



COLLEEN MITROW

2006

**PAM GILBERT AWARD
FOR GENDER EQUITY**



THE PAM GILBERT AWARD FOR GENDER EQUITY 2006 WAS PRESENTED TO COLLEEN MITROW AT THE BRISBANE BRANCH ANNUAL DINNER.

COLLEEN MITROW is the principal of Southside Education. She has had a long career in education, teaching in both State and Independent schools. As a teacher, she became aware of the large numbers of young people who are often marginalised both in the school community and in the wider community. Colleen observed that most young people not coping in the traditional school system had often suffered extremely adverse life circumstances and many continued to experience poverty, neglect and ongoing personal and family issues. The young people with the greatest needs and the saddest lives were those being excluded from school systems.

It was extremely difficult to provide an effective response to such troubled

young people within rigid school structures and in schools that had limited support staff.

Recognising that education is the key to empowerment for the burgeoning number of disadvantaged young people in our community, in 1997, with the support of State and Commonwealth Governments and *Queensland Baptist Care*, Colleen found the opportunity to begin developing a new school model for young women. The democratic school model developed with input from young people being crucial.

From small beginnings in a suburban house in Tarragindi, with seven young women as students, the school became an approved independent school in 1999 and now has a population of

80 young women. The school's latest addition is a JET Crèche and Family Centre where young women can leave their babies while attending classes.

At Southside Education, a multi-disciplinary staff provides both personal support and education for its students. Southside is about participation and reconnection to the school community and to the wider community. In this way many young women become empowered to achieve both their personal and academic goals. Last year all ten senior students entered employment or further training and three started university courses.

Half of the student population at Southside has no stable place to live and this continues to seriously impact on their education outcomes. Southside hopes that in the future, accommodation will be able to be provided as one of the essential services provided by the school.