

AUCKLAND IS PROUD OF YOU, SAYS MAYOR

Auckland Mayor Phil Goff was one of over 200 people attending the eighth Alcohol and Other Drugs Treatment Court graduation ceremony held at Higher Ground in March.



Auckland Mayor Phil Goff (centre) with (from left) senior counsel to the Mayor Lewis Mills, Labour MP for New Lynn Dr Deborah Russell, Family Court Judge Dianne Partridge, and Dame June Mariu from Hoani Waititi Marae.

The Mayor spoke after the screening of a video about AODTC graduates and their journey away from the cycle of crime and addiction. He put aside his prepared speech and spoke from the heart about transformation.

"The AODTC graduation was an uplifting event celebrating the progress of graduates who have worked hard to turn their lives around," said Phil Goff. "It was very special to be part of the evening and get to be inspired by the stories and successes of the programme participants.

"Congratulations to the graduates and to the judges, counsellors and other dedicated staff at the AODTC and Higher Ground who are helping people make real positive change in their lives. Auckland is proud of you."

Higher Ground director Johnny Dow put out a challenge for more funding for treatment. "It costs a billion dollars to build a prison and

\$100,000 per individual per year to run it," he said. "We could build a 52 bed facility like Higher Ground for around fifteen million dollars, and the \$100,000 per year it costs to hold each prisoner could probably pay for four to five people to go through treatment and become well, plus look after many people in the Pre-Admission and Continuing Care departments".

Three Higher Ground and Drug Court graduates also spoke to the gathering, including the only woman of the Court's current 18 graduates.

AODTC judges invite community leaders to each graduation, and this one was also attended by senior Health and Justice Ministry officials from Wellington, as well as High Court Judge Justice Christian Whata and Family Court Judge Dianne Partridge.

Kaumatua from Hoani Waititi Marae including Dame June Mariu, and Mana Whenua from Orakei Marae attended for Higher Ground.

A BRAND NEW PERSON

Open-minded, honest and willing and three years drug-free, she is a proud trans woman today.
A Higher Ground graduate's personal story.

“I was born a male (a little girl trapped in a boy's body) and felt different from the age of four or five. I remember my Koro putting me on a horse and I was wearing a dress because that's what I chose to wear, my Koro didn't mind.

Quite young I was trying to be a girl. I liked girls' clothes and I liked dolls not trucks, I thought of long hair and wanting a pretty face not that boyish, short-hair kind of roughness. I felt quite dainty.

I have a big family. I was born in Tauranga the oldest of six children, three girls and three boys, and was brought up with my Mum's parents. Mum's five younger sisters were like my sisters not aunties and they still are today. I remember being passed around like a parcel as a kid, living with different family members. I don't know why my grandparents didn't keep me, to be honest; maybe they didn't know what to do with me?

I loved my Nana and Koro but I'd think: Where's my Mum and Dad, why aren't I with them, why don't they want me? As a young child I hardly saw them or my sister and brother who were one and two years younger than me. I felt alone.

I grew up on a marae, learning kapa haka and waiata, and singing was a big part of my life. Music helped me escape my thoughts. I was a sad and angry child, I stole from my family, I stole from school, I played up something wicked soon after I started school. Thinking back I did that to get the wrong attention, it was like a cry for help: I don't want to be here, where are my parents? I remember feeling like that all the time. It stuck with me until now that I've finally got to let go of the past. That's where Higher Ground came in.

When I was 12, I went back to live with Mum and it was happiest moment of my life. I think the happiness only lasted a day. She was doing it hard as a solo mother, but she managed. Dad was out with his mates. The following year my Mum and Dad got back together and got married.

Mum got punched up on her hen's night. I hated my father doing that to her, I was frustrated that I couldn't help her because I was scared and that made me even angrier. There was a lot of alcohol and marijuana around us; it was our way of being.

Violence happened all the time when they were drinking. There were parties every week, ugly people coming through our house, they were paru, dirty, they had no respect, my sister and I were like Cinderella cleaning up.

My sister and I looked after our younger siblings and kept a close eye on them.

It was exactly like *Once Were Warriors*, that's how we lived.

I started drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes and marijuana at 13 and 14. I loved getting drunk, stoned, running away from home, getting up to no good. College was hard. I got picked on and bullied because I was different as a male and it showed. I was so feminine. I used to get called 'poofter' (even by my family). I hated being seen as a gay male.

I left college young because I couldn't handle being beaten up, followed, the name-calling. My thoughts for the first time were suicidal: how am I going to live like this and be treated like this? How am I going to stand up for myself if I can't even be with myself?

I had four best friends counting my sister and we did everything together. It was perfect, for a little while. But home was still the same. Hideous. Poor Mum. I was hardly there.

My first job was at a fast food outlet when I was 15, and it was okay, I fitted in quite well. In saying that I was transitioning as well and while I was working I was always thinking, how can I help my mum? I transitioned when I was 16 and 17, which meant dressing and thinking of myself as a woman. I jumped on hormone treatment at 18 and boom, for once in my life everything felt right in my heart – I matched up. Thanks to my special friend for helping me come out, she saw me before I even saw me.

I started street working at 17, I don't think we thought about it that much, it just happened. We heard of prostitution, we gave it a go, and I was still there 20 years later. I did it for the money at first, it was fun buying all those pretty things, and then it became my way of life, and harder drugs and crime followed.

I started wanting more drugs partly because of the work and also it was the wanting to feel more high, the feeling that addiction brings, higher than the sky. I was drinking till I couldn't remember spewing, clubbing, meeting guys, making money, hustling my way through life.

After years it felt normal, I was just always wasted, off my face, robbing clients. At 22 I did my first jail sentence of three months. That was a freaky experience in a men's prison, out of place. I was safe enough but mentally it did my head in. I managed to get into the women's prison for two of the three months. I did two more jail sentences.

I tried methamphetamine when I was 21 and was hooked after a couple of times. I used meth for 15 years and in that time my mother died. The feelings of grief were unbearable, as if I wouldn't survive, I thought using more and more drugs would stop the pain and it probably did for a little while but at the same time it didn't.

I was hooked and did anything for a bag, and ended up using needles. I introduced people I loved to it. I was high every single day, or coming down or falling sleeping for a couple of days, eating ravenously then using again.

I caught Hepatitis C from needles, and that pushed me towards recovery, along with my nieces, nephews and siblings wanting me to get off dope. Finally I reached out to a friend. Another friend of ours had been through Wings Trust and Higher Ground. At my assessment for a Wings residential support house they told me I had to stay clean for seven days. On January 15, 2015 I just stopped using. Higher Ground had suggested I go to Wings and Wings helped me get to treatment at Higher Ground.

I was 35 years old and ready for change and OMG! Higher Ground had a massive impact on my life. Four and a half months of tough but necessary and needed treatment. It whipped me into shape real fast, living with other people, having to be accountable, the challenge system, not having sugar, abiding by rules, having authority in my life, surrendering my willfulness, having to listen, take direction and find self-discipline.

I let go of past pain by talking and praying and changing the way I thought. Instead of being so down and negative I learned to

Au Revoir Kathy Mildon

Higher Ground's longest-serving staff member Kathy Mildon from the Community Team is retiring after 32 years on staff.

HIGHER
GROUND
DRUG REHABILITATION TRUST

invites you...



1pm - 4pm
Thursday
24 May 2018

118 Beach Road
Te Atatu Peninsula

Enquiries ph 09 834 0017
or email
admin@higherground.org.nz

Higher Ground would like to hear from Kathy's clients, colleagues and friends who wish to attend her combined reunion and farewell on May 24, which also coincides with her 70th birthday.

Guests will include graduates of Higher Ground who are up to 30 years drug-free.

"Among Kathy's strengths and skills is her ability to engage the most fearful, resistant or defensive person in the assessment process including whanau," says Board of Trustees chair and Higher Ground founder Janet Colby. "She has such empathy and compassion for those who present to the service. Over the years and till this day people quote me words of wisdom she has imparted on them sometimes years earlier."

Kathy trained as a social worker in Canada, which she says prepared her well to work with the strengths that clients bring with them. "A lot of what we do at Higher Ground is really not what we

learn from a book it's more about who we are."

As part of the Community Team, Kathy often visits clients first at Higher Ground or in prison, guides them into a support house, through treatment and Continuing Care and into their new lives.

She is often the first person clients and their families meet. She has continued to stay in touch and work with many of them for years, and there will be hundreds of people wanting to honour her. These days, unlike her early years, Higher Ground has premises big enough to accommodate such a gathering.

Kathy has seen Higher Ground grow from 10-12 residents in a house adjacent to the Mission Sisters in Upland Road, Remuera, to around 20 residents in St Georges Bay Road, Parnell and now up to 52 residents in Te Atatu Peninsula.

She was Community Team leader for many years, until 2010 when she went back to part-time work. In the last few years Kathy helped start and worked with an education group for whanau/family and friends.

A Brand New Person - Continued from previous page

be positive and upbeat, to look at it from a different angle. I felt like a brand new person.

Open-minded, honest and willing I am a proud trans woman today. I'm three years two months five days drug-free today. I attend Narcotics Anonymous meetings, I have a sponsor and work the 12-Steps, I do service at the Women's Prison, chair my home group meeting, support other women and do all those things that are suggested at NA meetings.

One of the most amazing gifts of recovery is that I am going to adopt a baby and be a mother and this opportunity doesn't come often for trans women. The most wonderful thing is that I am seen as a loving and suitable parent for my sister's baby, she has full trust in me and I have to live up to that.

I tell myself that every single day because I still have a lot of learning to do and I'm okay with that. That's what Higher Ground gave me, I'm okay with me, I am enough, and this is enough. Kiaora. ”

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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JACK CHARLES V THE CROWN

- rekindling the burning embers



Prominent Aboriginal elder Uncle Jack Charles visited Higher Ground when he was in Auckland performing his one-man show during the Auckland Arts Festival.

His play telling his life story of drug addiction, homelessness and jail is honest but uplifting and that was how he came across at Higher Ground. He was welcomed with a formal powhiri then spoke to residents and staff.

"He was funny, down-to-earth and real," says Kohe Pene, counsellor and leader of Higher Ground's Bi-Cultural Programme. "It was a wonderful visit and inspirational for residents to see how he turned around his life and inheritance and then spreads the message."

A gifted performer, Jack Charles has struggled for much of his career. Part of his recovery from addiction was acknowledging and affirming his Aboriginal identity and accepting his role as an elder.

Jack Charles is a survivor of the stolen generation of Aboriginal children and went on to become a founder of Kouri theatre in Australia and a theatre legend.

He shares his personal story and recovery to others on the same pathway, while acknowledging his story of colonisation is about lost or stolen identity, which is universal for indigenous peoples.

He often works in prisons: "I go there to tweak the prisoners' minds and consciences. My job is to rekindle the burning embers of their dreams."

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