



## PSN ISSUE

### **CARES Gives Parents Of Older Disabled Children Freedom to Fly**

**By: Lisa Orman**

#### **OLDER KIDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS CAN NOW SOAR WITH FAA-APPROVED CHILD AVIATION RESTRAINT**

Two years ago Helen, the mother of a young girl with special needs, was eager to fly to Disney World for her family's first vacation. She had the time, the hotel and the ticket. Her only obstacle was her daughter's specially designed car seat - it was not FAA approved to use on the airplane. Then Helen heard about the CARES child aviation restraint - a belt and buckle device, designed for any size airplane seat, that the FAA had recently certified for all phases of flight. And it weighed only 1 pound. CARES was the answer to her dilemma!



Along with Helen, other parents of young children with disabilities have discovered CARES in the last 2 years and enjoyed the freedom of just being able to bring it on a plane and use it for their kids with no advance arrangements with the airline. But CARES was certified for children 22-44 lbs, and under 40 inches tall – and while typical children eventually grow into using just the airplane seat belt, youngsters with special needs often continue to need additional support.

Candie, the mother of a 10-year-old special needs child who weighed 66 pounds wrote, We were forced to drive if we wanted to travel, because our son is too big for a car seat. I know other families in this same situation. The world is getting better for kids with disabilities but there is still a long way to go.

Fast forward two years - the FAA has just granted a special needs youngster who weighs 73 pounds and is 4 ft 11 inches tall, permission to use CARES.

This exciting new development is an outgrowth of the award-winning Child Aviation Restraint System (CARES) that has been sold to more than 35,000 families for global travel. This first-of-its-kind harness loops around the back of the airplane seat, has shoulder straps that come over the child's shoulder, a chest clip to hold the straps in place, and loops at the bottom of the straps for the regular seat belt. CARES holds the child securely against the back of the airplane seat.

Louise Stoll, a grandmother from Vermont and former Assistant Secretary in the U.S. Department of Transportation, created the award-winning CARES initially for toddlers. After hearing many stories from parents of children with special needs that ranged from physical challenges to autism, Stoll contacted the FAA to revisit the issue of certification on behalf of these older kids.

"The FAA took the request from the family of the 73 pound girl very seriously," Stoll said. "In its approval letter, the FAA noted that the components of the CARES restraints are the same as those used in adult restraints – the seat belts on airplanes – and would maintain their integrity with a larger child," explains Stoll in layman's terms. "A major reason for being concerned about a heavier, taller person using CARES is that with that much weight attached to a seat back, it would move forward more quickly in a short stop, causing the person behind the seat not to be able to brace himself. The FAA agreed that if a larger child using the CARES device sits in a row where no one sits behind him – such as in front of the bulkhead – everyone on the plane would be covered in an emergency."

Stoll noted that families traveling with a special needs child over 44 lbs who wants to use a CARES harness must still file a request with the FAA. "But the request will be granted more quickly and, eventually, we believe, more or less routinely," explains Stoll, "since the criteria have now been established."

"Of course" she reminds people, "any special needs child that weighs under 44 pounds can use the CARES product without advance arrangements and may sit anywhere on an airplane except exit rows where no travelers under 16 are permitted."

The possibilities for disabled children to soar the friendly skies is great news to advocates. Candy Harrington, an editor, writes about barrier-free travel for those with wheelchairs and walkers. Says Harrington, "parents who travel with their wheeler kids face some of the same access barriers as adults, hence planning a family-friendly vacation that is also accessible presents some very unique challenges."

With the FAA-approved CARES, moms and dads traveling with youngsters over 44 lbs who have special needs only have to carry a pocket-sized harness and a letter that grants the exemption for all their future travel. That leaves their arms free for hugs and holding hands.

## **About CARES**

CARES is an innovative child harness designed specifically for airplanes that weighs one pound, fits into a six inch stuff sack, and provides extra support to children between 22-44 pounds who are in their own airplane seats. It replaces the need for parents to lug a bulky car seat around the airport and onto an airplane. Parents are assured their child has the protection needed, as car seats often don't fit properly on a plane seat as they were designed for the back seat of an automobile!

Since its debut, the pocket-or-purse-sized Child Aviation Restraint System has wowed judges nationally and internationally, including winning the 2008 Good Housekeeping Good Buy Award - one of only 8 in the U.S. Dr. Toy, the noted child development authority, tapped CARES as last year's Top 10 Socially Responsible Products, part of the 2008 Dr. Toy's 100 Best Children's Products list.

The multi-award-winning child airplane harness can be ordered online at [www.kidsflysafe.com](http://www.kidsflysafe.com) retailing for \$74.95. CARES can also be purchased at select specialty retailers and e-commerce sites throughout the US, Canada, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and Singapore.