

“Hi, my name is Jacinda”

Friday May 31 was an exciting day for Higher Ground residents and staff. Our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern took time out from the Wellbeing Budget sitting, flew to Auckland and came to visit.



Residents and staff were gathered in the soft light of the beautiful Higher Ground hall in an atmosphere of warmth and excitement as preparations took place for our esteemed visitors.

Higher Ground Board member, Marino Sherwin-Gray (Ngati Tuwharetoa, Ngapuhi, Ngati Kahungunu) led the Karanga for the PM and her party and was greeted by Linda Kai Karanga for the Higher Ground Roopu. Ken Kerehoma (Ngati Whatua Orakei, Te Rawara) and Piripi Davis (Ngati Whatua Orakei, Ngati Kahu) led the Higher Ground residents in a welcome haka and waiata followed by a rousing Recovery Haka.

The PM was accompanied by The Right Honorable David Clark, Minister of Health, Robyn Shearer, Deputy Director-General Mental Health and Addictions, and Sonya Russell, Programme Delivery Manager.

Three residents came forward, introduced themselves and told their stories of active addiction, loss, law breaking and loneliness that brought them to their knees and in through the doors of Higher Ground. They named the changes that took place for them during their time in residential treatment and are taking place for them and their families and whanau as they continue their recovery journey.

The PM responded by introducing herself with “Hi, my name is Jacinda” and was met with a resounding “Hi Jacinda.”

Jacinda thanked the speakers for their generous sharing and spoke of the emotional impact the stories had on her. She acknowledged the power of story and how it connects us. Jacinda spoke of the first time she had heard of Higher Ground when sitting in the back of Te Whare Whakapiki Wairua Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court (AODTC) and hearing the judge mention HG several times. Now here she was.

In addition, the PM said as a result of the Mental Health and Addiction Enquiry the government has made a commitment to bring in accessible services for the people, including their families and whanau.

This government recognises the need for treatment facilities to expand the services they provide including supporting both post and pre-treatment. She named the ultimate hope as being “that we are here earlier to provide support, and people know where to find it”. She finished by speaking directly to the residents and saying, “We did this yesterday because people like you told us their story”.

Higher Ground Board Chair Janet Colby said “the Board were delighted the PM, the Minister of Health David Clarke, and their party took the time to visit and meet with the residents, to hear first-hand their stories of courage to overcome their addiction and trauma from their past. And to hear the value in treating the family and to recognise for Maori a connection or reconnection with their culture is integral to the wellbeing of whanau and their communities. Her warmth and compassion was witnessed by us all. We are so grateful to this government for the resources they are making available to the community that is often marginalised and stigmatised.”

When asked for comment after her visit the PM stated “I was overwhelmed by the stories people were brave enough to share with me. It was a powerful example of why we used our Wellbeing Budget to invest \$56 million into specialist alcohol and other drug services, including enhanced residential and aftercare support services that will help over 2000 people each year. The money also means an additional 5000 people will be able to access early support, for alcohol and other drug issues across 10 sites, including outreach support.

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I FOUND MYSELF, I FOUND MY DAD

**“Learning about addiction answered a lot of questions. It all started to make sense.”
A Higher Ground graduate’s personal story.**

“What brought me through the door of Higher Ground? I was at Wings Trust at the time and I saw other peers coming through that had graduated Higher Ground. I saw the way these people held themselves and had quite a solid grasp on recovery, so part of me wanted to go to Higher Ground for that reason, the other part of me wanted to go for my active charges at the time – supply of Class A drugs and quite a few driving offences.

I’d had other rehab experiences: One when I was 19 for three weeks. I was using the whole time I was there. I didn’t ever get a taste of recovery and didn’t understand what it was. Then at the age of 23 I went to a treatment centre in Ohakune which I completed. I then went on to Wings Trust and from there to Higher Ground. I stayed clean through that whole process. I got discharged from Higher Ground with one week left to go. I was still finishing off my sentence. I went to my mothers for two weeks as a grace period before I could get my bail address shifted and I was lucky enough to move in with my sponsor.

When I was at Higher Ground, I learnt that addiction was a family disease. I also learnt that it’s a part of who I am. Learning about addiction answered a lot of questions from growing up and who I am as a person – the way I act, my thought processes and just the way I am as a human being. It all started to make sense. Realizing it wasn’t to do with a lack of willpower why I couldn’t stop using for all those years it was to do with the fact that I’m an addict.

I learnt that I’m not actually a bad person. I’m a good person who was stuck in active addiction doing bad things. The things I had done didn’t determine who I am today. The biggest thing that I use today that I learned in Higher Ground is knowing my own truth and being okay with other people’s opinions. How someone sees something is okay – they are fully in their right to have their own opinions. I just have to sit with my own truth and find acceptance with other people’s opinions.

After being discharged from Higher Ground I was stuck on home detention for eight or nine months. I got right into my Step work and I did my 12 Steps with my sponsor. I was only allowed to go to one meeting a week. My probation officer was happy for me to go and work Monday to Friday. I decided I needed to put my recovery first.

Coming off home detention was a very scary time in my life. Up until that point I thought I had a pretty good grip on recovery. I thought I worked a pretty good programme and had done all the suggested things, I thought I had it sorted. I remember the day the guy came to cut my bracelet off. As soon as that bracelet came off my ankle my head went straight to “now you can go and use!” That scared me. How in the morning I was thinking, “I can’t wait to go to meetings and I’m free to do all this other recovery stuff” yet as soon as my bracelet was off my head just went straight to “you can go and use now, off you go”. So, I just sat on the couch all day waiting until my sponsor came home. And just waited, you know, because it scared me. It really did. I always hold on to that because I know that’s the power of addiction – my addiction.

When my sponsor came home, we sat down and made a plan. Basically, I immersed myself in the Narcotics Anonymous (NA) fellowship in Auckland and did as many meetings as I could. I reached out and got lifts because I had lost my license as part of my sentencing. I made a plan with my sponsor to keep myself busy in recovery.

My whole recovery has always been about helping others. Whether it’s picking people up for meetings or taking them out at weekends. I learnt to have fun in recovery through a Charitable trust I am involved with called Recovery First. That’s what was done for me and that’s just how we roll. I started doing service early on. Even on home Detention I was servicing the Recovery First motorbikes, doing all that sort of stuff. When I couldn’t leave the house, I was still doing the jobs I didn’t really want to do, but I was doing it for the other boys in the recovery community.

I probably did a good two years of solid recovery before I had a talk with my sponsor about work. I went to work with my sponsor for the next four years working in forestry. Our whole crew turned into a ‘clean’ crew at one point as well. Our recovery had such an impact, men who had been in the forestry industry their whole lives were able to turn their lives around.

I support my recovery by doing regular meetings. I’ve got two home groups. I do service. I do everything I did at the start. I’ve got a sponsor that I’m in touch with almost daily. I’ve got a lot of sponsee’s and I love them all. I’m really proud because they’re all working the 12 Steps. They’re all working pretty good programmes which is so cool to be a part of and see. Every single day of my life I’m talking to someone in recovery.

Fun in recovery is important. Our Recovery First charitable trust has a few motocross bikes that newcomers in recovery can come and ride. The trust also has paintball guns and we have Recovery Paintball Days. We also have jet skis. We include the children of the people in recovery. We have small bikes for the children to ride. Addiction is a family disease and also affects the children, so they are included in the recovery, which also means being included in the fun

The biggest gift I’ve got in my life today is freedom from active addiction. Freedom to be able to walk outside and walk down the road. I’m not in prison. I’ve been in the system since I was 13 years old. I’ve been in prison on remand for 4 months when I was using and once for a week when in recovery for breaching my bail.

So many gifts. I’m happily married with a beautiful wife who I’m able to be a good husband to. My partner is in recovery and she works a good programme in her life. We are able to pull each other up on our issues. Sometimes it’s a good thing, sometimes not so good (laughs). We do lots of travelling together. I’m a good son, grandson and nephew nowadays. The recovery programme I work has the answers for my problems. It’s all there if I want to look at it.

Another huge gift I have is the gift of giving. I’ve got so much to give. I’m a trusted employee. I’ve got full-time work for the first time in my life. Part of my job now is actually living my dream, so I love that part of my job. I’m doing my skipper’s ticket. It has taken a couple of years full-on training

“The biggest gift I’ve got in my life today is freedom”

Fuel for Life; how physical mental and emotional wellness intertwine

An interview with Andrew, Food Services Manager at Higher Ground.



How long have you been working at Higher Ground Andrew and what brought you here?

I've been here for a year now. My predecessor is a friend of mine and he mentioned that he was moving on to do other things and that I might put forward my interest in taking over his role.

I did an apprenticeship as a chef at a large Hotel in my teens and quickly fell in love with it. After that I moved around the country and overseas working in various restaurants for the following decade or so. I thrived on the intensity and pressure of professional kitchens, the long hours, heat and noise and the coordinated chaos... until it burnt me out completely.

It was not until years later that I regained a passion for cooking and developed a healthy relationship with the work again. And that relationship came in the form of a food truck.

How does your lived experience of addiction and recovery inform the work you do today?

I graduated Higher Ground in 2015. Addiction took a significant chunk of my life, prolonged suffering for myself and those close to me. Once I had experienced enough of that suffering Higher Ground was the place that brought me back to a point where I could start to rebuild my life with perspective that I could only have gained through all those difficult experiences.

I became strong in my recovery and largely at peace, but physically I knew that I could be far healthier. I began consuming as much of the scientific literature as I could get my hands on. Evidence based nutrition became and remains my number one interest. The overwhelming body of evidence suggests that the closer we can move toward a whole food plant-based diet the greater our wellbeing and I believe that physical, mental and emotional wellness are deeply intertwined.

How do the residents manage?

They manage incredibly well. The residents prepare and serve all the meals. I just set out the menus and recipes, make sure there is food onsite, give day to day support to the kitchen crew and teach basic cooking skills. Skill sets vary just like they do in the wider community, and the kitchen crews find a way to work together and produce some great food.

The residents usually have a few one-week blocks in the kitchen during the 18-week program. A lot of knowledge is passed between residents who are highly proficient in the kitchen and those who have not had a lot of experience at all. And I am always willing to open a

dialogue with residents as well as staff around food choices and health. My goal in the long run is not to make anyone change their habits if they don't want to, but to offer accurate information so that they can make their own choices based on what is important to them. In saying that though...I share a duty of care for residents while they are in the program and I do my best to fulfil that obligation by limiting harmful foods and promoting healthful ones. And showing that foods that are good for you can also be delicious!

Some residents do have special dietary requirements. I work closely with Anne the onsite nurse for medical needs such as diabetic, as well as various allergy concerns, to ensure the safety of all our residents. We also take into account peoples religious/spiritual beliefs and their ethical choices, such as not eating meat.

At Higher Ground we seek to make responsible choices in regard to sustainability, environmental impact and from an ethical perspective. This continues to be a work in progress. I think the key is being open to change when it becomes apparent that there is a better option available.

Where do you get support for the work you do and stay up with what's happening in the nutrition and wellbeing space?

I follow the charitable foundation Nutrition Facts <https://nutritionfacts.org/> Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine <https://www.pcrm.org/> PubMed <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/> the largest database of peer reviewed scientific literature

in the world.

As well as many leading evidence-based Nutrition professionals and communicators.

What keeps you interested and excited?

What keeps me going is the knowledge that we have the power to keep ourselves free from many of the chronic diseases that are leading cause of death and morbidity through the lifestyle choices that we make. If we are concentrating on wellness lets extend that to all aspects of health!

What do you do for self-care and for fun?

My self-care involves staying fit and active. I train at the gym most days, this is as much for my mental wellbeing as it is my physical wellbeing. I allow myself 8 hours of sleep opportunity every night and of course eating delicious healthful food. I do keep very busy. Between my work at Higher Ground and my food truck business I don't have a lot of down time. The time I do have is spent hanging out with my son, jamming a bit of Fortnite, battling with Beyblades, rock hunting or whatever he is into at the time. We get away camping when we can and I'm looking forward to doing a bit of travelling over the next few years. The gifts of recovery.

"I became strong in my recovery and largely at peace, but physically I knew that I could be far healthier."

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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The residents I met at Higher Ground are the reason we made the decisions we have, so that a group of brave and determined people get the help they need. I'm proud of that and of the staff I met who work there."



Marino Sherwin-Gray (Ngati Tuwharetoa, Ngapuhi, Ngati Kahangunu) Higher Ground Board Member; Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister; Janet Colby, QSM Higher Ground Board Chair; Sonya Russell, Programme Manager, Mental Health and Addictions; Robyn Shearer, Deputy Director-General Mental Health and Addictions.

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and I'm about 3 weeks away from getting my ticket. I've had to work through a lot of stuff because I have a lot of fears around my past catching up with me. I'm fearful About all my charges and will I be deemed a fit and proper person before getting my ticket. I have come to peace with that now. I'm happy whatever way it goes. I've handed it over and feel now it's not up to me. And that's all good.

I've now become the rock within my whole family. I'm trusted and respected. My uncles, aunties, my grandma, my mum come to me for support. Another gift I have in my life today is my father. I never had my father in my life until I had recovery. We are now reunited. And he's 28 years in recovery. I first met my dad at the very end of my using. My uncle, who's my godfather, said he thought it was time I met my dad. I had my own story in my head about my dad and had always said "nah, I don't want to meet him, he was never there for me." At that time my uncle organized it and I met him once. When I got clean, I started reaching out and made contact with him again. Now he's a huge part of life. One of the biggest things I now have is, in my contacts list on my phone, is a contact named "Dad" and a number I can call at any time.

I feel honored to be asked to tell my story. Especially around my 7-year clean milestone that I had last week. To celebrate I went to a meeting, shared my story and spoke of what my recovery has done for me. I also celebrated at my home group with a cake. I celebrate for the newcomer to show that the programme is working for me.

Higher Ground plays a big part in my life today. I regularly go back to support people in the family group. ”

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