

New adaptive harness opens sky for all to fly

EMBRACING THE OPPORTUNITY TO EARN MY WINGS - BY BRANDY STILES



Upon discovering that a number of peers were interested in skydiving, BC Paraplegic Association's Northern Peer Program Associate, Brandy Stiles set to work to offer an unforgettable experience!

After connecting with Barry Cyr of Skydive BC, it became apparent that there were some additional risks for tandem jumps involving persons with limited or no function of their lower extremities. Two main safety concerns were identified; body control in free fall and impact on landing. Both needed to be addressed for the safety of the participants and tandem master before attempting any jumps. 'When I realized the potential safety issues, it became not just about planning this event but embracing the opportunity to markedly change tandem skydiving so that others would also benefit in the future' says Brandy.

The goal was to develop a harnessing system to reduce the risks of injuries yet be adjustable enough to adapt to the needs of different participants, providing a safer experience for a variety of users. Leg cuffs attaching the passengers' legs to the tandem masters were designed to assist in keeping jumpers in correct form during freefall, avoiding involuntary shifting of the lower extremities. Barry explains 'Even a minor body movement can completely change your position when travelling 200 kms per hour in freefall. Cuff adjustments allow us to keep that in check throughout that period and then release the legs before landing'. The ability to raise the passengers' legs before landing was also required to avoid any lower limb injuries, as had been a common occurrence with tandem jumps of this nature attempted in the past. So a pull strap was created and attached to the front of the harness allowing the legs to be pulled out of harm's way.

The first tandem jumps with the new system made by Dan Andrews, Caleb Brousseau and Brandy Stiles definitely qualify as a success, although the evolution of the harnessing system continued. 'We had some issues with involuntary muscle spasms in the legs during the fall, so we adjusted the method of bringing the legs up and made procedural notes on the best time to release the leg cuffs. Having said that we were really happy with how it all worked' says Barry.

The next four tandem jumps completed bear testament to the success of the new system. Time was taken to review the first three jumps and make some adjustments to minimize the risks upon impact by creating a softer landing site. Family & friends of Kory Heyland, Jordan Kelly and Nelson Jewer all came out to watch. Spectators that day consistently heard shouts of 'Awesome!' as the jumpers neared the ground, and without exception everyone was keen to get back into the air again. Ryan Purves, the final jumper, summed it up perfectly 'If it wasn't so late, I'd be crawling back over to the plane right now!'

Barry and Brandy want to build awareness about their venture and hope to challenge other tandem masters



to follow suit in acquiring the adapted system, opening up the sport for many more to jump safely. Barry is even looking to provide an instructional course to share his expertise. Brandy feels that what has taken place this year could be the catalyst for much more in the future 'Everyone that jumped has been thrilled with their experience and with a system developed

others can join the freefall fever and fully participate in an active lifestyle, including this extreme sport!'

Watch videos on BC Paraplegic's YouTube Channel - <http://www.youtube.com/user/BCParaplegic>

To learn more about tandem skydiving contact www.skydivebc.com

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