



Down to Earth: BCMOS arranged 40 flights during summer 2007.

BCMOS reaches new heights

The latest BCMOS adventure got off the ground this year: gliding.

The program, which ran from May to September, used Vancouver Soaring Association's facilities at Hope Airfield. Thirty people with significant disabilities enjoyed 40 flights, with half getting to take the controls for a while.

Participants were transferred into a glider, which was pulled aloft by a Cessna L-19. Once the towrope was jettisoned they flew high above the towering Cascade Mountains, enjoying flights of between 45 minutes and an hour, including an aerobatics option – a loop.

Gliding program coordinator James Willetts, who is quadriplegic, flew a glider for the first time last year, and since then has been urging others with significant disabilities to try the sport. "It puts smiles on people's faces – and that's my reward," he said. "It's a rush."

Participant Dan Andrews, a quadriplegic following a heli-logging accident in January, described his flight: "Absolutely incredible. It brought me up when I was feeling down. The view was incredible."

Fellow flyer Sid Evans described his two loops as "real sweet." He said: "It was 100 per cent freedom. You are up there with the eagles. The last thing you think about is that you are a quadriplegic."

Jo-Anne Burleigh, resident therapist at Vancouver's GF Strong rehab hospital said activities like gliding are vital to the well-being of patients recovering from spinal cord injury. "If people have been active in the past, it's important to get them back to doing things to show them that they still can be active. It exposes them to the opportunities that are out there – there are so many possibilities, so many things to try. We encourage people to participate."

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