

First Steps graduate

Life-changing new pathway

Eloise Neeley



Timing was everything for Eloise Neeley when her life turned on its head and she returned to Whangarei after farming in the South Island for 20 years.

"The move north was a catalyst for reinventing myself as I'd been away from Northland for so long I didn't know many people. I had heard about First Steps and had it in the back of my mind so it was perfect timing when it came to Northland."

A believer in lifelong learning and development, Eloise had done other courses before but none challenged her more than First Steps which she described as 'life-changing'.

"I had done goal setting courses before – First Steps was different in that it challenged me to step outside my comfort zone and not go for the safe and easy option."

First Steps set Eloise on a new pathway which continues to evolve. After completing the programme, her goal was to develop an action plan for 2014. She decided on a two-pronged attack – to get the business degree she

had always wanted and find her place in Whangarei, meeting like-minded people.

Eloise aims to be an A-grade student working full-time towards a degree in applied management at NorthTec which she describes as a 'big change at the age of 47'.

Joining the local Chamber of Commerce 'campus chamber' and attending Whangarei Business Women's Network meetings has fulfilled Eloise's goal of meeting new people and led her along new paths. "I've met lots of interesting people including the AWDT chair Charmaine O'Shea who spoke at an event I attended. Since then she has become a wonderful supporter and role model for me.

Along the way, new goals have emerged. Eloise plans to use her agribusiness and communications experience and her degree as a springboard to a Masters in Management, majoring in Agribusiness. "Ultimately I want to become a Polytech tutor myself and trace this back to the inspiration provided by the First Steps facilitators and seeing the success achieved when people start believing in themselves. If that could be my life's work then I'd be a very satisfied person.

"You don't reach the end of First Steps, go home and never see people again or be accountable for the things you say you are going to do. Our group continued to meet after the programme finished, talk about our progress and coach each other. That made me even more accountable, especially when a meeting date was approaching. The group dynamic is very motivating – by drawing you out of yourself and making you realise you can extend yourself in ways you never thought possible.

"First Steps gave me the confidence to create a vision for the future – it didn't just rev me up, it gave me the tools to translate skills gained in farming and community work into an action plan. I feel like I'll carry that experience throughout my life."

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