



Cultural family group facilitators, from left counsellors Mary Caffin, Robert Tua and Tikanga Advisor Kohe Pene.

# A cultural way of working

**A trial Cultural Multiple Family Group is being held on Wednesday evenings, with up to eight Māori Pasifika residents and family members attending.**

Says Tikanga Advisor Kohe Pene: “Sad to say, but what a lot of Māori Pasifika have in common is they have experienced domestic violence, neglect, suicide, sexual abuse alongside alcohol and other drug abuse within the whānau. When these things are talked about in this group, we can go to another level because unfortunately the people in the group know these stories all too well.”

The group does similar therapeutic work to the other Multiple Family

Groups happening on Wednesday evenings and operates in similar ways, but also incorporates cultural elements. “We thought we would trial this as we know the difference and what bringing tikanga into the space would provide, so people could feel supported in their culture,” says Kohe.

Families steeped in Māoritanga are appreciative. The group opens with a mihi (formal welcome) from the senior resident. A Samoan whāriki (mat) is

spread on the floor with a harakeke (flax) placed on it representing whānau.

The group continues with whakawhan-aungatanga for participants to introduce themselves in turn, so everybody gets a picture of who is in the room. Residents say how many days they have been in house. Friends and family identify their connection to the resident.

# WE DO RECOVER

## He thought he would die an addict. Now 22 years drug-free, a Higher Ground graduate's story.

**“I** started experimenting with drugs when I was around 10 years old and I didn't stop using until I walked into the doors of Higher Ground at the age of 39.

My whole life revolved around drugs, drinking and crime. That's all I expected and all I thought it would ever be.

I first started getting into trouble at nine or 10 years of age. A childhood friend and I burgled my Nana's house in Takapuna and my Nana decided to teach me a lesson and take me down to the police station and have a cop talk to me. He found out we had burgled three or four of the neighbours' houses, had been wagging school and had bags and bags of shoplifted stuff hidden under our house.

I cannot remember what happened but the theory of scaring me straight didn't work. I was in and out of police stations and jails for the next 30 years and it was all drug or drink related.

I came from a pretty good, middle-class family. I had quite a good upbringing. I was pretty good academically but behaviour-wise I wasn't, even from a young age I was always in trouble. I felt like I was the black sheep of the family.

At the same time I started experimenting with sniffing glue I found out from a neighbour that my old man was actually my step-father. That must have affected me. My parents never talked about it. My step-father was a heavy drinker, whether he was an alcoholic I don't know and I don't know about my real father. But certainly not my mother.

I have over 100 convictions, including nine drink-driving convictions and I never once thought I had a drink or drug problem, it was just my lifestyle and everyone else I associated with was the same.

I loved drugs, I loved getting high and I'd do anything to get there. I was an intravenous drug user for many years, I went through a stage of loving the whole process, from getting ready to shooting up. I always thought this was my life and I would more than likely die with a needle in my arm.

In 1999 I was getting on the methadone programme, addicted to morphine, speed and benzodiazepines. I was just hanging in there with my partner and three children but I was sick of hiding my drug using, being locked in the bathroom while my young kids were calling for me, sick and tired of being sick and tired.

I went to court for shoplifting and expected periodic detention but got two weeks jail. It was one week before Christmas, so if I behaved I would get half on remission and be out just before Christmas.

I was sent to the old Mt Eden prison and straight down to the medical block. I thought I was in for an easy short lag but it was the worst time of my life, cold turkey from all the drugs I was on, some I had used every day for 15 or 20 years. I thought I was going to die. But it was the first time in my life that I thought about getting help getting off drugs.

I got out and was using as soon as I got picked up. But the seed of recovery was sown.

I saw my doctor and went into medical detox. While I was there the social worker from Higher Ground visited and I must have arranged to go to see her after Detox. Which I did after walking out of medical Detox. My roommate had a seizure while coming off the same drugs as me so I walked out and was using within the hour.

But I was still sick and tired of being sick and tired. I ended up living in Wings Trust support house. I remember getting dropped off and thinking 'my life's over, no more drink and drugs'. Little did I know then, my life was just starting. Wings Trust was fantastic, a safe place to wait to go into Higher Ground.

I went into Higher Ground (at Parnell) skinny, I had teeth missing, I had a sexually transmitted disease, my hand was swollen from injecting, and that was just the outside. Inside I was broken. I hated myself for what I was doing.

At Higher Ground I learned I was born with the disease of addiction.

Higher Ground was hard, way harder than any jail sentence. I remember literally white-knuckling it, gripping the arms of the chair

through the first few groups listening to people talking about their feelings.

When I first got there I was told I would get the tools to help me out in the world and I wondered what they were. But I now find myself using the tools of recovery every day.

I loved Higher Ground after the first week or so. I couldn't go back to living my old life so I listened and did everything that was suggested. I went to Narcotics Anonymous meetings and felt at home.

I graduated and went to live at Higher Ground's Calgary support house which helped me a lot to build a strong foundation. I did heaps of Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings and I stuck with people in recovery.

The hardest thing after giving up drugs was giving up my bros. I was bought up to 'back ya bros up 100 per cent and stick with them'. I had friends from my childhood who I couldn't go back to. That was hard.

At that time I was not allowed to see my three children who I loved dearly. I went to a lawyer and started supervised visits and then weekends. Within a couple of years I had full custody of two of my children: as they say, the joys of recovery.

Higher Ground and NA saved my life, 100 per cent. They gave me a lot of things but the biggest was hope, hope that I could live without drugs and drink, without committing crime to make money. Recovery gave me a conscience. It was a whole combination of things that added up to me being able to deal with life outside.

I was abstinent from drugs for 22 years on August 14 this year. I've made amends, I've done service, I have gratitude, I have hobbies, I have a job, I travel, I get trusted with the most important things in my children's lives, my grandkids. I love being a granddad (one of them is showing me a Tic Tok dance as I write this). I firmly believe I would have been dead years ago if I didn't go to Higher Ground. It was truly life changing for me.

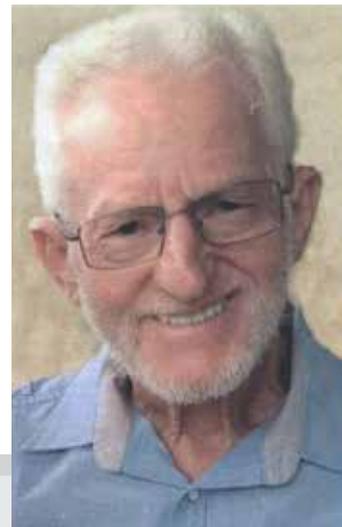
I don't really talk about my using out in the world. There's no way to explain addiction to people who haven't experienced it. I've learned not to glamorise it.

I got a reminder last week, through the childhood friend who I got into trouble with as a kid, who I used hard drugs with and went to jail with. We both went to register for the methadone programme and I decided to go Higher Ground and he went on the programme. I lost contact with him but last week found his address and went to visit him. He was physically and mentally broken, still living like we used to live and still on methadone 22 years later.

I've changed and I've left that life behind. We do recover. Early recovery is hard but the rewards are endless. One day at a time, I am a grateful recovering addict. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and thanks to the counsellors while I was at Higher Ground. You helped change me and my family's lives. Thank you." ■

# FAREWELL FOUNDER BOARD CHAIR KARL ROBINSON

It is with sadness that Higher Ground acknowledges the passing of Karl Robinson, a founder trust board member and chair of the board for the first 14 years. His enormous contribution was recognised in 2002 when he was made a Member of the The New Zealand Order of Merit (MNZM).



“Karl had a huge community spirit and drive to help people less fortunate,”

says Higher Ground founder and board chair Janet Colby, whose vision for a therapeutic community of recovery brought people such as Karl Robinson together and which resulted in the establishment of Higher Ground.

Karl made a big contribution to the strength of Higher Ground as it is today, using his connections in the community and the business world, fund-raising, talking to service organisations. “Without Karl we wouldn’t be where we are now,” says Janet.

Karl worked tirelessly and voluntarily for Higher Ground and for people affected by addiction, continuing to contribute after he had retired from his full-time job as an executive for Fletcher Challenge and later moved to Australia.

In 1983, the idea for Higher Ground was born and a steering committee of concerned people met for a year to shape Higher Ground’s vision. That influential Board stayed together largely for the next two decades.

It is fair to say that without Karl, Higher Ground would have remained no more than a hope in the minds of the other founders. He took steps to turn a dream into a tangible reality by ensuring a charitable trust was formed, funding was available, and premises and other resources were secured.

Karl was responsible for finding the original premises in Manurewa in 1984 and negotiating a generous lease from Fletcher Challenge. When Higher Ground had to move elsewhere (first to Remuera, then Mt Eden and then Parnell) he drew on his contacts and persuasive skills to ensure that satisfactory accommodation was always available.

“I loved working with Karl because he challenged us to broaden our vision,” says Janet. “He ran a very tight ship for the 20 years or more that he was on the board. Karl had great foresight in terms of our long-term goals to buy a property.”

He was determined to find permanent residence and ensure Higher Ground was financially stable. As a result he negotiated on behalf of Higher Ground to buy its first property in Parnell and to secure funding to give the organisation a stable capital base, so it could continue to deliver the programme which has helped so many people and will continue to do so in future years.

Higher Ground was based in Parnell for 15 years, the last five years of which the board looked for larger premises. He was instrumental in the process of buying and moving to Te Atatu Peninsula before retiring.

Higher Ground’s reputation was to a great extent due to the indefatigable commitment of Karl who worked evenings, weekends and workdays to ensure Higher Ground not only survived but flourished. He set a standard for staff, his fellow trustees and most importantly, the residents which energised everyone. For all of this he received no material reward and would have been offended if one were offered.

Says Board member Paul O’Sullivan: “Karl was there when times were tough, when there was very little money around, when there wasn’t the support from government that the trust has been able to enjoy in more recent years, so they were running on the smell of an oily rag for a long time. Karl’s dedication was a big part of keeping the place afloat steadily over a number of years slowly building it up from initially what was a very small operation.”

Higher Ground under Karl’s chairmanship and since, has defended its philosophy and stuck to its core business, adapting the programme through continued review

and ever-changing patterns of drug use. Whenever Higher Ground experienced problems, he sought out and enlisted the help of outside professionals. If he did not manage to persuade them to join the Board he ensured their expertise was available to the organisation on a continuing basis. He was known for repeating this process whenever Higher Ground was short of material resources. He would or could not accept that any problem was beyond solution.

Says Paul O’Sullivan: “Karl was always very direct, very focused, very keen on the board operating the right way and following the right protocols, keeping meetings on track. He was very business-like. He was a good solid chairman, very good at bringing in additional expertise at any given time when we had a specific project. He had quite a wide network and was always proficient at tapping people on the shoulder to assist.”

Higher Ground developed without a model or overseas template to guide it. It was borne from the frustration and experiences of people like Karl who had been affected by the addiction of a precious family member and were determined to do something to help.

There were some mistakes and wrong turnings along the way, but Karl’s dedication as Board chair helped ensure that Higher Ground survived and grew as a rehabilitation programme with a reputation for integrity, professionalism and effectiveness.

In his private life, Karl was a Gold Medal ballroom dancer, and a keen sportsman with major achievements in tennis and golf. He and his wife Maureen were awarded the Paul Harris Rotary award for services to Auckland Downtown Rotary, and his services to the community were acknowledged when he was made a Member of New Zealand Order of Merit. Karl is survived by his wife and soul mate of over 60 years Maureen, daughter Jan and grandson Julian. ■

## A cultural way of working continued

The group closes by singing the Serenity Prayer in te reo Māori. A bowl of water with pounamu at the bottom allows participants to wash their hands and sprinkle themselves at the end and leave the group processes behind.

Here families are able, often for the first time, to express how it has been for them during the active addiction of the resident. They read out their letters about the impact of addiction, and residents are able to take those letters away and work on a response to bring back to share with family.

"Some processes I find quite heavy," says Kohe. "I'm grateful that whānau feel a level of safety that they can be honest about the negative impact they have felt in the past by their loved ones behaviour during their active addiction.

"A lot say when they are asked, that they've never had the opportunity to tell this person what it was like for them, that whenever they would try the person would get up, walk out and leave. To have that person sit and really hear what they have to say has been really valuable for the whānau and the resident as well."

There is a different level of vulnerability in the group, she says, and a level of safety to go to places that they might not feel okay to in other spaces.

The group can explore what it was like being raised with neglect and feeling unsafe, and how this pattern of parenting has been repeated. "The raw honesty of being responsible for their behaviour now as adults in recovery instead of continually blaming and justifying their actions is really good for the whānau and residents."

At this time, not all Māori Pasifika clients are able to attend Cultural Multiple Family Group, as the number of Māori Pasifika continues to grow within the programme.

Counsellor Robert Tua, one of the co-facilitators of the group along with counsellor Mary Caffin, says cultural aspects of the programme scared some people coming into Higher Ground.

By the time the residents attend Cultural Multiple Family Group they are grateful their families could come into Higher Ground and get a sense of what they have been doing. Likewise, family members who took part were inspired to look at their own relationship with addiction.

For Robert Tua, the main themes of Māori and Pasifika families were violence and trauma. Domestic violence was a big family issue, not just amongst Māori and Pasifika.

"One of the things I liked about the group was working with our men and being able to confront them in a safe manner in regard to the impact they've had on their loved ones and seeing the growth, seeing how they responded. A lot of them have always responded with anger so it

was about being able to hold that part of themselves and remain engaged."

Kohe and Robert are both happy with the way the group is going and confident about the importance of Cultural Multiple Family Group.

Says Kohe: "Some non-Māori Pasifika people have both parents and families that were quite stable. They still grapple with addiction but not with the generational neglect so it is quite difficult for some Māori Pasifika to be able to talk about that in a room where you have non-Māori with both parents sitting beside them looking well resourced. The struggle is still very real in addiction, but their resources are a lot different from the ones Māori Pasifika have."

Robert sees his role being to help those in the group, including families who do not have the support of a therapeutic community around them when they leave. The Cultural Multiple Family Group has been an important way for families to regain their voices in relation to the person in treatment. "That is one of the really good things about the group, learning how to empower their family members."

Says Kohe: "I'm really grateful to Papa Taumata Higher Ground to being open to this group to see how it could be of value to Māori Pasifika people and their whānau recovering from the taniwha of addiction." ■

## 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.

## Trustees

Janet Colby	Counsellor & Chairperson of the Trust
Antonia Fisher QC	Barrister
Fiona Howard	Psychologist
Janine Parsons	Public Sector Area Manager
Karl Robinson	Consultant & Hon. Trustee
Marino Te Moana	Minister
Paula Parsonage	Consultant
Paul O'Sullivan	Company Director
Shane Hussey	Chartered Accountant
William Rainger	Public Health Physician

## Contact

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

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)

[www.higherground.org.nz](http://www.higherground.org.nz)