

Left on a plane at airport for hours



Disability advocate Karin Swift in Hobart where she was an attendee of the Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) leadership week. Picture: Amy Brown

SUE BAILEY

A DISABILITY advocate was forced to sit on a plane at Hobart Airport for more than two hours – and then fly back to Melbourne – because she was told “we just can’t get you off” because of a lack of infrastructure to handle her wheelchair.

The treatment of Karin Swift, a life member and former president of Women With Disabilities Australia, has been described as “outrageous”.

Ms Swift said she had flown to Hobart on six previous occasions and been able to leave the plane.

“We’ve stayed in Hobart regularly and I’ve gotten off the plane easy, it’s not been an issue.

“I’d say I was on the plane for two hours while they fig-

ured what to do. That plane was going back to Melbourne, so there was a plane full of passengers completely inconvenienced too.

“There was a fellow in charge and he said ‘we just can’t get you off.’”

Qantas said it spent 90 minutes trying to find ways for Ms Swift to safely disembark.

“We appreciate this would have been very unsettling for Ms Swift, but our teams did

everything possible to help her safely disembark the aircraft,” a spokesman said.

“Unfortunately, it wasn’t safe to use the eagle lift.

“The following day we had one of our Melbourne-based team travel with her to help her disembark with the help of additional special assistance team members.”

Ms Swift had flown to Hobart from Brisbane to attend a WWDA leadership forum and said she believed a

cherry picker used to take her off the plane was not available.

“I was completely deflated, I didn’t know what to do. This has never happened before. I’ve travelled many countries and they all just find a way to make it work.

“So to be sent back. I felt a bit like a recalcitrant school-girl, it just felt awful.”

Ms Swift was returned to Hobart on Monday with a Qantas staffer on board who brought a ramp to be placed over the exit to allow her chair to go down the ramp and onto the tarmac.

WWDA CEO Carolyn Frohmader said she was “angry and embarrassed” by what happened to Ms Swift.

“What sort of message does this send to disabled people who may want to come to Tasmania? You’re

only welcome if you’re not a wheelchair user?”

“Or if you’re ‘too disabled’ you’re not welcome?”

“What happened to Karin is simply outrageous. She has the same right as anyone else to visit Tasmania.”

Ms Frohmader said Tasmania had committed to upholding the human rights of all people with disabilities.

“Someone needs to be held accountable for what happened to Karin so that this never happens to any other wheelchair user wanting to come to Tasmania.”

Ms Swift said her experience had made her determined to ensure “this doesn’t happen to either myself or another person again”.

A Hobart Airport spokesman said it was a matter for Qantas.

susan.bailey@news.com.au

“There was a fellow in charge and he said ‘we just can’t get you off’”

DISABILITY ADVOCATE KARIN SWIFT

Backbone of health system honoured

SUE BAILEY

THE “backbone” of Tasmania’s health system – nurses and midwives – have been recognised for their dedication and professionalism.

The Tasmanian Public Sector Nursing and Midwifery Excellence Awards were announced in Hobart on Friday night with Royal Hobart Hospital midwife Hannah Yates named early career nurse or midwife leader, RHH clinical midwife Kristy Newitt winning emerging nurse or midwife innovator and the individual excellence in nursing or midwifery practice award going to director of nursing at the West Coast District Hospital Amanda Coulson.

The outstanding achievement in nursing or midwifery



Award winners Hannah Yates and Amanda Coulson. Picture: Richard Jupe

leadership went to nursing and midwifery director at the Launceston General Hospital Judy Parish, with the Covid testing clinics nursing staff honoured for team excellence in practice.

Ms Yates said she was humbled to be nominated and to win was “amazing”.

She praised her inspirational colleagues for “making a real difference” to women, babies and their families to optimise their birth journey.

“I love going to work and no one day is ever the same,” she said.

Ms Coulson also said every day was different and there were “no quick fixes in health”.

Tasmania’s chief nurse and midwifery officer, Associate Professor Francine Douce, said recognising nurses and midwives had never been more important than now.

“Nurses and midwives are indeed the backbone of the health system. They are the powerhouse that keeps the machine of health going,” she said.

HAVE SAY ON HEALTH HUB

HEALTH insurer St Lukes-Health is planning a new health and wellbeing hub in Hobart.

To coincide with the Christmas pageant on Saturday it threw open the doors of its new centre on the corner of Liverpool and Elizabeth streets and invited people to have their say on transforming the building.

St LukesHealth chair Mel Lukianenko said the 70-year-old insurer wanted people’s

input on health topics they wanted to learn more about.

“We know a lot of people struggle to navigate the healthcare system or are unsure where to turn for information on health topics,” Ms Lukianenko said.

“You shouldn’t have to be sick to get value from us. It all goes towards our vision of making Tasmania the healthiest island on the planet.”

The building will be open on Monday and Tuesday.

Musk on the nose with Twitter employees

THE future of Twitter hangs in the balance after its offices were locked down and key employees announced their departures in defiance of an ultimatum from new owner Elon Musk.

Fears grew that a fresh exodus would threaten the existence of one of the world’s most influential internet platforms, which serves as a key communication tool for the world’s media, politicians, companies,

activists and celebrities.

According to ex-employees and US media, hundreds of employees chose “no” to Musk’s demand that they either be “extremely hardcore” or leave the company.

“So my friends are gone, the vision is murky, there is a storm coming and no financial upside. What would you do?” tweeted Peter Clowes, who re-

fused Musk’s final warning.

Musk, also the chief executive of Tesla and SpaceX, has come under fire for radical changes at the firm, which he bought less than a month ago for \$US44bn (\$66bn).

He had already fired half of Twitter’s 7500 staff, scrapped a work-from-home policy and imposed long hours, as his at-

tempts to overhaul the company faced backlash.

On Saturday, Musk appeared to be pressing on with his plans to reinstate previously banned accounts, including that of comedian Kathy Griffin, which had been suspended after she impersonated him on the site. He did not immediately welcome back former president Donald Trump, saying the “decision has not yet been made”.



Elon Musk