

# A New Leaf: Telling Untold Stories, Jim

Written by Christina Tetreault

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Arizona Foothills Magazine and Azfoothills.com have partnered with the comprehensive, non-profit, and human service agency, [A New Leaf](#), for an incredibly special series; one that is very near and dear to our organization's heart. "**Telling Untold Stories**" will illustrate multi-dimensional and raw stories of real men, women, and families within our communities who have been dealt a tricky hand of cards. These stories are ones of despair - ones of defeat - and, ones of fear. However, these stories become ones of faith - ones of determination - and, ones of hope.

When someone is in an abusive relationship or homeless, they often find themselves struggling to find help, not aware of the community resources available to them. [A New Leaf](#) is one of those critical resources. The agency has been a beacon of hope, supporting women and men who experience domestic violence and homelessness.

The mission of [A New Leaf](#) is Helping Families . . . Changing Lives. A New Leaf inspires and supports individuals and families in their journey to lifelong independence. The agency operates Autumn House, a domestic violence facility in the East Valley, as well as Faith House, a domestic violence shelter and transitional housing resource in the West Valley as well as a number of homeless shelters for those in crisis.

Last year, [A New Leaf](#) served 17,519 individuals with resources, from immediate shelter, transitional housing, basic needs, job assistance, counseling and after school programs. Victims of domestic violence are able to start a new life due to the care and support of A New Leaf's staff and volunteers. Founded in 1971, A New Leaf is dedicated to making lives better and fighting against domestic violence and homelessness in our state.

## Jim, Homeless and Struggling to Raise an Autistic Child

Young Jace holds on to his dad's hand like a bolt; his curious eyes sweep the sidewalk, and he carefully watches the other children playing next to the building. He has a hard time making friends, says his dad, Jim, and though he is sharp as a whip, he shies away from people he doesn't know.

Jace seems like every other 7-year old, but he is not. Jace is autistic, and his father is a single dad – and together they are residents of A New Leaf's La Mesita Family Homeless Shelter.

Jim and Jace hold a close bond, and Jim's struggles to raise his autistic son, while finding meaningful employment and a permanent home have brought them even closer.

Three years earlier, Jace's mom walked out of their lives, leaving Jim to raise his son by himself. "I felt like I was dropped off a cliff," says Jim. "I was heartbroken – and I was constantly second guessing myself about Jace. He would have melted down in public and I would panic. I wanted someone to help me figure out what to do."

Jim searched online for any information he could find about autism. He would read well into the night and take careful notes so he would remember everything. He called a national hotline to talk to experts. And he decided to move with his son from his home of Dekalb, Illinois, to Sierra Vista, Arizona. Jim's biological mother lived there, and she offered to give him support while he looked for a job.

But after moving to Sierra Vista, he discovered that his mother was not a good caregiver, and he and his son had no resources in the small community. "I could see that Jace was acting out frequently," says Jim. "I really wanted to talk with other parents of disabled kids, and I needed more help than my mother could give."

So Jim and Jace packed their belongings, and they headed to Phoenix. Upon arriving, Jim used the rest of his savings to pay for a stay at a Super 8 motel. "I was desperate to be in a larger city and find places that could help me and my son," says Jim.

"It was really hard. We were alone in a big city, and I was stressing, knowing I needed to find a job and how could I find childcare for my son – and the money was running out."

Then a miracle happened. He learned of A New Leaf's La Mesita Family Shelter. "I was so relieved and happy when we were accepted – it was like the sun came up," says Jim. "Finally, I could start putting our life together."

Jim recounts how the staff welcomed him and his son with open arms. Jace, a big baseball fan, was given tickets to see the Arizona Diamondbacks through a donation, and the family attended several games. Jace was thrilled. Through referral from La Mesita, Jim enrolled Jace in the Rainbows Children Center, where he can receive specialized support. And the La Mesita staff helped Jim register with a parent's

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group at Arizona Autism United.

“Every day, I think how grateful I am for the La Mesita staff,” says Jim. “We’ve been so blessed. I don’t know what we would have done without this place.”

Jim and his son will be moving into an apartment soon, supported through A New Leaf’s Rapid Re-housing Program. Jim says his son is not acting out nearly as much as before, and Jim says the support network established through La Mesita’s shelter and staff has made all the difference.

You can help families like Jim’s find the stability and support they need. A New Leaf is where homelessness ends. Donate today and make a difference!



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