

## 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 20 years of age, 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 Ed Craig on 09-834 0042 for a pre-admission assessment appointment on weekdays between 8.30am and 4.00pm.

Assessments in prisons, 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

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## Contact Details

Address	• 118 Beach Road, Te Atatu Peninsula Waitakere 0610
Mail to	• PO Box 45 192 Te Atatu Peninsula Waitakere 0610
Telephone	• office 09-834 0017 • after care 09-834 0076 • admissions 09-834 0042 • residents 09-834 3700
Office fax	• 09-834 0018

# A Year of Change

It has been an eventful year at Higher Ground

Higher Ground has experienced a settled period of consolidation and growth

### New Director

Then in October this year, we farewelled Stuart Anderson and welcomed Johnny Dow as the new Director.

### New Clinical Manager

We also welcomed Otto Menedoht as the new Clinical Manager. Otto came from Springhill Residential Alcohol and Drug Treatment Centre in Hawkes Bay.

### New Pre-admissions Team Manager

For 24 years as Higher Ground's Social Worker, Kathy Mildon was the first contact for most new clients and their families. Higher Ground's longest-serving staff member, Kathy has gone back to a half-time position as Pre-admissions Co-ordinator. Ed Craig has taken over from

Kathy as Pre-admissions Team Leader, working with Shane Howell.

### New Pre-admissions House

One of the year's biggest concrete achievements – in actual bricks and mortar – was the opening of Haeata House, the first pre-admission facility in New Zealand.

### More Staff

Higher Ground now has over 40 full and part-time staff, including 15 supervisors working weekends and evenings to provide 24-hour staffing on two facilities.

### More Family Recovery

As well as weekly family therapy group in the main programme, After Care now also offers family group therapy on Wednesday evenings when there are 80-100 people attending.

# Volunteers Keep Higher Ground Going

At least 25 volunteers each week help keep Higher Ground running. Instead of staff, it is volunteers who drive residents to 12 Step meetings most days and take clients to appointments. "We really do use and rely on the pool of volunteers," says director Johnny Dow.

And the relationship between volunteers and residents is mutually beneficial. Most volunteers are former clients now in recovery whom residents see as people in good health, progressing and doing well in their new lives who keep on being part of Higher Ground, and who are practising a cornerstone of what they learn in treatment - that by giving back they keep their recovery.

Service strengthens recovery for volunteers such as Shane who went through Higher Ground and is now nearly 12 months drug-free. He started driving residents to meetings not

long after he graduated. "It's about trying to maintain an attitude of gratitude," he says.

Shane had relapsed when he was 15 years drug-free and working as a professional in the alcohol and other drugs field. "I ended up right back at rock bottom. For me volunteering is about keeping my ego in check, making sure I never see myself as better than or different than. I'm just another addict who got the opportunity to give back what has been given to me, so that's what I do."

Volunteering keeps the connections so that Higher Ground still feels like home. "It's nice to walk into the house and people say 'hello, how's it going?' and I know their names as well."

In many cases, volunteers will go on to become supervisors at Higher Ground and to undertake further training in the alcohol and other drugs field as social workers, counsellors or therapists.

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 Programmeme Director, Johnny Dow 09-834 0017 or fax 09-834 0018 email hgdrtr@xtra.co.nz www.higherground.org.nz

# HIGHER GROUND

## DRUG REHABILITATION TRUST

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# NEWS

## Season's Greetings

We are grateful for yet another rewarding, success-filled year of recovery from alcohol and other drug addiction for our clients at Higher Ground.

The Board of Trustees and staff of Higher Ground Drug Rehabilitation Trust offer our sincere thanks to all our friends, supporters and volunteers who have helped in so many ways. Without you, it would be so much harder to continue operating the high quality of care that we are proud that Higher Ground provides.

The Board of Trustees sincerely wishes to thank all our staff members for your continued contribution and the loving and special environment you each help create.

We wish you all joy and serenity in the coming year and look forward to sharing 2011 with you.

# How Did I Get Here?

**In Higher Ground he discovered that addiction was a disease that did not distinguish the colour of a person's skin. Now four year's drug-free, a Pacific Island man tells his story of recovery.**

"It's 7am, and I'm sitting in a toilet cubicle in an inner city bar. I can barely hold my head up. "Shake it off bro, get up and get another drink, that'll fix it," I think. I open the toilet door and stop to look in the mirror. Bloodshot eyes, dishevelled, fresh blood stains on my shirt, I can't even stand straight because I'm so drunk, so I lean on the basin. I am disgusted by what I see. How did I get here?"

I think of my two children at home with their mother and wonder why I can't be the father or the man that I want to be. It's a fleeting bout of self-pity but just enough to hurt and the only way for me

to get rid of the pain is to drink!

The first time I got drunk I was 16. A friend was having a party, that meant getting drunk. What other reason was there for alcohol? I couldn't wait. I knew the protocol: a box with the boys, talking about girls (never to girls), occasional arguments and fights but most importantly, getting drunk.

I will never forget my mother's words: "Be careful, son." I think I laughed and said something like, "of course, Mum."

I was like a fish nibbling on the bait. I know now what made me take that hook: for the first time in my life I felt okay

about everything. I was cooler, funnier, stronger and the more I drank the more I felt okay. Alcohol instantly filled a void that I never thought would or could be filled.

I vomited in the garden, I experienced my first black out, I lost my virginity to a girl I hardly knew and apparently in the early hours of the morning, as I continued to drink, cried about it all.

Over the coming 10 years I would carve out a career with alcohol, fuelled by excuses such as I had grown up in a state house without a father figure; my mother was Fijian and on the benefit; I was the eldest and only boy with two

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younger sisters; we came from an area made up of predominantly Pacific Island and Maori families. To me these were all disadvantages and valid excuses.

**M**y mother came to New Zealand by herself aged 19 and she did her best to prepare us for life in New Zealand. My father had just started to re-connect with our family when both my sisters stayed with him one night and there was a party with a lot of drugs and alcohol. My sister phoned me crying the next day to come and get them.

As the eldest boy in a family with Pacific Island values, I was supposed to be the provider and the protector. I felt I had failed to protect my sisters from an appalling incident. My family brushed the whole thing under the carpet but the thing that happened became a permanent part of the décor.

**N**o one was accountable, we didn't deal openly with our feelings and grief and nothing was confronted. I learned that avoiding pain would be easier than feeling it. Alcohol and drugs were the perfect way to do this.

My experience is not unique. To me, every Pacific Island boy in my neighbourhood was drinking and getting drunk. As a Pacific Islander it mattered more whom I was drinking with and how hard I was drinking, than what the consequences were for the weekend binges, fights and idiotic behaviour.

Raised in a Pacific Island home I found it very hard to seek help. To do so would reflect badly on my family and automatically label my mother as a failure. I could not disrespect her and so, long before I ever admitted I had a problem, I lead a double life, attending church on Sundays, even getting up to pray for the youth group. And in the evenings I'd get drunk with the boys.

**F**or about three years I used drugs as well as alcohol daily with a vengeance, and life became 'whatever, whenever'. For a short while that worked to block out emotional pain and challenges. I could not see the person I was becoming. I separated from my

wife and left her with our two children repeating, ironically, exactly what my father had done.

But in the end I hated myself and everything about me. I hated what I was doing to my family and I couldn't stand who I was. When I phoned my ex-wife that morning and told her I had a problem, she said to me, "So what do you want to do about it?" I replied, having never consciously considered it before, "I want to go to rehab."

"I went through profound change and was given the necessary tools for a life in recovery. I had found hope."

**T**wenty eight days later I entered Higher Ground. I sought out other Islanders in the programme and found one Tongan resident and one Samoan staff member. It seemed to me I was one of only two Islanders in Auckland who suffered from addiction. But over the next 116 days I would learn about addiction and the 12 Step programme. I went through profound change and was given the necessary tools for a life in recovery. I had found hope.

Growing up, I hated my father and that I was half-Maori because of him. I had gone through my whole life being anti-Maori; everyone knew me as full Fijian. At Higher Ground I joined Maori group only to avoid doing written work instead. And when I turned up to my first session I felt I had come home.

I could not believe I had denied myself

the enjoyment of that part of me. That will always be a huge gift from Higher Ground. I ended up leading the haka after a couple of months and I loved it. There was no way I would previously have taken part in anything like that.

I had always considered my path chosen for me when I was born with brown skin and that meant I would ever amount to much. At Higher Ground I was alongside people of other ethnicity and I realised addiction wasn't a disease that distinguished the colour of a person's skin.

**A**nd yet there is something so powerful about connecting with people of your own culture. I found that having two other Pacific Islanders around me was enough to keep that part alive. Two things I always connected with being an Islander was eating lots and laughing lots - and we did.

I graduated over four years ago and am still clean today as a direct result of my time at Higher Ground. I have shifted to another city where I am an active member of 12 Step programmes and maintain my recovery by regularly attending Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. I have grown to love these meetings as my lifeline to continued hope and a sustainable life in recovery.

**T**oday I am a father, a mentor, a coach, a leader, a valued employee, a sportsman and a responsible member of my community. Today I am Fijian and Maori. I embrace both cultures equally enjoying my diversity and now proudly wear a Ta Moko tattoo on my left shoulder for my Maori ancestry.

Today my children know their father loves them. My family tell me how proud they are of me and I lead my life in a way that brings honour not only to them but also to my Higher Power whom I choose to call God.

**T**oday when I wake up and look in the mirror, I'm happy with what I see and I do not have to ask any more, "How did I get here?"

# New Director, Same Forward Direction

It was with much pleasure that the Board of Trustees appointed Johnny Dow as the new Higher Ground Director.

**W**hen Johnny Dow shifted office and telephone extension he prepared for a learning curve moving into the role of Higher Ground's new director. In fact, the move from clinical manager has gone very smoothly, he says. "I'm really glad I know the place, that's been a plus. It feels lucky it's flowed fairly well."

Says Chair of the Board of Trustees, Janet Colby: "We are blessed to have people of such high calibre on our staff. Johnny was a natural choice because of his outstanding professional and personal qualities. He has the confidence and high regard of all who work with him at staff and Board level. Johnny is passionate about the treatment of addiction within the therapeutic community model and has been integral in strengthening the programme. We look forward to working alongside Johnny over the next year."

His first two months in the job have been busy. Since starting in October Johnny has led the team through two more successful audits with excellent results, one for alcohol and other drugs standards for accreditation and one as part of on-going contracts with district health boards. The auditing process is part of the on-going life of Higher Ground he is used to as a long-term staff member.

**D**uring his four years as clinical manager, Johnny participated in the Australasian Therapeutic Communities Association (A.T.C.A.) and presented specialist papers based on his work as a psychotherapist at Higher Ground. These papers included working with different personality types and a paper on the Multiple Family Groups that Higher Ground specialises in. He received an award from the A.T.C.A. in 2008 for significant contribution to the therapeutic community movement.

"I just love therapeutic communities. I would like to keep promoting therapeutic community as a way for people to get well," says Johnny. "They work for alcohol and other drug clients and I think they work well for so many other different disorders. I like the idea of community and working within a team. Teams are really powerful places, you get challenged by everyone and you challenge other people as well."



Johnny Dow and Stuart Anderson

**A**s clinical manager, Johnny worked for the extension of the family groups and was involved in the setting up and introduction of Higher Ground's research programme. He would like to continue working towards more Maori involvement in the programme.

Johnny started at Higher Ground 12 years ago as a counsellor then worked at Community Alcohol and Drug Services. He returned to Higher Ground two years later as counsellor and then managing the After Care department.

He became clinical manager in 2006 and has seen the

community grow since shifting from Parnell to larger premises in Te Atatu. The key to success has been preserving what was already established within a therapeutic community model. "We needed to bring with us all the traditions and basic principles that we knew worked well, and incorporate them into a bigger organisation."

The expansion means Higher Ground can offer more places for those seeking help to recover from serious alcohol and other drug addictions. "One of the biggest challenges is that there are a lot more Justice clients but Higher Ground has worked to have a balance of people from the general public as well."