

## 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 18 years and over, 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 Ed Craig 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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Resentments consumed me and I was secretly judging others. I was jealous, envious and desperate for others to like me (at that time I didn't spot the irony!). On the outside my life looked good. I had maintained a relationship of 15 years. Financially we were stable. I had worked in the same field for 20 years and at the same job for the previous seven years. And then the bottom fell out of my world when I didn't get my own way in a work situation. I subconsciously decided to cope by obsessing about suicide – constantly planning how and when and where. I even told people, carefully choosing those who would not take any action. I never told my partner, justifying that omission of honesty by telling myself I didn't want to worry her.

Then a miracle happened. I was at a 12 Step meeting when someone said they were many years clean and sober and attending the Higher Ground programme. I wished I had been listening to their sharing instead of thinking what I would say if I got asked to speak. As soon as the meeting finished I went over to talk and I remember the wave of hope that washed over me. I spent the next weeks torn between suicidal obsession and knowing that Higher Ground might offer me help if I asked. But was I courageous enough to ask? Was I desperate enough to ask? That was a very difficult phone call to make and it took me several attempts over several weeks. I had to get over my pride, ego and sense of shame because I was personally known by the staff at Higher Ground.

When I finally spoke to the admissions person he was very kind and made an appointment for an initial visit. What a relief. But I still remember my fear as I drove there. Suicidal thoughts were more familiar and comfortable than taking this action to get help and face the work required for change. At my first visit I was so scared and overwhelmed that I wasn't able to stay more interviews with one helped me relax environment. date was arranged to fit very hard to tell family my decision to attend partner didn't want I went to counselling.

*“Going to Higher Ground saved my life.”*

The sessions were helpful but an hour once a week felt inadequate for my pain. Friends in recovery struggled to understand why I would need to attend a live-in programme. Most of them believed the programme would be too easy for me. My experience was the exact opposite as I faced the reality of my immature, self-destructive behaviours.

Higher Ground is a therapeutic community. I came to understand that it was client-lead and that aspect of the community was where I got most of my learning from. The therapists and staff kept us directed and were incredibly helpful, and without them we would have had anarchy, but we as clients challenged and kept each other accountable constantly and I was not able to hide. I found that very powerful and profound. It felt like being in a pressure cooker, with all my feelings and emotions compressed in time.

I thought I was going to be different or special. I was shocked to find that my self-destructive behaviours were exactly the same as the other residents' behaviours. I hadn't expected this. After all, I had worked at another treatment centre and then gone through their programme twice as a patient, in the 1980s.

Attending Higher Ground was both incredibly challenging and extremely rewarding. After graduating from the full programme it was suggested I live at HG's support house. I thought 'no way, I have a job and a life to go back to', but despite my initial resistance, I am very grateful I did. I needed the help to transition back because my behaviour deteriorated and the support house was set up to keep us on track. In total I was away from my home and work for six months. Today that feels like a small price for my life and sanity.

It is now two years later and the experience of Higher Ground for me and my partner has benefitted our relationship. I have stayed close to Higher Ground in a variety of ways. I attended Aftercare group and have been a volunteer driver. I still support others in family group and have on-going counselling.

Going to Higher Ground saved my life. Thank you. ”

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 Programmeme Director, Johnny Dwo 09-834 0017 or fax 09-834 0018 email admin@higherground.org.nz www.higherground.org.nz

# HIGHER GROUND

## DRUG REHABILITATION TRUST

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# NEWS

## HELPING A RECOVERING ADDICT STAY CLEAN

**Was there nowhere she could turn for help with living? After 22 years drug-free, this former resident was struggling and suicidal. She discovered there was a place of healing for her - Higher Ground. This is her story.**

“I was 22 years in recovery when I asked for help from Higher Ground Drug Rehabilitation Trust. I was a “dry drunk”. I didn't think there was anywhere in New Zealand for people like me to get intensive help from a therapeutic community since I had not relapsed. I was wrong. Higher Ground accepted me.

Being drug-free has been the most important thing to me on a daily basis for many years now. My belief is that I would rather kill myself than relapse. A friend took her own life when we were both 17 years drug-free. The difference between us was that she had stopped attending meetings of a 12 Step fellowship. As one of her pall-bearers, I remember my feeling of gratitude that I was on the outside of the coffin. I also knew that there but for the grace of God it could have been me.

I grew up the eldest of three girls in an immigrant Catholic family where alcohol was frowned upon. Aspirin was reserved for extreme emergencies only. I am not aware of any addiction in my family history. I started stealing when I was about six years old because I was angry at my sisters. It was an unexpected thrill and I now believe it was my first active addiction.

The first time I got drunk it was like a switch went on. I had found the magic answer to coping with my life. My constant fear melted away and I felt happier than I had ever been. I only ever drank to get drunk. I quickly became a lone drinker because of my shame when I was told of my behaviour such as starting food fights, vomiting on others and urinating in public. I experienced blackouts almost from the start.

I trained as a nurse and this unexpectedly opened the world of pharmaceuticals to me. I discovered the ease of a blackout without having to put up with the taste and side effects of alcohol. I always stole medication and initially I was never a suspect when there was fuss at work about missing meds. Ultimately, it was the consequences of this behaviour that led to my recovery path. My desperation to avoid trouble was my motivation to attend and then work the 12 Step programme.

At my rock bottom I still appeared to be a healthy and active young woman. I hitchhiked in New Zealand and overseas, walked a lot of the tramping tracks in New Zealand, was an active member of an alpine club, and sailed around the Pacific for almost a year. I was competent at leading a double life.

When I was five years drug-free my youngest sister was killed. Her death was the single saddest event I have ever had to cope with. In her honour I did one skydive. It never occurred to me that I would cross-addict to adrenalin. I did more than 170 parachute jumps. Over the next few years I tried every extreme sport I could find that involved non-motorised flying. During that time I believed I was not suicidal.

I had felt occasionally suicidal since I was 15, almost 40 years ago. In active addiction my attempts were mostly pathetic, with a few very close calls. Afterwards, I had always been grateful that I was still alive as I realised the truth in the old saying “the bad times pass”. In recovery I still experienced suicidal thoughts occasionally, but I found that they decreased over time when I worked the steps, especially the part of Step 12 about carrying the message of recovery to others. I experienced many months without these destructive desires. It was a challenging time when another woman whose recovery path had initially attracted me to get help chose to take her own life. Also my former sponsor from a 12 Step programme committed suicide after relapsing. The disease of addiction that I suffer from is fatal and without turning to a Higher Power for help I believe that “jails, institutions and death” would be my natural outcome.

Complacency is one of the enemies of recovery and after my 20th anniversary I was less committed to working the 12 Steps, reduced my meetings and didn't put much effort into my home group service. With women in the fellowship that I sponsored it was often a case of “do what I say, not what I do”. I changed my own sponsor regularly so I didn't have to deal with intimacy. I was impressed with the length of my sobriety and quantity became more important than quality. I was God in my own life.

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# DEDICATED COURTS FOR DEPENDENCY

The launch of two Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Courts in Auckland ushers in a new era in justice and rehabilitation for people affected by addiction, and for Higher Ground. As one of the designated treatment providers, Higher Ground has four places funded for referrals from the new Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Courts (AODTC).

Higher Ground has formed an innovative formal network partnership for the AODTC courts with treatment providers Odyssey House and The Salvation Army's The Bridge programme, for provision of beds, a day programme, peer support and case managers.

"I think what the drug court will do is give the client a more successful outcome," says Higher Ground's director Johnny Dow. "The clients coming through the drug court will be coralled in a more therapeutic way. There are a lot of relationships going on in the court. Everyone's working for the person in a different way rather than towards a prosecution."

Courts in Auckland and Waitakere opened on November 8, following a blessing by tangata whenua the previous week. Both courts will refer to Higher Ground. Each court will take 50 cases a year, 100 in total, and will identify the best treatment option as part of the ongoing management of the case which occurs prior to sentencing.

Taking time to deal with issues and teamwork are keys to a different outcome. During their 12-18 months progression through the drug court, offenders will check in regularly with a team of professionals including judge, lawyers, police, peer support workers, case managers and social agencies who know their case. Members of the 12-Step Fellowships of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous will also attend court.

The drug courts apply the normal principles of sentencing, but do so after the offender has had the chance to address the cause of his or her offending.



Judge Lisa Tremewan (left) and Judge Ema Aitken of the new drug courts, Te Whare Whakapiki Wairua – named The House Which Uplifts the Spirit by Hon. Dr Pita Sharples

Says Waitakere's Judge Lisa Tremewan: "We don't usually, as a criminal justice system, take the opportunity to work out specifically where people are on the scale of addiction in order to adopt a process by which such issues might be addressed where reasonably possible, while the case is still before the court, achieving better outcomes not only for the offender but for the community too."

"Judges may not have assessments available to them or may not have particular knowledge of alcohol and other drugs in sentencing to know if someone has a dependency. Drug abuse is where there is still a choice, and education and punishment responses may be suitable, whereas you cannot effectively punish dependency," says Judge Tremewan. "Prison provides time out of circulation before someone who is drug-dependent comes out and starts re-offending, she says."

The judges have visited Higher Ground on a number of occasions, talked to staff, Board, team managers, pre-admissions and attended group therapy and Family Group. Says Auckland's Judge Ema Aitken: "Visiting

Higher Ground provided an invaluable opportunity to see 'treatment in action' and to hear input from participants and their families.

"I was very impressed by the way the family night sessions were run by the Higher Ground clinicians, what a skilled job, given that you cannot really predict who will say what. I was struck by the dialogue between participants, who were very honest with each other, but often supportive at the same time."

"To me these meetings also seemed like a 'therapeutic community' in action and we have much to learn from these experiences. There is also the enormous value in listening to each participant's journey, and its impact on their families. To run these new courts successfully, we as judges need to understand as much about dependency as possible – and this was a unique learning environment."

Says Judge Tremewan: "I've only ever been really impressed by the dedicated commitment of the staff. As a district court judge I've referred a lot of people to Higher

Ground over a long period of time and seen some really good results. I've got really good feedback from a variety of sources.

"I also look at commitment to kaupapa Maori issues. It's so important that it's a place that is comfortable and meaningful for Maori in terms of their treatment, and in my view that makes it better for Pakeha too."

Although the new drug court works in some ways differently, there are important similarities with other courts. Those coming into the courts will have resolved their charges with guilty pleas and there are a number of other criteria which must be met. Participants can however choose to leave at any time (and return to the normal sentencing court) and the court too can exit a participant for continued failure to respond to opportunities given by the court. The law already allows the court to adjourn a case to enable a defendant to undergo rehabilitation.

The new drug courts are focussed on providing intensive rehabilitation to a particular group of offenders. They are alcohol and/or other drug dependent and have high treatment needs, but are also at high risk of failing in treatment and committing further offences without the intensive input and monitoring the courts can provide.

In sentencing the judge will take into account a number of factors, including the interests of the victim. An offender will be required to undertake a range of programmes and commitments, including working in and for the community, working to pay reparation if possible, and attending restorative justice meetings with the victim if the victim is willing. Judge Aitken believes the court is holding the offender accountable in a way that is much more effective than imprisonment.

Judge Tremewan says drug courts can do a better job of the work that the courts are currently doing by taking positive action about what causes the offending. The drug court is a lever to keeping someone in treatment longer and therefore increases

the likelihood of successful treatment and aftercare working towards a mature recovery. Before offenders graduate from the court, they must have an on-going individualised treatment plan which may, for example, include kaupapa Maori aspects. Dealing with the drivers of the offending also has the effect of reducing the number of future victims.

Says Judge Aitken: "Just having the same judge throughout the process, and someone who has a genuine interest in the offender's ability to access a wide range of appropriate interventions, makes a huge difference to the individual offender, and the outcome."

There will be a close relationship with treatment providers. Says Judge Tremewan: "Because we are focussing on high risk-high needs, a high number of offenders will need residential treatment and a number of

those we would hope would be going through Higher Ground."

Higher Ground's director Johnny Dow says Higher Ground, which specialises in treating severe dependency, already has a lot of experience and success working with justice system referred clients referred from there. "We are looking forward to more success in the future."

"Higher Ground salutes Judges Tremewan and Aitken for their commitment and drive to get the drug courts underway," says Board chair Janet Colby. "The conference they organised earlier this year hosted by the Auckland District Law Society was testament to their commitment - bringing eight presenters from the United States and attracting over 300 people drawn from a wide range of sectors, so that we would work together to assist those within the drug courts to achieve good outcomes."

## RECOGNISING MAORI AND OTHER CULTURES

A commitment to kaupapa Maori and wider cultural understanding is seen as part of Higher Ground's contribution to the new Alcohol and Other Drugs Treatment Courts (Te Whare Whakapiki Wairua – the name gifted to the new courts by the Hon Dr Pita Sharples).

Maori programme team leader Rawiri Pene is part of the steering committee of treatment providers to the new courts. "What I hope to provide is a cultural perspective. How we fulfill that is still to be seen," says Rawiri.

"It's early days and this is still being created. But one of the things I hope will come from this is more collaborative work between these organisations on cultural issues, and that we can extend further into closer work on other levels. One question would be how we support Maori who chose to return to their tribal regions after going through the drug court."

Higher Ground is part of an innovative partnership of treatment providers for the new drug courts. Higher Ground, Odyssey House and The Bridge programme will provide residential treatment, Community Alcohol and Drug Services will provide assessments, The Bridge will provide peer support and a day programme, and Odyssey House will provide case managers.



### Seasons Greetings

WISHING YOU ALL A SAFE AND HAPPY NEW YEAR AHEAD.

At the end of another busy and fulfilling year Higher Ground wishes to thank all our friends, volunteers and supporters. Higher Ground is a therapeutic community where residents can feel they are part of a loving programme. Higher Ground will continue to provide this invaluable service as our programme grows and moves forward positively in the coming year.

Our very best wishes to you for 2013 and beyond, from Higher Ground Drug Rehabilitation Trust's Board, staff and residents.

