



by Phil Pacey



*Angel Flight NZ, [www.angelflightnz.co.nz](http://www.angelflightnz.co.nz), founded in New Zealand in 2011 by AOPA member Lance Weller, was established to help those with health/financial and travelling issues to get to medical appointments in the main centres. This is the story of one such flight.*

On receiving an email request to deliver a six year old boy and his mother from Dargaville to Auckland's Starship Hospital, and as he was to go back the same day, I applied for both legs. My request was accepted and I was scheduled to pick them up from Dargaville at 9.30am 22 July with my wife Judy keen to come and assist.

We arrived at Ardmore Airport to thick fog (the day fog led to total disruption of air services out of Auckland); a phone call to Murray Foster at the Northern Wairoa Aero Club confirmed a similar situation in Dargaville. We got the 206 ready, taxied to the run-up area and did all the pre-flight stuff. Being in the Clevedon Valley, Ardmore is fortunate in that a slight sea breeze from the coast occasionally lifts the fog. With confirmation from Murray that it was also lifting in Dargaville, we took advantage of opportunity and set off.

Airborne we were on top in beautiful weather, calm and clear. The fog stopped at the West Coast but all of Auckland was smothered; we watched the big jets doing their go rounds.

In just under an hour we landed at Dargaville and met Angel Flight Co-ordinator, Ron Miller who had flown his Ultra Light from Whangarei to meet us and our passengers, Joseph Tebbutt and his mother, Erica. Ron had been busy rearranging appointment times as we were running just a little late due to the fog.

Joseph has multiple congenital health issues and has a wheelchair. He is six and firmly told me he would be seven very soon. A truly delightful young chap who also has a twin sister who, thankfully, does not share his condition. Erica, Joseph's mum, is one of those people you can only admire for her dedication and commitment. Long car trips are out of the question for Joseph because of special feeding arrangements over short periods.

With Mum and Joseph strapped in and the wheelchair in the back, we were off. Joseph gave us a running commentary on everything he could see from the plane. Back along the West Coast and landing at a now clear Ardmore (Auckland still fog bound), we delivered our passengers to Ted Leng, the volunteer on the ground

(known as an 'Earth Angel') who was taking them to Starship.

Three hours later Ted had Joseph and Erica back to the airport for their trip home, accompanied by Wayne Scott. As the fog had finally cleared we decided to go over the city to show Joseph the Skytower and Eden Park, the Harbour Bridge and east coast. We got Joseph counting swimming pools to give him a job (do you know how far a 6yr old can count?). In just under an hour we were back on the ground in Dargaville and Joseph and Erica were on their way home.

It was humbling to see such a happy kid, despite major problems requiring serious treatments. For Erica, the Angel Flight avoided a very tiring and disruptive three day, two night round trip. For us it was back to Ardmore with a feeling of satisfaction that we'd made a difference to this little guy's life, and had been able to do it doing what we love best: flying.

I'll be on the lookout for another chance to make a difference, and encourage others to register with [www.angelflightnz.co.nz](http://www.angelflightnz.co.nz) and come on board. 🛩️

Grateful thanks to AOPA [NZ] Magazine