

From left to right: Kate Moses, Coralie Pollard, Heather Harding, Andrea Lee and Belinda Pearce are all members of the Registered Master Builders Executive board for the Canterbury region.



A FORCE FOR CHANGE

After focused efforts on increasing the number of women entering the construction industry, a real shift is underway. However, the real test of how much the industry is changing is not just the number of new female tradies, but how many are in leadership roles. The increasing number of female leaders in building organisations shows the industry is truly becoming more representative, helping create a snowball effect as more future builders see themselves in successful construction careers.

In the Canterbury region, the Registered Master Builders Executive has five women on board. Coralie Pollard, Kate Moses, Andrea Lee, Belinda Pearce and Heather Harding, all have managerial roles and extensive construction industry knowledge and experience. To honour the theme of this year's International Women's Day, inspiring inclusion, we talked to them about their experience and advice for other women in the sector.

The message was clear: women have a lot to bring to the sector, and attitudes among colleagues are key to building confidence and encouraging more women to give it a go.

Heather Harding is a member of the South Canterbury Registered Master Builders Executive. She has long standing links to the construction industry through her General Manager roles at Harding Construction and Coresteel Buildings South Canterbury as well as concept design.

Speaking of her experience as a woman entering the industry after a career in the education sector, Heather had to learn to trust herself and her abilities. The attitude of her new colleagues was invaluable in helping her feel at home.

"At first, I was unsure of myself. I had a lot to learn and lacked confidence at times. When I started attending Master Builders meetings, I was concerned I wouldn't fit in because I was female, and I wasn't a tradie, but everyone was welcoming and inclusive. Over time I became more confident and comfortable in the environment," she says.

President of the Ashburton Branch and Managing Director of Fowler Homes Ashburton, Andrea Lee, says construction is becoming much more supportive of women.

"When I first started in the industry there was a lot of old-school thinking, but it's so refreshing to know this is changing. There are now far fewer barriers than there were, something we can all be proud of. I have loved my time on the exec, where I've focused on bringing members together and fostering that supportive environment" she says.

Belinda Pearce agrees an open-minded approach is the vital ingredient in the change happening across the industry. As Sales and Customer Liaison at Milestone Homes, Belinda runs the office and management side of the business that she owns with her husband, Steve. She was keen to step up as a member of the Master Builders

Executive in Ashburton not only to grow her own skills, but also to ensure a female presence in a typically male-dominated industry and show others what is possible.

"People need to realise that everyone brings different skills to the table. Just because there's a way things have always been done, that doesn't mean that it's the right way. Be open-minded and let people prove themselves, regardless of gender – give them a shot," she says.

Jennian Homes Project Manager and fellow Ashburton representative, Kate Moses, had a similar observation.

"Women in the industry fit in better than they think. We possess so many skills that are important for the success of the sector. It's all about being down to earth and building relationships," she says.

All emphasised it's not just about having more women on the tools.

Coralie Pollard, Commercial Manager at Landmark Homes, sits on the Canterbury Executive. Her involvement in the industry has been varied and draws on her double diploma in quantity surveying and construction management.

"Women can wear many hats within the industry. I have spent plenty of time working on sites and am handy on a set of tools but there are so many different roles. From consultants and architects to designers and tradies, it's exciting to see more women being encouraged to take on different parts of the trade," says Coralie.