

ESOL News Oregon

Volunteer pilots provide free flights for families in need

(MAY 6, 2022) Oregon is a large state. Much of the state is rural. Many parts do not have hospitals or clinics. People drive long distances to receive medical attention, especially for specialized care. This takes a lot of time and money.

Angel Flight West is a nonprofit organization that helps. It provides free flights for people in need. Volunteer pilots fly patients from rural areas to hospitals and doctors in 13 Western states, including Oregon. Sometimes patients travel on a regular airline. Usually, however, they travel on a small, private airplane with its pilot. According to AFW, "pilots and partners donate their time, flying skills, and all the expenses of each flight."

Free flights are available for patients traveling for non-emergency care at major research and children's hospitals, specialized treatment centers, and even camps for burn survivors or cancer patients. Pilots also help relocate people in special situations, such as survivors of domestic violence. Often a companion travels with the patient.

"AFW is often the connection that enables a patient to get to an important treatment or diagnosis that would otherwise be inaccessible because of financial or logistical challenges," says the organization.

To travel with AFW, the patient must be medically stable. They must walk and sit upright. They must have a medical appointment. They must have financial need. Patients might also need to fly in a small unpressurized airplane.

One Oregon example comes from Eugene where a young child needed to travel to Children's Hospital in Seattle. The child, Brenna, has Crouzon syndrome. This is a condition that prevents the skull from growing normally. Her family could not afford trips to Seattle. So a social worker connected them with AFW. Volunteer pilots have provided Brenna and her mom with more than 20 round-trip flights.

Another special mission in Oregon was in 2020 when wildfires burned large parts of the state. Firefighters needed more supplies quickly. So volunteer pilots helped deliver N95 masks to Oregon firefighters.

AFW has given more than 93,000 flights since it began in 1983, including about 40 in Oregon in the past 90 days.

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