

LIVING THE DREAM



Prime Minister John Key in a lighter moment with Board chair Janet Colby. Others from left are MP Phil Twyford, MP Alfred Ngaro, the Prime Minister's chief of staff Wayne Eagleson and Shane White from Hoani Waititi Marae.

Two hundred and fifty people including Prime Minister John Key gathered in Higher Ground's new hall in November to celebrate the opening of the beautiful new facilities.

It was welcome and welcome back to then-Prime Minister John Key, who had previously visited and shown his support for Higher Ground's work by funding eight places for methamphetamine-addicted clients.

"It's great to be back at Higher Ground," said John Key. "To all the people who work here, it's got to be incredibly satisfying but also an amazing amount of hard work and dedication to make the changes to peoples lives that you do. The facilities are really beautiful so it's great to have such a tremendous environment for people."

He acknowledged the commitment of addicts in recovery. "I think whatever the facilities, whatever the care, most of all you have to want it. Success comes when you most passionately want to do that."

Board of Trustees chair Janet Colby welcomed Ngati Whatua, judges of the district and high courts and friends of Higher Ground including local Members of Parliament Phil Twyford and Alfred Ngaro, Judge Ema Aitken from the Alcohol and Other Drugs Treatment Court, and representatives of district health boards, Ministries of Health and Justice.

The completion of the major building project was the fulfilment of a shared vision for Higher Ground and its clients. "We are proud to have this beautiful, functional facility and be able to provide 52 beds today for our community, to extend our outreach and family services pre and post treatment," said Janet.

"It's fabulous," says Higher Ground's finance manager Bill Jordan, who played a big role in the building project along with director Johnny Dow. "When people come to visit they are totally blown away."

With 15 years experience in property development, Bill was the go-to person between the construction company and Higher Ground, while architect Hamish Cameron from Archimedia (designers of the recent Auckland Art Gallery refurbishment) prepared the design of the buildings and project managed the building phase. Building took two and a half years from start to finish, but there were at least two years of planning before then.

The former rest home had a complete refurbishment when Higher Ground moved in in July 2006. Prime Minister Helen Clark officially opened the premises, and throughout her term was extremely

RECOVERY A PRIORITY EVERY SINGLE DAY

From party girl, to Mondays off work, to losing custody of her child, this is one Higher Ground graduate's story of addiction.

I began using drugs in my teens at school because everyone else was. I was a party girl and drugs were part of the lifestyle. Initially I was thrill seeking but then drug-using became a regular thing, my feel-good, the feeling was out-of-this-world. Most of all drugs seemed to block out the problems in my everyday life.

Before long I became dependent and I couldn't seem to live without drugs. My using increased from every-now-and-then to a daily habit, starting with speed then ecstasy then methamphetamine.

I grew up in West Auckland with a very loving and supportive family, both my parents worked really hard and were always there for my sister and I and always did their best to provide. My sister and I enjoyed having our grandparents living with us, and they often looked after us while Mum and Dad worked.

Home was full of love. We were taught that if you wanted things in life you got a good education, got a good job, you worked hard and things were not handed to you in life.

I think my problems stemmed from my feelings about my real father who was an alcoholic. Even though my stepfather was my Dad, I still felt abandoned by my father. I felt angry that I didn't know him, and my sister and I couldn't understand why he couldn't be there for us. He always let us down and I could never understand why.

I left school at 16 and got an office job, but I was using drugs and increasingly unreliable. I went from job to job for the next four or five years. When my first true love took off for England I was devastated, it broke my heart.

Looking back I can see that the abusive relationships I got into after that were attention-seeking. As young girls do, I wanted my true love to come back and rescue me but that didn't happen.

I would spend hours sometimes days searching for my next high, and soon nothing else mattered, my main focus was making sure I had my daily fix and I never ran out. I could not get out of bed in the morning, do the housework or go to social gatherings without drugs. Drugs gave me self-confidence, I was on top of the world and I felt I fitted in, I thought I was just like everyone else.

In fact, I had problems with my partner, my family and my friends. I was constantly arguing. The person I once was was fading away. I became obsessed with myself, disconnected from people, self-absorbed and didn't care about anyone else as long as I was okay. I became a compulsive liar and a very good manipulator.

I was having every Monday off work after I had partied too hard in the weekends. If I did manage to get myself there I would always end up making up excuses so I could go home when I began coming down and I needed a boost to get me through.

I was with the father of my daughter for 13 years. When our relationship began it was exciting, and I was happy and managed to stay away from drugs. But within three years that began to change and the relationship became toxic, unhealthy and was filled with

dishonesty, manipulation and my partner became very verbally abusive. I began using drugs and disconnecting and disappearing and within six months I went from a size 16 to a size eight. I halved my body mass. I looked gaunt and sick but I thought I was absolutely beautiful.

My partner used alcohol and other drugs too but he could always stop when I couldn't and he didn't like me using. He was controlling and mentally abusive, nothing I did was good enough, and he was always chipping away at me and putting his friends first.

When I was 30 I found out I was pregnant. I thought that might be my saving grace but even though I managed to give up drugs during my pregnancy, that was short lived. I gave birth to a beautiful, healthy baby girl, and she was the most precious gift. My love for her was unconditional but even she was not enough for me to stay clean or consider changing my life.

I ran up north with my daughter when my world in Auckland was unraveling and my relationship was barely holding together. The vacation was short lived as again my life became very unmanageable.

My parents had walked away as that's what they needed to do. They had simply had enough. My daughter's dad came and took my baby girl. In the whole time we were together not once had I seen him cry but I did this day. As he put our beautiful daughter into her car seat he said I might not see this now but he is doing the right thing for our daughter and as her dad he needed to protect her and keep her safe and right now I was not capable of being the mum that she deserved and needed.

It broke my heart and at the time I hated him. Now I can see why he did it and I think it was the best thing, I'm proud that he stepped up. I'm grateful he did because otherwise I might not be where I am now.

Even after losing everything it still took me another year to work out that I had a problem. I was alone, empty, the drugs had run out, I had no money, and no home and I just wanted it all to end. I guess I hit my rock bottom.

At a Salvation Army support house I met a lady who was in recovery and she helped me get to the places I needed to be. I moved to a Wings Trust support house and lived with other people like me. My case manager was patient and kind and slowly I learned that I could trust her.

I arrived at Higher Ground the day before my 35th birthday. I couldn't believe I was not going to celebrate in town high on drugs.

Three times that day everyone sang me *Happy Birthday* and I cried each time.

I thought I could fly through this program, I would tell the case managers what they wanted to hear and graduate and it would all be sorted. But that wasn't going to be possible.

I knew though that if I wanted a new life then I needed to be



supportive and encouraging of Higher Ground's work.

"At that stage we thought we'd future-proofed it," says Bill. Higher Ground was fortunate that, due to good management over a long period, it owned the land and buildings and therefore did not have to pay rent. But with more contracts and more clients, five years later Higher Ground was bursting at the seams, and planning started on extensions.

Demand for places at Higher Ground remains high, with the waiting list currently around three months, which is a long time for someone in addiction. People waiting required intensive assistance by the outreach team to hold their hope and prepare them for treatment, said Janet, and it took courage and commitment to reach out for help and learn to live drug free.



The new hall provides a single space for guests, or divides into three group rooms as well as providing multiple other uses.

"We endeavor to provide a calm, simple and beautiful environment as recovering clients learned to value and respect themselves and the community. Our therapeutic programme is demanding and healing. Higher Ground lays a foundation for a new life. Those who stay connected and engaged in 12-Step support need never look back."

honest, learn to talk about and let go of my past no matter how uncomfortable. It was like learning to walk again.

I came to understand my addiction and my feelings towards my father. I can now understand his addiction and accept him for who he is, that he wasn't present because he couldn't be.

My family attended weekly Multiple Family Groups even though I had had nothing to do with them for a while. Hearing what they said left me feeling empty, sad and guilty. In addiction you don't realise the effect your addiction has on others.

I am truly grateful that Higher Ground has given me my family

back. And my daughter is back in my life. My partner still has care of her but my supervision has been lifted and I have her more and more regularly. I can see a time when we will have shared custody.

In active addiction I never stopped to think of the consequences, now I actually look at the bigger picture and how it's going to affect my daughter and me. I do the next right thing.

I have achieved so much in such a short period of time only because I continue doing the suggested things and I make recovery a priority every single day. Most importantly I just don't pick up any drug. ”

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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CULTURE SHOCK – IN A GOOD WAY

“Culture shock” is how First Nation’s counselor Bryan Smith describes his experience of coming to work at Higher Ground.



Bryan belongs to the Piikani Nation of the Blackfoot Confederacy. He was referring to both differences of national culture, and the differences between Higher Ground and treatment centres back home. His goal to work with First Nations people brought him to Higher Ground for a three-month clinical placement last year.

Bryan graduates this month from the addictions counseling programme at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada. He is also receiving teachings in traditional spiritual ways of healing from his Native Elders.

Bryan first started looking to Australia for a treatment centre which incorporated traditional ways of healing and where Aboriginal people shared their culture. “My thinking was, there has to be a way

to get white people, other ethnic groups as well as my people to work together.”

His research led to New Zealand and to Higher Ground. “My Elders told me that I was coming to a good place to learn, that Maori were years ahead of us in the process of healing from colonisation.”

From the start, it was full immersion in Higher Ground’s Maori cultural programme. He arrived on a day when residents participated in Te Reo and Whanau Groups, cultural counsel, Paua Ceremony and powhiri. “I found Maori were willing to share their culture and non-Maori people embraced it here.”

Bryan started university as an adult student through a First Nations Transition Programme. That was after he started his own recovery nearly 10 years ago. “Because of my drinking years I had lost my traditional roots, and since my healing journey, I’ve gone back to them. I believe that the more I learn about my traditional ways of healing and protocols, the better counselor I can be for my people.”

He hopes to return to New Zealand with his wife Karen Spotted Bull who also works in the field of addiction, and introduce her to Higher Ground and to Maori culture.

“Basically I’m in awe of the whole program at Higher Ground. I can definitely see why in comparison to back home, Higher Ground has a higher success rate,” he says. “I believe in my heart that I definitely came to the right place for what I was looking for and hoping to learn and gain,” says Bryan. “Saying thanks will never be enough for what I have already accomplished and learned at Higher Ground.”

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