

# A DOPELESS HOPE ADDICT

*At Higher Ground, he was able to talk about the deep and disabling trauma of his life for the first time. A graduate's anonymous story.*

“I am the eldest of three boys and was raised in a loving and caring environment with firm but fair boundaries. As a child I was, on the whole, happy, social, playful, energetic and vibrant.

My parents are of European descent who had no religious belief or background. We lived in a developing, working class suburb of South Auckland. My father was in the Merchant Navy and away for long periods, and my mother was the housewife and homemaker. Dad was a heavy social drinker, but I don't remember alcohol causing problems.

At 16 I became ill over a period of weeks with the flu and a sinus infection. I lost weight and the headaches were so bad I couldn't lift my head from the pillow. Mum took me to several doctors who said I had the flu, gave me antibiotics and sent me home again. My desperate mother finally took me to hospital where I collapsed. The infection had traveled to my brain and I was admitted into neurological intensive care, a scary place for a young person, where my skull was drilled in order to drain the pressure and swelling of the abscess.

Back at school, I hit my head playing rugby and a week later started having fits. I was re-admitted to hospital for six weeks, diagnosed with epilepsy and discharged with a prescription for anticonvulsants, pain killers and heavy tranquilizers to slow me down, without any further explanation about the medication or warning about

possible side effects.

I hated feeling like a zombie and the way my personality changed, and just stopped the medication. I soon relapsed into convulsive grand mal seizures and found myself again in hospital. This time I got the run-down on how the medication worked and sent home minus the tranquilizers, a teenager distraught and traumatized by the whole experience. There was a follow-up plan for my physical, medical condition, but nothing for my emotional care or any suggestion I might need help for any possible psychological damage. There was no offer of contacts or education about my illness, no peer support group for people with epilepsy.

Without the emotional suppression and inner glow of the tranquilizers, I felt confused and deflated, as well as isolated and ostracized by the social stigma of epilepsy. I started hanging around with older boys who were already in the pub and party scene, wiping myself out on alcohol and marijuana to get away from my feelings.

I left school at 17 and found my epilepsy an obstruction to getting a job. I choose another option. I stage-managed the ill-effects of my condition and medication to get an invalid's benefit and supplemented it with illegal activities and casual or black market employment. From here I started falling into the sub-culture of drug-use and crime.

*continued overleaf...*

**M**y drinking increased and I would binge until blackout, waking up only to carry on again for days on end. Nine years later I was tired of it and one day I suddenly stopped and never drank that way again.

I had already removed myself from the city, from my family and other people and lived in many remote areas of the country, never staying longer than three or four months at a time. It just seemed easier to isolate than to struggle in the city. When I was younger, I would come out of a seizure and see Mum white and shaking. I removed myself partly to save my family that pain. I was running away but I couldn't see what I was running from.

**I** settled in isolation 850 km away from my family, with no constructive means of support. My life was dishonest, deceitful and deceptive. By 25, I started using opiates intravenously, and fell further down into the abyss of substance abuse for another 11 years. I suffered the consequences of many overdoses, the ill-fate of insane ideas and irresponsible actions and I went to prison. I tried many times to overcome my drug addiction. I repeatedly attempted to detoxify myself and achieved nothing more than repeated humiliation and embarrassment.

A community alcohol and drug service put me on a drug-aversion trial and their methadone harm reduction programme twice, both of which treatments failed. And I then lost my job with that area health board. I attended a residential drug treatment centre, where at least I learnt that addiction was a disease.

**F**inally, while reducing my dose of methadone, I started going to the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous where a desire to stop using is the only requirement for membership. It was there that

someone suggested I go to Higher Ground. After attending an N.A. convention I found the belief that I could get clean and there was something for me to belong to.

Higher Ground was my second rehabilitation programme, and it was the turning point in my life. I've done some wonderful things since leaving there; snorkeling with sea turtles on Great Barrier Reef and wandering the temples of Angkor Wat, but Higher Ground gave me the most significant gifts and rewards.

**I** experienced what it was like giving and receiving empathy and compassion to others who suffer the same affliction as I do. At Higher Ground I found people who not only wanted to listen but were also able to help.

At Higher Ground I discovered a sense of self consciousness and self awareness. I began to identify, acknowledge and transform my character defects into attributes, rather than inflicting them in a tyrannical fashion upon the people, places and things in my life.

My father had passed away, but my mother and brothers attended every Family Group and visited every Sunday, supporting me through Higher Ground and since in my recovery. During the years of my addiction they were always there for me but because I felt ashamed I stayed as far away from them as I could.

Higher Ground taught me a lot of the skills I needed in order to stay drug-free once I left. I learnt that I am not to blame for my addiction, but I am responsible for my recovery. I am now able to accept there was deep and disabling trauma in my life and talk openly about it. I have been able to take it out of that dark place and bring light to it. I take responsibility for my actions and behaviors for today and my future.

**I** enjoy life as I never could since I was 16. In a way, I started again as that 16-year-old before I went into hospital. All those years I lived in fear of my medical condition and it's social ostracism. I

had friends for years I never told about my epilepsy because I was ashamed and yet I was afraid I would have another fit and either not wake up, wake up disabled, or wake up to other people's reactions. Epilepsy was something I had no control of. I would feel it coming, it would grab me by the throat and shake the hell out of me until I would black out and afterwards I would have nothing to vent my anger onto. The way I took control was by using drugs.

At Higher Ground I started the process of experiencing those feelings I had locked away.

**O**ne thing that I found beneficial was that once I had graduated from Higher Ground, the doors stayed open and I was able to return to give back what I had been given. I was able to do voluntary service such as driving the vans to meetings, supporting other men in Family Group, and supporting staff

during house social outings. This kept me connected, kept me grateful and kept me in touch with where I'd come from and with people who were very much like me. It's like being part of a family where there's a new child born every day, each time someone new comes into the house.

I have been drug-free since I first entered Higher Ground nearly three years ago, and stayed drug-free through being a member of Narcotics Anonymous, a non-profit organization of men and women who meet regularly to give each other support by their sharing experience, strength and hope. I have an N.A. sponsor who helps me with direction and gives me guidance in working the N.A programme. There is a structure in place that gives me a sense of purpose in my life today. Through this Fellowship and programme I find hope and a daily reprieve from my afflictions and myself.

**T**oday I can honestly say that I have transformed myself from a Hopeless Dope Addict to A Dopeless Hope Addict and have nothing but curiosity and optimism as to what God's plans are for me. "✠"

**“At Higher Ground I found people who not only wanted to listen, but were also able to help.”**

# Spiritual Healing in Maori Group

*Maori Group has been part of Higher Ground's therapeutic programme for more than 15 years. Group time has increased and more time is allotted for marae visits, attending Maori recovery hui and meeting other Maori recovery programmes.*

Rawiri and Kohi Pene who lead Maori are both recovering addicts grounded in their culture who provide strong leadership by example and create a family atmosphere of love and joy.

Their five small children play, join in and are sometimes passed between arms as the group practice marae protocol, powhiri (welcome) waiata (songs) karakia (prayer) haka, whakapapa (lineage) or leadership roles on the marae.

Ra explains to the group the specially written recovery waiata, line by line bringing inspiration and meaning to the words. The song talks about being part of a recovery family in the house of healing (Higher Ground), standing together as united, being strong in unity and strengthening one another.

"The haka is full of passion and expression," he says.

"This waiata is about quietness of the spirit so you understand the duality of the self being on one hand fully expressive and on the other hand still and calm and peaceful.

"I guess for the guys this is bringing a more feminine touch to it. This song brings a weeping inside rather than a shouting. Like after you've had a good cry and you get that feeling that comes over you of relief. That's the aroha, because right in the next line we're talking about hurt, great is the hurt that we've experience as addicts and alcoholics that's caused us to come this way.

"Next line, not to be afraid of looking at ourselves, at the good, the bad and the ugly ...you've taken this journey in recovery, you're a person...you're taken this stand. The mauri, the life force, is the force of recovery as long as you're clean and sober."

A resident who is about to graduate from Higher Ground farewells Maori group: "It's been really healing to my spirit. I love singing to God in this group in Maori. I can come down here not traveling so well but leave here on top of the world. It makes things easier being here to have people around who are happy."

Kohi who is 12 years drug-free, enjoys giving back to people who have a desire to get well. "It's nice to be part of a group of people on this journey of recovery."

Ra, who is 15 years drug-free, says: "I really don't get personal. It comes out through the song or the korero, the conversations that occur. They take up what they need and it fills them. Most of the time I don't know what's filling them but it works. Every time I leave here I get a sense of fulfilment too."

Higher Ground's support of the Maori programme is vital, says Trust Board member Marino Te Moana.

"We give them the tools for going out onto a marae, to get up and speak and afterwards receive affirmation from other people. It's incredible for someone three months drug-free to be able to stand there with mana and we can be proud of them being in our community. This couldn't happen if we didn't have the whole of Higher Ground right up to the Board supporting and valuing the Maori programme."

People in active addiction often live without security, so getting a routine and a platform for recovery is the main objective of coming into a residential programme, says Programme Director Stuart Anderson. With that they are able to address some of the important issues in their lives and find the cornerstones to keep their recovery whole.

"People in addiction are emotionally barren and have no concept of their spirituality and how they fit in the world, whether that's because of their religious background or experiences of the past. Here we have people who for the first time are willing to look at spirituality and wairua and what that means for them.

*continued overleaf ...*

## Gift of Education

One-off funding totally \$20,000 has allowed Higher Ground to go shopping for recovery educational material and electronic equipment.

The shopping list includes \$4500 worth of audio tapes and DVDs from the Hazelden Foundation, a leading recovery publisher in the United States. This will enhance Higher Ground's existing library and will cover a whole range of topics from relapse prevention to the family disease of addiction, including literature relevant to younger methamphetamine dependent clients.

It also allows Higher Ground to buy much-needed education equipment including two whiteboards with the capacity to print what has been written on the boards and to link digitally to another purchase, a laptop computer.

One of Higher Ground's on-going objectives is to develop better education resources for the clients and for their families.

"In Maori culture that is about standing with a family and standing together which fits with the spiritual principles of recovery from addiction."

The Maori component of the Higher Ground programme is provided within the framework of mainstream drug and alcohol treatment services. Although only about 10% of Higher Ground clients identify as Maori, at least half the residents chose to attend the weekly group.

Maori Group provides regular, consistent and constant challenge to clients to meet their potential in Maori culture, "it mobilises pride in Maori culture," says Stuart.

Marino was one Maori Group's first facilitators when Maori Group first started at Higher Ground and as Maori advisor to the Board she helped develop the programme over a number of years. It started in response to clients' attendance of the Maori meeting of Narcotics Anonymous, she says.

Clients needed to have a Maori cultural component to the programme which walked alongside the 12

Steps. "We stay focused on recovery and bring to that our experiences as Maori; otherwise we could get sidetracked into other issues. We're not there to become political but to look at how our addiction has become unmanageable in our lives.

"Higher Ground allows clients to start healing around the issues of feeling different, racism, the shame of using drugs and of having unmanageable lives but we don't focus on those things too much or it could be an excuse to go out and use drugs again." *H*

**WEBSITE UP AND  
RUNNING...Check out Higher  
Ground's new website at  
[www.higherground.org.nz](http://www.higherground.org.nz)**

## 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) 302 1604 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.

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, 46 St Georges Bay Rd, Parnell,  
Auckland.

For further information about the  
*Higher Ground* rehabilitation programme  
phone Programme Director, Stuart Anderson  
09-302 2315 or fax 09-302 2334  
email [hgdrt@xtra.co.nz](mailto:hgdrt@xtra.co.nz)

Higher Ground Drug Rehabilitation Trust  
46 St Georges Bay Rd, Parnell Auckland  
Ph 0-9-302 2315 Fax 0-9-302 2334

### Higher Ground Trustees

Antonia Fisher	Lawyer
Fiona Howard	Psychologist
Janet Colby	Counsellor & Chairperson of the Trust
Karen Colby	Desktop Publisher
Marino Te Moana	Minister
Paul O'Sullivan	Company Director
Shane Hussey	Chartered Accountant

### Hon. Trustee

Karl Robinson	Consultant
---------------	------------