

Saving lives, one flight hour at a time

Use your fractional share to give cancer patients a lift.

Timmy (not his real name) is a four-year-old cancer patient. He cannot fly commercially due to his condition. But he must travel several times a year for treatment between his California home and Duke University Hospital in Raleigh-Durham, N.C.

For many years, Corporate Angel Network has flown patients like Timmy and their families to such appointments on corporate jets. But there's a problem with arranging Timmy's flights: CAN uses empty seats on jets that are already scheduled to make a trip, carrying executives of the company that owns the aircraft. But California to North Carolina is not a heavily traveled business route and so it's hard to find flights for Timmy.

How You Can Help

For further information about the organizations mentioned in this article, see their Web sites: www.corpangelnetwork.org, www.veteransairlift.org and www.angelflight.org. You might also want to visit www.shaircraft.com, for information on ShairGive, a program established by James Butler, the author of the accompanying article. Under the program, his company will work pro bono with donors and charities to facilitate contributions of fractional flight time. —Ed.



What to do? Use fractional aircraft whose owners have donated flight hours to CAN. Although only a small percentage of the charity's flights tap fractional hours, these donations provide critical support for CAN's mission. Without them, patients like Timmy simply would not receive needed treatment.

To date, CAN has worked with NetJets and Flight Options, both of which "have been wonderful," according to CAN executive director Bonnie Le Var. "They allow us to bank these hours, and so they really do become life-saving gifts."

By "banking" hours, CAN is able to aggregate small donations of an hour or two in order to fly the trips it needs. In addition, when a fractional owner contributes hours on a large or mid-size jet, CAN will downgrade to a light jet, thereby maximizing flight time and helping as many patients as possible.

"Last August, we received requests from three cancer patients who didn't know one another, each of whom had an early-morning appointment on the same day at MD Anderson Cancer Treatment Center in Houston," Le Var said. "A scheduled Corporate Angel business flight that they could take from their homes in Oklahoma wasn't available. But because we had banked donated fractional hours, we were able to take these patients round trip to their appointments." Le Var added that because fractional donations enable CAN to schedule itineraries to or from out-of-the-way places that otherwise cannot be served, "We cherish these hours."

Walt Fricke, who founded Veterans Airlift Command last year, said he would also much appreciate the donation of fractional hours to his organization. Fricke, who was wounded during the Vietnam War, knows how hard it is to recover when you're thousands of miles from home. He found that his own healing began in earnest only when his family was able to make the trip to visit him in the hospital. That experience stuck with Fricke and led him to found his organization, which provides veterans and their families with air transportation for medical and other compassionate purposes.

VAC has helped vets like Marine Cpl. Christopher Brink, who was injured in a bomb blast in Iraq. While recovering from his injuries, Corporal Brink received help from VAC that allowed him to travel to meet his platoon as it returned from Iraq and receive his Purple Heart. As one of the pilots who flew Brink's mission said, "This is a great way for us to give back... You just can't imagine the appreciation of the young men and women we are helping."

Although VAC has to date used volunteer pilots and their aircraft to provide these flights, Fricke welcomes the opportunity to employ fractional aircraft as well. "The response has been fantastic," he said. "People feel really good about it."

Also eyeing the use of fractional hours are the volunteers at Angel Flight America. Using



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mostly four- to six-seat, single- and twin-engine piston airplanes, Angel Flight specializes in trips of 1,000 miles or less. But sometimes it undertakes a longer mission that isn't suited to these aircraft. Take, for example, the five-year-old from Los Angeles who needed to get to Boston's Children's Hospital for a bone-marrow transplant. Her fragile immune system eliminated commercial air travel as an option. The flight is too long for small general aviation aircraft, and there was no corporate jet available that was making this time-critical trip. Donated fractional hours perfectly fit the bill.

Founded in 2000, Angel Flight provides seats on private aircraft to patients with various illnesses, as well as veterans and others in financial need. The charity was particularly effective after Hurricane Katrina, flying about 2,500 missions. In total, it flew more than 20,000 flights in 2006.

Angel Flight envisions a variety of uses for fractional hours. In addition to helping patients who need to travel long distances when airlines aren't an option, it hopes to use the hours at times when corporate flights are cancelled. The hours will also be helpful when patients need to quickly reach a medical facility for bone-marrow or organ-transplant surgery, according to Suzanne Rhodes, director of public affairs for Angel Flight Mid-Atlantic.

If you're nearing the end of your fractional-share contract and have hours that will go unused, or if you're just looking for a way to help others, consider donating flight time to one of these worthwhile charities. Or if you have an empty seat or two on an upcoming flight, offer to share a ride with a cancer patient or veteran in need. You might just save a life. □

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