For many of us living in the capital cities, Darwin seems like the most far-flung of outposts. For Suzi Hullick it is the “land of opportunity”.

LEADERSHIP IN THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

Darwin is where she was first posted as an electronic warfare specialist with the Royal Australian Navy in 1988. And it’s where she is currently based as Westpac’s state general manager of commercial banking for South Australia, Tasmania and the Territory.

In 2012, Suzi’s leadership skills were spotted in the bank’s inaugural Women of Influence employee awards.

Her prize? Participation in the AGSM Women in Leadership Program.

“I was so thrilled to be recognised for my work in indigenous employment and advocacy” says Suzi. “I know from personal experience that other banks talk about supporting women. But Westpac really does focus on the development of women and provides real opportunities for women to lead.”

“Female leadership is discussed in the boardroom and then executed on the ground” she says. “It flows right through the business.”

THE AGSM EXPERIENCE

Suzi says her program touched every aspect of what she was going through and what she was contemplating. “Everything fell into place at the prime time in my career.”

“The content was incredibly relevant for me as a female in middle management wanting to take the next step. It was the pathway to my next step” she says.

She especially appreciated the structure of the program with four two-day modules punctuated with a period of time back in the workplace.

“You get the chance to check ideas and practice with a supportive group. Then head back to the business to implement. And then you come back for more coaching. It’s such a rare opportunity.”

Suzi still draws on her reference materials from time to time. “If I’m going into a tough discussion I might think ‘hmm, what would Rosamund Christie do right now?’ and I’ll go through my tips and set my course.”

“Rosamund was incredible the way she challenged my thinking and thought processes.”

It was also the diversity of the program presenters that made a strong impression.

“It [AGSM Women in Leadership program] was the pathway to my next step”

Suzi Hullick, Westpac
on Suzi. “They are all very different women. But all of them are strong leaders. The discussions, the one-on-one coaching and the networking were incredible” she says. “It’s a well-targeted and very well resourced program.”

Suzi still keeps in touch with her cohort and finds the members productive for bouncing around different leadership issues. “It’s reassuring to receive advice from these very strong and capable women.”

THE OUTCOME

The fact that Westpac backed Suzi’s participation speaks volumes on the bank’s commitment to develop its female leaders.

“It was acknowledgement that I had a voice at the table” she says. “Women working in finance, and particularly in regional Australia, do not typically have their opinion sought.”

“So that is the first tangible from the program: the courage and affirmation of my voice. The second is how my role as a state manager has changed.”

Suzi likens herself to someone who was a “passive observer on the bus” to someone who is now a “thought leader”.

“For me, this transformation has been critical. I like having my voice. And I like hearing that I’m part of the changing face of commercial banking” she says with satisfaction.

“I could not have stepped up and made the change on my own” she reflects.

The year 2013 was a huge year for Suzi. And 2014 is shaping up as a big one too. She’s recently been asked to add New South Wales to her state management bow for a while.

She also has plans for major changes that will help grow indigenous communities through micro-finance and small business development.

“We are leading the nation in these initiatives” she says proudly. But we need people in the right locations who can lead these changes. With the support of my team, I’m up for the challenge.”