



Sky's the limit to enjoyment

By SHAYNE ELDRIDGE

It's a rare perspective looking down on the world from a plane.

But thanks to Child Flight Charitable Trust, with generous help from local businesses and sponsors, children with special needs can experience that thrill in a 30-minute flight over the Hamilton and Raglan areas.

Chief executive Chris Jordan started the organisation and dedicated it to his sister, who had two children with Downs Syndrome and died last year from cancer.

Child Flight registered with the Charities Commission in September 2012 and had its inaugural flight on November 7.

Since then, about 25 children have benefited from the programme.

"We give kids a 3-D view of the world," Mr Jordan said.

Child Flight aligned themselves with Patricia Avenue School and worked with them to come up with a design of how the programme could operate.

The school would identify students, permission would be sought from parents or caregivers and the flights would take place.

Child Flight has also become involved with the Waikato Chamber of Commerce and Child Cancer Foundation.

When the *Hamilton Press* visited the Waikato Aero Club, where the flights take off, Te Kauwhata Primary School students Liam Pepper, 7, and Joseph Campbell, 9, as well as Hillcrest Normal School student and Child Cancer Foundation member Harry Logan, 9, were the recipients of the free flight.

All three had not flown before and were excited to be given the opportunity.

Safety is paramount for the organisation and Mr Jordan, who is a pilot with more than 300 hours of experience and fellow pilot Murray Baker, a Qantas Airlines pilot, both fly the plane with two passengers in the back.

Mr Jordan said they deem children with "special needs" as those with intellectual and physical disabilities, children with cancer and those who are "at risk".

"Any child that is in need," he said.

He said if they were successful, he hoped to take the Child Flight concept around the country.

In order to continue to offer the service and to hopefully expand their reach, Child Flight is seeking benefactors.

At present, local businesses and people have been sponsoring flights.

Mr Jordan said they hoped to expand the operation to take children in wheelchairs up in the plane - with their wheelchair.

"We want to promote special needs and the fact that because you're special needs doesn't mean you can't do something that others can do.

"You can do anything."

■ To find out more about Child Flight visit the website childflight.blogspot.co.nz or the Facebook page facebook.com/ChildFlightCharitableTrust.



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READY FOR TAKE-OFF:

Te Kauwhata Primary School students Liam Pepper, 7, left, and Joseph Campbell, 9, were the latest recipients of a Child Flight Charitable Trust flight.

Photo: CHRISTEL YARDLEY