

NZ Express's Abbey Ray rises to the challenge

WORDS BY WOMEN IN ROAD TRANSPORT CHAIR, MERYN MORRISON

Abbey Ray, dispatch manager at NZ Express Transport in Christchurch, is one extremely busy woman. Not only does she work long hours dealing with the day-to-day challenges of managing the dispatch operations of the largest road carrier of containers to and from Lyttelton Port, but she is also studying towards a Bachelor of Commerce degree at Lincoln University.

She admits to having next to no knowledge of trucks, axle ratings, HPMV or how to dispatch when she started at NZ Express Ray. She did, however, know all about containers after five years of working for the Lyttelton Port Company. She also credits the close working relationship she had already established with NZ Express drivers for making her transition a lot easier than it could have been.

Through a lot of hard work and long hours, as well as guidance and mentoring from her bosses Angus and John Petrie, Ray progressed to become dispatch manager 12 months ago, only three years after joining the company.

Ray enjoys the job. Her working day is varied and there is always a challenge to be worked through. She gets a lot of satisfaction from getting to the end of the day knowing that her team completed what they set out to do that morning. She is full of praise for her dispatchers, describing them as "great people, each with their own different personalities and each bringing something unique to the team".

Ray started at NZ Express just after the Canterbury earthquakes and she describes it as a very challenging time. She is proud that the company was able to get back up and running within hours of the major 'quake and that the staff put their lives on hold to help the community.

NZ Express is still involved with many of the projects undertaken as part of the recovery and rebuild of Christchurch. Most recognisably, this included organising and creating the container wall that protected road access to Redcliffs and Sumner from the unstable rock face above. An eyesore to many, but without doubt an integral project that allowed continued access to those seaside communities.

The impact from the earthquakes continues to play a major role in NZ Express operations. Damaged and uneven roads have increased repairs and maintenance on the fleet, while the continuous re-planning of routes to avoid roadworks and road closures presents a constant challenge for the dispatch team.

NZ Express currently boasts ten female employees, five out driving trucks with a



Meryn Morrison

further five situated in the office, making up 20 percent of the company's staff. When Ray started, none of the company's drivers were women and she still believes there are a number of impediments to more women joining the industry.

"The biggest issue my female drivers face is the lack of facilities when they are out and about," Ray says. "This is slowly starting to change but still has a long way to go."

Ray also believes that transport operators needs to start having a zero tolerance policy towards the remaining pockets of chauvinism within the industry, especially those who see it as a 'man's industry'.

"I think the key is to have a good support system in place for women within your business. If I had not had such great support here at NZ Express it would have made my progression 10 times harder."

Recently, NZ Express's Samantha Fairbrass won the Region 4 Young Driver event of the New Zealand Truck Driving Championship, an achievement the whole company is really proud of. Just two years after obtaining her class 2 licence Fairbrass is now responsible for one of the company's eight-wheeler swing lifts on a day-to-day basis and a 40-foot swing lift when required.

"It is great to see such enthusiasm in our younger staff who are wanting to learn more and grow within the industry," says Abbey. ■

For more information or to get involved, email wirtnz@gmail.com



Abbey Ray (left) presenting Samantha Fairbrass with her award as winner of the Young Driver category at the Region 4 Truck Driving Competition