

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 09-834 0042 for a pre-admission assessment appointment on weekdays between 8.30am and 4.00pm.

Assessments in 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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LIFE CHANGES FOR THE BETTER

Higher Ground's commissioned research gets feedback from graduates and current residents on their experiences, the value they place on the programme and how it has helped them live free of alcohol and other drugs.

Higher Ground graduates and current residents find the programme challenging but highly effective. Being pushed out of their comfort zone is key to personal growth, which in turn helps their recovery from addiction.

These are among the findings of research by Julian King & Associates commissioned by Higher Ground Drug Rehabilitation Trust in August and September last year. Researcher Michelle Moss carried out in-depth interviews of 22 graduates and three current clients across a range of demographics and recovery time.

Overall, Higher Ground had been a life changing experience, and interviewees' lives had changed for the better as a result of completing the programme. They were staying in recovery although some had relapsed and come back, were feeling better, finding employment and studying.

"It's the best thing I've done in my life," said one participant.

Interviewees liked the therapeutic community setting, despite finding it strict and challenging. "In fact, it's the challenges in themselves that appear to support the personal growth and development necessary for recovery to occur," says Michelle.

Staff were considered professional, non-judgmental and caring, and having a group of peers to go through the recovery journey with was highly valued. The opportunity to question and reflect on their own and other people's behaviour was part of being in a therapeutic community. This helped them learn to be responsible and functional members of society again.

Interviewees found therapy groups, family groups and one-on-one counseling to be most useful for their recovery. The 12-Step programme was also considered key to their recovery, and this became even more important for maintaining recovery after graduation.

Both Māori and non-Māori valued the whānau group. "The programme is hard, and the whānau group was considered more gentle. Most of those I spoke to found it to be a very safe place. Whanaungatanga helped people to connect on a deeper level", says Michelle.

For most Māori, cultural identity was revitalized or strengthened. However, taking part in cultural practices, exploring spirituality, connecting with people on a deeper level and learning about Māori values also helped non-Māori to strengthen their identity as New Zealanders.

Interviewees said their thinking, knowledge and behaviour improved. They became more able to open up and trust people again, felt connected in meaningful ways and re-found a sense of belonging lost in active addiction. Part of that was finding a spiritual belief and a Higher Power. Higher Ground fostered the importance of giving back and supporting others.

Although leaving Higher Ground was stressful for many, all interviewees felt well supported through this process. Having an exit plan was key, as were continuing care groups and involvement of whānau in the discharge process.

Interviewees did not think the programme could be improved, but would like to see it expanded so that people around New Zealand could access it. It was also suggested that programmes for mothers and their children were developed.

"Overall, it was clear that Higher Ground's rehabilitation programme has had a profound effect on interviewees, and fundamentally changed their lives for the better. Those who had tried other rehabilitation programmes felt this was by far the best" says Michelle.

Julian King & Associates carried out previous quantitative research on outcomes for clients. "Higher Ground is unique in that it has quite an extensive research programme, which really supports ongoing development and improvements," says Michelle.

<http://www.higherground.org.nz/research/>

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

PM COMMITTED TO TREATMENT



From left, finance manager Bill Jordan, programme director Johnny Dow, Prime Minister Bill English, Board chair Janet Colby, Maori programme leader Kohe Pene, MP Alfred Ngaro, Board member Shane Hussey, Maori programme leader Rawiri Pene.

Higher Ground recently welcomed a visit by Prime Minister Bill English and local MP Alfred Ngaro.

"Making the decision to seek help for drug and alcohol abuse is an incredibly brave step and a fundamental one because people can't overcome such a debilitating illness if they don't choose to do so themselves," said The Right Honourable Bill English.

"I was inspired by the stories I heard on my visit to Higher Ground. Many of those there have dealt with real challenges in their lives. Whether it be a tough childhood, mental illness or other circumstances that led them to dependence, those at Higher Ground have since made the decision to try and overcome that.

"The Government believes in you and those who work with you and it's why we are investing significantly more in treatment. With the right commitment and support, people can overcome even the most serious challenges and the Government is committed to supporting those seeking to overcome addiction."

"It's a fantastic privilege to have you here, Prime Minister, and to have you back Alfred," said Higher Ground director Johnny Dow

welcoming Bill English and the Honourable Alfred Ngaro, National list MP based in Te Atatu.

Johnny said he remembered the first methamphetamine clients at Higher Ground about 20 years ago when most clients were opiate users, and there was no indication then how methamphetamine would become the "scourge" it is today.

Higher Ground always had a list of about 70 people, who waited around four months to come into treatment. "If we took all the people waiting to come in from prisons we'd probably have over 200 on the waiting list but we can't do that because we like to take people from the community as well as from the justice sector. So the problem has grown.

"But we're really grateful to your government's methamphetamine initiative its allowed us to create a treatment which has significant effect on the residents, and it's allowed us to look at outcomes and do research which shows that our treatment helps a lot of people.

PARENTS COPING WITH A SON'S ADDICTION

Before their son went to Higher Ground, these parents were constantly trying to stop him using alcohol and other drugs. They found their way forward by attending Al-Anon Family Groups. Nine years later this is their story.

A Mother's Story

“ I grew up in a very safe, tidy family. Or so I thought. I knew my grandfather was an alcoholic. I never heard his name mentioned with warmth or love. He always seemed to be a source of great disappointment and anger to my mother, never nice stories. He died as the result of an alcohol influenced car accident the year I was born.

Later on, my two brothers started their drinking and drugging around the age of 13. I was beside myself with worry about their behaviour and their friends. By the time my brothers where 18 my parents divorced. I blamed my brothers' drinking and drugging, and treated them with distain and distance.

I married a wonderful man, and had two beautiful children. They were not going to grow up and become the sort of people my brothers were: I made sure they knew all about the dangers of alcohol and other drugs.

We educated my son about sensible drinking and he always made sure that he slept over if he was going to a party where there was drinking. He started university at 17 and loved the social life. In his third year at university he had a very bad reaction to synthetic cannabis. It was the first we knew about his drugging.

We tried to shadow his every move and monitor all his comings and goings. The entire family was consumed with our son's behaviour. I became hypervigilant and totally untrusting and he was starting to loathe me. My actions were based on a combination of love and fear. It broke my heart when we cancelled his 21st birthday as a result of a consequence we said we would bring if we found any more drugs in the house.

I couldn't work out why even with all the tough love and punishments he was still not making any attempt to stop drinking or drugging.

It got to the stage where I was set to leave my marriage and the family home. Our son said that he would go to a community drug service if I stayed. We were there the next morning. They asked my son why he was there, he said, "because Mum was going to leave home" – not because he had a problem.

He completed that programme but importantly my husband and I did an intensive outpatients programme where I was introduced to some Al-Anon members. I realised that I had grown up in a family affected by alcohol. I related to their stories. I wanted to get some serenity and understanding too. I'd had enough of hearing about the constant, acute stories. I wanted Recovery with a capital R. So nine years ago I attended my first Al-Anon Family Groups meeting, a 12-Step programme like Alcoholics Anonymous.

By this stage my son was working in the farming industry. Out of the blue we got a call from him. We collected him, he was not well at all.

The next day when I was sitting at the table with him yet again trying to find him another job, his Dad said bluntly, "your problem is not a job, it's your drinking". Miracles, he agreed. Within two weeks he was at Higher Ground.

At my first Multiple Family Group at Higher Ground I remember vividly someone saying how lucky our son was that I was attending Al-Anon. I didn't get the significance of that at the time but the comment stuck with me.

I learned through Al-Anon that addiction was a disease and things started to make sense. I learnt that my 'addiction' or compulsion was my son and his behaviour; I was completely obsessed with what he was or wasn't doing and full of fear and resentment.

My son's drinking got me to Al-Anon but I had already been affected by generations of alcoholism.

I did a huge reassessment of my role as a mother. I learned that I did not have to sever all contact with him as my family had done with my brothers. I could still love him but I was learning to detach from his behaviour with love.

My son didn't graduate from Higher Ground. I realised that I had handed him over to Higher Ground to keep him safe not to a Higher Power. He had his own Higher Power and it wasn't me. I had to find mine.

I also knew that the experience and knowledge he had gained at Higher Ground was life changing and that when he needed help he would know how and where to ask for it himself.

I focused on living my own life, one day at a time, to its fullest potential. Worrying about my son would only make me feel worse and not alter his behaviour one jot.

My son had a long period of being well (I never checked up on his recovery) but recently he relapsed with serious consequences. Without Al-Anon I wouldn't have had the skills to support and love him and keep myself well too. Al-Anon has taught me that alcoholics and addicts in recovery can help other alcoholics and addicts. I need the help and support (fellowship) of other family members in recovery. ”

A Father's Story

“ To the best of my knowledge I do not have a family history of alcoholism or addictive behaviour, although my family could hardly be described as close or large. Certainly my father suffered terribly from depression and anxiety and my mother expended an enormous amount of energy covering for this. My younger sister and I were never close, we rarely communicate and live at opposite ends of the country.

I left New Zealand as early as I could with a professional qualification, and worked and travelled overseas. I returned and married a wonderful woman and I thought the rest of life would go

swimmingly (we are now in our 34th year together, a testament to the patience and tolerance that each of us has developed).

Our son was given everything that he could possibly need and progressed through a private school doing well academically, socially and generally. He was gifted musically, achieved high honours in school, was a prefect, popular and definitely part of the "in" crowd. He was a year younger than his peers and as parents we chose the accelerated path instead of holding him back.

He started university at 17 and got into veterinary school. He had only ever wanted to be a rural vet so again life seemed to be going swimmingly. Year one his grades were straight A's, year two saw a significant drop, year three further significant deterioration so that he had to re-sit papers.

At the beginning of year four, following a bizarre telephone conversation we dropped everything and went to Palmerston North to see for ourselves. He had descended into a fog of drugs and alcohol and was suffering extreme paranoia. It is barely an exaggeration to say he didn't know what planet he was on. We bundled him back to Auckland where we believed we could get the necessary and urgent help required to get him back to university.

Part of the prognosis was that one of us should live with our son in Palmerston North, that he had to cease his drugging and that instead he should have a glass of wine at night with us. He hated those arrangements as much as we did, especially as we now had a fractured family, a marriage under threat and a daughter effectively abandoned in Auckland.

My background is in project management and my son was simply another challenge that I would address on a project basis so he could return to university. Thereafter I wasn't too worried where life took him, as my belief was that having attained a degree he would always have something solid to underpin whatever he did.

As part of this project approach, my wife and I attended Tough Love where we learned about boundaries. This was pretty straightforward; it was what I had been doing all of my working life.

The funny thing was that no matter what boundaries we put in place they had virtually no impact, as the drinking and drugging just continued, indeed probably got worse. So my wife and I went to a community addiction service. It was suggested that we think about attending Al-Anon Family Groups.

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So we're actually reducing crime, increasing employment and getting better housing for people as well. The unfortunate part of it Prime Minister is the waiting lists and that the demand is just so great.”

A resident spoke about growing up with a mother abusing opiates and alcohol. "I had a lot of emotions I struggled to deal with. As I came into teenage years I struggled with that too, as I am a gay man as well." At 13 he turned to alcohol and started getting into trouble for dishonesty and later for drink driving. "I was in the justice system from a very young age and have been ever since." At 17 he cross-addicted to methamphetamine and trouble escalated. "I wasn't just dishonest out there, I was dishonest to myself."

After two drug treatments and four months in prison he was desperate, with no goals or aspirations and no idea where to go or what to do. Facing serious charges, he reached out for help from the Alcohol and Other Drugs Treatment Court and was referred to Higher Ground.

"Coming here has changed my life. I have dealt with some very serious issues from my past and started to take responsibility for the things I've done wrong. I'm just extremely grateful I've had that

We had tried everything else so there was nothing to lose going to another place to learn how to control our son's drinking and drugging.

About the same time our son was admitted to Higher Ground. We attended some very raw Multiple Family Group sessions there, then just over midway through our son was discharged. Seeing him sitting outside with his bag was one of the saddest things.

He immediately returned to his drinking and drugging mates and it dawned on me how totally and utterly powerless I was over my son's life. His life was his business. My life was my business and part of my business was to keep out of his.

Al-Anon taught me a number of things, primarily that my son's addiction was a disease and not something that he chose, and that I could love my son at the same time as not loving his behaviour. This was a very difficult concept for me to grasp. I was unashamedly a control freak and saw things very much as black or white and nothing in between.

I learned that I didn't cause my son's problems, I couldn't control them (as much as I had tried over the years) and I couldn't cure them (again as much as I had tried). For me this was a revelation, it released me to live my life and let him live his.

I honestly believe that my son was doing his very best despite his addictions and anxiety. He has for the most part played a productive role in the workforce. He has chosen to do that far away from where I live.

Whenever I have shared my story at Higher Ground and other places, I have been asked if my son is in recovery. I have always responded that I don't know; it isn't my business.

Recently my son hit rock bottom and while I offered support I did not try to rescue him as I once would have done, and more importantly I did not experience the anxiety that I once would have. He is now attending two 12-Step programmes and although it is early days he seems to have accepted that this is the key to his future wellbeing.

There was no input from me on this, I made my decision to seek my recovery nine years ago. Right now it is a new and uplifting, experience to have three out of four family members in 12-Step programmes. Long may it continue but I have learnt to take one day at a time and not to take anything for granted, especially not to future-trip. ”

opportunity and how at the age of 25 I am able to look to the future.”

A graduate of Higher Ground spoke about constant physical, mental and sexual abuse as a girl at home and at school. "It was like a vicious cycle for me, I had nowhere safe to run. My anger grew, the rage made me very violent. I went looking for love in all the wrong places. I turned to drugs and alcohol because they helped me forget all the horrible things that happened to me."

She smoked marijuana from age 10, and started using methamphetamine in 1999. "It was the only time I felt good and escaped reality. All this drug use lead me to insomnia which lead me to psychologists which eventually lead me to Higher Ground.

"I have not looked back since. Yes it was a struggle; yes I wanted to leave every day. The only thing that kept me at Higher Ground was the hope that I would regain the family I had lost.

"I used to be insecure around people because I felt ugly inside and out but today I am standing here in front of you all and it's okay. I am grateful for all the hard work put into me at Higher Ground, now I can give back."