



NGĀ TAONGA

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PŪRĀKAU OF WHĀNAU JOURNEYS OF RECOVERY AND WHĀNAU ORA

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Ngā Taonga, March 2023

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Let the law be right for whānau experiencing mental distress and/or addiction
while in the criminal justice system



HE TURE
KIA TIKA

Karakia whakawatea

Waerea i runga, waerea i raro
Waerea kia pure, waerea kia para
Tiraki ana te kapua mōkinokino
Manaha ana te whenua taurikura
Tārake a Nuku, tīhore a Rangi
Kia mahea te hua mākihikihi
Tūturu whakamaua kia tina na!
Tina! Haumi ē, hui ē, tāiki ē!

Cleansing blessing

Clear it above, clear it below
Clear so it is purified, and it is free
The gloomy clouds lift and the bountiful land is clear
The land is cleared and the skies have
peeled open
Let the way forward be free
Clear the path for us to walk upon
Bind it and make it so!
Join, group, and affirm

This karakia whakawatea is a cleansing karakia, in that it draws on the metaphors found in te taiao (the environment) grounded in te ao Māori philosophical whakapapa that acknowledges our connectedness to Ranginui (Sky Father) and Pāpātūanuku (Earth Mother). The karakia asks that the wayfarers may travel safely by lifting the gloomy clouds or negative impacts on their journey and that their pathway forward to a new homeland is made clear. We offer this prayer of protection over you, the reader, as our whānau pūrākau (stories) may incite some deep emotions within you; we welcome your tears, your anger, and your dismay about the injustices or inequities. We invite you to be part of our rōpū and the movement that is He Ture Kia Tika – Let the Law Be Right.

The He Ture Kia Tika co-design rōpū have had the immense pleasure and privilege of hearing the intimate whānau pūrākau collated in this book. Whanaungatanga set the kawa (precedent) for our engagement in a culturally safe space led by lived experience researchers and collaborators guiding the process. We are profoundly humbled to have heard key moments of life stories marked by trauma, abuse, loss, grief, abandonment, and dealing with mental health and addiction issues that led many on a pathway to prison.

This collation of whānau pūrākau highlights four key themes derived from these taonga (treasured stories). Whanaungatanga highlights the importance of connecting, building trust and meaningful relationships in clearing the path for people to transform and achieve their goals and reach their destination. Tūmanako (hope) creates a space in which whānau share and show hope has been the motivating factor in their continuing journeys of recovery. In most cases, acts of aroha (love, compassion, kindness) or kia tika (doing the right thing) either became the catalyst for change or gave whānau encouragement to stay the course in realising their aspirations.

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FOREWORD

He Ture Kia Tika - Let the Law Be Right project was a five year project that culminated in a report recommending that the Government implement our proposed solutions for developing a trauma-informed justice system that collaborates with a diverse network of community-based resources. We provided an action plan that involves redistributing government funds to prioritise Kaupapa Māori services and peer support, which are at the forefront of establishing such a trauma-informed system. We emphasise the Government's responsibility to support Kaupapa Māori services; the communities who contributed to this research demonstrated exemplary trauma-informed care practices that incorporate te ao Māori and lived experience.

The report which accompanies Ngā Taonga presents a series of actionable steps to improve the criminal justice system for whānau experiencing mental distress and/or addiction while in criminal justice environments across Aotearoa (summarised on the next page). These steps were developed from a multi-year project that focused on finding effective solutions for Māori, guided by Māori perspectives. Our research is based on acknowledging the rights reaffirmed in Te Titiri o Waitangi for Māori, and our approach was guided by tikanga. Our research, "He Ture Kia Tika – Let the Law Be Right", is underpinned by and prioritises those rights.

Our four-stage project involved working with whānau and hapori to co-create pūrākau, stories that offer insights into lived experiences of recovery journeys; we also drew on data from whānau moving through the court system, and we connected our findings with a comprehensive literature review of recovery, whānau ora, and the cessation of offending.

Two truths became apparent throughout the stories: many of the whānau in this project had experienced trauma; and the justice system needs to adopt a trauma-informed approach. Trauma can affect a person's neurological, biological, psychological, spiritual, social, and cultural wellbeing. Thus, to reduce the risk of causing further harm, anyone working with whānau in the criminal justice system must have the tools to understand the impact of trauma.

A trauma-informed approach focuses on acknowledging what has happened to someone rather than trying to identify what is wrong with them. For Māori, a trauma-informed approach considers the importance of the wider community including whānau, hapū, iwi, and hapori. It also acknowledges intergenerational and historical trauma and incorporates a te ao Māori worldview and Māori healing concepts and practices. Trauma-informed care involves nurturing individuals so they can thrive. It prioritises treating people with kindness, humanity, compassion, dignity, respect, and generosity while upholding their mana. The relationship between whānau and those supporting them is critical for whānau healing. These relationships can foster safety, security, hope, and trust. Trauma-informed care also respects the autonomy of whānau. It creates opportunities for them to feel empowered to make their own decisions about their lives and livelihoods (Abuse in State Care & Royal Commission of Inquiry, 2023).

In recent years, Aotearoa has implemented a criminal justice reform plan with the goal of improving the system by utilising evidence in all aspects. Our research indicates that achieving this transformation requires culturally appropriate methods of gathering evidence at the grassroots level, in collaboration with government agencies and sectors involved in the criminal justice system. The primary objective of He Ture Kia Tika was to partner with whānau who have experienced incarceration to co-create a more effective justice system in Aotearoa. Ngā Taonga exemplifies how we can learn by taking the time to read the stories of whānau who have experience our complex, and often traumatic justice, health and social care systems.

We invite you to read, reflect and join us in our movement to reduce discrimination and create transformative change,

Katey, Stella, Dave and Jess

LET THE LAW BE RIGHT FOR WHĀNAU EXPERIENCING MENTAL DISTRESS AND/OR ADDICTION

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. CREATE THE FOUNDATIONS FOR A TRAUMA-INFORMED JUSTICE SYSTEM

- Establish a Māori justice authority/entity to provide cross-sector, strategic leadership for trauma-informed justice innovation.
- Grow regional partnership hubs that direct resources to iwi, hapū, and hapori to ensure te ao Māori approaches to trauma and whānau healing across Aotearoa.
- Provide trauma-informed relational engagement education for all professionals interacting with the justice system.
- Create a public anti-discrimination campaign celebrating stories of success.
- Reconsider drug law and policy reform to reduce harm from prohibition.

2. STRENGTHEN PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

- Devolve resources to iwi, hapū, and whānau to govern the care and protection of tamariki Māori.
- Bolster whānau ora support to wrap around whānau Māori.
- Co-determine opportunities for schools to be wellness hubs.

3. DEVELOP A SMORGASBORD OF TRAUMA-INFORMED SERVICES

- Prioritise resourcing restorative kaupapa Māori approaches to trauma and healing.
- Develop specific trauma-informed addiction and mental health support for wāhine.
- Ensure access to diverse and balanced mainstream support.
- Remove barriers to support by offering open access in, out, and back again.

4. EMBED NETWORKS OF PEER SUPPORT EVERYWHERE

- Establish a lived experience national association to provide autonomous protection and guidance.
- Resource community-based peer networks within and outside specialist trauma-informed services.
- Co-develop, resource, and establish peer navigator roles in police, court, prison, and aftercare settings.

5. ENHANCE DIVERSION AND COURT PROCESSES THROUGH COMMUNICATION AND CONSISTENCY

- Create a centralised information hub to empower whānau to access support of their choice.
- Enhance communication at points where diversion options are offered.
- Support probation officers to provide holistic whānau ora reporting to support trauma-informed sentencing.
- Ensure consistent use of Te Ao Mārama principles across all courts and monitor rehabilitative sentencing.

6. TRANSFORM THE FABRIC OF PRISONS

- Resource the Māori justice authority/entity to develop kaupapa Māori alternatives to prison.
- Integrate access to diverse rehabilitative options at every security level.
- Recognise the strengths in whānau and develop opportunities for self-improvement.

7. BOLSTER PLANNING AND SUPPORT FOR REINTEGRATION

- Enable collaboration between probation officers, whānau, hapori, and peer navigators to co-develop whānau ora plans for successful reintegration.
- Resource post-sentence restorative justice processes inclusive of a focus on whānau, hapu, and iwi reconnections.
- Develop a network of opportunities for voluntary work for whānau to connect with the community.
- Co-design, resource, and offer living skills programmes across prison security levels.

8. ADDRESS THE GROWING EXPERIENCES OF FINANCIAL HARDSHIP AND POVERTY.

WHANAUNGATANGA

BORN FROM FIERY SOUTHERN SKIES
A CHILD OF STORMY SOUTHERN SEAS
MAKING YOU HOPE
MAKING YOU BELIEVE

THAT YOU ARE A SEED
BORN OF GREATNESS
AMONGST THE SEAS
OF RANGIĀTEA!

I GIVE TO YOU THE EYES TO SEE
THE MEANS TO BE FREE
TO BE FORGIVEN, TO BELIEVE
TRUST ME.

YOU STRIVE THROUGH LIFE
TO FIND A WAY THROUGH STRIFE
AND YOU END IN PLACES
WHERE THERE ARE ONLY EMPTY COLD SPACES

AND YOU WONDER AT LIFE
AGAIN, IS THIS ALL THERE IS
BARS AND LOCKED DOORS
SOLID EMPTY WALLS

TRUST ME.
YOU WILL FIND SOMETHING TO CONNECT TO
SOMEONE TO LOVE AND LAUGH WITH
THAT MUCH, AT LEAST, IS TRUE

FOR THERE ARE BETTER THINGS OUT THERE
OUTSIDE THAT LOCKED DOOR
CAN YOU NOT FEEL IT?
SUMMERS SOFT SUBTLE CALL

SUMMER IS CALLING
WINTER HAS HAD ITS FILL
IN THE MIDST OF A MISTY MORNING
WITH THE SEA GULLS QUIET IN THEIR SOARING

BURIED DEEP IN YOUR HEART
LIVES ANOTHER STORY
OPEN YOUR EYES E HOA
TRUST ME. I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

By Jason Haitana

This chapter explores the powerful influence our connections with others can have on our lives, including how they can offer hope and contribute to healing. The stories show that healing is a personal and ongoing process that can be fortified by building trust and meaningful relationships with whānau and hapori. Many stories in this chapter (and others) emphasise the importance of strengthening identity and understanding our roots to find healing. The stories also show how small, yet consistent positive actions can add up over time to support recovery and that simple solutions are often the most effective. The chapter concludes by showing how whānau use all these tools to help on their journey towards whānau ora and recovery.

As you read through this chapter, there is a broader message that we can all consider and act upon. The stories shared in this chapter can help us realise that, under certain circumstances, we could have been in the same position. We encourage you to connect with the stories of families and see how they may transform your thinking, grow your understanding and empathy, and reduce judgment. Then, join us in taking anti-discrimination actions to remove the societal barriers that unnecessarily make journeys to whānau ora and recovery more challenging than they need to be.



SHANE'S STORY

Ko wai au

He uri tenei o te waka Tainui

I te taha o toku papa, nō Matamata

Ko Ngāti Hinerangi te marae

Ko Ngāti Raukawa te iwi

Ko Weraiti te maunga

Nō te whānau Bidois, nō te whānau Aoake

I te taha o toku whaea, nō roto o Pare Hauraki

Ngaihutoitoi te marae

Ohinemuri te awa

Ngāti Tara Tokanui ngā hapū

Ko Tapu-a-Ariki te maunga

Nō te whānau Karu, otira ka whai panga tonu ki te whānau Harrison

I nuku mai ko Ngāti Porou ki runga i a Hauraki
ka noho i Harataunga, ko Kennedys Bay

As he speaks his pepeha, Shane returns to those landscapes. His sense of connection and belonging is an essential part of his story. In Shane's own words: "I am hooked up hard."

As a young child, connections to a Māori way of life were disrupted for Shane. This disconnect had a long-lasting impact. He was raised in a whānau of nine children. His father worked hard trying to make it in a Pākehā world, including stripping away their Māori culture - but the doors never opened for him, and, despite all his mahi, he received very little. Shane describes how this sense of dissatisfaction in life led his father to drink.

Shane's first experience with the police happened when his Dad, along with one of his uncles, was arrested for robbing shoes for the whānau. It was the first time all the kids had

new shoes. But the excitement only lasted for an hour before the police came and took back the stolen goods. Shane remembers his Dad was very hard-working but always felt that “We do all the work, and someone else gets the money.”

Kai was always a big thing in Shane’s household. There was always whānau staying, and always a lot of drinking going on, which meant food would run out. As kids, Shane and his siblings started stealing kai to feed whānau. The adults made them feel like heroes for bringing home treats, and no one really cared that it was stolen.

In telling his story, Shane emphasised that his parents were very loving and never hurt him. Instead, they themselves were just not in a good place:

“They tried to live a Māori life and share their place with wider whānau; it just happened to be beer they shared instead of kai. They lived in a world when it wasn’t nice to be Māori.”

Shane and his whānau would often move around, sometimes switching homes monthly. They never stayed in one area for more than a year. Before being embraced by Hoani Waititi Marae, Shane says the place he stayed at longest was Paremoro prison.

Schooling was a constant in Shane’s life, but his whānau were always the “poor brown family in an otherwise asset-rich farming community”. Feeling that they were the butt of jokes and often looked down on, he and his siblings developed a negative mindset. They started stealing milk, a luxury for his whānau. There was never a perception that thieving was wrong in Shane’s household because “when you are hungry, that’s what feels wrong.”

Getting on “that stairway”

In his early teens, Shane’s whānau moved to urban west Auckland and stayed for some time. He started to feel independent, finding a group of peers with whom he started on “that stairway”. His first brush with the law was at 12 years old when he stole from a neighbour and gave the stolen items to kids at school. The police soon turned up.

Although Shane enjoyed attending Bruce McLaren Intermediate, things changed when he got to college. He didn’t like secondary school and was often truant. During this time, he started stealing cars. Shane was caught and sent

to Waikeria prison on a 15-month youth justice sentence. Shane says he can’t recall ever being offered police diversion during this period.

Later, Shane tried painting houses alongside his dad, but despite their hard work, they earned little money. Shane returned to stealing cars, seeing cars as a symbol of success and independence. He bought into the whole ‘gangsta’ lifestyle and travelled around the country, stealing cars and drinking for courage. He associated with gangs to sell cars, and his sisters became involved with gang leaders. The gangs became places of support for his lifestyle and an informal place to barter/trade in illegal goods. Eventually, Shane stole to order, with car yards buying directly from him.

In 1985, aged 17, Shane received a life sentence for killing the man involved in raping his sister. He was released after serving nine years and six months, with 14 months on remand.

During his first few years in prison, Shane says he learned to be humble, keeping his eyes down and isolating himself to avoid trouble. He was stuck with the Mongrel Mob, as they presumed his shooting was gang related. But he tried to avoid that story, never feeling that the gangs provided him protection.

Deciding to live a deliberate life

Shane’s turning point came when he met Ana Tia, a kuia prison volunteer. He learnt kapa haka, talked with peers, and “straightened” his thinking. Ana Tia could “get growly” at Shane and his peers, but it came from the “nana” perspective and was accepted.

Even before meeting Ana Tia, Shane had decided to live a “deliberate life”. It was a moral decision; he knew he didn’t want to be in the same position again, wasting 10 more years of his life.

Being the golden child

By the end of the sentence, Shane was seen by Corrections as a “golden child”; he was called on to teach te reo and kapa haka to peers. He would be instructed, “Now go do kaumātua for prison; do pōwhiri for Ministers.” He was also brought out of prison to speak to at-risk youths. Corrections would take him from his cell to deliver “scared straight” talks to kids in Ōtara. Shane recalls feeling odd because he

doesn’t think of himself as scary. He often thought, “They may see much more scary things in their lives than me.”

The talks never sat well with him. Shane believes that a negative approach does not create a positive impact and that most Māori are not scared of prison; rather, they are “mainstream” inside and have whānau in prison. Prison is normalised.

What impacts people in prison is their disconnection from whānau. Shane witnessed this sense of loss when he heard gang members crying at night at the thought of missing crucial steps in their child’s life or their parent’s funeral.

“But...then the next day, they put on their outer shield of toughness. How gangsta is prison? When you miss out on this. We need to un-gangsta the place.”

Hoani Waititi

In prison, Shane missed 10 years of living an intentional life. When he was released, he knew he could no longer cruise through life; he wanted to live his life deliberately. Ana Tia helped him develop strong relationships with Hoani Waititi Marae, and the parole board accepted his release when Tā Pita came to support him. While in prison, Shane found children’s books on te reo written by Hoani Waititi, and it felt like many things were coming together. His “fear of things all Māori” was replaced with a burning desire to know more. When he got out of prison, Shane did not care where he started out on the marae: “...cleaning the toilets. That’s the start, cleaning someone else’s shit and mimi”.

Within weeks, he began visiting people in prison and working with them to support their release.

Some 20 years later, Shane now humbly stands on the marae, working tirelessly with whānau caught up in the system. He draws on his own experiences to offer a different pathway. One founded on te ao Māori cultural perspectives. Shane helps to run two-day tikanga programmes in prison. The programmes are always well attended. Together, Shane and the participants sing waiata and take time to kōrero. Shane aims to support his peers by encouraging them to:

“Exercise their brain [by learning] some waiata from your area. It’s not just learning how to say the words but understanding what they mean.

Learn your pepeha - something relevant to you.”

The power of living and breathing tikanga Māori

To illustrate the powerful impact of cultural connection through living and breathing tikanga, Shane recounts a story from his time in prison, when he wanted a kapa haka team to come in and work with whānau in prison. He wrote to Ngapo Wehi (a kapa haka legend) once a month over two years. Ngapo finally came, bringing 200 performers to support all whānau in prison. They started with a patere (secular chant) called “E Pā tō Reo”:

“The roof lifted. And I thought, ‘Wow, that is kapa haka!’ I called a practice the next day, and our group had quadrupled. We all felt it. We all wanted some of that. And that’s right, you can still be part of your gang, but here, can we be Māoris? Let’s row in our canoes and see how far we can get.”



ANDRE'S STORY

Ko Te Reinga toku awa

Ko Waihou-nui-a-rua toku marae

Ko Waimirirangi toku whare tupuna

Ko Ngāti Te Reinga toku hapu

Ko Te Rarawa, ko Ngāpuhi oku iwi

Ko Ngātokimatawhaorua toku waka

Ko Andre Matthews toku ingoa

Early life

Andre's whānau come from the Hokianga, and he feels a powerful connection to Aotearoa's Far North – it's where "his roots are". Andre moved around and outside of Aotearoa in his early years. Mostly, he enjoyed a "relatively stable" childhood in Australia.

Though his stepdad worked hard to provide for the family, they didn't have much money. By the time Andre turned 13, he was "shoplifting and getting in with the wrong crowd... [he went] from being bullied to becoming the bully and getting into trouble".

At home, Andre had free rein and did what he wanted. Each time police picked him up, he rang his parents to come and get him. Nothing they did could discourage him from his path of destruction; eventually, Andre was sent to a Boy's Home. By the time he was 16 years old, Andre had been experimenting with harder drugs, including heroin. Before long, he was using heroin every day. The type of crime Andre committed also changed from minor to more serious. Andre became stuck in an endless cycle:

"...of going to prison and getting back out, nothing changing, and getting back out to the same world and not knowing anything else but to get into crime to survive. Well, I call it survival. Everyone I knew was a criminal, and anyone that wasn't a criminal, I didn't want to know. That cycle went on for 20 years, maybe longer".

Same cycle, different place

Andre had three children over the course of his different periods of incarceration.

"I created three children who, although not caught up in the criminal world directly, were caught up in it because I was not around."

Andre went to prison for around four years when his twins were born. After only a few weeks of release, he went back inside for nearly five more years.

In November 1999, following his release, Andre was escorted back to New Zealand by two police officers. They left him at the airport with virtually nothing. Still experiencing addiction, Andre went straight from the airport to find a source of drugs. He found himself back in the same cycle of destruction – this time centred around his new meth dealers and new opportunities for crime. It wasn't long before Andre was imprisoned in New Zealand.

Compared to his experiences of incarceration in Australia, Andre found New Zealand prisons old and primitive. He described Mt Eden prison as "like a time warp", where incarcerated gang members wanted to take his shoes. Andre felt he learned nothing from being locked up – if anything, it just gave him access to more people in the criminal world. When he was released from jail, Andre stepped out of prison right back inside the revolving doors of destruction.

After living outside of prison in New Zealand for a few years, Andre snuck back into Australia, where his third child was born. He connected with his sister, who was deeply involved in the same meth world that Andre had known. Following being busted again for drugs, Andre was deported back to New Zealand and sent to Paparua prison in Christchurch. It was a short jail term. Not long after being released, Andre was imprisoned again. At the end of the sentence, Andre moved back to Auckland, where his sister had also relocated. They lived together for some time, during which Andre re-entered the cycle of offending.

A turning point

In 2007, while incarcerated at Rangipo prison in the central north island, Andre's daughter rang him in distress, sharing the difficult times she was going through. The phone call

was a turning point for Andre. He decided he wanted to untangle himself from the web of crime and drugs his world had become. But although he knew he wanted to change, he didn't know where to start. The situation worsened because Rangipo prison lacked prisoner support programmes: "There was just nothing to do."

Reaching out

Fortunately, Andre contacted someone about going to a drug treatment unit. He was transferred to Waikeria Prison in the Waikato. Entering Hikitia, the prison's mental health and addiction service, Andre met key support people who helped him through rehab. After completing the programme, Andre was encouraged to remain at Hikitia as a mentor for other prisoners seeking drug treatment and support.

Andre stayed drug-free at the unit for two years but faced significant challenges of not using drugs when living on the outside. He was encouraged to move into a residential rehabilitation programme after release from prison. Andre contacted Higher Ground, a drug rehabilitation Trust in west Auckland, hoping to access a spot in their residential programme. Eventually, Andre was assessed and accepted.

Andre found the staff at Waikeria's Hikitia drug treatment unit and Higher Ground to be kind, constructive, and supportive – even when they challenged him on specific behaviours. When Andre was released from prison, practitioners in the drug treatment unit bought him new clothes. Once, Andre walked out of a Higher Ground group session, and his caseworker came out after him to encourage him to return to the group. He reluctantly agreed. Though deeply uncomfortable, the decision to go back and continue with the session was a significant moment for Andre: he could have left, but he chose to stay.

The Māori cultural group at Higher Ground was integral to Andre, who wanted to learn more and more about who he was and where he was from. Andre had always felt embarrassed that he knew so little about being Māori. Through waiata and haka, Higher Ground gave him the gift of Māori experiences and belonging. Andre had never known how to perform a haka. Once he learned the Higher Ground haka, he took it everywhere – including to team meetings, where he and his peers would regularly "bust out a haka".

When he left Higher Ground, Andre lived in their after-care support houses, Calgary and Wings. At Calgary, Andre was introduced to counselling sessions, which proved incredibly significant in supporting the changes he was making in his life. Andre kept in touch with his counsellor for a long time, valuing their continued support as he faced challenges along his journey. At Wings, Andre used threats and violence to reprimand others' dodgy behaviours. Despite "acting out" in these ways, the support house allowed him to stay. Andre remembers how his counsellor stuck by him every step of the way.

Eventually, Andre was transferred to a "level 4 house", which felt more like flatting than a pre- or post-treatment living arrangement. Around this time, he was supported by Higher Ground to get his full licence. They also encouraged him to study to become a support worker. Andre studied at Weltec and was offered a placement at Higher Ground for his work experience.

Andre went on to work in the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court in Auckland, where he met new peers and professionals working in the addiction field. In his last year of study, Andre returned to Higher Ground for his final placement. Once he gained his qualification, Andre entered a full-time position at Higher Ground, where he worked for several years.

Narcotics Anonymous played an essential part in Andre's early recovery from drugs. At first, Andre hated the meetings. After a while, he actively listened to the shared stories and reflected on how they resonated. Eventually, he found someone he related to and tentatively approached them as his sponsor. They agreed and became friendly ears, encouraging him to serve in the fellowship. The move was good for him. Today, Andre still draws strength from his tight bunch of friends, whom he says:

“...are always around to support each other through difficult times. We are all in recovery and understand what we are all going through. I feel we were drawn together because we were all Māori.”

Connecting with culture, whānau and peers

In 2013, Andre's Mum passed away. Higher Ground provided massive support throughout this challenging time

and made him feel genuinely valued. While at his Mum's tangi, Andre reconnected with his older sister, who was adopted at birth to non-whānau.

Particularly since his parents' passing, Andre has been inspired to learn more about his Māori culture. He has completed te reo Māori classes and plans one day to enrol in a Bi-Cultural Practice paper offered by Te Wananga o Aotearoa. He understands the challenges of being Māori and having little knowledge of your cultural heritage. He recalls seeing the whakamā amongst Māori clients at Higher Ground who didn't know the kupu of the waiata or haka.

While working at Higher Ground, Andre met his wife. Together with his stepdaughter, they formed a whānau unit. Despite a couple of times when Andre nearly destzed his relationship with his wife, they are together today. Her family is a vital source of support in his life.

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JOE'S STORY

Ko Taupiri te maunga

Ko Waikato te awa

Ko Waikato te iwi

Ko Kaitumutumu te marae

Ko Ngāti Whawhaakia te hapū

He piko he taniwha, he piko he taniwha

Taniwharau

Early years

Joe was born in Auckland's National Women's Hospital in 1976. His mother was only 17 and in an abusive relationship with Joe's Dad. His grandparents disapproved of the relationship, and, as a safeguard, they took baby Joe and raised him at their home in Greenlane. Joe remembers it as a loving environment. As the only child in the household, he was often spoiled. Tikanga and Māori kaupapa were the norm, and Joe was often at the Kaitumutumu marae in Huntly, enjoying life in a rural setting and feeling connected to iwi and hapū.

Joe enjoyed his early school years. But although he was comfortable with the academic work, he was also a sensitive, emotional child. He started stealing while in school – taking toys and other small things but did not understand why. Then, he started shoplifting. He seldom stole stuff he wanted. However, it was more for the thrill of getting away with it.

Learning the truth

When he was around 10 years old, Joe was told the truth about his family. He had grown up believing his grandparents were his parents and his biological siblings were his cousins. Joe remembers how painful it was to learn the real story:

“Why was I given away? Why didn't my Mum want me? I guess I felt hurt. They were all together, and I was the separate one. For a long time, it really bugged me. I thought my Mum didn't love me, you know, it was really hard for me to accept.”

From that point, Joe and his family worked to form a relationship. His parents wanted to be part of his life. They visited him often, and he started spending time with them on weekends.

In the meantime, other changes were happening in Joe's life. He became withdrawn and less sociable at school: “I became a nerd.” Still academically diligent, Joe was often picked on and bullied, which pushed him further into isolation.

Misbehaving teens

By 13, Joe had become heavily influenced by his stepsister. Although just two months older than him, she was smoking, drinking, and hanging out with older boys. Joe thought hanging out with “the cool kids” was great. He started smoking and drinking and soon became seen as one of the cool kids.

At the same time, Joe began to drink more openly. This was normalised behaviour at his parents' house but not under his grandparents' roof. They had tried to shield Joe from this kind of life, blaming his stepsister and mother for Joe's misbehaviour. In the end, Joe moved into his Mum's house in Sylvia Park. His biological father was no longer on the scene, so her home was free of domestic violence.

Life at Joe's Mum's house differed significantly from his grandparents' home. He had to share a room with two brothers and two sisters. Joe says, “I went from a household where I was the king to a household where I was a nobody.” Joe had to compete for attention, which he did by being naughty. He felt he was never acknowledged for anything good; this further fuelled his misbehaviour.

Joe's mother re-married, and her new husband did his best to help Joe, who says he was a “really awesome man. He raised all of us really well”.

By age 15, Joe was drinking regularly and stealing cars, and he had become a fixture in his stepsister's social group.

He liked the thrill of illegal activities; he felt accepted and belonged. He lost interest in his schoolwork and the tikanga values he had been raised with. At 16, Joe was sent to Weymouth Boys Home. Although his whānau supported him, Joe identified with those in the youth justice setting and adopted their disruptive behaviours.

Getting on the incarceration buzz

At 18, after being arrested with a workmate for burglary, Joe was imprisoned for the first time. He was denied bail and remanded in custody to Mt Eden prison. He did not like this setting at all.

“I thought, ‘Whoa! What’s happening? I’m in with the big boys now.’ I was always suffering from depression. I was really sensitive, and this wasn’t a place for me. I didn’t like this place, and it was hard. I had a big cry on the phone to my Mum.”

Joe quickly learned to hide his emotions and pretend he was “all good”. He connected with others he had known in youth justice settings and found his place in prison. He got lots of support from whānau through visits and support at court. His grandfather engaged and paid for a lawyer who eventually got him bail. Joe returned to Onehunga to live with his grandparents, but it didn’t last. Joe was now regularly using cannabis and alcohol.

It wasn’t long before Joe returned to prison. This became a cycle of getting out and going back in, with the periods of freedom becoming shorter and shorter.

“I really couldn’t survive out here. Once I got on a roll on that incarceration buzz, I felt like that was my home. It felt like that’s where I belonged, and it was tough for me to break that cycle.”

When Joe was 19, his first son was born; at 20, his second son was born. Joe’s parents were constant support, and he was seeing psychologists and psychiatrists who diagnosed him with bipolar disorder. Joe knew his erratic behaviour more likely stemmed from the increasing amount and variety of drugs he was using.

Joe loved crime. He felt he was addicted to it, and he saw himself as “the man”. Accumulating stolen property gave Joe a sense of power. He felt like Robin Hood, often giving

things away to friends and family, which made him feel valued and brought him joy. His family hated Joe’s lifestyle of going in and out of the prison system. They were openly upset with him, but they remained supportive.

By now, Joe had built a reputation he was proud of. He had no specific gang affiliations; instead, he had business relationships with all the gangs and was known as someone who could “get things”. This often meant sourcing precursors for manufacturing methamphetamine. Joe was shown how to cook meth and became a manufacturer for the gangs. As he went from gang to gang, Joe started wishing for prison time to get a break.

“There was no escape after that; I was just stuck in it...I couldn’t go anywhere by myself...I was kidnapped, stood over, threatened, guns...[I] had to look for any opportunity to escape.”

Joe felt comfortable in prison. It was a haven, somewhere to have a break from drugs, get healthy, eat three meals a day, and catch up on sleep.

By now, Joe’s parents felt they had done everything they could. To help him manage his bipolar diagnosis, they had gained access to doctors, psychologists, and medication. Looking back, Joe sees how his experiences, first in boys’ homes and then in prison, disrupted his emotional development and maturity:

“Time would freeze. I’d be stuck in there, then when I’d get out, I’d be in that same mindset...I’d just be the same, but everyone else had changed.”

During the brief periods when he was out of prison, Joe would spend time with his grandparents, reconnecting with tikanga and te ao Māori and getting rongoā, traditional healing, from his grandfather. Joe knew his behaviour wasn’t congruent with his upbringing and that something needed to change.

Planting seeds for change

Joe was sent to the Drug Treatment Unit at Spring Hill Corrections Facility, where he was given “another perspective on a different way of living”. For the first time, Joe began to see the value of education, the paths to recovery, and the possibility of another way of living.

In the unit, Joe met Simon and the team from Recovery First. They ran Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings and became role models for many in the programme. Also, for the first time, Joe put his life story into words. It allowed him to see the patterns that led him to where he was. That understanding enabled Joe to release anger, hurt, and pain. Eventually, however, Joe was kicked out of the unit and returned to mainstream prison. Upon his release, he again became immersed in the criminal drug world. But the seed of change had been planted.

A shift in thinking

The next few years followed the same addiction, offending, and arrest cycle. Now 35 years old, Joe had three children and a grandchild, but he “just couldn’t get it together”. His parents began to withdraw while still supportive; they felt too much pain and hurt. Joe’s sister challenged him strongly, reminding him that his grandson was growing up without him.

While on bail and staying with his parents, Joe contemplated what change might look like. He was assessed by the Salvation Army to enter the Bridge Programme. But just before his admission, a friend called and offered him drugs. Joe cut off his bracelet and fled. He was arrested about 12 hours later and remanded in custody.

While on remand, his lawyer mentioned the new Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court. Joe was assessed and accepted into the programme. Though he had doubts, the seed that had been planted years before had Joe thinking about “really giving it a go”.

Joe was released to Wings Trust. He had no friends there but soon found he was enjoying the programme. He was abstinent, thinking clearly, and surrounded by positivity and support. He attended 12-Step meetings and was away from anti-social associates and the drama of his earlier life. He found earning nine dollars a week humbling. He had to budget and plan and started thinking differently about life. He liked his freedom to be in the community without worrying about the police. For the first time, he was conscious of simple pleasures like the feeling of rain, wind, and sun.

Joe went into the Salvation Army Bridge programme from Wings Trust for eight weeks. He was randomly drug tested

and reported to the court every two weeks.

“What I liked about it was the Judge was holding me accountable every two weeks.”

Joe feels the routine and direction helped him learn to manage freedom and liberty. After years of being institutionalised and controlled, Joe lived freely and became part of the community. He returned to Wings post-treatment and then moved back home.

Finding strength from giving back to others

During this time, Joe became involved in NA service, immersing himself in recovery networks and giving back to others. Phase three of the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court required him to engage in community work before moving into employment or study. Matua Ra Pene, the Pou Oranga of the court, introduced Joe to his brother, Hone Pene, for his community work. Hone was involved in various community activities, mainly focusing on restoring the Whau River and the waterways. He talked about restoring tāngata through restoring the whenua and connecting to Papatūanuku. Hone reminded Joe of his grandfather; he had a strong wairua and a te ao Māori worldview and approach. Hone was warm, compassionate, and caring, and he made Joe feel that he was important. They started their days with karakia and morning readings and shared experiences, strength, and hope. Joe became the first employee of He Tohu Aroha Trust, running their upcycling enterprise where they raised native trees in a nursery and made furniture from pallets and recycled materials. Joe says the environment had never mattered to him before, but Hone changed his focus and showed him why it is essential. During his months with Hone, Joe learned how to be a role model to others coming through the court.

Graduation

Joe graduated from the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court on September 16, 2016. He was supported by his parents, some of his siblings, and many others he had built relationships with during his recovery. The event was filmed for a documentary. Joe proudly recited his pepeha and mihi to the court and his whānau. He felt he had never really achieved anything before this moment. While many tears were shed that day, they were tears of joy.

Graduation was followed by a year of probation, which Joe had always disliked. This time, however, probation was different. Joe felt empowered in recovery. He was working and supporting his family, which boosted his self-worth. His probation officer helped by meeting Joe either at work or at home. His employer, who knew about Joe's past and recovery journey, was also fully supportive.

Today, Joe is a team leader with a roading company, where he is trusted and supported:

“I pay my rent, pay my bills; all the things I never used to do. I've taken responsibility for my life and get to reap the rewards of my mahi.”

Joe acknowledges many critical people in his recovery journey, particularly his whānau, who have constantly supported him. Today, they look to him to help them strengthen their whakapapa links. When Joe's grandmother passed away, his cousin brought the whole whānau back to the marae and suggested they start to meet regularly. At first, Joe was whakamā/ashamed because of his history. He felt that he had desecrated his grandparents' name through his actions. As the oldest of the siblings, his cousin challenged him to stand up and lead. Joe was already aware that his whānau looked to him for his knowledge of whānau whakapapa. So, together, they started to wānanga/learn about their whakapapa and how to identify with their hapū, Kaitumu. Joe has also supported his stepbrothers and sisters via his stepfather, who whakapapa to te Whānau-a-Apanui. During these wānanga, they enjoy connecting and learning about their place in the history of the Kingitanga. At one of these wānanga, Joe realised his grandfather comes from Kaiaua, Ngāti Paua.

Joe has four children, including a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, who he says is “his world”. She was born while he was in recovery, and Joe is grateful she will never see the person he used to be. Joe doesn't hang out with his co-workers when they go to have a drink, preferring to get home to his beautiful little girl and his partner, who has supported him since they met. He is proud of his whare and gardens, where his wife grows vegetables and herbs while studying naturopathy. She has two children of her own; one stays with them.

When asked about his strategies for staying safe when

things get complicated, Joe says he often uses the Serenity Prayer, which he finds grounding.

“I no longer react like I used to. I'm at peace. I've found a love for myself and for others. It amazes me daily when I think about how I used to react, but now I don't have to react that way...I can't afford to go back to who I was. Those behaviours don't work for me.”

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MIKE'S STORY

Mike was born in 1970 in Sydney, Australia. His father was a New Zealand-born Pākehā of Irish descent, and his mother is from Ngāti Kahu. Her father was a Māori Land Court Judge, and her mother was a full-blood Māori who was a teacher at the original Native School in Taipa. Mike has two older brothers and a younger sister. The oldest brother, James, was brought up in Hamilton by his grandmother, and his sister and other brother grew up with Mike.

Growing up

When Mike was two weeks old, he was sent to live with his grandmother in Hamilton for about two years. He then returned to the family in Sydney.

“That disconnection, being raised by my grandmother for two years and then going back to my parents, meant that at that stage, they were just strangers to me.”

Adding to this disconnection were Mike's childhood memories of his father, which involved scenes of a drunk and violent man.

The whānau returned to New Zealand after another couple of years and lived in Waikato. Mike remembers when he was about eight and his brother was 10, his father came home drunk, and they woke up to his mother screaming. His brother went out and was hit by their father. This incident led to the marriage breaking up. Mike says his mother doesn't share much of what life was like back then, but *mamae* (pain) remains.

Getting into trouble

Mike was always up to mischief growing up – lighting fires and stealing. He started drinking alcohol when he was about 14 years old, and this was soon followed by cannabis use. He ended up at Hamilton Boys High School, which he said was “alright”. Mike was intelligent and excelled academically when he applied himself, but he wasn't into sports.

As a teenager, Mike delivered newspapers to residences and businesses. He started breaking into premises on quite a large scale, leading to 46 charges on his first arrest. Before

this arrest, he had had brief stays in various Boys' Homes for minor things, but this was Mike's first time in court. He initially appeared in Youth Court, but the Judge remanded him to the District Court, which meant he was treated as an adult. It also meant he had a life-long criminal record.

Mike left home and school when he was 16 years old. Most of his teenage years are a blur of jail stints. He did six prison lags during this period, including Corrective Detention and lags in Waikeria, Crawford, and Linton prisons. By the age of 21, Mike had over 100 convictions, comprising fraud, drugs, burglary, and some violence. He viewed prison as an “occupational hazard” and never did a hard lag. He knew how to manipulate the prison systems to make himself comfortable until he got out, and then he would carry on again till the next time.

When he was 20 years old and doing a lag in Crawford Prison in Wellington, Mike met a ‘bent’ lawyer who helped him enrol at Victoria University, where he took a range of papers, including social policy, political science, and information systems. He found a way to use his student allowance to get a chequebook, and this led to more fraudulent activities and increased drug and alcohol use. After being arrested for cheque fraud, Mike got a six-month lag in Crawford. When he got there, he got into trouble for inciting a riot and spent most of the lag “in the digger” (solitary confinement). While incarcerated, Mike spent the time thinking about, and seriously planning, an armed robbery of a bank in Hamilton.

First steps in a journey to recovery

Just before his release, however, Mike started to feel like he needed to change his life.

“When I was about a week away from getting out, I just suddenly thought that I'd had enough. I just suddenly thought, ‘Ah, fuck this.’ So, I asked the AOD counsellor to get me into rehab as soon as I'm eligible or I'll never get out. And she did.”

Mike's first experience of recovery occurred when he entered a six-month-long Therapeutic Community Programme. The programme was run by NSAD (NZ Society on Alcohol and Drug Dependence), and a switched-on character named Dustin Lamb. The programme was in a huge old hospital; it was a good experience for Mike. He completed

the programme and went from Chucks Cove in Taipa to a house overlooking Doubtless Bay. While Mike had never lived in the area before, he often visited on holidays as a child. He had a comfortable three-bedroom home; it was cheap living, and he felt like he was in paradise.

Before leaving NSAD, Mike had connected with someone who would remain a key person in his life, for the rest of his life. Gary Harwood, an alcohol and other drug counsellor from Kaitaia, taught him to play cricket, which became a passion and led to Mike regularly playing in local competitions and the indoor cricket league. Gary retired as a counsellor in February 2020 after 34 years as a frontline clinician in the sector. Mike describes him as a wonderful person, and they continue to have a close bond.

Cultural disconnection

Mike felt he was not culturally connected at this stage of his life. There had been incidental connections with iwi and marae throughout his life, but nothing substantial. He described his father as racist, which had precluded any connection to his culture in his early years. He always knew where the marae was, but there was a real disconnect.

Staying sober

Mike stayed sober for the next six years. He got work with a private training establishment as a computer trainer and enjoyed the great lifestyle of the North, with its beaches and friendly people. During this time, Mike had his first child, a daughter who is now 25 years old. She lives in Melbourne, and Mike says they are very close despite not having played much of a role in her early life. Although this was a great period in Mike's life, drugs began to re-enter his life.

“Life was pretty good, one of the best periods of my life. I started smoking dope again but didn't really think too much about it, you know, because for me, my drinking had always been appalling. I had, from a very young age, been a black-out drinker, never known how to drink any other way. But the drugs had never seemed to create the damage in my life that alcohol had.”

In his community, everyone was smoking dope – it was perfectly normal. It was around this time that Mike became aware of what he describes as *déjà vu*, and he realised he had

been having for a few years. He then started having seizures, always after experiencing the feeling of *déjà vu*. Eventually, he found out he had epilepsy. This was hard for Mike to take in, and he “lost the plot, big time”.

Back to prison

Mike became involved with a working girl from Hamilton who had visited the North. When he found out she was being mistreated by the owner of the massage parlour she worked at, Mike went down to Hamilton and assaulted him. Unbeknown to him, the incident was recorded on camera. Mike went back up North and continued to drink heavily; everything seemed to be going bad. Mike got into a local rehab. Meanwhile, the Hamilton incident ended up on Crimewatch. A friend advised him to hand himself in. Mike was sentenced to 3 ½ years in prison:

“I remember my iwi coming to my sentencing on that last lag to speak on my behalf. It was the first time, when I lived up here, my first real connection with Māori, you know, I was secretary of my marae, going to marae meetings and connected with all my cousins and first developing that connection, that sense of identity, of belonging, that this is home.”

Life unravelling

When Mike was released, he moved to Auckland and got into large-scale hydroponic cannabis growing. He was very successful at this, despite dodging gangs and police, and managed to avoid detection.

After a year, Mike moved to Hamilton and continued growing cannabis, drink heavily and use other drugs. However, following a serious run-in with one of the major gangs in Hamilton, he had to get out of town fast.

That's when “everything went pear-shaped”.

Once again, Mike entered NSAD in Marton. He saw rehab as “somewhere to go to get clean and get his act together, when he had reached the end of the line with no other options left”. He wasn't in trouble with the law at this point, but, having done it all before, Mike recognised it was inevitable. He knew his life was unravelling because of the copious amounts of drugs and alcohol he was consuming.

Mike completed the rehab programme, but his recovery didn't last long. He still did not recognise recovery as an all-or-nothing gig.

Mike moved back to Auckland, where he stayed for many years. He worked in various roles and was in a relationship with his ex-partner for about five years. They bought a house in Manurewa and had a son, who is now nine years old and lives in Tauranga. Mike says his son is “very cool”, and they are very close, but it is difficult to maintain that connection. His access to his son is cut off, and Mike doesn't get on well with his son's mother. He has initiated a mediation process to gain access through the Family Court.

After his relationship break-up with his son's mother, Mike went to live with a cousin in Wellington. His cousin was a senior gang member and lived a drug-fuelled lifestyle. Mike's daughter's 21st was coming up in Melbourne, and he wanted to be there. He applied for a New Zealand passport but found his citizenship had lapsed. This meant that Mike had to go through an extensive process of getting an Australian passport. While going through this process, Mike was in the middle of what he calls “savage” meth use. His cousin told him that having an Australian passport was “gold” and that Mike had no criminal record in Australia. Mike didn't appreciate that at the time, but he does now.

Mike went to his daughter's 21st and managed to stay sober and have a great time – so much so that he decided to move to Melbourne. Once there, he got a job working in credit management. Mike made good money and returned every three or four weeks to see his son. During this time, he was sober, but he was using more and more meth. It was then that he got a call that his cousin in Wellington had died. This was devastating for Mike; they had supported each other all their younger lives and were close in their later years. He returned to New Zealand for the tangi, which was all very painful for him. He still doesn't even know what the cause of death was.

Mike returned to Melbourne but couldn't deal with things, so he came back to New Zealand. He soon got into trouble with the law after crashing a rental car and being charged with drunk driving and other charges.

Following these events, Mike was homeless for a while and again entered rehab. This time, he entered a kaupapa Māori service called Te Ara Hou in South Auckland. He was

discharged after six weeks following a disagreement with staff about not being able to see his son.

Experiencing kaupapa Māori rehab

Mike then went to live in Cambridge and then returned to Auckland. In Auckland, he went into a brief respite at Puna Whakataa. With the help of Gary Harwood, he contacted Ngāti Hine Health Trust in Kawakawa and entered treatment there. By now, Mike was much more culturally aware, so Ngāti Hine Trust suited him:

“I think it's been a gradual thing, you know, so lucky to have an identity, so lucky to be able to know who you are and where you belong, where your connection is. It's been an important part of my recovery. It's not easy being Māori in Auckland in that sector. Everyone has all those fucking Bill of Rights and other brochures there in Māori, but there's not a lot of Māori focus, awareness or understanding of things Māori.”

After completing the programme at Ngāti Hine, Mike became the trust's first client to go into Wings Trust in Auckland. It was hard going from a kaupapa Māori rehab, which teaches clients how to do things in a Māori way, to a mainstream service like Wings Trust. For example, he was told he wasn't allowed to mihi a good friend from Ngāti Hine because it “wasn't how they do things there”.

Mike spent four-and-a-half months at Wings post-treatment, and then another 11 months as a house host. He then entered a Level 4 house, allowing him to work or study. He had to attend regular 12-Step meetings during this time but says that one of the only places he felt comfortable was Māori Narcotics Anonymous (NA), where he felt a real connection with his peers.

Conflicting times as a peer

During his time at Wings, Mike attended other support groups in South Auckland. He developed strong connections with people he was going to the long-term recovery group with and completed Peer Employment Training (PET) with Recovery Innovations in Manukau. He then undertook Advanced PET training with them. Mike started mentoring WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan) groups and gained employment as a peer

support worker.

Becoming an employee began to have some negative impacts on Mike's recovery. As soon as he was an employee of the organisation, he was told he could no longer attend group sessions with peers and that he had to be careful not to associate with clients at meetings. This meant that Mike lost those connections with peers that were so important to him. He never seemed to find a way to make it work.

“I just felt more and more isolated, to be honest, leaving.”

Mike had always been advised to connect with everyone when he was in early recovery, but as a peer support worker, he was told to break all those connections. He had also lost his counsellor and felt he had no one to talk to. He had external supervision once a month and, while that was good, he needed something else.

“For me, I've battled addiction all my life, all of it, and if I was to go into a counsellor, they'd say, 'OK Mike, you need to go to meetings, get a sponsor, home group.' I've done those things so often, and I've failed.”

Mike also struggled with the approach to some of the sex offenders who attended the groups he facilitated. He described them as “dangerous paedophiles” who regularly “acted out” in the group sessions. After months of this behaviour, during a clinical meeting, Mike says:

“I lost my rag, kicked down the back door and said, 'Fuck ya! Stick to your job.' That was appalling behaviour, but...”

Mike relapsed and resigned from his job. Mike's manager told him he had issues that he needed to deal with and that he should go to Higher Ground rehab.

“I relapsed in October last year after I lost my job and lost my clean time; somehow, I was drunk and dialled my ex's number, so she knew that I'd been drinking. It all turned to custard rather savagely fast.”

There are a lot of positives for Mike from the four-year period in recovery, but he still has a lot of anger about

how things worked out in the end. He feels disillusioned with recovery. Luckily, the relapse was short, and he has no current police or legal issues.

Settling up North

Following his relapse, Mike moved back to the North. He says life in the North can be quite wonderful. Summer in the Far North, living across from the beach, is magical. He doesn't know a lot of people, and while he feels his mental health is not the best now, he knows it could be a lot worse.

Mike is not sure where to go from here. He is about to turn 50 and has 127 criminal convictions.

There is a 12-Step meeting nearby, but Mike says usually only non-Māori attend, and he can't relate to them. He feels isolated but doesn't know what the answers to this isolation are. Mike's relationship has become better with his Mum, who lives nearby, but he says they have never really been close.

Mike looks back on his involvement with the criminal justice system and describes it as “a mess”. He thinks we need decent legal aid lawyers who really want to help people instead of just ticking boxes. Mike views the introduction of the drug courts as offering real potential but recognises the difficulties with rolling them out nationally. He would like to see more treatment beds and programmes and a strong focus on developing kaupapa Māori treatments within existing frameworks.

For Mike, any initiatives should be offered outside of the prison environment, shifting the focus to acknowledge addiction as a health issue. For Mike, completing drug treatment programmes and violence prevention programmes within Correctional environments was ineffective.

“The war on drugs and long prison sentences for drug offences is absolute bullshit. We have a raging meth epidemic in NZ after 15 years of this war on drugs – it does not work! Addiction should be a health issue. Build more rehabs, train more counsellors, fund more AOD services – instead of building more prisons!”

Mike singles out Gary Harwood as the one constant in his life, someone who has always been there. He still sees Gary

now and is tight with him and his family.

There is hope for Mike in the current work going on in the North, particularly between Crown agencies and Iwi. A partnership has been signed between the Crown and Muriwhenua, which he thinks will bring big changes to the fortunes of Māori in the rohe o Muriwhenua.

Kia tau ki a tatou katoa

Te atawhai o te runga rawa

Te aroha o tetahi ki tetahi

Me nga manaakitanga o te wa

Haumi e

Hui e

Taiki e!

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SHANNAN'S STORY

This is Shannan's story of her life and experiences with alcohol, drugs, crime, incarceration, and her journey to whānau ora (family wellbeing). Shannan was joined by her Mum, Ailene, to tell her story. This is their whānau story.

Ailene introduces herself and explains that she finds it difficult to speak te reo Māori because she wasn't taught it by her mother growing up. Ailene, however, is proud of her whakapapa:

“My mother was raised [to believe] she was a dirty Māori, so we were raised to be little white people – which we're not. Our people come from Rotorua, so we're Te Arawa, Ngāti Whakaue and Ngāti Pīkiao, and our lake is Rotoiti, and our maunga is Ngongotaha...my mother was Ngaire Herewini, and she married a Norwegian – Peter Amundson. Roald is his lineage, and he went to the South Pole.”

Shannan introduces herself:

“Ko Ngongotaha tōku maunga

Ko Rotoiti tōku awa

Ko Ngāti Whakaue tōku iwi

Ko Te Arawa tōku waka

Ko Shannan ahau

He tangata waipiro kai warawara ahau

I'm an addict, but I'm four-and-a-bit years clean now, so quite established in my recovery, I feel.”

Early years

Shannan was born in Sydney, Australia. Ailene left Shannan's father and moved eight-week-old Shannan and her older brother back to New Zealand, where they lived in New Windsor, Auckland.

Ailene was a solo Mum for most of their upbringing and

describes their life as very similar to her own mother's upbringing, as Pākehā. This has been hard for Shannan, as she explains:

“I'm the whitest in the family, but I feel it should be the other way around because I feel being Māori here [pointing to her heart]. People would always say, 'We didn't realise you were a Māori 'til you spoke.' I've got the Norwegian looks and Norwegian lineage coming down...I'm just learning about my whakapapa and about who and what came from where.”

When Shannan was six years old, Aileen met Shannan's stepdad. Shannan calls him “Dad” and describes him as a “beautiful man” who raised her like his daughter and taught her much about life.

“He taught me how to build fences, paint, and play different card games. I look up to this man in such a way; he was my idol.”

At around the same time, however, something devastating happened to Shannan. When she was six, Shannan was sexually abused by a close family friend. She was eight by the time the case went through the courts. Shannan does not dwell on this incident, explaining:

“I work with a lot of whai ora who have trauma this big [holding open her arms]. I wouldn't want to minimise or compare what I went through, but it's NOTHING compared to some people...I want to acknowledge it was damaging, but I have done a lot of work around that.”

Overall, Shannan is grateful to her parents and feels she had a good childhood:

“We had a pretty good upbringing. We never went without; we weren't well off or privileged, but we kids never went without kai; we never went without hot water; we never went without anything. Probably when I was little and was quite spoilt, but I thought the opposite because everyone else was having takeaways and flash shoes or whatever. But Mum and Dad did everything they could for us.”

For Ailene, it was evident from an early age that her daughter was determined and strong-willed:

“Attitude, when she was two, she had an attitude.

She was a good girl, though. I used to go to Mount Roskill to pick my Mum up from work because she didn't drive, and I would drop her off at Titirangi. [We had] a beetle, and these two [Shannan and her brother] were in the back; their car seats were closed. Shannan was two, and [her brother] was four, and she used to annoy him and annoy him, and they were screaming in the back. I said, 'If you don't stop annoying your brother, I'm going to stop the car and put you out on the footpath, and you can walk home.' So, she did it again; she pushed the boundaries. So, I stopped the car...put her out on the footpath, and she let me hop back in and drive off before she screamed to come and get her. I said to my Mum, 'She's not going to scream,' and I thought, 'What are we going to do?'"

The family moved from New Windsor to New Lynn, West Auckland. Shannan didn't enjoy school but "did alright" academically. However, she was good at sports and got involved in many activities, including ballet.

Changes in behaviour

Another pivotal point came when Shannan's little sister was born. Shannan explains, "She was Dad's only biological daughter." Shannan was 10 years old and found suddenly having a little sister on the scene difficult:

“Thinking back, that's when I really started to play up and knowing now what I know, it was obvious there were high amounts of jealousy and insecurity.”

Shannan continued to "play up", and when she started intermediate school, Shannan got into a "crowd that was a little bit wonky". Shannan began wagging school, being naughty in the classroom, and smoking cigarettes. She used to stand outside the dairy asking people to buy smokes for her, and someone always would. When she was 12, Shannan tried alcohol for the first time. She was at a friend's place, and she drank until she blacked out:

“I went to this boy's house...and his uncle was drinking the Double Browns and whatnot. I just basically just started drinking, and drank, and drank and drank until I was basically blackout drunk. Now I know what alcoholism is, so I know I'm an alcoholic. Back then, I just thought it was normal.”

Throughout her teens, Shannan's behaviour deteriorated, and she put her Mum "through the wringer". At 13, she ran away to the other side of town, met some boys, and got rotten drunk with them. Her Mum eventually found her sleeping under a house. Shannan thought, "Yay, I've gotten away with this" – but that's not what happened. Ailene and her husband had been working with a Tough Love group and received a recommendation from the church to send Shannan to a "naughty girls' home" in Massey. Ailene says, "We hoped it would help snap her out of it." For Shannan, the home was scary, and she didn't like being there; she caused trouble and, at one point, broke a door. Shannan stayed for three months, but rather than bring about positive changes, the experience hardened her resolve; she developed a 'Fuck the world' attitude.

Things were good for a while after Shannan returned home, but she started "playing up" again, including threatening her brother with a knife. Nine months after her release, Shannan's Mum returned her to the naughty girls' home. When she was due to be released, the home refused, arguing that Ailene and her husband could not control Shannan, and that it was their responsibility to intervene. It was a horrible situation; Ailene had to fight the system that was supposed to help:

“I put her in a system that I couldn't get her back, and she was my child. It was wrong to put her back in the second time; it wasn't good for her – I could see that.”

Creating a wall of hardness

At 13, Shannan had developed a 'wall of hardness' that made her act as if she were bulletproof. Her Mum describes Shannan at the time as "strong-willed, with a sassy attitude". At home, things continued as they had been. Shannan was volatile, and her moods were changeable. But she maintained her schooling and was involved in a lot of sports

and other pro-social activities.

When she was around 15, Shannan started drinking heavily with friends. With their parents' permission, they had a safe place to drink at her Mum's house. But for Shannan, drinking alcohol was problematic:

“I'd drink until I passed out; there was no alcohol left until I'd abused somebody, tried to fight that guy, tried to fight that girl, you know, like classic signs, you know, punch a window...there were classic signs of an alcoholic, but I had no idea at the time”.

While still aged 15, Shannan became pregnant and had an abortion. She stands by her decision, as does her Mum, even though she was strongly anti-abortion at the time.

Delving deeper into a drug-using lifestyle

By the time she turned 17, Shannan was drinking regularly and had started taking ecstasy and LSD. At 18 years old, Shannan got a boyfriend who was into methamphetamine, and her drug use increased rapidly. Shannan maintained jobs throughout this time, mainly in the finance and debt collection industry and, in many ways, was functioning well. However, her meth use would soon change all of this.

“I remember smoking off a tea light candle because we had no bowl or anything like that. We drove around and around for the whole weekend, had a bit of fun, and then, by Monday, came back down. I was a mess but got through to Friday and then did it all over again. It started off like a weekly or fortnightly thing, and the next thing, I was showing signs and symptoms in my workplace.”

Increasingly, Shannan also started skipping work and taking sick days. Workmates started to ask questions about what was going on and whether she was using drugs. Convinced she would soon be sacked, Shannan quit. She broke up with her boyfriend and used her final pay of \$3,000 to invest in, and start selling, meth. At the time, she thought it was cool to roll around in her car being a drug dealer. These activities became her life for the next few years.

Creating life

When Shannan was 21 years old, she discovered she was hapū. Her Mum had often asked if Shannan was on P, which she consistently denied. When Shannan finally admitted her use of P, she took on a staunch stance, saying, "Yeah, this is me [I am taking meth]; what are you going to do about it, fuck you?" Her Mum initially asked her to leave the house, but then she learned about the pregnancy. Shannan remembers thinking that perhaps there was a deeper reason for her pregnancy, that it was meant to be, and it allowed her to explore change.

“I remember thinking that this must be 'atua'. This has to be something because I knew something wasn't quite going right for me, but I didn't really know. So, I gave up cold turkey. I gave up absolutely cold turkey. I'd been smoking maybe 3 ½ years by then, every day if not every other day, and I just gave up cold turkey.”

Shannan remembers this being the most horrible week of her life; she had morning sickness from the pregnancy and from coming down from the methamphetamine. Although separated, Shannan's Mum and stepdad wrapped support around Shannan. Shannan saw the support she gained from her whānau as a sign and decided to keep her baby. By this time, Shannan had a new partner, and they had a tiny home in Glen Eden. For a while, things went well. Her first son was born on 6 May 2008.

Two weeks after she gave birth, Shannan relapsed on magic mushrooms and soon spiralled back into using meth. When her son was about 15 months old, Shannan split up with her partner and returned to her Mum's. Shannan then met her new partner and, soon after, fell pregnant with her second son. Once again, she managed to stop using meth during the pregnancy. Shannan reflects on how she could stop using meth when pregnant but not for herself: "I can do it for the little person I'm growing, but I can't do it for me.”

She managed to stay off meth for about a year until one day, she ran into a dealer and bought a bag of meth. Shannan liked the energy it gave her. She felt like a super-mum on meth and was able to clean the house, cook dinner and change nappies. Her partner had no idea she was using meth.

This way of life didn't last long, and the relationship ended. Shannan took her older son with her and left her younger son with his father. She returned to live with her Mum, but it wasn't great this time. She wasn't parenting well and was using meth quite heavily. Eventually, Child Youth and Family Services got involved. There was a custody battle with her ex, but Shannan managed to hide her drug-using, winning full custody.

No boundaries

Shannan became involved in several relationships with men who were physically violent, emotionally abusive, and filled with drugs and alcohol. She and her son took refuge at her Mum's house when needed, but it was a challenging time for Shannan and her mother.

After the second violent relationship ended, Shannan and her son moved out of her Mum's place and went to stay at a friend's house in Glen Eden. Shannan still finds it hard to admit that her parenting was not good then. There remains a lot of *mamae* (pain) between her and her Mum about this time in their lives. About three months after Shannan moved in with her friend, her Mum and the father of her son filed a 'without notice' parenting order and took custody of her son. Although her Mum wasn't able to raise her son, she knew she had to do something.

Shannan thought she could get sober and present well to the court. Once again, she attempted to "manipulate the system". She spent 28 days detoxing by herself, in bed. She remembers getting to that stage, and then she relapsed and slid straight back into full-on using.

A cycle of crime and addiction

Around 2012, Shannan started to use meth intravenously and was connected back to one of her previous toxic boyfriends. Shannan never thought that she would ever resort to this type of use and always looked down on others who used needles. Intravenous use meant that they had to sell drugs; moving to IV use was another level of needs, wants and coming down, and more cash to pay for it. Their wheeling and dealing, however, weren't enough to cover their own needs. This lack of money started their pathway to doing crime. At first, their criminal activities began with stealing – shoplifting make-up, handbags, meats, and anything else of value.

Shannan got her first conviction when she was 27 years old for driving on a suspended licence, which had come about through demerit points. Over the next few years, she was arrested numerous times, on driving charges, possession of meth, car theft, shoplifting, and fraudulent use of documents. She was remanded in custody but was generally able to get bail. Shannan describes how she was good at manipulating the Judge:

"I think because of what I look like and how I can articulate myself, I would always be able to like 'woo' a Judge. I looked like a Pākehā, and I could speak well and say I am this, and I am that. And Mum would most likely be at court. And I would look like, 'Oh poor little girl; please give me bail.' I would always manage to get bail each time. So, I would only end up being in custody a week or so."

Shannan's Mum tried to engage her with Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings and took her to Higher Ground. However, because she was still using meth, none of that worked. Shannan would not, or could not, turn up for meetings when she was supposed to.

Her first sentence for criminal offending was six months of home detention, which she received for more than 20 charges. While she was lucky to have an approved address, sticking to the sentence conditions was challenging. She used drugs throughout the sentence anyway while telling friends and family that she was sober. Shannan felt like a queen of manipulating and bullshitting the world.

Over this time, Shannan was in another toxic, violent relationship and was having minimal contact with her children. She was off on the same road again when the bracelet was gone. Shannan also managed to complete the Corrections Te Whare Tapa Wha programme and was a star pupil, while using meth the whole time. Firmly stuck in the cycle of addiction and offending, she soon started getting arrested again for burglary, car theft, fraud, deception, and driving while disqualified. She had no respect for the law, wasn't paying her rent, and was regularly getting bailed out financially by her Mum and other whānau. Her Mum would buy her furniture and other possessions that Shannan would just walk away from when it suited her.

Shannan had also started using GBL (Gamma-Butyrolactone), a highly addictive drug growing in popularity in New Zealand and ended up in the hospital a dozen times with no heartbeat, plugged into machines. She also fell asleep at the wheel, crashing into a power pole in a car that her Mum had bought her.

"Things were going from bad to worse, and I was just doing more and more disgusting things to get my needs met. I didn't prostitute, but I would get with a guy and become his partner if he had a big bag or whatever. I wasn't on the side of the road turning tricks, but I was quite promiscuous right through those years."

Shannan wanted a better life; she attended church with her son's grandmother but knew things were bad. She found she couldn't last an hour through the church service and ended up using drugs in the church toilets. So, Shannan prayed to God to help get her out of it, and three days later, her home was raided by the cops: "So, it was an answer to a prayer – just not what I thought it would look like."

Hitting rock bottom

Shannan's last arrest was in 2016 for burglary. The police raided her house. Shannan took \$20 with her to get a taxi home when she got bailed. However, bail was refused. Shannan sobered up quickly over the next two weeks and used the time to write to anyone who could help. She appeared in court again before Judge Tremewan and realised that her old tricks of manipulation were not going to help this time around:

"[The Judge] is guided by the prosecution; she has to make a pretty big call to go against what the prosecution is proposing. So, there was a big file of oppositions of bail because of non-compliance bail breaches [and reoffending] ...so, she had to remand me in custody, which was the biggest blessing!"

Shannan eventually started to realise she could be looking at a long sentence. Shannan's lawyer, Peter Boylan, was a strong advocate and constantly tried to get her assessed for admission to Odyssey House, but Shannan wasn't ready to accept that she even had a problem with drugs. Ailene

adds that she was in constant contact with Peter and acknowledges the efforts he put into trying to help Shannan because he believed in her. After a few months, she appeared before a Judge who told her that the starting point for the sentence was 28 months, with possible discounts. The Judge suggested that the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court might be suitable. At the time, Shannan had no idea what that court was, but she agreed to do anything just to get out of custody, not to get clean. Ailene adds:

"She used to tell me her motivation for staying clean was because she didn't want to go back to jail. I thought that's not a good reason, and then it changed later."

Shannan started to meet the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court team from Odyssey and the Pou Oranga, Matua Ra, Peer Support Worker Lou, and a case manager. They all wrapped around her once she was accepted into the programme. Shannan found that people were doing all sorts of things for her, and after 5 ½ months, Shannan was bailed to her son's father's house and started attending church and engaging with the 12-Step Fellowship. She had no idea what recovery was or what recovery services looked like.

Drawing on experience to help others

Shannan started to use her resilience and capability constructively. She had been doing voluntary work at Higher Ground and was encouraged to take a job in a supervisor role, where she could use her lived experience to support others in the programme. Then, Shannan got her own rental home, which she still has today. Soon after that, she got her son back.

"That moment there was, like, the last two years of what I had been doing, was for that moment. The pain of him not, you know...me not being there for five years, seeing how deteriorated he was because he was living with his addict Dad with severe mental health issues."

Shannan says the following year was a real struggle. She cared for her son and worked part-time in a demanding role at Higher Ground. Her Mum, stepdad, his wife, and others wrapped around her in support. She wasn't financially

stable during this time, but the family were happy to help in any way they could. Ailene admits, “It took everyone a while to trust her again.” But they were all encouraged by the changes they saw. Now, Shannon thrives on the relationships she has:

“I am the best I’ve ever been now in all my relationships with all my whānau. I’m still hard, and they say, ‘Oh, your hugs are shit, you know, you’re like a rock.’ But I think I’ll always be like that; I just don’t like all that stuff.”

Shannan’s current partner is also an Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court graduate. They have five tamariki aged 7, 10, 13, 21 and 22, with an additional three mokopuna. After her first year out of the court, Shannan took on helping her partner’s eldest daughter:

“We took her in, and she was ‘out the gate’ and on the run. I presented myself to Probation and said to them, ‘This is me; this is what I have done, and this is who I am, and this is what I want for her. Don’t worry about my past; you can check it all you want, but what I am showing you today, can I have her in my home on her sentencing? I’ll get her right.’ The Judge looked at it and said to [Monique], ‘You are really lucky to have such pro-social parents.’”

Hearing the Judge say that shocked Shannan. She realised that the system now viewed her as a pro-social parent.

Shannan’s partner is Ngāpuhi, and they have blended their whānau, which works well. They met in Higher Ground, and their relationship was initially frowned upon, but they have worked hard on it. He relapsed early on after leaving Higher Ground, but he came back from it, and they have made it work. Five others in his whānau have graduated from the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court. Shannon and her partner weren’t living together at first, wanting to ensure they had a solid foundation for the kids. After a year, however, Shannan needed help, and her partner moved in.

Working at Higher Ground was hard, and Shannan had to scramble for enough shifts to earn enough money to care for the whānau. She managed to get a couple of permanent shifts but was still doing it tough financially. She saw an ad

for a job as a Peer Support Worker in the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court and thought it was time to move on. Shannan liked helping others through a programme that had given her so much.

“I always thought to myself, ‘If I ever leave Higher Ground, because that place has my heart, it’ll be for the Drug Court because that place also has my heart.’”

Shannan applied for the job and was successful. The position gave her stability as she no longer had to juggle shifts. Shannan has been there for 18 months and loves her work. She knows what she is doing and is a valuable Odyssey Drug Court Treatment team member.

Key whānau and recovery supports

Shannan and her sister are close and a big part of each other’s lives. Her stepmother, who is Māori, is another crucial support. Shannan describes her stepmother as a driven, successful, and self-motivated woman who put herself through a university degree over four years. They have a close relationship, which has blossomed over time. Her stepmother has been a role model for Shannan, particularly career-wise.

Aileen lives in Australia, which Shannon finds hard – she misses having her Mum around, but they maintain regular contact online and have a strong relationship. They have had their challenges, particularly around the events that led to Ailene taking custody of Shannan’s son:

“I took a long time to move through that resentment for Mum for taking my son – I’m talking years. It’s still there, but I just need to keep telling myself the logic of it. She did the right thing. It was my doing, but that still hurts.”

Shannan has a somewhat distant relationship with her brother, a successful geologist who lives in Australia. Shannan finds it hard to “penetrate his life”. Shannan has been having challenges with her 13-year-old son’s behaviour but is well-placed from her own experience to deal with it. There is a sense of powerlessness at times, even though she has her own life in order. Her biggest challenges today are these family situations, mainly around the kids not meeting expectations, but Shannan knows she can deal with things as best she can.

Shannon’s best friend, whom she met at Higher Ground, is also in recovery. She, too, has several children, and she has become an absolute rock for Shannan.

Finding a sense of identity

Culturally, Higher Ground was huge for Shannan, and she feels that this was where she started to identify, connect with, and build a sense of who she is. She didn’t know her whakapapa when she came to the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court, and she did not want to know. Her interest started with pepeha and grew from there, learning a more spiritual side of being Māori.

“There’s a piece of me that feels things that I can’t explain, and I’m sure that’s my connection with my tīpuna. I wasn’t brought up that way, and it’s like a conflicting feeling; it’s a bit strange.”

Full fluency in te reo Māori is a goal that Shannan intends to pursue. She led the haka at Higher Ground and was told, “We can hear your tīpuna when you karanga.” She didn’t know what that meant then but is now starting to understand. She had been involved in the church and always found comfort there, but it began to feel inauthentic. Her belief has now evolved to something more authentically cultural.

Shannan also says her psychotherapist at Higher Ground first taught her boundaries. For Shannon, she stands out for her ability to teach and “get through” to her. The psychotherapist she connected with after Higher Ground, whom she continued seeing for several years, was also pivotal. Shannan feels she wouldn’t have healed without her.

Continuing to grow and thrive

Shannan has completed her Level 4 Mental Health and Wellbeing certificate by distance learning. This was a real achievement for Shannan, who never completed a School Certificate. She has been accepted into the Social Health and Wellbeing Level 7 bachelor’s degree programme and has just finished her first paper. While it is challenging, she is finding her way forward and feeling increasingly confident in her ability.

“My life today is ka pai, ka pai; all that hard work and stuff that I went through in my rehabilitation are all worth it; even my hardest day is a blessing.”

Practising good self-care is a significant protective factor for Shannan in life today. Having balance around her children, home, work, studies, and everything she has created in recovery is vital for her. Whānau are at the core of who Shannan is and how she lives. She recognises that there are still those who hold doubts.

“I have a lot to lose now. I have a lot riding on what I’m doing because, even though they might not want to admit it, somewhere inside of them will be a little thing saying... ‘hmmm.’”

Shannan takes care of herself by keeping her mind busy, getting up daily, and getting on with life. She also likes structure, purpose, and rewards, like getting a massage, getting her nails done, or buying a new car. She knows that whatever she sets her mind to, she can achieve.

Shannan did over 300 Narcotics Anonymous meetings while she was in the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court programme but is no longer a regular attendee. Meetings are a tool she can use, and she knows it is a safe place to go and share. Supportive people surround Shannan. They know her and are there to listen, to help. Though she appears totally composed, Shannan knows it is essential to have ways to share her doubts and fears in a variety of settings when she needs to.

Healthy living is important to Shannan. Meditation and diet are a focus for her. She is trying to give up smoking, and she feels her mental health is in good shape. She knows that once she decides to do something, she will do it. She loves working with people and building relationships and finds fulfilment in this. Shannan feels supported in all areas of her life and excited about the future.

TŪMANAKO

IN THE DARKNESS OF THE NIGHT
WHEN I STRUGGLE TO GET IT RIGHT
I SING ONLY TO MYSELF
WONDERING AT MY PLACE AND MY LIFE

STRUGGLING IN THE HĪNAKI
TROUBLED AND SHUNNED FROM THE LIGHT
IS IT IMPOSSIBLE TO BE WHO I WANT TO BE?
TO BE BRIGHT IN MY OWN SHADOWED SIGHT?

OR SO IT SEEMS!
AND IMPOSSIBLE AS IT SEEMS
I DREAM! I DARE!
TO HOPE! TO DREAM.

THERE IS A GLIMMER OF HOPE
ON MY HORIZON
SOMETHING IN ME ACHING TO BE FREE
TO BREAK FROM CAGES THAT BIND ME

LEARNING TO COPE, TO CONNECT
SPREADING MY WINGS TO FLY
HIGH IN DELICATE NEWFOUND SKIES
SAYING GOODBYE.

I AM ALIVE! HĀ! I AM ALIVE!
AND I HAVE YOU TO HELP ME
BECAUSE YOU TOO ARE FREE
OF THE DEMONS THAT PLAGUED YOU PLAGUE ME

FOR HOPE FLOWS FREE FROM MY SOUL
SEEING THE LIGHT BRIGHTEN
BECKONING ON MY QUIET ROAD
LIGHTENING MY LOAD
FOR TRUTH BE TOLD

WITH HELP I CAN SEE THE WAY
TO WHERE MY LIFE AND HEART
NEEDS TO STAY

By Jason Haitana

These whānau stories are united by hope. As we read the pūrākau, we see glimmers of hope that seem to fade, but at some point, they gather such momentum that they take on a power of their own. We see that hope gains power from witnessing the change in real life. The support of peers creates endless possibilities. Tūmanako is embodied in a person and our whānau model it. Peers are qualified by experience; they are living examples of – and experts in – change. We learn from whānau the significance of seeing a change in others and reflecting on the energy that comes from mirroring possibilities of self-change. This creates a feeling of “I can do it. I have hope to be who I want to be.” We invite you to see that hope is for all. Readers can connect, feel, and see that change is within each of us; it is always possible.



CARLY'S STORY

Ko Aoraki te maunga

Ko Waimakariri te awa

Ko Ōtautahi te whenua

Ko Ngāti Pakeha te iwi

Ko Patricia Haggart taku Māmā

Ko Steven Laughton taku Pāpā

Ko Carly Laughton taku ingoa

Carly is proudly born and bred in Christchurch and has been in recovery for nearly three years.

At school, Carly had behavioural issues and was labelled ADHD, dyslexic, naughty, bad, and having post-traumatic stress disorder. When she wet her pants in class because she felt “scared and afraid” and got very little understanding from anyone in the school system. Sometimes, her Mum would forget to pick her up from school; at other times, Carly would be truant.

Carly was a bright and creative student who excelled at many subjects and earned good grades. But because her family moved around a lot, it wasn't easy to establish consistency:

“I went to six primary schools, three intermediates, and four high schools...I didn't struggle to make friends. I was good with other kids, but their parents didn't want them to be friends [with me] because of my family.”

Carly admits that when she did connect with her friend's parents, she often threw herself at them, showing them “all the love she had”. She now realises she experienced many attachment insecurities.

From solvents to morphine

When she was between nine and 11 years old, the violence in Carly's home escalated. As an escape, Carly started experimenting with solvents:

“I remember the first time I used solvents. It was like a suede protector spray, and I used the whole can straight away and then hid it and lied about where it had gone. But I have a photographic memory of that first time I used it because I remember thinking, ‘This is it; this is the solution; this gets me out.’”

Carly knew huffing was dangerous. So, by age 11, she started stealing cannabis from her mother. For Carly, having access to cannabis opened the door to friends, which meant having money and a way out of her head. By 13, Carly was a daily cannabis user.

Carly recalls constantly feeling intensely anxious and nervous; she was in a “constant state of hypervigilance”. When she took meth for the first time, it triggered a drug-induced psychosis. Carly also experimented with mushrooms, party pills, and alcohol, often getting “black-out drunk”. She struggled to recreate her euphoric feeling when she first took meth. She knew getting drunk and taking meth simultaneously was dangerous, but she wanted to find the balance of having the energy to deal with life without the anxiety or blackouts. Carly looked to her closest role model, her mother, to find a coping strategy. She led Carly down the dangerous path to morphine.

A life of crime

From her early teens into her twenties, Carly had been involved in minor driving-related offences, including getting arrested for being Drunk in Charge (DIC) 11 hours after earning her learner’s license.

When Carly began a relationship with morphine, her offending increased. She started breaking into and stealing cars daily. Carly developed a “grandiose view” of being a car thief - “like Angelina Jolie’s character in the movie, ‘Gone in 60 Seconds’”. But as Carly’s drug addiction intensified, so did her offending. She became more violent. During this time, Carly was grateful to her mother for intervening with the police and saving her from facing more severe consequences.

Carly grew up around many “broken women”, which made her determined not to become like them. The people she

saw with power wore patches or had money and drugs. These men were her role models. She took great pride in being “one of the boys”, hanging out with them and doing what they did, including dating women. She desperately wanted to be like her role models.

Carly fell pregnant in 2007. Except for cannabis, she stopped using drugs - but developed a cross-addiction to food. Carly had been 57 kilograms; by the time her daughter was born, she was over 100 kilograms. Carly had such low self-esteem due to weight gain that she returned to morphine. When her daughter was six months old, Carly also started offending again. In October 2010, she was arrested for car theft. Most women who need detox are put into the At Risk Unit (ARU), where they will be cared for during the detox process. But that was not the case for Carly:

“They detoxed me in the pound [in the Women’s prison]; they didn’t put me into ARU because I was covered in sores and scabs and didn’t know what was wrong with me. I looked bad...They held me for a short time in the cells, and then they got me straight out to the prison. My memory is really blurry, and it’s not what I like to remember. But I remember waking up in the pound and talking to the other women... Only in retrospect do I understand how crazy it was that they put me straight into the pound to detox me, not into ARU.”

A turning point

While Carly was in the pound, the police brought a stack of charges against her. Then, they offered her a deal. On reflection, agreeing to the deal in a room with three detectives was a “coercive environment”. She served a year in prison but maintained that if the police had “been honest about what they were doing”, her sentence would have been reduced to around three months.

Carly also believes that had she been given more and earlier support for her addiction, she could have been saved from going to prison altogether. She admits that being behind bars lulled her into a sense of security:

“I was comfortable in prison. I had friends. I had a roof over my head. I was free from finding ways and means to get more [drugs]. For the first time, I didn’t have to worry about drugs because they weren’t around. I got to be myself. And when the door closed at night, I knew no one was coming through it. I felt safe for the first time in my life. I think I learned something. I was still young, but I learned this is the solution.”

While in prison, Carly was never offered drug treatment or support for her experiences with trauma.

Getting out of prison

After her release from prison, CADS referred Carly to the methadone programme, even though she had not used it for a year. She knew nothing about recovery or treatment, so she relished being referred to a service that legally provided free drugs. For the first 18 months of the methadone programme, Carly lived a “relatively stable and good life”. But it did not last:

“My tolerance for methadone built, and then it wasn’t cutting the mustard anymore. So, those same feelings and thoughts started returning; all the trauma and all that shit started returning. I wanted to start using it on top of the methadone. So, I started smoking cannabis, and they [CADS] were like, ‘Nah, that’s fine, you can use cannabis. That’s all good.’ They didn’t worry about my dirty urine or anything like that. Next came Valium. Then, I started using methamphetamine again.”

Over the next two-and-a-half years, Carly’s meth use intensified her psychosis, and she self-admitted to the hospital Accident & Emergency at least 20 times. She would be placed in the mental health ward each time, given 72 hours to detox, and then kicked out. Carly describes this period as an emotional “rollercoaster”; she made multiple suicide attempts.

Carly tried several times to get help but without success. She developed an intravenous drug habit and continued her car-related offending. Although she suffered injuries,

including being stabbed in the face, Carly is proud that she never physically hurt anyone or stole personal property.

In June 2013, Carly was again arrested. This time, the arresting officer sexually and physically abused her. Although she made a complaint, nothing was done about it. By this stage, she had reached the end of her tether. She again self-admitted to the hospital, then took the drastic measure of holding the mental health ward hostage, refusing to leave until she was put into a drug treatment unit. Eventually, Carly was discharged home. Her meth dealer partner lived there – and it was far from safe. Carly felt hopeless:

“I woke up one morning, and I just wanted to die. I did not want to be here anymore. I didn’t talk to my partner or anything. I just got up...I didn’t take our car because I planned to end my life that day. I took the bus into central Christchurch. In 2013, they were still rebuilding after the earthquake, so there were a lot of empty buildings. I intended to get into one of the old car park buildings and jump off. I wanted it to be definite; it wasn’t going to be a maybe, you know...I was walking down, and I happened to see a little girl who had blonde hair like my daughter. She made me think of my daughter...I saw that little girl, and something switched. I had a knife on me, so I walked into a dairy and held up the dairy worker at knifepoint. I climbed over the counter and said, ‘I’m coming over. I don’t want anything from you.’ I took a packet of cigarettes, left the dairy, walked around the corner, and waited for the police to come. Then, I asked them to take me to prison.”

During her sentencing, Carly and the judge were both crying. The judge acknowledged that Carly had been trying to get help for a long time. Carly went to prison for a second time but desperately wanted to change. But though she tried not to use drugs, she had no idea what treatment or recovery was:

“I had never been to a meeting. I never knew about Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous. I didn’t know what recovery looked like or even heard that word. Even through all my prison sentences.”

A new start

Carly completed her prison sentence in October 2014. At 28 years old, she needed a change. She moved to Oamaru to be with her daughter, her partner, and the father of her daughter, hoping to maintain a relationship with her child. It was a courageous move. Carly was allocated a Presbyterian Family Works social worker and completed the 'Out of Gate' programme.

“I was so ready for change. I had her sit down with me and ask me what I wanted and what my goals were. We really worked towards those goals. Within six months, I had opened a youth centre and was running it...”

On reflection, Carly says living alcohol and drug free in a new town meant the youth centre became her addiction. Carly established a group of like-minded people to be trustees. They started running programmes and had many resources. Carly was focused on helping youths, but there were challenges:

“I was working but wasn't trained, so I didn't know anything. I had really shit boundaries, and I had young people and their kids coming and staying in my whare with me. I was picking them up at all hours of the night, and they had my phone number. So, I had a house full of teenagers who weren't mine. I had a heart of gold and all the best intentions but no training to back them up. And it was a recipe for disaster. I closed the youth centre for Christmas, and with my Christmas bonus, I went and purchased some methamphetamine.”

Seeking help

A close friend of Carly's encouraged her to go away and work on herself. She went to the Kaitaia Women's Refuge, followed by a support programme at Kaitaia's Salvation Army. She was finally introduced to treatment programmes with Wings and Higher Ground there. While in these programmes, Carly developed strong relationships with other women in Narcotics Anonymous (NA). She was attending regular NA meetings and camps when she entered

Epsom Lodge. Today, NA and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) remain crucial to Carly's recovery journey. She attends three meetings a week and has a sponsor.

Carly has done “heaps of service” at Merivale, a minimum six-month, full-time residential programme for mothers and children. She also does service for NA and AA. Giving back to those who need help is Carly's greatest joy:

“Being a sponsor is the biggest pain in the arse sometimes, and sometimes it is just so beautiful. I have got girls, especially this year during COVID, who have relapsed, and then they have come back, and they are getting six and nine months [clean] up again. Sometimes, I cry and think how lucky I am to support these women in their lives to make better choices and change. It's so cool!”

At five months clean, Carly started seeing a therapist every week. She has been seeing him for over two years. These sessions have been healing; she connects with him at least twice weekly. She is still surprised at how far their therapeutic relationship has come.

Continuing to learn

Carly has always been interested in Te Ao Māori and loves performing in kapa haka and expressing herself through waiata. She says this interest comes from exposure to the system and profoundly yearning to be part of something.

“Unfortunately, our tangata whenua are over-represented in our justice system. I learned my pepeha in jail, and my tikanga Māori programme was run by Mairehe Tankersley (Whaea Louise). Whaea Louise used to go into the Christchurch Women's prison and run three tikanga Māori programmes a year where you learn waiata, tikanga, and haka and perform them to your whānau.”

Because of her love for Māori cultural activities, working with He Waka Eke Noa, an Auckland-based recovery rōpū (part of Te Ha Oranga), is a natural fit for Carly. She loves performing with them and is honoured to have been able to lead the karanga.

Throughout her journey, Carly has continued educating herself: She completed Peer Employment Training at Ember Korowai Takitini, followed by the level four Health and Wellbeing Certificate at Unitec, Waitakere. With the support of Odyssey House, Carly hopes to complete Te Taketake and learn te reo Māori.

Working life

Carly began working for Lifewise as a youth worker, supporting young people experiencing homelessness as they transition from the care of Oranga Tamariki. Carly managed a site of flats, where each young person was given their own whare and assigned a youth worker. Together, they sit down to discuss their goals, identify the barriers, and learn how they can be supported to achieve them.

“It's chaos because it is hard, but it's so beautiful. It's amazing. [One young man I have been helping] ...he has grown and changed so much in his time here. For the last couple of weeks, we have been writing letters to the landlord to encourage him to let him have a cat. Now, he has a cat, and this is a young man who everyone said was dangerous and that nobody could work with. I can assure you that right now, he and Princess are upstairs, just hanging out.”

Carly loves working with youth who have been homeless and committing crimes to survive. She has seen the change in some young people who do not have whānau or strong connections to people and have suffered significant trauma in their young lives.

Carly will soon start working with E Ara E/Rise Up, the Odyssey House programme that provides employment and education placement support for 18–24-year-olds.

“I am really, really excited about that. I think the thing that I have enjoyed the most in my role here is creating programmes for pro-social engagement that reflect some recovery from trauma from drugs and alcohol...So, we've been able to do some really cool stuff in this space...I want to be taking young people to places that are already happening and doing things.”

Carly has a dream. She hopes to open a treatment centre for whānau on a piece of land with five houses.

“I would love for Aotearoa to have a house. So, if a house gets raided, Dad is not ripped in one direction, Mum is ripped in the other direction, and the babies are ripped in another direction. I would really love for families to be able to go somewhere all together and heal in the community with each other.”

Key people and whānau

Several people have been instrumental in Carly's journey to recovery. When she was younger, a youth worker continued to believe in her through it all; in Oamaru, her social worker also believed in her, recognising Carly's potential to work with others.

Even though her mother provided her with many substances, Carly explains that, in her own way, her mother was trying to give her a solution. Drugs were her mother's way of dealing with her pain. Carly's relationship with her mother has grown over the last year after her Mum contacted her and admitted she was sick of her life. Carly draws on her NA network to support her mother to attend meetings. Her Mum still uses methadone and smokes cannabis.

Looking after herself

Carly trains regularly and focuses on her fitness, health, and well-being. Currently, she is preparing for a Muay Thai fighting event. Going to the gym allows her to experience her true self:

“Self-awareness around my body has been a massive part of my journey, and building a healthy relationship with food and with my body and myself has been a massive part of my journey...I go into that gym, and I'm not Carly the youth worker or Carly the sponsor or Carly the addict or Carly the recovering meth mental health patient, or whatever. I'm just me. I'm just Carly.”

Carly is grateful to have met many people from various backgrounds who have contributed to her recovery journey. She especially appreciates the diversity among her support group:

“I love how diverse my recovery is now. I’m abstinent, and my best friend isn’t - he smokes cannabis., But that’s his thing. I think some people in recovery in my life sometimes drink wine...I know until the day I die that I won’t. That’s me, and everyone respects my choice. I like how diverse my support group is because it doesn’t feel punitive; there’s no ‘You’re bad, you’re doing it the wrong way’. We all have different ideas.”

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DAVE'S STORY

“I have three unique things:

I have that rich lived experience that includes a lot of jail time. That is a qualification.

I have some academic qualifications, and I have te reo Māori. With those three things, opportunities are just opening; it makes me unique.”

Dave's parents settled in New Zealand in the mid-1950s. His father was from Scotland and grew up in England, and his mother was born and raised in England. They emigrated to New Zealand when his older brother was little, and his mother was pregnant with his sister. Dave was born in Pukekohe, but soon after, his parents built a property in Northcote. His earliest memories are of growing up in this house.

Dave recalls what, on the surface, seemed like a typical childhood – birthday parties, holidays, and school. But he reflects on the lack of deep connection he felt with his parents:

“I didn't really have a relationship with my parents. I never remember hearing 'I love you' from my parents. I was fed, clothed, and schooled, and I got a present on my birthday and Christmas. There were times I felt special, but in normal everyday life, I felt like I was a bit of a burden.

I didn't really spend time with my parents, and they didn't spend time with me or my siblings. In those days, we had a lot of other kids around, so we made our own fun. We didn't have a lot of control or direction. So, you know, I didn't get much guidance in making decisions, although I was clearly told if I had done something wrong! There was never much praise if I had done something right.”

Part of the problem was a lack of pro-social role models in Dave's life – people who were positive and motivating in

their behaviour. His father was busy working and playing hard and spent much time playing soccer and drinking with colleagues. Dave was exposed to his parent's partying ways, including drinking alcohol, and smoking cigarettes. By the time Dave was 10 years old, his father had spent less and less time with the family, and problems developed between his parents. Eventually, his father left the house, leaving his mother struggling to raise three children independently.

The exposure to his parent's partying led Dave and his curious friends to start stealing alcohol from their parents' houses and believing drinking and getting drunk was cool. Anti-social behaviour went hand in hand with their use of alcohol, and Dave and his mates roamed around pinching stuff and vandalising property.

Meanwhile, Dave was told he was high functioning at school but needed to apply himself more to his studies. Dave lacked the confidence and focus to study without any encouragement from home. Even though he excelled at most group sports, he increasingly experienced social anxiety and started to isolate himself from his peers.

Dropping out and doping up

At about this time, Dave's neighbours, who were in their 20s, introduced him to smoking cannabis. By the age of 11, Dave had established what he called the 'dope fund'. He would collect money from kids in the neighbourhood and use it to buy dope from one of his brothers' friends for himself and his neighbours to use. From there, Dave started raiding the medicine cabinets of the neighbourhood, stealing drugs like Valium. Dave and his friends were all about 'getting out of it' and doing 'bad' stuff. Dave was heading straight down an anti-social pathway.

Heroin came into Dave's life when he was 13 years old. The Mr. Asia syndicate operated then, and heroin was cheap and plentiful. With his regular use of heroin came criminal activity:

"...a lot of us turned into heroin addicts, and of course, to pay for it, we stole. We weren't pinching for fun; we were trying to make money."

For some years, Dave's older brother had been a member of the local motorcycle club, which had become known as the "bad crew". Dave and his friends idolised them. Being with the crew brought them into even more trouble. At 15, Dave was expelled from school for selling cannabis.

First encounters with the justice system

Dave's first arrest came at age 15. His friend had told him they could benefit by accessing and then pinching some of the cannabis for themselves before they gave it to the customer. Dave was indirectly involved in purchasing the cannabis before his friend passed the drugs on to the cop, so he was charged with supplying cannabis. He was fined \$200 and given six months of community supervision. This incident put Dave headlong on the pathway towards increasingly anti-social behaviour.

"In those days, it made me one of those bad people because no one did that stuff back then. So, I just carried on alcohol, cannabis, heroin...I was an outcast."

Thriving on being bad

Not long after his arrest, Dave began to steal cars, burgle property, and act out in dangerous ways. He became known as the "baddest kid on the block". Dave thrived on that notoriety but eventually got caught and jailed. His mother, who had refused to let him live at home during much of this period, would not bail him out. In a youth wing at Mt Eden prison, Dave found himself in a "cool place" where he could access drugs inside and felt reasonably safe.

When he got out of prison, Dave was homeless. He returned to the cycle of anti-social activities and hung out increasingly with his brother's crew. They were a lot older than him and a lot more violent, and they ranked amongst the most notorious gangs of the time in New Zealand. They would go to war with other gangs, holding their own but not without themselves getting severely injured and sentenced to jail. Dave ended up in a detention centre for young people that involved Army training in Rangipo. When he left the centre, he was fit and immediately got back into trouble. He was sent twice to Waikeria Borstal, where he learned many practical skills:

"I learnt a lot in there...about basic self-care, washing, cleaning, going to work. I didn't know those things; I had not had that. I had gone from being a very small child to an outcast, a bad kid out on the street."

When he exited Borstal, Dave returned to the cycle of anti-social behaviour. By that time, however, heroin had weakened, meaning more was needed to get high. Dave decided it was too expensive compared with the high from being drunk. He never touched heroin again.

Eventually, Dave got a job. He continued to drink and smoke heaps of dope, but he would turn up and do the work. But one day, he got busted again by another undercover cop he thought was a friend. Dave was charged with supplying a Class B narcotic for handing over a bag of hash. This resulted in nine months of jail time. Dave lost his job. Even though he believed he had the basic building blocks for life – a job, a house, and the time, money, and energy to party on the weekends – that foundation was disrupted by his prison sentence.

When Dave got out of jail, he got another job. But after being fired, Dave spiralled out of control and continued to behave violently along with members of the Northcote gang.

Family life

At around this time, Dave met Heather, who would become his partner for 25 years. She tempered his demeanour, and although they had a volatile relationship, he was generally stable and stayed out of prison for a long time. Dave worked as a landscaper, paver, and painter during these years. He loved team sports and excelled at rugby league. When he got a job on the Harbour Bridge, Dave started a social team for rugby league, which became another anti-social gang. He looks back on this time with much regret, but he did have some good times.

Heather had told Dave she never wanted children. But when she experienced an ectopic pregnancy, she changed her mind and realised she wished to have a baby. Dave and Heather were told the only way to conceive was via IVE. They tried two times without success. Adoption became an

option when a friend, already raising several children in a dysfunctional family unit, invited them to adopt her as-yet-unborn baby. They said yes – and that's how they became parents to their son, Leo.

When Leo was a baby, Heather stopped working. Dave struggled to pay the high interest rates on the mortgage. His relationship with Heather deteriorated, but Leo was amazing and helped Dave focus. Dave eventually drifted apart from Heather and started acting out again.

The world of methamphetamine

Dave was working and playing hard when he found methamphetamine – and with meth came his association with people who were "not good". He initially acquired precursor materials for meth, supplying those manufacturing the drug. This involvement grew when he started supporting importing drugs from overseas, particularly from Korea, where wholesale medical suppliers were located.

Dave was caught in action by the police. By this stage, he had also started to cook the drugs himself, appearing in court now and then for active charges. Dave describes these as chaotic times: he was moving within an anti-social meth world while at the same time taking Leo to kindergarten or reading him a bedtime story. In his early 40s and the Dad of a five-year-old, Dave felt immense shame.

While on bail, Dave was arrested again after getting busted with cooking utensils in his care. All the evidence was against him. After a period of remand in custody, he was found guilty and received a sentence of 6 ½ years in prison.

Turning a corner in treatment

A significant turning point for Dave was when he was sent to the Drug Treatment Unit at Springhill Prison. At this point, he had been caught using drugs in prison and, despite all efforts to resist, was sent by the parole board to undergo drug treatment. Dave intended to go to Springhill and follow instructions to get parole. Soon after arriving, though, his plan was disrupted:

“I am unpacking my cell, and a guy I knew came in. (We had done a lot of jail time together). He said, ‘Giddy Dave,’ and I said, ‘What is the deal with this place, mate? What is the way around it...what is the scam?’ He said, ‘Nah, no scam mate, this is for real... it’s the most fantastic...’ I don’t remember what he said, but he talked for five minutes, and I just stood there with my jaw hanging. I thought, ‘Fuck, you’re different’ – because he used to be really bad. If I was bad, he was a no-hoper. I just had that thought for the first time: ‘I don’t know what you have got, but I want it.’

I contemplated for the first time what life would be like without drugs. That is really scary when you first have those thoughts. Then he wandered off, and another guy, Sean, came and did more or less the same thing. I didn’t even know Sean, but he just said, ‘Welcome, good to see you here,’ and told me a bit about him...it was just how they talked; they weren’t bullshitting. They were real. They were passionate. It just embedded that feeling of, ‘I actually want this.’ So, I embraced the programme.”

In the Drug Treatment Unit, Dave was asked by his group therapist what was essential to him. Dave thought relationships and intimacy were important. The therapist challenged Dave, asking, “What is intimacy to you?” Dave found it difficult to answer without referring to sexual acts. For the first time, Dave was offered a broader conceptualisation of intimacy, which focused on being honest and open rather than acting as a people pleaser, wearing a mask, or trying to get something or manipulate someone. It was about just being in genuine relationships. Dave recognised how his limited view of intimacy had contributed to his anxiety and addiction:

“I think about all those years of social anxiety – which was probably the reason for all the drug use, you know, I drank because it made me someone else. That was key to me, being part of the world with true intimacy with others...feeling...belonging.”

Finding support from peers

Another turning point for Dave occurred during the Drug Treatment Unit programme when he wrote to Narcotics Anonymous (NA) for support. He requested that NA send some of their literature to the unit, and they responded by visiting in person. One of the NA members blew the crowd away with his own story of offending, incarceration, and finding wellness. Identifying with his story was huge for Dave and his peers. From then on, NA members visited the unit every Friday.

When he finished his treatment at the unit, Dave continued to be supported by NA to help him recover while in mainstream prison. NA was also a significant support for Dave coming out of prison. As soon as he was on parole, he took up the challenge of attending 90 meetings in 90 days. Through this, he found “that framework, network of support, and stayed away from the old crowd”.

Another aspect of Dave’s recovery journey was joining the Recovery First Trust. The trust is a group of recovering addicts who focus on people like Dave, who have been in and out of the cycle of addiction, offending, and incarceration. Trust members support each other, taking people to 12-Step meetings and running various events, including motocross riding, paintball, and jet skiing. They were, and still are, instrumental in the role-modelling recovery of Dave and others.

“My life is so different today, and when I look back, a key component is Recovery First. I think if I had just done the Drug Treatment Unit and got out, I would have easily slipped back. I wouldn’t have had that core group of people, those pro-social people, and those relationships in that crucial early stage of release to keep me on track and excited. In a way, it’s sort of like if I hadn’t had them, I would have been trying to force out the old faces, which would have left me isolated. Instead, I filled my life with so many positive, focused people that there’s no room for the other ones. I call it ‘Love them from afar.’ If I did bump into those old faces, it would be like, ‘Hi, how are you going? It was nice seeing you, but I got to go, bye,’ and just staying really focused, alive and recognising that.”

Dave knows what works for him, and abstaining from using drugs and being surrounded by his peers in Recovery First and NA are crucial to his continued recovery:

“Abstinence works for me; NA works for me. It doesn’t work for everyone, but it matters what works for you. If people can have a joint or a drink and not end up being arrested or losing their relationships, good on them. I can’t, you know. For me, if I pick up one thing, I’d kid myself, and I would pick up another. It’s possible that I could have the odd social drink, but why would I try? Life is so damn fantastic right now. Why would I change it? I am healthy, I am happy, I am successful. But I will never forget and never leave my Recovery First roots because it is crucial. It’s not like I am recovered; I will always be recovering, so I need to keep the elements that got me here in my life.”

Finding meaningful employment

Because of NA’s encouragement and Recovery First’s encouragement, Dave gave peer support training a go. The experience became another central turning point in his life. Once Dave completed peer support training, he initially struggled to get employment (due to being recently released from prison). He had been told about opportunities to provide peer support within a newly developed initiative within the courts. After some initial hesitation, he was accepted to provide peer support to participants of Te Whare Whakapiki Wairua – The Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court.

“It was quite amazing and had a big impact on my life – working in a judicial space, working with people I knew coming out of prison into treatment, and being able to use my lived experience of addiction, of offending, of incarceration, and treatment– all those things, and of success. Even though, at that stage, I was probably four years abstinent, so a relative success. So, working in that space and being able to role model that to other people and see it work for them, understanding how that peer voice worked – about not being directive or doing things for people, but building self-efficacy and finding that balance. I made quite a few mistakes. But I learnt from them and had great support and supervision.”

Dave worked in the drug court for over five years, when he was awarded the first-ever National Award for Excellence in Peer Support. He then moved into a peer management role within the more comprehensive support offered by Odyssey House. In this role, Dave set up a peer support team and became engaged with a broader range of peer and consumer groups nationally and internationally. In 2019, Dave was appointed to the role of consumer lead at Odyssey House, which gave him access to the broader mental health and addiction sector while also gaining feedback from consumers of the Odyssey Houses programme and feeding that back to senior management. He was also given the independence to have the space to network with the sector and be involved with national groups developing codes of ethics and competencies and being part of the Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Collaborative. Dave is immensely thankful to the leadership at Odyssey, who are supportive and are helping him be ready to take on new things to help him grow.

The transformative potential of learning

Dave also found further education and involvement in research transformative. While in prison, Dave finished a level 6 environmental management diploma; his peers encouraged him to study more. After being turned down by every tertiary institution, he applied to AUT, which recognised that his lived experiences in the drug courts were relevant and strengthened his application to study for the graduate diploma in mental health and addictions. Dave completed the diploma over two years as a pathway into postgraduate study. He is continuing the research journey doing his master’s as part of this project - He Ture Kia Tika.

At the same time, Dave immersed himself in te ao Māori. He found taking part in haka and waiata therapeutic in their collaborative nature. Like in rugby league, he felt like he was part of a team. While in prison, he had begun to learn his pepeha and to understand the purpose of identity and connections – who am I, and how do I connect with the people I am with? While in drug court, Dave learned karakia and mihi through cultural competency training. These learnings spurred Dave on to study te reo. Today, Dave continues to deepen his understanding and connections to te ao Māori through the guidance of Matua Ken, the kaumatua for Odyssey.

“I get a connection from it, a sense of spirituality.

A glimpse of the Māori worldview. It is not mine; I cannot have it because I am not Māori. I do not have a Māori worldview because I am Pākehā, but I may be able to understand it and let it influence how I think.

I feel quite committed to that pathway that Māori hold the solutions, and it is time for us actually to back them...you know the people in the negative statistics are Māori, so why are we trying to ‘fix’ them our way? Maybe if Māori can teach their ways, it may also benefit others.”

Strength in family

Throughout his recovery journey, Dave found inspiration in his mother. He misses their daily conversations since she passed away a few years ago. Dave’s mother showed him he could endure tough times by keeping his head down and on top of his finances. Dave sees his ability to manage his finances, pay bills, and keep within his budget as behaviours he learned from his mother. This is important for Dave because losing control of money triggers his anxiety. He has also seen numerous instances of how much his mother, a schoolteacher, was loved by her students:

“People would come up to my mother and rave about how she was the best teacher they had. A real inspiration.”

Dave is happy that he was abstinent and in recovery and doing “lots of good stuff” during the final five years of his Mum’s life. He knows she was very proud of him.

Dave is excited about life, learning and growing, and community involvement. He is still learning te reo and sees opportunities in the future. His son is in his fourth year of medicine, and they are very close. He also found his now long-term partner Karla, who is a continual support and companion. He takes things one day at a time and lives life on life’s terms.

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“I need to make up to them. I’ve hurt them. When they’re ready to live this way, they come to me – the other cousins, and different gangs – and I’ll do karakia for them or give them words of wisdom or even from afar. Every day, I wake up, and I karakia to stay clean and sober and carry on with the hikoi. I do it to make amends to all of them, and it kind of gets rid of my shame and guilt – whakama.”

TE POU’S STORY

Te Pou was born in Rotorua and raised by his maternal grandmother, Ruhia Waerea of Te Arawa, and her husband, who whakapapa to Rarotonga. Te Pou’s mother, Ani Poona, was from Te Arawa, while his father, Peka Henry, was Tūhoe from Ruātoki. On his paternal side, Te Pou’s grandmother, Raiha Makamaka Peka, was born and bred in Ruātoki, and his grandfather came from the North, Ngāti Kahu ki Whangaroa. Te Pou has a twin sister, an older sister, and a younger brother. Te Pou is married to Kotiro from Ngawha, near Kaikohe. Together, they have four children aged between 9 and 18 years old.

Early years

During Te Pou’s early childhood, there were a lot of problems between him and his parents, and life was hard for the family. His father was in and out of prison for family violence charges, and the kids were shuffled between their grandparents’ and parents’ homes. His father was a hard, tough man, and “no one messed with him”. Growing up, Te Pou believed that was how he had to be, too:

“Whenever Dad went to jail, I would fret for my father. I would cry throughout my upbringing. I was told I was a bit of a tangi weto (cry baby), and that’s how it was told to me. ‘Oh, you’re a softy,’ you know, and I kind of felt like as I grew up that I was crying, and I wasn’t meant to cry. That’s the kind of teachings that I had.”

Te Pou also recalls being in and out of the hospital. As a three- or four-year-old, one of his earliest memories was of his mother trying to feed them. There were three kids at the table, one bowl of milk, and his mother would put cereal in the bowl, one at a time, for each of them. Te Pou’s grandmother told him that when he was about three years old, he was often in hospital for malnutrition. He had been 4 lbs when he was born prematurely, while his sister had been bigger.

“We were sickly kids, always sick when I was a baby, and I had bad asthma. So, poverty; Mum and Dad were struggling at the time to try and raise us and feed us. Mum and Dad were both addicts.”

One time, when Te Pou was at the hospital, the doctors spoke about their whānau when a Te Arawa tohunga, a well-known matakite and healer, overheard the conversation. The tohunga worked in a cultural role at the hospital and knew the whānau. He tried to get the doctors to keep Te Pou and his sister in the hospital. This was because he had had a vision where he could not see Te Pou and his sister in the future; if they went back to their parents, they would likely die. The tohunga told Te Pou’s nana that the twins, who whakapapa to Ngāti Kea Ngāti Tuara, had bad luck and that a makutu or curse had been placed on their whānau. It had started when other twins in their whakapapa, who were intelligent, had been cursed because of their abilities by a jealous makutu ‘curse’ practitioner. Those twins had died after being cursed, and the makutu had stayed in the family bloodline.

Te Pou had not realised until he was much older how seriously his grandmother took the warning from that tohunga; she said it was about tikanga. His grandmother told him that her parents also had twins and that they had died. One of her own siblings’ children had also had twins who experienced horrific injuries after accidents. One twin was left with paraplegia after an accident, and his twin sister got hit by a car when she was five years old. She is partially paralysed and has a mental impairment. Te Pou learned that other whānau had also either lost twins or they were always sick.

As a result of meeting with the tohunga, Te Pou and his twin sister ended up in permanent care with their grandmother to minimise any repercussions from the family makutu.

School years

Te Pou remembers struggling at school. Although he was only about six years old, he remembers not being focused.

He constantly missed his parents, especially his father, and felt he didn’t fit in.

“At school, there wasn’t a day, really, that went by where I didn’t feel out of place and fretted for my father. It was more my Dad than my Mum, and so I struggled to learn. I fought all the time, right from being a little kid. Another thing I struggled with was getting on with other kids; it was really hard because

I was ashamed. I kind of felt like I had a burden because every other kid I’d see their parents going to support them at school for sports events and stuff like that, and my Dad was never there.”

Te Pou naturally gravitated to the other naughty kids at school. But he also tended to self-isolate, and he started stealing lunches from other students.

As Te Pou’s stealing got worse, so did the discipline he experienced from his grandfather. Te Pou’s grandfather was fresh from the Cook Islands and raised with military-like discipline. When Te Pou’s grandfather caught him stealing, he got a hiding. After a while, Te Pou became immune to these hidings. He stopped caring about the consequences and continued stealing throughout his schooling.

As he got older, Te Pou came to view his grandfather as a father figure, and the two had a close relationship. Te Pou occasionally visited his parents, who were living in Auckland. When he was there, he would see all sorts of flash material things like cars, clothes, and money. That lifestyle was unfamiliar to Te Pou, and he wondered what moving to Auckland with his Mum and Dad would be like.

Loss, grief, and moving to Auckland

When Te Pou was about 12 years old, his grandfather passed away. By this time, his grandmother struggled to control him, so he moved to Ōrākei, Auckland, to live with his parents. Te Pou missed his grandfather and felt a deep sense of grief:

“I didn’t care if I lived or died. I wanted to be with him, and the easiest way to be with him in my mind was if I was dead, then I’d be with him. Now, I look at it today, and I understand it was because my physical body was here, but my wairua was with my grandfather in heaven. I wanted to be with him, so I always thought, ‘If I die, I don’t really care.’”

In Auckland, Te Pou’s stealing got worse, and he had his first experience with using cannabis. He was peer pressured at school to try it. He wasn’t too worried about using cannabis because his grandfather was no longer around to “growl” at him. Today, Te Pou concedes he was vulnerable at that time in his life:

“So, I took it [cannabis], but straight after I had my first use, I was hooked. That was the first time I felt free of the sadness of not being brought up by my biological parents and the sadness of my life to that date and the impact of my grandfather dying.”

Gang life

Things started to “click into place” for Te Pou as he gained an understanding of what his Dad was doing. He came to realise the friends, who he thought were just whānau staying with them, were gang prospects, and their job was to sell dope. All the while, his Mum and Dad were paying their rent and buying food with the profits.

Despite this income stream, there were still tough times, and they would go hungry. Te Pou noticed his parents would argue and fight when things were hard. Te Pou started to think of ways to support his parents and began paying close attention to what was happening during the drug dealing. He reasoned that if he learned how to hustle and be tough, no one would mess with him. He, too, could become a gang member, establishing a name for himself. He dreamed of taking care of his parents so they wouldn’t have to deal drugs or fight.

By this time, Te Pou was at Selwyn College, and although he wasn’t engaged academically, he was highly athletic. He excelled at every sport he participated in:

“I was so athletic as a kid. That’s one thing I was good at: sports, any sport I could play, and I do it really well. I remember playing rugby when I first started at Selwyn College, but after I started smoking cannabis heavily, my desire went from that. I wanted to play sport and play rugby league for a career; that was my dream as a kid.”

Te Pou’s whānau in Rotorua had all been athletic but using cannabis had had a detrimental effect on them all.

Despite the sporting activity, Te Pou was no longer motivated to go to school and started fighting on the streets in his community. He could hardly walk down the road without getting into a fight. He thought people were looking at him, and he didn’t care how big they were. He felt good about making a name for himself in the area. Gang culture had become normalised for him by now, and he gave little thought to the impact he might have on others. It was just how things were – like a sport.

Things changed when Te Pou’s family moved from Ōrākei to Panama Road in Ōtāhuhu. In Rotorua and Ōrākei, fights had been one-on-one, but in Otahuhu, groups jumped him. In Rotorua and Ōrākei, there was a larger Māori population, but in Otahuhu, there was a different ethnic mix, and the social norms were not what Te Pou was used to. In his second year at Selwyn College, he was expelled. He tried to get into other schools, but his record of disruptive behaviour made it too complicated. Although he tried to help, his Dad’s criminal record made enrolling in any school impossible.

Learning the trade

Since returning to school was no longer an option, Te Pou put all his energy into learning about the drug trade:

“I ended up growing up from there, in tinny houses... and learning the trade from my Dad and my uncles because that’s what I wanted to do. I told them, ‘This is what I want to do.’ I was only about 14 or 15...I was with uncles and different gang members from different chapters in the BP [Black Power].”

Te Pou’s uncles showed him how to do what was required in the drug trade, including cultivation and other parts of the business. He helped with the growing, manicuring, and preparation of cannabis. His uncles would give him cannabis as payment, mainly because they knew he would try to steal it otherwise. Today, Te Pou believes they were trying their best to help him find his way within that lifestyle.

Te Pou remembers that the family became very “hot” and attracted a lot of police attention. In response, they gradually moved further south to evade police notice. Whānau were getting arrested and became subject to surveillance. That was the norm for Te Pou: he was often stopped and searched and would be used as a lookout for the whānau, watching out for the police when things were happening.

Te Pou became close with all the gang prospects, performing functions to support their activities. He still has close relationships with them today, despite their gang affiliations. They are whangai brothers. Te Pou recalls times when his whangai brothers took the blame for his Dad, saving him from going to prison. At times, they also were imprisoned, serving long sentences. This was an accepted part of Te Pou’s world, and his dream was to be a patched member so he could follow the same path.

“It wasn’t all bad. It was good to feel like you had things that other wealthier families had. The hard thing about it was seeing the whānau go in and out of prison.”

Things seemed to get better for a while as they continued moving further south to keep out of sight of the police. The family ended up moving into an area that was a Mongrel Mob stronghold. As a family aligned with Black Power, Te Pou remembers the whole street was against his whānau; they had to fight for the right not to be messed with. Te Pou knew they had to find a way to accommodate each other, to have a treaty with those families from the Mongrel Mob. At first, it was either shoot or be shot. However, Te Pou was able to have conversations with the other kids whose parents were gang members and ended up making peace with them.

Despite everything that was going on around him, Te Pou had limited involvement with the criminal justice system. He was either too young to be of interest, or he was able to manipulate his way through the system to avoid jail. He came very close at times, like when he moved back to Rotorua briefly and was involved in severe violence with another gang prospect but avoided the consequences by quickly moving back to Auckland.

Voices of reason

Te Pou's Dad started to become a voice of reason, preventing him from being violent toward other gang members and teaching him about "Māori and stuff like that". Te Pou realises that he was being taught "how in that game to be kind of diplomatic".

When he was about 17, Te Pou tried to become an active Black Power member, but his Dad blocked him and told other gang members to stay away from his son. At the time, Te Pou was facing serious violence charges, having nearly killed someone. He feels remorse for that now, but he had been taught how to lie, deny, and manipulate the system at the time.

One day, Te Pou attended his uncle's anger management programme graduation at "Losys" in Manurewa. His uncle was an old-school gangster who had taught him a lot while growing up. Although Te Pou went to awhi his uncle, he remembers a man getting up and speaking about getting "clean". Concepts of recovery, change, and managing anger were all new to Te Pou, and this event would play a part in his desire to change.

Hitting rock bottom

At the age of 17, Te Pou met his long-term partner, Kotiro; two years later, they had their first child. Te Pou had become close to many kids in the other gangs on his street and moved into their world. He had first become involved in meth through them and their parents, who were gang leaders. By the time his daughter was born, Te Pou was 19 years old and addicted.

Kotiro struggled with his violence and often threatened to leave him. Te Pou had sworn he would never be like his Dad but found himself doing the same violent acts towards her and didn't know how to change it. Eventually, Kotiro left him for the first time, taking their daughter with her. Te Pou confesses that Kotiro leaving him almost broke him:

"It broke me. I thought, 'Why can't I stop that anger and kind of mentality in me when I know the effects that it does?' I just couldn't stop it, I guess.

Everything I tried to stop it with, I thought I'd go and get money by dealing. I thought I could stop it, but I became just like my father with the violence towards my partner and then other family members didn't want to be around me anymore because I was unpredictable. I got into a dark, lonely place."

Te Pou didn't know how to stop being violent and seek power and control through that violence. He believed that what you had to do to have a productive, peaceful life. He kept trying different things and meeting different friends, but nothing changed. He had homicidal and suicidal thoughts often, but he couldn't bring himself to take his own life because of his kids. It was easier to hurt others. However, many of his patched uncles, family members, whangai brothers and friends in the neighbourhood became concerned about his behaviour. He believed they started to be more distant from him because of his highly violent tendencies, and this hurt him. He felt rejected, and in a way, he became increasingly desensitised to hurting people, and the longer the behaviour went on, the lonelier he became.

Te Pou's partner, Kotiro, would make up excuses not to go to public places or mix socially as a family with the children. She later told him that she feared for their lives, knowing she couldn't stop him and that, often, the violence would be directed towards her. Te Pou recalls not being invited to specific family gatherings involving his children, and this brought up the trauma he had experienced during his childhood of having an absent father. Later on, when he got into recovery, his uncles, cousins, family, and friends disclosed they, too, had not wanted to be around him for the same reasons – he was always initiating life-threatening violent altercations.

"I was hurting people all the time. A lot of times, I should have gone to prison. Still, I'd lie and manipulate my way out of it by getting others to take the blame or use seniors and affiliates, including my father, to pressure witnesses or school them in how to manipulate the justice system. I guess that's when I got sick of it, and I think my wife had given me the last chance to shape up or risk losing my relationship with my children. She had taken me back many times; I'd become addicted to meth along with my

close brothers now, one of the senior Mob family kids. Me and him had become really close [even though] we were enemies on that same street."

Te Pou thought that drug dealing could help him find financial freedom. He didn't know anything about legitimate employment. His father was driving trucks by then, and Te Pou sometimes travelled the road with him. He was still learning the drug trade and was confused about what he should be doing. He also felt he was getting "mixed messages" from his Dad who, while still engaged in criminal activity as a "gangster", was trying to teach Te Pou "how to embrace fear and humility":

"I found it hard to change, and then I saw it as hypocritical of him. Now I am older, I accept he did the best he could, and although he was hypocritical, I feel he genuinely wanted me to create a different life from the one he lived. Those were some of the ugliest days of my life."

Te Pou's father and uncles continued to move in and out of prison; this was normal for them. It was the same on his mother's side of the family; his uncles and aunties saw drug dealing as the norm, and it is still the same today for some. While he doesn't condone it, Te Pou recognises that drug dealing is all that has kept them out of poverty.

Te Pou and his wife had two more children; he has always loved being a father.

When Te Pou was about 25, he got into serious trouble at a party, running over people with his car. The police were called, and they witnessed the incident, but Te Pou managed to get away. He remembers crying after the event and praying, "God, why do I always end up in this cycle? Everything I do always stuffs up!" His wife gave him the last warning. Te Pou thought he might not be able to see his children again.

"Before I had my kids, I didn't care if I lived or died. I thought my spirit would go to Te Ao Wairua with my pops, and then I could be reunited with him in the heavens. But then I had my daughter and my son, then another son, and I thought, 'Damn, I gotta change for them.'"

Healing his wairua

Te Pou's wife took him to see a tohunga at Manurewa Marae, who heals wairua. The tohunga told Te Pou he had a crack in his soul. Something had happened to his wairua, his spirit.

"My mind's eye, my 'third eye,' became clear; the colours of nature were more vibrant, and I noticed this immediately. The tohunga worked to heal the crack."

Te Pou recalls it was like his eyes had been closed and that he had been sitting in darkness forever. Through this, Te Pou had a spiritual awakening. It was like a spiritual compass in his spirit had been dormant and just flicked on like a light switch. The next day, he went to Losys and said he needed to see someone. He knew he needed help.

"I walked in, and I cried; I said, 'I'm psychotic, I don't know what to do, I keep hurting people.'"

Te Pou feared what would happen when the police caught up with him, but he also knew he was sick and needed to change.

His journey towards an "alternative way of being" was bolstered when Te Pou met Megan, a counsellor at Losys. Megan told him that if he genuinely wanted to change, he needed to realise that he might be a special type of person, an addict. He had no idea what that was; everyone he knew used drugs. Megan told Te Pou about the Salvation Army Bridge Programme and recommended he go there. Te Pou admits that a big motivation to go to the Bridge Programme at the time was simply to avoid a jail sentence.

Through the Programme, Te Pou started attending Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings where he met people like him. It was towards the end of the Bridge Programme that the police finally caught up with him, and he was charged with using a vehicle as a weapon. When he finally appeared, the judge recognised his commitment to recovery and the work he had done. Te Pou managed to avoid prison.

Megan also taught him that he had Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder (PTSD) and had become desensitised to violence. He had triggers that sent him into fight or flight mode. When he saw red, he associated it with the Mongrel Mob and would fly into a rage and resort to violence; it was the only way he knew how to respond. Megan helped him through therapy using colours to desensitise and change how he responded.

“The freedom I felt when I got therapy was unbelievable. That’s what made me do that work. It freaked me out; I thought, ‘Wow, this stuff works’”.

During treatment, Te Pou learned about how drugs worked and about withdrawal, and he could see how those things had affected his parents and others throughout his life. It all started to make sense and fall into place. He began to learn about colonisation and what had happened to Māori. All the good teachings from his grandmother came back. Most importantly, he learned that addiction was a sickness.

“Holy shit, it’s a sickness, but there’s a way out, and I was committed genuinely, and I feel when I went to court, that’s what they saw.”

He started to find a new way to live that involved not putting his life at risk and being able to support his children. He had never known about rehabilitation or social ways of doing things. He went to rehabilitation and started getting clean; he then started seeing a trauma therapist.

Te Pou continued going to Manurewa Marae, where he worked on healing his wairua. He didn’t know that some of the people he was seeing there were his relatives.

They taught Te Pou how to work through and understand the things he was experiencing. It all went back to the makuta, the curse that had been in his whānau. Some intergenerational issues and grudges went back into his whakapapa. He learned that there were issues related to colonisation through Tūhoe and Te Arawa. His Mum’s people were the main kūpapa, military for the Crown. They were promised they would get their land titles back if they joined the Pākehā forces in the hunt for the prophet Te Kooti. As a result, some of Te Pou’s tūpuna from Ruātoki, on his Dad’s side, were killed. Te Pou also learnt more about the rare (trouble) between his ancestors on his Dad’s

whakapapa to Ngāpuhi; they also went to Te Arawa and killed people.

Te Pou is matakite (seer) – he sees things. He needed help from tohunga to understand and deal with this. Te Pou reached out to kaumatua in his whānau, people he respected. They taught him old whakapapa. By digging deeply into his issues and those in his whakapapa, Te Pou started to re-experience the trauma.

Drawing on lived experience to help others

Te Pou engaged in many forms of support and has worked on broader issues in his life. He was fully engaged with 12-Step fellowships and started peer support training with Recovery Innovations in Manukau. Peer Employment Training (PET) and Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) were immense learnings for him. Te Pou was empowered by the idea that he is the expert on his recovery. He says his mana “blossomed”, and he found a way to be his own tohunga. He spent six months at Recovery Innovations in a peer support role and then spent two years with Care NZ. Te Pou enrolled in the Te Taketake Diploma in Counselling at Moana House and focused on integrating peer support and clinical approaches at Care NZ. He thrived in this role, leading peer interventions as he studied and developed his clinical focus.

Te Pou went from Care NZ to Mahitahi, where they had a much more clinical focus. It was here Te Pou started to use his learning in a mental health setting, using what he calls “the language of the heart”. He worked alongside the clinical psychology teams in Counties Manukau at Te Puna Waiora, bringing his lived experience, peer, and clinical knowledge, and supported by his growing cultural understanding.

After three years with Mahitahi, Te Pou went to Homecare Medical for two years. By then, he was a DAPAANZ registered clinician. Homecare was establishing a contract with Counties Manukau DHB to develop a peer talk line. He helped to create the talk line using his peer experience while also being recognised for his clinical work. He helped train the peer specialists about maintaining their mana while training the clinical staff about the peer role, addressing the contrast in approach and tensions between the two roles.

While at Homecare Medical, he established a cultural steering group. He enrolled in a postgraduate diploma program in Kaitiakitanga Bicultural supervision with Te Wananga o Aotearoa. Te Pou had been getting clinical supervision for some time, but his supervisor could not help with the cultural issues he was experiencing. His uncle, Eru George, was a big help with this and guided his focus on a more cultural approach.

Te Pou’s ongoing journey into learning more about the issues in his whakapapa and reconciling that with his own lived experience has been challenging. He experienced vicarious trauma and had to work hard to find his way forward. He had conflicting messages from both the clinical and cultural worlds and had to develop his understanding based on his own experience. The influences of peer, clinical, and cultural approaches were difficult to reconcile.

“I didn’t realise, though, that what I learned growing up with Nan and Koro was a blessing, as my Nan was one of the main people at the marae for years, and I used to go with her for wānanga with my other Nanny and all that stuff I hated growing up. When I got older, when I was at Homecare Medical, it was all kind of sitting there, just waiting to come to fruition, so I developed my bicultural supervision model, which is Pou Kaitiakitanga. I believe everyone can be their own Pou and their own Kaitiaki because of everything I learned in peer support, 12-Step, and clinical therapy; I’ve done them all.”

Te Pou now recognises that the learning from his life experience growing up – in active addiction within a gang setting, experiencing anger, trauma, PTSD, and attachment issues – and then getting the peer, clinical, and cultural learnings have given him a comprehensive perspective that is inclusive and strengths-based.

For Te Pou, a crucial part of his growth was learning to be a Dad and be in a relationship. He and his wife attended couples counselling along the way, which has embedded his belief in whānau and family first. He knows that without going into what he calls the “Māori stuff”, he would not have been able to make it all work.

As he developed his new approach, Te Pou moved into a role with Te Atea Marino at CADS to help them be more tūturu (true) to their tikanga. Then he moved over to Kahui Tū Kaha at Ngāti Whātua. Since he’s been there, he has been allowed to apply Kaupapa Māori methodology. He is still there now in a part-time role, working three days a week. Most of what he does is acute alcohol and other drug outreach with the Housing First model. Te Pou feels they are leading the way for most Māori organisations nationwide. The Housing First model means they work with chronic homelessness and emergency housing and help people get into a short-term sustainable tenancy. Te Pou spends the rest of his time in private practice. He does much of that as a contractor for Odyssey House, where he provides cultural supervision and support for various teams, particularly in the prison programmes they run at Spring Hill, Auckland Men’s Prisons and Wiri Women’s Prison.

“What I’m doing at Odyssey is Kaitiakitanga supervision, which is bicultural in context to Māori and the Crown, where I use Māori values to honour the mana of the Crown and honour the mana of Māori because that’s what tika, pono, and aroha means to me. That’s what being tūturu means – you whakamana the other Crown, or tangata tiriti, or every tangata tiriti in my whakapapa, all the people that come over as tangata tiriti, the Pacific that come over with the urban migration from the islands, which was my grandfather. I’ve learned to whakamana both sides because that’s what tikanga Māori is.”

This inclusive approach recognises the value of relationships with manuhiri. He takes a macro view of this and relates it to tangata tiriti and Māori, being bound by tapu to look after others. Te Pou accepts that all approaches – Māori and non-Māori – work. The way forward is to have the courage to use it all or the right approach for the right situation.

Kaitiakitanga

Te Pou now sees his role within his whānau is to stay clean and sober and maintain his mana. He doesn’t see his Mum and Dad very much but does see his baby sister in an informal kaitiaki role. He had to step in last year after an incident involving his brother that led to trouble for his

Dad. Te Pou had to mediate between the Mongrel Mob and Mangu Kaha, helping to de-escalate the situation as a tūakana. He says when these things happen, “the korowai comes off,” meaning he must be true to himself and say and do hard things.

To support his well-being, Te Pou uses karakia every day. He knows his unique, inclusive approach is the way forward. The key is kaitiakitanga in his work and his life. He knows that tikanga can greatly benefit Māori and other indigenous cultures. Te Pou sees the 12-Step fellowship as a wairua programme and still regularly attends meetings as an active member at his home group. The programme has taught him how to use his tikanga better.

Te Pou has always had a strong religious connection through his Anglican whānau in Te Arawa, which has become more prominent over the years. He is involved in the marae, maintaining kaitiaki responsibilities to himself, whānau, hapu, and iwi, and where he is recognised as a tohunga in his own right. He is often asked to do blessings for houses and people and to bring his unique wisdom to help others. He has a standing as a “priest” in a sense, much like the Ratana Apotoro, which is almost like a 12-Step sponsor, or a spiritual guardian, a tohunga healer.

While Te Pou has never been sentenced to prison, he has been in court and is aware of the harm he has caused through violence and drugs. He sees himself as very lucky to have come into recovery and avoid a path that his Dad and many others went down. He lives now to make amends to those he has harmed.

“I need to make up to them. I’ve hurt them. When they’re ready to live this way, they come to me – the other cousins, and different gangs – and I’ll do karakia for them or give them words of wisdom or even from afar. Every day, I wake up, and I karakia to stay clean and sober and carry on with the hikoi. I do it to make amends to all of them, and it kind of gets rid of my shame and guilt – whakama.”

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BEX'S STORY

Bex was born and raised in Upper Hutt, Wellington and identifies as a Pākehā female. For most of her childhood, she lived with her parents, two sisters, and one brother. Her parents highly regarded the Christian religion, and the household attended church regularly. Although her parents were very strict, Bex understood that this came from a place of love, in which they were trying to protect her from harm, and there was never any physical abuse in her home. However, the family unit broke down as Bex entered her adolescent years. Her father moved away suddenly, and she rarely saw him again.

After her father left, Bex's mother became increasingly overprotective of Bex and her siblings and immersed herself in her religion to cope with the separation. For Bex, this marked a time of feeling alone and outcasted, particularly by her peers. Compounding these feelings, Bex experienced a traumatic event in which she felt a profound loss of control. All these factors combined to have a significant impact on her physical health, with her body shifting into a stress response. Bex experienced severe asthma attacks and was consequently hospitalised for the duration of her fourth form year. Every time she was able to leave the hospital, she would soon need to be admitted again. During this time, her emotional and physical health became inextricably linked: "I put on a lot of weight, and I was lonely, and I spent a lot of time in there by myself."

Dysfunctional relationships

By the time Bex reached her teenage years, being physically unwell had become all-consuming. At 14, she entered her first committed relationship. Bex needed love and acceptance more than ever and became co-dependent on her partner. She had also started using cannabis regularly, marking the beginning of her substance addiction. Bex had long felt confused in her home life and lonely amongst her peers. Within this relationship, she felt a sense of comfort, which encouraged her to stay for years. However, her partner was physically and psychologically abusive. He ridiculed her weight, which deeply affected her self-esteem. Bex also described an event in which he assaulted her with

steel cap boots. After this incident, she was unable to sit properly. She did not tell anyone; until recently, Bex "always kept a lot of secrets".

At 19, Bex left this relationship and met her second serious partner, who was well-known to the police. Bex moved in with this man and his brother, who was serving a sentence of home detention at the time. The police often waited near her house to pull Bex over in her car. Although she had been committing offences, such as driving without vehicle registration, Bex felt the police were unfairly targeting her because of the people she lived with; she had become "guilty by association". Soon after moving in with her partner, Bex was arrested for obstruction while the police inspected her vehicle. She was pushed to the ground despite trying to explain that she was pregnant. This marked her first serious interaction with the legal system and the first breach of duty of care perpetrated by police.

"I was pregnant, and he put the handcuffs on so tight that I had blue and purple rings around my wrist, and he took me to Upper Hutt police cells, and I think I was there overnight, and I had a miscarriage. I do not know if that would have still happened. I do not blame them...but I do know it was traumatising at the time."

Disordered eating and substance abuse

Not long after the miscarriage, she entered a new relationship with the father of her daughter, Lucy. During and after her pregnancy he, like a previous partner, made degrading comments about her weight. When their daughter was two weeks old, her partner left and started dating one of her friends. This was devastating for Bex and led to further insecurity. She began obsessively trying to control her weight.

"This was when my heavy drug use began. I was sniffing about a tray of Ritalin a day for weight control. I called my friend, crying my eyes out because I had eaten half a muffin, and I was 44 kg and had a six-month-old baby. I was skin and bone."

During her early 20s, Bex entered a relationship with a drug dealer who had a steady supply of methamphetamine. This

is where her “love affair with methamphetamine began” and Bex rapidly became addicted. Bex also described a pattern of moving from one relationship to the next, with each partner becoming “higher up the [drug supply] food chain and more violent”.

The following relationship Bex had with a panel beater, who lived together above his workshop. This man was also physically and emotionally abusive towards her. Bex rapidly became consumed by the relationship and found it nearly impossible to leave him; even when she managed to escape her mother’s house, she would inevitably turn back. During these times, she would leave her daughter with her mother. At one point, he broke Bex’s fingers. She described him as “paranoid” and the angriest person she had ever met. He also obsessively controlled Bex’s finances, rationing her weekly benefit. This restricted her freedom and movements until she could not leave the house alone.

Feeling trapped and powerless, Bex accepted an outside offer to supply methamphetamine on her own, a decision she kept secret from her partner.

Supplying illicit substances and dangerous situations

Bex soon realised that she excelled at “hustling”, marking the beginnings of her identity as a supplier of methamphetamine and other illicit substances. She sourced her contacts, initially enabling her to make her own money and leave her controlling partner. From this point, Bex never looked back:

“It was such a buzz to have my own money after being so controlled that I got really out of hand with it really fast.”

Bex had surrounded herself with gangs, and the consequences of this lifestyle soon began to catch up with her. As much as she wanted to change her life trajectory, Bex was caught up in a cycle of addiction and relationships that made it challenging for her to break free.

To provide some normality for Lucy, Bex moved in with a close girlfriend and her four daughters, which felt like a family home. The older girls looked after Lucy, and they

were like the sisters she never had. However, Bex’s life was still marred with methamphetamine. Many nights, Bex and a driver would travel to Ōtaki to purchase drugs. Bex’s friend, whom she was living with, would stay with the children, and Bex would be back before sunrise. Bex would then sell drugs when the children were at school.

Bex had become romantically involved with another man who lived in Ōtaki, and he was providing her with large quantities of methamphetamine. Bex now sees this as one of her most predominant downfalls, reflecting that she “always slept with the crack dealers”. On one occasion, while her daughter was spending time with her father, Bex went to stay with her partner in Ōtaki. She described a traumatic turning point:

“We were in bed, about to fall asleep, and all of a sudden, the door flew open. I remember hearing the bolt flapping on the door because it was such force. I sat up in surprise, and there was a gun in my face and five guys with masks on and guns pointed at us. That was my first scary experience in the drug world that wasn’t violence from a partner, and it did not end there. Like it just got worse and worse...So then my stupid mind thinks like, ‘I have got to go find the biggest baddest gangsters to keep me safe,’ instead of, ‘I have got to get out of this world.’”

From this point on, Bex became heavily affiliated with the Mongrel Mob and other gang members to gain protection from harm. She also entered a relationship with a man who was higher up in the drug supply than any of her previous partners. This signified another critical point, in which Bex became even more immersed in the drug scene and the corresponding collateral consequences of selling illicit substances. Bex fell deeply in love with her partner and was especially attracted to the high-rolling gangster “Pablo [Escobar]” side of him. The two used and sold drugs on a large scale while living in an expensive home in Miramar with dogs, vehicles, and plenty of money. However, this man was violent, and although Bex saw him as the least abusive towards her, there were incidents of violence, including him splitting her head open, which indicated the experiences of trauma endured.

There is no protection from either side of the law.

Bex and her partner were also under constant surveillance by the Wellington Police. Bex had intuitive feelings that this was occurring, though the substance use restricted her ability to change anything. The more methamphetamine she was consuming, the more she was surrounded by police, gangs, and violent situations. Despite being over her head, Bex always attempted to ensure her daughter was safe. She kept a low profile when they were together and utilised responsible people to care for Lucy when things got out of hand. Bex believes that God kept her daughter safe throughout this time.

After dark, Bex always had someone physically strong, usually from a gang, in her lounge for her protection. She recalls many situations in which gang members and drug seekers would turn up in the yard at night. Bex had previously experienced being kidnapped twice, so feeling safe in her home was vital to her.

Bex had become terrified of gangs and the police, and it was not long before her world started falling apart. Their house was raided multiple times.

Bex was placed on 24-hour, seven-days-a-week curfew. As a result, she rapidly lost money and her home. Bex decided to go on the run with her daughter after the police raided her house. They stayed in hotels, and Bex felt at a loss for what to do. She attempted to call her lawyer multiple times, but he did not answer her calls. He told Bex she did not need rehabilitation and did not appear to have Bex’s best interests at heart. A friend recommended she contact Lucie Scott, a lawyer who proved to be exactly what Bex needed.

Bex attempted to find a bail address where she and her daughter were safe, which proved difficult. Bex believes the police could have allowed her to live on bail at her mother’s home. However, they seemed more interested in making an arrest and gathering further information through surveillance than assisting Bex out of the dangerous lifestyle she was immersed in. Her life continued to snowball out of control. Every night, she was left thinking, “Am I ever going to get out of this? Who is going to get me, the gangsters or the police?”

Eventually, Bex handed herself into the police and was advised by Lucie Scott that they had found evidence on her phone about a supply of methamphetamine and 80 litres of the substance GBL. She further advised that Bex would likely go to prison the next day. Bex was terrified of this prospect and found waiting in the cells to hear the judge’s decision was anxiety-provoking. Fortunately, Lucie successfully argued that bail was the best option for Bex because she had custody of her daughter.

Although she was grateful to be on bail, Bex believed the police had her movements under surveillance to gain more evidence on her partner. She felt she was being watched: “It was almost like they let me out to dig myself a deeper hole. They did; they gave me a rope to hang myself.” Bex was denied bail to her home, so she went to stay with a male friend in an area she describes as the “hood”. She was unable to pick up her possessions from her home in Miramar, and everything she owned was stolen by someone she had considered a friend.

At this point, Bex asked Lucy’s father to help care for their daughter, but he declined. Bex was struggling to manage her life. Her partner was of little help at the time as he did not like Bex living with her male friend. Her partner asked her to move in with his father, which she accepted. Despite describing this home as a mansion with a beautiful view, Bex said her time there was a “living hell”.

Her partner’s father was unkind, and she felt constantly uncomfortable in his presence. Bex also missed her pet dog and cat. She had finally reached a point of desperation.

Feeling alone and lost, Bex phoned Red Door, a rehabilitation centre in Lower Hutt. She spoke to the staff member there for over an hour and said she yearned to be clean from drugs. However, her partner talked her out of attending Red Door. Instead, Bex moved in with a Mongrel Mob member who had inherited a house. She now sees this as one of the “biggest mistakes [she] had ever made in [her] life”.

Bex felt unsafe in the home and wanted to protect her daughter. She had installed a camera and pleaded for her partner to place locks on the doors and windows to keep the Mongrel Mob and others from breaking in. Again, he

chose not to help her because she was living with another male. Her partner continued to control Bex in various ways, which left her feeling even more frightened and alone. She describes one particularly traumatic event-

“I was terrified of the Police and the Mongrel Mob. One night, I was watching on the camera, and two carloads of [Mongrel Mob members] pulled up in the driveway in the dark, and I saw all these patches come out of the car. I was sitting in my daughters’ room with a knife, and one of them knocked...they said, ‘Is that you, Bex?’ and my heart sank. I really don’t know how I got out alive, but I heard one of them say, ‘The captain said we can’t touch her.’ ...I knew everything was getting way over my head, and I felt there was a target on me.”

A significant turning point

Bex’s life was in turmoil. She had 25 active criminal charges, including supply of A and B class substances and breaching bail. She was traumatised by her intimate partner relationships, where she had been financially controlled. She carried this with her and continued to make as much money through drugs as possible. This lifestyle came with collateral consequences; for example, the Mongrel Mob stole all her belongings.

Things like this kept her on constant alert most of the time. The police were also constantly putting pressure on Bex and, in some cases, using her daughter as leverage. There was an incident during a raid where police officers were trying to force Bex to reveal the passcode to her phone, which eventually led to them garnering evidence against her. Bex describes this event in her own words:

“When the house got raided the first time, I drove into it, and they had a warrant for my arrest and my vehicle. They got my phone, and I had my daughter with me. I said, ‘I want to take my daughter to school, and even if you walk me there, let me get her out of this scenario because it can be traumatising for her.’ [The Police] said ‘We won’t let you take her to school unless you give us the pin for your phone.’ I did not know what to do. I fought them for a little bit, and then one of the police officers picked her up, and that kind of ripped my heart out. I thought I was never going to see her again.”

The police also constantly showed up at Bex’s bail addresses and stalled her morning routine. They would then offer to help transport her daughter to school. Bex needed her daughter to be there on time; however, when she accepted these rides, the police would often try to draw information out from Bex concerning her ex-partner and his criminal activity.

Bex knew something had to change. The police disagreed with her moving into her mother’s house due to her mother living in a retirement village and the disruption bail checks could cause. However, Bex finally went to live at her mother’s home.

Then Bex was arrested on another bail breach, but for the first time, she felt that the police treated her as a human being rather than a criminal. Speaking with one detective was a significant turning point. Bex explains:

“[The detective] said, ‘You are going to jail tomorrow, and I had just had enough. I was so broken, and I just wanted to be with my daughter. I had desperately been trying to figure it out on my own, you know, and I started crying and said, ‘I need to be with my daughter.’ He said, ‘Have you ever thought about rehab?’ I was like, ‘No, I haven’t.’ After years of being in the system, I have lost count of how many times I have been arrested, and this one detective, it was like a light switch went off in my head. I feel like it was because I was praying, and God sent me the right person.”

The detective said he would try to help her get bail if she could promise him three things. Firstly, she had to officially change her lawyer from a man not working in her best interests. Secondly, he asked her to tell her mother everything that was going on, and thirdly, he wanted her to admit herself to a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility. Bex agreed, and from this point on, her life changed drastically. She was bailed to her mother’s home and carried out all the conditions the detective had requested. Bex has not been arrested since.

The beginnings of a transformative journey

Bex’s mother agreed that she needed to go to rehab and had been waiting for her to do so. Despite not having the funds initially, Bex was quickly accepted into the Red Door treatment programme, and her mother paid as soon as she could. The manager, David Collinge, has been a significant support. During her first weeks in treatment, Bex felt overwhelmed by her life, including active charges, relationship issues, and financial insecurity. David was able to help her deal with each issue one at a time. He told her they would get her to a point where she could relax, which became a reality. He also drove Bex to get tooth surgery because years of methamphetamine had destroyed her dental health. David is a constant support; she believes he saved her life. David also helped Bex make a formal complaint about her previous lawyer, and she officially changed lawyers to Lucie Scott. Lucie was an excellent lawyer for Bex. She made sure that Bex received just outcomes. Lucie initially worked for Bex pro bono. She also supported Bex by paying for and delivering groceries to her home. She treated Bex like a human being and went beyond her role as a lawyer.

During her time at Red Door, Bex started to believe that her partner had put her in a position where she was powerless within the justice system. For example, he ensured it was Bex and not himself on camera, and he provided her with a lawyer who continuously let her down. During her treatment, Bex’s partner asked her to visit him. She had an ominous feeling about it and declined because she thought the police might find out. Her intuition turned out to be correct, as that night, his house was raided, resulting in a significant seizure of illicit substances. The detective who had helped her get bail called the rehab and told Bex they had been listening to their phone conversation and congratulated her for declining her partner’s request. At this point, Bex and her partner separated.

Red Door was life changing for Bex. She learnt about how to be and stay abstinent from drugs. She had the support of staff and peers. She found a new way to live. Although she was immersed in recovery, Bex still had sentencing for two different groups of charges pending. On the first set of charges, home detention of eight months was granted due

to a “glowing report” from Red Door and other evidence that showed Bex was making positive changes in her life. The second set of charges was more significant. The police offered Bex a six-year sentence. They also tried to coerce Bex into passing on information about her most recent ex-partner; however, Bex was adamant she did not want to do this, as it would put her in an unsafe situation. She continued to work a strong recovery on home detention, was baptised and attended Narcotics Anonymous 12-Step meetings.

Bex also became employed through her brother’s construction company. She followed a contract called “learning to live again”, which her brother created to support her; this was a condition for Bex to stay with him. The contract included Bex being drug tested, keeping her distance from associates, and not engaging with social media. Bex and her daughter lived in a unit on her brother’s property. She says, “I could do that for the rest of my life, living in a little room with my daughter, because I came so close to losing her.” For Bex, it meant the world to go to bed with her daughter every night and be clean from drugs. For a time, she felt safe, and nobody dangerous was aware of where they lived.

During her time in home detention, Bex never breached her conditions; despite transport issues and other obstacles, she stayed on track. She preferred to keep constantly busy, avoiding the quiet times because it was in those moments that the memories made her anxious. Her brother noticed this and made sure she took time out to sit with her feelings; he gave her two days off work per week to do just that. Bex described how her brother broke this down for her:

“If you picture a dirty pond and there is lots of stuff at the bottom of the pond. If you keep stirring the water, you cannot see what you need to clean out at the bottom. He said you just need to let it sit and let it clear. So, he made me spend some time sitting with my emotions every day.”

Bex was learning new ways to live. At one point during her home detention, Bex contacted the mayor of Upper Hutt regarding strengthening services at Red Door and helping more people in active addiction find help. He met with her, and they discussed this prospect, establishing the “Freedom

from Addiction Foundation”, an initiative Bex and her brother founded. The foundation aims to raise money to build a new rehabilitation service in the Wellington region. The foundation is currently in the final stages of formation. Bex is proud to be part of the initiative.

Bex attended church throughout her community-based sentence. At one church service, in August 2021, she unexpectedly saw the detective who had helped her change her life and supported her bail application. He was incredibly proud of her and had been observing her recovery journey from a distance. He asked her whether she would give a presentation about addiction at a police training day. She cleared this with her lawyer and asked her brother and his partner to support her by being there on the day. Bex was a guest speaker to the organised crime unit at the Wellington Police Station; a considerable transformation was evident. Bex had only ever been at odds with the legal system. Finally, she could speak her truth and shape outcomes for others.

When she entered the room, many police looked shocked to see such a transformation. They were not expecting someone they had previously arrested to be there to educate them. Bex spoke of how she had committed crimes due to her addiction. She educated the officers about what it is like to be dependent on methamphetamine. Notably, she was also able to answer their questions, stating:

“I said to them, ‘My biggest fear for the past seven years has been the police and the gangs,’ and they could not believe I was so terrified of them, but I felt like that ever since I had the miscarriage in the police cells, they weren’t on my side. I felt like they always wanted to get a charge; they did not want what was best for me. They said to me, ‘What was your turning point?’ I said, ‘I got spoken to like a human being and not a criminal and got offered help.’ I took the help, and I never looked back.”

The detective who had helped Bex cried as she spoke. He stated that Bex has been the highlight of his career. As a result of Bex talking to the crime unit about the importance of helping rather than just arresting people in addiction, police proceeds from crime are being donated to the Freedom from Addiction programme. Bex sees this as an excellent way for her to make financial and living amends as

part of the ninth of the 12 Steps. The fund will be ongoing and support the new rehabilitation facility that Bex and her brother plan to establish.

In 2021, Bex went up for sentencing on the supply of methamphetamine and GBL charges. This was a traumatic and uncertain time for her; however, she had significant support. She had letters from Red Door, the detective who helped her, and her brother. Her lawyer was also working in her favour. She was employed, had a safe home, and she was clean from alcohol and drugs. All these factors contributed to a new way of life for Bex. They resulted in a non-custodial sentence of 18 months of intensive supervision without Bex having to testify against her ex-partner. She believes God and others had her back.

The importance of community support and family

An array of people and communities supports Bex. She acknowledges the Anti-P Ministry, who wrote letters for her court cases. They outlined the trip to Kaitaia she had been part of to raise awareness for those struggling with meth addiction. In addition, the online support on the Anti-P Ministry Facebook page has helped her tremendously:

“There’s a lot of support on that page, heaps of support. I’m pretty much like they’ve really been helpful for the addiction side of it and withdrawal, and there’s always someone that can help, and it’s always, you know, tips and ideas on how to stay clean.”

Bex is also seeing a therapist to help her deal with the trauma of her past. She is beginning to see that she is extraordinarily strong and that her coping mechanisms are a natural response to all she went through. Being part of the church is still essential to Bex’s life. The church community was there for Bex throughout her bail and home detention. They prayed together regarding her sentencing, and she never felt judged by anyone in the congregation. They have become like whānau for Bex, and she attends services weekly.

Another aspect of current community support for Bex is attending Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings. She has many friends and a sponsor who mentors her through

the 12-Step programme. Bex also does service for the fellowship, and one of her goals is to help other mothers stay abstinent from illicit substances. Bex has recently completed her 12th Step and follows spiritual principles to maintain her transformative recovery. She is on a journey of healing and is currently more than one year clean from all drugs and alcohol.

Bex acknowledges her mother’s role in working hard to protect her family. She has always been there for Bex, helping care for her granddaughter, and providing a safe retreat. Bex’s relationship with her older brother and his wife has gone from strength to strength throughout her recovery. She has so much to be grateful to them for providing her and her daughter with a safe home, structure during her recovery, and a new career. More importantly, with their assistance, she has learnt how to look after herself by reflecting on her journey. She can talk to them about anything; they are her “go-to people” whenever she struggles. She feels a strong re-connection to her family.

Throughout her life, Bex has loved and cared for her daughter. This bond has been her number one motivation for becoming abstinent from drugs and alcohol. Bex stated that she was desperate to get well and stay out of jail for her daughter. Although some people have expressed that getting clean needs to be internally motivated, Bex believes she would still be using and selling methamphetamine if she were not a mother. She and her daughter are very close and have a positive relationship.

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AWATEA'S STORY

Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua

I walk backwards into my future with my eye fixed on my past

“It will always resonate with me about how much hope I had lost about ever being able to live a life where I could have the freedom to be myself.

“To carry those experiences that I had with criminal justice, addiction, and mental health into those spaces [of] both having secure housing, of having satisfying gratifying employment that I love to do and furthering myself through education.

“I just have such a great support system of friends and family. ‘Cause that was another thing. I thought people would never – that I wouldn’t be accepted into a good society because of my past. [In the past] I then got to mix with people who came from my old life because they would accept me.

“To be here today – it’s freaking awesome!”

Stolen childhood

Throughout her childhood, Awatea felt unsafe. Physical and sexual violence featured strongly in her memories. She can still picture the violence she witnessed against her mother; growing up, Awatea herself experienced sexual harm from two family members.

But she kept those experiences secret, creating excuses to sleep alongside her brothers as protection. Over time, filled with anger and self-loathing, Awatea’s behaviour changed. She threw tantrums and lashed out at her siblings, seemingly for no reason.

In her early 20s, after confiding in Rape Crisis counsellors, Awatea told her whānau about her abuse. Her brothers felt they gained important insights into her childhood

behaviours, but Awatea’s mum felt like a failure – she had not protected her daughter from harm.

Awatea was prepared for this kind of adverse reaction, having learned through her work with Rape Crisis that the harm she experienced was not her fault.

Troubled teenage years

Awatea remained deeply unhappy. She swung back and forth between excelling at school and acting out socially. Alcohol, cigarettes, and nightclubs in Central Auckland began to dominate Awatea’s social life. Awatea made her first attempt to take her own life in her mid-teens. Despite doing well in her classes, she was asked to leave the school. When she landed at her new school, Awatea joined a group of students she identified with – Māori and Pasifika kids who were high achievers but also liked to party.

Resurfacing fears

By the time Awatea was 16, the school had taken a backseat to drinking and smoking cannabis. Within this environment, Awatea encountered threats of physical and sexual violence by men. Her feelings of being unsafe resurfaced. She became increasingly wary, and to better protect herself from harm, she stopped drinking. At 17, Awatea met her first partner – a heavy drinker who was often violent. Eventually, Awatea found the strength to leave the relationship, finding solace with her father and his family in Ruatoria.

Grief and loss in Ruatoria

In Ruatoria, Awatea was incredibly close to her aunts, who joked that they were a “community of alcoholics”. Awatea resumed drinking and smoking marijuana. One night, she had an altercation with one of her aunts. As time passed, Awatea felt terrible about their argument and wanted to make amends. While searching for her aunt one evening, Awatea saw police cars speeding past. Soon after, her uncle told her that her aunts had died. For a long time, Awatea was deeply impacted by their deaths.

“I was 19 then. For two years, I was like just down, and I didn’t come up for two years. I don’t have many memories of those years. I was drinking every day, taking drugs whenever I could.”

While grieving the loss of her aunts, Awatea began a relationship with the man who would eventually become her son's father. Five years in, their relationship became violent. But they both worked hard to keep the connection alive, drawing on their lifelong bond as parents to their son.

Connecting painful realities

Awatea participated in a women-only Barnardo's course. During the programme, she began to see the connection between her experiences with sexual abuse and her violent behaviour. For the first time, she realised her anger was directly related to her sense of self-loathing.

The anger management tools Awatea learnt from Barnardo's courses made an impression. She apologised to her younger siblings for mistreating them. She shared her story with them and promised never to hurt them again. It took over two years to gain their trust; today, her siblings see Awatea as loving and reliable.

Awatea tried counselling through Gisborne Mental Health Services. Although her partner would say she seemed "lighter" and more "humorous" after her sessions, her counsellor interpreted her progress differently. After a year of treatment, the counsellor shared notes from their early sessions, observing ongoing issues and patterns in Awatea's life, particularly within her relationship. Awatea left the session feeling upset and offended by her counsellor's description of her as a "broken record".

After a breakup with her partner, Awatea experienced suicidal ideation. She attempted suicide and was placed in respite mental health care. Here, Awatea received a unique treatment that had a profound impact: Her treating psychiatrist prescribed readings, not medication, to help her recovery.

"He came in [looked at the chart] and said, 'Stop all of that; they have it wrong – she is not going to be taking any drugs.' Then he said to me, 'Do you like to read?' I said, 'I like to read.' He said, 'I want to prescribe you Madam Bovary and Great Expectations.' And I was like, 'OK.' I read Madam Bovary and was like, 'What the fuck! Does he think that I am fucking Madame Bovary?' I remember

that time being so offended... And then I read Great Expectations, and I got it...When you pin your hopes on some things in life, and you want things to turn out a certain way and then when they don't, you know, because you form this attachment to outcomes, and when those outcomes don't eventuate, you're fucking devastated."

Awatea also received help from a psychologist to support her with the sexual harm she had experienced. Gradually, Awatea understood that, instead of fixating on and amplifying negative experiences, she could magnify the positive experiences in her life.

Standing strong in wellness

For a period, things went well for Awatea. She developed a healthier relationship with her son and partner. She worked for the Community Law Centre and Rape Crisis and garnered a good reputation in the Gisborne community.

Then, Awatea's father died.

Even during this time of grief, Awatea managed to keep strong and stay well:

"I'm amazing during that time. I'm the real backbone of the family, and it was amazing because I wasn't always reliable, and to be that person and have everyone look up to me during that time. And yeah, I'm proud of myself for how I was during Dad's tangi."

Cascading into prison

However, within a year of her father's death, Awatea's mother fell ill and died suddenly. Awatea, who often travelled to visit her unwell mother, was then fired from work. Her relationship with her partner came to a violent end. The events culminated in Awatea behaving disrespectfully at her mum's tangi. That's when Awatea made a conscious decision to start using drugs again and selling them:

"I became hooked on the fast money (from dealing meth). It was two years of selling drugs. In my town, I

was considered a 'Lord', like a drug royalty in the drug scene. At one point, I was top of the town, and that lasted another 1.5 years after that. And then, in the last six months, my family became concerned about what my son was getting exposed to, and I had several CYFS meetings. I had been arrested the year before. Then, I got arrested again."

Awatea received a prison sentence and was sent from Gisborne to Auckland Women's Prison.

Glimpses of humanity in otherwise inhumane conditions

While transported to prison, Awatea experienced small but significant moments of humanity. In one instance, a police officer allowed her and other inmates to have a cigarette while in his custody. He shared a story that resonated deeply with Awatea:

"...The guy starts talking to us, saying, 'You are all beautiful young girls; what are you doing? Why do you want to lose your freedom and be in prison? I want to share with you guys about nine years ago; I got cancer. I thought I was going to die. My wife left me; I was at the lowest point of my life. Slowly, I got better. I put the cancer behind me and started to look at life differently. I was so grateful to live and have a future. The worst thing I could think of was having my liberty taken away from me. That is what I don't understand. How could people let liberty be taken away from them.'"

In another police station, Awatea was allowed to spend hours with her son and brother despite the usual time limits on visits.

But prison did not offer many glimpses of humanity, and Awatea witnessed violence and victimisation of and between women. In response, she built a mentally resilient, physically powerful self – a self she didn't like but needed to survive.

Learning to talk the truth with peers

Still viewing prison as just a short break from her meth-dealing lifestyle, Awatea began attending Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings to help her chances of getting parole. As they shared their experiences, her fellow participants challenged Awatea's perspective on life:

"After the fourth time, I think, 'This shit is real. That is some truth they are talking about there.' I was starting to question everything about what I was up to. I wasn't convinced, but I was like, 'There is something to this to what they are talking about. Talking truth.' It resonated with me. I had come from a world where I had lied about everything. And to hear people being so selfless and sharing without wanting anything from me."

Drawing strength from immense loss, grief, and harm

One night, three guards took Awatea from her cell to the staff base – she knew something was wrong. She was told her son had gone missing while swimming and that a search party was looking for him. Awatea's overnight wait for news was agonising and traumatic.

The following afternoon, Awatea heard on the radio that her son had drowned.

As a result of various administrative mistakes, Awatea was only granted 12 hours of leave to attend her son's tangi in Gisborne. In a welcomed moment of humanity, the female corrections officer who accompanied Awatea allowed her the space to grieve with her whānau. As they drove back to Auckland, the corrections officer commented, "What a wonderful, beautiful family you have." Those words made Awatea reflect on and truly appreciate all she had in her loving whānau.

Awatea's planning

As a result of her work in counselling sessions, prison courses and NA meetings, Awatea began to understand the impact of her many experiences with harm, grief, and loss.

She realised she needed to become self-reliant and plan. Awatea mapped out her short- and long-term goals and identified what was important to her:

“One of the things about making my plan was that that was the best way to honour my boy. I knew my boy loved me so much and would have wanted me to be happy, and he would want me to live a full life, not a life of despair. I wrote that down because I knew it was true. As much as I was devastated, the love of my son was definitely the thing I had to carry me through. By not offending and not using, I can honour his memory.”

She found support in other women, particularly those in NA, and she participated in every class she could, from anger management and cognitive behavioural therapy to mindfulness. The programmes all supported her commitment to not return to jail.

Despite not always having positive experiences with mental health professionals, Awatea believes that each counsellor made an impression and, eventually, all those impressions connected to help her reach a positive space. She stresses the importance of not giving up and continuing to search for a counsellor who understands and suits their needs.

Honouring her son, loving life, and inspiring others

After 22 challenging months in prison, Awatea was released. She moved to Wellington, where she found safe, secure accommodation with her brother and a supportive recovery community. She also enrolled at university.

Today, Awatea has a double degree from university and a job she loves. She has become an inspiration for others.

In sharing her story, Awatea strives to honour her son and the women still inside. She believes that by sharing her life story, she can help others see the potential for their positive futures:

“These experiences, these painful realities...I can offer other people hope that they can make a better future for themselves; that makes it so powerful. That is what brings meaning to what’s happened. That is why I am open about it. There is the myth that once they are on meth, they are fucked. That is why it is important to tell my story. It is about honouring my son and honouring those women inside who supported me. I will share my story if I can help those women who share an experience of being inside to see how there may be turning points in their lives and contexts. Second, to my son, it is about honouring those women. That is what keeps me going. My message is mainly for those girls inside.”

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TIKA, PONO

I MAY BE MANY THINGS
TO MANY PEOPLE
BUT THE MOST IMPORTANT FRIEND TO ME
IS ME

BEING FREE IS ONE THING
BUT BEING LOCKED IN MY HEAD IS ANOTHER
EYES STARING OUT OF THE CAGE OF MY FACE
WITH EMOTIONS LOCKED, OR SO IT SEEMS

WHAT DO I BRING?
THAT WILL BE LOVED
BROKEN LONG AGO
THAT AE YES IT STILL SHOWS

BE HONEST WITH ME
WHAT DO YOU SEE?
WHEN YOU LOOK AT MY SCARRED SOUL
AND THE TRUTH THAT I KNOW

SO BE EASY WITH ME
I BATTLE TO BE FREE
OPEN THE DOOR
LET ME IN

FOR ITS COLD OUTSIDE
AND I NEED TO HEAR
THAT I CAN BEAR THIS PAIN
MY LIFE, AND LOVE, TO GAIN

By Jason Haitana

In this chapter, we see whānau engaging in deep self-reflection, displaying awareness and honesty, particularly during vulnerable moments of hitting “rock bottom”. These efforts are hard, akin to pulling what is known from the unknown. How can you be what you cannot see? While we can create supportive environments to facilitate positive change, whānau must step outside themselves and reflect on their life as it is. Whānau are not anchored in stuck and unwavering mindsets; instead, whānau strive for self-determined lives that are enriching and rewarding.



JESSICA'S STORY

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Born in 1981 and raised in Auckland, Jessica or Jess is a “proud, pure-born Westie girl”. Her mother comes from Taranaki, and her father is from Te Araroa on the East Coast. One of Jess’ goals after her ankle bracelet is removed is to return to her whenua/homeland:

“I’d like to return home to Te Araroa, and I’d like to go onto the marae. I want to mihi and know who I am and where my ancestors come from to fill that other half. I’m proud to be Māori; I just don’t know nothing about me.”

As a child, Jess recalls her father telling her that “learning Māori wasn’t going to help put food on the table, Jessica!” She grew up knowing little about her Māori side beyond the whakapapa she shares. Throughout her life, though, people always made a “big fuss” when they heard her name - Apanui. Jess only recently learned that her great-grandfather was Apiata Apanui, a member of the Māori Battalion. Jessica recognises how her goals and priorities have changed since beginning her recovery journey:

“I have always felt like there has been half of me missing. My journey in recovery also includes finding out who I am, including the cultural aspects of it... when you are in addiction, you don’t care about these sorts of things; all you want to know is, ‘Where are the drugs at?’”

Early childhood

Throughout childhood, Jess lived in fear inside a violence-filled home. She was afraid of her father, who “had no tolerance for any form of disrespect whatsoever”. Jess knew people were scared of her father. Jess experienced pain and trauma related to his violence, so when she turned five years old and her parents split up, she thought there might be some reprieve. However, her mother continued to have relationships with violent men. Jess didn’t like being at home, where frequent drunken parties left her “ducking and diving” in fear.

School life

In primary school, Jess was bullied. Physically, Jess was a big girl, and she used her size to her advantage. As a result, she admits to “turn[ing] into the bully”, becoming “tough” to survive:

“All through my life, through my addiction, I was a staunch type of girl and had that approach to life. Being involved in the drug life, you needed to be like that. It’s survival of the fittest.”

Jess started using drugs when she was 12 - first, marijuana, and then alcohol. By the time Jess began college, she had drunk by morning teatime and lunchtime or wagging school entirely. Soon, she started exploring other drugs: magic mushrooms, acid, ecstasy. By the time she turned 16, Jess was hooked on speed. By 17, she frequently had a needle up her arm.

During this time, Jess rarely went home. Jess reached the stage of life she calls the “fuck its”. She preferred to do her own thing. She travelled around the country, funding her lifestyle by committing fraud.

“I had a needle up my arm...I’d be dressed in a business suit, and I was in and out of banks. I’d spend a lot of time just in and out of banks, just [going from] one bank to the other. That was what my whole day went like going from bank to bank to bank to bank and just cashing cheques, swiping gold cards.”

Jess was finally caught, arrested, and charged. But soon after being released from custody, her friends collected her in a car loaded with blank chequebooks and gold cards, and she offended again.

Deepening addiction and criminal activity

Jess’s life turned darker when she started experimenting with her sexuality. Her drug use increased; she was rarely home and had little family time. When she was around 18 years old, Jess became pregnant with her daughter. She describes her relationship with the baby’s father as “very abusive”. Jess reflects, “After watching all the violence [throughout my

life], I fell in love with men who were just the same.” When her daughter turned six months old, Jess stopped injecting methamphetamine.

Jess’ aunty was involved with a man who had access to a container full of methamphetamine. Jess couldn’t resist seducing him for his drug supply. Her relationship with the man caused a huge rift within her family. Jess acknowledges that she “had no loyalty and didn’t care because it was about who’s got the P, [and getting it] by all means and at all costs”. Jess also seduced her partner’s son because he also had a big container of meth. Jess says, “Everything from this point was fuelled by meth, meth, meth...I betrayed my friends and family, and I got involved with gang members.” Her carefree and careless attitude and behaviour made her a target, and many people were angry.

By the time Jess turned 26, she was running an earthmoving business with her then-partner. Meth continued to feature in their lives. Jess discovered she was pregnant after being up for three days straight on meth. At first, her partner was not keen on having a baby because he had children from a previous relationship. But Jess knew she wanted to keep the baby, and he eventually accepted the decision. For a time, life was good for them. But it continued to be fuelled by meth.

Escaping to Australia

The next turning point came when her partner’s friend, a meth cook, was released from jail. Eventually, he blew up a house, and Jess acted as his alibi. At this point, everything became too much for Jess. She packed up her stuff and moved with her children to Australia.

After 11 months in Australia, Jess learned she had contracted Hepatitis C. Getting treatment in Australia was difficult, so, on her grandmother’s advice, Jess and her kids moved back to NZ.

Getting back into life in New Zealand

Jess’ cousin, Opal, was instrumental in helping Jess get 48 weeks of intensive treatment at Auckland Hospital with liver specialist Dr Ed Gains. Jess is grateful to have been put on Interferon, Ribavirin, and another trial drug. During her

Hep C treatment, Jess had much drug-free time and used that time to assess her life. At first, she considered taking a foundation course in nursing because she had felt helpless while her nana was sick. Jess then realised she wanted to stop people getting sick in the first place, so she embarked on a Bachelor of Sports degree at Unitec.

Jess cared for her alcoholic father for seven years, including while she studied.

“...it was a tough time; dealing with an alcoholic was, for me, worse than dealing with a meth addict... [I] wore too many hats, there was a lot of pressure, and I didn’t know about recovery. I just thought, ‘I’m doing a healthy gig here and can’t be doing drugs.’ But I was still drug dealing - I just wasn’t indulging in methamphetamine.”

Overwhelmed by caring for her alcoholic father while simultaneously being a coach, manager, drug dealer, mother, student, and an aunty, Jess started using again:

“...people needed a bit of Jess all the time. I remember it was Friday night whānau touch, and I had four assignments due. I was sitting at my dining room table, and literally, a light bulb went ding with the letter ‘P’ in it, and I picked it up after being clean for five years. I got the assignments done, and I never stopped [using P].”

Jess confessed to the head of the sports department that she was addicted to methamphetamine. To this day, Jess recalls their response: “You know what, Jess, it sucks to be human, aye?” After the meeting, the Head of the Department and other Unitec staff supported Jess in completing her degree.

To add to the challenges of this time, Jess formed a relationship with a woman. Their relationship was “fuelled by methamphetamine” and was “toxic”. When her family learned she was using again and was in a destructive relationship, they tried many interventions.

“Our relationship was so toxic and chaotic that we ended up parting ways, and I moved to Taranaki once my partner returned to Rotorua. I was still in contact with her, and being separated was hard. Even though

our relationship was toxic, I still wanted her in my life.”

Jess still attracted the same kind of company in Taranaki, and her meth use continued. She applied for a job in Rotorua, and within six weeks, she had packed up her house in Taranaki and moved with her children to Rotorua to be back with her partner.

After four and a half years at Unitec, Jess graduated with a Bachelor of Sports and Nutrition, majoring in coaching. Although she couldn’t attend her graduation ceremony, her Mum accepted her tohu in Jess’ absence.

In Rotorua, Sports Bay of Plenty hired Jess as the fundamental skills sport’s coordinator working with 13 schools. The role involved teaching essential skills for movement and sport. But after 90 days, due to her meth use, toxic relationship, and disorganisation, Jess was fired.

Jess moved back to Auckland, staying with family while she looked for a house. She felt under much pressure. Though she didn’t know what recovery was, Jess knew that drug use didn’t fit with the healthy lifestyle she wanted. She was still drug dealing to make ends meet, but she wasn’t herself using meth.

In May 2019, Jess’ father passed away from alcoholism. Before he died, her father had broken up with his wife and sold his house, and he had left money for Jess. Today, Jess carries a lot of guilt, pain, and shame about using this money to fuel her addiction:

“I wish I could have changed things with my Dad before he died; I just did everything wrong. I was so dishonest and deceitful, and I was a real scum bag. The worst things I did were to innocent people, bystanders, and my family, including my children.”

The raid

On September 18, 2018, Jess returned home from dropping her son off at school to find her street swarming with cops. Her home had been raided; two meth cooks had been found in a downstairs room below her children’s bedrooms.

Jess knew she had made a mess of her life. She knew she needed help.

Reaching out to whānau

Once again, Jess’ cousin, Opal, supported her. Jess vividly recalls what happened:

“I was sitting on my deck talking to my cousin and saying to her, ‘I’m done, cuz,’ and then the phone cut out. The next minute, I’m seeing a hand coming through the gate to unlock the door, and I was thinking, ‘Who’s that?’ It was my cousin; she was there to help me.”

Opal took in Jess and her children.

For the first two months, Jess slept most of the time, only occasionally popping her head out of her room to say “Hello”. Opal had a big whānau, and there were always people around. Jess wanted to avoid them because she was embarrassed. Opal would tell people that ‘Cuzzo Jess is in there,’ which annoyed Jess at the time. She now understands that Opal was helping to pull her “out of the guilt and the shame”.

As Jess worked to get clean, her cousin would not let her go anywhere alone:

“I was such a little ratbag; I used to say, ‘I’m just going to the shop,’ and the next minute, I’m up North. So, my cousin knew what I was like, so every time I went out, my kids had to come with me. There was a method to her madness because these times also allowed me to build up my relationship with my children.”

Trying to access support services

Jess recognised that she needed professional help and researched what was available. But her numerous Google searches proved confusing and frustrating: “I didn’t know what the process was – it was a process!” She believes it needs to be simplified for people going into recovery. “I just about gave up; I was at my wit’s end.” While she had heard the drug court had been helpful to others, in her case, she

ended up doing most of the groundwork herself.

Oranga Tamariki became involved with Jess after her mother, concerned about her mokopuna, called them and the police. Despite initially disliking the children's social worker, things changed once she got clean. Oranga Tamariki referred Jess to Grant Foster, a counsellor who had been clean for 21 years. Grant was a lovely man who helped Jess onto her pathway to Community Alcohol and Drug Services (CADS).

Detox and Higher Ground

After being assessed by the CADS team at the start of 2019, Jess began her journey with social detox. After a couple of weeks, she rang Higher Ground and asked if she could be admitted a week earlier than planned. Accessing Higher Ground was straightforward: She went in for an assessment and spent some time getting used to the community before being admitted in the first week of January. Jess spent three months with Higher Ground but was discharged for lacking engagement with the therapeutic progress. She missed her kids and knew they missed her, too. Jess says she did not forget what she was taught, including:

“... family history of anger, chemical dependency, a need to control, an impact letter and a father letter. I did a five-page father letter, which involved a lot of work”.

At Higher Ground, Jess learnt about Narcotics Anonymous (NA). Everyone was encouraged to attend regular NA meetings after leaving the treatment bubble and re-entering the real world. Knowing where meetings were held and how to connect with friends in the fellowship became vital to Jess' recovery.

Getting out of rehab

After being discharged from Higher Ground, Jess started attending a daily rehab meeting, and she got a sponsor, an “amazing woman” who had been clean for a long time. She had children the same ages as Jess' but, more importantly, she could relate to everything that Jess had been through. Jess says having a sponsor who was independent of her whānau helped:

“There are some things that go on in my life that I can't talk to Opal or to my Mum about because they just don't understand, and that's OK because they are not meth addicts. I can go to my sponsor for anything.”

Jess also found her current rental property two weeks after being discharged from Higher Ground. Jess had always tried to live by her mother's words: “When you tell the truth, it will set you free.” She told the property manager her whole story, including leaving her housing New Zealand home uninhabitable after cooking meth in it. She was surprised the property manager gave her a chance and rented her the house.

Having found a home for her family, Jess worried about surviving on a benefit. During her years of offending, “money had been a big driver”. Although she no longer committed crimes, she was still involved in illicit activity. After seven months of staying clean, Jess lapsed for 24 hours. But this time, instead of continuing to use, she returned home, went to a meeting, and talked with her sponsor. Four days later, she confessed to her Mum that she had relapsed. Jess says she “sat in guilt and shame for three days” before brushing herself off and resuming her journey.

Sitting comfortably with challenges

In recovery, Jess faced the challenges of dealing with her emotions, changing her drug-fuelled mentality, and being a mother. She learned to sit comfortably with shame, guilt, pain, and fear. Today, she can evaluate her feelings and admit, “I'm feeling quite sad today because this happened.” Jess knows much of her sadness stems from her childhood and finds that “owning it has been healing and re-energising to the point that it pumps my tires up and fills my cup up and, boom, I'm ready for the day”.

Jess found that being a mother in recovery was challenging and rewarding:

“... [my children] would never backchat me when I was in addiction. If I said, 'Jump!' they would say, 'How high?' Now that I'm in recovery, they have got all the mouths...some days, I want to backhand

their mouths and tell them to get to their rooms, but I don't because that's not how we roll today. The thoughts are there, but I don't action them.”

For the most part, Jess' children love their Mum in recovery, but there are times they miss that freedom and wish Jess was less attentive:

“I now have an opinion on what my daughter chooses to do. It means being involved in her life. She is 17 years old, and she needs to be actively looking for work, so before, I wouldn't care about that. She would say, 'I've been looking for a job,' and I would say, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah.' Now, I say, 'Have you applied for jobs today, and is your CV updated?' and I'm on top of that. Now, she's getting hoha with my level of involvement in her life.”

Finding hope and strength in the recovery community

Since being on her recovery journey, Jess has learned about the many different resources, services, and professionals available to help whānau experiencing addiction. She recently attended the Cutting Edge conference and saw first-hand the number of “people working in the background to try and better understand the mind of an addict”. The conference exposed her to the work undertaken by postgraduates, researchers, practitioners, and peers. She saw and heard presentations that showed that 50% of people involved in drug addiction came from gangs. Many were from broken families, had domestic violence experiences, or were wards of the state. She also learned that, in many cases, addictions stem from childhood trauma.

Jess also realised that, despite the plethora of services, it can be challenging for whānau to get the best recovery information through their own Internet searches. That's why Jess now uses her Facebook page to help share the realities and resources around recovery:

“...[A Day in the Life of Jess] is about delivering a story of hope because recovery is not all roses. We have our bad days and our good days...some days, you get the 'fuck its' and think 'Fuck NA, fuck Higher

Ground.' That's the reality! Then there are days when you hold so much gratitude for those places.”

Jess has made so many friends in recovery - they far outnumber those she said goodbye to from her previous life. Jess knows that if she is struggling, her recovery whānau will be there for her:

“I can say, 'I am having a bad day, life is not great for me right now, and my head is in a dark space,' and it's sweet as. I can say whatever, and they will talk me through it; they can relate and understand.”

Self-care strategies

Jess finds peace believing in a Higher Power and comfort in praying, knowing that her Higher Power will never fail her. She uses prayer or karakia – sometimes several times daily – to help her achieve peace. Today, Jess has her spirit back.

Jess also does her 12-Step programme, and although she likes helping others, she recognises that “sometimes Jess needs to do Jess. I can't forget about me; my recovery must come first so that the ones I love don't come last”. The 12-Step programme helps her address the underlying reasons and behaviours behind her drug use. It also reminds her of the person she was when she was in addiction, compared to who she is now, in recovery.

One of her self-care strategies is taking time out to reflect on her journey:

“Yesterday, my heart was heavy, so I did something different. I went to Point Chev beach and had a lovely seat right there – peaceful, surrounded by trees and overlooking the water, and I did my mahi on me. It was healing. Then I went and got my hair done and a bit of self-care, and boom, a bit of re-energising and revitalising yourself.”

Closing words

Today, Jess is a strong advocate for reducing methamphetamine use in her community. She is involved with the Anti-P Ministry and uses her Facebook page to

promote awareness and education for whānau about the meth epidemic. Jess has immersed herself in recovery as a lifestyle. She acknowledges critical people who have helped her recover, including her sponsor, her fellowship, and her whānau.

Jess knows the value of having “one person who believes in you and supports you when you are willing to surrender and say ‘Fuck, I’m sick of being sick and tired.’” Today, Jess is grateful for the faith, trust, and belief she has rebuilt with her cousin, Opal, whom she describes as her “backbone”. And even though she knows her behaviour has caused her Mum stress, worry and health issues, Jess’ mother has been her constant supporter. When they see each other now, her Mum’s face lights up with joy and pride to see that her daughter and grandchildren are well.

Jess is most grateful that getting clean has enabled her to be a real parent to her children, who she knows were hurt the most during her struggles with addiction. Today, “being a mother is about caring, being involved and being present”. Together, they are learning how to navigate the challenges and enjoy the rewards of Jess’ recovery as a family.





JAMES' STORY

James was born and raised in Kelston, West Auckland. He has three sisters, including one stepsister. His Mum and Dad were both born in New Zealand. James currently lives in Auckland; he has one son.

Early life

Throughout his childhood, James lived with his two sisters and his parents. His stepsister was distant from the family and largely absent from James' life until he was 16 years old. James remembers his parents being severe alcoholics, and their house was constantly filled with parties:

"I remember coming home from school. You could hear the music before entering the street."

Loud parties had become the norm in his home. Back then, James recalls that the kids in his house were "seen but not heard", and almost every night, as the party progressed, the music would get louder and louder.

Experiences of isolation and fear

It wasn't long after the parties at their house ended that James' parents would argue. From a young age, he and his sisters would run out of their rooms, attempting to protect their mother from the violence. One of James' sisters tried to protect herself and her siblings by lining up full glasses of water down the hallway so that if anyone approached, they would hear the glasses toppling over. They were all terrified that someone would come into their rooms. James and his sisters would also sleep in the doorway of their bedroom, feeling incredibly fearful, never knowing who was in their house one day to the next.

When James' sisters were old enough, they left the negative situation at home and went to live in the United Kingdom. Whilst this meant they were now in a safe place, it left James alone in Auckland, where he had to deal with the uncertainty and chaos of their family life. After they left, life got even worse for James. One of his Mum's female friends started sexually molesting him, which went on for

a significant amount of time. This was incredibly isolating and traumatic, yet James was powerless to move out because he was too young to leave home legally. James recalls, “That kind of shaped my relationship with women in the future.”

Being surrounded by dysfunction and abuse often left James angry as a child. He felt powerless and alone most of the time. These experiences also affected his schooling, where James lacked focus and acted out by smoking weed. James was adamant, however, that he would never drink alcohol because of what he had witnessed of his alcoholic father. It was important to James that he never end up like his Dad when he was an active alcoholic.

Moving from chaos to destruction

As soon as James was old enough, he moved out of the family home and reached out to his stepsister, who gave him a place to stay. James was around 16 years old when he moved in with her. He had no interest in school and was full of resentment towards his family. It was at this time that James discovered methamphetamine. He began to associate solely with other users of the drug. Methamphetamine was mainly accessible to him because his stepsister was immersed in the meth world, even cooking it herself, which meant it was cheaper and readily available. James explains that:

“My life was destructive. I had no path, no goals... The only way I could escape what I was bought up in was to do drugs and hang out with people doing the same.”

His parents attempted to contact him once they learned James was taking methamphetamine. Their attempts remained futile as he closed off from speaking with them. When James was around 19 years old, his stepsister was arrested on charges related to methamphetamine and his cheap access was cut off. James then decided to get a job as a sales representative, but he never made enough to fund his habit. So, he started committing burglaries to keep up supporting his supply.

James’ parents, like his two sisters, were still trying to reach out to him. With James’ 20th birthday coming up, his sisters suggested they could give him a trip to the United Kingdom to spend time with them. James accepted

and went to London for six weeks. Whilst there, he also travelled with his sisters to Spain and Barcelona to celebrate his birthday. It was a great night he remembers fondly. James enjoyed being away from Auckland, living a different way of life. This trip was good for him, mainly being off drugs and having quality family time.

The holiday was bittersweet, however, since James knew he had to go back to Auckland and was confused about what to do with his life. James accepted an offer from his parents to move back into the family home. They convinced James their drinking had slowed down, and things wouldn’t be as they were. Before long, however, James realised not much had changed; they were still partying, strengthening his resentment of being let down and unsafe.

Feeling the need to escape the situation, James left his parents and became immersed in the drug world again. He explains: “I did what I knew was best to escape. I left there and got back into meth”. With his stepsister still dealing with her own legal issues, he needed to fund his expensive habit, so he began committing more crimes.

James’ lifestyle caught up with him more quickly than ever before. Not long after he started using again, James received an 18-month sentence in Mt Eden prison. The environment at Mt Eden was dark and gloomy, and James hated being there. Having his 21st birthday in prison, he remembers recalling:

“I knew no one. I felt like a boy in a man’s world. I felt like, what am I doing here? It was one of the worst times in my life...that was my first time in jail, and I hated it.”

James asserts that spending time in jail did little to help him change his lifestyle. At that time, he used meth and crime to escape; he didn’t know he had other choices. He didn’t think he was an addict, but he didn’t know how to get work legitimately or how to function in society.

The progression of addiction and crime

James was sent back to Mt Eden prison for another two and a half years after being released for six months. Despite being in a similar setting, James remembers how:

“[This] time in jail was different to my first time at the rock [Mt Eden]. This time, I met a whole different circle of people.”

These new associates were like James in their lifestyle, coming from broken homes, doing crime, and being addicted to meth. They explained to James that they were making money illegally on a larger scale, more so than he had ever done.

Meeting this group of people would shape the following years of James’ life. They became like brothers to him. James explains these relationships as “addictive” in that they were all inside, looking out for each other with the same criminal goals. He also loved the “war stories” in which they would tell him all the dangerous and exciting things they had done in the meth world.

Throughout his meth use and prison time, James always tried to stay in touch with his Mum despite still feeling resentful. When it came to his Dad, however, James was too hurt and angry to speak with him. Still, his parents always visited and were there for James at his court cases. James’ parents began to change, with their drinking lessening over time, potentially due to seeing the harmful effects of drugs in James’ life.

James did not want to return to his parents this time upon release from prison. Despite them visiting him often in prison, he still carried resentment for what he experienced throughout his childhood. James didn’t understand how his parents could suddenly start caring. It just so happened that many of his prison brothers were released at the same time as James, so he chose to reconnect and spend more time with them instead.

This time, James’ addiction and lifestyle got to another level. He was exceptionally criminally active; he “cooked” almost daily and experimented with drugs other than methamphetamine. Again, the consequences of these actions caught up with him, and James was sentenced to another four and a half years in jail. Nothing had changed; he was now used to being inside and thought he would just put his head down and do the time.

“Still, I didn’t realise I had a drug addiction. I didn’t realise how badly I was stuffing my life up. I just went straight back into survival mode.”

Rebuilding family relationships

James’ parents continued to visit him throughout this time in prison. However, because of his residual anger, James still did not want to be too involved with them. Around this time, his two sisters had moved back to Auckland with their husbands and kids. Often, James’ parents would bring his nieces and nephews in to visit. Seeing his parents bringing their grandkids into the prison allowed James to see a different side of them. He said, “They were really nurturing, and you know what, my family...is becoming a family, but I’m not there. I’m stuck in jail.” Though it seemed surreal at the time, James started to talk to his Dad, and the family formed strong bonds that didn’t exist before. Although he was in jail, he was beginning a journey of reconnecting with his family.

At about age 25, James was granted parole on the condition that he completed six months of home detention to be served at his biological sisters’ house. The plan was to spend time with family and get to know his nephews with whom he would be living. Over the first few months, all went well. James was getting to know his family, and despite slight undertones of resentment remaining, he continued to connect with his parents. James severed ties with his criminal associates, and life seemed to be running positively.

Old bonds deepened addiction

About a month before James finished his sentence of home detention, his old associates were starting to get released from jail. James found it incredibly difficult not to reconnect with them. By the end of his parole, he was utterly fried on meth again. James rapidly became entangled in crime, and his relationship with his family faded into the background.

Each time James relapsed, his use of drugs and criminal activities got worse. At the time, his girlfriend introduced James to the needle, and he started using meth intravenously with her. Although she was dangerous for James, he was attracted to the excitement of being with her. James

recognised that “she was on the same path as me, the path of destruction.” Injecting methamphetamine brought James’ experiences of the drug to another level. It was stronger, more immediate, and more addictive – it changed everything, including his overall mindset. James was now doing even more crime as his addiction deepened.

James also found a family role by being with his girlfriend and her daughter. Then, his girlfriend told him she was pregnant:

“That was one of the first times in my life I actually stopped and thought about who was around me, what I was doing with my life, and where I’m gonna end up.”

His girlfriend’s announcement made James reflect on his upbringing. He thought, “I don’t want to bring my son up like I was bought up, stuck in that pattern, and I don’t want him ending up in prison.” By now, James wasn’t just dependent on drugs; he was also addicted to the lifestyle that came with it. He found that cutting off his associates, who had been a massive part of his life, was just as hard as abstaining from methamphetamine.

James continued to use meth secretly while his partner was pregnant; however, deep down, he didn’t want to continue using it.

“I tried my whole life not to become like my father, but in trying really hard not to end up like him, I realised I ended up exactly like him.”

Apart from not assaulting his girlfriend, there were many similarities between James and his father, including addiction and toxic relationships with women. Then, one of James’ friends was murdered. James found he came to use even more meth as an escape.

His son was born not long after, but this did not deter his addiction. James continued down this destructive path as he reflected:

“I was so blind...I still didn’t know I was an addict, even though I spent many years in prison. My whole life was stuffed; I still didn’t know I was an addict.”

With a new son and pressure to support his lifestyle, James accepted a \$200,000 job offer to do an armed robbery on a drug dealer. This job led to James being arrested again, and whilst on bail, he was caught for another burglary. He was sentenced to four years and eight months in prison, with a 50 per cent non-parole period. His son was aged just six months at the time he was sentenced.

Turning points

Although he had been to jail before, this time, James felt emotionally broken, confused, and deeply upset about how progressively destructive his life had become. James remembers sitting in prison, contemplating how he had spent all his 20s in jail.

James found the strength to reach out to his family for support, which was a significant turning point for him. His son’s Mum was in prison concurrently, and it broke James to think:

“Our kids are out there alone. What the hell am I doing? It was in that sentence that I thought, ‘You know what? Stuff this, I have to change my life.’”

James contacted his Mum, knowing he needed to ask her to look after his son while he was inside. Around this time, someone, possibly a counsellor, said to him:

“Why would you agree to do that robbery? Why would you do that burglary? Why would you use drugs when you have such a beautiful little son at home?”

These words hit James hard and have always stuck with him. His son became a catalyst for change.

In contrast to all his other sentences, James begged to do programmes that would help him with addiction. However, the system wouldn’t allow him to do courses while serving his non-parole period. To James, this was incredibly frustrating and held him back from making positive changes in his life. After three years in prison, James was eligible for early release. This time, he went to the parole board with a different attitude. James had been attending Narcotics Anonymous meetings in prison and had started to see that

there might be a better path for him. So, he surprised the parole board by saying:

“I’m an addict. I need help. I realise I’m an addict. I’ve got a problem. If you release me, I will relapse and re-offend. I will come back.”

The parole board was taken aback by this and stood him down for one year. Within this year, James wrote a letter to the Drug Treatment Unit (DTU) in Springhill Prison once every couple of weeks until he got accepted into the six-month programme, which he completed. Although James relapsed back into mainstream prison, writing his life story in the DTU was immensely helpful, and he remained determined to change his life.

James was also introduced to kapa haka through the DTU programme and continued to attend NA meetings. One of James’s significant memories of the DTU is patting one of the prisoner-trained guide dogs. He remembers seeing his first glimpse of hope and freedom in the puppy’s eyes. It was the first time he had been in contact with an animal in years. After graduating from DTU, James started writing to Higher Ground every week until they finally told him they would come and see him for an interview and approve him for the residential treatment there.

After serving over four years in prison, James presented a release plan that was accepted by the parole board. He was then released into the support of Higher Ground, describing this programme “as harder than the 10 years of prison” he had done. Initially, James was still acting out on his old behaviours of “lying, denying, protecting, inappropriate humour...all these masks”. Despite being given multiple warnings and sanctions, it wasn’t until around day 90 at Higher Ground that James started “surrendering”. By surrendering himself, James gave up old behaviours and embraced the programme. It was important for him to receive constructive feedback and warnings about his behaviour. Without this, he would never have gained inner wisdom and become aware of how he acted out.

Healing with whānau and peers

For James, one of the pivotal components of Higher Ground was family therapy which involved his two sisters

and his Mum and Dad accompanying him to work with Linda, the counsellor. “This is where Linda grilled me,” James says jokingly. James was able to work through what he needed to with his family. James told his Mum about the sexual abuse he had experienced as a child. Although this disclosure “absolutely broke” his mother, Linda’s supportive environment encouraged them to heal together.

In July 2016, James graduated from Higher Ground. After graduation, James went into Calgary, a post-treatment support house offered by Higher Ground to support ex-residents to reintegrate back into the community through a foundation of recovery. James says, “Calgary put me on a whole different path. I thought, ‘What am I doing with my life?’” Peers who had experienced similar circumstances to James were inspiring, and he found his way, through peers, to help others struggling with addiction.

One of James’ friends was working at a private residential detox called ‘The Turning Point’ and James started volunteering there. Eventually, his volunteer work turned into part-time, then full-time, employment. James felt pleasure in working in a field he was incredibly passionate about.

James strengthened his relationship with his son’s Mum, who was also in recovery. She saw his positive changes, dropped a protection order, and gave James 50/50 access to his son. In recovery, James found the ability to be the best Dad he could be – and the Dad he always wanted to be. He described how he and his son “are best friends today, and we co-parent, and my son is the healthiest little boy you would ever meet”. James no longer wants the ripple effects of his actions to affect his kid negatively, and this drive to be a good Dad influences him to turn his life around.

Although James has experienced many gifts of recovery, it hasn’t been smooth sailing. Around two and a half years after living in recovery, James found his then-girlfriend in their bed with someone else. He was devastated. With no thought of relapse but experiencing emotional pain and lack of gratitude, James went to a bar with a friend and ordered water. However, the bartender didn’t hear him properly and gave him a beer. Justifying that he had never been an alcoholic, James got incredibly drunk. He was so out of it that he wandered onto a property and got a burglary charge

that landed him in prison for three weeks. James was broken but humbled by the experience:

“I just honestly wanted to kill myself. I thought, ‘You worked so hard. You just got your son back, and now you got drunk. What the hell happened?’”

James was released on EM Bail and remembers driving home from court, screaming at the top of his lungs. At this point, the powerlessness over his addiction was undeniable. Subsequently, he lost his job at The Turning Point and couldn’t see his son. At the same time, his Dad’s health was failing. James felt he had lost everything.

“I had two options. I could either repeat the same behaviour, repeat what I had gone through and keep going hard, keep relapsing on alcohol or whatever and go back to prison [but instead] I choose to reach out.”

James went back to NA with a friend. At this meeting, he broke down crying. He was honest about what had happened and received much-needed support from the fellowship.

James began to pick himself up. He started volunteering 40 hours a week at Turning Point, attended meetings, and finished his Level 4 qualifications in Mental Health and Addiction Studies. Within 10 months, James’ Higher Power returned to him all the gifts of recovery he had lost through his relapse and more. This included full access to his son, more awareness about himself and his addiction to all drugs, greater motivation for recovery, and a full-time job at the Turning Point. James feels his Higher Power is guiding him to be awake to gratitude for his life in recovery. Having everything taken away has done that for James, and he can now share with others what happened to him so that they might learn from it.

Another positive change in James’ life is his strong relationship with his parents: “They’re my biggest support network.” He is also incredibly grateful that his Mum and Dad were there for him when he couldn’t look after his son. Today, James is best friends with his parents, a massive shift from how their relationship used to be. James is also close with his sisters; they all spend time together. Sadly, his Dad

died of cancer not long after writing this, but James can now be there for the family, thanks to recovery.

James is also passionate about health and fitness. Upon leaving Higher Ground, one of his greatest fears was participating in a ring fight, though he also wanted to do it. He has now had two ring fights and is doing the Tough Guy, Tough Girl challenge and the 18km Tough Mudder, all with people in recovery. Working out helps James maintain good physical recovery and de-stress.

James attends regular NA meetings, works in a field helping others, has a sponsor, and walks in nature. He also stays connected to people on the same journey and keeps away from old associates. James seeks other healthy male role models to help him on his path to wellness and follows a holistic recovery approach.

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ROY'S STORY

Roy recalls having a great upbringing in a white, middle-class family, playing sports, and regularly going on holiday. He loved the outdoors, especially fishing and diving, which would become his life-long passions. He spent his teenage years at East Otago High School. While on the surface, he was in a loving, supportive family environment, other issues would end up significantly impacting his worldview and behaviour, notably, being sexually abused by his music teacher.

“School was a struggle for me. My father was the headmaster, and that made things a bit difficult for me. I think I felt that I had to be worse behaved than everyone else, and I think the sexual abuse impacted on that, as well. I think I developed a ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ personality at an early age, so I could be really nice, or I could be really bad.”

Roy got through school, eventually. When he was 16 years old, he ran away from home and went to Geraldine in South Canterbury, where he got a job at a cheese factory. He had started drinking at an early age and remembers that it was always unmanageable for him; he could never drink socially. The culture he had grown up in was all about rugby and drinking, getting drunk and driving into town in the middle of the night. He was always the one that threw up or did something stupid. When Roy left home, he started drinking even more and getting in trouble.

Roy returned briefly to school to finish his University Entrance (UE) year. He only managed to get through by manipulating the system. Roy used various means to avoid exams, which he was worried about passing, including lying and using bogus medical certificates. Looking back, he sees these actions as early evidence of his controlling and manipulative behaviour.

Drugs and other distractions

At 18, Roy went to McKenzie Country and worked for a few months at a sheep station during the hay-making season. A keen tramper and mountaineer, Roy was interested in a

career in Parks and Reserves. He got a “really good” job on the Ski Patrol for the Tongariro National Parks Board. Roy hoped to take a college course that would lead to further opportunities, but he found many distractions.

“That was my big introduction to drugs, really. Where I grew up, there was hardly any marijuana around. Well, there was a bit. But when I got to the mountain, it wasn't long before my girlfriend, who worked in a chemist shop in town, was supplying me with amyl nitrate. Buddha sticks were around, so while I was on the ski fields, I managed to try everything I could, including sticking needles in my arm.”

Instead of applying to Lincoln University to learn about being a park ranger, Roy got involved in crime, including insurance fraud. After ripping off some people, he headed to Switzerland. He travelled with a mate he had worked at the mountain with, and they did a lot of skiing.

Roy was away from NZ for nearly two years. He describes the time as a “bit of a blur”, travelling extensively around Europe, the UK, and Africa. Roy and his friends always found ways to get drugs (mainly cannabis), but it was all starting to take a toll; Roy realised he needed to get home.

“By the time I left Africa, I was really sick; I'd picked up all sorts of horrible bugs, and I had dysentery and was really unwell. When I got to Athens, I contacted my family, who I hadn't talked to for a long time, and they sort of helped me come home.”

Back at home

Back in New Zealand, Roy went to stay with his family on the South Island for a while before returning to Taumaranui in the North Island to reunite with some old friends. He worked as a scaffolder in Taumaranui, building the new freezing works. Roy says Taumaranui was a “real drinking town”; it was also the last place in New Zealand to have prohibition, which was in effect until 1959. While living and working in Taumaranui, Roy regularly got drunk and stoned, took pills, and partied hard; he also became involved in cannabis cultivation.

Settling into Auckland and prison life

Roy moved to Auckland and started working as a barman. He settled into the local party scene and began selling drugs. He had a flat in Herne Bay, close to a tavern, and he often sold drugs during the week. Roy's first serious brush with the law came when he was arrested for indirectly selling drugs to an undercover policeman. He had also been caught with a big bag of cannabis 'bullets'. He was sentenced to periodic detention (PD).

While on PD, Roy carried on what he was doing and was arrested again for selling to an undercover cop. This time, it was a \$50.00 bag of cannabis (a couple of ounces) and a bag of about 700 seeds. This was deemed "involvement in cultivation". Roy reflects on how this offence was considered quite serious back then but not so much in today's terms.

"I was just so naïve, just a middle-class white boy. I used a duty solicitor when I went to court. I got sentenced to jail and didn't even realise what was happening to me. I got a six-month jail sentence at Mt Eden, which was pretty traumatic."

It was 1981, and Roy was 22 years old. One of the more prominent gangs severely assaulted him in Mt Eden. They knew he was a drug dealer, which made him a target, and several gang members badly beat him. All his convictions were related to alcohol and drugs. However, he had no convictions for violence or abuse. Roy says he can never be "clean slated" because of the jail sentence and still finds himself in situations where he must explain his past. Although he feels this has hindered him in some ways, it has not had a significant impact.

Just before his second drug dealing arrest and incarceration, Roy got a job with an office systems company in Ōtāhuhu. One of the managers took Roy under his wing, becoming "a bit of a mentor" to him. He could return to the same job after being released from prison. Roy did well with the company, earning a Diploma in Management from the New Zealand Institute of Management (NZIM). He started on the shop floor and worked his way up to general manager. However, while appearing to be holding things together, in the background, Roy was still using drugs.

Deepening drug use

When Roy was 26, he married Lucy, who was only 19. They both liked to drink and take drugs but weren't out of control. He wasn't involved in much criminal activity because he was paid so well, but there was a lot of partying. After his early experiences of intravenous drug use at Tongariro, Roy often sought that out. Although he and Lucy were together for five years, the marriage only lasted about 18 months. Roy says he acted like an adolescent – he was unfaithful and didn't understand what growing up was all about.

"When we split up, that was when my drug use really escalated, and my peer group really changed. As my drug use increased, my true friends weren't so keen on hanging around with me anymore."

After his marriage ended, Roy had a few more girlfriends, mainly "working girls linked to the hard drug scene". Meanwhile, his mentor sold the company, and while Roy stayed on, he wrote off one of the company cars and was arrested again for drunk driving. Roy became involved with people importing drugs (mainly cocaine) into the country and was almost arrested with his best friend. Luckily, he wasn't charged. But Roy's friend was sentenced to nine-and-a-half years; another friend was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years.

A catalyst for change

The sentencing of his friends was a catalyst for Roy's recovery. He was working for a furniture company and had a new girlfriend. She and Roy's family and employer staged an intervention.

"I didn't want to stop using. I just wanted to get them all off my back, but it was the start of realising that I needed to stop even if I didn't want to. They sent me off down to Hanmer Springs. At that stage, you had to pay, and it was quite expensive, so everyone put a bit of money toward it, but it wasn't enough, so Hanmer Springs gave me a 'tick' for the rest of it, which I thought was a pretty silly thing to do with an addict."

Hanmer Springs was only a five-and-a-half-week programme, and Roy was still in the early stages of detoxing. Roy was pretty good at being compliant and talking the talk but admits he was trying unsuccessfully to score drugs the whole time he was there.

A brief leap back into chaos

Roy left Hanmer Springs and returned to Auckland and his high-pressure job and unhealthy relationship. He relapsed as soon as he got some money, and things went downhill. He lost his job and his relationship. Even though his partner had become pregnant, she left him. Life had become chaotic. He was going to Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings but was dishonest with everyone, essentially leading two lives.

A turning point

Again, Roy's family got involved. His sister, who worked in mental health, decided that Odyssey House would be best as a long-term treatment option. He went for an assessment and was accepted, but he wasn't sure it was the right thing to do. He called his sponsor, who suggested he call Higher Ground to give himself another option.

Roy's sponsor took him to an NA meeting at the Salvation Army in Mt Eden, where he shared honestly for the first time. He bought an introductory text, the NA Big Book. Roy describes this moment of finally being honest with himself and others as a real turning point.

"This is all in 10 months, from leaving Hanmer Springs to when I went into treatment at Higher Ground, and I was in a bad way. I was ready. That was my rock bottom. My ex-girlfriend was pregnant, I didn't have a job, and it was just beaten out of me that I couldn't stop."

When he was assessed Higher Ground, Roy had to admit that he was powerless over his addiction and to accept that he needed to listen and do things differently. He remembers being told he could be out by Christmas if he went in immediately, but Roy wanted to stay and take his time. He used once more before admission, meeting his dealer outside a public toilet in Lynnfield. He went inside, shot it up his arm and immediately wanted more, but there wasn't

any more. He went to his parents' house in Mangawhai Heads and detoxed again for a week.

Roy went into Higher Ground on the 3rd of September 1996. He admits he put a lot more into treatment the second time around. He listened, found a concept of a Higher Power, and developed a great relationship with his case manager. They went back to basics, and he had a great group of peers, some of whom are still recovering. He joined the Māori culture group, which he had been interested in at Hanmer Springs. The group helped give him an insight into spirituality through kapa haka, karakia, and waiata.

Making recovery a job

Roy went to Calgary House for six months of support after graduating from Higher Ground. He attended many NA meetings and joined a Steps group where he did the 12 Steps. He also got involved in service in the 12 Steps fellowship in the Hospitals and Institutions committee, where they run meetings in places that are challenging or impossible for addicts to access regularly. Roy made recovery his job. After Calgary House, he moved in with a peer who was 10 years in recovery. He felt supported and kept in contact with his sponsor and peer group.

Roy started a labouring job with a solid plasterer and got fit. He was 37 years old and enjoyed having no responsibility. But after a three-month stint as a production manager in the furniture industry, Roy ended up on paid leave for four months. He was still in recovery but felt "a bit mad" and was confused about what to do.

A passion for learning and helping others

He started part-time work at Higher Ground, working nights and weekends as a supervisor. The managing director suggested Roy study social work; even though he wasn't sure what a social worker was, Roy applied to and was accepted at the Auckland College of Education. He was one of only two white males in a class of 50. He continued working at Higher Ground on the weekends.

Roy loved the stimulation of being in full-time study and meeting interesting people. He did his first placement at Youth Justice with Child, Youth and Family Services

(CYFS) in Grey Lynn. This was where Roy discovered an affinity for youth work. He did his second placement at Youth Horizons Trust. At that time, it was possible to do a two-year diploma and become a qualified social worker. Roy immediately got a job, working with the same team he had done his placement within the CYFS Youth Justice team. He liked the work, which was primarily about short-term interventions.

“There was a pilot that started between CYFS and the Department of Corrections. It was around multi-systemic therapy with young offenders and a few slightly older ones. That’s why it involved Corrections. I applied for a job there as a therapist, and I got it. Corrections didn’t do a police check. They figured I must be alright because I was working with CYFS. After a few weeks, I got called into the boss’ office. He said, ‘Have you been to jail?’”

Roy had been there long enough for his employers to want him to stay, regardless of his history. After a couple of years, the pilot was taken over by CYFS, which suited Roy because he liked their philosophy. The role was significant for him, and he got a lot of training, working intensely with small caseloads. As a social work job, it was terrific, well paid, with a car, and involved doing a lot of training throughout New Zealand. Eventually, Roy became the Clinical Manager.

Roy enrolled in a master’s programme at Massey University. By this time, he had two diplomas, one in management and the other in social work, and he needed to do some bridging papers to prepare for the master’s. Public policy was fascinating for Roy, who relished the mix of macroeconomics, statistics, New Zealand history, and opportunities to meet many interesting people. Roy’s thesis, which he describes as “quite clinical”, is entitled, ‘Where do they go? A national review of the treatment options for anti-social behaviour among New Zealand adolescents.’ Roy focused on the top 3% of kids acting out who were part of the Alcohol and Drug and Child and Adolescent and Youth Justice programmes. He found that many kids with high and multiple needs ended up in all three places. Roy conducted interviews and focus groups with professionals in the field and used a phenomenological methodology. He loved the whole process and felt it was good for his self-esteem. He saw the study as a process that paralleled his recovery life.

Roy was becoming increasingly involved in NA service, first at the group level, then at the area and regional levels. He became the NZ regional delegate and was involved in NA World Service initiatives and events, attending Asia Pacific and World conventions. He went to events in India, Bahrain, and Iran, recalling how incredible it was to find commonality with others in recovery in an international setting. He says this helped broaden his worldview, and he learned more about how to be and act in life. He ran the NA Field Service Office (FSO) for some time, which he says was akin to running a small business.

By this time, Roy had moved to the Waitemata District Health Board (WDHB), working in child and adolescent mental health. As a manager, he recruited members of his wrap-around team. As part of introducing an evidence-based model, he went to the US to research and visit other programmes, bringing the evidence and insights back to NZ. His team was excellent, and he was so lucky to have a psychologist, a psychotherapist, two nurses, and two social workers in the unit. The team developed into a high-fidelity wrap-around group with excellent outcomes for families. He is still very close with all these people and sees it as one of those moments in his life when all the stars aligned, and things really came together.

Roy had spent seven or eight years at CYFS and then nine years at the DHB, but things unexpectedly came to a head.

A significant turn of events

On his 19th birthday, Roy’s son was sentenced to life in prison for murder. When his son was 17, he and a friend had been targeted by a paedophile. The boys were groomed, supplied with drugs and alcohol, and driven around. They decided to rob the offender. But things went wrong when, after they beat him up, he died. Because robbery was involved, the boys were charged with murder, not manslaughter. The event was, and remains, a massive shock for Roy and his family. Roy has been through many moments of questioning his Higher Power and not wanting to use drugs again. The flip side is his fantastic support from his family and NA.

“I just fronted up, really. That was part of how I got through it, just going to meetings, not pretending that everything was alright, because it wasn’t.”

Throughout his recovery, Roy has had a relationship with a Jungian therapist who lived in the Waitakere ranges.

“When I first met him, I ended up driving into the Waitakere ranges, driving up into the bush. This little old man just came down this track out of the kauri trees and led me off into this hut in the middle of the bush, and that was the start of the most incredible therapeutic relationship. Because I had that sexual abuse to deal with, he was great for that, and he just helped me so much. I didn’t always see him, but I would do pieces of work with him, like six sessions at a time. Throughout my recovery, I’ve kept going back to him, and when that happened to my son, I was working with him through that. That relationship is amazing.”

Shifting focus in work

Roy needed a break from what he was doing. He and his partner went North, built a bach in Whangaroa Harbour, bought a boat, and set up a charter fishing business, Albacora Sports Fishing Adventures. It was going well for about four years, and he was very successful in leading fishing and diving charters. But it all came to a grinding halt in 2020 when COVID-19 hit.

To pay the bills during the pandemic, Roy returned to clinical social work. Ngāti Hine Health Trust hired Roy immediately during the first Level 4 lockdown, and he went straight into leading their youth team.

“I love the kaupapa Māori here. There is so much learning in that for me; you learn so much more within that. The work’s good. I currently work with kids at school and a few youth justice clients, but mostly school kids from five different colleges. We have karakia and waiata here every morning, which is a really good way to start the day, learning karakia and mihimihi and things like that. There are some incredible people here. It’s a real honour to work

here as a Pākehā. I get on well with everyone and find I can live in that world, but all that stuff I did in treatment and the Māori culture group prepared me well for it.”

Roy has kept the charter business going to see what might happen, but the future is uncertain. He has spent the last three winters fishing in Hawaii. He has made good connections in the fellowship there, and it has been a home away from home for him. Because of COVID-19 and his role with Ngāti Hine Health Trust, he wasn’t able to visit Hawaii.

Growing recovery communities

Roy has been trying to build the NA fellowship in the North, helping to start meetings in Kerikeri and Kaikohe, and working on building the recovery community. Roy has had two sponsors. The first sponsor relapsed after working with Roy for several years. A sponsor relapse can be a real challenge, but Roy was able to stay on track. The second sponsor is a fishing mate. Roy says it has been a challenging relationship at times, but it is based on love and trust and has endured for many years.

Self-care strategies

For self-care, Roy goes to meetings and loves to be outdoors. He had started playing rugby in early recovery, finding it a great way to vent frustration and anger. He joined a soccer team with a group of other social workers. For over 14 years, they played indoor soccer, seven-a-side, and social games. It wasn’t recovery-focused; it was just good fun.

Roy says his love of the outdoors is a big part of his life. Fishing and diving give him positive, conscious contact with his Higher Power. He relates this to his understanding of Māori philosophy, as most atua are associated with the environment, te tai aō. He loves the challenge of the outdoors and being in the open air.

Being supported to be ‘real’

Roy says his case manager at Higher Ground has been key in his recovery journey. When he arrived there, Roy

felt “emotionally dead” and couldn’t identify feelings. His case manager helped him return to basics, doing breathing exercises twice a day and carrying a notebook to write down physical sensations when they happened. On an emotional level, Roy felt heard and appreciated. His case manager encouraged Roy to use positive affirmations and helped him become vulnerable and authentic. He learned to challenge his inner “know-all” and strip away the Jekyll-and-Hyde-like behaviours.

“There were a lot of tests along the way. I’ve seen so many people come and go over that time; 24 years is a long time, and a lot of deaths, too. Like I said, I was lucky not to spend a long time in jail like many of my friends. It was never my plan, and I really believe it was Higher Power stuff that someone was looking out for me.”

Roy would like a different approach to criminal justice, particularly with youth. He feels that working with youth in isolation is ineffective, and there needs to be a systemic approach where families and communities are included. He likes the whānau ora concept and is convinced that prison is unhelpful in most cases and that we can learn from some of the Scandinavian models. Approaches must be holistic, building life and employment skills, and recognising the impact of alcohol and drugs. He sees clear links between poor parenting, poverty, lack of resources, isolation, and not having good links between families and schools.

Today, Roy enjoys his life in the North: he is happily married to Audrey, and they have one young grandchild and two more on the way. Roy and Audrey look forward to having more grandchildren running around the place.

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TROY'S STORY

Troy was born and raised in West Auckland. He had what he describes as a “normal upbringing” that created a happy childhood experience. He explained that his parents were “straight-shooters”, which, in reflection, probably helped because he “always played up”, particularly in school. Most of his school reports describe Troy as being “easily distracted”.

Some may have diagnosed Troy with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). Still, Troy’s mother was a nurse and opposed using prescription drugs to curb children’s behaviour she saw as typical. Over the years, after meeting people who exhibited similar behaviour, Troy has wondered if there is a medical reason for his behaviour:

“I’ve just always had this reason to be naughty and, um, just to get attention and be the class clown. That just kicked off on my journey to gravitating towards people that were naughty, [too].”

Throughout his schooling, Troy was constantly in trouble. He was suspended for bullying students and verbally abusing his teachers. By the time he reached intermediate school, he found himself amongst a group of kids who would sneak down the back of the school to smoke pot. Troy adds:

“I can’t stand pot; it’s not a drug I enjoy whatsoever. It just wigs me out and makes me feel sick and paranoid. But at that stage, I just did it purely to rebel against the school system[and] what my parents wanted for me...I was naturally intrigued by and attracted to the naughty kids. That’s where my drug use started.”

At the age of 13, Troy was caught smoking weed at school and suspended. The punishment did not deter him; he smoked weed daily when he started high school. Troy was constantly kicked out of class, usually for making fun of the teachers or refusing to hand in his phone. Despite his troublesome behaviour at school, he excelled in his studies. He recalls his teachers telling him he had “potential”.

However, by the beginning of Year 11, the Dean told him

he had to leave school, or they would kick him out.

On an impulse, Troy decided to go to chef school. He thought, “It sounded good, and I liked eating food”, but he again started hanging out with the wrong crowd. Troy recounts that a group of older people at the chef school would spend their travel allowance every couple of weeks on alcohol. They liked to drink at Myers Park. Eventually, Troy joined them.

“I loved it. I didn’t like smoking weed, but I loved alcohol.”

Troy began getting drunk every day and fighting with his parents. Finally, he was kicked out of home for putting holes in his Mum’s wall while drunk.

Troy moved in with his girlfriend of two years. Troy admits he had “treated her like shit”.

Deciding to get high all the time

Troy explains how his meth addiction began: His friends from the chef course were also smoking meth, so he was surrounded by people buying and using the drug. Troy also randomly re-connected with an old intermediate schoolmate who had started working; together, the pair relished having money in their pockets. One day, they decided they, too, would try meth:

“I chipped in with him on a dollar bag, and I loved that shit!”

Initially, Troy used his wages to pay for meth, but things changed as his addiction took hold. He would be awake for a few days at a time, go to work, and be a mess:

“I stopped going to work because I just decided I wanted to get high all the time...work was getting in the way; everything was getting in the way of it. My family, my work, school, all that stuff.”

Troy lost his job and started hanging out with people who, at the time, were heavier drug users than him. He discovered “other means of acquiring it [meth] through these associations, like stealing, dealing – selling it”. Troy

learned to steal cars, and robbing all day was an easy way to fund his habit. The “crime thing had kicked off.”

Entering “The Rock”

At 18 years old, Troy was arrested for aggravated robbery and sent to “The Rock” (Mount Eden Prison) the year before it was closed (i.e., became privatised). Troy was remanded for six months in The Rock and recalls, “It was a scary place.” Troy learned quickly to adapt, which meant he had to try and connect with those he was inside with, including gang members.

Troy is critical of his time inside because there were no opportunities to join programmes or rehabilitation options. Fortunately for Troy, the Judges in his case identified his addiction issue and granted him bail at Odyssey House. Despite being in treatment for six months, Troy still was not ready to stop:

“I didn’t understand the nature of addiction – it’s with you for life. I thought that time healed everything. I’d been off everything for so long; I thought I could go back out there once I got out and have a drink and be all good.”

After his release, Troy’s cycle of addiction was reignited after he went for a drink and started sourcing meth. A year later, Troy moved from his Mum’s place and started flatting with some mates using meth. He was in and out of different jobs. Getting paid generally meant he didn’t work, either because he hadn’t slept or because he had no gas in his car to get to work. Troy became involved in criminal activity to feed his drug use, and with that came cycles of incarceration:

“Working just never worked out for me when I was using. So, I had to find other means to support my habit: burglaries, stealing cars, breaking into cars, and taking the contents. That was pretty much my lifestyle for a while. I did some dealing on the side, but I could never drug deal [laughs]. I was my best and own worst customer. I took it all myself and did not pay it back. I was always in this hole, looking at charges and jail time, and I’ve pretty much been on probation since I was 18 because every time, I got off charges, maybe a week later, I’d go back to remand for

a bit. Then, I’d get out on bail or supervision. That was pretty much my life; I felt like I was trapped in the system for most of my late teens and early adult life.”

Troy’s experiences of remand only led him to connect with more people with whom he could hatch plans:

“What do you do? You talk with people; you make connections. You make plans for when you get out; it’s just a breeding ground. I was constantly looking over my shoulder and getting hidings, just for being a little white boy.”

Early journey through rehabilitation programmes

Over the years, Troy has completed several court-ordered rehabilitation programmes in Auckland. These included The Bridge, Higher Ground, and Wings Trust. Troy did what was required of him throughout each treatment programme, but he admits that he was not ready to stop using during his time in these facilities. Not when he was 18 and sent to Odyssey House, not in his 20s when he found out about NA, and not at 22 when he relapsed and was sent to Higher Ground. Troy was perplexed about Higher Ground regulations requiring people to be clean from drugs before admission, saying, “If I could do it on my own, I wouldn’t even need to go to rehab.” He believes it should be easier to access treatment and knows treatment facilities often have long waiting lists. After Higher Ground, Troy returned to Wings and relapsed again, this time for a year.

Struggles with identity

For a long time, Troy had felt he had no identity or skill. At school, he had never been good at sports like other students. He wondered if “doing drugs and crime...and being a scumbag” was his “calling”. With no goals or ambitions to keep him grounded, Troy was quickly drawn back to drugs and crime.

For much of 2016, Troy went on a crime spree of “stealing cars and sleeping in them, and robbing building sites”. By September, he was back in jail, this time for nine months; again, he did not receive any rehabilitation. When he was

released, he returned to his Mum’s house but was kicked out again. He then stayed with a mate who was heavily in the meth game. Unfortunately, Troy’s addiction reached a new pinnacle:

“It was the worst it ever got... [I was] using heavily, using a lot of rinse as well. I couldn’t function without it...I was no use to anyone.”

Then, he received a message that would change his life trajectory forever:

“My Mum...messed me and sent me a link to rehab in Wellington. Usually, I ignore my Mum when I’m going through that stuff, but I saw it, and I thought, ‘Yeah fuck that, it’s a rehab out of Auckland. I’ll give it a go.’ I thought there’s no use going back to those Auckland rehabs because I just see all these people, I know...I’ve just found it so hard. I know a lot of people get clean in their hometown, but to this day, I don’t think I could have done it.”

Putting a distance between an old and new life

At 25, Troy moved to Wellington to attend Red Door, a private rehabilitation centre. Troy needed more out of the actual treatment and group work than the facility provided. But the critical turning point was being away from Auckland. Moving away allowed him to kickstart his journey into a new life in Wellington, without all the distractions. Moving to Wellington had not always been easy, and Troy had become depressed. He is now grateful for the support of his best friend, who was also in recovery at the time. Together, they joined a 12-Step fellowship in Wellington and have “been solid” in their support of one another. Although Troy has experienced a relapse, he has got back on the wagon much quicker than in previous times:

“It has been rough; my recovery to date has not been 100% perfect, especially lately. I have slipped up, but I have managed to pull myself back because, down here, I have got a solid support network. Whereas, in Auckland, it is the opposite.”

Expanding horizons through education

After reaching one year “clean” Troy decided to attend university. He started a degree in psychology but found his passion in criminology and sociology. Studying has helped Troy abstain from using drugs. His university learning began to open his mind, and he believes he has now found his “calling”. He defines this period of his life as a “big turning point” because he has seen “something that he loves and wants to do”. Studying has given him “identity and purpose”.

Today, Troy remains critical of the criminal justice system. Whereas he once blamed the system and took a victim approach, he now understands how his choices helped to lead him down the prison pathway:

“I have let go of all my resentments towards the justice system and all that victim shit. I have come to realise that I can only really work on myself. I cannot change what other people do. I was the root cause of my problems, so I can use my story to help others. Help bring attention to society. When we label people a ‘bad person’ and lock them up, it’s like you [ignore] that the person wasn’t born bad. There are aspects of society in how they have grown up and how they have been treated, and that’s the reason they have become who they are. It might be too late for that person, but [it might not be] for their children, their grandchildren, and so on...If we don’t look at the bigger picture and the root cause of the problem, I feel like their voices are going to continue to be [like that].”

Supports in life

Troy acknowledges several key people who have supported him during his journey. Troy has a new relationship with his Mum. They chat regularly on the phone and have far fewer arguments:

“... When we do [argue], I don’t like to leave it like that. Now, I feel feeling about it; it cuts me deep. I can apologise and own my stuff, and often, she does the same. It used to get way out of hand. I feel like I’m blessed.”

Troy has also come to realise that, compared to some of his friends who have only known crime as a way of life, he is fortunate to have had “straight and narrow” parents:

“[I’ve] always known what normality and pro-social life is like...my family have been my rock and my fall back. I’m grateful to my family.”

Troy also acknowledges his best mate, who is like a brother to him:

“He has been solid. No matter what I have done, he has treated me no different. He has been my rock. So, I could be in a state, for instance, but I’ve got that normal person who is sane, and he brings me back down.”

Another significant person in Troy’s recovery was his first sponsor, who helped him achieve a substantial amount of clean time in the first year after Red Door. Together, they did 12-Step work and talked about ways to look at themselves, their choices, and owning their part.

Content with life

Today, Troy is in his late 20s and is happy with life. He has a job that he enjoys: “It has a good vibe... my best mate works there, too, so there is a lot of good banter.” He has discovered a love for kickboxing or Mu Tai, and although a recent injury has limited his training, he is learning how to deal with this frustration. Troy is contemplating taking up lighter exercises for a time, including yoga.

Troy does not follow the NA principles to their full extent, but he honestly admits that he would not be where he is today without the things the programme taught him about spiritual awareness. As he shares his lived experience of addiction and incarceration, he offers these closing words:

“I still fuck up every day! But the difference is that I can recognise when I have done something wrong today. I cannot always apologise for it straight away, but compared to how I used to be, I am a lot more self-aware. At this point in my life, I am rapt with how far I have come, even though I’ve got a long way to go, I am fuckin’ rapt with where I am.”



JESS'S STORY

Jess was born in Wellington in the 1980s. She is Pākehā with Polish ancestry. She is an only child and was raised by her mother in a huge house where they lived with Jess' grandmother. Jess and her family remain close.

Dangerous teen struggles

Jess tried alcohol early in life and was curious about drugs – but her first addiction was sugar. She developed an eating disorder and became overweight at school. Jess realised that if she stayed like that, she would keep being teased and rejected; if she could change, she would have some power and control over her life. She started to wag school and became disruptive. Jess felt alone, isolated, and confused. Over time, she developed other eating disorders – bulimia and restrictive dieting – and lost a lot of weight.

Jess experienced anxiety and depression, although, at the time, she didn't know what they were.

“I wish I had found some prescribed medication that worked. I think I might not have started to self-medicate. Anti-depressants and medication are some of the best things I have ever done in my life. I now know I have mental health issues, but at that young age, I didn't know what was wrong with me...I would cry and be really sad all the time. It was just really horrible.”

When she was around 15, Jess moved into a flat with people addicted to substances and crime. They would drink and listen to music together – it started as teen fun. Her flatmates would shoot up drugs, but Jess feared needles, so she started drinking speed instead. She liked it.

Her Mum and Dad tried to get her out of the flat, but Jess was too far gone. Jess describes her teenage years as “quite dangerous”. She smoked pot regularly and used other drugs but wanted to return to school to do art and photography.

Around this time, her friend was murdered by another friend. Jess describes feeling “checked out of life” and

started using more methamphetamine. This was a turning point. She moved deeper into drug use, and life became a blur. She was living in a dangerous world, but drugs made it easier to continue along this path.

Jess's mother tried to help her stop using drugs. When Jess was around 21, she had her first attempt at rehab at the Capri treatment facility. When she got there, she thought that meth was her only problem. She didn't want to give up everything, so she used benzos. Her Mum paid a lot for Jess to go to Capri and thought it would work. Instead, Jess left the facility. She felt it had not helped – although, looking back, Jess realises that a seed was planted during her time there.

Getting deep into the drug world

After leaving Capri, Jess entered into another relationship. She relapsed immediately and returned to the drug world. Jess would rip off anybody and do anything for drugs.

Several years later, her family sent her to Ashburn Clinic in Dunedin. This happened after Jess says she “lost the plot on drugs”, and the police were called. Jess describes it as an insane time – “straight jacket style crazy” – and she recalls screaming at the clinic nurses. Jess remembers having her birthday in Ashburn Clinic and hating the place. It was based on the therapeutic community model, not the 12-Step programme that eventually helped Jess. When Jess left Ashburn Clinic, she was given an envelope of pills. She didn't take the medication as prescribed.

When she was about 23, Jess decided there weren't enough drugs in Wellington and went to Auckland for her birthday. There, Jess got involved in more criminal activity. Her ex-partner in Wellington suggested her criminal skills could be an asset. Jess liked this idea and felt clever and accepted. Working in the illegal drug world became her identity. Eventually, she was arrested.

Entering the justice system

Jess hated her first night in the cells, although her friend was with her, which made it more bearable. This was her first engagement with the justice system – but it wouldn't be her last.

She had linked up with a new partner in Auckland, and everything seemed to intensify. Having been under surveillance as part of a police operation, Jess and her partner were soon arrested. Over time, they were raided three times in different apartments.

Jess' lawyer was Ron Mansfield. She had a good relationship with him, and he fought for her "big time". This time, Jess thought hard about trying to avoid prison by attending another rehab programme.

Turning things around

Jess entered Pitman House, a social detox facility. She describes it as her "favourite thing in the world" – she loved it. She met incredible people, laughed, ate, and had a lot of fun. She spent two weeks as a patient there and was prescribed Valium. She did chores in the morning, went to the pools in downtown Auckland, and mixed with men and women. It was the first time in a long time that the collective could all relax and laugh.

From detox, Jess went to Wings Trust, which was initially scary. She didn't enjoy living with women or know how to associate with them. During her time at Wings, Jess went to Waiheke Island to see someone she had started a relationship with at the social detox, and she relapsed. Drugs showed up in her system after a drug test. She denied taking anything, and Wings allowed her to stay, attributing it to the Valium she had previously been prescribed.

Jess thinks this was a critical turning point. She believes if Wings had kicked her out then, she wouldn't be alive today. She feels that they let her mess up just once, and that leniency was helpful. One of Jess's friends explained that Wings was an abstinence programme, meaning she had to stop all drug use. Jess didn't understand this approach at the time, but she ended up flushing her pills and became abstinent. She struggled with behavioural challenges but didn't relapse again.

Jess went from Wings to Higher Ground, a programme she was initially not a fan of. They were tough at Higher Ground, and Jess would get told off or challenged. She had a criminal mentality, and there was much trauma to unpack, which made the experience even harder. One of the good

things was the close friends she made, many of whom she still sees today. She also found the family and other groups helpful. She was challenged about her relationships with men and understood that she needed to fully break away from her ex-partner. Jess sometimes lied to get through, reflecting now that:

"You can't force people to do anything if they don't want to do it at the time, and giving people more chances to recover would help."

Jess wanted to graduate from Higher Ground and avoid being sent to prison. Ultimately, Higher Ground helped because it gave her structure and supported her to see the truth about herself. Jess will be forever grateful for that. After her time at Higher Ground, Jess returned to Wings, where she felt more settled than she previously had.

Now 26 years old, Jess was due to be sentenced in court.

Prison time

Jess' pre-sentence report recommended 12 months of home detention. But when Jess got to court, her lawyer said that the usual sitting Judge was sick, and the replacement was not good. He told her to expect the worst. Jess was supported by a massive crew from the recovery community, and she tried to remain positive.

The Judge sentenced her to four years.

Jess was not prepared for this sentence. She had nothing with her but the dress and high-heeled boots she was wearing. It was a massive shock to her and all her supporters.

Finding strength

Jess felt lucky to end up in a cell with someone she knew. One day, Jess asked her cellmate if she could get her some Valium. Her cellmate refused and instead encouraged Jess to stay clean. This was another turning point for Jess. She had wanted to use drugs in treatment, but now that she was in prison, she found she didn't want to use anymore. The sentencing hadn't triggered a desire to stay abstinent, but the combination of her return to Wings and her cellmate's words helped her look at things differently.

While in jail, Jess finally managed to end her relationship with her former partner. Though she still loved him, she knew that if she didn't break things off, there was no way she could be in recovery. Jess missed her ex. There was much love in the relationship. Jess believes that for women, their love for the men in their lives often pulls them back into unhealthy cycles of behaviour and toxic relationships.

It was at this time that Jess discovered a sense of spirituality. Jess prayed a lot and worked the Steps because she felt desperate and unhappy without drugs or contact with her ex. She did have letters and parcels daily from family and friends. She felt such loving support from people and didn't want to disappoint them. Jess had a 12-Step sponsor who sent Step Working Books and talked on the phone with her every Saturday. As well as the support of her sponsor, Jess felt supported by her parents, who flew up every weekend to visit. She also had visits from Wilson from Wings. Jess felt so lucky to have so much support.

Today, Jess believes that prison either gave her obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) or made it worse. Her mental health suffered, and she didn't realise what was happening. The OCD affected her eating habits, and she lost weight, shrinking to 45 kgs. Jess tried to cope with feelings of powerlessness by doing exercises, including star jumps on the concrete floor in her cell. The activities ended up causing Jess a long-term injury. It was not the healthiest way to cope, but it was the best she could do then.

While in prison, Jess couldn't get into the Drug Treatment Unit. Her request continued to be declined until a week before her first parole board hearing. Her sentence had previously been lowered in an appeal, so parole came up quicker than expected. Wilson from Wings came to her parole board hearing and advocated strongly for Jess. He said what she couldn't say – that her eating disorder was related to her meth addiction and that she had the support of Wings. Jess wasn't sure if she would get out after being so let down at her court hearing. However, she was granted parole.

Spiritual support

Throughout her prison experience, Jess felt a spiritual

connection, as if she was being looked after. She believed in good and felt spirits around her. Today, Jess doesn't believe in God, per se. But she is still spiritual and believes something was with her when she needed it.

Finding support on the outside

When Jess was released, she went back to Wings Trust. She immediately made amends (Step 9) to Wings over her relapse when she had stayed there previously. The Wings staff forgave her and put her in the Level 4 House.

Jess lived in the Level 4 House with others in recovery. They all paid rent and power and could work or study. This was the first time Jess experienced how to live in a flat legitimately, paying rent and bills and living with others. Jess also started attending the CADS women's group, which introduced her to meditation. Meditation changed her life, allowing her to escape life – just as drugs had done, but in a healthy, positive way.

Jess stayed at the Level 4 House for a year. She felt anxious for much of that time and didn't want to leave the house. She was riddled with panic about things like getting on a bus. Jess feels this was all related to her OCD. Eventually, Jess found a house with another woman in recovery. The house was not far from Wings; it felt safer.

At this time, Jess was seeing a psychotherapist who also works at Higher Ground. Jess found therapy very helpful with essential life skills, anxiety coping strategies, and dealing with various relationships. Over time, Jess needed less therapy and saw other counsellors when times were tough.

A new start

In 2012, Jess enrolled to vote and found a brochure about the New Start bridging programme at Auckland University. Though she had previously thought she wanted to be a hairdresser, Jess enrolled in criminology. The university was scary, and Jess wondered about her ability to graduate. Her grandmother gave her money to support her enrolment. Today, Jess doesn't think she could have done it without her.

Jess made some great friends at university, but the stigma

was apparent. Jess often felt shame and guilt. The lecturers were supportive, and Jess needed to tell people about her story because she thought it could be of value within the learning environment.

Different approaches for different distress

Jess says it took her time to figure out that she needed support for the different aspects of life she was struggling with:

“One of the most important things for me was dealing with multiple issues separately. I have an eating disorder, addiction, co-dependency issues, and OCD. There is a big clash sometimes between those things.”

Jess had to learn to compartmentalise the different treatment approaches. Her OCD therapy has been crucial to her wellbeing. Even though she was eight or so years in recovery, Jess says the treatment was challenging – “At times, I wanted to die.” But she found support from someone in America, and the first two online sessions changed everything for Jess. A key factor was that he had the same OCD as Jess. She had felt alone and unwell with OCD. Finding someone who had changed their life and accepted the treatment was hard. He shared with her the things he had done. He told her she should go on medication. It was tough, but she followed his advice, and the meds made her feel better. She sleeps well now and doesn’t have any adverse side effects.

Another support person for Jess was Jill Palmer from Wings, who has, sadly, passed away. Jess has also been supported by many 12-Step sponsors, each of whom was there for her at the right time and in the right ways.

Midway through her university degree, Jess contracted glandular fever, which developed into chronic fatigue syndrome. She was bedridden for six months. Jess feels her physical recovery is slow in many ways, but her relationship with her Higher Power and others is now much more vital. She looks inside herself and to her Higher Power, Metta (universal loving kindness). She prays, attends meetings online, and is still clean and free from OCD and eating disorders.

Finding support in whānau and community

Jess has found practising meditation and participating in recovery network groups extremely beneficial. She now leads the introduction meditation and regularly attends sessions. Mindfulness and Metta meditations have helped Jess develop self-compassion and awareness and assisted her recovery from anxiety, eating disorders, and self-harm.

“Sitting in my own skin for half an hour was hard but also good for resilience.”

Jess’ whānau has played a significant role in supporting her recovery. This includes her 12-step family, her Higher Power, her biological family – her Mum, stepdad, and aunt – alongside other close family members and friends. Without this constant support, Jess believes she would have relapsed.

“I have been held through the darkest days and experienced incredible joy in the light.”

Jess continues to see her family regularly and still attends 12-Step meetings every week to “maintain sanity” and share with others what has helped her. Her 12-Step sponsors have also been a crucial part of her recovery.

After university, Jess got a job with JustSpeak after being free from drugs for around seven years. She worked on the project Kōrero Pono, which involved project coordinating an art exhibition that explored the collateral consequences of incarceration for ex-prisoners and their families. She had previously worked short-term jobs like waitressing but had always been wasted and hated the work. Getting a job with JustSpeak, where she felt accepted and valuable, was a significant turning point for Jess. The exhibition was a huge success, travelling the country and providing a space for people with lived experiences to share and bring to life their stories through art. Jess will always be grateful to JustSpeak for introducing her to paid work and providing outstanding support and meaningful learning.

“I didn’t feel like my incarceration was in any way a bad thing; it was an asset, and I was made to feel like a normal human being at JustSpeak, which was something I really needed to experience to gain confidence.”

When her contract with JustSpeak ended, Jess had no idea what she would do next. Fortunately, she was already part of a co-design group for He Ture Kia Tika and was offered a paid, part-time role as a researcher with the core team. This experience has been incredible for Jess: she again feels like she is helping others, and rather than being a hazard, she feels like an asset. Having a purpose and working are the main factors helping Jess stay “sane and clean”. She also now works as a contractor, writing cultural reports to support those in the justice system to have equitable outcomes.

Other self-care strategies include reaching out to others, attending meetings, hypnosis, meditation, and prayer. Jess finds balance beneficial, and she understands and embraces life’s rollercoaster.

“I am grateful to feel my feelings; I am grateful for the ups and downs because they are part of authentic living.”

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AROHA

I STAND IN THE WIND
THAT COMES OFF MOUNTAINS
AND STREAMS
BECOMING DREAMS
IN THE MIST
AND THE RAIN
I AM A CHILD OF OLD PAIN
IN THIS THE QUIET AND BEAUTY
OF MY LAND
CAUGHT UP IN MOONBEAMS AND SUNSHINE
AS THE OLD ONES SING IN SHADOWS
TO YOU THEY SING
YOU ARE ME AND I AM YOU
AND I LOVE YOU MOKO
FOR YOU STILL HAVE A LIFE TO LIVE
OF HOPE AND HAPPINESS BUT MOST OF ALL
YOU WERE SENT TO US FROM ABOVE
ANSWERING OUR HEARTS CALL

By Jason Haitana

Small acts of compassion and kindness, especially in moments of vulnerability, are powerful. The stories in this chapter show the openness of whānau to the wisdom of others; this receptiveness enables seeds of hope to be planted in these moments. Hope grows when aroha is shown – from the smallest, seemingly most insignificant acts to life-changing occasions when unconditional loving acts are in full bloom.



MARK'S STORY

Mark was born in Rarotonga and moved to Aotearoa when he was young. He describes early life in Auckland as challenging for his mother, who worked hard to raise Mark and his six siblings. Later in his childhood, Mark's mother met a Samoan man. He helped raise Mark and his brothers and sisters within the Samoan culture, where church, discipline, and hierarchy played essential roles. Structure and physical violence are also featured in their lives.

Mark felt lost.

Back then, being from one culture while thrust into another was hard. He spent some time with his Cook Islands family; his grandmother tried to be an anchor for him.

Mark yearned to be like, and be with, his biological Dad. His family tried to shelter Mark from the truth about his father's path. He now realises these topics were considered taboo and not to be discussed within the family.

While telling his story, Mark is adamant that no one in his family is to blame for his behaviour growing up: "It's just what his whānau was dealing with at the time."

Teenage years

Mark's desire to connect with his biological father grew stronger as a teenager. Eventually, he did, and that's when he "moved into a different world":

"When I finally entered the world, I exploded into it. I was exposed to drugs when I went to seek my father...First, it was marijuana and things like that, but then it was crime and harder drugs. I just thrust myself into this world, this unknown world."

He started using drugs at 16 years old; by 17, Mark was incarcerated:

"I was only a young boy when I went to prison, and I suppose that is where my life of crime carried on. I am smart, and maintaining this lifestyle was not that hard...I became pretty good at what I was doing."

Hitting rock bottom

Mark worked his way up the criminal justice system. He was in jail every year for 20 years. He says he didn't care about anyone, not even his children. He describes himself at this time as "selfish".

As he reached his mid-thirties, Mark started to feel sick and tired of his lifestyle. He remembers a pivotal point when he was released from prison on Friday and back in custody by Monday. He had hit rock bottom:

"...all your foundations are just cracked. I felt like I was at the lowest ebb I could have been. You know, three days – out on the Friday and back on the Monday – I had money and stuff, and I couldn't even last. There was a lot of shame and guilt, you know, it was fucking shit."

Mark felt he had let himself and others down. At the same time, however, he was developing an understanding that things could be different. Mark describes it as a "lightbulb moment", which subconsciously launched him on a mission to get out of the "shit" space he was in. But for a while, his life continued in the same pattern.

Mark's partner at the time was bringing drugs into prison for him. Corrections staff soon spotted the activity, and Mark was put into isolation. He says he started "going a bit nuts" from being alone and stripped of everything while constantly being watched. At this vulnerable moment, a Māori Corrections Officer said something that stuck in Mark's mind:

"She said, 'How dare you! Your partner is seven months hapū with your baby, and she is bringing drugs in for you!' and then she slammed the door."

For a moment, he told himself, "No, I won't keep taking drugs." He continued to take them, but the officer's comment stayed with him.

"It just resonated and resonated with me. I thought, 'Fuck, she's right, you know.' She [my partner] could be sitting right over there, giving birth to my baby inside the prison. It was another thing that went off inside me."

Something was growing inside Mark, but he didn't know what it was.

The best decision he ever made

Later, while in his cell, Mark saw a story on TV about the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Court (aka, "drug court"). He got excited by the thought of getting out of jail and being there for his partner, who was about to give birth to their child...and do some drug deals. He approached his lawyer and asked to be considered by the drug court.

Weeks later, Mark appeared before a judge. The judge recognised Mark's need to get bail and favourably considered his application to drug court. Four weeks later, Mark made an application before the drug court team, where "strange things" happened:

"Like, the cop stood up and said they supported my application to come into the court. Usually, the cops are my enemy. I had never had a cop stand up and support me."

While still in prison and waiting to be bailed into treatment, Mark found talking with his case manager and peer support "incredibly helpful". But he also found the idea of not using drugs confronting; until this point, Mark says his worldview was so "tainted" that he couldn't imagine life without drugs.

As he started his journey through the drug court, Mark was in two minds about the process. He saw the drug court as an opportunity to "make bail and scarper" but also wanted to "give it a go". Because he was not immediately released from prison, Mark spent Xmas and New Year inside. Spending these two significant holidays in prison helped him appreciate the opportunity he had been given; he realised he might never miss these celebrations again.

Out in the community, Mark started building his recovery at the Salvation Army Bridge Programme. He was kicked out after being accused of something he did not do, which Mark decided was a lesson to "never let anyone get in the way of recovery". He realised, "I am all in, now!"

Mark entered the Wings Trust Programme, which he says helped "cement" his recovery.

His journey then took him to Higher Ground, a drug rehabilitation centre, where he underwent a recovery programme that "turned him inside out and upside down". Higher Ground helped show Mark who he was not and also that whānau was integral to his recovery.

"I wasn't this gang member...it taught me who I wasn't...It highlighted for me some of my character defects – the way I talk to people like I was standing over them...my body language changes, and I lean in a bit more. They taught me some great lessons... whānau. I adopted the Māori culture because my culture was not [represented] there. This was important for me. My family came in, and they told me the truth about how much I had hurt them. They get a phone call in the middle of the night and expect it to be about me being dead on the side of the road. 'Fuck, really?' I didn't even know."

While at Higher Ground, Mark's whānau continued to support him, creating a ripple effect: his partner also went through the programme. Whānau, particularly his Pacific Islands family, is extremely important to Mark. He acknowledges their support: "My sister has helped me with my girls."

Mark graduated from drug court and returned to Higher Ground as a peer support worker. He considers his choice to enter drug court the best decision ever. Without that pathway, Mark believes he would have remained in the cycle of incarceration and crime. He is grateful to the judge who made the initial intervention to allow his application to the drug court.

Important relationships

Mark acknowledges the people who have helped him grow strong in recovery. It started with the Corrections Officer, who first made him think about his actions. Mark's lawyer has also been instrumental:

"He was a huge person in this story. I need to pay more homage to [him]...he would often tell me, 'You have a 10,000 to 1 chance of getting bail,' but he would get me bail on all these charges. He never gave

up the fight for me. He was fighting for me when I was like, 'Who gives a fuck.' He was that one in the corner, the silent one wiping your sweat away when you don't even know you are sweating. He was a huge person for me."

Although he didn't recognise it then, Mark now sees that his lawyer's constant support helped him embark on the journey to whānau ora.

Mark also found inspiration in his first peer support worker: "There was something about seeing, breathing, and smelling their experience of having been where I was to get somewhere else, more positive." The support worker was there for Mark when he was released from prison and had a plan in place for what was next. Peer support is vital in Mark's recovery: "They have experience."

The drug court judge was also a key supporter from when Mark entered the court to when he graduated and became a peer support worker.

"I told her I was going to be the star...I could be something strong."

Mark felt the judge's pride in him – as if they were whānau.

Keeping well by connecting with peers and whānau

Mark has developed strategies to keep himself well. He has aligned himself with the 12-Step fellowship, finding comfort in sharing problems and developing relationships with other men supporting each other. Talking to others about issues was a new skill for Mark, but 12-Step has become his foundation.

Before going to prison, Mark was a promising rugby league player. He has returned to playing, describing rugby league as "my other saving grace; there is a comradeship". All aspects of the sport - running around, concentrating on the ball, telling stories, the sense of brotherhood - give him release.

Mark says prison prepared him physically and mentally to

take up rugby league again:

“One thing jail did was preserve me, physically and mentally...in prison, you get three meals, you train, sleep...it is quite an easy life: it’s doable. But out here in the real world, there are financial stressors, food that needs to be cooked!”

Mark has developed strategies to look after his wellbeing when people around him are using drugs or offending. A protective factor for him is always to be surrounded by his children:

“I have my babies there. I could do what I like, but then I look at my babies and think, ‘They cannot drive my car; I must make sure they get home.’ There are high-risk situations; you must do what you can to recognise that. I am good now at reflecting. I am conscious.”

Sometimes, Mark is caught off guard and must remove himself from a situation and take time to plan. For example, when he enters a whānau situation where drugs are used, Mark often responds physically, such as sweating. When that happens, he knows he needs to remove himself and consciously relax before letting his whānau realise he can’t be around drug use while on his recovery journey. Mark feels guilt and shame about his past and a “massive passion” to be there for his children.

Finding strength in culture

Mark has also found strength through reconnecting with his culture.

“These [ei/necklaces] are from the Cook Islands. When I was last there my cousin said, ‘I have a gift for you, cuz,’ and put this around my neck. Outside of my brother and sisters, he is the closest to me... he is important to me. It is prickly on the back, so it reminds me not to get too comfortable. I get my strength from my homeland. So, it is important to remember him, as well...I have other ones [ei] with different meanings for different times.”

During his time in treatment, Mark wholeheartedly embraced Māori culture. Eventually, he realised it was not his culture. He says there is “humbleness” that comes with learning his own culture:

“I need to learn more about my own culture. From then on, I have brought my own culture to the forefront. When I am here, I am Chief. When I go to see my cousins, I am a boy. I know my role.”

Today, Mark works in a drug treatment programme in prison. Mark facilitates in-depth talks with his group about what culture means and tries to offer another way of being with people. Being honest with each other in groups is essential. Everyone is learning. Mark aims to help others see what recovery could look like.

“It is important for others coming through to be informed. I did not know because my life was so tainted. I didn’t know there was Narcotics Anonymous [NA] or that I was an addict; I didn’t know you could not use drugs. This is simple, informative stuff. Maybe things might have been different if I had seen it earlier.

“Working in the prisons now, I have realised that if people are unwilling to change, there is not much you can do about it. But if they are willing to give it a go... they need to be informed about basic stuff. There is help here, and you can go here and do this. A lot of people are just oblivious to it.”

Today, Mark is focused on building peer support among his work groups. He believes seeing, hearing, and feeling peer support is key to starting a road to recovery.

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HALEY'S STORY

Haley was born in Whangārei but not long after, her family moved to Māngere in South Auckland. They remained there until she was 10. Haley's upbringing was what she describes as a "pretty normal childhood". Both her parents worked, and there was no violence in the home. Haley recalls her father "going away", which she later realised was code for him going to prison for drugs. Haley doesn't believe her father's absences affected her as she didn't know when he was in jail. Eventually, he would come home again, and things would return to normal.

When Haley was 10 years old, her family moved to Kaitia. By age 15, Haley didn't feel like she fitted in anywhere except when hanging with the "misfits." They smoked on the school field, tried pot, and ran away from home. When she was 16, her parents gave Haley an ultimatum: "Go to hairdressing school in Whangārei or go to Whangārei Girl's High". It was an easy choice for Haley. She hated school, so she started studying to become a hairdresser.

The spiral downwards

Within her first month at hairdressing school, Haley was introduced to meth and acid by some of her peers. Around this time, Haley also met her first partner, who did not like her smoking meth. Haley stopped for a while. Between 18 and 23, Haley was off and on using meth. She was able to stop her meth use when she met some people who did not smoke the drug. Though they all drank and took other drugs together, having these friends helped Haley stay clean from meth because she wanted to fit in with them.

Here abstinence did not last. When she was 25, Haley met her second boyfriend. The two of them were into meth, and their relationship was "toxic". Eventually, they broke up, but Haley fell deeper into the meth scene selling it, associating with gangs, and doing things that were "out of character" for her.

"One day, against my better judgment, I decided it was a great idea to rip somebody off, and of course, there are repercussions for that, so I got stood over for

my car, which my friend eventually got back for me. I just felt really ashamed...I decided I had enough.”

A chance for change

It was at this point that Haley entered Higher Ground. She was 26 at the time and, despite this being one of the most challenging things she has ever done, Haley completed her treatment and graduated. She left Higher Ground adamant that she never wanted to return because of how difficult the programme was.

“They make you confront yourself...I was stubborn, and I’m not a very forthcoming person. I’m only learning just now to give what I’ve got because it might help someone else.”

Haley remembers saying to her Higher Ground counsellor: “You say that this is a place where we come to build ourselves back up again, [but] all I’ve felt since I’ve been here is you tearing me down.” He replied, “You’ve had a whole life of people telling you the good things; it’s about time people told you the bad things, and maybe then you’ll be able to improve yourself.” The counsellor was stern with Haley, but he got through to her and broke down some of her walls.

Another counsellor at Higher Ground was also helpful. Although the two of them had various run-ins, by the end of the programme, Haley had done much healing. She realised how deeply she appreciated the counsellors for their work and the daily support offered in Higher Ground - regardless of how tough the delivery felt.

One of the things that kept Haley in Higher Ground was that her family refused to pick her up when she wanted to leave. This meant she had nowhere to go, which may have been a blessing. At the same time, Haley wanted to be in recovery.

“I was sick of it; I was sick of the life I was living...I never actually enjoyed that lifestyle.”

Laying foundations

After graduating from Higher Ground, Haley went to a

support house called Wings, which gave her more freedom and felt almost like a “holiday resort” in comparison to Higher Ground. She had her bedroom and was only required to do counselling groups a few times a week. After the initial two-week starting period, she was also given more independence including using her car and cell phone. At Wings, Haley could also eat whatever she wanted, unlike Higher Ground’s more regimented food structure and rules. Haley lived at Wings with other girls from treatment and got along well with the house host, Gini. After completing the first three levels of the programme, Haley moved into a Level 4 Wings house with people who were farther along in their journey. Haley began working for her friend Natalie, doing market research. She found that Wings gave her the foundation to build her confidence and start living in recovery.

“Wings allowed me to heal while learning to live in Auckland...as a child, I was sheltered by my parents, so I had to learn how to [catch the] train, I had to learn how to catch a bus...we don’t even have traffic lights in Kaitaia...so it was a great transition period for me.”

Downward spiralling

After one year in the Level 4 house, Haley moved into a flat with others in recovery. However, none attended recovery meetings, and things “came to blows” in the house. Haley was over two years’ clean, but after visiting an ex-boyfriend and taking meth with him up North, she started using again. She was also made redundant from her job in Auckland. Against her better judgment, Haley moved back up North and “it was all downhill from there”. At first, the amount of meth Haley was using “wasn’t so bad”. However, over time, this increased to all day every day.

Becoming a mother

In 2015, while living in Whangārei, Haley became pregnant with her son. No matter how much she wanted to, she could not stop using. Before her son was born, she had moved back to Kaitaia to try and get away from meth and be closer to her family. Every time she tried to stop using, she would get incredibly stressed and start bleeding. On advice from her midwife, Haley continued smoking meth throughout

her pregnancy. Fortunately, her son was born healthy.

When her son was one year old, Haley became pregnant again to another man who, like her son’s dad, was not interested in being a father. Haley abstained from smoking meth for the first 16 weeks of her pregnancy. However, she started up again “harder and faster” than previously, right up until two days before her daughter, Lilah-Rose, was born in January 2018.

Lilah-Rose seemed healthy at birth; however, that changed in the moments after she was delivered. “As soon as we cut the cord, my baby wasn’t getting any oxygen”. This was hard for Haley; her daughter spent a week in the hospital, and Haley could not feed or hold her the whole time. “I was blaming myself and wondering if it was my fault, and to this day, I don’t know.”

During the week Haley’s daughter was in hospital, her mum and dad looked after her son. On January 6th, three days after Lilah-Rose was born, Haley’s grandmother passed away in Invercargill. This broke Haley’s Dad because he was not there to say goodbye to his Mum, and Haley did not get to say goodbye to her grandmother. After her grandmother’s passing, life got rough. Haley’s Dad was rarely there, and her parents eventually divorced.

During this challenging time, Haley’s mum took much of her anger out on Haley and her children. Lilah-Rose had colic and would scream all day and night; Haley had no support around her. At this point, Haley got deeper into drugs as a way to “not have to deal with all of it”.

“We needed her [my Mum] to be a mother and grandmother. We needed her to be, but she couldn’t even be that for herself.”

Operation ghost

One huge turning point for Haley was a day in June 2018. Haley was asleep in bed with five-month-old Lilah-Rose when her house was raided by police under “Operation Ghost”. The police told Haley her children would be uplifted by Child Youth and Family Services unless her Mum could come get them. Fortunately, she did. However, this was challenging because her Mum supported Haley, and her

two young children, ran two businesses, paid a mortgage, and covered Haley’s rent. Emotions were running high.

“We were all grieving for something we didn’t see coming”.

Although they found no meth on her, Haley was charged with 14 offences including offering to supply and possession for supply of methamphetamine. All these charges occurred through the police watching her phone and gathering evidence through text messages. The raid was totally unexpected. About eight others were arrested during the operation; all are currently either clean or doing much better than they were.

Within the meth harm team that raided her home, one Māori woman was much more humane, which Haley appreciated. She let Haley hold her baby and rode in the police car with her; she also attended Haley’s police interview. After the interview, one member of the meth harm team said to Haley, “You’re a mother; you’re all these children have got.” This wrenched Haley’s heart; she knew she was right. When Haley was released from jail, she called the officer, thanked her for arresting her, and explained how it had ended up being a positive turning point for her. The officer told Haley she had tried to make a prevention approach by approaching her house before the raid to tell Haley she would not be arrested if she stopped dealing. However, Haley was not home on these days. Although this was nice to hear, Haley knew deep down that, “I wouldn’t have stopped if I hadn’t been arrested.”

Despite Haley breastfeeding at the time, the Judge would not grant her bail, stating she was an “undue risk to the community”. This hit Haley hard. She reflects that being away from her family was the most challenging part of being in Auckland Regional Women’s Correctional Facility (ARWCF). Although she takes responsibility for what happened, Haley believes that mothers, especially those breastfeeding, should be treated with more empathy when granted bail. She also believes that if another women’s prison were to be built, it should be in the North, so families do not have to travel so far to visit their incarcerated loved ones.

“The men have a prison in Ngāwha, which is only an hour away, so that’s a lot easier for their family to visit them. The women don’t have that, and it’s the women who suffer more being away from their children.”

Prison life

Although this was Haley’s first time in jail, the others arrested with her had been inside before, and they helped Haley adapt. Haley does not consider herself a fighter, so she surrounded herself with older ladies who are more grounded and who are not involved in the drama that can happen in prison.

“It was intimidating. We got to the jail, and it was dark; we went around this giant prison in the dark... we got put in what they call ‘the pound’ the first night...there’s no TV in these rooms, there’s no privacy in these rooms, the whole front wall is glass or plastic, ‘coz its where you go if you’ve been naughty or tried to kill yourself or something...that was my first night in jail before we went into the mainstream and that just made it even more terrifying.”

After spending five weeks in remand, Haley was moved to High Security, where she spent four more months. Unfortunately, besides a short mindfulness programme, there were hardly any courses in this unit: “It was mainly a toxic environment.” Haley managed to get a cleaning job, which kept her occupied.

A fresh start

When the time came, Haley’s case was heard in Whangārei by a Judge willing to take Haley’s children into account at sentencing. The Judge seemed to understand that recovery, rather than punishment, was the best approach. Haley was sentenced to eight months of home detention, 12 months of supervision, and 200 hours of community service. On the same day as sentencing, she could go home to her children. Haley did most of her community service at parenting courses, so she learned a lot during this time. She also did the ‘Incredible Years Programme’ and the ‘Circle of Security Programme’ while serving her sentence in the community.

Before Haley was incarcerated, she worked with the Rongopai House Community Trust, part of the St Saviours Anglican Church in Kaitaia. When Haley was out, she told her probation officer she needed to return there, and her probation officer agreed. Their flagship programme, Feed My Lambs, was something Haley could work on while doing her probation. This programme arose through a need to help mothers with parenting skills and housekeeping. They also supplied mothers with nappies, wipes, and formula as a practical initiative:

“Feed my Lambs supported my children the whole time I was in jail with nappies, wipes, formula, food, clothing [and] they didn’t have to - but every week they dropped [all of it] off.”

Rongopai House Community Trust told Haley they might have a job for her when she came off home detention. This started with some voluntary hours; every time extra work came up, Haley would take it. Eventually, Rongopai House Community Trust gave her paid employment, which has allowed her to come off the benefit and work somewhere she loves. To this day, she helps run programmes. This work has positively changed her life.

“We work really hard to get funding to support these people, these mothers, but it’s just such a mission, and I really wish that the work Rongopai House Community Trust does would get more airtime.”

Haley had three different probation officers who were all “awesome”. One of them understood Haley’s life as a solo Mum and gave her more flexibility and support, like when the kids were sick. Her next probation officer was also a mother and showed understanding. Haley’s last three reports went so well that Haley was told she was “wasting their time” even reporting in.

Haley has worked out that Kaitaia has around 39 social service agencies, so she knows there is much help up there, and she is grateful and proud of the community she lives in., Haley loves it up North. She has “moved past the embarrassment” of being named in the NZ Herald about her charges, and she lives a great life. The only people who seemed to mind were the real estate agents; Haley initially found it hard to get a rental. Kaitaia is a tight community:

“You ask for help, and people are there.”

Apart from a slight heart murmur, Lilah-Rose is a healthy three-year-old. Haley and her children are developing a relationship with Haley’s parents (Nan Nan and Poppa). Haley works hard to maintain her recovery and stays away from drug users, even though there are a lot of them in Kaitaia. She often stays at home and only goes out when necessary - to work, the park, and the shops. She hangs out with friends who are clean and supportive. Haley is over drugs, and the threat of losing her job or children keeps her accountable. Now that she is on the right path, Haley has abundant support. She draws on the help of her school friend and her friend’s mother, who took her in on home detention so she did not have to go to jail. “She’s amazing, and she’s like another grandmother.” Whenever Haley asks for help, she is there.

Haley is now off the benefit and still works for Rongopai House Community Trust. Some people coming to Rongopai House Community Trust have more trust in what they do because they can relate to Haley’s lived experience. Haley navigates seeing them as friends and being on staff, finding a balance between being in authority and building trust, especially with women experiencing abuse or addiction issues.

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FETE'S STORY

Fete is an Auckland-born Samoan. His mother became pregnant out of wedlock in Samoa. Two years earlier, his biological parents had had a daughter who was being raised as a whangai (adopted child). When his sister was born, Fete's parents were admonished for their indiscretion. When his mother became pregnant for the second time, the aiga (whānau) decided she should have the baby (Fete) in Auckland. Unbeknown to his biological mother, however, the aiga had decided to whangai Fete to her cousin and his wife.

After Fete's birth, his biological mum was sent back to Samoa to complete her training as a nurse. In the late 1960s, his mother moved to Aotearoa and settled in Ōtara, where she married and had a daughter and three sons. Fete shared that, when his uncle found out that Fete's birth mother had become pregnant again, he beat his biological father "to within an inch of his life". The village also banned Fete's biological father from returning there for five years.

Throughout his childhood, Fete had known his biological mother as his "aunty". This changed when he read his first social welfare report and discovered that she was, in fact, his birth Mum. Fete continued interacting with his biological mother from childhood until she died in 2014. To the best of Fete's knowledge, his biological father still lives in the same Samoan village with his wife and 12 children. Fete has nothing to do with him; he met him once in 2007 when he, Fete, was 45. Unfortunately, the meeting with his father did not go well. It was short and abrupt: "It wasn't one of those 'Whoa' moments."

The early years

Fete describes his upbringing in Grey Lynn with his four whangai sisters (one of whom has since passed away) as that of a "typical" Samoan family. Despite not having much money, home life was characterised by hard work, church, and rigorous discipline. Throughout his life, Fete continued to cross paths with his older biological sister, who was raised by paternal aiga (whānau), and he continues to have ongoing contact with her.

As Fete grew older, he started associating with other kids his parents disapproved of, mainly Māori children, whom he found to be more fun and who were part of "more relaxed" families. There were two Māori families in his street, and he talks about them being "laid back, with old cars on the lawn, sitting around drinking". This brought severe disapproval from his parents, and Fete was often subjected to what he describes as "next level beatings", not only for associating with the kids but for being disobedient (for example, being late home from school). The disapproval and violence at home further alienated Fete; by the age of 13, he was running away often. Each time he was caught, he would be badly beaten at home.

It was around this time that Fete was taken to Ōwairaka Boys' Home. There were a few other Samoan boys there, and Fete realised that he was intellectually and physically capable. He could not only defend himself, he could also intimidate and lead others. He started to build some "capacity" in that world; Fete felt a shift to being "intentionally at odds with society" as he adapted to a structured custodial setting.

"There was no real intent to be in that world, but the Boys' Home started me off on that path and, to be honest, there was no going back from that."

Fete's release from Ōwairaka Boys' Home was followed by foster care. He found little difference from his family home: both were marked by strict discipline and violence. By this time, Fete was no longer a little boy. He had grown bigger and was able to defend himself. He idolised Muhammad Ali and watched every one of his fights.

Prison life

By the time Fete was 17, he was in Waikeria Youth Prison, having been sentenced to Borstal Training (a zero to two-year sentence). Waikeria was heavily gang-oriented, and it was here that Fete began to build a reputation for violence, emerging as a leader amongst his peers. He says he took on the mana of the gang's name; at the time, he felt like he had nothing else. Upon release, Fete worked on Council-run work schemes, primarily comprised of fellow gang members. In this environment, alcohol and cannabis became the norm.

Fete entered into a continuing cycle of imprisonment, release, gang activity, arrests, and re-imprisonment. At one stage, Fete was involved in severely assaulting a rival gang that was trying to establish itself in central Auckland. Fete was arrested and sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

Alcohol and cannabis had been a part of his everyday life in those times, but during the three-year sentence, Fete discovered heroin. He "lost himself" in the drug and in the world that surrounds it.

Around this time, Fete became involved with members of the local Polynesian Panthers and began to follow overseas activities by the Black Panthers. The Polynesian Panther Party was a revolutionary movement founded on 16 June 1971 by New Zealand-born Polynesians. The American Black Panther Party explicitly influenced the party, particularly through Huey Newton's policy of Black unity. The movement became a significant influence in Fete's life. He was inspired by their politics and the loyalty and commitment to what they stood for. Fete described how "they were prepared to die for their colours". But his gang associates did not share the views Fete embraced from his involvement with the local Polynesian Panthers, and they saw him as somewhat of a radical.

Back in the community, Fete continued to become further embedded in criminal and gang worlds. He had three children, and his wife cared for them while he focused on the gang and drugs. Fete speaks little of his family at that time, saying his focus then was very much on his relationships with his gang "brothers".

In 1994, Fete was sentenced to three years' imprisonment, which was run concurrently with his seven-year sentence in 1995. He served the time in various prisons but, for the most part, he was incarcerated in Mt Eden and Paremoremo. He was released in February 2000. While in prison, Fete received a note from an associate telling him to "find this guy, put him under your wing, make him show you how to make this stuff, [called] 'P'". The person referred to was a known manufacturer of methamphetamine which, at the time, was a relatively new illicit substance that was fast taking hold. Fete organised for a younger associate to learn how to make the drug, and he used meth while on day-work release. So began Fete's long involvement in the world

of meth, including the vast sums of money and notoriety that came from being at the "top of the chain".

The world of methamphetamine

Fete describes the following years as a "blur of activity". He was involved in manufacturing large quantities of methamphetamine, mingling with senior criminal players, overlapping with other gangs, and working with a lot of money. In late 2000, Fete was caught up in a major methamphetamine bust. He managed to evade arrest for six months but was eventually caught. In 2022, he was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment. Fete served around five years of this sentence and used meth for most of the time inside.

Upon release, as usual, Fete continued to manufacture methamphetamine. He was now in the top tier of meth players, earning big money that he often gambled away:

"You always get a consciousness in that world that you understand the pace of the game...you realise when you reach those levels of criminal activity that it's all about the money, not the drugs."

Eventually, as Fete became a "wild card", there were fallouts and disagreements. His behaviour became unpredictable, and he would break the "unwritten rules of conduct" for the world he inhabited. At first, his associates tried to warn him and begged him to "play the game", but Fete refused. He was a law unto himself. Associates challenged him, telling him he was too "visible" and that his social (i.e., gambling) activities were "bringing heat" onto others.

After some time, Fete's associates told him he was no longer trusted, and he was placed outside the "inner circle". Fete could no longer access drugs at the price he was accustomed to, which impacted his ability to reap high profits. Threats were made against his family. At one point, Fete received a photo of his daughter and her boyfriend. Fete became enraged. His associates wanted him to "knuckle under" and submit. But for Fete, this was not an option. He moved his family out of their home and into a very short-term stay. Fete felt under tremendous stress; the pressure of the situation was overwhelming.

Initially, Fete thought he could simply drop out of sight and lay low to let things settle down. His thoughts focused on revenge and payback. It was at this time that his wife first suggested that maybe he could "pull away from it all" and that she was tired of the gangs and "the whole lifestyle". Fete had never considered this option - but he knew he would probably lose his wife and children if he didn't.

"It trampled on my wairua, it trampled on my mana, it trampled on who I was, and it burnt me to the core of my heart and soul."

A new start

At the same time that Fete felt ready for change, one of his whangai sisters was unwell. He had visited her occasionally and his whānau had asked him to help care for. Fete offered to stay with her for a while, which would also give him somewhere to hide out. She agreed, and Fete's wife suggested that they could now consider giving up the drugs. They spent the next 10 months with his sister, walking, sleeping, eating properly, and occasionally smoking cannabis occasionally - but they completely stayed off meth. The respite period allowed Fete to clear his head, experience life in a family-oriented environment, and begin to appreciate what was important to him.

One day, Fete's wife suggested he "do something with his life" and mentioned studying at university. At first, he was totally against the idea. She talked to him about a programme called 'New Start', an adult learning programme at Auckland University. Fete enrolled and made it through the first semester. He was struck by his lack of friends in that new world. Sometimes, he missed the money and the drugs, but he never felt a strong enough urge to go back. Fete described how a big part of the motivation to stay off meth came from his five sons and 17 grandchildren.

While he was studying, some of Fete's sons were in jail. He would often visit them between university lectures. Watching their struggles sealed it for him: he was never going back to that life. He felt he owed it to his sons to help them be good people for their families.

Fete's life today

Today, Fete has a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in Sociology and Māori Studies from Auckland University. He does what he calls "odd jobs", including guest lecturing at the university, giving community talks, and working as a panel member on Radio NZ. Auckland University also employs him as a research assistant for the Criminology Department. The research explores Māori and Samoan youth experiences of the youth justice sector across New Zealand, Australia, and the United States of America.

Fete credits his wife as the "critical positive driver of change". Fete can now reflect on his lack of engagement with his children over their early years and the lack of relationship he developed as a parent and grandparent. These moments of reflection have built up since seeing his sons' involvement in jail, and now, looking back, he does not want to believe he was that person.

"In that world, to me, how you do your lag, the drugs, where you sit, all contribute to your mindset in that world, and depending on where you are in that world depends on how you behave."

Fete is passionate about the place of women in both the gang and criminal world, particularly about their lack of influence. For Fete, the subordinate position of women is carried on and reinforced by the prison environment:

"In a world that is dominated by patriarchy and by sexist, macho behaviour, places and environments like prison enhance that, encourage that, enforce that - no matter what programmes you do in there. Because when you get out, it's the same thing; it's the same environment, patriarchal and sexist. In that world, women have no place at the table."

With both the prison and gang worlds reinforcing a patriarchal system, Fete believes respect for women remains minimal - and this directly impacts reoffending. He thinks this should be addressed in the prison environment through aftercare and reintegration measures that specifically assist in bringing families back together.

“I really believe, 110%, that if these men learn to respect their women the way they respect their mothers, that would go a long way to stopping their offending. I believe that’s the answer.”

Although he has managed to escape the world he was in, Fete believes the ideology of capitalism, power, and status is alive and well in that world. Fete says for many people, crime is the only way forward.

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TANIA'S STORY

Born in 1983, Tania identifies as transgender and European. She was raised in Auckland and has one full brother who is five years older than her. When Tania was very young, her parents adopted a boy who, following the death of his mother, had become a ward of the state.

From age five, Tania's life changed forever: her adopted brother began sexually abusing her. The abuse continued until she was 12 years old. Tania recalls the abuse would occur most days. It was often "horrific". Being sexually abused every day for eight years became so routine that Tania recalls just waiting at the door, thinking, "OK, let's go." Only when Tania turned 12 could she tell her parents exactly what was happening. Her adopted brother admitted his guilt, and Tania's parents asked him to leave the house, avoiding a court process. At the time, her parents believed a court case would be too traumatic for a child of Tania's age.

"They didn't think it was going to be beneficial to put a 12-year-old child through that, to re-live the whole encounter. He had admitted guilt, so it was settled out of court."

Gatherings with her wider family, like at Christmas, became very difficult for Tania because her adopted brother was present. Tania had already lost so much of her childhood and was resentful that Christmas was no longer a celebration she could enjoy as a child: "Christmas was taken away from me."

From self-medicating to drug dealing

As she got older and became a teenager, Tania experienced learning difficulties and identity issues. Although today Tania proudly identifies as transgender, she admits she was "quite messed up". She realised she was different at a young age, but the sexual abuse had made understanding who she was confusing. Tania ignored these feelings:

"I am very strong-minded and very resilient. I kind of just brushed all the past away and must've held it down more than brushed it away. I felt that I was coping quite well in my teens."

Tania's parents sought help for her learning difficulties, and she was diagnosed with ADD (attention deficit disorder). To this day, Tania feels that the diagnosis was wrong and that it became the catalyst for her later experiences of drug addiction. She was prescribed Ritalin and Dextroamphetamine for her ADD; she recalls realising that drugs were an answer to certain behaviours:

"The more I misbehaved, the higher the dose I got, so it was teaching me at a young age that if something wasn't right – you just self-medicate."

Tania's parents initially sent her to a single-sex high school for boys. However, her parents were soon informed that the school was probably not "the right fit". So, Tania was enrolled in a co-ed high school in West Auckland. Tania fitted in better at this new school, describing how "they were a lot more inclusive, and I was able to be myself". In her fifth form year, Tania dropped out of school.

Tania has learned from watching documentaries, reading books, and from her personal experiences that the impact of drugs in her life meant her brain became "arrested" at the age of 16. By then, she was heavily addicted to methamphetamine, partying, and living on K-Road.

A deepening addiction

At the age of 18, Tania came out as transgender. From that point, her parents had little to do with her. Until then, Tania didn't know what being transgender was. Her only knowledge of it was through the drag queens on K-Road – and she knew she wasn't like them. As Tania started interacting with the drag queens, she learned that most of them were street workers and were heavily into drugs. Tania joined them, taking drugs but not engaging in prostitution; she knew that life wasn't for her. Instead, she saw a market in being a drug dealer and supplying the girls.

Tania was living in the city, dealing and addicted to drugs. She recalls there were several terrifying incidences during that time, with guns being held to her head by gang members and being "stabbed in the back with machetes". Tania reflects that this was the first time in her life she wasn't being beaten up because of her gender. Instead, it was because she was drug dealing.

Trying to sort her shit out

Eventually, Tania was caught, convicted, and sent to a men's prison for one year. Tania didn't like it in prison but was determined to "sort her shit out". She applied to enter Odyssey House and was accepted. Over 12 months, Tania completed the programme. At the same time, she got paid to work at a call centre. For her, Odyssey House "was an okay programme" because she learned how to behave. But it did not address her core issues. She also felt there weren't enough opportunities to talk about and resolve her addiction to drugs and alcohol. Tania continued to work at the call centre; employment was required to graduate. But the week before graduating, Tania relapsed. Although she tried to carry on working at the call centre after her relapse, she eventually went back to her previous life as a drug dealer.

Back into addiction, drug dealing, and time inside

When Tania turned 21, she met her partner, who had been in and out of addiction. They moved in together, and their drug dealing and drug use grew more "intense". Tania developed a severe drug addiction; at its peak, it was \$3,500-a-day habit. Tania used fraudulent methods of transferring money from one account to another to fund her habit. Then, one day, BNZ accidentally paired Tania's account with another account containing hundreds of thousands of dollars. At first, Tania began drip-feeding it into another account, but she admits that the greed grew alongside her addiction. She was gambling and buying more and more things, including two convertibles.

"When you're on a benefit, and you're driving around in two different brand-new convertibles...you know, there are sirens and alarm bells to the police and other authorities."

The "alarm bells" increased the chances that Tania would be caught and that the high-end lifestyle she and her partner were accustomed to would end. One day, while Tania's partner was on 24-hour curfew, probation came around for their regular bail check. Usually, they were happy to wave at the door, but this time, they wanted to come inside. Tania knew she was in trouble and started tossing things out the window. She was arrested for supply and theft of \$52,000

from the bank and placed in custody, again inside a men's prison. Tania reflects on her time there:

"It's nothing but a hassle for them [prison officers] because of all the security issues that come with it. The hidings they get and the whole prison has to be shut down just to move one transgender...[Tania wanted] "to be seen as a trans woman and to help other transgender women transition from a men's prison to a women's prison."

Turning point

After her arrest, Tania knew she was facing a lengthy sentence – potentially eight years. She immediately applied to go to Higher Ground. Because she was transgender and being held on remand in a men's prison, they accepted her quickly. Tania recalls that Maree, the admissions manager for Higher Ground, went out of her way many times to help her. Maree showed a genuine interest in Tania's story and made her realise that she was a "minority within a minority".

Some of the staff at Higher Ground were also GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender), which Tania found comforting. Their presence allowed her to discuss gender issues, and the service was generally "very inclusive". Being transgender was not an issue, and she was treated as just another person. Tania felt at home at Higher Ground; she could relax and sort out some of her issues.

One tool Tania learned was not to worry about what others thought of her., Tania says she found Higher Ground to be:

"...absolutely amazing. To be introduced to NA [Narcotics Anonymous] and be part of something that was very intense...I found my grandiose behaviours, which had kept me safe as a drug dealer in the community, didn't play a part in normal society. I needed to soften myself a lot. I found myself in trouble quite a bit with my behaviour."

Tania worked her way through the programme and, after graduating, went to Calgary, the Higher Ground aftercare support house. Then, she learned she had been sentenced to four years in prison.

Creating transformative change

Tania became determined to change the law so transgender women could be sentenced to a women's prison. The urgency she felt to help bring about "transformative change for others" became her turning point. Tania tried to tell herself that her previous prison experience "hadn't been that bad" and she hadn't gotten into "too much trouble". But this time, Tania says going to prison is like being "a child who has had their toy taken away from them". She felt the loss more profoundly than before.

"Take my freedom away, take my partner away from me, and put me somewhere that was really uncomfortable [a men's prison]."

Tania had learned so much from her time at Higher Ground: she had developed good leadership skills and wanted to use those skills to help change the legislation – a goal she achieved:

"I was the first transgender to go through the correct procedures and help change legislation."

Although Tania advocated for this change, not all trans women favoured the change. In a men's prison, Tania explained, "Trans women can manipulate the men because they are...they are the closest thing to a female. So, they can get away with a lot." If Tania had stayed in the men's prison and prostituted herself, she knows she could have had everything handed to her on a silver platter. Tania is critical of trans women who don't take the opportunity to transfer to women's prisons because "it is easier to do nothing" while serving out their time. She argues this is not right, and that if you identify as a woman, you should go to a women's prison and participate in their programmes.

Tania is firmly of the mind that transgender people do not deserve special rights – just the fundamental human rights:

"I am into human rights, but I am not into GLBT rights where we deserve something different...that's not me, and I don't support that...I feel that the more you try to highlight gay and lesbian rights versus just getting on with your life, that people really don't care."

Tania believes that advocating for special rights may expose GLBT to more discrimination that can be better achieved by "just getting on with your own life".

Life inside a women's prison

After five months in the men's prison, Tania was transferred to a female prison, where she was determined to work hard to reduce her time. Tania believes people in prison should be made to work whether they like it or not, and a reward system could be introduced to help people learn better behaviours. For example, Tania suggests that the work could be paid for with something prisoners like (for example, toiletries) and wouldn't cost much.

"Jail will work if the system is changed, and it's more about reintegration, rehabilitation, and programmes. Addressing people's issues and teaching them how to learn to work is key."

Although Tania acknowledges that "Some people thrive in jail...they love it," she knows it is not the life she wants. Tania believes some people are in prison because they have mental health issues. She understands that while most women in prison are no longer on drugs, their brains have become arrested at a very young age. Tania observed that many women revert to their childhood behaviours, treating everything as possessions and using language that reflects that approach. For example, Tania witnessed women saying things like, "That's my friend, not your friend." Tania could see that many of her fellow prison mates had been robbed of their childhood and, consequently, were still in their childhood.

Other women seemed incapable of connecting or feeling part of anything.

"There are people who go to jail; they sit in High Security, but they achieve nothing because their behaviour is so bad. Or they just don't care – their sentences are so short that they don't care, and they are happy just to sit there and do the bare minimum."

On the other hand, Tania met women who wanted and strived for a different life. In Tania's mind, these women were "successful".

In contrast to being in the men's prison, Tania could walk around freely in the women's prison. She relished the opportunities this presented, including the chance to learn new skills. Tania worked her way up to become a team leader on the External Grounds team; she thrived at achieving new job titles and earning the highest pay rate. She also used her time to study and became a qualified gym instructor and personal trainer. Tania also earned her forklift license and digger license. With all her achievements, Tania says she was at the top of her game. She knew that if she could achieve these goals in jail, she could do it anywhere else.

Leaving prison

Once Tania was eligible for parole, Higher Ground saw how much work she had been putting in and accepted her into Calgary. The parole board agreed with this exit plan. Tania went to Calgary and completed all the integration requirements. Within three weeks, she got her place in Mount Eden. At the time, her friend got her a job with Youthline. Although life was good and her recovery was going well, she realised living in Auckland was not a good place for her. There were too many old associates, and she constantly bumped into them. So, Tania and her partner decided to move to Christchurch, where she now runs her own cleaning company.

Finding a support structure

Tania acknowledges her ACC counsellor, who helped her prepare her sexual abuse claim and taught her strength.

Tania has also been supported throughout her journey, first and foremost by her Samoan partner of 16 years. He has always been by her side. She has also formed a close relationship with her partner's family, who, in many ways, adhere to traditional cultural values. Tania's mother-in-law plays a big part in her life, becoming "like a mother" to Tania and warmly welcoming her into their family after they moved to Christchurch. Tania also developed a strong bond with her partner's Nana. She would clean Nana's house every week, and they would often go out to a café. Tania says, "We had a really, really good bond." Nana would sometimes tell Tania off, but Tania was always respectful and never reacted negatively.

Tania says usually, she never has a problem confronting someone or calling people out on their behaviours. But if there is an emotional event, such as a death, she struggles to show any emotions. So, when Nana died in 2018, Tania cried for her and was very upset at her passing. Tania observed and grew in her understanding of the Samoan cultural traditions of her partner's family. Tania recalls Nana's funeral, which lasted two weeks. Though it was long, she knows that the length of time taught her a lot of patience. She is still amazed by that learning because, usually, "I have no patience – none."

Recently, Tania has also been able to reconnect with her parents. They were able to meet up again and have fully accepted her "as Tania".

Self-reflections

For Tania, giving up drugs meant learning how to be an adult and how to pay bills. She was no longer that 16-year-old whose lousy conduct could be explained away as teenage misbehaviour. Growing up meant accepting that she would not always get what she wanted and that there is no means for "instant gratification". Learning to be an adult was a shock to Tania, given she had always managed to manipulate her way through everything, including the court system.

Tania had been on anti-depressants for a long time. But when she stopped taking drugs, she shifted her focus to her wellbeing by becoming vegan and going to the gym every day. Tania realised she no longer needed to take a lot of the medications she was on, including her anti-depressants.

"I actually don't need these medications, so I just came off them...I got what I needed from the change in diet and exercise."

Tania is generally positive in her approach to life, using self-talk and self-care approaches to overcome those low moments:

"Snap out of it now. You are not going to achieve anything in life being in the foetal position, lying in your bed.' I love having naps in the afternoon, especially when I feel slightly sorry for myself."

Tania concedes that having been sexually abused. She has learned to protect herself by using over-confidence and strength act as a mask:

"I was really, really tough. On top of being sexually abused, I was gay, transgender, and I lived in a street where there were a lot of gang members and was told 'to harden up.'"

When Tania speaks to other people who have been sexually abused, she often sees how they are affected a lot more than she has been. Tania cannot understand why they do not accept what has happened and then move on. She struggles to cope with people who continue to see themselves as a victim. So, Tania sometimes finds the best thing to do is remove herself from situations or conversations, knowing she does not have a filter and will likely say something that will upset others. Tania believes that it is not easy to help someone when they are in "victim mode". She does not see herself as a nurturing person or think she has enough empathy and sympathy for others. She believes that some people are nurtured too much, which leads to them becoming too reliant on others.

Helping others

One day, Tania hopes to be able to work with the families of gay and trans people to help them understand their children. She would like to work in the field of addiction but does not want to go to university. Although the peer support route offers an alternative pathway, Tania knows it would need to provide her with an income she could live on. Tania has had many job opportunities in the field, not only with Higher Ground but also with the Canterbury DHB, who are keen to employ her as a freelancer to work with the GLBT and trans community.

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TRENT'S STORY

Trent was born in Hamilton in the late 1970s and has an older brother and sister. The family moved to the North of Auckland when he was around four years old and then, when he was about seven, to Wellsford. Trent says he had a good upbringing; it was a happy, comfortable childhood with everything he wanted.

Unsettling changes

Things started to change in Trent's life when his parents separated, and his Mum entered a new relationship. Trent noticed his mother's focus shifted from him and his siblings to her new partner. He also suddenly had two new, older siblings – a stepbrother and stepsister. While the kids got on well, his relationship with his Mum was "never the same". Trent reflects on the impact that this change had on him:

"As I was getting older and my mother was getting into a relationship, you could see her focus...turn from us to her new partner. I vividly remember that, in my teens, so I started to start looking for comfort elsewhere at that stage, and it happened to be drugs and not school."

Searching for comfort

There had never been drug or alcohol issues in the family, and drug use in the community was "very covert". Some of Trent's older siblings were smoking cannabis, and Trent started to experiment, too. He found he didn't fit into the sports-oriented culture prevalent in the community and at Rodney College. He began to hang out with people who did outdoor pursuits like fishing, hunting, and motorbiking. They were more likely to smoke cannabis and drink, and Trent followed suit. He says he found out very early that alcohol was not for him:

"I got wasted a few times early on and didn't like the buzz, and that was the end of it."

Trent ended up going to school less and less often. He would tell his mother he was going to school, but instead,

he would go to a mate's house. They would go eeling and smoke dope.

Trent feels he never received any guidance or structure at this time in life, a realisation he revisits often. He reflects on trying to replace the lack of comfort he felt from his Mum by trying to find something else. He was only 14 or 15 years old and had no skills. He didn't know how to get a job or what to do. This state of mind carried on for much of Trent's adult life. He had a few part-time jobs here and there but could never get into the idea of entering the daily cycle of going to work.

Trent's father had moved down the line after separating from his mother, and he showed little interest in maintaining any form of contact. Even today, Trent has no contact with his father, despite Trent stopping in to see him a few times to try to rebuild the relationship. Meanwhile, Trent's mother was "indifferent" to his wagging school and would give him money if he asked for it. Trent now realises this didn't serve him well.

"There was no structure when I was a child, which was OK at the time. I didn't mind it. Seemed cool at the time, but not now, when I look back on it."

Moving out and into jail

Trent's overactive imagination meant he eventually got bored living in Wellsford. He wanted to do all sorts of things but didn't know how to go about it. When he was about 17, Trent moved to Auckland. He had no plan and does not remember how he met up with the first group of people he associated with: "It just happened." They were not a criminal group, but Trent needed money, so he started stealing cars "and anything else".

At this time, there was even less structure in Trent's life, and he felt lost. He ended up in a relationship but didn't know how to treat a partner. He says he realises now he had control issues, which then turned to violence, and he ended up in jail. Trent served a short sentence of Corrective Training. Trent reflects that he had never considered how his stepfather treated his mother. They are still together now. On release, Trent simply repeated the behaviour:

“It became a pattern of domestic violence over the next 10–15 years, in and out of relationships, in and out of jail for domestic violence, using drugs...I didn’t know how to function in society, how to act...[I’m] only really learning that now.”

Trent says his “normal” became being locked up, which provided a structure. He knew “what the plan was” and could relate to it in a way he couldn’t relate to the outside world. Trent loved the structure of being inside. Most of his sentences had been related to domestic violence, and he thought he had to control any situation through violence. No one had ever told him any different – except for Judges – and jail was the only way it was dealt with.

Trent attended various prison programmes but was just “ticking boxes for Corrections”. To him, there was no rehab, just a bus ticket at the end of the sentence, and a trip to probation to tell them what they wanted to hear – but with little oversight.

Over those years, Trent fell in with harder criminals and gangs. They did whatever they wanted, and there was even less structure.

Not long after it was established, Trent applied to enter the Waitakere Drug Court. He lied and said all the things he thought they wanted to hear. He was not genuine in his application to the court and just wanted to get out of jail.

“I was trying to pull the wool over their eyes, but they weren’t having a bar of it.”

He ended up being sentenced to a relatively short time in prison, so he considered himself lucky that he hadn’t been accepted in the Drug Court.

Trent programme in Hamilton called Tai Aroha, a 16-week intensive specialist residential treatment programme targeting high-risk offenders who have multiple treatment needs related to violence. The men-only programme is open to all cultures; and most of the participants have been convicted of violent crimes, including domestic violence, drug use, robbery, and assault. The programme aims to provide a culturally responsive rehabilitation experience by

respecting and incorporating tikanga and kaupapa Māori concepts within and alongside Western-based rehabilitation practices.

Trent highly respects this programme. However, upon his release, he returned to his old ways.

Arrested again within 18 months, Trent became involved in a gang war within the prison system. He was isolated in a unit dominated by the “other side” and was severely beaten and stabbed. When he came to, he thought for the first time that maybe he had had enough of this lifestyle. He had no idea what change would look like but knew that if he didn’t do something, he could die in prison.

Contemplating change

Trent signed himself on to Segregation, and there he met others contemplating change. Some just wanted to say whatever they had to in order to escape jail, while others were more serious. He saw a pamphlet about the Drug Court and applied for the second time. He was very open that the primary motivating factor for him was getting out of a dangerous place where he might get stabbed again. Trent no longer felt comfortable in jail. With over 160 convictions and disconnected from his entire family, he realised he needed to try something else. This time, Trent was accepted into the Drug Court. Being in custody had made it easy to come off the meth. On the outside, getting meth was a core focus, and he had to steal to get it; on the inside, however, meth was only available some of the time.

Finding positive structures

Trent was picked up by Drug Court staff and went to Wings Trust. His case manager asked about Trent’s motivation and revealed his own lived experience of addiction, which Trent identified with. He was supposed to go to Higher Ground, but Trent knew he could not do that programme. He was honest about that at the assessment. Instead, he went to the Salvation Army Bridge Programme in Waitakere. The Bridge Programme was quite relaxed; Trent did not learn much from it, but it was good as a “time-out to settle, focus, and think”. Wings was a big deal for Trent, especially the routines of breakfast, lunch, dinner, classes, and voluntary work.

“Getting a bit of normality back into my life. When I used to get out of jail, I’d usually just go get a screwdriver and pinch a car, but this time, I was sort of given a bit of routine in my life.”

Trent was required to do five 12-Step weekly meetings, but he did one every day. He didn’t like sharing too much but wanted to listen to others. He also attended the CADS Intensive Outpatient Programme, a cognitive behaviour parenting programme in New Lynn, Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT) and literacy support with Howard League. All these things built up the sense of structure Trent craved, and spending time around positive, pro-social people rubbed off on him. At Wings, he completed the Drug Court voluntary work hours doing maintenance work and was rewarded with a spot in the Wings Level 4 house.

Trent progressed smoothly through the Drug Court programme; he did as he was told and kept moving forward. A pivotal moment was when he was prescribed medication, which helped him sleep and reduced his anxiety. After 18 months, Trent graduated from the Drug Court.

While Trent was still in Wings, he met his current partner, Courtney. He was lucky not to get discharged, as it was against the rules for residents of Wings to be in a relationship. Soon after, however, Courtney moved to Higher Ground for treatment, and they could circumnavigate the restrictions to keep connected. Trent was still at the Wings Level 4 house when he discovered that Courtney was pregnant. She was from the Hibiscus Coast, so Trent started looking for work there. He applied for a job with Waste Management, and even after telling them about his background and criminal record, he got the job. His employer was open to helping people recover; several others were in recovery at the work site, too.

Being part of the Drug Court programme allowed Trent to build up his career quickly after graduation. While in the programme, he was supported in passing and gaining his driver’s licence. This process started with getting a birth certificate, which had always been a barrier for him, but Drug Court helped and paid for his licencing tests. Now that he was employed with Waste Management, Trent could get other licences. Trent now has his full car, motorcycle, and

Class 1,2 and 4 Wheels, Tracks and Rollers licences. When he got the Class 4 licence, Trent left Waste Management to drive trucks. He found himself not really liking the truck driving; when he was offered a job as a digger driver for a contractor back on the Waste Management site, he accepted. Trent has been working there for two years now and feels like he has options.

Connecting with family and peers

Trent has regular contact with family, especially his sister. His Mum and stepdad visited from Australia and celebrated Trent’s 40th birthday at Stanmore Bay. He has two beautiful children, a daughter and a son, with his partner, Courtney. Trent has three other children from previous relationships with whom he has connections.

Trent lives a busy life and puts a lot of energy into his work. His family are significant, especially spending time with his daughter after work. Trent and Courtney live in a beautiful home and are very proud of their house. He goes to the gym 3–4 nights a week and sometimes gets to go fishing as a reward. He loves to ride his motorbike but knows he tends to get speeding tickets, so he is currently trying to limit that activity. Courtney is a special person in his life; she challenges him if he is acting out.

Today, Trent seldom gets to 12-Step meetings but knows that if he feels triggered, he can go to a local meeting to “get focused”. He usually attends the NA Men’s Fishing Camp at Kawau Island. Trent says he doesn’t have a “tight five” of recovery supports, as suggested within 12-Step fellowships. But he has friends at work who are in recovery, and he finds that keeps him “mindful”. He did have what he called a “father figure” in recovery who he looked up to, but, unfortunately, he relapsed and has since died.

Trent is grateful for the support of his case manager, Lisa Mannion, from the Drug Court, and he has high regard for the Drug Court Judges and the Drug Court process that allowed him to change his life. Trent says he only started to learn how to function in life when he was in the Drug Court, taking little steps at a time. It’s been a long, hard road to get to the point he is at now, and he wouldn’t be here if he hadn’t been through the Drug Court process.

“If it weren’t for the Drug Court, I’d still be in the same position. I was pretty lucky. It was pretty good; the testing kept you honest. I had a pretty cruisy ride through it; it could have been easier, but then I wouldn’t be here.”

Trent still takes medication, and this approach works for him. He knows that when he stops exercising, he starts to play up; he is aware of how important structure and routine are to him. Trent says he has a good life, a sense of peace; he is happy. He went to Fiji a couple of years ago and enjoyed travelling. He says that, with Courtney being half Australian, they hope they could one day move across the ditch.

Trent now has several years of abstinence and recovery. It is a considerable achievement and one that he and those around him are proud of.

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BRENDON'S STORY

Ko Ngāi Tahu te iwi

Ko Aoraki te maunga

Ko Rangitata te awa

Ko Takitimu te waka

Brendon introduces himself by reciting his pepeha, which he learnt when he was 14. He remains determined to learn more about his whakapapa. He has Māori heritage via his koro (grandfather) on his father's side. His koro had a brief affair with his grandmother: "He got her hapū and just done a runner." As a result, Brendon's father formed a hatred against Māori, blaming his own father for hurting and abandoning his mother. Consequently, Brendon was raised with his father's ideology of White Pride and White Power. Drinking and violence went hand in hand with these views:

"When my Nan died, Dad just went out the gate [with] alcoholic parties. We were drinking long-neck beer bottles at five years old. [We were doing the] South Island swallow; my brother was three years older than me and could do a flagon. I could never do the flagon. But that was all my father wanted; it was his goal to one day be able to drink with us at the pub. It was just a party house, with bad people coming into the house. Yeah, it was just not a good thing for two kids because he was a solo father. He got sole custody of me. We used to abuse my Mum when she rang and make Dad happy."

Brendon remembers the parties would last for days. He and his brother would go to school and return home to find the party still going: "We got to sip their beers, pick up cigarettes, and do our own thing."

When he was 14 years old, Brendon was kicked out of school for throwing a bucket of water over a teacher. For a time, he was sent to live with his grandparents in Strathmore, Taranaki. At 15, Brendon was kicked out of home and

became homeless. Brendon was also sent to Epuni Boys' Home in Lower Hutt after he was caught selling property he stole from his mother.

Gang life

As a young adult, Brendon wanted to "piss off" his father. So, he joined the Black Power. When he saw Brendon wearing the gang's blue scarf, his father was so infuriated that he called Brendon a "black nigger" and "bottled" him (hit him with a bottle). They fought violently, and Brendon pinned his father down. Brendon knew that if he didn't "deal with" his father then and there, he risked being attacked while he slept. Violence was a regular feature in Brendon's life; he had a head injury from being "kicked in quite bad". This violence helped Brendon rise through the ranks of the Black Power. He became the Treasurer, Vice President, and President. He then started his own Black Power chapter in Dannevirke.

Dealing with loss, and loathing the police

In 1992, Brendon and his brother swapped cars but not registration numbers. His brother got into a police chase in central Hawkes Bay. The police believed they were chasing Brendon and continued the pursuit. The chase ended in his brother's death. From that moment, Brendon had a personal vendetta against the police:

"Our club was involved in shooting at the police van outside the Wellington courts...There was also a Mongrel Mob member in the van who had de-patched one of our members. We thought we could kill two birds with one stone."

Brendon recalls doing "lots of stupid shit" and links it to his loss from his brother's death: "I guess I had mental health problems because of what happened to my brother."

Diving into the meth world

By 1999, Brendon had tried methamphetamine ("P") for the first time. He didn't like it. Regardless, he learnt how to cook it from the first P cook in New Zealand. At the time, Brendon had legitimate jobs that gave him access to the ingredients to make meth. For example, as a floor sander,

he could buy the chemicals for \$650 a bottle and sell them for thousands of dollars. Brendon had access to iodine balls when he was hired at an engineering company that worked on sewerage systems. When meth first appeared in New Zealand, there were only two gangs in Auckland producing it:

“It hadn’t been easy for the Black Power to get into [making meth]...but I was good at opening doors. I saw that as opening the door to our club, something that would help them learn to cook. But it didn’t help us at all. In the end, I saw that we made a lot of money from the suffering of others.”

Finding Jesus

One night, Brendon was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He and a couple of others were accused of murder and of fire-bombing a house. He pleaded guilty to the second charge and was jailed for two years. Because he was president of the Black Power, Brendon experienced a lot of “run-ins” while in prison.

During his time inside, Brendon gave his life to Jesus. Previously, he had been critical of Christians who professed one thing but often were “all shit”. While in prison, however, Brendon read “Taming the Tiger”, by the boxer Tony Anthony. Tony came to New Zealand from England and spoke to a group of prisoners in Linton. Brendon sat three rows back, listening to Tony deliver his testimony and praying. Tony asked if anyone in the audience wanted to give their life to Jesus. Although he cannot fully explain what happened to him, Brendon says something “significantly spiritual” happened that day.

Brendon had not read many books, but he liked reading the Bible and speaking with the prison chaplain. The Bible was filled with stories about ordinary people and families; as Brendon read more, his curiosity led him to ask the chaplain many questions. But after a while, these questions angered the chaplain.

Back in his prison cell, Brendon prayed for Jesus to come into his life:

“I want to become your soldier and have Jesus as my brother. I wanted no guilt, glory, emotions, or anything, just to be a soldier. I asked for that and didn’t realise what you get.”

A deepening addiction

When Brendon was released from jail in 2008, he saw first-hand the real impact of meth. People had no food in their fridges, and the wives argued with “the bros”. Nevertheless, Brendon resumed producing meth. He knew some people trying to make meth using ma huang, a Chinese herb used as a precursor to meth. When they finally shared the meth with Brendon and some of the young bros in the Blacks, they were “blown away” by the quality.

“We thought we were opening a new door. We knew it was quality, and we knew what it did. With ma huang, it took a few days of soaking it before we pulled it. That’s when I started taking the line. The days were getting long. I took a line, and then I had a smoke. It was the first drug that I found enhanced everything in me. That was a dangerous thing for me and for society...I didn’t like other drugs because I like to be in control, but meth enhanced all my emotions.”

Brendon’s meth addiction intensified his hatred for the police, who he blamed for his brother’s death.

“I wanted to wipe out the Waipukurau police because of what they did to my brother...I always wanted to do that. I wanted vengeance. I looked it up, and you only had to kill 10 police to get the record in New Zealand. It was a bad state or way to think...My job was to distract the police. I’d take on the police if they came and then take the heat. I liked that part of it...I loved taking on the police when I was on meth. I loved all that side of it.”

In 2015, Brendon’s father died. Entrenched in his addiction and focused on shooting the police, Brendon did not take the time to go back and bury his father.

Understanding past behaviours and thought patterns

Brendon understands that “meth has messed up his head”. While he acknowledges many of his thoughts could be seen as “mental problems”, Brendon maintains that certain signs - the synchronicity of events, numerology – are “significant”.

“So, I have a bit of mental health and a bit of brain injury, a bit of rabbit hole and a bit of meth-induced psychosis. Put it all together, it can be hard...it just sounds out the gate, but then I can push play and show you that ‘lightning bolt’ moment.”

Brendon started seeing synergies everywhere. For example, whenever he saw the number 11:11, he was reminded of the Bible – particularly, the writings of Mathew, Mark, Luke, and Paul. Between 2009 and 2010, Brendon registered his house as a church and became a licensed minister, providing a legitimate front for his drug dealing:

“You couldn’t bug a church. A whole lot of deals were happening at my house. I don’t know if my head was fried... but to my knowledge, you couldn’t bug a church back then. Then, suddenly, they brought out the Search and Surveillance Act 2012. At the time, I thought that was all to do with me.”

Brendon cites other incidents that deepened his mistrust of institutions. This includes the story of his friend, Antonie Dixon, a meth addict and convicted murderer who Brendon says “became the poster boy for public perceptions of the impacts of P on society”:

“I was there. He (Tony) asked for help so many times. He went to the police earlier; he ran down to Manukau and would tell them, ‘I’m going to kill someone soon,’...[Then] three-and-a-half arms [severed], one person shot dead, a kidnap situation, police endangered and being shot at...There was so much happening that night. It was mental health and psychosis that night...There just wasn’t the help there. He was a good person to his friends, but he just got on meth, and everyone just saw him get into psychosis.”

Brendon says Tony’s story particularly resonates with him because of their shared belief that they were being followed. When Brendon told his doctor he thought satellites were

watching him, the doctor said he was “fried” and needed to stop taking drugs.

Brendon still views the 18-22 March equinox period as “significant”. He was married during the equinox, and his son was born on March 18, the day his brother died. People often dismiss Brendon’s beliefs in equinox, numerology, and synchronicity, as well as his contention that he, like his mother, has the gift of foresight. But Brendon is unwavering. To him, these beliefs “just make sense”.

A journey towards recovery

Brendon had several short-lived experiences with recovery. Then, while imprisoned in 2007, Brendon founded the Anti-P Ministry (APM), which he says finally helped him out of addiction. Brendon says the concept of APM stemmed from the work he saw being undertaken by Te Roopu o Ahikaa (The Home Fires). This self-funded group provided bail accommodation options and actively protested the methamphetamine epidemic.

In 2016, APM gained media exposure for its work supporting a man in Taupō to recover from addiction. APM helped clean the home of all the gear and declared it a P-free home. The media covered the story and highlighted the work and aims of APM. Richie Boynton of Kotahitanga saw the news article and realised how APM was working to raise meth awareness. Brendon was invited to join them, walking from Cape Reinga to Wellington. It was an 1100km drive to get to Cape Reinga from Dannevirke. On the journey up North, Brendon made the mistake of having a line of meth.

When he arrived at the start of the hikoi, Brendon was deeply moved by the karakia delivered by kaumātua Phil Paikea and the kaupapa everyone was there to support. The hikoi had a long-lasting impact on Brendon’s recovery journey:

“We did six days from Cape Reinga, going through Kaikohe, Kaitaia, Kawakawa, Paihia. We did all the towns, and on the sixth day, we marched onto Waitangi. We had thousands and thousands of people behind us and Nans coming up and asking me questions about their mokos, crying, and giving

me hugs. I just couldn't pick up again after that day. Something spiritual happened...there is something about Phil Paikea as a man of God."

When the group arrived at Waitangi, respected Ngāpuhi kaumātua Wiremu Wiremu said to Brendon, "Don't let this stop here." Since then, the Anti-P Ministry has tirelessly spread and shared the message of hope.

Making amends by helping others

Brendon owns his past. He is cognisant of the harm and damage his former lifestyle has caused his family, friends, and the community:

"I fucked my family over and my bros over, big time. I made a lot of money, but it was all off the suffering of others...I know I've done a lot of damage; my stepbrother lost his children to CYFS, and it took him three years to get them back. I know there are suicides, domestic violence, and all the shit we have caused. You know, you can't take that back, and that drives me. I've got a lot to make up for."

Brendon now helps people in a variety of ways, including supporting his flatmate, who is attempting to recover:

"Sometimes, when you need help, it just helps to have someone say, 'Bro, you've just had meth,' and then help you to ride it out. So, hopefully, I can help people get off it."

Getting a bus to share the message

As the founder of APM, Brendon dedicates his skills to supporting the APM kaupapa. He helped secure a bus named and blessed as Te Rerenga Wairua, which is used in hiko around the country. He also helps support fundraising initiatives to keep APM's work going. Those involved with APM live by the mantra, "I'm going to let the wairua guide us." Brendon remains inspired by the words of Wiremu Wiremu; since Wiremu's passing, Brendon is even more determined to revisit the towns and people who need to hear the Anti-P messages and who need help.

During each hapori hiko undertaken by APM, Brendon acknowledges the leaders spearheading the Anti-P work within their communities. Brendon is grateful to the hapu, iwi, and many marae who have been supportive. He recalls the lessons they have learnt from each Māori community:

"I think in some areas, hapu and iwi need to do more. But on the flip side, when we went to Taumarunui, someone said that the answers are in the marae. That blew me away. When I sat there and told them my story, they were laughing...We were sitting in the [wharenuui], and behind me was this carving that had a cross, and my whole story was in this carving... We stayed in four or five marae during our hiko. There was evidence that the hapori were impacted by meth. Some of the kaumātua out the back were on it, smoking and affected by addiction. Some of those kaumātua have passed now, and I can only imagine how those maraes are coping."

Supports and self-care

Brendon remains close to his three daughters and two sons, who live nearby with their mother. Brendon has also recently started talking to his 23-year-old son, who lives in Australia. He lives a gang life that is similar to Brendon's former life. Brendon recognises that "with my family, sometimes, I need to be pulled back and shown what to do".

He is grateful to the many people, organisations, and services throughout his journey that have shown him a better way. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings, and fellowship have taught Brendon to reflect on and clean up his own life:

"NA has been kicking my arse, but I'm going to their camp...and I go to their meeting every Friday. They also ring and ask if you are OK. I've never had that in my whole life."

Brendon focuses most of his attention on APM to get through each day. To help him relax and sleep, he takes medication – melatonin and xylocaine: "I don't want to be on them...I feel like I'm not clean, but I can't sleep without them."

Making a difference

In 2022, Brendon was named among the Kiwibank Local Hero of the Year 100 local legends (<https://thespinoff.co.nz/business/26-01-2022/meet-the-local-heroes-at-the-heart-of-aotearoa-communities>). Brendon says he does not do this work for the glory; he would prefer to get diesel or money to keep Te Rerenga Wairua on the road and continuing the work.

Reflection on his work with APM, Brendon is most thankful for the privilege and opportunity of reconnecting whānau and planting a seed of hope for many:

"The best thing for me is seeing children coming home to their parents. We're helping with Oranga Tamariki now and planting seeds. We watched one girl there get unsupervised visits now. And people coming through the courts, just helping them..."

Brendon remains critical of the court system, where a judge can remove children from the whānau and determine when they will return: "I think Judges should look at addiction as a health issue."

Brendon is inspired by whānau who make personal choices that lead to transformation. He knows, however, that helping whānau make those changes is not easy. Brendon says that sometimes, people need to be shown "how to fix their own lives" because it will not just happen overnight.

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USING PŪRĀKAU TO CONNECT PŪRĀKAU: NAVIGATION OR WAY-FINDING

The act of ‘pulling’ islands out of the sea. A profound art and craft of navigation pull people on the moana towards their destination, pulling them closer and closer to that place, islands rising out of the sea. All the signs along the way enable that act. The birds, the currents, all things we feel and sense on our journey.

Our destination is always known, even within the vastness of the ocean. Getting there means pulling that island out of the sea, based on all the signs and our knowledge of finding islands where there is none in our memory.

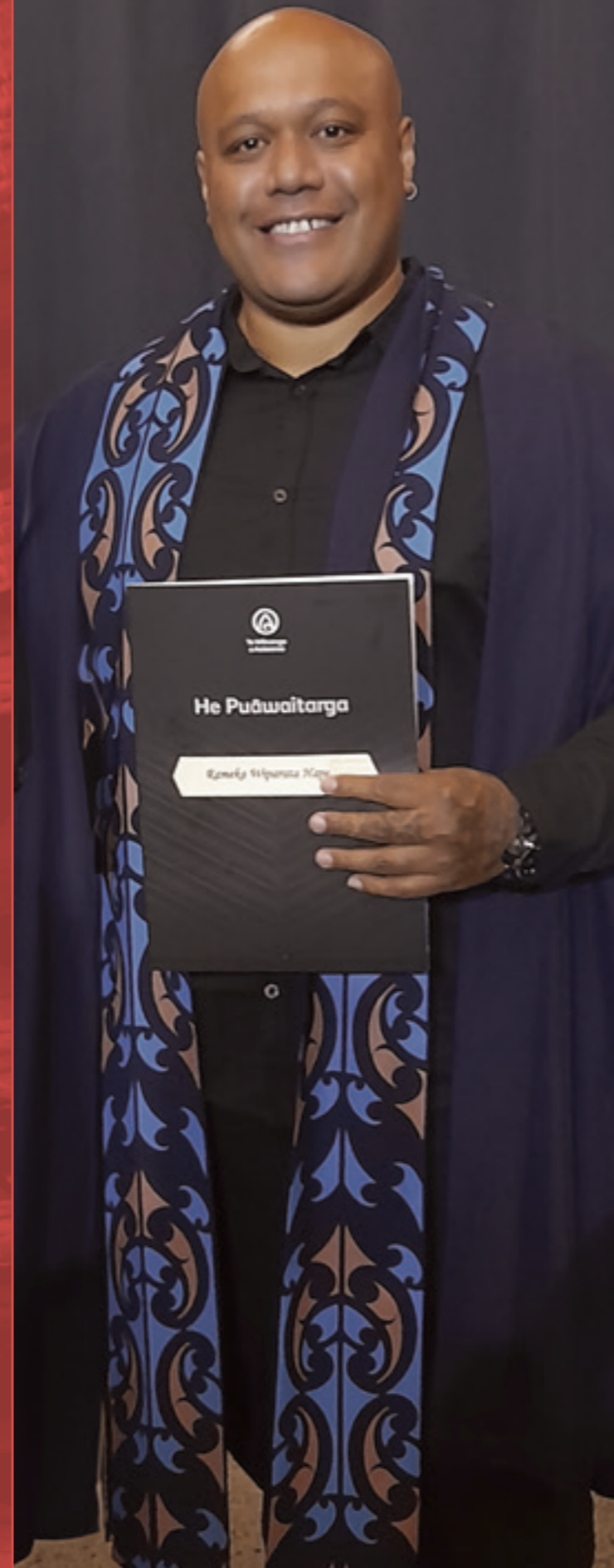
Across the whānau stories, we see kōrero on the fact that we are pulling the unknown out of the known. However, we have a destination in mind, and we are striking out with courage and an understanding of the environment that there is land at the end of it. We know there is land; all the signs are there for us to see. Pull the island out of the sea; the closer we get, the larger and more real it becomes.

Our tūpuna knew to marshal their resources to make long journeys; nothing was left to chance; it was all founded on knowledge and design rather than randomly striking out into the unknown. With the stars guiding us, the waters of the seas, our highway, and the winds guiding us to a new home.

A Journey through Tāne Whakapiripiri.

Ko Ngāti Kahu o Torongare te hapū.
Ko Te Paia, te whare tupuna
Ko Ngāraratunua, te marae.
Ko Mārurua te awa.
Ko Ngātokimatawahaorua te waka.
Ko Nukutawhiti te kaihautū o te waka,
Ko Rameka Hape, ahau.

My people are Ngāpuhi (te iwi).
Paia is our ancestral meeting house.
Ngāraratunua is the gathering place of my people.
Mārurua is our river.
Ngātokimatawahaorua is our canoe.
Nukutawhiti is the captain of our canoe.
I am Rameka Hape.



RAMEKA'S STORY

Chummie Thomson is the Charge Nurse Manager of Tāne Whakapiripiri Unit, a minimum secure Kaupapa Māori rehabilitation unit at the Auckland Regional Forensic Psychiatry Service's secure hospital, the Mason Clinic. In 2012, he composed a haka to help tāngata whai i te ora (service users) on their recovery journey. This pūrākau depicts Rameka's journey through the Mason Clinic, using the haka as leverage for Rameka to tell his story. The courts ordered Rameka to the Mason Clinic because of the link between his mental illness and serious violent offending for rehabilitation over an extended period determined by political decision-makers under the related legislation.

The Kaea (haka leader) calls to the Kapa Haka (Haka group):

Ki ngā tāngata whai i te ora
Kei hea rā koutou
Whakarongo ki aku kōrero.
Me ū ki Te Ao Mārama.

To all Tāngata Whai i te Ora. Where are you?
Listen to my korero. Welcome to 'The World of Light'

Kia ora koutou, e te whānau. My name is Rameka Hape, I'm currently a tangata whai i te ora in the Tāne Whakapiripiri Unit. I would just like to refer to this last sentence of the call of the Kaea to us: "Me ū ki Te Ao Marama", which means "Welcome to a world of light". E te whānau, I would like to commence with first sharing some of my experiences living in a world of darkness.

I was 18 years old. Highly strung out on methamphetamine.

A contributing factor to that was the loss of my father. The loss of my loved one, my rock. The one that meant the most to me in my life. When that happened, I was 15 years old when I lost my father. And I felt a lot of emptiness when that happened.

As the years progressed, I met up with a partner of mine at around the age of 17. We had a baby when I was 18. And we

had a baby the following year, which made me around 20. I was a young father who didn't feel like settling down at the time. I had this thing. I just felt empty, and I just felt like I needed more. Having lost my father early, I still felt lost at this age. I sort of fell into the gang life. I started living a double life, lying to my family, the ones I loved the most.

That behaviour got even worse to the point where I started manufacturing P, which escalated the whole situation. Making things worse to a level I couldn't even believe. I started living an antisocial lifestyle. I started living a life of crime. I started going in and out of prisons on a regular basis. And it all got to a stage where I eventually started to become mentally unwell.

The response of the Kapa Haka to the Kaea:

**Ka tau ki roto i te korekore
O ngā tūpuna
Ki te ako ko wai mātou
Nō hea mātou**

We step into the realms of our tupuna to learn who we are and where we come from.

My first experience when I first went to the Tāne Whakapiripiri Unit was having this thing, what they call a whakatau, which is welcoming in someone new to the unit. I sort of noticed that when I first came in, all the whānau were there. They were there to welcome me - the whai ora and the kaimahi (staff).

I got to the door and looked up at those pictures that were hanging on the wall, and I thought to myself,

“Hey man, these are Rangatira (distinguished people) on these walls.”

I sort of noticed that some of them were my Rangatira. I knew straightaway right there that I had some connection with my Māoritanga. I really believe that was a time when I wanted to want to reconnect with my Māoritanga (Māori way of being).

I felt warm in that situation. They made me feel warm.

They made me feel welcome, and I'm grateful for that opportunity. We learned a model of well-being, which is whare tapa whā. In whare tapa whā, there is your hinengaro which is your mental well-being. So that's identifying the issues mentally that are going on in your life.

There is Taha Whānau, which identifies all your support networks. Finding out who your support networks are enables you to find your loved ones, your friends and your extended whānau. There's Taha Tinana, which is your physical health. Physical exercise is anything physical that's beneficial for the body. And then there's also Taha Whānau reconnecting back with your family. And your wairua, your wairuatanga, which is your spirituality.

What I found out about being in Tāne Whakapiripiri is that they had karakia (prayers) and pepeha (identifying who you are) every day. And I thought to myself, well, this is cool. You know, you actually get to hear a word of the day, a karakia, and then you stand up and do your identity.

“Kia ora koutou. My name is Rameka Hape. Nō Whangārei, ahau (a little place called Whangārei, on my mother's side). Ko Tē Paia, te whare tupuna; Tē Paia is the meeting house; Ko Ngāraratunua te marae, Ngāraratunua is my marae; Ko Mārurua te awa, Mārurua is my river; Ko Ngātōkimatawhaorua te waka, Ngātōkimatawhaorua is my canoe and Ko Nukutawhiti te kaihautu o te waka, Nokotāwhiti is the captain of the waka”

And I just like to say that's how I feel connected to my whenua, to my forefathers and my tupuna (ancestor). And I also found out too that Tāne Whakapiripiri became my new whānau, my whānau hou, who followed me on my recovery journey.

The Kaea calls to the Kapa Haka:

**He wero nui,
He kaiuaua tō turia
Ki roto i te whare haumarua o Meihana**

*Your journey through Mason Clinic will be
challenging and arduous*

I still had that attitude around this time when I was being told what to do. They told me that I had a mental illness. I didn't want to hear it. I didn't want to listen to the staff. You know, I felt they were telling me I had a drug-induced psychosis, paranoid schizophrenia. At that time, I didn't want to have a bar of it or even listen to what these people had to say. And then I sort of experienced that something going on, and I had to be open and willing actually to trust myself to be able to trust anyone else.

I was experiencing a lot of paranoia, denial issues and a lot of blaming. Just shifting the blame onto other people and shifting the blame onto my other failures. So, I was just living a life of denial. And I felt at the time that I had lost my own sanity, and then they prescribed me medication, and I was thinking, “Nah, this is not right, this is not right, this stuff's making me tired, it's making me drowsy.”

I got told what to do. I felt restricted. And I couldn't be my authentic self. But then, I thought:

“Hey, man, I've got something going on here, and I need to do something about it ASAP.”

The response of the Kapa Haka:

**Ko te mate ahotea
He mea uaua kua tō ki runga i a koe
Mai i te hītori o te hara**

It's been a difficult journey diagnosed with psychosis, and a history of criminal offending.

At this point, I still refused to accept my behaviour. I was caught up in that cycle. I was caught up in that cycle of prison, going in and out of prison. My drug use had gotten worse, to the point where I couldn't handle myself. But another thing that stood out for me was the stigma of mental illness. What will people think about me, especially my family? How would they think about me with a mental illness, which we call Māori pōrangī?

And then I thought to myself,

“What about my standing with the gangs? How would they think about me on that sort of stuff?”

So, I was feeling embarrassed, feeling ashamed. I'd like to refer back to the word pōrangī. I felt labelled as being crazy. I felt lost. I felt confused. And so, I started losing hope.

The Kaea calls to the Kapa Haka:

**E tu rangatira
Whakaaetia ki te wero
O ngā tūpuna**

Stand up and accept the challenge of our Tupuna

Who is the rangatira? Through my genuine recovery in Tāne Whakapiripiri, I found that I am the rangatira. I'm a reflection of my forefathers, my tūpuna. They paved a pathway in the future for myself and my uri (offspring), who are to come into this world. I found, like, I needed to take ownership. I needed to take responsibility.

And I started by trusting the staff and getting more engaged in everything. Then, I started becoming well. I started feeling well. I started feeling myself again. Learning more about mental illness. So, engaging myself in whatever I could to learn more about my kaupapa, about my situation, about my life, about my emotions, my behaviour and the things that triggered my more horror situations. My early warning signs, my coping strategies. I had to learn them all. But first and foremost, I lived my Māoritanga. I was re-engaged with my Māoritanga. And I feel real grateful for that. And I found I had to change to become my more authentic self again.

The response of the Kapa Haka:

**Kua ngaro taku whakaute
Me taku mana motuhake
Araitia e nga tūpuna
Kia kotahi ka rerekē ō tātou ao.**

We have lost our self-respect and self-determination. With our Tupuna guiding us, together we can change our lives.

Well, whānau, what I'd like to say is I was in a real good space at Tāne Whakapiripiri at that time. Things were going well for me; my leave process was going well, and I had real good things happening for me. But I would just like to say I let

those taniwha (challenges) back into my life. I decided to go on some leave. I went up to Pt Chev, and I purchased some methamphetamine. That was my own choice.

I had a real bad experience taking it. I got heightened voices again; I had paranoid thoughts. I thought people were after me; people in the unit were after me. It was just a real bad experience.

At the time, I had a real bad guilt feeling happening inside me because of our karakia and pepeha we do in the mornings. And I knew I had to face up to my whānau and Tāne Whakapiripiri. And I felt whakamā (ashamed). I felt embarrassed. But overall, when I did admit to the whānau, I felt relieved that I did. I took it upon myself to just be 'pono' (truthful) and 'tika' (do the right thing). I knew that I had to. I had to say what I had to say. I felt relief, I felt a lot of relief. And I felt like I got my 'mana' (dignity) back. It felt like I put myself back in check again, you know. I put myself right. I know I lost a lot of my leaves; two years and no leaves.

That was my cost factor; what I lost. It was very hard. I felt a lot of embarrassment and shame for quite a long time, actually for quite a few months, especially towards the whānau of my support people and kaimahi who were there to support me. I had to put myself right. I had to refocus with my recovery.

The Kaea calls to the Kapa Haka:

Haere whakamua
Whātoro atu ki te rangi

Go forth and reach your full potential.

So, whānau, I never gave up hope. And I'm grateful for that. The support was amazing, especially from my extended whānau in Tāne Whakapiripiri. Mainly from my kaimahi, who put a support team around me; supports in place, which helped me get through this little hara (mistake) that I had at that time. I re-engaged in programmes. I did anything that needed to take place that was going to be beneficial for me and my recovery.

I was part of the coffee collective. So, we were a core group

that designed a coffee cart that gives coffee services at the Mason Clinic. It's a thriving business. But apart from that, it was a beautiful experience just working on my social skills again, and just meeting up with people and discussing ideas and coming up with a plan and executing our plan to the point where the coffee carts are currently going.

And I presented that at the programmes governance meeting in 2021. So, I presented that there, and it was a very big experience; like I'm putting myself out there, but at the same time, only good comes out of it. I'm putting in good mahi (actions). You get good mahi out of the good mahi you do.

I am involved in a lot of groups to help with my recovery. The main one for me is the AOD group we do with our social worker on a weekly basis. I found that of great benefit. I am also involved in our violence reduction programme (VRP). Also, in our Pathways to Safety Programme. These are about everything you need as whai ora on a recovery journey. That is part of your network and your support system that's going to keep you well in your recovery.

Pathways to Safety co-aligns with the VRP and drug and alcohol programmes. They are all similar. Pathways to Safety is a programme that offers you a safe way of being able to work in your recovery. So, it's about awareness, being self-aware. We focus in Pathways of Safety on identity because, without identity, you have no platform to work from. So, with identity, you get your foundation of a strong whare (structure).

I set a lot of goals. I set a lot of goals with my team. I achieve a lot of my goals. I am especially grateful for having the opportunity to be able to lead other whai ora. Given that position, I'm grateful because it's just so mind-blowing.

I'm doing a level five Te Reo Māori course on the net. I just graduated before that from a course on doing Māori business in Māori organisations with Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. So, I do Te Reo once a week on a Tuesday evening from five to nine o'clock. So, given that, I am pretty much setting a standard, especially coming out of the Mason Clinic. Being able to go out and study and gaining the trust of your team and your support networks. By being able to do that, show other whai ora. Giving them the incentive that anyone can do it if I can do it.

The response of the Kapa Haka:

Me ako tātou mai i ngā hara
Koinei te kī mō ō tātou moemoea
Kei te heke mai.... aue hi!

Let's learn from our past mistakes because this is the key to our future aspirations.

Like all I can say, just from my own personal whakaaro, my reflections, if I didn't have the time that I've had to be able to do what I've been done, I would still have been the same person. 2021 was a life changing experience for me because at that point, when I relapsed, it was obvious I still needed time. So, I still needed time, I needed to re-heal. I needed that experience to be able to move forward. Like I said, building the trust back to whakamana myself.

2022 was a positive year for me, I had a graduation this year from Te Whare Wānanga o Aotearoa. My unescorted community leaves are going well. I'm two hours unescorted leave. Eight hours community drop off- pickup. I am working on achieving four hours of community leave so I can get to places like the library and malls or anything we are able to work with within four hours.

My goal for the next three months is to focus on my leaves and see what sort of opportunities are there for my leaves, like getting four hours. Then, hopefully, a good transition into Te Kotiu. Te Kotiu is a step-down residential place linked to the Mason Clinic.

I just like to say that now I feel like my authentic self.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Rameka for being brave in revealing what can be achieved through storytelling undertaken by Māori with Māori (kanohi ki te kanohi) from the perspective of Te Ao Māori. The storytelling started by asking Rameka did he want to tell his story of mental illness and criminal offending by using Chummie's haka. Each phrase of the Haka describes the experiences tangata whai i te ora go through. Rameka connected with his wairua, mauri and mana to have confidence and trust to tell his story. The story that is told is filled with emotional realism that has provided strength, healing and hope.

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NGĀ MIHI – ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The He Ture Kia Tika rōpū acknowledges Hoani Waititi Marae for supporting this rangahau. We pay particular thanks to matua Shane White, who has guided us with his wisdom and shared, beyond this project, how we can find the strength to live positive lives through our cultural connections, acceptance of difference, and our deep sense of belonging.

The He Ture Kia Tika rōpū sincerely thank the whānau who participated in this project. Their powerful pūrākau of transformational change has helped us envisage a justice system that supports whānau experiencing mental distress and/or addiction.

We also wish to thank all the people that helped make this report come to life. Ngā mihi to Ryan Quinlivan who designed all our dissemination pieces and Amber Older for her close eye for detail and general support of this rangahau.

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**HE TURE
KIA TIKA**

heturekiatika.com