

Eastern Ontario program helps skiers with disabilities

40 people now taught including many children with a variety of challenges

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An Ottawa-area ski program for people with disabilities is helping many children improve their motor skills.

The Calabogie Adaptive Ski Program at Calabogie Peaks Resort, about 100 km west of Ottawa, has now grown to teach about 40 people learn to glide down its hills.

The decades-old program started as a tool for skiers with physical disabilities, but now features children with a wide variety of challenges including autism, Down's syndrome and cerebral palsy.

Jacob Lafantaisie, who has autism, said he plans to spend every Sunday for the rest of the winter at Calabogie Peaks. He also said he wished he could spend the summers there, as well.

"I will literally go down to the basement and look at my skis [all summer]," Lafantaisie said.

Many children need help developing basic motor skills

His mother, Karen Lafantaisie, said Jacob always had difficulties with basic motor skills and movements.

"He was always a bit slower when it came to fine motor and gross motor things," she said.

"When we came here he just came along really well. It's been good for his social skills, his self confidence."

There are 70 volunteers involved in running the program, which costs about \$30,000 a year to run. Luckily, most of the money comes from fundraising and corporate sponsors.

Skiers pay a \$100 fee for eight weeks of skiing plus a banquet.

Bob Gilmour, operations manager at Calabogie Peaks, has helped develop the adaptive ski program for 30 years. He said initiatives like the one run by Claw Dawdy at Calabogie Peaks are very important to families.

"It's a pretty special day. You have the parent come over to you in tears, say, 'You've just made my day.' Well, you've made our day," said Gilmour.

In addition to the many children who participate in the program, adult amputees, stroke survivors and those with spinal cord injuries also take part.