

Recognising the importance of Roberta Perkin's work at Southside Justice

Launch of Southside Justice Office 4 May 2023, Hilary Knack, Manager of the LGBTIQ Legal Program

I want to acknowledge the work and life of Roberta Perkins as part of today's proceedings. As special guests today we have, Deborah and Barbara Barker, as members of Roberta Perkins family to celebrate the naming of one of the Roberta Perkins meeting room. I also want to acknowledge Son Vivienne, as the CEO of Transgender Victoria.

Roberta Perkins is a much-celebrated transgender woman, that advocated for trans and sex worker rights in Australia since the 1970s. See Roberta's account of [police brutality and the treatment of trans sex workers in Sydney, 23 September 1983.](#)

Roberta, born in 1940, was a sociologist and an author as well as a renown trail blazer. Her fierce advocacy has been demonstrated through her bravery, dedication, love and support for trans and sex worker, communities. She is recognised as one of Australia's first openly transgender women and as a founding member of the Australian Transgender Association and the Australian Prostitutes Collective in the early 1980s. In 1983 Roberta successfully campaigned for funding to establish Australia's first transgender housing support service, 'Tiresias House' in Sydney, that would later become the Gender Centre. See [gendercentre.org.au](#)

Her life and work continues to be celebrated across Australia.

Over the last 50 years of our advocacy Southside Justice has worked closely with both the sex worker communities, trans and gender diverse and broader LGBTIQ community members. In recognition of Roberta's life and work in 2019 Southside Justice named our first trans and gender diverse legal project after Roberta Perkins. It was the Roberta Perkins Law Project.

This was the first legal program in Australia to be led by and for trans and gender diverse people. It has also been a key in advocating for and highlighting the legal needs of trans and gender diverse people in Victorian prisons. The legacy of this work continues today.

The significance of naming one of Southside Justice's key meeting rooms after Roberta is to ensure that we continue to celebrate her life and work and the impact of our first trans specific legal program, as well as the 50 years of support Southside Justice has proudly provided to these communities. It is a commit to continue to do this work and provide a safe space that celebrates the histories and contribution of trans and gender diverse people in our community.

Lastly the Roberta's family would like to acknowledge that Roberta would have been incredibly proud to have the room named after her in our legal centre and would like to thank Southside Justice for this recognition.

On behalf of Southside Justice I want to say that we are incredibly proud to contribute to the recognition of her legacy.

Find out more about Roberta Perkins: [Stepping in to sex work history through the archives of Roberta Perkins.](#)



Deborah and Barbara Parker at the opening of the Southside Justice office in May 2023.