

Service an angel in flight

Patients have alternative to commercial air travel

Fast facts:

What: Angel Flight – a charitable trust providing free air transport for people with medical needs who would benefit from air travel but cannot afford commercial flights

Where: Now operating in Otago and Southland.

More information: angelflightnz.co.nz

By CHE BAKER

Central Otago residents suffering from a medical condition and in need of assistance to attend medical appointments can now call on an air angel.

Angel Flight is a charity which provides flights for patients that need non-urgent medical treatment where road travel could be physically or emotionally demanding.

It started in New Zealand in May last year after retired businessman Lance Weller saw the need for a service for people who could not afford to pay for commercial flights but required them.

He had flown missions for a similar charity in Australia.

Flights are undertaken by private pilots and over 200 aircraft owners and volunteers are already involved.

This week he announced operations have expanded to Otago and Southland with the inclusion of Wanaka and Queenstown-based pilots.

Wanaka Flight Training owner and Angel Flight pilot Peter Hendriks said he and his wife Julie got involved in the charity as a way to give back to the community that supported them.

Families who had a sick family member could struggle to balance appointments and “there is enough stress going on for the families as it is”.

They provided the service to relieve some of that stress and the stress of having to travel

long distances to attend specialist appointments, check-ups or medical treatments such as chemotherapy, he said.

In Queenstown, Angel Flight pilot Hugh McLellan said he had read about the initiative, thought it was a great idea and made contact with organisers.

“Flying is a specialist skill and I have 2000 accumulated hours in a fixed wing craft, with a lot of that time being clocked in over the West Coast.

“There’s maybe only a handful of pilots with those kind of hours and that accumulated knowledge of the area around and its a good thing to use that knowledge and experience for a great cause.”

To qualify, registered health professionals needed to refer “mission requests”.



Angelwings: Angel Flight pilot Peter Hendriks and Earth Angels Julie Hendriks and Philippa Lumsden are looking for families in need of their services in Upper Clutha. The trio are a part of Angel FlightNewZealand which offers free flights and transfers to non-urgent hospital appointments. Photo: CHE BAKER 628678387



Angel wings: Queenstown pilot Hugh McLellan with the plane he will pilot for the charity Angel Flights – offering free flights and transfers to non-urgent hospital appointments.
Photo: GRANT BRYANT 628676213

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