

## 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

Janet Colby	• Counsellor & Chairperson of the Trust
Antonia Fisher	• Lawyer
Fiona Howard	• Psychologist
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

## Contact Details

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# OUR THANKS FOR LONG-TERM GUIDANCE



When finance executive Paul O'Sullivan was invited to join the Higher Ground Trust Board he had no idea the association would last so long. More than 20 years later he is leaving to take up a promotion in Australia.

"Once I was on the Board, I was really happy to be there," he says. "It's a great organisation to work for."

Paul was invited to join Higher Ground by then-Board member Karen Colby, a work colleague. He also knew her sister, Higher Ground's founder and current Board chair Janet Colby (who was last year awarded a Queen's Service Medal for services to addiction).

"Higher Ground has been blessed to have Paul on the Board for such a long time," says Janet. "His contribution has been outstanding. Paul has been a strong navigator and a steady support throughout our journey. His departure will leave a huge gap, we will miss him and we wish him well in his new position in Australia."

When Paul joined the Board, Higher Ground had shifted into premises at St George's Bay Road, Parnell. The purchase of that property and subsequent sub-division set the Trust on a sound financial footing, and enabled Higher Ground to focus on the work of recovery from addiction, on clients and on adding new components to the programme, says Paul.

"We have invested in the people and staff, and been able to improve professionally. From the Board's point of view, it's about supporting the people who work in the programme."

The move to larger premises at Te Atatu Peninsula - another big achievement - meant the programme could expand to take more clients, offer a better working environment and better accommodation. "I hope all that's provided better outcomes for clients."

He has enjoyed working with both Board and management of Higher Ground. "When you're employed in the commercial world it's really nice to be involved with something that's not for profit and where you're looking for different outcomes. It provides another dimension and I will miss it hugely. It has been a substantial part of my life for a long time.

"You learn about life and the pitfalls of life. Every now and then you look around and say 'there but for the grace of God go I'."

# GOODWILL VISIT FROM U.N. AMBASSADOR

American author, actor and activist Chris Kennedy Lawford recently visited Higher Ground with an uplifting message of hope and recovery. He is the United Nation's first Goodwill Ambassador on Drug Dependence, Treatment and Care. Chris spoke to residents about his personal journey from 20 years of addiction to being now more than 24 years drug-free.

"I was spellbound," says one Higher Ground resident. "He's a really charismatic guy, and he related to us so well. He used the analogy of every day of addiction being like dancing with an 800 pound gorilla. He made it clear just how strong the addiction process was."

Chris Kennedy Lawford campaigns tirelessly on behalf of the recovery community in both the public and private sectors, speaking around the world on issues related to addiction, mental health and Hepatitis C. Born into the influential Kennedy family in the United States, his mother Pat was sister to President John F. Kennedy and Senators Robert and Teddy Kennedy.

"What really touched me," says another resident, "was hearing his story as a person born into such privilege and yet it was still no defence against the disease of addiction. And his courage. I was really grateful to hear of the work he does on behalf of all of us."

"He gave a strong message that we still counted, that we must never give up. The world still needs us and there is a way out and



Chris Kennedy Lawford (in sunglasses) with, from left, staff Rawiri Pene and Otto Mengedoht and Trustees Janet Colby and Marino Sherwin.

it is what we are doing here. He is a firm believer in the 12 Step programme that we follow at Higher Ground."

While in New Zealand Chris spoke at two public events and met with politicians and key people in the alcohol and drug treatment sector. He spent two hours at Higher Ground where he was welcomed with a powhiri and watched a play about how paua reclaimed its true colours - a story paralleling the addict's journey to recovery.

Another resident commented on Chris's response to the tikanga Maori of Higher Ground's programme. "This is a unique aspect of the way treatment is run here at Higher Ground. I think he really appreciated that, I know I did, I was definitely proud to be part of it."

# ADDICTION – THE FAMILY DISEASE

First a mother then four years later her daughter find recovery at Higher Ground. Now seven and three years drug free, they tell their stories.

## A Mother's Story ...

“ It was my kids in the end who got me into Higher Ground. My daughter rang to make the appointment. My choices were limited, Higher Ground or death.

I went into Higher Ground grateful for a place to put my head down, feeling exhausted like I was 105 years old rather than 46. What a relief...

I grew up in a newly established neighbourhood in Christchurch the youngest of three children. My brother, two years older, was my close mate. My dad was in the Air Force so we moved around before we settled in Christchurch.

My parents both had difficult childhoods. Growing up during the Depression, my mum was an only child with an alcoholic father. My dad moved between family members after his mother died when he was eight after a prolonged mental illness.

Coming from these backgrounds, there was an undercurrent of shame that ran through my family. I grew up with a sense of not being good enough. My siblings felt it too.

At 14, I was introduced to marijuana and it helped me fit in. By 16 I was a regular user. My parents had parted and a year later, were making an attempt to get back together in a new city. My brother and sister had left home. It was all pretty messy. My loveable alcoholic grandad came to live with us. I felt lonely and lost.

I quickly made friends, found people to smoke dope with and tried to make my way. Drug use was very much part of the scene. I was scared of hard drugs, as my brother had developed a significant drug addiction and I had witnessed him selling possessions to pay debts.

I focussed on saving my brother and not my own dependence on substances. By 22 I was depressed and searching for a solution. I was about to sit my nursing finals and yet feeling like there was no hope.

As a child I had always had a belief in God, which was part of my family life in a low key way, and that belief took me down a road away from drugs.

I became part of a Wellington street community which had co-operatives and work groups. It was a mix of interesting people all looking for something, but its Christian community stood out for me.

At a time of deep hopelessness, I made the decision to give this a go. Some of us established a 13-bedroom community house and we lived together, worked in the co-op, had great discussions and heaps of fun, and I met the man I later married aged 24.

Life was good and stimulating. We moved to Hong Kong. I love adventure and other cultures, it was amazing.

I had three wonderful children, my dream job. But still there was a hole inside. I was plagued by not feeling good enough. I had not attended to myself, just to others.

Twenty years after putting down the drugs, I picked up alcohol. A glass of wine at night became my new companion. Over the next 10 years my drinking escalated,

and now this secret added to my shame.

Five years into my new relationship with alcohol and after 12 years in Hong Kong we moved back to New Zealand. I had confessed my big secret, my marriage was struggling and we went through a major adjustment.

I went more inside myself, while playing the fix-it role on the outside trying to make sure everyone in the family had what they needed but not attending to me at all.

I worked harder, pushed myself on every level and became increasingly dependent on alcohol, drinking secretly. In the last six months I was drinking at work too, just to get by. I came to a point where I stopped trying to lead a double life and just drank, I had no choice.

The family recognised that something had to give. In fact it was my daughter who was flattening next to Higher Ground who made the contact and I attended an appointment. I thought I'd do it my way though and tried an out-patient programme, but continued to drink so it was no solution.

I actually had to be removed from my environment. Higher Ground provided a supportive space for me to begin to see life for what it was and begin the journey of recovery. I was challenged and at the same time incredibly supported by my counsellor. I discovered I am deserving of help and do have choices. I was shown hope for a future not driven by substances, which was grounded in a 12 Step spiritual programme. I grasped it with both hands and it remains central to my life.

For an alcoholic like me, it has proved to be a solution, and I regularly attend

Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.

My children all suffered from alcoholism, and thankfully two of them are in recovery. But three years into my recovery this disease claimed one of my children's lives. He was desperate to find recovery, but his life was snatched.

## A Daughter's Story ...

“ On Christmas Eve 2007 I got the news that my brother, who was my best friend and drinking buddy, killed himself after failing to get clean.

That was it; I didn't care or try to control my using any more and got to the point where I was either going have to get clean or I would also kill myself.

Ten months later, I got to Higher Ground. I was 23; I felt a wreck and was terribly sad.

The most significant aspect of treatment was that Higher Ground gave me the space to grieve and face my pain, my past hurts and demons. To do that, I needed to be in a safe environment where there was no alcohol or other drugs around.

My family – mum and dad, a older sister and younger brother - always were and still are very close and I have always felt loved and accepted. I was a happy child and had a simple life growing up in rural Hong Kong surrounded by sugar cane fields with lots of adventure. I particularly have fond memories of playing with my younger brother.

I was always a schemer though and very determined to get my own way - through manipulating or bullying, being loud or dominating. Even in kindergarten. At high school I realised that being a carefree, enthusiastic person was not going to make me cool or popular which meant backstabbing and being mean. I joined in to be part of the cool group but it did not prevent me from being a target. Eventually I was so miserable I got violent towards a girl in my group, which led to being bullied and fighting.

I changed schools, but I was angry and

I was very grateful that I had three years recovery, that drinking was not an option, and alcohol was not a solution to anything. After my son died I wasn't looking for a way out, I wanted to be present to honour his life, acknowledge my grief as far as I could,



frustrated not knowing who I really was. I liked the next school but - as has been the story of my life - I got bored and wanted something different. When I was 13 I asked my parents if I could go to boarding school in New Zealand.

Then I really hated school. I was different: I didn't talk or dress the same. I was depressed, bored and itching for trouble and became friends with the naughty, older girls. I started smoking cigarettes which lead to marijuana.

I was always in trouble, and got caught smoking on the roof at night. The school was going to suspend me but since it was the end of term it was more punishment to keep me there.

So I left. My parents were now living in Auckland and agreed for me to come home on condition I went to a local school.

The family was not happy. My mum had developed a drinking problem, my sister was sick with a mental illness which had a profound effect on our family, and my dad was angry all the time. My parents' time was taken up with my sister so I continued rebelling and getting into trouble.

I met a girl in my first week who also had trouble at home. The chemistry between us was dangerous. I started drinking heavily and was truant. I would wait outside supermarkets asking older guys to buy me wine, go to a park with my friend to drink it and get rides from guys in cars.

I would often drive drunk which I continued to do until I got sober, writing off cars, getting DIC'd, generally causing havoc. I was asked to leave school without school certificate, and enrolled in a travel and tourism course.

A relationship with a guy who didn't drink or use other drugs kept me stable until we split. I managed to get a university degree, but I was still very much lost and miserable, always discontent, looking for the next feel-good.

My mum's drinking got progressively

and walk though that valley.

For me addiction is about life and death, and choice. With this disease there is no compromise - it will kill me too, or I can live a meaningful and fulfilling life being true to myself. “

worse and she ended up in Higher Ground. I actually made the phone call that got her there.

I returned to work in Hong Kong, and after a few crazy months of drinking alone at night and living off sleeping pills, I meet an asylum seeker from Africa and we got married.

I felt like I was a hamster running around and around on a wheel, scared to stop in case I came crashing down. I realised the marriage was a huge mistake but I was scared to tell anyone, particularly my parents.

I knew the partying would have to stop, and that if I was going to clean up it would be through Higher Ground. I'd been for an interview there when I was 19, and I'd even lived next door to Higher Ground. I entered treatment four years after my mother graduated.

I had attended her family groups, and the whole process was quite amazing. I knew if it got my mother sober, then I had a chance. I had lost my mother and then I got her back. I trusted the staff and knew I could go there and be safe.

Higher Ground saved my life, I learnt to laugh again and accept myself for all the good and the bad. I was introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous and I continue to regularly attend meetings.

There, surrounded by people like me, I find peace. The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous have helped me live freely, not paralysed by fear of failure or loss of control. All I have to do is be willing, stay open and be honest.

I separated from my husband and later meet the gentle man I am with now. We share a beautiful daughter, have just bought our first home and are looking forward to the future with a second baby. My life is not perfect, it is full of ups and downs and moments of irritability and discontent but I have hope, and for the most part I am incredibly grateful for the gift of recovery. “