

Stepping Stones

Leadership Skills For Rural Women



Final Report 1996/97

Stepping Stones Report

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- g Written by Pam Cuelho, Project Officer, Rural Women's Network and Kim Davidson
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Further information and copies of the Report:

Rural Women's Network
Office of Rural Communities
NSW Agriculture

Locked Bag 21 <u>ORANGE</u> 2800 **☎**(063) 913620

Fax (063) 913650

Email:cuelhop@agric.nsw.gov.au

Central West Regional Council of Adult & Community Education 185 Bathurst Road

ORANGE NSW 2800

☎(063) 61 2595

Fax: (063) 61 8543

Email: acecw@ix.net.au

Foreword

The *Stepping Stones* program has provided an excellent opportunity for women in small communities to develop the skills and contacts they want so that they can take a more active role in the decision making process.

Stepping Stones is a joint project of the Rural Women's Network (RWN) and the Central West Regional Council of Adult & Community Education (ACE) and funded by the NSW Department for Women.

RWN is a program within the Office of Rural Communities in NSW Agriculture. RWN works with rural women, service providers and other agencies to address issues affecting women in rural communities.

ACE operates in hundreds of locations across NSW and is flexible, community based and demand-driven. In the Central West, ACE operates in over 35 communities training 9000 people per year.

RWN and ACE have brought together their skills, contacts and commitment to ensure that *Stepping Stones* meets an important need in small communities.

K P Sheridan **Director-General NSW Agriculture**

Audrey Hardman, OAM
President
Regional Council of Adult
& Community Education

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Acronyms

Australian Broadcasting CorporationABC
Central West Regional Council of Adult & Community Education
Central West Community CollegeCWCC
Rural Women's NetworkRWN
Rural Women's Satellite ProjectRWSP
Western Institute of TAFE TAFE

Overview

Stepping Stones is designed to develop rural women's leadership skills. It is a joint project between RWN and ACE, funded by a grant from the NSW Department for Women.

Stepping Stones was developed following the Rural Women's Satellite Project (RWSP). This project highlighted the need for rural women to develop a variety of skills including self esteem, assertiveness, mediation, conflict resolution and communications. The women involved in RWSP saw these skills as a fundamental step to being leaders within their communities.

The *Stepping Stones* workshops have enabled women to identify their strengths, access relevant training, develop network relationships and improve their status at work and in the community. The programs were flexible, developed through consultation with local women. Each group received a tailored workbook which was developed to meet their needs. At the completion of the workshops the women had developed many new skills. These skills will help them to be more actively involved in the decision making process at a local, state and national level.



Objectives

LTo identify, develop and recognise the skills and knowledge of rural women to become leaders in their community and take active roles in decision making processes.

LTo establish support mechanisms to assist these women on a longer term basis.

LTo provide training and support for women from a diverse range of backgrounds to ensure access and equity to leadership roles.

LTo develop awareness of the importance of women as leaders and decision makers.

Central West Regional Council of Adult & Community Education

Outcomes

- ☑Community based planning groups were established in Garema, Tottenham and Tullibigeal, three small geographically isolated communities within the central west of NSW. At meetings with the planning groups, relevant topics were identified which suited the communities' needs.
- ☑These topics became the basis of the program for the workshops developed by Pam Cuelho, RWN Project Officer.
- ☑Stepping Stones was designed to be flexible and cater for the needs of the communities. Therefore, the structure and content of each workshop varied. The workshops were conducted by a range of facilitators, each an expert in their field.
- ☑ Stepping Stones' training style was based on group dynamics and networking. The outcome of this training style was a network of support and mentor groups.



Overview

- ☑ 15 other women from around NSW, who already have some leadership roles within their communities, attended a special *Stepping Stones* in Orange to show them what the program was all about and provide them with the skills and some resources to enable them to implement similar programs in their local communities.
- ☑A user friendly Leadership Training Kit has been produced to extend *Stepping Stones* to other communities. It is a self-help guide on the organisation of these types of workshops (*see page 16*).

Locations

After liaising with NSW Agriculture's Drought Support Worker, RWN Project Officer approached Garema, Tottenham, Ungarie and Rankin Springs to determine if they would benefit from *Stepping Stones*. Garema and Tottenham responded enthusiastically by establishing workshop planning groups. Tullibigeal's participation was due to a suggestion from the Central West Community College (CWCC).

Due to the success of *Stepping Stones* in Garema, Tottenham and Tullibigeal, it was decided to hold a special workshop in Orange to promote the Leadership Training Kit. Key women from different communities were invited to this workshop. Each woman was chosen for their commitment to raising the awareness of rural women as leaders and decision makers.

Difficulties

Stepping Stones targetted geographically isolated communities. As a result the RWN project officer experienced difficulties in establishing groups in certain communities and workshops did not proceed.

The majority of these difficulties were ones of isolation and the range of problems rural women face daily. For example, time, distance and finding time to fit the planning group meeting into their busy schedules, along with work, harvest, school holidays and local events.

Highlights

Stepping Stones has encouraged women to be leaders within their communities. The development of their leadership skills has been as diversified as the women themselves, and has led to personal and professional achievements. This publication will highlight some of these achievements and the success of the program.



Garema

Garema is 26 kms south west of Forbes, a small community consisting of a silo, a house and a hall. *Stepping Stones* was held in the homes of two participants which created a friendly atmosphere. The mood at Garema was positive due to recent rain and being able to sow winter crops. The timing of *Stepping Stones* was perfect for this community. All these factors contributed to a very successful program.

How we got started

Initial contact was made with a local woman, who was very positive about the idea of *Stepping Stones*. She contacted a neighbour and between them they set up the initial meeting. This meeting was attended by five women who discussed topics, dates, venue, promotion, catering, childcare and enrolments. It was due to their enthusiasm that *Stepping Stones* was piloted at Garema.

The program

Garema's workshops were held on 13, 14 May and 24, 25 June 1996 and were promoted through a brochure, a press release in the Forbes Advocate, and an interview on ABC radio.

Childcare was provided for the participants, with two women utilising this service. Catering was provided by The House With No Steps.

Topics covered were self esteem, communications, stress and time management, team building, group presentations, meeting procedures, media skills, managing change, decision making, conflict resolution and networking.

16 women from Forbes, Garema, Wirrinya, Grenfell, Bathurst and Orange travelled to *Stepping Stones*. The group was diverse with ages ranging from 22 to 60 years; backgrounds varying from city, town and bush; and occupations covering farmers, teachers, office workers, mothers and grandmothers.

A student of Charles Sturt University, Kim Davidson, took photographs at Garema and helped with the writing of this report.

"The Stepping
Stones program is
a wonderful way
of helping women
in rural
communities to
'kick start' their
confidence and
self esteem
through group
learning and the
sharing of their
experiences.

"As a presenter I found it very rewarding as I love working with people. It also helped me to 'polish up' my own presentation skills, which I've taken for granted over time."

Ann Charles, Facilitator

Garema

Evaluation

The pilot program received positive feedback from all participants and facilitators. Evaluation forms mirrored the success of *Stepping Stones* with comments like All topics excellent and will be useful now and in the future, Glad I was able to come, and An excellent workshop, I would do it again. The following graphs are the results of the evaluation forms:

"It was great to have something in our own backyard."

Participant







Claudia's story

I'm a rural women, and have lived on the land for 35 years. In 1993 my life changed due to the terrible loss our our daughter, Melinda, to breast cancer. She was 30 years of age. Through her illness I learnt of the important service the Jean Colvin Hospital offers to country cancer patients, and wished to speak to community groups to inform them about this hospital. I did not have the communication skills to do so!!

This was a terrible time in my life, and I realised that I needed to really re-assess my life. It would have been easy to withdraw and by so doing become very bitter. I looked within, and knew that I wanted to share and help others with what I had learned from Mel's illness.

Stepping Stones has helped me to meet the changes and challenges in my life. I have been amazed by the growth in the other women who were participants.

Since being a participant I:

- **♥** Have enrolled in a writing course with TAFE
- Have become the Publicity Officer of Cancer Patients Assistance Society in my home town, continue my work with Compassionate Friends, and visit and support cancer patients in their homes
- Became a regional finalist in ABC's recent "Rural Woman of the Year Awards"
- ₱ Became a look good/feel better volunteer ~ and have completed an accredited beauty course to complement this role
- Returned to my role as a counsellor and also work with our senior citizens
- Completed an eight week course through "Family Link Up" sponsored by Burnside
- Agreed to take part in a pilot program called "Rainbows" a course facilitated by "The Loretto Land Link"
- ♦ Have been travelling and speaking to community groups about the Jean Colvin Hospital ~ I am passionate about this ~ A dream realized.

The benefits of adult education in rural areas are many. We have lost many of our services. We need access to good education. Stepping Stones has nurtured and encouraged many talents, has strengthened many broken spirits. We need leadership courses such as this one. We need our country to recover and regain



Tottenham

Tottenham is 40 km from of the centre of NSW, 200 km north west of Parkes. A small centre that services 600 people, with a school, hospital, post office, hotel, supermarket and bank. *Stepping Stones* was held in the local community hall.

How we got started

Initial contact was made with the principal of Tottenham School, who thought that a program like *Stepping Stones* would be beneficial to some of the senior girls at the school. A meeting was held, which was attended by some teachers and the CWCC. After looking through the topics, they decided that they were all worthwhile. It was agreed at this meeting that *Stepping Stones* would not only be beneficial for the students of the school, but also for women from the wider community.

The program

Tottenham's workshops were held on 17 June, 16 July, 8 August and 4 September 1996. The workshops were promoted through the school newsletter, a brochure and word-of-mouth.

Childcare was provided for the participants with three women utilising this service. Catering was provided by the School Canteen.

The topics covered were self esteem, communications, stress and time management, team building, group presentations, meeting procedures, media skills, managing change, decision making, conflict resolution, networking and mentoring.

25 women from Tottenham, Tullamore, Albert, Bobadah, Trangie and Tilpa travelled to *Stepping Stones*. The ages of the group ranged from 15 to 65 years. The distances travelled by participants was amazing ~ the result of a survey of 18 of the participants showed that over 2,500 kms was travelled, and that was for only one of the four days!

"I feel the whole
course was
worthwhile and
would be suited to
rural men as well as
women. It has made
me feel a better and
more confident
person so that I can
hopefully help my
children to be
genuine caring
people."
Participant



Tottenham

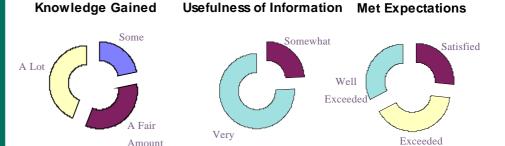
Evaluation

Stepping Stones received positive feedback from the participants with comments such as It was worth every kilometre and I enjoyed the day and am looking forward to the next one. The following graphs showing the results of the evaluation forms:

"A presentation to one's own community can be a daunting experience particularly when the group included my teenage daughter!!

What an energetic and inspiring community of women we have in Tottenham."

> **Fran Rowe Facilitator**



A participant's story

Thankyou for helping me to learn how to express myself and to get the most out of me.

Before this course I didn't know how to go about addressing problems and people who were in my everyday life. Knowing how to deal with these problems I now feel more confident about myself and my situation.

Also, during this course I have learnt to feel better about myself. I have always hated the way I look, but you have shown me that if I love myself and feel good about myself then it shines to others.

I recommend *Stepping Stones* to all women.



From those involved ...

My name means 'Pure'

To coin a phrase, the word is 'pure' Just the opposite of manure I've heard the phrase "as pure as snow"

But 'pure hell' I sure don't know.
Pure is: ideal, clean and bright
I'll settle for soap thats just Sunlight!

"I think my self
esteem has
improved and I
have greater
confidence which
allows me to stand
up for what I
believe in"
Participant



It's hard yakka for land

From RoseMarie Crowe ...

Stepping Stones is a dynamic example of effective networking.

RWN and ACE launched a pilot project with the aim of helping women in isolated areas take an active role in addressing the needs of their changed circumstances. *Stepping Stones* was devised to incorporate workshops in personal development for effective leaders.

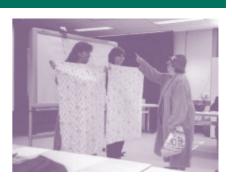
As a facilitator of these workshops, I witnessed the enormous impact on participants. The women were highly motivated, eager to be involved and quick to see uses for the strategies.

The feedback was enthusiastic. The women, long accustomed to the isolation of their rural areas, appreciated the accessibility and low cost of the programs. *Stepping Stones* resulted in the formation of local networks to share ideas and skills.

Many reported improved relationships at home and in community organisations. Some took courage to confront long-standing inequities in their communities. Using constructive negotiating methods they were delighted with their successes.

As a pilot, *Stepping Stones* has proved its worth. Local communities can now model similar programs on the tried and true formula developed by RWN and ACE. The *Stepping Stones Kit* will be an invaluable tool with its abundant compilation of resources.

However, the greatest resource is the vitality of the rural women themselves. They are to be congratulated ~ and encouraged to continue.



My name means 'Pearl'

Margaret Elliott, Forbes
©1996

O pearl of great price,
How did you appear?
Born in irritation,
Deep in an oyster's shell;
Buried in darkest sea,
Enfolded in mother-of pearl.

Clandestinely the oyster strove
To cover the infliction
With soothing secretion of nacre,
Layer upon layer,
Quietly moulded
To pearly beauty.

The transformation complete,
The pearl awaits its release.
Lithe body dives beneath the deep,
Risks life to free the lustrous pearl.
Deft hands pry open the shell
To reveal the splendent jewel.

Precious pearl, product of pain, What is your ultimate fate? Merchants vie to buy the glowing gem,

Reflecting all light it has absorbed. Chosen to enhance a lady's grace, Who can assess its worth?

Life's trials are but stepping stones When placed in the Master's hand. His Love secretes a healing balm, Layer upon layer, Till we enter the holy city Whose gates are made of pearl!

... in Stepping Stones

Women inspired to have their say

"All the workshops were relevant and all gave helpful information and encouragement."

Participant

My name means 'Graced'

Ann

I am graced with a wonderful and loving family. A wonderful Mother and Husband and three beautiful children.

I am graced with many gifts and talents that I love sharing with other people in the hope of making them happy and to draw them closer to me.

I am graced with a wonderful life filled with happiness and the time to do many things that I enjoy.

I am graced with the love of my very close friends and the support that they give and the fun and laughter that we share.

I am graced with good health and that physically I am OK.

I am graced with the ability and the love to write.

I am graced with wonderful opportunities like this and I hope that I am graced with enough courage to use it calmly and quietly when I get home.

Thank you God ~ I am very graced with your love.



"I can see this program forging ahead for both men and women" Participant

Stepping Stones

Clear water moves between the stones,

Disguising the depth between.

Each step a voyage of discovery,

Through shafts of light seldom seen.

Beneath the canopy of hanging branches,

The banks offer places to rest. A chance to pause, to gather our strength,

Before we put the mountain to test.

The mountain rises steep above the cliffs.

A plan we will have to decide That allows us to climb in gentle stages.

For our time we may have to abide.

The summit is veiled in wispy cloud It's face hidden until we arrive. To stand at the top ... breath in the air

It's so good to be alive.

by Karin Duce, Mendooran

A journey. A Day. Time. Your life Is measured in just the same way. Stepping Stones to show you a path,

A helping hand ... accept it you may.

Now listen to the music start subtly, As you accept a chance To work with our neighbours, Life will ask you to dance.

Look down in clear water You may see your reflection. Reach out, touch your soul, Feel laughter in action.

My friends lets tread on the Stepping Stones,

In contact, our strengths to discover.

Planning the path up the Mountain of Life

Our Destinies linked as we help each other.

Tullibigeal

Tullibigeal is half way between West Wyalong and Lake Cargelligo with the district's population being approximately 400. Being around 80 kms from their nearest centre Tullibigeal has a post office, hotel, school, two garages, cafe, co-op store and a swimming pool. The area produces wheat and sheep. *Stepping Stones* was held in the local CWA hall.

How we got started

The Central West Community College at Lake Cargelligo suggested that Tullibigeal would be a good place to hold a *Stepping Stones* program. A local contact was enthusiastic about the program and set up an initial meeting, which was attended by six women who discussed topics, dates, venue, advertising, catering, childcare and enrolments.

The program

The women who attended the initial meeting decided that, with some of the more practical topics being offered by other service providers, that they would concentrate on the personal development topics such as self esteem, communication skills, managing stress, time and change, effective teams, decision making and conflict resolution.

Stepping Stones was promoted through the school newsletter and also a mail drop of the brochure.

The program was run over three days, 19 and 26 July and 2 August 1996. Nine women from the area attended the program. The women all knew each other, but by the end of the program, firm friendships were established.

Childcare was provided for participants with three of the women utilising this service. Catering was done by the local CWA ~ who provided a sit-down feast!

"It has been a privilege to be involved with the Stepping Stones program.

I went to Tottenham,
 Tullibigeal and
 Orange
 masquerading as a
 presenter ~ I came
home stimulated and
 inspired by these
three vibrant groups
 of women."
 Fran Spora
 Facilitator



Tullibigeal

Evaluation

The program received positive feedback from the participants. As the group was so small it made it easier for the women to discuss private and personal issues and help each other resolve conflicts in their lives. The following graphs are the results of the evaluation forms:

"I gained a lot on how to deal and cope with situations, loss, grief, to believe in myself and my ability to do well"

Participant

Knowledge Gained Usefulness of Information

A Fai Amou





Met Expectations

A participant's story

I attended the *Stepping Stones* program in Tullibigeal and came away feeling that I left a load of baggage, things that were weighing me down, left-over bad feelings etc. I learnt about myself. I can be an important person in the community.

I have just finished a year as president of the Mother's Club and learned that when people get along you achieve anything with a positive outlook.

Our group was wonderful and we still have a bond of friendship. I recommend anyone to attend these sessions, where you can talk about anything and it stays private.

Stepping Stones was publicised by a mail drop of the following brochure

STEPPING STONES

Stepping Stones is a program specially developed to meet the needs of rural women in the Tullibigeal area. You are invited to enrol and join the program which will run over three days (see below)

Stepping Stones is designed to appeal to women from different backgrounds and no prior experience is necessary. Through this training you will develop many new skills which will give you greater opportunities to be involved in the community and within decision making roles.

The emphasis in on learning in a handson and enjoyable way.

Program Details

DATES: Friday 19 & 26 July and 2 August 1996

VENUE: CWA Hall, Cargelligo Street

Tullibigeal

TIME: 9.00am to 3.00pm

(Lunch will be provided)

CHILDCARE WILL BE PROVIDED ON REQUEST

Topics

- Self esteem
- Communication skills
- · Managing stress, time and change
- · Effective teams to achieve results
- Decision making
- Conflict resolution



STEPPING STONES

LEADERSHIP SKILLS FOR RURAL WOMEN



A joint project between Rural Women's Network and

Central West Regional Council of Adult & Community Education

TULLIBIGEAL
19 July 1996
26 July 1996
2 August 1996

Orange

Due to the success of *Stepping Stones* in Garema, Tottenham and Tullibigeal, it was decided to run a workshop inviting key women from different communities ~ with an expectation that they then organise a similar program in their own areas.

It was decided to hold this workshop in Orange, which is a major town in central west NSW, located approximately 270kms west of Sydney.

How we got started

Key women from a wide range of areas were contacted and asked if they would like to participate in the *Stepping Stones* program, or if they knew someone who would be interested in attending. The response was overwhelming and it wasn't long before we had a full class of 15 people.

The program

Orange's workshop was held on 13, 14 and 15 February 1997.

Childcare was not provided for this workshop ~ although an additional participant joined us who was only 5 months old! Catering was provided by a local cafe.

Topics covered were self esteem, communications, stress and time management, team building, group presentations, meeting procedures, media skills, managing change, decision making, conflict resolution and networking. A session covering the 21 steps to organise a workshop was also included.

15 women attended the workshop, travelling from: Condobolin, Bungarby, Kikoira, Cootamundra, Narrandera, Hargraves, Bourke, Burren Junction, Dubbo, Lithgow, Mendooran and Greenthorpe.

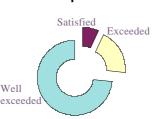
Evaluation

The program received positive feedback from all participants and facilitators. Evaluation forms mirrored the success of *Stepping Stones* with comments like *The whole workshop was absolutely fantastic!!*, and *The whole three days were educational, motivating and entertaining*. The following graphs are the results of the evaluation forms:

Knowledge Gained Usefulness of Information Met Expectations







"The whole three days were educational, motivating and entertaining. It was a privilege to be part of the group and to meet so many committed people, both participants and presenters."

Participant



Orange

A participant's view

by Elizabeth Clarke, Bungarby

Stepping Stones attracted women from as far away as Bungarby (an hour south of Cooma) and Bourke in far western NSW.

The women brought with them a diverse range of interests and skills. They came from varied backgrounds and they were willing to share their talents with everyone.

The youngest, 5 month old Brooke Charles, had a lively input, and with her good natured chuckles and laughter, and her extraordinary capacity to 'party on' in appreciation at the end of the day, gave us a reason to have such seminars, in the belief that what we do today will make a positive difference to the next generation of young women.

Ann Charles' session on Presenting to Groups gave an important insight in thinking about how others see us, and the type of image we need to present. It was an important message on how the wrong image only serves to detract from the statements we are making.

RoseMarie Crowe's sessions, in strengthening self-images and resolve to continued achievement, were such a boon. In times as tough as they are now it is not always easy to continue to stand our ground and press ahead with that which we believe is right.

Another session which attracted perhaps more input than anticipated was on How To Conduct Meetings. Traditionally women have largely been seen as number-fillers for meetings, leaving the power broking positions to men. However the women at the *Stepping Stones* program displayed such a lively interest in the legal processes of meetings that this session could have continued for a much longer time. The major stumbling block to its continuing further beyond its allotted time was the fact that by this time we were famished!

Another session that could have gone on for a much longer time was that of dealing with the media. Many of the women in the program held public positions, were involved with community groups and often had to develop media releases, or were simply keen to develop an awareness of how to read 'between the lines' more effectively.

Fran Spora's session on Managing Time, Stress and Change more effectively was another one that proved so rewarding to all the women. We all have so little time to manage all the things that need doing and stress levels build up so that we need to take stock by awareness/management techniques. Fran seemed exactly the right person to take this session. Her techniques of coping were often tinged with the humorous.

Sonia Muir's Networking and Mentoring was a program that everyone related to. The notion that we are all connected by common points within the network was so intriguing that I have given considerable thought to it since arriving home and wondering how best to utilise it.

Another session that I personally found of immense interest was Margaret Carroll's on Team Building ~ developing the concept that we can achieve more in teams rather than individually and building on the idea that we really are not alone. Many other women have the same ideas and concerns as we do.. Learning to break down the barrier of 'I' and develop an 'us' concept to promote achievement was a valuable session.

In summary I can only say that the *Stepping Stones* program proved of such immense assistance in developing some points of courage for me that I would like to see some of these messages passed on to other women. Its value cannot be underestimated.



"I came away
exhilarated, both
laughing and
'release' crying on
my drive home."

Participant

Leadership Kit

A step by step approach to organising workshops that can help you become more involved in your community.

Who is the Kit for?

This kit is for people interested in organising Stepping Stones in their local areas and could include:

m individuals

m community groups

m educators and service providers

How do you use the Kit?

The kit has all the materials you need to organise your own workshop. It has two parts:

Part 1

21 steps to get you started ~ an action kit for those involved in the planning process; and

Part 2

Worksheets to be used as a guide for your workshop ~ a sample of information, ideas, and examples ~ to get you started.

The success of your workshop depends on careful planning. The 21 steps are only a guide and can be adapted creatively to suit your needs.

Where can the Kit be obtained?

The kit can be obtained from:

Rural Women's Network
Office of Rural Communities
NSW Agriculture
Locked Bag 21
ORANGE NSW 2800

(063) 91 3620

Fax: (063) 91 3650

Email: cuelhop@agric.nsw.gov.au

Central West Regional Council of Adult & Community Education 185 Bathurst Road ORANGE NSW 2800

(063)61 2595

Fax (063) 61 8543 Email: acecw@ix.net.au

Contact List

Stepping Stones Management Team

Pam Cuelho, Project Officer, Rural Women's Network, Locked Bag 21, Orange 2800 ☎(063) 91 3620

Gina Perks, Central West Regional Council of Adult & Community Education, 185 Bathurst Road, Orange, 2800 ☎(063) 61 2595

Facilitator's List

Self Esteem, Communications, Conflict Resolution

Team Building

Margaret Carroll, Rural Women's Network, Locked Bag 21, Orange 2800 ☎(063) 91 3611

Getting Results from Meetings

Audrey Hardman (Garema) "Bradgate Park" Mandurama 2792 (063) 67 5034

Fran Rowe (Tottenham) "Bombah" Tottenham 2873

☎ (068) 93 3843

Marlene Farrell (Orange) Commonwealth Employment Service, Anson Street Orange ☎(063) 91 2700

Media Skills

Kim Goldsmith (Garema and Tottenham) PO Box 933 Dubbo 2830 (068) 87 7243

Vicki Adams (Orange) ABC Radio, PO Box 863, Orange 2800 (2063) 91 2550

Managing Change, Stress & Time

Margaret Flynn (Garema) Centacare, PO Box 28, Forbes 2871
☎ (068) 51 2133

Fran Spora (Tottenham, Tullibigeal and Orange) "Corniglia" Gulargambone 2828 (268) 48 5348

Networking

Sonia Muir, Rural Women's Network, Locked Bag 21, Orange 2800 (2063) 91 3616

Group Presentations

Ann Charles, "Cudgegong" Narrandera 2700 ☎ (069) 55 6236

Mentoring

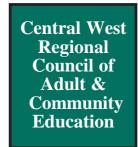
Sue Pardy, "Craigie Burn", Huntley Road, Orange 2800

(2063) 61 8213

Acknowledgments

- (Thanks to the NSW Department for Women and the Women's Grants Program for providing the funding for this very worthwhile project.
- (A special thanks to Rose Marie Crowe, who facilitated a number of the sessions in each area. Her input was invaluable as she inspired and motivated the women involved in *Stepping Stones* workshops to make the most of who they are, and built up their confidence and self esteem so that they believe that anything is possible.
- (Thanks to the participants of *Stepping Stones* in Garema, Tottenham, Tullibigeal and Orange for making *Stepping Stones* a successful pilot program.
- (Thanks to all the facilitators who presented workshops in a professional and entertaining fashion and who inspired the participants on many different levels.
- (Thanks to the local planning groups, without whom *Stepping Stones* would not have been possible.
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