

Volunteering for Dreams Take Flight

A personal story

BY KATHRINE O'NEILL

After a restless night worrying that I'd not hear my alarm go off, in the wee hours of Oct. 1, I started my day a bit earlier than usual. At 3:45 a.m., I crawled out of bed, stepped gingerly over my bewildered dogs, and proceeded to get dressed. Why was I up before the birds? I had volunteered to help out at the Montreal chapter's Dreams Take Flight "Dreams Flight," set to depart that morning.

When I arrived at Dorval base at 4:30, the place was already a hive of activity. Volunteers, feeling the first nip of fall's arrival, guided arriving cars to their parking spaces and showed sleepy-eyed families the way to the hangar. However, once they stepped inside, all thoughts of sleep vanished.

The hangar was packed with people, there was music, balloons, Disney characters on the hunt for kid hugs, volunteers working the registration tables and mingling with the kids

and their families, and the media recording the event. You could feel a sense of anticipation everywhere. Best of all, everyone had big smiles on their faces.

Dreams become memories

As I chatted with the kids and volunteers I remembered the other Dreams Take Flight I was lucky enough to participate in. Back in 2000, I took part in the Calgary chapter's "Dream Day." Each time I think of it, I'm engulfed by a kaleidoscope of images, memories and emotions.

Two memories stand out. One child became overexcited and couldn't calm down. Seeing her distress, I did the only thing I could think of – I started to gently rub her neck and back. Her head immediately dropped to my shoulder, and she relaxed. This episode made me realize how important, and comforting, touch is – especially for a confused child.

The other was the heartfelt statement from the young boy I spent the day with, that this was "the most wonderful day of my life. I'm never going to forget it!"

Volunteers make a difference

But the most inspiring thing of all is the profound commitment and dedication shown by the Air Canada employee volunteers who give up great chunks of their personal time and energy in order to make this event happen. The reason they do it is for the children.



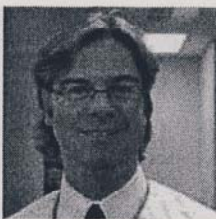
Making a positive difference in the lives of special needs children across Canada is the driving force behind this effort. The children and their families face difficult challenges that most of us can barely imagine. That is why, throughout the year in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax, a dedicated force of employees organizes special fundraising events to create this day of magic. If you're interested in getting involved in this worthy cause, check with your local chapter. You can find their coordinates by visiting the website at www.dreamstakeflight.ca.

Back in Montreal...

The next three hours went by quickly and before I knew it, the kids were boarding the aircraft and heading for Walt Disney World. They waved all the way up the stairs. And everyone in the hangar – families, volunteers, sponsors and employees who had come to share in the magic – cheered, clapped, cried and waved back to them. This was a morning none of us was going to forget.

2003 Dream Flight schedule

- Winnipeg – April 9
- Edmonton – May 14
- Toronto – May 28
- Ottawa – Sept. 24
- Montreal – Oct. 1
- Vancouver – Oct. 21
- Calgary – Oct. 22
- Halifax – Oct. 22



"To accomplish great things, we must not only act but also dream. Not only plan but also believe." – Anatole France



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