

# Susan's story

## **From isolation to strength: Susan's story**

Many women working in male-dominated industries can feel isolated and underconfident – especially when they don't have a community of women to talk to and draw strength from. For Susan\*, that was particularly true.

## **Isolation and low self-esteem: The tipping point**

Working in her own business, she often works remotely and when she is in contact with people, it's usually only with men who she doesn't feel she can share her experiences with.

"I was feeling quite isolated, but I didn't know how to reach out to be involved in groups," explains Susan. "I wanted to be connected to a community but I didn't know how to go about achieving that."

Susan knew she was struggling with both isolation and lack of self-esteem so when she saw Auckland Women's Centre's course *Positive Change: Self Empowerment* by Anna Keyter, it picqued her interest.

"It took a while for me to have the courage to want to be in a group situation where I'd have to be in front of other people sharing stories, but I realised that self-esteem was something I'd wanted to work on for a long time."

She decided to sign up to take part in the multi-week course and soon found herself among women with the same fears and concerns.

## **Opening up and building connections**

Although she went in feeling extremely nervous, taking part in the six week course was a real eye-opener for Susan. Women in the course came from a huge range of ethnicities, ages, and backgrounds – but many of them had experienced similar challenges that Susan herself has been up against. "I grew up with a dominant father figure and so had many of the other women. I'm in my 50s but even the young women have experienced things I had experienced in my early career, like bullying in the workplace," shares Susan.

The course, which involved cognitive behavioural therapy techniques, visualisations, and other exercises that helped women discover and move past the causes of their low self-esteem, had several highlights.

One of them was exploring the idea of catastrophising – considering how often we blow a small problem out of proportion and let it affect our whole day. "It was done in a light-hearted enough way that it didn't feel very confronting, and it was great to pull those feelings back to their simplest form and see how they can impact the rest of our lives. I could see so clearly how that applied to my life."



## **Finally part of a community**

Since finishing the course, Susan feels far more strength in herself, and far less isolated. "Some of that isolation came from feeling like nobody else would understand me. What the course gave me was the realisation that other people go through similar struggles, even if they have different experiences. It was amazing to hear someone say, 'I know exactly what you mean, that happened to me'. I felt a real camaraderie for the first time in my life. It really helped me feel more included in a community."

That feeling of community has helped Susan in her day-to-day life, helping her build her self-esteem and giving her the confidence to go through life without fear.

"It made me understand that I have to (and can!) stand up and be strong. It even changed my own processing of how I look at other women – I just felt incredibly connected to them all and walked away with real strength and respect for women."

To find out more about the latest courses running at Auckland Women's Centre visit: [www.awc.org.nz](http://www.awc.org.nz). Counselling and other support services are also available. Please visit our website or contact the centre directly on (09) 376-3227.

*\*Name changed at the request of the participant*