



## DISABILITY NEWS

Promoting Full Citizenship for People with Disabilities

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WINTER 2007

# Up, up and away ... BCMOS set to soar this summer

## *Pilot project takes to the skies*

A new leisure opportunity is being launched by BC Mobility Opportunities Society (BCMOS) this year: gliding.

The summer project will allow members to take to the skies with an experienced pilot for flights of between 45 minutes and one-hours' duration. It will use the clubhouse and equipment of B.C.'s biggest gliding club, Vancouver Soaring Association (VSA), which is based at Hope.

The seven gliders at Hope Airfield are hauled into the air by a Cessna L-19, then the towrope is jettisoned, and they remain aloft for as long as the thermals will carry them.

BCMOS gliding program coordinator James Willetts wants to open up the sport to people with significant physical disabilities.

As a quadriplegic who went through nine months of rehab at G.F. Strong, he knows first hand about the depression that follows a spinal cord injury. He regularly returns to visit patients, hoping to instill confidence that

"there is life after becoming a quadriplegic or paraplegic."

Willetts flew a glider for the first time last year and enjoyed it so much he drove nine others to the grass airstrip, 150 km east of Vancouver, so they could fly. Meanwhile, he was planning to enable many more to experience flight – so he secured BCMOS backing to turn the dream into reality. Forty people with disabilities will enjoy flights in 2007.

"It's so peaceful when you are up there," he explained. "There's no noise, and you are soaring like an eagle. It's the most amazing sensation."

"I got to take the controls. It was difficult, because there's so much to concentrate on. They made me do a figure eight, which was tough without any points of reference."

Introductory flights generally don't go longer than 30 minutes, but the VSA will double that for this project, "to give people with disabilities a really good experience,"



Photo: Submitted

**High-flier: Jack Levesque of Vancouver gave gliding two thumbs up after his first session last summer.**

said its president, Fiona Bailey.

"We committed to 40 flights this year," she said. "But we have a vision for future growth."

The general public wanting an introductory flight in a VSA glider would pay \$140 for 30 minutes, according to Bailey – flying through this project will cost \$30, which will include

transportation out to Hope Airfield. Flights will be scheduled alternate weeks between May and September.

Volunteers will assist with transfers, but anyone wishing to fly must bring sunglasses, a hat and a packed lunch. More information and bookings: James Willetts 604-837-5616.