

HELPING PEOPLE TURN THEIR LIVES AROUND

In 33 years Higher Ground has grown from eight residents in a house provided by Fletcher Challenge in Manukau to its own extensive buildings in Te Atatu for up to 50 residents. This has been accomplished through the constant effort and guidance of its Board of Trustees, which is responsible for ensuring the Trust's mission is fulfilled. Each board member has a strong commitment to or passion for providing and developing the best service possible for severely drug-dependent clients and their whanau. Who are these people who give their time voluntarily as Board members and provide long-term stability and vision for Higher Ground?



From left, Shane Hussey, Antonia Fisher, Janet Colby, Marino Sherwin, Fiona Howard, William Rainger and Paula Parsonage (absent, Paul O'Sullivan and Janine Parsons)

Janet Colby, QSM, alcohol and other drug clinician, Board Chair

"The biggest reward for me is seeing residents and their whanau turning their lives around, seeing residents begin healing after years of destructive living and abuse and moving to become happy, productive members of society," says Board chair Janet Colby.

"I believe the therapeutic community is an effective model for treating addiction – it provides a holistic approach and an introduction to 12-Step fellowships. We see the profound changes that occur for those in treatment."

In 2013 Janet was awarded the Queen's Service Medal for services to

health and for her support to those addicted to alcohol and other drugs. She was instrumental in beginning 12-Step meetings in New Zealand to support those seeking recovery from active addiction.

Janet has worked tirelessly towards her vision for a therapeutic community for drug rehabilitation. She brought the idea for Higher Ground to the original Board members in 1982 and has helped steer and guide Higher Ground Drug Rehabilitation Trust ever since.

Demand for treatment remains high. "As a board we are continually challenged to develop our services and provide more within funding restraints." Each Board member contributes wisdom and different professional skills in what is an ever-growing, complex and challenging field.

"I am humbled by their dedication, each contributing many hours a month with no remuneration," says Janet.

Funding is primarily from contracts with District Health Boards, Justice and the Alcohol and Other Drugs Treatment Courts, generally for three years with performance and reporting criteria. "The careful planning and vision of the board, which resulted in Higher Ground purchasing and owning the premises, means that we are able to survive on the funding presently provided."

The Board's vision is for Higher Ground to continue to provide quality treatment and hope to as many severely drug-dependent clients and their whānau as it can, and continue to challenge discrimination around addiction. "This requires constant review and research while we try to predict opportunities and threats to our services."

The guiding principles of Higher Ground are those embedded in the 12-Step program, that is, honesty, open mindedness and willingness: "With these we are well on our way."

Antonia Fisher, Queen's Counsel

In 2001 Antonia met Janet Colby who was acting as a support person for the victim in a court case. "Janet and I developed an immediate rapport. We talked at length about the work she was doing at Higher Ground and the vision she and the Board had for its future. I was struck by the level of Janet's commitment and the passion with which she spoke of the community at Higher Ground. When I was asked to join the Board in 2002 I was delighted."

Antonia has practiced as a barrister in Auckland since 1985. Through her work Antonia has always been aware of the harmful effects of addiction and was impressed with Higher Ground's approach to treatment, the holistic support of those effected by drugs and the support offered to the wider family.

Dr William Rainger, health management consultant

Public awareness is growing of the abuse of alcohol and other drugs, a serious issue particularly for young people, says Higher Ground Board of Trustees member Dr. William Rainger. "There has always been a need for Higher Ground, but people and decision makers are seeing it more and more."

William joined the Board in 2011 bringing expertise in health services policy, management and funding. "The vision, mission and nature of the organisation itself are most important to me. It's inspiring having anything to do with Higher Ground, it really is quite wonderful. It's a great organisation that does really good work, it's got an excellent reputation and the Board are very good people to work with." Board members bring a whole range of perspectives and work together very well.

"Higher Ground has achieved so much over a long period of time. But in recent years has more health funding contacts so we are able to help more people, the new facilities are beautiful and we now have outcomes monitoring so we can actually quantify what we are doing. For most organisations not just in the alcohol and other drugs and rehab sector but across the board, it's very difficult to do that. So we are doing very well."

Paula Parsonage, freelance health project manager

Like other Board members, Paula's pathway to the Board was through work she undertook for Higher Ground.

In 2006-07 she was contracted to help set up Higher Ground's treatment outcomes monitoring. "It was a great project and the team of Higher Ground consumer representatives, cultural advisor and clinicians was impressive, as were the Board I reported to.

"Everyone involved was dedicated, knowledgeable and wanting to do more and better. I got to have a good look at Higher Ground and learned more about the therapeutic communities model and what it could offer people."

When the project was completed the Board invited Paula to join. "A lucky break!" she says. "I joined because Higher Ground provides a great opportunity for people who are looking to transform their lives. I feel fortunate to play a small role in supporting that.

"What keeps me energised and engaged as a Board member is that

Higher Ground is always developing and everyone strives to keep improving. I've seen the programme strengthen and there is always plenty of action requiring input and support from the Board."

Examples are the continued development of the Māori whānau group, pre-entry groups, participation in the Alcohol and Other Drugs Treatment Court initiative and the growing support provided to family and whānau. "It's easy to be proud of what Higher Ground residents and staff achieve. That's what keeps me there."

Paula works in the addictions and mental health sector on projects focused on developing services, workforce development and evaluation.

He aha te mea nui o te ao he tangata he tangata he tangata

Marino Sherwin, Minister

"I love working for the betterment of Maori and the field of alcohol and other drugs is my passion," says Marino, a Board member for over 18 years. "My hope is that the Maori programme continues to support and strengthen recovery and therefore strengthen whānau, hapu, iwi and wider community."

Marino helped set up Higher Ground's Maori programme in 1994-1995, and from this work progressed onto Higher Ground Board of Trustees.

Marino trained as a teacher with a Bachelor of Education degree and taught at Ponsonby Intermediate, completing a Masters degree in education at 1998. She completed her theology degree in 2003 from Otago University and became an ordained Minister in 2007, working as a chaplain with children and their families at Auckland's Starship Hospital.

Marino is the youngest of 16 brothers and sisters. Her mother was a Maori artist from Ngati Tuwharetoa/Ngati Kahungunu and her father was a builder and accomplished musician of Ngapuhi and Spanish descent. She has two daughters and two mokopuna.

Marino continues her work with the Board although she is currently travelling after the death of her husband Mark Gray who was a huge supporter of men in recovery and men at Higher Ground.



Paul O'Sullivan, chief financial officer

For nearly 20 years, Paul's finance and business expertise has helped steer Higher Ground to the strong position it is in today. He remains an active Board member even after shifting to Australia five years ago to work for a large manufacturing company.

Like other Board members, he joined through personal and work relationships with chair Janet Colby. "I have an enormous respect for Janet, she deserves huge credit for steering Higher Ground over all these years."

Higher Ground was building up financial assets and needed to make sure it had the right business governance structure without losing sight of its primary purpose of treating addiction.

"It meant we had a Board with a good balance of skills and resources, from the alcohol and other drugs sector as well as people with legal, business and management skills."

For Paul it's meant being able to give back. "It's rewarding to volunteer a bit of time making use of the skills I've built up during my working career, and to be involved with an organisation that is doing a great job."

It's been very satisfying to be involved with building a legacy that will continue into the future. "I see an ongoing role for Higher Ground unfortunately, and probably more so considering how some aspects of our society are developing. There is a definite need for such a well-resourced, professionally managed facility with its dedicated and able staff."

Shane Hussey, chartered accountant

"The testimonials of those who have been through the programme demonstrate the value of the services that Higher Ground provides through its dedicated team," says Shane.

Shane has operated a specialist accounting practice in Auckland for more than 20 years and has been on the Higher Ground board for around 13 years. He was part of the finance and building committee responsible for the purchase and redevelopment of the Te Atatu Peninsula site in 2004 and when the premises were expanded in 2016.

"It has been a privilege to be part of the organisation. My initial expectation was that I would provide financial and governance advice, but the reality is that I have learned a lot about many other areas as a result. I am proud of what Higher Ground offers and what it has achieved."



Janine Parsons, public sector area manager

Janine is Higher Ground's newest Board member. "I have recently had the honour of becoming a Higher Ground Trustee. What attracted me to accept the offer is Higher Ground's kaupapa.

"Being passionate about carrying the message to the addict who still suffers, Higher Ground's organisational mission resonates with me personally as I know from experience that transformational change is possible for people suffering from severe addiction.

"In addition to 28 years of personal experience in working the Steps and supporting others in their recovery, I also bring to the role 30 years of public sector work experience and strong management skills. I am looking forward to sharing my experience with the Board and learning from the other trustees

who are all committed to sharing their skills and knowledge to support Higher Ground."

Fiona Howard, clinical psychologist

Fiona's main clinical experience and interests lie in adult mental health, addiction and positive psychology.

Her primary role is in the Doctoral Programme of Clinical Psychology at the University of Auckland. This involves the oversight and organisation of the clinical internships for doctoral students. She teaches at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. She also works in part-time private practice.

She has worked as a psychologist for over thirty years, initially in mental health and then addictions before working in the University. Fiona has also specialised in approaches to managing stress and maintaining resilience and wellbeing in clinical practice.

Fiona has been providing training in clinical supervision for over fifteen years, facilitating workshops for many health professionals and organisations including District Health Boards, CYFS, Corrections, Ministry of Education and Explore.

Fiona has another governance role. She is the Director for Professional Development and Training for the NZ Psychological Society.

STICKING WITH THE WINNERS

Using methamphetamine became more important than her family and the values and standards she had been brought up with. Losing custody of her child drove her to seek help at Higher Ground. Now more than three years drug-free, this is her anonymous story.

At the age of 11 my life turned upside down. My country was hit by the war, which dramatically changed the course of my life. Life was tough for the next few years. I saw and experienced things that a child should never go through.

I was brought up to be a loving, caring and kind person with strong values such as being honest and trustworthy. My mother taught me to be courageous and respectful and to treat others well.

My parents separated when I was seven. My father moved to Germany soon after the split and he would only come once a year for a short visit. I remember missing him and thinking about him a lot.

At the age of 16 my future looked bright. My mum and I were lucky enough to immigrate to Australia where we started our new life. It was tough as I had to learn a new language and start a new school but it didn't take me long to fit in. I was making new friends and I even got my first job.

I started going out with friends and they were drinking. I drank a bit too, but at 20 I took my first drug (ecstasy) and remember instantly falling in love with how it made me feel – on top of the world, happy, floating, without a care. I remember dancing all night without stopping.

After that I was chasing the same high. But it didn't last and I didn't find it. I started experimenting with other drugs but speed (amphetamine) and cocaine were my drugs of choice. Before long I couldn't imagine going out to clubs without taking something.

I kept working but was using drugs every weekend. In 2005 I met my now ex-husband who introduced me to methamphetamine, the drug which almost took my life. The first few years were exciting and challenging. I was in love and thought he was the man that I was going to spend my life with.

We moved to New Zealand in 2007, started a very successful

business and bought our dream home. He was pleasant as a drug user but he'd become a heavy drinker and now was emotionally, mentally and on few occasions physically abusive. I had no friends or family and was very unhappy so I turned even more to drugs. The combination of him drinking and using drugs, and me being high every day was disastrous. I started taking money from the business to feed my addiction.

Despite all that we got married in 2010 and soon after I found out I was pregnant. This is when I realised I had a problem because even though I was blessed with the most beautiful gift in the world I still couldn't stop using drugs all through my pregnancy. I still didn't want to admit to anyone I had a problem.

My son was only four weeks old when I left my husband and lost the business and income. I had no idea what to do and how to support my baby and myself. My mum decided to sell her house in Australia, come to New Zealand and stay with us to help. She had no idea about my drug problem and what she was getting herself into.

I sold anything I had of any value until I had nothing more to sell. I went against all values I thought important, and broke all my own and my family's standards. Methamphetamine was taking over my life. I was lying, stealing and breaking the law. I started not caring about my self, my family and others.

A few years later when my mum found out how deep in trouble I was with drugs I took my son and moved out without letting her know where we were. She knew we were not safe and was desperate to find us.

About a month later Child, Youth and Family Service located me and I was asked to attend an interview. I thought I had it all sussed. They asked for a hair follicle test, which I tried hard to avoid as I knew I would fail. After the CYFS investigation I received a phone call telling me that I had

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.

Higher Ground Trustees

Janet Colby	• Counsellor & Chairperson of the Trust
Antonia Fisher QC	• Barrister
Fiona Howard	• Psychologist
Janine Parsons	• Public Sector Area Manager
Karl Robinson	• Consultant & Hon. Trustee
Marino Te Moana	• Minister
Paula Parsonage	• Consultant
Paul O'Sullivan	• Company Director
Shane Hussey	• Chartered Accountant
William Rainger	• Public Health Physician

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three days to hand over my son to my mother's care. That was the worst day of my life and my rock bottom. I could only see my son while supervised and it was heartbreaking every time I had to leave.

I knew I had to do something to change. I was told about Higher Ground so I rang and begged for help. About a month later I was admitted to Higher Ground and I have never looked back. After years of feeling suffocated and in pain I was finally receiving the help I desperately needed.

I found Higher Ground very challenging - being told what to do, confronted about my behaviour, being in close contact with others, the rules and consequences. I thought I could just go in there for four months, come out and I'd be right. But around week eight I had enough of fighting and surrendered and it became easier. At times I really wanted to leave but I was encouraged to stay and keep pushing.

I looked at issues I hadn't thought had affected me, such as loss of contact with my father, the trauma of the war, leaving my home country and family. We had never talked about what happened in the war once we had left. It was good to have some kind of closure. My mother came to family group and although it was uncomfortable when she challenged me it was really constructive.

My son is what gave me the motivation and strength to carry on. Higher Ground saved my life and gave my son his mother back and I will forever be grateful. My recovery became my number one priority.

Higher Ground was the beginning. The on-going journey is about personal growth, being a better person and practicing gratitude and understanding. To be able to do that I have to be honest, open and willing and I stay that way by going to 12-Step meetings with other recovering addicts.

Getting off drugs was the first step, recovery has given me an opportunity for a new life, to achieve goals and dreams that were once out of reach. Today I am a present mother, daughter and friend. I am three and half years drug-free, working full time and supporting other addicts.

The success of my recovery was due to the support I received from Higher Ground which introduced me to the 12-Step programmes of Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous. I go to NA and AA meetings regularly and I'm sticking with the winners. I love my life today and I wouldn't change it for the world. ”



Best Wishes for a Happy and Healthy New Year

It has been another full year for Higher Ground and we couldn't have achieved what we have without the dedication and generosity of all who support and work in collaboration with us.

We have hosted some big events in our hall for the wider community this year, including two graduation ceremonies of the Alcohol and Other Drugs Treatment Court, two visits by Prime Ministers, and many training forums.

We wish to thank our friends, supporters and colleagues in the therapeutic community for your help, so we can continue giving hope and saving lives. We look forward to more good work together in 2018.

