

First Steps graduate

Understanding own potential benefits others

Cathie Cotter



When newly-appointed Dairy Women's Network (DWN) South Island Convenor Coordinator, Cathie Cotter, went along to First Steps to see if it was a suitable course for her convenors she got much more than she expected – the start of her own personal development journey.

"I had talked to other women about the programme, but hadn't thought about it from my own perspective. First Steps not only gave me a new awareness of my skills, but permission to start my own personal journey as a respected industry professional, as well as a dairy farmer, wife and mother."

Having mentored students in her former career as a nurse, Cathie had a valuable skill which she hadn't recognised in the context of her new role at the DWN. "First Steps made me see that my ability to mentor and help others still applied. Now that I understand my own potential, I am much more able to see and develop it in others."

That's now having spin-offs for many other women. Based in Invercargill, Cathie travels widely to support Dairy Women's Network members with their events and activities.

"First Steps gave me confidence to talk to others about their skills and encourage them to use them in different arenas. It was interesting watching the programme facilitators Jane and Sara at work and how they managed to draw information and skills out of programme participants. I've certainly absorbed some of that and am now using it to help build leadership within the Network.

"I believe in my decisions and direction far more strongly than I did before. I used to talk about doing something - then wonder if I could. Now it's about what I want to do and how to do it.

"I get a lot of great feedback from others who have done First Steps and other AWDT courses. All of a sudden women realise what they have already done rather than always wondering what their direction should be. One of my convenors left the programme a completely different person with so much more direction – it was very powerful."

Cathie's First Steps group continues to meet 18 months later. "We put everything else aside to come to meetings because it fills our souls – it's so encouraging to see how women who would not otherwise have had the courage are moving on and putting themselves forward."

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