

Ask the expert

Catherine Cosby: Ski2Freedom

Catherine Cosby set up Ski2Freedom to give disabled people the knowledge and reassurance they need to experience a wintersports holiday. Rosie Barcroft asks the questions.

How does Ski2Freedom operate?

It's a major portal providing comprehensive information about snowsports and mountain activities worldwide. It aims to meet the specific needs and requirements of young people and adults who have a disability, or who have suffered a trauma and need reassurance that a winter sports holiday can still be part of their journey back to recovery. Ski2Freedom also wants to help the young carers to have the same advantages as others, and to help other charities substantially enhance their aims and objectives.

How did it all begin?

My daughter, Alexandra was the catalyst. She has Rett syndrome, a genetic disorder that affects approximately one in 12,000 females (it is rarely seen in boys). It causes severe physical and mental disability that begins in early childhood. When Alexandra was diagnosed, I started seeing everything differently. I was from the generation in which women weren't encouraged to have jobs - you were expected to do charity work or pluck pheasants, no questions asked! I'm someone who hates being left out - I love being part of the action, and for me that's in the mountains. I can't live without height, horizons and space. If you abuse the mountains' trust, you'll probably hurt yourself. But if you're feeling vulnerable, like I was,

they will take you in and give you some perspective. Not only do I want to help the many disabled people get back into skiing, but also the many people who do all the hard work of caring for them non-stop.

What challenges have you faced?

Trying to get charity status and price benefit, definitely, plus getting people to facilitate us - and for everyone to realise

that just because someone is disabled, it doesn't mean they can't do it. Understandably, many able-bodied people aren't interested in Ski2Freedom. Yet many of our paraplegic skiers are those who've been injured in motorbike accidents, sadly showing that it can happen to anyone.

What's your biggest achievement to date?

Finally being accepted as a leading authority and recognised within the industry. We continually aim to help people source the information they're after, whether it's about ski resorts, the best places to go with families or other activities that you can also take part in while you're in the mountains.

Where can you see the charity going in the future?

I'd love Ski2Freedom to be globally recognised as a source of information which can be used by everybody. I just want to make as many mountains as possible accessible to people with disabilities. I would also like to help other charities meet their aims and objectives and set up workshops and talks. My own personal experiences have helped enormously. With Alexandra I've experienced being outside the group, so to speak. I think I've developed an understanding of other people's situations, almost like a sixth sense.

With all the Winter Olympics hype, do you often think that the Paralympics is lost?

I've always found it incredibly disappointing that the Paralympics never receives as much attention as the Olympics. I would love it if the two events could be a



Joszef Metelka: Still jumping with a prosthesis