

Arizona teen wins award for service to the disabled

SPECIAL FOR THE REPUBLIC

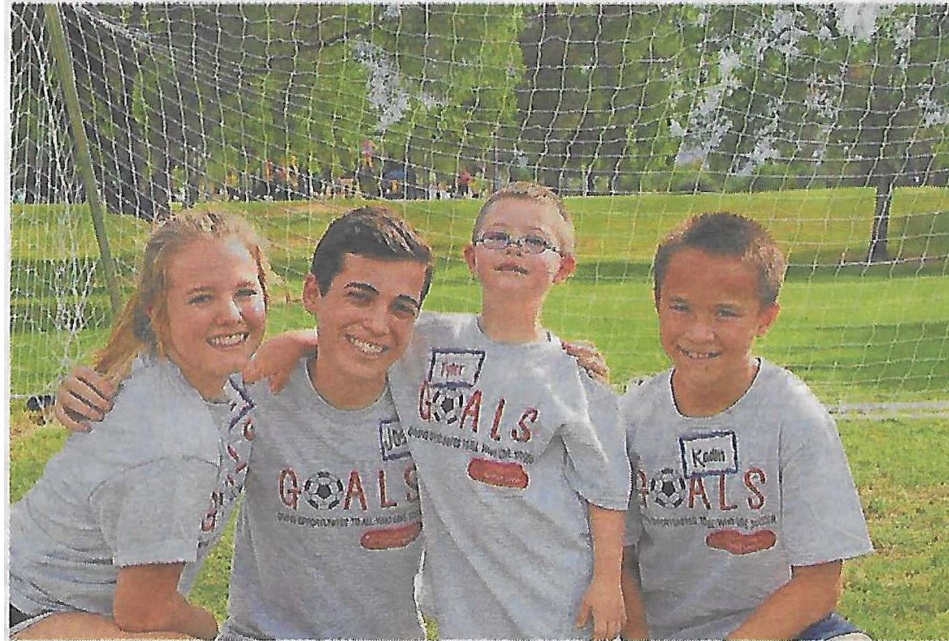
Josh Kaplan, 18, has been named a national winner of the 2017 Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes.

Each year, the Barron Prize celebrates 25 inspiring, public-spirited young people from across North America who have made a significant positive difference to people and the environment. Up to 20 top winners each receive a \$5,000 cash award to support their service work or higher education.

The Phoenix teen founded GOALS (Giving Opportunities to All who Love Soccer), a non-profit unified soccer program that pairs intellectually disabled kids with neurotypical peer buddies. The pairs play side-by-side in non-competitive scrimmages held twice each month. In just two years, Kaplan's program has affected more than 400 children and has become an official partner of Special Olympics Arizona.

Kaplan started GOALS after watching a soccer teammate's brother, who has Down's Syndrome, kick a ball alone along the sidelines during games, without a team of his own.

That sense of isolation was familiar to Kaplan, who has struggled with ac-



Josh Kaplan, second from left, founded GOALS to give more kids with intellectual disabilities the chance to play on a team. BARRON PRIZE

ceptance because of a childhood stutter. He decided to create a way for "sidelined kids" to experience the cam-

araderie and confidence that he'd found on the soccer field.

Through GOALS, he has been able to

break down the barriers that separate kids with special needs and has seen true friendships develop. He is also creating a garden that will provide food to refugee families in his community and has designed the Braille-Board, a recently patented smartphone keyboard for the blind.

"There is so much that is wrong with the world, but so much is right, and more can be made right over time," says Kaplan. "It's my job to step outside my bubble and not just to see the world but to participate meaningfully in it."

The Barron Prize was founded in 2001 by author T.A. Barron and was named for his mother, Gloria Barron.

"Nothing is more inspiring than stories about heroic people who have truly made a difference to the world," Barron said. "And we need our heroes today more than ever. Not celebrities, but heroes — people whose character can inspire us all. That is the purpose of the Gloria Barron Prize: to shine the spotlight on these amazing young people so that their stories will inspire others."