

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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I dabbled with jobs like fishing and freezing works but my world revolved around the opening hours of the chemist and growing dope. I had ample opportunities to turn my life around, but the usual consequences were not enough. I didn't respond to jail – it was a normal part of my family life.

After my last prison sentence I met my now-partner and mother to our child. For two years I was slipping in and out of recovery, desperately trying to stay clean alone. Deep in my heart I knew that some brutal honesty and becoming humble was my only option.

When I truly wanted to have a life to be part of, everything happened to get me there.

Higher Ground was not like my previous six treatments. It offered the security and safety I needed along with support that was often delivered in disguise. The protocol, rules and structure I was used to, being institutionalised. Having had a lot of therapy since I was a child meant I needed an intensive environment with encouragement to reflect and process. I needed to be confronted with love and care.

Higher Ground is an amazing place; I've never experienced anything like it. I knew people were genuinely there to help me, much as I disliked them at the time. They really pushed me, but gently.

Personally the most significant part of the programme was the whanau group, which was the biggest challenge I have ever taken on. I identified as Maori but was riddled with shame and guilt. The shift I needed to make was strongly influenced by the interactions, processes and mahi of that group.

Dad came to the family group, which is probably why our relationship is so good now, and my partner was also able to attend. To bring in people who meant a lot to me was another defining aspect of Higher Ground.

Treatment was great for building foundations, discovering some identity and introducing me to a twelve-step program. Narcotics Anonymous was what broke the cycle for me.

Making the transition into the community to lead a life with integrity always presented the real challenge. I was shown the way and that is how I live my life now, one day at a time.

I go to twelve-step meetings because I need to be seen and to connect with other addicts. Addiction segregates, isolates and devours me when I give it my power and the antidote for that is connection, being heard, being accountable.

I could never previously have imagined the life I have today, with a loving and stable home, partner and child. I maintain my recovery by participating in it, nothing spectacular, I turn up to meetings throughout the week and maintain contact with my sponsor, do twelve-step work and service. I do this all regardless of whether I'm in the mood or not because the addict in me can easily get some brilliant ideas that have a tendency to turn out not so good.

I have so much love, gratitude and respect for everyone involved in Higher Ground. The attention to the individual and their needs is unprecedented in my opinion. It is a very special place where I feel safe at to this day. ”

CHANGING LIVES

Higher Ground's new hall has hosted several big events in the past few months. Judges and dignitaries were among 230 guests for a moving ceremony to honour the third Alcohol and Other Drugs Treatment Court graduations.

“It was a great celebration of people getting well and finding recovery having come from a really difficult background,” says Higher Ground's director Johnny Dow. “It was good to acknowledge the tremendous influence and success of the drug courts within the justice system, in changing attitudes and approaches to treatment of addiction.”

After powhiri and haka from the court's treatment service providers Higher Ground, Odyssey and the Salvation Army, graduates of the AODTC spoke about their journey.

Honoured guests and other speakers included, Auckland Deputy Mayor Penny Hulse, Judge Lisa Tremewan, Judge Philippa Cunningham, Police Superintendent Wally Haumaha, Waterfront Auckland chair and former Waitakere Mayor Sir Bob Harvey and Lady Barbara Harvey, Dame June Mariu, Papa Wiremu Kora and Tipene Pickett from the community advisory group.

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

HIGHER GROUND

DRUG REHABILITATION TRUST

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NEWS

WILDEST DREAMS AND BEYOND

In addiction he was a big risk taker and would do anything he could to alter how he felt. Today he is two years drug-free and living a life he could never previously have imagined.

“ Growing up, drug use was as normal as fish and chips on a Friday night. The dynamics of my family growing up were neither good nor bad considering where my parents had come from.

My mother was sixteen and Dad seventeen when they had me, both of them kids from difficult backgrounds searching for a sense of identity and running from their own pain.

I am one of seven siblings Dad had with four different women. Mum only had three children with Dad - myself and my younger brother and sister. I was the oldest child until my older brother found us; he was adopted out at birth. There were other siblings to come into my life at various times.

Life was chaotic to say the least. I was enrolled in seven different schools before leaving at fifteen, which gives an indication to how unsettled we were. I couldn't do well at school and escaped into fantasy.

My grandparents were strong people, and there was a lot of love in our family so that has served me.

Mum and Dad separated when I was seven and life leading up to this was not ideal. Dad was absent and unfaithful; both of them were self-medicating with pharmaceuticals (Mum for bi-polar disorder) alcohol and other drugs and involved in the criminal world.

From my conception, because of their life, their behaviour and the environment, there was no understanding of accountability. My parents had a lot to say but they did what they wanted to, until there were consequences and then things bothered them. When I adopted their survival skills their reaction was plain confusing.

My father and I sold each other drugs and hot gear, that's how we related, but we were always ripping each other off. Dad didn't know any different. Mum tried to connect on an emotional level but because of her moods and unpredictability it was pretty hard.

As a consequence I never felt adequate growing up, always anxious and uncomfortable in my skin, very cautious and aware of how dangerous the world could be, and I became very distant and isolated.

I don't know if I was born an addict, but looking back there were signs - my fear and self-doubt; I couldn't stand attention it was too much for me. Whether or not I had addictive tendencies, my environment certainly gave it a place it to develop.

I desperately wanted to be part of what my parents and their mates were doing and to fit in. I started smoking cannabis when I was 11 and that same year tried alcohol. Accessibility wasn't an issue, finding mates to use drugs with was difficult. So I gravitated to older kids and spent a lot of time alone as I had loads of freedom and very few boundaries.

From the moment I used alcohol and other drugs I found a sense of identity and self-importance. This was something I knew enough about to have a purpose. My goals then revolved around experimentation with substances, which was my calling.

I left home at sixteen because of abuse and changes within the whanau. On my travels I discovered intravenous drugs, in particular opiates and opioids. They were made for me; they took away all my emotional pain.

Nothing mattered apart from being able to avoid life on every level through substance abuse, disassociation, crime and whatever other means available. I would do anything I could do alter how I felt, and I was a big risk taker.

I joined the underground and fringes of society: I wanted what I wanted and I got it regardless of the suffering of others or even of myself. I didn't care.

For the next eighteen years I went through life thinking that jail, police, crime and debauchery were the norm. I had no concept of any other life and to be honest the thought of doing anything else was just as scary as not being able to stop. That's just a terrible place you can't enjoy.

It didn't take long to lose any self-esteem and self-respect I had. I became a shell of a person full of false promise, deceit and deception while smiling at you, shaking your hand and saying thankyou.

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THE BIGGER PICTURE

Higher Ground residents joined staff for a day of professional presentations about therapeutic communities, addiction treatment and recovery.

They attended *Partnerships in Treatment*, the annual conference of the Australasian Association of Therapeutic Communities, this year hosted by Odyssey (Auckland) Care NZ and Higher Ground.

"The conference was a huge success in the way it brought people together culturally and therapeutically," says Higher Ground director Johnny Dow: "It was important to affirm our shared values and how our organisations work together." Therapeutic communities used evidence-based therapy, and the conference was a platform to share ideas and experience of what worked, he said.

The conference started with site visits to Odyssey House and Higher Ground. It focused on the numerous partnerships that are part of providing a therapeutic community - including client, families and support networks - from health boards, justice and corrections departments to community agencies, bi-cultural and multicultural relationships.

Higher Ground staff had the opportunity to hear keynote speaker Dr Ken Robinson from the United States, co-founder of Moral Reconnection Therapy (MRT) an important treatment approach at Higher Ground.

Residents and conference attendees watched the documentary *Te Ara Wairua* about Higher Ground counsellor Andre Matthews, from a TV series on Maori who changed their lives. They were inspired to hear about his journey from a life of crime and almost two decades in jails and detention to recovery and career.

"For me, the documentary was about giving hope and encouragement to others who suffered from disconnection and loss," says Andre.

He was one of three Higher Ground staff who spoke to the conference, along with Karen Blacklock and Anne Carroll.

Researchers Simon Waigh presented on Higher Ground's Maori



The conference also acknowledged Higher Ground counsellor James Kolose for more than 10 years service to a therapeutic community. James provides an excellent role model to Pacific Island clients.

programme and how Maori navigate recovery, and Julian King presented on outcomes for Higher Ground clients who use methamphetamine.

Maori programme director and tikanga advisor Rawiri Pene was awarded for his significant contribution to the therapeutic community movement in Australasia. His work developing Higher Ground's Maori programme was significant in propelling Higher Ground towards a fully bi-cultural program. This was both an individual award to Rawiri and a whanau award to include his partner in the Maori programme, counsellor Kohe Pene and their children.

KEEPING THE HOUSE IN ORDER

- Partnership within organisations

Team dynamics, or conflicts, happen in every group and every workplace. Life in a therapeutic community - where people live and work together as part of the process of recovery and change - may magnify unconscious dynamics.

Psychotherapist Karen Blacklock from Higher Ground's residential team presented on how relationships between staff can impact on clients to the Australasian Therapeutic Communities conference.

"I wanted to make sense of some of the conflict and relationship difficulties that can happen in teams of dedicated, passionate, well trained and professional clinicians," says Karen. "We all know that therapeutic communities work for a great many people. Nevertheless I wanted to talk about some of the problematic parts of our work I think are really important to understand so that we can be of more use to our clients."

If unconscious dynamics remain unnoticed, hidden or unresolved they may escalate. "Much of the client's treatment will depend on the team's ability to think critically about its own functioning, and to discriminate between the client's projections and problems belonging to the staff."

This level of honest communication among staff is difficult as it touches people's personal vulnerabilities. Space and time are required to think about what happens, says Karen, so individual supervision, group supervision and personal therapy are all important for clinicians, as well as specific training on team dynamics and other aspects of therapeutic community work.

In addition to problems relating to teams unconsciously 'acting out' the inner worlds of clients, she identified larger organisational, social, cultural and political forces also at work influencing team relationships. Influences can come from management, boards, funders and the structures and restrictions of the socio-economic environment.

"It's important that the organisation as a whole which includes management and governance levels, has a recognition that they are also part of the unconscious life of the therapeutic community.

"Organisations and teams need dedicated space in which they can think about what's happening with staff/team relationships and how that relates to the work - that's really important and can help us help clients to make sense of their inner lives."

CONNECTING THE DOTS

- From criminal to counsellor

Andre Matthews' presentation Connecting the Dots looked at some of the agencies involved in his change from career criminal to a career in counselling.

"I was highlighting some of the partnerships and organisations I had been part of through the justice system and then the addiction sector. I thought it would be helpful to stress the importance other agencies and wraparound services, and how important they were in supporting me towards a career."

Andre had a lengthy association with the justice system. "I was locked up in boys homes from the age of 14. I left school at 14. I was a criminal for 20 years, 12 or 13 of those years in prison for various crimes of dishonesty and violence."

Smoking cannabis at 12 and using heroin daily by the age of 16 lost him family, friends and morals, he says. He broke the chains of addiction while in prison as part of a Drug Treatment Unit operated by Care NZ.

He went on to Higher Ground for further drug rehabilitation while still on parole. At Higher Ground he was introduced to twelve-step meetings.

Living at a Wings Trust support house he practiced what he had learned at Higher Ground. Staying involved in Higher Ground's therapeutic community got him into training. He completed a degree in Addiction Studies from WelTec (Wellington Institute of Technology) while working as a night shift supervisor at Higher Ground.

Andre worked as peer support at the newly opened Alcohol and Other Drugs Treatment Court. He returned to Higher Ground nearly three years ago to further his career as an alcohol and other drugs counsellor. Higher Ground enables staff to begin their career while studying. It is good support, he says, and produces experienced graduates.

He identifies his foundations for life and recovery as study, work, twelve-step fellowship, sport and recreation, relationships and whanau and keeping cultural connections.

Through the Maori programme at Higher Ground, he began to understand his cultural identity. "Being Maori but knowing nothing about it, that connection has really given me a passion for it and some sort of grounding, knowing who I am and where I am from."

SMOKE FREE = HEALTHIER LIVES

Going smoke free has been another major achievement for Higher Ground.

It seemed it would be an uphill battle to get clients off cigarettes from day one, given that 70-80% of them are smokers coming in to Higher Ground. But that's not actually the way it's turned out, according to Higher Ground's Nurse Anne Carroll who steered the smoking cessation process.

"In the beginning our fear was that people may exit the programme early or not want to come into Higher Ground, knowing we are a smoke free program, and that hasn't happened," says Anne.

Higher Ground has now been smoke free for two and a half years. However the planning and preparation took 12 months prior to get underway.

Anne's presentation to the ATCA conference was on how smoking cessation was achieved and is maintained within an addiction-focused residential therapeutic community.

All clients needing support with smoking cessation are provided with Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT) patches and gum. Of currently 46 current clients only 11 are still using NRT. "They say 'being in a smoke free facility I don't even think about smoking any more'," says Anne.

About 90% of smokers on admission tell Anne it will be a relief to stop smoking. Most say they have tried many times and have never been able to stop smoking. They talk about the expense along with health concerns like asthma, high blood pressure and diabetes. Most of the parents say that their children don't like them smoking.

Anne offers continued support particularly over the first week or so to the clients who are scared and anxious about stopping. Most of them do not want to continue on NRT within the first month.

"They stop because they're just not triggered any more. It's that safe. It's extraordinary. So their health improves. And they're not acting on their addiction any more."

Six months out from the first smoke free day Higher Ground's property was made completely smoke-free for staff. Work could then start with residents. "At three months prior to our smoke free day the pre-admission team started working with people around their smoking, informing them of our change in policy, knowing a lot of them would be residents during the transition to becoming smoke free."

Clinical manager Otto Mengedoht lead a weekly smoking cessation

group for clients. Meditation and relaxation were introduced and a weekly Nicotine Anonymous 12 Step meeting was held on the premises and literature purchased.

"We created an atmosphere of celebration on our first smoke free day and took all the residents to the movies. While they were out we completed putting up all the smoke free signs and from then all tobacco and smoking paraphernalia has been banned from the premises.

"We don't allow our visitors to bring alcohol or other drugs onto the premises. We now include tobacco in that. It's about keeping a safe environment. "At the conferences I attend they talk about 'alcohol, drugs and tobacco' now, cigarettes are included with the other drugs."

... AND OTHER DRUGS

How Higher Ground went smoke free and stays that way attracted a lot of attention across the Tasman when Higher Ground's Nurse Anne Carroll spoke at the Drug and Alcohol Nurses of Australasia (DANA) conference in Sydney in August 2015.

"It's been such an amazing achievement," says Anne. "The Australians were really impressed by Higher Ground's smoke free policy."

Anne was thrilled when she was called up on stage to receive the inaugural Professor Margaret Hamilton Scholarship for her presentation Smoking Stopped - A Smoking Gun.

Earlier in the year Anne Carroll impressed Waitemata District Health Board funders and planners with her presentation to them on going smoke free. "I know there was some initial reluctance and reservations," said Waitemata portfolio manager for mental health and addictions Cate Wallace.

"It's a real credit to Higher Ground how those issues were managed and achieved, that the preparation work is done before people come in and how the issues are dealt with in treatment so that people are leaving not just drug-free but also nicotine-free."