

## 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 Ed Craig on 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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# TUNED IN TO BRAIN INJURY

Reciprocal training with brain injury trusts has given Higher Ground clinical staff a better understanding of working with clients who may find concentration and communication difficult and who need more rest.

Co-training between Higher Ground, Goodward Park Healthcare Trust and ABI Rehabilitation clinicians has proved beneficial in understanding the treatment of clients with addiction and brain injury.

"Many of our clients have mild brain injuries," says Higher Ground director Johnny Dow. "Some of our anti-social clients in particular will end up in fights or accidents and have their head hit in different ways.

"We've been learning to pick up an injury that is not obviously severe or previously diagnosed. Alcohol and other drug abuse can be in itself a brain injury."

Higher Ground has a continuing programme of staff training, and welcomes opportunities to expand knowledge of addiction. Clinical manager Otto Mengedoht says staff found the co-training trusts helpful and informative.

"Our clinical staff is more aware of brain injury and how to recognise it. We see how brain injury affects not only their ability to absorb information and to think things through but also a possible impairment in the ability to plan and put into action any conclusions and decision they have made.

"We realise the prevalence of brain injury among our clients, and are perhaps more considered in our treatment and response to it. Being conscious that the intensity of our programme can result in mental fatigue for people with brain injury, we have become more accommodating with frequent rest periods for them."

Goodward Park Healthcare Trust and ABI Rehabilitation provide rehabilitation for people with traumatic brain injury or stroke. Higher Ground's clinical team presented to them on New Zealand alcohol and other drug use, treatment options and therapeutic community, working with anti-social personalities, motivational interviewing and co-existing problems.

Tania Roebuck is service leader for traumatic brain injury residential services at Goodward Park Healthcare Group. She says one of the most valuable aspects of the reciprocal training was that her staff learned how the Higher Ground programme was structured.

"They had no idea how packed and intense the day was and they realised how difficult it would be for a lot of our clients with moderate to severe brain injury to participate in residential alcohol and other drug treatment. They could understand why clients we refer may be turned down," says Tania.

Brain injury clinicians described how impaired cognitive and executive functioning would affect a client's ability to participate in alcohol and other drug treatment programmes. They described the complexities that people with brain injury experience, such difficulties with communication.

"Fatigue can be a serious issue for people with traumatic brain injury and can even be more severe in a mild to moderate TBI than in a severe TBI."

Brain injury clinicians presented on how they worked with residential clients with co-existing alcohol and other drug issues. "I think a lot of TBI clients have preexisting or have developed post-injury dependency on alcohol and other drugs. Also other mental health issues may go undiagnosed," says Tania.

"There clearly needs to be some specific service for people who have a traumatic brain injury and have co-existing alcohol and drug issues."

The three services are looking at ways to continue working together, clinical support and sharing of information between clinicians.

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 admin@higherground.org.nz www.higherground.org.nz

# HIGHER GROUND

## DRUG REHABILITATION TRUST

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# NEWS

## SOLVING THE MISERY, FEAR OF ADDICTION

It was as if he woke up one day with a crate of beer in one hand and a set of car keys in the other. Alcohol opened the way to narcotics. Now he is 12 years free of alcohol and other drugs. A Higher Ground graduate's anonymous story.

"We were a family not at ease, but it was what I was used to. Mental illness (Mum's), addiction (mine,) and emotional absence (Dad's) were all present in what I thought was an average, normal childhood.

I had a relatively sheltered upbringing on my parents' Waikato dairy farm. We went to town every day to school, sports or church so we weren't isolated and I thought we had a lot of fun as a family.

I went to a Catholic school where I learned the alphabet at the same time as the catechism and believed everything I was taught from five to 12 years old. But my education came with a burden of guilt. I'm still a recovering Catholic.

My mother had bi-polar disorder and was quite regularly hospitalised. She was fun when she was well, then would become repetitive, the same old lines over and over again. It was unbearable, and I preferred it when she went to hospital.

Part of my belief system was that I had to be a good boy and not upset Mum so she wouldn't go to hospital. But on the other hand I used to pray the doctors would take her away to get some relief. It took me 30 years to figure out that no matter what I did, it didn't and wouldn't change what happened to her.

There were some times when the doctors came and she would be as sane as the next person - until they left. At times I hated her, and thought I hated my Dad too for not doing anything. But he'd been through the illness over and over again and he was hamstrung, he couldn't take action until it got bad enough for the doctors to do something about.

We didn't talk about it as a family - nothing was said. I remember only one time when my older sister said, "If Mum and Dad split up where would you go?" I had no

concept of that being a possibility.

My father drank every day, a few beers after the milking, always the same amount and his behaviour never changed. Any moment of his life you could tell where he would be. He lived a very managed, methodical life but was not emotional. If you approached him he was great, but he was very hard to approach.

My four sisters claimed Mum was sick because Dad drank. I countered that Dad drank because Mum was sick. My escape was kicking a football around, or hunting and shooting.

I did well at school, had plenty of friends: there was something not quite right but I didn't give it much thought. My personal brand of insanity began at 15 when I got my driver's license and off we went, driving around drinking beer, smoking pot.

It was as if I woke up one day with a crate of beer in one hand and a set of car keys in the other. An inexperienced drinker and inexperienced driver, I surely must have been blessed to survive.

My first blackout frightened me and I confided in a mate who unhesitatingly brushed it off with, "That happens to all of us." So I normalised it and didn't give the blackouts much thought after that.

One thing alcohol did for me was overcome my inhibitions and fears. It wasn't why I drank, everyone did, but I loved the effect instantly. Alcohol opened the door to other drug use. Unlike with alcohol, which was acceptable, my family was completely intolerant of other drugs.

So I started lying to them and to myself. In hindsight, once I started using drugs, my purpose in life became to seek out and use something to make me feel better.

# READING RECOVERY ... WHERE 2+2 CAN = 5

**Higher Ground prepares clients to live productive, drug-free lives in the community. For some, recovery includes literacy support - catching up on reading and writing skills they missed in their addiction.**

Jan Emmitt was a primary and intermediate teacher for over 30 years in West Auckland schools. Now she is enjoying working with her first client as a Higher Ground literacy tutor, and the progress he's making.

"People should be able to read," says Jan. "If you can read what you're doing, where you are going and what it's all about, then the world is an open book."

Her client finds it difficult to read for any length of time. His drug use may have affected his comprehension and concentration, and he was not interested in school to start with. "Because he has been out of school for so long and missed so much of his schooling from the age of 13, he's lost a lot of his basics and hasn't got the things he needed from secondary school."

Jan responded after the Howard League For Penal Reform called for literacy volunteers, and the League matched her skills and locality with Higher Ground.

Outreach worker Kathy Mildon is behind Higher Ground's literacy initiative. "The neat thing about our volunteers is that they are all busy people who live productive lives and they come with a lot of skills," says Kathy. "They are people with a very strong history through teaching. They've worked at primary school level and that's where our clients may have stopped learning."

There is a close relationship between addiction and low self-esteem, and literacy problems compound feelings of worthlessness, inadequacy, fear, shame and hopelessness. Higher Ground's programme has a strong educational component, providing information about addiction and skills for daily living. But some clients lack confidence and comprehension for daily written work.

Although few clients are illiterate, many do not have the skills that are essential to daily living and employment. A few have specific learning disorders. Many have not finished school. "But you can't always tell straight away that they have reading and writing problems," says Kathy.

Kathy is Higher Ground's longest-serving staff member, and joined the staff 27 years ago in 1986. She is often first contact for new clients, some of whom are in prison. She recognises that literacy is a particular problem in the prison population, and about a year ago made contact with the Howard League.

The League knew that addressing literacy was one thing it could do to reduce New Zealand's high rate of re-offending. Over 50% of prisoners in New Zealand have problems with literacy, says the League's chief executive officer Mike Williams (former president of the Labour Party).

"Without literacy it's almost impossible to get a job. Even shoveling

gravel at the side of the motorway you need a Site Safe certificate, which is a written test.

"We realised that at any one time there are over 4000 prisoners with literacy issues, and there are about 10,000 retired schoolteachers. I thought, why don't we put two and two together and come up with five?"

"And it's working. It seems that the guys, and they've all been guys up till now, are getting the attention of someone who's sympathetic."

## On the Same Page

*I ran away from everything at school. I hated schoolwork.*

*I sound words out differently from everybody else. So as much as I tried, I got the letters wrong. I go to read words and I can't read what it's supposed to say. I read a completely different word.*

*Maybe it's part of what's called dyslexia, but I've never found out anything properly about what my difficulty is. I just thought I was dumb. No one picked it up at home or at school. I covered up by being the class clown. And by using my memory.*

*I never sat an exam in my life. I just waggged school. I did tests and I would always cheat or copy. At home I always had my Nana there for homework and without even knowing it she would always give me the answer. She thought she was helping me. My Dad's like me too.*

*When I start reading, by the time I get to the end I've forgotten what's on the first page. I'm not getting the meaning because I'm putting so much energy into each individual word. That's why 12 Step meetings give me the most learning; I can just listen to what people are saying.*

*I can write basic things like a daily diary, I use bullet points and lists. But if I have to write in sentences I wouldn't have a clue. I've just winged it.*

*It comes down to having low self-esteem and confidence, and drugs covered that up. But every week, I go away from tutoring with a little bit more confidence. I come away with a bit of support. Someone's told me, "You're doing well" and "just keep being open".*

*I've done heaps of physical jobs like driving diggers, bulldozers, big trucks, and golf course construction. I had to remember stuff but when I got put on the spot it all went. I've always been told to go get the licenses but I never did because I didn't want to fail the test.*

*One-on-one is what's really working. My tutor can see the days I am not so switched on, and she works with that. She's on my side.*

From school I worked in the dairy factory, moved from job to job, hitchhiked around a lot. My drinking and drug using subtly yet steadily progressed along with life's responsibilities and challenges.

I was close to my father and when he died, I just shut down. I'd met a woman at the local hotel, and we moved in together that evening - love at first sight.

In time, I discovered she had mood swings like my mother: when she was good she was the best but when she was bad she was unbearable. I introduced her to intravenous drug-use before our two children were born. As parents we were loving and caring - but not always coping.

She died of an overdose in her early 40s when the boys were aged five and seven. They were removed from my care and I got shared custody with my partner's sister. From then on, the children's families were divided.

Serious decision-making was required in order to get them back. First, no alcohol: my propensity for blackout was potentially destructive when combined with my barely controllable levels of anger around the custody issues.

My decision was to use morphine daily: I needed something to get me through. And it worked, sort of. I did my lawn-mowing round, stayed home and got angry inside.

I struggled for a year, driven by hatred, resentment and the hope of getting my children back. When I didn't get the terms I wanted, I relinquished my joint custody. The family was irrevocably divided and there seemed to be no hope left.

I sought more of 'something to make me feel better'. From there my emotional, mental and spiritual deterioration was quick. At 40, overcome by despair, confusion and fear I rang an old drug-using friend who had previously cleaned up through Higher Ground.

Any fight left in me was sad and pathetic. My belief system had failed and my only hope was 'if he can do it, so can I'.

One of the first requirements at Higher Ground was to share with each member of our peer group what brought us to Higher Ground. That was very powerful. Hearing their tragic stories connected me to the human race again, a sobering exercise.

Another powerful undertaking was to present my drug history. Writing it all down opened my mind to just how prevalent and dominant a force addiction was in my life. My history was so long I needed two sessions to present it to the group.

In 18-weeks, with Higher Ground's support, it became easier to eliminate the negative and accentuate the positive. Higher Ground illuminated the difference between shame and guilt, hence shifting a belief that I was a "bad" person. However I did have some bad behaviour that required repairing and amending.

One counsellor regularly said, "A man who changes his mind

against his will is a man of the same opinion still." That statement haunted me, mainly I think because I only wanted to address my morphine habit and needle fixation. I still entertained the notion of a few beers and the occasional joint.

The most powerful Higher Ground experience was a two-chair exercise, centred on my children's deceased mother. I talked to her and with her and imagined what she would say back to me, then responded. I got honest with her about how much I loved her, hated her, and missed her.

Despite my doubts it really worked. I left that room a changed man, my shoulders lighter, the stress gone. It was as if I didn't know I had been carrying a heavy weight until it was gone. By getting honest, the darkness was removed. Amazing.

I left enthusiastic and excited about life. I hadn't felt like that since I lost my partner and children.

I entered Higher Ground's support house, but followed only the suggested things that were acceptable to me. It took two days for the thought 'what do I do now?' to enter my head. It took six weeks for that idea to grow unbearable and I sought 'something to make me feel better'.

Lies and deception returned. Shame and insecurities flooded back. I was caught in the grip of the progressive disease once more. This time was far worse because I was aware of what was happening. That's when I discovered what powerlessness really meant; using drugs against my will.

Six months of misery later, I was beaten. In my fear, I prayed to God for help. That evening I went to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. I knew my dilemma wasn't with the suggested things I had been able to put into my life, but centred squarely on the things I refused to do.

I had not taken steps towards disclosing my darkest secrets; nor of taking responsibility and offering reparation for my behaviour towards others.

At that meeting a man recognised my despair, took me aside and gave me an Alcoholics Anonymous book and offered me the 12 Step solution. This time I really did what was recommended without reservation.

The transformation was dramatic. Within 35 days the promises of A.A. were manifesting. The obsession and compulsion to drink and take other drugs had been removed and I am now 12 years drug-free.

Even in the last couple of years my life has taken off to another level of healthiness. I'm engaged to be married, and this is my tenth year in a job I enjoy. I stay close to my 12 Step fellowship.

My purpose in life is no longer 'getting and using something to make me feel better'.

My primary purpose is to stay sober and help others achieve sobriety. I thank God, my sponsor, AA and Higher Ground. ”

***"I left that room a changed man, my shoulders lighter, the stress gone. It was as if I didn't know I had been carrying a heavy weight until it was gone. By getting honest, the darkness was removed. Amazing."***