



## **CONTACT**

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **FLY DIRECT– HOME TO HOPE**

Declan, his four brothers, and parents Elisabeth and Christopher left the rural town of Elmira, NY, in July 2022, to visit his grandparents just outside Philadelphia. The family was looking forward to a respite from frequent trips to the local community hospital where they'd taken Declan more than 16 times in the year since he was born for medical incidents that couldn't be diagnosed.

The vacation went as planned until one morning when all the boys woke up except for Declan. Elisabeth was unable to wake the 1-year-old, who was lying limp in her arms with a high fever. He was rushed to an academic medical center in the Lehigh Valley.

Doctors knew immediately that Declan had a serious condition. He was referred to Columbia University Irving Medical Center in New York City. Doctors diagnosed him with a genetic disease, a mutation in the gene ATP6AP1. Declan is one of 31 known cases of this genetic mutation which causes an abnormal breakdown in protein resulting in his body being in a constant state of inflammation.

Fortunately, the medical team at Columbia University had a treatment plan for Declan for the first time. A potent mix of medicines delivered by infusion started to improve his health and address his immunodeficiency and liver issues. However, the family faced the challenge of managing the eight-hour round-trip with 5 children and the financial burden of the required overnight stays for Declan's life-sustaining infusions.

Elisabeth looked for answers and found Angel Flight East (AFE) located in Blue Bell, PA. through her local doctor after asking for travel assistance. AFE is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the community by facilitating free air transportation for children and adults with medical conditions who need treatment far from home. Since October 2022, AFE has coordinated 36 flights round-trip flights for Declan and Elisabeth to fly to and from their home to Teterboro, NY. From there they take an AFE-funded Lyft to the hospital.

Thanks to experienced volunteer pilots like AFE's Michael Bush there is no cost to fly. Michael is Declan's favorite pilot and has shown great kindness, even sending Declan his forgotten ball cap and extra goodies after a recent trip. AFE's network of 400 pilots also offer compassion flights and deliver medical supplies in times of crisis. This year, 103 AFE pilots have taken 161 passengers on 707 flights to offer hope.

Declan hasn't been hospitalized since January 2023. Elisabeth says when Declan sees a plane in the sky he points and wants to go. His next trip with pilot Michael is scheduled for later this month.

Listen to a [podcast](#) about Elisabeth's and Declan's experiences. Angel Flight East depends on the support of the community. Please visit us at [AngelFlightEast.org](https://AngelFlightEast.org) to make a contribution or find out how you can get involved.

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