



FAA Volunteer Helps Make Skies A Bit Friendlier for Kids with Disabilities

Flying can seem out of the question for some families of children with autism or other intellectual or developmental disabilities. [Wings for All](#) is a program that helps alleviate some of the stress that families who have a child with a disability experience when traveling by air. The program provides families with the opportunity to practice entering the airport, obtaining boarding passes, going through security and boarding a plane. Wings for All also gives airport, airline, Transportation Security Administration (TSA) professionals and other personnel the opportunity to observe, interact and deliver their services

in a structured, learning environment.

Wings for All aims to help parents find out if air travel is right for their special needs child. The goal is for these families to get a taste of what air travel is all about and remove some of the anxiety and surprises from the process.

AIR's **Brian Morris** has been participating in the program for the past two years after discovering the event through a family connection of his own.

"My wife, Cecilia, is a Service Coordinator Supervisor with Fairfax County's Infant and Toddler Connection. She thought it would be a good opportuni-

ty for me to volunteer," Morris said.

On March 17, Morris volunteered with the Arc of Northern Virginia's Wings for All program at Dulles International Airport. The program took special-needs participants through a step-by-step air travel process — from getting tickets at the ticket counter, to going through security and even boarding a simulated United flight 2839 bound for Baltimore.

Dulles has held the program for the past five years and Ronald Reagan National Airport has participated for the past four. In talking with the United Manager for Accessible Programs, Rosalie Cobb, ►



United is hoping to have more programs like this all over the country. United was able to loan the program a 777 for the day and a flight crew to walk everyone through a safety briefing and answer questions. The event came together through a partnership with Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, The Arc of Northern Virginia and United Airlines. The Arc is a charity that supports people with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as their families.

“At the end of the day, there were a lot of smiles on the faces of the kids, and the parents too,” Morris said. “Many families were going to be travelling over the summer and are going on their first flight as a family.”

Airports across the country will offer [similar programs](#) with several upcoming dates this year.



Brian Morris (second from the left) stands next to other “Wings for All” volunteers.