

Higher**Ground**

DRUG REHABILITATION TRUST

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Tikanga Advisor Kohe Pene (left) and Te Rau Ora Work-Based Placement Lusan Turton.

# Growing Papa Taumata (Higher Ground's) cultural programme

**Kia hora te marino**

*May peace be wide-spread*

**Kia whakapapa pounamu te moana**

*May the sea be like greenstone*

**Hei huarahi mā tātou I te rangi nei**

*A pathway for us all this day*

**Aroha atu, aroha mai**

*Give love, receive love*

**Tātou I a tātou katoa**

*Let us show respect for each other.*



Haka practice for Higher Ground residents. Te Rau Ora Work-Based Placement Lusan Turton (left) and Tikanga Advisor Kohe Pene.



Tikanga Advisor Kohe Pene.

There has been a big expansion of Papa Taumata's (Higher Ground's) cultural programme in the last 10 years. This year has seen it growing even further, with two cultural therapy groups, regular Maori/Pasifika staff meetings, and outreach to out-of-towners.

A new addition to the therapeutic programme is the weekly process group Te Rōpū Mauri Ora for the seven most senior Maori/Pasifika clients. It uses models of practice such as rakau (trees), pounamu (greenstone), waka (canoe). "We use cultural mediums to help process things they are going through in their ongoing recovery," says Tikanga Advisor Kohe Pene. "A lot of our residents do not have much connection to their culture, they struggle to speak any reo, the Pasifika clients struggle as well, they know very little about their culture. It is a group where they can talk about the shame and embarrassment of this, and the sense of struggling to fit in either culture, Māori and Pakeha. "They can talk about some of the comments they were raised with such as 'it's a white world, no good learning your culture, it's not going to get you anywhere'."

"One reason why they enjoy this particular group is that they get to experience a bit of their culture and we do it in bite-sized chunks so they can take it in."

Papa Taumata has at times had residents whose Māori culture is intact but even they too need support and guidance. "I am sure they too would have had challenges to explore in regards to their culture."

There is now a cultural Multiple Family Group being trialled on Wednesday evenings. The group does similar therapeutic work as other Multiple Family Groups, but opens with a mihi (formal welcome), a Samoan whāriki (mat) is spread on the floor and a harakeke (flax)

placed on it representing whanau, and closes with singing the Serenity Prayer in te reo Māori.

"Sad to say but what a lot of Māori/Pasifika have in common is they have experienced domestic violence, suicide, sexual abuse alongside alcohol and drug abuse within the whanau, so when these things are talked about in the group, we can go to another level because unfortunately the people in the group know these stories all too well."

Māori/Pasifika staff meetings continue monthly after being weekly for several months. "That was really good, an opportunity for whanaungatanga (connecting) talking about everyone's areas within the organisation and where culturally they feel they could create more in their spaces to support residents culturally. It was really good for me as the Tikanga Advisor to hear from them all and the amazing growth personally and professionally."

Higher Ground now has a dedicated whanau room, a space for small groups and counselling sessions that is available to all staff to use. "It's been fabulous having this space, creating a cultural ambiance where we hope when whanau come to do work with their loved ones, it has more of a whanau feel.

During the rahui (Covid 19 period) residents were not able to go out for their usual marae noho (stay) so the marae noho was brought to Papa Taumata in the hall. Although not the most ideal, it meant that the marae noho could continue every 10 weeks and senior residents were able



Tikanga Advisor Kohe Pene with Te Rau Ora Work-Based Placement Lusan Turton.

to mahi tahi (work together as one) kai tahi (eat together), moe tahi (stay together), elements that are created when staying on a marae.

Another development in the cultural programme has been a women's sleepover once every 10 weeks for the women to connect, giving them their own space to be together. "That's been really rewarding to be with just the women, as they are a minority group within the programme," says Kohe. The last sleepover the women sat together and made nga whetu (stars) and putiputi (flowers) from harakeke (flax). From going to harvest the flax to sitting together, singing, talking, and laughing. "It was very new for a lot of women."

Kohe and Rawiri Pene started the cultural programme 17 years ago with a one hour a week kapa haka group and it has grown from there. Rawiri has passed on the Tikanga Advisor role, to work as Higher Ground's liaison and Pou Oranga (Pillar of Wellness) at Te Whare Whakapiki Wairua (The House that Uplifts the Spirit) Alcohol and Other Drugs Treatment Court.

"Both Rawiri and Kohe have been instrumental in modelling living in recovery. Their whole whanau is part of it and show a very healthy way of living," says Programme director Johnny Dow. "Kohe's work of going to see residents that have been through treatment on a continuing care basis is excellent. I think she has done an exceptional job, they both have. Exceptional.

“Higher Ground Board of Trustees commitment to bi-culturalism has helped challenge us and increased the number of Maori we have in the programme.”

Within its existing framework, the cultural programme extends what Higher Ground offers clients. Alongside the activities that people see is a philosophical and structural base. Since 2016, Higher Ground has worked on a Maori Health Strategic Plan, updated every two years. All Maori staff have contributed. “It’s an important part of Higher Ground having a strategic plan we keep revisiting and seeing what we have accomplished and where we need to go in the future,” says Johnny. “It’s little steps all the time.”

In 2010, Rawiri Pene and Johnny Dow met at Higher Ground with Maori leaders within the addiction field and were challenged to become a stronger bi-cultural organisation.



Taonga worn by senior wahine.

“So over the last 10 years we have moved the Maori programme forward more and more, slowly it grows and grows which is really important,” says Johnny. “It’s strengthened our relationships with iwi and outside organisations like Orakei Marae and Hoani Waititi Marae and with organisations such as Wings Trust, Odyssey and Salvation Army.”

Alongside new initiatives, Tikanga Advisor Kohe Pene, clinical staff member Rob Tua and other staff continue their regular weekly groups for powhiri, the Paua Ceremony for graduates, kapa haka, Te Roopu Mauri Ora and Parenting.

Around 40% of Higher Ground clients are now Māori. Says Kohe Pene: “I guess unfortunately, it’s because we get a lot of Māori coming from Corrections. For the women, their motivation to be here is because their children are their priority. A lot are methamphetamine users as well.

“They fit the bill in areas there is funding and beds for. Something that keeps me here is my belief that Higher Ground is the best treatment centre in the country, if not in the Southern Hemisphere, and I would like Māori to have access to the best. I feel glad that the numbers have risen so they are getting quality treatment.”

Te Reo is taught where it will be remembered. Male residents learn the mihi (formal speeches) and women learn the karanga (call) something they can take with them and use if they have a need to. Residents learn a pepeha introducing

themselves in Māori by naming the places and people they are connected to and in Higher Ground that they are alcoholics and addicts.

The cultural programme supports Māori back to their culture and all residents have the opportunity to experience the indigenous culture of Aotearoa (New Zealand). “Once upon a time it was optional and I liked that because the people who attended really wanted to be there.

“A few years back it was decided to try it as compulsory and part of me was hesitant, because I felt I was going to be confronted with people that didn’t want to be there.

“There is a saying in the 12-Step Fellowship rooms, “Acceptance is the answer to all my problems today”, that means feeling okay with where someone is at right now. Those people will initially stand at the back, I just let them be in that space, it is a process.

(senior) that is when it is their time to lead.

“We are aware that each iwi have their own tikanga (ways of doing things). We ask residents to leave these ways at the door and take on the therapeutic tikanga within the programme here.”

When residents graduate, they hear the story of Paua and how her colours represent inner beauty. “We’ve written a waiata and a play about the story and we usually get those who come on the marae noho to show the teina (junior residents). It gives them a different picture of the story when they’ve seen it acted out.”

They wear cloaks, costumes and masks made by ex-residents and the story is mimed, allowing residents not to be shy about acting, with a narrator telling the story. “It’s really lovely to get participation. This leaves a positive residue for the next month or so. When residents hear this story

## **Nāu te raurau, nāku te raurau, Ka ora ai te iwi With your food basket and my food basket Together we will flourish.**

“I don’t think I’ve ever had anyone stay there their whole treatment. By the end, they have come all the way up to the front where they start leading. I always love it when they do their Paua Ceremony and say ‘when I first came in here I really didn’t want to be in this group’ and I smile to myself because I remember.

“By the time they are up the front, they are very proud that they can lead the haka, do the mihi/karanga and do things that they never dreamt they could do, that’s a big success for me, having those that really didn’t want to be there have a change of heart.

“I’m aware we have all different backgrounds. Many people have been raised in families where Māori were put down, or they have had bad experiences with Māori and so they are confronted with racism. I am able to hold those who struggle to be in the cultural space as I believe people do not want to be and feel this way.”

“When they have the courage to stay with the process and work through these uncomfortable feelings, they leave with a different experience of Māori culture. This would have to be one of my greatest rewards.

“For those who are fluent, and confident in their Māoritanga, their challenge is to have patience and tolerance with others who are learning. It is about slowing them down, letting them know there is a process here and when they are the tuakana

every week they remember the images from the play.”

By the end of the rahui (Covid 19 period) a number of ex-residents had been waiting to return and claim their Pounamu, which had been put on hold. This signifies they attended 90 12-Step meetings in 90 days since graduation. At the ceremony graduates share about their experience of doing this. Residents get to ask questions, make acknowledgements and then the ex-resident receives a pounamu (greenstone) and a Papa Taumata tee shirt.

Even during 2020, there has been a Hineora (women) and Tamatu (men) ceremony for graduates who have attended four sets of 90 meetings in 90 days within two years, are doing fellowship service, have a sponsor and sponsee, and are working the Steps. “Most of them do it within a year,” says Kohe.

There are currently five Tamatu and five Hineora and other people achieving their meetings, so this is building up a resource of graduates. “I’ve been here for 17 years



Higher Ground hall's marae noho/stay.

now it's been a slow process but again, like the Tamatu/Hineora I feel the cultural programme is starting to gain momentum."

Kohe has started travelling to Tauranga monthly to meet with ex-residents who travel from Kirikiriroa (Hamilton), Rotorua, Waihi and surrounding areas to strengthen their connection and recovery journey.

"These people came through Papa Taumata (Higher Ground) at different times and they don't know each other until they get there. We do a round of whanaungatanga (introductions) they share about their time in treatment. This is what connects them to each other; they really understand each others language.

"One woman was struggling to go to 12-Step meetings and another woman said 'come with me' and helped bring her back into the fold. We have a shared kai together and by the end everyone is swapping phone numbers. My hope is that people who are contemplating coming into treatment will start going to these groups and get to hear about what it is like at Higher Ground.

"I understand that a lot of them can't travel up here weekly for pre-admission or After Care groups and visits. Therefore, going to

local 12-Step meetings and seeing a familiar face from these groups will help them feel more part-of and keep them focused on their well-being. Our aim is to support the newcomer as well as those who have been through our programme."

Kohe plans to establish a similar group in Northland. "My experience is ex-residents who live outside of the Auckland region have so much love and gratitude for this programme. A common comment I hear is, 'Higher Ground saved my life'. They just cannot do enough for us. Because they live so far away, they cannot come here and give back, so when they hear Higher Ground is coming to them, there is lots of excitement."

Kohe is grateful that Higher Ground has been open to doing things differently culturally. The senior management team have been supportive in making space available within an already busy programme for the cultural component. Staff within the organisation have stepped up taking on learning karakia, waiata and genuinely wanting to work culturally where possible within their own workspace.

"Papa Taumata has been given scholarships

for Māori, giving them the opportunity to have a go at working here, to see if it is something, they might like to do. I've got a lot of gratitude for what Higher Ground is currently doing culturally." ■



Graduating residents leave a piece of paua on the pou/post in the courtyard at Higher Ground.

## NEW DIRECTIONS, NEW LIFE

A new face in the front office of Higher Ground is Josh Kemp, who started training on a year's scholarship from Te Rau Ora and was employed full time in August.

"I've had an amazing year," says Josh. "I've been grateful every day I come to work and when I walk in those doors. It's such an awesome feeling, continuing to help others where I have been helped to find my purpose and my place. Even when I'm at home I look forward to coming to work."

Josh graduated from Higher Ground in March 2018 and was interested in training in the addiction field. "I was anxious imagining myself working in the place that actually got me well. I was so afraid of what that might look like, and of being turned down but I slowly built the courage to talk to somebody."

He was encouraged to send in his resume and was interviewed for the scholarship by Higher Ground's Programme director, Johnny Dow and Tracey Potiki from Te Rau Ora Strengthening Maori Health and Well-Being.

Josh considers himself really fortunate to be in a three-way relationship with Te Rau Ora and Higher Ground where he is now employed full-time as a Residential Support Worker. He is also supported in completing his level 4 mental health and addiction studies.

Josh is a qualified line mechanic, and had worked as a builder, fabricated steel worker, on construction sites, as a digger operator and in agriculture.

"I never thought I'd see myself working with my thoughts and my mind, I was so used to working with my hands. It's a lot different from the mahi that I normally do, the things I've done in my past."

Director Johnny Dow says it has been important for Higher Ground in partnership with Te Rau Ora to increase the number of Māori working in addiction systems.

Josh came to Higher Ground through the Alcohol and Other Drugs Treatment Court, having spent most of his adult life between the ages of 25 and 38 in prison. He is now three and a half years drug-free.

"He's been great," says director Johnny Dow, "It's been fantastic. We'll keep employing him. We have another trainee Lusan Turton this year as well."

The Health Workforce funds Te Rau Ora to provide opportunities and work placements to develop the Maori



Josh Kemp

workforce. Higher Ground has been part of this programme for many years. Josh was able to train within the addiction treatment system under the Hoe Rua programme.

"It took maturity for me to wake up and see the light," says Josh. "But it was the help of the Drug Court that paved the way and showed me what change would look like if I stuck to it." ■

# A young addict finds recovery

She was only 20 when she got to Higher Ground, but she knew she could not live much longer in her addiction. Now two years drug-free, this is one graduate's personal story.

“ I thought I had a good childhood. We lived in an okay area, I did pretty well in school and my parents always put food on the table and had the bills paid. I was told never to compare myself with others... unless I was doing worse than them, in which case, I would be blamed for not being good enough. I didn't really worry about my own happiness as a child. That wasn't what life was about. It was about being the best at school so that I could have a 'good' life.

I am a child of two immigrants. I felt abandoned when my sister was born, she was the baby and I had had eight or nine years of being the only child. My parents' migration to New Zealand brought with them their values and intergenerational trauma. Both of which I had no choice but to take on as a kid who was struggling to make sense of my identity, that is, being New Zealander and having a different culture at home. There was confusion and the feeling I didn't belong in either of my cultures.

On top of that, at 12, I realised I was gay, which instantly burdened me with the realisation that my family would never be able to accept me for my true self. That wasn't their fault. It was just what they were brought up with. But it didn't make the journey any less painful or confusing for me.

My teenage years were a tangle of internal conflict and confusion. The only space I felt comfortable in was my depression and self-harm. Academically I did quite well at school and was a high-achiever, but emotionally I was in an anguished state all the time.

I started using alcohol at 15. I was introduced to it by some friends, as just a social thing. But soon enough, I noticed that I was drinking to quieten my mind and calm my feelings, rather than to have fun. My drinking became more and more frequent. I wouldn't be satisfied unless I drank myself to complete darkness, surrendering all free will. But I didn't have to look at my behaviour because it was socially acceptable and everyone around me was doing it, or so I thought. I could get away with drinking the way I did because there was always someone worse.

The first time I used my drug of choice (cannabis) was the beginning of a slow decline. My first few times using felt like out-of-control experiences where the drug took an absolute hold and I couldn't function. This was terrifying. But as I used more, it worked more for me, and I became addicted to medicating myself with the exhilarating excitement of drugs. I chased those early highs that felt so incredible, but no matter how much I used, I never got to feel that feeling again.

Using drugs helped me forget about my depression and suicidal state at times, but as the highs got less and less, and the excitement started to wear off, I knew I was doomed because I just couldn't stop. Using wouldn't even make me feel that great, but on the other hand, I couldn't do anything without it. I would wake up in the middle of the night to use. I dropped out of university so I could use more drugs. Somehow I managed to keep jobs. I used before I went to work, during work, after work, at family functions, before meeting friends, before I went to the gym, while on the phone, while I was driving on the motorway... You name it, I was using.

I spent the last few years of my using in a continual suicidal state. I don't think I would have survived if I didn't have my own destructive sadness to keep me company.

I knew I wouldn't live for long in the depths of my addiction. I didn't want to live. Life was so bleak. It was only me and the drugs. I had become the addict of my worst imagining. I had become what I thought stereotypical low-life addicts were. I'm not proud of the things I did during this time, both to keep using and to boost my ego. I lied, manipulated and cheated those closest to me, because I thought I could get away with it. I destroyed relationships that were important to me. I broke the law like it was my God-given right. I put my life at risk every day, without so much as a thought. I tormented myself with violent hatred. My one wish was to die. My worst nightmare was making it to another birthday.

After exhausting the options to try to fix myself without looking at my drug using, I packed up and moved overseas. It was when I got there that life came crashing down. I had moved thousands of kilometres away but I was still left with me. Angry, disappointed, depressed and suicidal as ever.

On the 24th January 2018, a few weeks after my 20th birthday, I went to my first Narcotics Anonymous meeting and I've been drug-free, inclusive of alcohol, ever since.

I was introduced to the 12-Step programmes six months before I got drug free. An associate had mentioned she went to Narcotics Anonymous and had not used drugs for 10 years. I was high at the time, but hearing that was amazing even though I didn't think it would ever apply to me.



## Farewell Rumpty

Higher Ground's cat Rumpty recently received a culturally embellished haka powhiri burial. "She got a beautiful send-off," says Tikanga Advisor Kohe Pene. "I don't know if some people get a send-off like Rumpty got. I've never seen an animal get this."

There were roles for everybody who wanted to participate, karanga from the 10 most senior residents, residents digging the grave in the garden and spreading flower petals.

"Then we all went in for a cup of tea and shared memories of Rumpty. She was such a character she was in charge of the place. I think it helped everyone to feel they had a part to play, they all had opportunity to say what they needed to say for her.

"We had our first fire drill recently without her, her name was always called and she would always come down, everyone mentioned that Rumpty was not there."

I went to my first 12-Step meeting in Europe and I never used again. There's no explanation except that I felt the programme's full effect.

After being free of substances for a few months, crying and sweating myself through the initial withdrawals, I realised my malady was a lot bigger than just the drugs. I heard about Higher Ground through the N.A. network. At four months drug free, I entered into Higher Ground, with no idea what to expect. I thought I 'wasn't as bad' as my peers. I was young (20). Rehab was an old person's game. I didn't need to be here.

But the desperation to never live through the pain I had experienced again and a curiosity to heal the damaged parts of me that I didn't know existed kept me at Higher Ground. When people ask me what it was like, I often refer to it as an 'emotional bootcamp'. I thought treatment was about alcohol and other drugs. I didn't realise it was going to be about building connections, sharing my vulnerabilities and healing my trauma.

Higher Ground was far from a walk in the park. I couldn't lie and manipulate like I had done for so long. I had no choice but to be honest and present my true self. And quite often, that was a hurt and confused child that hadn't had her needs met. I remember some of the most painful experiences were talking about my family and my childhood. But all of the counselling, groups and support from my peers helped me to bring closure to that pain.

My family were only minimally involved, they came to family therapy twice and twice to Multiple Family Group, I pretty much did it on my own.

I didn't realise how much I had learnt and changed until after I graduated. Life as a person in recovery is really different. Not having substances to turn to means that I actually have to practice tools and strategies to look after and show love to myself. Higher Ground set the base and armed me with the most important things I need in this new life.

I am now over two and a half years abstinent of alcohol and other drugs. I am lucky enough to be working in the Mental Health and Addictions sector, using my experience to help people just like me.

Higher Ground still plays a big part in my life. It's the place that gave me what I have today so, how could it not?

I go to 12-Step meetings regularly, do service and stay in touch with my peers. I need those meaningful connections and the recovery community around me to keep me well.

My outlook now is completely different. I'm excited to be alive and I'm stoked that I can wake up each day and have purpose. I have so much to look forward to. It takes some work and commitment to maintain my recovery but the return I get from living drug free is beyond anything I ever expected for myself. I don't know what I thought a 'life beyond my wildest dreams' looked like in my addiction, but the life I am living now is incredibly rich and meaningful. I wouldn't have it any other way. ”



## WISHING YOU ALL THE BEST

Season's greetings and best wishes to all of our friends, well-wishers, readers and supporters. The year 2020 brought exceptional challenges, navigated safely so far at Papa Taumata (Higher Ground) which has continued the essential work of saving lives affected by addiction.

Thanks for your understanding in the restrictions which have been important to safeguard the health and well-being of the house during the Covid 19 period.

Thank you each and every one for your on-going support and wishing you well in the coming year.

*From Higher Ground Board of Trustees and staff.*



## Referrals

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.

## Donations

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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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](mailto:admin@higherground.org.nz)

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