narcotics Anonymous who encouraged me to pray and to believe that I would recover.

When I was a year drug-free I moved in to live with two other recovering addicts. I was healing and my relationships with my family improving. I made recovery my main focus and weathered the return of my feelings. Everything was new and I couldn't predict how I would be feeling from moment to moment.

My heart began to open with love for my friends and gratitude for what I have been given. I lost the harsh edge that had kept me safe and began to let my defenses down.

Service is an essential part of my recovery. I now sponsor three women in Narcotics Anonymous. Our little family is growing and I am growing along with it. Recovery for me has been this gorgeous, organic process. I never know what will happen next and I love it. Change is the only thing that is constant and I just keep going. Keep making sane decisions, keep showing up for life. One day at a time. “

A Dream Realised

Higher Ground's new facility at Te Atatu Peninsula was officially opened by the Prime Minister Helen Clark and Mayor of Waitemata Bob Harvey with honoured guests. The celebration marked a milestone in Higher Ground's 23-year history in drug rehabilitation.

Trust Board chair Janet Colby spoke of Higher Ground's pride in its new home, and the Trust's challenging and rewarding journey to reach it. The idea for Higher Ground was born in 1983 ...

While I was employed at the Auckland Drug Dependency clinic it became evident there was a need for a residential treatment programme for people wanting to overcome their addiction, which in those days was primarily to narcotics.

The family group was full of people despairing at their inability to help their loved ones who were withdrawing from drugs but unable to make the changes necessary to stay drug free.

A group of concerned people formed a steering committee that met for a year to shape Higher Ground's vision - to provide an 18-week residential programme for the severely drug dependent which offered hope and empathy and was based on the 12-Step principles.

We believed we could provide a safe and structured environment to begin the process of healing and offer a foundation for living life without the need to resort to mood-changing chemicals.

In 1984 Higher Ground was registered as a charitable trust and chaired diligently by Karl Robinson for 14 years. His services to welfare were recognised by being awarded NZ Merit of Order in 2001.

Sadly some of the pioneers on the board who worked so tirelessly have now passed away - Dr Fraser MacDonald, Minister of Justice Dr Martyn Findlay, Stuart Naismith and Sue Martin. But their legacy lives on.

First Home

Our first eight-bed facility was opened in Manukau, generously rented to us by Fletcher Challenge. Funding and experienced staffing were in short supply; we had to rely heavily on the goodwill of many volunteers. A Board member and I would often go to three speaking engagements a week just to raise enough money to keep us afloat. It was a steep learning curve.

In 1986 Fletcher Challenge was developing the Manukau site and we needed a new home.

No one wanted a bunch of drug addicts in their community except the Sisters of Good

Shepherd who extended their hand to live alongside them on their property in Upland Rd, Remuera.

Move to Remuera

You can imagine the objections at the public meetings held to stop to us moving in. The locals were afraid. We were getting desperate and considered dressing the residents as nuns and moving them in overnight, quite funny when you think they had just kicked their habits!

Securing an operating licence we set up our second home able to house 12 residents. We had a wonderful interface with the nuns next door. Residents would often visit the chapel and many came to appreciate New Zealand fine art and Colin McCahon's stained glass Stations of the Cross. Luxuries were few, everything was donated. I remember praying for a photocopier and then one day looking out the window to see one arriving tied on top of a Board member's BMW, courtesy of Fletchers.

Terra Firma in Mt Eden

Not long after that, the Justice Department rented us a property in Mt Eden and we opened our first support house for graduates, to assist in their integration back into the community. It was aptly named Terra Firma (solid ground).

By 1988 the nuns indicated the Remuera property was being put on the market. We sadly and anxiously looked for alternative options. Nothing suitable could be found so we moved temporarily to our support house and worked under limited conditions. Administration was run from a caravan out front. Morale was low.

Then the Justice Department decided to sell their buildings. Odyssey House in Parnell was also renting from Justice and moving to Avondale but was looking for an admission facility. With some creative work by both their chair, Dame Barbara Goodman, and ours we negotiated to exchange and purchase the properties.

15 Years in Parnell

Parnell became ours and at last we felt a sense of security, even better we could provide up to 25 beds for an increasing demand on our services.

The property at Parnell served us well for many years as we consolidated our programme and expanded our services to meet more women's needs, started family group, Maori culture group and After Care.

With expansion and the need to rent extra offices, our wise chairperson Karl Robinson realised to stay in Parnell was not feasible long-term and developed a plan to purchase the facility we have today. Whilst we remained in Parnell for some 15 years the last five years were actively spent looking for a suitable property.

Purpose-Built to Last

Patience prevailed and Christian Healthcare assisted our purchase by having a long settlement date so they could build their new rest home. So even though we entered an agreement to purchase the property in December 2004 we couldn't start building till early last year.

After extensive renovations, overseen by architect Dean Wylie and project manager Don Coombs we moved in July last year. Home at last! Able now to provide 38 beds, two support houses and good conditions for both staff and residents, we feel excited.

We still face the problem of an eight-week waiting list. And we project that we will probably assess in excess of 400 people over the coming year and that demand for residential services will not go away. Many of our clients are seeking help at a younger age due largely to the current pattern of drug abuse and dependency on methamphetamine and alcohol.

Now that we are settled we can plan services to the wider community.