

## 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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## Contact Details

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middle of the night, standing on the footpath and my first N.A. sponsor's voice came into my head. Somehow that stuck out amongst all the mess I was hearing. I would like to say I went home and got clean the next day but I don't think that's true. I had a lot of help from concerned N.A. people.

Medical detox was full. But there was a woman at social detox who saved my life. She told me, "Go to your doctor, get medication, go home and I will ring you every day for a week. If you are clean in a week you can come to detox but I don't think you will be able to do it."

In a week I was at social detox. That's the bit I was always scared of, afterwards when your head wakes up again after the worst of the physical detox is over. I think I had just had enough this time.

I went to a support house and that's where I saw all the happy people graduating from Higher Ground. The psychosis didn't go away straight away, I was really depressed and swung between angry and suicidal. I know now that anger was a cover-up for fear, and really I was scared - scared it wouldn't work, scared I wouldn't be able to stay clean, scared to look at myself, scared of myself.

It was worse in some ways in early recovery than it was at the end of my using, as there was no longer any escape.

I knew a lot of people from the 12-Step fellowships, but I didn't have any real friends. I was terrified of getting to know people or letting them know me and I used my anger to keep them away. That's a lonely existence and part of the reason I would always pick up drugs again.

Higher Ground was the start of learning how to be a part of rather than a loner. I had no problem with the rules but the getting past a 'hows'it?' in the hallway was scary. I had trouble believing that people wanted to be my friend and that the staff were on my side.

I would always have this feeling that I was pretending at life. I would look at people laughing and chatting together at meetings and get angry. Shame would come up because I felt like I didn't know how to do those things. But there was hope at Higher Ground, seeing the changes in the other residents made me think I might be able to change as well.

A couple of times I wanted to leave but I had to ask myself what would happen. I knew it wouldn't be anything good, and thank God I stayed desperate. The best thing my sponsor said to me one Sunday afternoon during visits was, "So?" When I had a list of things to complain about, she said, "Why did you come here?" That was enough to propel me through the rest of my treatment.

I guess that's been the key this time, to remember that my main purpose is to stay in recovery. When I left Higher Ground the second time, I kept doing what I didn't want to do - I took suggestions, I went back to Higher Ground to support others at family group and I kept going to meetings.

I recently went to celebrate a Higher Ground peer's second birthday at a meeting and there was a whole row of women who had done treatment together and were still clean. I still have the same home group. It's my job to wash the tea towels at the moment, and I try to get there early to talk to people.

I've made lots of mistakes but instead of letting the mistakes drag me back to addiction I was able to face them with the help of my sponsor and female friends in recovery. It is still my first instinct to isolate when things get hard but I have stayed desperate enough this time to reach out.

I got a part-time job and finished the degree I started the first time round and am now working full time in a job I really like. I live in a flat with other people in recovery and do lots of really normal stuff. My relationships with family have dramatically improved.

Everyday life is probably my biggest struggle now, looking after myself is a completely new concept. But I don't feel like I'm pretending at life any more, I'm actually living it. ”

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

# DANCING FOR HIGHER GROUND

Nothing in her public life compared to the recognition Pam Corkery says she attracted as a celebrity participant in the recent television series *Dancing with the Stars* – largely for her chosen cause, Higher Ground Drug Rehabilitation Trust.



"I've had my moments of being noticed or being recognised publicly but this was extraordinary and it was all 'what do we do? How did you do it?'"

Pam did not go through Higher Ground when she stopped drinking and taking other drugs six years ago, but it was an easy choice of recipient for the show: "As I am a recovering addict, I wanted to support Higher Ground as they save lives.

"Higher Ground is the gold standard, it really is, and everyone in the field says that. I've seen miracles there and it's just a great place."

The mini documentary filmed with Pam at Higher Ground for the 3D current affairs programme on TV3 attracted a lot of attention.

"Since being in *Dancing with the Stars*, I haven't met anyone in New Zealand who is not affected by addiction in their family or friends because that's the main thing people would stop and talk to me about.

"Maybe they didn't want to talk about my dancing expertise," she laughs with her trademark humour, "but there was just this desperation in people's faces..."

Director Johnny Dow sees the benefits of raising awareness as equal to or greater than the donation that will come to Higher Ground from the TV show. "We were thrilled that Pam nominated Higher Ground as her chosen cause. Pam has always been a great supporter of Higher Ground. Her open discussion of substance addiction is brave, and it allows people to see that change is possible. Higher Ground is grateful for her generosity and we thank her for choosing us."

Many people Pam talked to did not know there was a residential treatment programme such as Higher Ground in New Zealand.

Says Pam: "The number of people who came up to me and said 'what's this recovery business?' was surprising. I grew up like that.

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# METHAMPHETAMINE RECOVERY SUCCESS

Higher Ground's on-going research tracks progress from first contact through the programme and beyond – providing a wealth of data for evaluating the work done here. Nearly 50% of Higher Ground's clients are methamphetamine dependent.

Higher Ground is highly effective in working with clients who are methamphetamine users, and people leaving the programme are staying off methamphetamine, according to an independent research report.

Of those clients able to be followed up, 94% were abstinent from amphetamines three months after discharge and 87% were abstinent at 12 months.

"It all looks very positive, it's all what you want to see," says Julian King, the independent consultant who prepared the Review of Outcomes For Clients Who Use Methamphetamine. Higher Ground has a robust research system that provides rich data against a whole range of measures that track people's progress over time. "This is among the best outcomes research programmes I've seen," says Julian. "I've evaluated lots of health services, mental health services and alcohol and other drugs services and Higher Ground has the sort of outcomes research data that I always want and don't very often see."

Alcohol and other drug services usually collect administrative data on things like how many people come into the service, how long they stay, percentages of male and female, and how many are Maori or Pacific. "But it is rare that the data can tell us this much about people's outcomes. Higher Ground has a set of validated psychometric tools that they administer at different points in time."

Julian emphasises that Higher Ground's data is combined so that no individual can be identified. "When the data is all put together we can track the outcomes for the service overall and we can see what people's recovery looks like according to these different measurements from first contact through to exit, and what happens in the year after that."

Says Director Johnny Dow: "This research will be of real interest to the wider therapeutic community. I believe this information on what happens to people during and after treatment and the outcome of treatment has not been available before."

"It shows that once clients make a commitment and a decision to get here, Higher Ground can and does help them and recovery is within reach. What we do here that works so well is create a continuous support system, so people can see others succeeding and have real hope it can work for them too," he says. "We are saving a lot of young lives."

Julian is currently preparing an updated report looking across all Higher Ground clients, not just methamphetamine users, which will be released shortly.

Higher Ground's researcher Rebekah Robinson gathers data from

clients starting at pre-admission, then at different times through the programme. She makes contact with people at three, six, nine and 12 months after exiting.

The methamphetamine study released last year looked at 155 clients discharged between Dec 2011 and March 2014 who had been in treatment longer than 30 days. It found clinically significant positive improvement in all of the indicators.

For example, data shows that on average, clients who used methamphetamine arrived with severe depression, severe anxiety, and moderate stress – and all three emotional states were normal by discharge. Clients able to be followed up at three, six, nine and 12 months remained within the normal range for depression, anxiety and stress, indicating sustained recovery.

Many methamphetamine clients also arrive at Higher Ground with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Of these, the vast majority (82%) made clinically significant improvements by discharge.

Julian King will be presenting the methamphetamine research to the Australasian Association of Therapeutic Communities (ATCA) international conference hosted in Auckland in October.

There is good evidence that therapeutic communities – such as Higher Ground – are effective in reducing substance dependency and use, and that involvement with 12-Step programmes improves outcomes for clients. However, a literature scan conducted as part of the research found no specific data on methamphetamine users' recovery in therapeutic communities, either in NZ or overseas.

One of the problems with measuring treatment outcomes in addictions services is finding a valid point of comparison. "I think it's fair to suggest that for people who don't receive any treatment, their condition often tends to stay the same or get worse," says Julian King. "You would expect people not seeking help or getting treatment to still have an addiction problem 12 months later."

Higher Ground has an eight-bed contract through the Prime Minister's Methamphetamine Strategy, and accepts other clients funded through area health boards.

Almost all methamphetamine clients were aged 20 to 39, with a dependency averaging 10 years. Overall 45-50% of Higher Ground's clients have methamphetamine dependency, with the remainder mostly alcohol dependent.

**Methamphetamine research is available on the Higher Ground website, [www.higherground.org.nz](http://www.higherground.org.nz). Previous research has reported on the Maori programme (2012) and a Higher Ground evaluation (2013).**

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I didn't know anyone in recovery, they just all died from kidney failure or something... and we had a fair history in our family. Rehabs – I thought they were all in the States."

Although recovery is now central to her life, she had no plans to learn to dance before the opportunity was presented. "The crazy part is I went to a meeting and heard someone talking about recovery as experiencing new things, increasing the size of your comfort zone or getting outside your comfort zone and I thought, that's right there are only two directions, backwards or forwards..."

"So I said a wee prayer that night, 'you know God, I'm sort of ready to stretch myself, and if it's your will....' Next morning, ring, ring, *Dancing with the Stars*. I thought 'you can't be serious'. My Higher Power's clearly got a sense of humour. I just laughed. Obviously I didn't tell them that."

She says the makers of *Dancing with the Stars* stressed the benefits to her charity and its profile. "I thought well if I'm going to do it... It seemed such a no brainer to me to try and do something good with it, even before I said yes."

"I said to my sponsor obviously we can't do anything for the anonymous 12-Step programme, and I don't know how the conversation came around but she said, 'Higher Ground, we know they do God's work'."

"Even before doing interviews I went through it all with my sponsor and we would work out how best to attract not promote because I can only talk about me, my recovery. We did the best we could and I think it came off fine. In my position it's a good way to do service."

There were also huge personal rewards in *Dancing with the Stars*. "It was brilliant – and the fitness is insane. You could bounce chisels off my thighs."

"It was amazing getting over so much in terms of body image, being willing to expose myself as a seemingly graceful talent, although not the way I executed it at times," she laughs.

"I would have liked to show not only can we recover, we can actually dance."

## CHANGE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

*"I'm not pretending at life any more, I'm actually living it," says a Higher Ground graduate now two years drug-free. She tells her anonymous story.*

"I knew I had to go back to Higher Ground. I was living in a support house watching people graduate from Higher Ground and they all had something about them, you could tell that something good had happened on the inside."

I knew about Higher Ground because I had been there before on the advice of a lawyer who told me I was in serious trouble and had better go to rehab. Looking back, I think I wanted the trouble to go away but I wasn't ready to admit defeat.

My addiction was the usual story of too much, too often, for too long. Addiction took over pretty much as soon as I picked up. It had a good grip from the start and ruled my life.

I started drinking before school and smoking lots of marijuana in my early teens. I got kicked out of school because I was always wasted, and started working in the hospitality industry. Drinking's always been a constant in that business. Working in bars in my early 20s, I started doing a lot of speed, then methamphetamine and ecstasy.

I moved to Sydney to try and get away and ended up swapping addictions for pills. I was mostly working in bars and everything involved around drinking and drugging. I didn't do hobbies or lasting relationships, I got fired from my jobs, trouble with the police, car crashes.

I was a daily user until age twenty six. Life was falling apart again and back in New Zealand I went to rehab, got introduced to 12-Step meetings of Narcotics Anonymous, but met a man and relapsed again. I again got into trouble with the police and six months later was in Higher Ground for the first time. I graduated, went to a support house, but I drifted away from recovery after meeting my obligations, and spent the next six years in and out of recovery.

Those years were characterised by bad relationships with men who were as unwell as I was. I had very little self-esteem and relationships in recovery were my downfall.

I don't really remember the end again this time, just bits and pieces vaguely - fighting the security guard trying to get out of Auckland hospital so I could get back on the drugs, the crisis team turning up on my door step, and having to carry a knife because there were things that were trying to kill me.

I'd go to a meeting from time to time – I guess I knew there was nowhere else to go. I had seen people get good lives there. By that stage I thought there was something wrong with me, I just couldn't get recovery, I'd had so many goes at it. But somewhere inside there was a bit of hope.

I was discharged from a hospital emergency department in the

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