

## 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.

## Higher Ground Trustees

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## Contact Details

Address • 118 Beach Road,  
Te Atatu Peninsula  
Waitakere  
Auckland 0610

Mail to • PO Box 45 192  
Te Atatu Peninsula  
Waitakere  
Auckland 0651

Telephone • office 09-834 0017  
• after care 09-834 0076  
• admissions 09-834 0042  
• residents 09-834 3700

Office fax • 09-834 0018

# CELEBRATING TWO DECADES

A sit-down lunch for 80 people held in the courtyard of Higher Ground was a joyful and sometimes emotional farewell for three long-term associates.

Laughter, speeches and haka honoured the work of Caroline Leys and Philip Jeffares who led the weekly spirituality group for 19 and 17 years respectively, and of Jill Palmer retiring as manager of Wings Trust.

Residents, staff, trustees and friends enjoyed hangi food, beautifully cooked and served by residents supervised by Higher Ground's Kitchen Manager James Taihia. Jill, Caroline and Phil were presented with specially made greenstone taonga, each of different design and significance.

"Thank you for what you have done to help Higher Ground grow and for the lives you have helped save," said director Johnny Dow.

Caroline Leys, an Anglican priest, started work at Higher Ground in Parnell in 1995 and in 1998 Franciscan friar Philip Jeffares joined her. In nearly two decades, Caroline and Phillip have taken part in many aspects of Higher Ground's spiritual life, from listening to residents' fourth steps to blessing the house and foundations of the new extensions.

In the first 14 years one of the spirituality group leaders would come in at Easter and also on Christmas Day to offer a thought for the day and a blessing for those residents and family who wished to join. More recently Philip has blessed the kai on Christmas Day.

"Together you were explaining to us the freedom of spirituality as opposed to the confines of what many of us see as religious," said Higher Ground Trust Board chair Janet Colby. "You introduced spirituality in a way that helped our clients establish this essential basis of their recovery from addiction."

Caroline is now based at a spiritual retreat centre on Aotea (Great Barrier Island). "The work I have done in your midst has been an honour," she said. "You have taught me something I could never have learned anywhere else. It's a tremendous gift."

Philip continues his work at the St Francis Retreat Centre in Hillsborough. "It was a great sadness to me to finish at Higher Ground," he said. "I am very grateful. The group was an important part of my week and did me the world of good!"

"Somehow it brought me down to earth. Being there helped me appreciate a lot more what lies behind the journey of recovery. It was a delight to work alongside and learn so much from both staff and residents."

Chair Janet Colby recognised the special relationships Jill Palmer maintained, working with outreach to ensure continuity of care post and pre-treatment.

Many Higher Ground graduates go on to live in supported accommodation at Wings Trust houses. Wings and Higher Ground were both 12-Step based and worked well together, said Director Johnny Dow.

He too acknowledged the long association with Jill Palmer since she was on staff at Higher Ground in the 1990s. "When you took over Wings Trust about seven years ago it changed and grew into an organisation that is so well respected today. It's magical what you have done and what you will go on to do, whatever that is."



Caroline Leys and Philip Jeffares

# HIGHER GROUND

## DRUG REHABILITATION TRUST

2014 • ISSUE # 55

# NEWS

## DIVERSITY IN ACTION

Rainbow cultural training is making a world of difference at Higher Ground.

Accepting and supporting diversity has always been part of the Higher Ground philosophy and this year Higher Ground has taken further action and reached out to the rainbow community.

This is part of Higher Ground's on-going commitment to creating a safe place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, takataapui, fa'afafine and intersex people as clients, family, staff and visitors.

During the year, Higher Ground underwent a full rainbow audit of all aspects of the programme. All staff members from director Johnny Dow to supervisors have completed Rainbow Cultural Competency Training. All residents now attend monthly Rainbow Cultural Education Group.

The initiative has been driven by Higher Ground's staff nurse Anne Carroll. "One of my goals at the beginning of this year was to increase the rainbow population at Higher Ground," says Anne.

Joe MacDonald, from Affinity Services, completed two half-days with clinical staff and one full day with supervisors. "I got the sense that the majority of people there were already doing really competent work and it was helpful for them to be able to back themselves up," he says.

Training explores the culture of sexuality and gender identity. It helps participants to recognise sexuality as a continuum and accept that diversity is normal for everyone.

"Often people already understand how some people are gay, some people are straight and some people are somewhere in between," he says. He finds it useful to add more layers by identifying the differences between assigned sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexuality and sexual orientation.

Participants are asked to put themselves into the picture. "Instead of just talking about transgender people or gender diverse people, we are all somewhere along those continuums and a lot of us move and change over time."

Staff were able to integrate changes straight away, says Anne, and put them into practice through attitude, approach and language.

"Some of the clinicians said that people often struggled with



Left to right: Anne Carroll, Joe MacDonald and Tommy Hamilton

gender, in particular with regard to trans people. Whether the transition was male to female or female to male, people still wanted to call the person by their birth gender or sex. Since we've had that training there's none of that. It's really clear. They are what they say they are."

Higher Ground then looked at training for clients, which starts with getting people comfortable talking about sexuality. Tommy Hamilton, from Re.Frame, now takes a monthly group for all clients on gender and diversity.

Says Tommy: "We're very clear we are not talking about sex, we're talking about the culture of sexuality and how that is part of our wider community, how that is part of the community they are in at this particular moment, and how that relates to the work they are doing at Higher Ground."

The training is an opportunity for clients to understand their own attitudes, language, sexuality. Says Anne: "Higher Ground is a really holistic programme now. It's not just about your addiction it's about your whole being."

Many clients have experienced sexual abuse or hostility towards people's differences. "People are reaching crisis a lot younger in their addiction, we are getting people in their early twenties attend treatment unlike the older narcotics users," she says.

"I think a lot of the younger people still carry the beliefs of their parents, they haven't had a lot of opportunity, especially being absorbed in addiction, to get their own ideas. So this is really helping

them to broaden their mind.”

Joe Macdonald audited the whole service from policy to practice, partly to find out if there were areas to target during training. “I’m glad that Higher Ground didn’t just decide to push for greater numbers of clients without addressing the need for continual improvement and safety.”

Higher Ground is committed to on-going training of all staff. “You need those structural supports like policy, environment and staff-wide training to make sure that knowledge is not lost when staff leave, and to not rely on a particular person pushing that kind of information.”

All his recommended changes on inclusiveness and safety were made looking at not just residents but also family, visitors and staff.

Posters in public areas and interview rooms state that Higher Ground is a safe place for rainbow community, and identifies staff members to talk to. Anne Carroll’s office has more rainbow identifiers. “Rainbow people who come in here know this is a safe place, you can see that, it’s advertised,” she says.

A small rainbow symbol now appears on the Higher Ground website. “It might not mean much to heterosexual people but any rainbow person seeing that is going to say ‘there’s something here for me’.

“What’s going on here at Higher Ground is a reflection of what’s going on in our wider community. It’s about acceptance of diversity.”



## Season’s Greetings

*The Higher Ground Board of Trustees would like to take this opportunity to thank the wider community for their support and to wish you all a Merry Christmas.*

*The board continues in its endeavor to improve and provide quality services to those who suffer from addiction to alcohol and other drugs, through ongoing research, monitoring and evaluation. Some of the highlights from the last 12 months include:*

- *Higher Ground’s major refurbishment and extension to its residential facility, is due for completion in February 2015.*

- *Findings released from research projects including a review of outcomes for clients who use methamphetamines and a report on the Maori Programme.*

- *New therapies introduced to enhance treatment outcomes include Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Coping with Anger, Moral Reconation Therapy, and the WINZ Job Seekers Course.*

*Thank you, again, we cannot achieve our objectives without our community’s support.*



# Compulsion Becomes Understanding

**He graduated from Higher Ground two years ago. Recovery is like an umbrella, he says, a good umbrella protects you and everything under it. His anonymous story.**

“If someone had said to me, within the next four months you’ll lose your job, house, car, get arrested five times, be sleeping in a park and asking for money at bus stops I would have thought they were on drugs! But that is what happened.

I worked for 25 years in the travel industry, with great holidays and experiences. Single for much of it I had a good income to enjoy an active social life in my Ponsonby neighbourhood, and being openly gay I felt quite at home making a few places my regular hangouts.

I’m not one of those loud, party guys who know everyone, but more the quiet, observant one that would rather have two or three close friends or just enjoy my own company.

Being gay to me is normal, I don’t know any different. It has helped me understand and accept diversity and look at people as people. But growing up knowing I was gay I didn’t quite fit in. I was always on the outside, not quite ‘part of’. On guard, because being different I was always a target.

I’d worked my way into management and enjoyed balancing office dynamics, clients and my own fun. I was a ‘caretaker’ manager, loved looking after others and was more than happy to cover when they needed time off or whatever.

But as my addiction took hold, so my days off increased. With lowered expectations and performance I was struggling to maintain my secret life (the drinking). I either had a stomach bug or the flu, I never said I had a hangover or told anyone I was drinking in my lunch hour.

When my closest friend, travel companion and social buddy moved overseas it left a huge void. After 15 years of indulging in good wine and food, my weight had crept up. I’d gained over 50kgs in my thirties but on the surface I was happy and enjoying myself. I wasn’t looking for love so if someone wanted me, there was just more of me to love, I told myself.

On reflection, the weight was a way to not allow people to get close. At 40 I felt very alone and empty.

My social life became quite solo. I had no problem going to my regular places, eating and drinking alone. Bantering with the waiters was fun and I looked forward to that interaction. I started to prefer my own company because I could drink as much as I liked without being

observed.

The problem came at social events. I struggled to keep pace with other people’s drinking. They were too slow! So I’d drink in advance and limit myself in front of others knowing I could have more when I got home. It never occurred to me that I was an alcoholic or had a problem drinking. No, the problem was I was lonely, bored, fat and didn’t have any self worth.

At 41, I made the decision to have gastric bypass surgery and nearly halved my weight in under a year. I had to avoid alcohol plus there was no room in the stomach to eat and drink at the same time. I struggled with food; I was never hungry and a lot of food types didn’t agree with me.

Once I allowed alcohol back into the plan I discovered liquids filled me up just as well as food. My tolerance level sure was pretty low and I was careful for the first few months.

At a work conference I had been to in consecutive years, the first at my heaviest, the next at my thinnest, the difference was extraordinary. From just blending in to being fought over to ‘join us’ was really hard to accept. I was the same on the inside, there was just less of me on the outside, but people were suddenly interested.

Now I was thin and still lonely, and shopping replaced the boredom. Friends were noticing the drinking, I would get drunk and wobbly at dinner parties often wandering off to lie down somewhere or I’d just up and leave a restaurant.

One friend was in tears trying to tell me I had a drinking problem and that no one knew what to do. I argued that there was no problem I just needed to find a better balance with eating.

My solution came when I took a job managing a motel in Australia, where I thought I could change a few things but wouldn’t get hassled about my drinking. It couldn’t have been further from the truth.

The hours were long, the job exhausting, I had no time to make friends. I was drinking to sleep, drinking to stop the shakes, wine in coffee cups or a straw from the bottle some days when I was too shaky for a glass. I was drinking anytime I was awake; time had no relevance.

I didn’t know how to stop. I didn’t want to drink, but needed to. It was horrible not being in control. I really compromised the business I was running and out of desperation one day just left to return to Auckland.

When I blacked out in front of my parents, an intervention put me into Detox. and Higher Ground was mentioned. It still never occurred to me that I was an alcoholic, I’d simply had a problem with drinking because there were so many problems in my life.

I was told not to drink and go to Alcoholics Anonymous: I went and didn’t feel I belonged. I certainly wasn’t the coat-wearing, park bench, paper bag drunk and I couldn’t relate (although ironically that was what I would become). Again I felt on the outer.

I returned to work in travel. It was difficult to avoid Friday night drinks, and I eventually started with one shandy - I don’t even like beer! But I fitted in.

After six months, I went to Los Angeles to relax by a hotel pool. I gave myself permission to drink on holiday and had my first glass at the airport at 6am. I was drunk for the next two weeks and don’t remember flying home.

I’d had a job through most of my addiction, but this time I got paid

out and fired. I don’t quite know what happened; I was in blackout.

I soon lost my home and car, and was drifting for the next four months. Family and friends tried to reach out. I just wanted to be left alone to drink myself to death. My plan was to blow all my money and die before Christmas.

The insanity lead me to crime, blackouts, hospitalisation and total disregard for the stress I was causing family and friends. Desperately cold and lonely in a park one night, I made my way to Auckland City Mission to get a blanket and someone took time to listen to my story.

I have no doubt that person saved my life. They got me temporary accommodation, back into Detox. and an admission date at Higher Ground.

I arrived two years ago aged 46 with three weeks sobriety, completely bewildered as to how I’d ended up at Higher Ground. Somehow the kindness of others helped me get a sense that I was needed as a friend, a son, as the funny, witty person I once was.

The Higher Ground programme is really easy. The content isn’t! Everything is taken care of, bed, fed and watered so all that’s left is to address the problems! I didn’t grasp that at first. I thought just sobering up and examining a few issues I’d pop out the other end and pick up life again - from the good days, of course.

I didn’t accept I was an alcoholic. I didn’t want another label, another reason to feel isolated.

I was intimidated by the thought of sharing a dorm with other men, straight men at that! My instinct from school bullying days was to avoid any situation that put me in an environment like that. The totally amazing thing is that it had the reverse effect. I felt ‘part of’. Everyone was different, each with a story, and yet they were just like me.

There was a sense of belonging, acceptance and respect from peers. I recognized that my own judgments had been limiting me,

holding me back from joining in, trusting others and letting my inner self be exposed.

I never felt alone once in the four and a half months at Higher Ground. I learnt most from the interaction with the other residents and the opportunity to be honest and open without fear.

That was sometimes awkward and confronting but never belittling or isolating. There was always someone to talk to, someone to listen or someone who wanted me to listen.

I’m fortunate that I was able to take some time out and went on to a support house, which was a fantastic extension of the Higher Ground experience. I had time to rebuild my confidence, discover who I really am and establish a new life with the trust and support of family and friends.

Life couldn’t be further from the past, and I am so grateful. I concentrate on what I have, not what I haven’t. I’m financially poor but I’ve never been so rich. Emotionally and spiritually I feel connected and I’m truly privileged.

I attend regular A.A. meetings where I belong to a fantastic ‘club’ where we get to share our feelings and thoughts and work through the Steps. I get a real sense of community listening to the similarities not differences at meetings.

I was worried that taking alcohol out of my life would leave me humourless and boring. It’s been the opposite, and incredibly liberating. ”

*“Everyone was different, each with a story, and yet they were just like me.”*