

# Connecting the dots .....

## Stories of change: Women in Local Government

### A strong voice and role model for women

Cllr Lesley Way, Mayor, Siteki Municipality, Eswatini

Project involvement: Women in Local Government network and mentor

#### *Summary*

*Lesley Way was 23 when she first became a councillor. After being content to be on the back benches for nine years, Lesley's experience as a mentor as part the Connecting the Dots Projects project made her realise that she had a lot more to offer. It gave her the courage to stand and be elected as mayor from where she has gone from strength to strength. She is now a representative on the board of SWALGA and deputy chair of the national mayors association AMICAALL.*

#### *Background*

Lesley Way was 23 when she first became a councillor in Siteki municipality. Lesley had been content to be a back-bencher for nine years, not having the confidence and doubting her own potential to think about going further in her political career.

When she was nominated by the municipality to get involved in the Connecting the Dots project, for the first time Cllr Way had the opportunity to engage with other like-minded women with similar experiences and to mentor young women who were interested in following in her footsteps to become councillors themselves. This changed her view of life and her own potential for the future.

#### *How the CtD project has helped*

After hearing other women's stories, Cllr Way realised she was not alone in the issues that she faced. This helped her find her own voice and recognise her own potential as a mentor and leader.

"Being so vulnerable and having the opportunity to express yourself on all these issues that are relatable and seeing that everybody is going through the same thing made me find my voice and gave me a reason to speak out," said Cllr Way.

Despite being nervous about public speaking, Cllr Way gave presentations on leadership to the young women attending some of the project's leadership training sessions. This built up her confidence in speaking in public. In addition, her self-confidence was given a boost and her perspective of herself changed when she realised how impressed her mentee was and how excited she was to be working with Lesley.

Being involved in the network and having a mentee who looked up to her helped Lesley to step outside her comfort zone and think about running for mayor. After campaigning in May 2020 she was subsequently elected and became mayor of Sitegi.

“This was a tipping point; after being content to be a back bencher for nine years the initiative of this project pushed me to achieve that,” explained Cllr Way.

“When we had leadership training sessions with mentees I was presenting on leadership; this helped me find confidence in speaking to a group of people; it really was an experience that contributed positively.

“My mentee helped me change my perspective. When I met with her she was so engaged with me and so excited about what I had to offer - she was impressed. It made me step back and realise I could be a mentor and then I started to sound like somebody I would like to be and I realised that I am that somebody.”

Lesley has found that the whole experience was also reflected in her family life. Thanks to the good support she has had from her husband, there has been a positive effect on her family and their attitude to women, showing them how to support women and value them in society.

### *Impact*

Cllr Lesley Way has not only been elected mayor, but has added to her achievements: she now is a member of the presidential committee of SWALGA, and after becoming a board member of AMICAALL has now become its deputy chair.

“This whole experience has taught me to believe in myself; it was quite intimidating at first because a lot of women who were there are my own age, so I was doubting myself as to whether I was capable of mentoring, or equipped to take on an important and crucial role for their future in local government,” said Cllr Way.

“This comes from how society has forced to believe that we can’t take on roles and responsibilities, so now I know I have a purpose and can continue to inspire other young women.

“This programme has given me self-affirmation: from being councillor to mayor, member of presidential committee of SWALGA, deputy chair of AMICAALL, so I cannot doubt myself and my capabilities any more, or what I might accomplish in the future.”

“Thanks to getting involved the Jo Cox Connecting the Dots project and the mentorship programme I have had the chance, together with my CEO who is also a woman, to step outside my comfort zone.”

“I hope that what I have taken from this programme on a personal level I can engage more and communicate to other women to take the first step in local government,” she concluded.

