



(Clockwise from above) All smiles after flying; another flight enjoyed; TVGC's Al Spencer and Richard Hannigan; airfield facilities; some high fliers

# OPENING EYES

Katharine York reports on Lincolnshire GC's High Flying Girls days in July



**O**VER two days in July, Lincolnshire Gliding Club flew 12 adults and 13 juniors – all female. Not bad for a club with less than 25 members and only one club aircraft! It should have happened in May, but the weather had other ideas.

For some mysterious reason, women are under-represented in gliding. I can speculate on a few causes, but part of the reason must be lack of awareness, just not seeing others doing it. Having attended a very successful Girls Go Gliding event at Camphill in 2014, I had firsthand experience of trying to get women involved. Some leapt at the chance – but were busy that day. Many ran a mile. Another responded via email saying: "Sounds great." Naive as I am, I thought this meant she wanted to fly. Nearer the date, when confirming names and numbers, I found she had meant "Sounds

great for someone else. There is no way you are getting me up there!"

So I hatched a plot. I told a number of women how awful it was that girls were under-represented and what skills and opportunities they were missing out on. Each of the women agreed it was a crying shame and something ought to be done.

I asked them to be role models, using their influential positions to support and encourage girls to fly, and to offer themselves as mentors. Amazingly, they all agreed to take part in my High Flying Girls day, and several encouraged me to set up a steering group so they could get more involved.

I sent out a lot of letters to local dignitaries, celebrities, businesswomen, but the greatest success was when I spoke directly or via someone I had already persuaded. Seeing potential mentors' eyes light up convinced me I was on the right track.

Eventually I had to turn two women down, having reached the maximum the club could



(Photographs by Katharine York)

# TO FLIGHT

cope with flying in a day. I kept them on a reserve list, which came in handy later!

The S&G article *Teens spread their wings* (pp46-47, June/July 16) was also used to promote the event. There was a positive vibe, but the break-through for getting girls to sign up was finding an enthusiastic governor of a local school. John Whitgift Academy identified 10 of their most committed Year 10 students, and between us we obtained sponsorship from small businesses and individuals to cover their flying fees.

Everything was set for 31 May, apart from forgetting to book the weather. Winds of 45-50mph all week meant we had to postpone at the last minute.

The school was so keen for the girls to fly that they offered several dates within term when they could attend. It proved harder to pin down the women, but we settled on two dates. All was looking good until, with five days to go, the school realised they had something else on one of the dates and, oops,

none of the girls could come!

Fortunately, the steering group pulled together and rustled up five girls for the problem date. In the meantime, various mentors had to pull out, but between us we found replacements. The original goal had been to fly only 20 people, so to achieve 25 despite the obstacles was a great success.

Members worked hard to get everyone involved with jobs around the airfield, and help the girls overcome their initial shyness and reserve. There was a real mix of attitudes amongst the new flyers, from burning desire to absolute dread. Some needed patience and careful handling, but they all came down beaming. Many were happy just to sit back and absorb the experience and exhilaration of being aloft, others had the confidence to want a turn on the controls early on.

Will any of them stick with it? Difficult to say at this stage, but we've opened their eyes to the possibility and who knows where it will lead.

## PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

Think toilets! Airfields often lack privacy. Teenagers in particular are shy, and there's no getting away from the fact that sometimes girls need better waste disposal facilities than boys. We got a great deal from Popaloo for an odourless toilet with privacy tent.

Twenty people to fly was manageable, but would have been a strain with only one glider. Our good friends at Trent Valley Gliding Club very generously gave a free loan of their K13, with Alan Spencer and Richard Hannigan also donating the aerotows between sites. Two gliders transformed good days into fantastic ones.



Popaloo packed away

## PLANNING FOR FAILURE

Get over-subscribed. Have more women waiting in the wings in case of the inevitable hospital appointments, work crises and so on. Even better if they know teenagers they can get hold of at the last minute - daughters, nieces, friends of the above.

## PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

The flying days are supposed to be just the start of new relationships. Follow-up contact between mentors and mentees is planned, and a virtual group is set up on Facebook for all to stay in touch. Additional flying days will encourage new converts to stick at it, and details of The Caroline Trust bursaries have been given to all.