

## AZ Giving Spotlight: Aaron Blocher-Rubin of AZA United

Written by Samantha Giunta

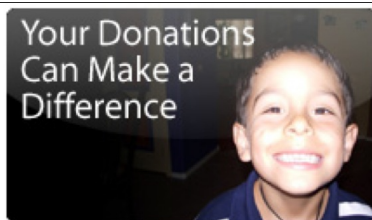
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Aaron Blocher-Rubin's relationship with autism hits close to home and is the inspiration behind his study and therapy for children with autism. He has now created AZA United, a nonprofit solely providing help for children and families with effective autism treatment. We are empowered by our Q & A with Blocher-Rubin—and hope that you will be too.

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### **AFM: Please tell us a little bit about yourself and about how you first got involved with AZA United?**

**ABR:** When I was in high school I learned that my baby brother (age 2) had been diagnosed with autism. He didn't talk and it was almost impossible to make eye contact with him, but other than that I really knew nothing about autism and didn't realize how serious it was. I soon went to college at UCLA and decided to study psychology so I could learn more about my brother's condition. There I got involved in a world-renowned autism program where I became a behavioral therapist for young children with autism. I learned how to motivate these kids and teach them how to talk, play, interact with others, and take care of themselves. I absolutely loved the job and was amazed at how well the kids could do when the treatment programs were done right. Upon moving to Arizona after college, I quickly found that the program I did at UCLA did not exist here. There was nothing even close, and most families could not get effective intensive treatment for their children. After working at another autism nonprofit for a few years running the parent training programs, I decided to start Arizona Autism United with a group of families. Our goal was to create a nonprofit organization whose sole focus was to help as many families as possible in our community with direct services and effective treatment, without barriers. We have now been running for eight years and have grown from a staff of 1 to 400. We operate on a five million dollar annual budget and provide direct treatment for hundreds of children with autism every day across Maricopa County in homes, schools, our clinic, and community settings. We are a family-centered organization, and parents whose children receive services are elected at an annual meeting for all of our families to represent their interests on the board of directors. This approach ensures that the organization's priorities are always guided by the people who need us most.

### **AFM: What is the mission and goal of the nonprofit?**

**ABR:** Our mission is to provide direct services that help as many children and families affected by autism as possible. Our goal is to make all services accessible to anyone in need regardless of barriers, and to expand statewide. Our vision is that every person affected by autism will be accepted and supported by society.

### **AFM: What are some specific services AZA United provides families with autistic children?**

**ABR:** Speech therapy, behavioral intervention, habilitation therapy, respite care, annual conference, school supports, applied behavior analysis, and community events.

### **AFM: Are the members of your staff trained by the organization or outside?**

**ABR:** By the organization, but some come to the organization with previous training and experience.

### **AFM: Can you tell us a little more about your annual community luncheon and other upcoming events?**

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**ABR:** Every year we host a community luncheon to engage leaders and supporters in the general community. We have parent speakers, an awareness video, updates, and opportunities to support AZA United or get more involved. This year we had about 200 guests attend our event at the Hotel Palomar in Downtown Phoenix on Sept. 12. The Palomar was our sponsor.

### **AFM: How can you become a member of AZA United?**

**ABR:** Any family who needs help can call or email us anytime. There's no formal process to become a "member"—the idea is simply that if you need our help, you can be part of the organization and help us achieve goals that help everyone. We also have a Parents Association that is for any parent of a child with autism in Arizona, whether or not they receive our services. It is free and the concept is to give every parent a way to chip in (volunteer), speak up (give feedback and share ideas), and help each other out (parents helping parents).

### **AFM: How can members of the community get involved with AZA United without becoming a member?**

**ABR:** Anyone who would like to get involved by volunteering, donating, working with kids, or anything else is invited to contact me directly at [602-773-5774](tel:602-773-5774) or [Aaron@AZAUnited.org](mailto:Aaron@AZAUnited.org).

To learn more about AZA United, click [here](#).