

Inspirational Mt Alvernia College educator receives inaugural award for exceptional teaching in a girls' school

Helen Stower, Teacher Librarian and Program Leader of the iCentre at Mount Alvernia College is the inaugural winner of the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia's Roslyn Otzen Award for Exceptional Teaching. Her goal of bringing literature into the life of teenage girls and the initiatives she put in place to achieve this won her the attention of the judging panel.

Launched in October 2018, the initiative is the first of its kind in Australasia to focus on girls' education. By sharing the teaching practices and programs of inspirational teachers and placing their achievements in the spotlight, the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia (Alliance) aims to raise awareness for the unparalleled opportunities girls' schools provide for girls and young women and the incredible work our teachers are doing.

Loren Bridge, Executive Officer at the Alliance said it was vital to acknowledge the importance of great teachers is in the work they do to inspire students, colleagues and communities.

'We're delighted to recognise their achievements and commitment to educating girls through this award, and to show our appreciation for the work they do and the difference they make to their students, their schools and the wider community,' said Ms Bridge.

Award winner Helen Stower said she was passionate about improving girls' engagement with books for two specific reasons.

'The first is that vast research into the impact of reading beyond curriculum offerings concludes that it improves academic and social outcomes. The second is that when I read books and articles about people who have achieved great things in their lives and careers, they repeat a common message – storytelling is a key ingredient to success,' said Mrs Stower.

'Through books, our girls will experience great stories and I hope these will translate into an ability to tell their own stories in life.

'I was overwhelmed to learn that I am the inaugural recipient of Roslyn Otzen Award for Exceptional Teaching. I absolutely love teaching girls and think school libraries play a very special role in education, it is certainly a career highlight for the Alliance of Girls' Schools to commend my work as a teacher librarian.'

Roslyn Otzen, Alliance founder and former president of the Alliance, and after whom the award was named, said that great teachers in girls' schools bring out a unique strength in their students.

'The teachers' example is not merely in how and what they teach, but in their encouragement for girls to seize all that the world has for them, unafraid and filled with enthusiasm', said Ms Otzen.

About Helen's program

Recognising that reading levels amongst adolescent girls have been steadily decreasing in Australia, Helen began to investigate programs that would reverse this trend at Mount Alvernia.

Her approach consisted of three key strategies:

1. Classroom practice: identifying the need for evidence-based research to inform her practice, Helen initiated a project to gather data about the impact of the reading program, called Campfire, in year 7 and 8.
2. Extra-curricular offerings: to foster a reading culture and create a reading community, Helen identified that opportunities beyond the classroom were needed to engage students in the world of books and literature. To this end, Helen set about collaborating with other passionate colleagues in the teaching and book worlds, and inter-school Book Clubs and the *Read Like a Girl* movement was established in partnership with St Rita's College and Riverbend books.
3. Collaboration with all stakeholders (parents and staff): to create a reading community, Helen recognised the need for all stakeholders to be onboard. To this end, she initiated a project called *It takes a reader to grow a reader*. This project encapsulates a series of opportunities for parents to be involved.

An interview and photo can be arranged.

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About the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia:

The Alliance is a not for profit organisation which advocates for and supports the distinctive work of girls' schools in their provision of unparalleled opportunities for girls. It represents all school sectors – independent, Catholic and state, and has over 180 member schools throughout Australasia, representing over 132,000 girls and 17,000 educators.