



NEWS RELEASE

# It's Cool to Fly American celebrates a decade

5/28/2024

This year marks the 10-year anniversary of the It's Cool to Fly American (ICTFA) program, an initiative centered around preparing children and their families for air travel through mock travel experiences managed by American's Abilities Employee Business Resource Group (EBRG). The program partners with the **HollyRod Foundation** and several local organizations to raise awareness and provide resources to families with a loved one living with autism.

"We know the challenges that children with autism may experience in our airports and during a flight," said Julie Rath, Senior Vice President of Airport Operations at American Airlines. "This program not only helps reduce anxiety and discover the fun and adventure of travel, but it also enlightens our team members to travelers with special needs which, in turn, helps us promote a more inclusive and compassionate environment for all."

American's volunteers and leaders with Holly Robinson Peete, founder of the HollyRod Foundation

During the events, families can practice the entire air travel experience — from checking in at the airport, going through security, boarding the plane and taxiing out to an active runway and experiencing a simulated take off. All of these experiences help our customers become more comfortable with the sensory experience of air travel.

Bruce Sickler, Customer Care Manager in Global Reservations and Program Director for ICTFA, started the program in 2014 when he saw the need to bring solutions to the obstacles the disabled community faces while traveling. Sickler suffered an injury that limits his mobility and has a grandson on the autism spectrum, which is why he volunteers his time to educate and advocate on the needs of those living with disabilities. Sickler serves as the global lead for the Abilities EBRG, connecting more than 2,300 team members across five chapters globally.

Since its inception in 2014, “It’s Cool to Fly American” has hosted more than 8,500 participants from approximately 4,500 families in more than 62 locations.

An American Airlines captain with his son after volunteering for the ICTFA flight crew