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Not-for-profit Chief Executive named South Australia's top business woman

23rd October 2015

An Adelaide woman responsible for creating financial stability in a leading not-for-profit has been named 2015 Telstra South Australia Business Woman of the Year.

Kate Thiele, Chief Executive of Guide Dogs SA/NT, joined the organisation at a time when the economy was uncertain due to the global financial crisis. Using her extensive sales and marketing experience, Ms Thiele brokered a multi-faceted giving program that tripled turnover, grew active donors from 5,000 to over 50,000 and regular donors from just 450 a year to an astonishing 21,000.

During her tenure, Ms Thiele has driven the expansion of the program to include Autism Assistance Dogs – the first Guide Dog organisation in Australia to run the program, offering families with at-risk children the ability to lead lives that many take for granted.

Ms Thiele was also presented the For Purpose and Social Enterprise Award at the 21st annual Telstra South Australia Business Women's Awards at the Adelaide Oval last week.

With a career spanning the health, retail and manufacturing sectors, Ms Thiele said the key to her success has been a passion for enabling others to better their own realities and a strong leadership style.

"I am passionate about empowering others. Witnessing people living with disability opening up their worlds is truly humbling and I am proud to be part of their journey."

"Guide Dogs SA/NT faces unprecedented change. Disruption needs to be seen as a positive opportunity to reshape and redefine. I love the challenge of successfully adapting an organisation to problems that may not yet be clear and situations that are fluid."

Telstra Chief Operations Officer and Telstra Business Women's Award Ambassador, Kate McKenzie, said Ms Thiele and all the South Australian winners had achieved outstanding results in their respective areas of business.

"The 2015 South Australia winners are brilliant business women who are passionate, courageous and not afraid to challenge the established status quo."

Ms McKenzie said the Telstra Awards judges made particular reference to her academic achievements and commitment to drive change during her time with the organisation.

"The judges noted that, as the first South Australian to secure a fully funded non-profit fellowship to Harvard Business School, Kate has been able to radically change the operating environment within the not-for-profit sector."

The winner of the Entrepreneur Award and founder of Rise High Financial Solutions, Marissa Schulze was recognised for her work in assisting more than 1,500 Australians achieve their financial goals; while winner of the Start-Up Award, Sarah Bartholomeusz, was honoured for the provision of innovative virtual legal services through her business You Legal.

The University of Adelaide's Professor Pascale Quester won the Government and Academia category, Ashleigh Stiling of Harsco Metals and Minerals took home the Young Business Women's Award and Michaela Webster of Peregrine Corporation won the Corporate and Private Award.

The South Australia winners will proceed to the national finals in Melbourne on Wednesday, 18 November.

WINNERS OF THE 2015 TELSTRA BUSINESS WOMEN'S AWARDS

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2015 Telstra South Australia Business Woman of the Year and the For Purpose and Social Enterprise Award**Kate Thiele, Guide Dogs SA/NT, Adelaide
Start-Up Award- Sarah Bartholomeusz, You Legal (Adelaide)**

At 32 weeks pregnant, Sarah Bartholomeusz was made redundant from a role as an in-house lawyer and joint company secretary at a leading public company. The redundancy provided her with the incentive to establish You Legal, her own independent firm of virtual lawyers. You Legal is a new category of corporate and commercial law firm that has reinvented the way people engage legal services, providing an alternative to engaging traditional and often highly costly law firms. The Telstra Awards judges see Ms Bartholomeusz as a future leader with an innovative approach to business.

Entrepreneur Award- Marissa Schulze, Rise High Financial Solutions (Adelaide)

Marissa Schulze's passion for business was clear from an early age, when she was named Australian Young Achievement Business Person of the Year at 16. Ms Schulze began her mortgage broking and insurance business, Rise High Financial Solutions in 2011 with the aim to educate, inspire and empower people to improve their financial literacy and well-being. The judges were impressed with Marissa's commitment to assisting those in the community most in need of her expertise.

Government and Academia- Pascale Quester, University of Adelaide (Adelaide)

French-born Professor Pascale Quester is an active researcher in the areas of consumer behaviour and marketing communications and also drives the learning and teaching agenda at the University of Adelaide. In 2010, as a result of her contributions, the University of Adelaide produced the first female Aboriginal Rhodes Scholar. Professor Quester holds a PhD in Marketing, is a distinguished fellow of the Australia and New Zealand Marketing Academy and holds the National Order of Merit from France. The judges took note of her dedication to promoting culture and diversity within the University.

Corporate and Private Award- Michaela Webster, Peregrine Corporation (Adelaide)

Michaela Webster is Chief Operating Officer for On The Run (OTR), a privately-owned convenience store chain operating across South Australia that is part of the Peregrine Corporation. Over the past ten years Michaela has been instrumental in growing the business from 25 to 125 sites with 2000 employees. Operating under an accredited traineeship process, OTR is also a training centre with a team of 17 recruiters and trainers, training some 10,000 people over the past decade in South Australia. Ms Webster's celebration of diversity within the workforce and her community-mindedness struck a chord with judges.

Young Business Women's Award- Ashleigh Stiling, Harsco Metals and Minerals (Whyalla)

Ashleigh Stiling joined Harsco Metals and Minerals in 2008 as a cadet from university. She is the company's first and only female Operations Manager in Australia. Ms Stiling's role involves managing four shift leaders as well as co-ordinating all training requirements and the daily production activities of the operation to ensure customer expectations and internal budgets are met. In 2014, Ms Stiling won the Whyalla Business Woman of the Year, and her tenacity within a male-dominated industry received commendations from this year's judges.

More information on the Telstra Business Women's Awards can be found at www.womensawards.com

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