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Disrupting Health Care, Transforming Lives

Christopher Barnett recognized as EY Entrepreneur Of The Year® 2024 U.S. Winner

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Disrupting markets, revolutionizing industries and transforming lives. These are aspirations for many entrepreneurs. For [Christopher Barnett](#), they're a reality.

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coveted honor.

“We’re so excited about the visibility that the EY award gives us for our platform to talk about autism and how we can change lives,” says Barnett.

Barnett is the Founder and Chairman of [ABA Centers](#), an integrated behavioral health care organization focused on autism diagnosis and care. Since 2020, ABA Centers has become one of the fastest-growing providers of individualized autism care in the U.S.

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“ The lack of services available and the long waiting lists that families were experiencing were just unacceptable. With the expertise I had in the health care industry, I knew things

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of ABA Centers

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The implementation of ABA therapy can change lives – and even literally save lives. “A lot of people don’t know that the No.1 cause of death in kids with autism is drowning. And through ABA therapy, we can prevent that from happening.”

Barnett, a YPO member, was with more than 70 of his peers from YPO’s Entrepreneurship Network of YPO, when the award announcement was made. They were attending the **Strategic Growth Forum®**, the nation’s most prestigious gathering of high-growth, market-leading companies.

“My YPO forum has been incredible through this process by providing support because what I’m doing has really been uncharted territory. It’s great to know that I have a group of peers to be truly authentic with.”

An independent panel of judges chose Barnett from a group of 214 Entrepreneur Of The Year regional winners, representing 185 companies across the U.S. for demonstrating innovation and his dedication to making a significant positive impact

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Entrepreneurial journey adapts

Barnett has been a serial entrepreneur since the age of 18. Armed with just a high school equivalency diploma and some community college courses, he created his first group of companies within the real estate space. Over time, he refined his approach, applying a process-rich, data-centric methodology to build enterprises that share a goal to serve the community, change lives and redefine industries. And along the way, he earned a bachelor's degree and a law degree.

Everything took a turn when he suspected that his daughter Madison was on the autism spectrum. After countless struggles to access a diagnostic appointment, it was confirmed. "We spent years dealing with a misdiagnosis and missing out on the proper treatment she desperately needed," says Barnett. "As a parent, I began searching for what was available in autism care and the inadequacies were infuriating, but I decided to transform those emotions into action."

One in 36 children in the U.S. has autism, and millions of families are experiencing the same thing Barnett's

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things could be done better.”

Innovating care, advancing research

Realizing the opportunity to disrupt the autism care space, Barnett launched ABA Centers in the fourth quarter of 2020, despite the tumultuous headwinds of the COVID-19 pandemic. Barnett set out to build a team that could innovate the autism care of the future, dedicated to genuinely making a difference in the lives of families through clinical excellence and expedited access to care.

Established and built with a de novo and self-funded growth strategy, ABA Centers is vertically integrated and provides diagnostic and applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy services to children with autism spectrum disorder through a play-based approach rooted in positive reinforcement. “In three short years, we already serve families throughout 10 states in 34 markets with plans to expand even further across the U.S.,” Barnett explains.

He’s maintained his capitalization table with very little debt. “That’s a testament

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Barnett achieved this by hiring – and compensating well – highly qualified therapists and reducing clinical caseloads in an industry prone to burnout. He prioritizes better pay, career advancement, and employee development, recognizing that the organization’s success starts with its people.

He also drives clinical innovation, investing heavily in artificial intelligence (AI) to develop cutting-edge software that enhances care. ABA Centers also created a research department within the business, paying full-time Ph.D.-level researchers to advance the field, and has partnered with Temple University to establish the ABA Centers Autism Laboratory.

“And there’s no monetization on that. It’s just to do the research, look at massive amounts of data and see what works and what we can do better,” he says. Ultimately for Barnett, sharing this research helps kids just like his daughter get access to incredible care around the country, even in markets ABA Centers haven’t reached yet.

Benevolent profitability

For Barnett, what began as a mission to provide care worthy of his daughter

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acquisitions or private equity backing.

For him, the success of ABA Centers is more than a professional milestone; it's a deeply personal mission to improve the lives of autistic children and their families. "Private sector innovation often outpaces government agencies in driving meaningful change," Barnett explains. "As a business leader, I see it as my duty to leverage this potential for the greater good. Effective public-private partnerships can transform lives, and I believe the private sector is uniquely positioned to enact change swiftly and impactfully."

A culture of giving back is integral to Barnett's leadership and family values, with his daughters volunteering weekly at local food banks. He champions the idea that profitability and benevolence can coexist. ABA Centers has also been the launchpad for his next venture, CurativeAI, which aims to revolutionize health care with cutting-edge AI technology and expertise.

Reflecting on his journey, Barnett shares: "You sacrifice so much to make an impact, and at 41, receiving this kind of recognition is both humbling and surreal. It's a reminder of the power of authenticity and purpose in leadership."

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