**Presidents Address - AGM 2023**

Tena Koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

Welcome to the Annual General Meeting for Rural Women New Zealand 2023, Special acknowledgement to our National Life Members and National Members of Honour, to those who were recognized for their contributions yesterday, those who will be successful today, to our first time attendees, and long time attendees.

It’s wonderful to see you all here, in the garden city of Christchurch, after our false start last year. As I mentioned yesterday, in collaboration with the office team, and the board, the Canterbury Conference Committee have shown great courage and tenacity to continue with organising this Conference after having so many setbacks and cancellations in recent years due to covid restrictions. Thank you!!!!!!

My sincere thanks to the Board, our Staff, our Regional Leaders and their teams, and to you our members . You are all an integral part of the whole team that is our organisation, each as important and valued as the other to the success of team Rural Women New Zealand.

I want to start today by talking about our Values. Alongside the Creed, our values indicate how we should treat each other, both within the membership, and anyone else we come in contact with while wearing our Rural Women New Zealand Hats, so to speak. It’s what we stand for and how we work as an organisation.

As Frances presented so well earlier,

**Our Values:**

 Charitable: We continue our traditional role of supporting rural communities.

 Innovative: To meet the needs of today and for future generations.

Respectful and Respected: We behave respectfully and in ways that earn respect and enhance mana.

Inclusive: We are curious, open minded and embrace learning.

I’d like us all to think about those values, and how we each implement them in our day to day dealings with people.

Are we Charitable? I hope we can agree that by our actions, as Rural Women New Zealand members, we understand the **act** of being charitable.

Charitable can also mean giving people the benefit of the doubt in uncertain circumstances,

In the words of the Creed:

 *“Let us be large in thought and word and deed”*.

*“May we strive to touch and to know the great human heart, common to us all”*

Are we Innovative? I believe that as women belonging to the organisation, we sometimes tend to meet the needs that we see as important to us individually, which may often mean, from a Rural Women NZ perspective, sticking with the status quo while continuing our usual work as part of the organisation, and not necessarily looking for or supporting new opportunities.

Collectively, there are sparks of innovation, a ‘can do’ attitude, and support for the innovators, but we need to see more of those.

Are we Respectful and Respected:

This means approaching all people, all conversations and interactions with a positive, respectful attitude. If there are issues to be dealt with, this is done respectfully, constructively and with empathy. We value and respect everyone, and their contributions, whatever those contributions might be.

There is no place for confrontation or negativity.

Both of these approaches have the amazing ability to spiral out of proportion very quickly and can easily turn a simple molehill into a massive insurmountable mountain unless addressed with respect, constructively and with empathy.

We all have times when we are upset by a decision, or something has gone wrong. But by taking some time to assess a situation objectively, by ‘standing in the other persons’ shoes’ so to speak before responding, we are earning that respect , being respectful, and enhancing everyone’s mana, in the process of working through a situation.

These phrases from the Creed come to mind here:

*“Teach us to put into action our better impulses”,*

*“Make us grow Calm, serene, gentle”*

This constructive approach creates “Wins” for everyone involved, along with an extremely supportive and nurturing culture, and enhances the reputation and mana of RWNZ, as opposed to confrontation and negativity which is extremely unhelpful and can start one of those downward spirals that can be so difficult to climb out of. This can also be harmful to RWNZ’s kind and caring reputation.

It goes against our values, and those of the creed, which so many of us see as so important.

Last but not least: Are we Inclusive? This means being open to, and respectful of, a wide range of thoughts, cultures and ways of doing things. Are we curious and keen to learn more about things that may be new to us, or are outside our comfort zone? Being open minded simply helps to give us a better understanding of different perspectives, and makes us more open to new ideas. It is about being respectful of others, and non judgemental.

From the Creed *“ May we never be hasty in judgement and always generous”*

 Appreciating our individuality, while working together collaboratively and constructively is the key here.

 In the words of the Creed *“That in the big things in life we are one”*.

Let’s just take a moment to reflect here, and consider our own individual approaches to communicating with people as we focus on that last very important phrase of the Creed *“Let us not forget to be Kind”.*

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Now, let’s look back at what we have achieved since this time last year:

We have, at last, been almost free of Covid restrictions for 12 months.

-We completed the Communications Survey, which has led to a more ‘member friendly’ Communication plan being put in place. I hope you are enjoying the fortnightly “Rural Wrap Up”. This is the most obvious result of the survey to date, but all feed back has been taken into consideration in all facets of the organisation’s work.

This Whakatauki , or proverb, reminds us of the importance of building a good team through good connections and communication…

**Waiho i te toipoto, kaua i te toiroa …**Let us keep close together, not wide apart .

*It speaks to the importance of keeping connected, of maintaining  relationships and dialogue so that we can keep moving forward together.*

* We have upgraded our database. The first win here has been the ease of member renewal, compared to previous years. These differences may not necessarily be apparent to you as members as yet, but rest assured , it is leading to significant efficiencies for the office team, which is a huge win. As time goes on, more benefits to you as members will be implemented.
* We are settled in our new premises at level 10, 175 Victoria Street, after some initial hurdles last year, and have hosted the Regional Leaders and others during the year. Please do call in if you are in Wellington, the team love having members visit.
* We have set up the new Policy Action Advisory Groups, or PAAG’s, and these are getting up and running with enthusiasm and focus. The new format is enabling members with knowledge and appreciation of the various PAAG’s, to work together with others from around the country on monitoring the various aspects of our public policy work, for the benefit of our rural communities and women and families. There are still some gaps in the regional positions available on the PAAG’s, which we would value any expressions of interest for.
* A Comprehensive Regional Review is underway following member dissatisfaction with the current system.. More on that a little later in proceedings.
* The Centennial Committee is working its way through the significant task of celebrating 100 years since a group of very courageous women held the initial meeting to establish our wonderful organisation. More on this later in the meeting too.
* We ran 3 very successful Activator sessions around the country, one more than last year, and look forward to offering those who were part of those sessions continued opportunities to build strong connections with RWNZ and each other.
* We are seeing some new groups spring up, and new initiatives happening in some regions that will hopefully lead to a refreshed approach adding to the vibrancy of the organisation. Supporting these new initiatives is key to the revitalisation of Rural Women New Zealand.
* We have delivered mental health and wellbeing education to approximately 600, mostly women, around the country through the Ministry for Women funding we were successful in securing.
* It has been totally humbling, to see the huge efforts that our members have made to support those affected by the devastating weather events this year, in particular Cyclones Hale and Gabrielle.

We can all be so very proud of the support we have given, and continue to give, often alongside others such as Rural Support Trust, Federated Farmers and Beef and Lamb NZ. My visit to Hawkes Bay recently was really valuable. Seeing the sheer scale of the damage and destruction first hand was quite overwhelming. There is a very long road ahead to recovery for the areas badly hit right around the country and I’d like to think we’ll be there to support as best we can for the duration.

* The funding package that we have recently secured through MPI, in collaboration with others, will enable more of this continuing support work to happen.

There are some big items there that have been achieved or started, and we look forward to growing the momentum as the coming year progresses.

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The other topic I want to cover today is the inspiration of courage and a ‘can do’ attitude to change things, that our forebears have given us.

We can hark right back to the courage that our founders showed to think outside the square and establish the Women Division of the Farmers Union. They were the inspiration for others who followed in their footsteps to have the ‘can do’ attitude to think creatively and setup the Bush Nurse scheme, which eventually, led to the WDFF housekeeping Scheme which then, through innovative thinking, evolved into Access Homehealth. This in turn takes us to those who had the tremendous courage to make the difficult decision to sell that business and bring a massive shift in the position of our organisation… but no change to our purpose though. That decision has provided the legacy fund that we now have, and will take us into our next 100 years.

It has taken courage, innovation and a ‘can do’ attitude to come up with so much of our work over the years, including buying a Spitfire during World War 2 and the purchase of our wonderful Rest and Recouperation homes, which have also been a significant part of our history.

“Let’s get Plastered for Breast Cancer”, our previous Leptospirosis campaigns, working with others to establish the Life Education Trust here in New Zealand and the Mighty Morning Tea are just a few, more recent examples.

Our strong voice in the public policy field has been very well established over many years, and we are rightly very proud of that history.

All that we have achieved has taken courage, tenacity and a ‘Can do” attitude that was largely focussing outwards, towards helping others.

However, in order for Rural Women New Zealand to flourish, we now need to focus our courage, and ‘can do’ attitude on looking inwards, adjusting how we work within the organisation and what we offer to new members in order to grow and prosper, while still maintaining our mission, and purpose.

Please remember, “Why” we exist…. to Strengthen, Support and Connect People and Communities…. doesn’t change…, it remains constant. It’s ‘how’ we do it that we need to adjust.

We understand, respect and appreciate that some of our local branches of more senior members really enjoy coming together as they do, and have given so much to the organisation over so many years, which we are all truly grateful for and inspired by.

We are not asking you to change. We are here for you. You are an important part of us, just as your fellowship through RWNZ is important to you.

Beyond these traditional branches, though, we need to be ready to support a different way of doing things going forward.

We must be brave enough to trust in those coming into the organisation as newer members and support **them** to carry RWNZ forward in strengthening supporting and connecting people and communities in their own way, so that we become that vibrant and relevant organisation that we need to be to continue for the generations to come. That is where our strategy is aiming.

Going forward, that courage and ‘can do’ attitude, is what we must all be willing to embrace, as we work together to support each other as a team to adjust, grow and present the vibrant and relevant organisation that is the Rural Women New Zealand of the future . **I have great belief that** **we can do this!! I hope you are looking forward to playing your role in this journey of rejuvenation as well.**

Nga mihi nui

Gill