

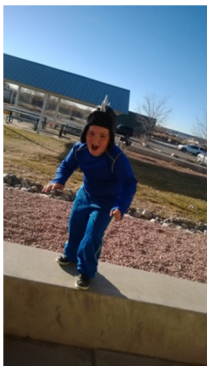
## “Blaze”

By Jordan Grant



From my first day the first day of the summer program I could tell that Blaze Duffy was going to be quite a handful. While he was very friendly to me, I quickly noticed the way he interacted with the other children. One day as I was watching a group of kids play a game of four-square, it was Blaze’s turn and he looked quite excited to be in the game. After a couple of rounds, in which he did very well, he was finely beaten by one of the other boys. He then resorted to the old childhood claim that we all used when we were beaten: “He cheated!” I had expected this at some point, but rather than stating the issue to me or another staff member, he walked right over and hurled the ball at the other boy’s head. As the famous Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu once said, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single smack to another kid’s face.”

As my days here at the club progressed, so did my relationships with each of the children, but Blaze and I began a ‘love-hate’ relationship of sorts. We could be the best of friends at the beginning of the day, but as soon as he got into trouble and was put in timeout - I became his worst enemy. He would try whatever it took to stay out of the dreaded timeout corner. He would cry, yell, even threaten me on occasion, but it always ended the same way. He would eventually make his way to timeout and do the time. But it wasn’t just a lack of respect for authority that was in desperate need of change, but his social behavior with the other children.



Wrestling is a very popular past-time for kids, especially the younger boys who don’t know when enough is enough. Blaze happened to be an excellent wrestler. He was much more skilled than the other boys. Being larger than other kids his age gave him quite the advantage. These things always start off as a friendly game, but more often than not somebody, usually Blaze, would go a step too far and before you know it you’ve gone from a game to an all-out brawl. While we react as quickly as possible to these situations, we can’t always get there before there’s an argument. While we’ve never had a serious problem with fighting, we have had our fair share of kids sent to timeout for rough housing or arguing. We knew Blaze was going to need help controlling his anger and learning what the right thing to do is when somebody makes you angry.

When it came to the middle of the summer, Blaze was hardly showing up at all. We had been told that he was having a hard time with some of the other kids and did not want to come because they were mean to

him. From time to time I would see him in the grocery store with his parents. He would always smile and talk to me and I would usually end up asking him if he was ever coming back to the Club. He would always say the same thing, “Maybe”. One day, it finally happened... Blaze came back.



We were very happy to have Blaze back, but we still had some work to do on his attitude. With a little patience and a few talks, we got him speaking instead of hitting. He would come to us with an issue and we would involve whoever it was with and hash it out. Sometimes it would end with one or both of them in timeout, but most of the time we could resolve the problem without any disciplinary action. We got him apologizing when he did wrong, and even harder than that, accepting apologies from others. But, more progress was in store.

While he still very much enjoys a little wrestling, Blaze is one of the friendliest kids you will ever meet. We, as examples to our youth, try to show them that there is no shame in being who you are, but at the same time you must respect the people around you. Blaze is incredibly rambunctious, but he now knows that if he's being too rough, it's time to pump the brakes. He sticks up for others and does his best to tell us when they are being bullied.

Blaze still has his moments of outburst, but nobody is perfect. We enjoy having him around. He's always quick to crack a joke or tell me I smell like 'the inside of a hobo's shoe'. Blaze continues to advance in his social skills and has become one of my best helpers. He's an imaginative little guy, and our Club wouldn't be the same without him.