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**Phoenix IDA, Maricopa County IDA and Arizona Department of Housing
Commit \$1 Million to First Place AZ**

PHOENIX, Ariz. – September 15, 2016 – The Phoenix Industrial Development Authority (IDA), Maricopa County IDA and Arizona Department of Housing are committing \$1 million to support [FirstPlace AZ](#), a local non-profit working hard to ensure that housing options for people with autism and other special abilities are as bountiful as they are for anyone else.

The announcement came during a celebratory event at GateWay Community College featuring producers of two PBS NewsHour segments, which acknowledge Phoenix as “the most autism-friendly city in the world.” In addition, event sponsor Cox Communications announced its \$235,000 contribution to First Place making it the exclusive Internet provider of Gigabit services and telecommunications technology at First Place-Phoenix.

First Place AZ is positioned for transformational impact on how society approaches housing and community development for individuals with different abilities. The nonprofit is advancing plans for its first property, First Place-Phoenix featuring three main components: the First Place Apartments, 50 studio, one- and two-bedroom units for lease by residents; the First Place Transition Academy, representing a residential training program for students focused on independent living skills, career readiness and interpersonal relations; and the First Place Leadership Institute, a national training center for professionals, direct service support providers, among others.

First Place-Phoenix is scheduled to break ground in late 2016 at 3rd Street and Catalina Drive in the heart of the urban area, pending the successful completion of its \$10 million charitable campaign. The campaign also includes a conventional loan and the benefit of New Markets Tax Credits, bringing the total funding of charitable, private and public funds to \$16 million.

“Our First Place board and our entire team of industry leaders are thrilled with the collaborative support from the Phoenix IDA, Maricopa County IDA and the State Department of Housing. This generosity toward our capital campaign and capacity building for operations is making new dreams possible for the people who work and learn through First Place, and for the peace of mind it brings to families,” said First Place Founder and President/CEO, Denise D. Resnik.

Charitable Investment by the Phoenix IDA

The Phoenix IDA is investing \$250,000 for the First Place Transition Academy, an integral part of the First Place-Phoenix residential community development.

“Our investment in First Place AZ supports the Phoenix IDA’s goals to support education and healthcare, and provide housing for the underserved and most vulnerable in our community,” said Juan Salgado, Executive Director, Phoenix IDA.

“The Board of Directors of the Phoenix IDA is confident that First Place will enhance the quality of life for individuals with special needs by creating ‘home’ environments that support their development and contribute to the long-term quality of life for the entire Phoenix community,” he added.

The donation by the Phoenix IDA will be used to build capacity for the First Place Transition Academy, which offers a highly structured and supportive two-year, tuition-based curriculum to help adults and special learners develop crucial interpersonal, independent-living and career-readiness skills. The expanded program will serve 32 residential students annually; graduating 16 adults/year, ages 18+. A beta site has been operating successfully for 18 months at 29 Palms in Phoenix, a development of the Foundation for Senior Living (FSL), which was featured on PBS NewsHour this summer.

One of the four-bedroom Transition Academy suites is being named for the Phoenix IDA.

Charitable Investment by the Maricopa County IDA

The Maricopa County IDA is donating \$335,000 toward the First Place-Phoenix capital campaign and the creation of the Center for Education, Employment and Training within the First Place Leadership Institute.

First Place AZ is focused on employment and job creation for First Place-Phoenix residents and students, and other special learners, as well as the personnel needed to support them from across our county, state and nation.

Through the national Leadership Institute, direct support service providers will be trained, building on community connections with Maricopa Community College District, Arizona State University, Dignity Health and a variety of businesses, creating

new employment opportunities for people and enterprises that serve this rapidly growing segment of our population.

More than half of youth with autism are completely disconnected from both employment and educational opportunities during the first two years after high school, according to the [2015 A.J. Drexel Autism Institute National Indicators Report](#).

The Maricopa IDA Center for Training, Education & Employment will address that challenge through:

- (1) Classroom and experiential training focused on social and interpersonal skills appropriate for a range of work environments;
- (2) Connecting private, public and charitable sector employers to this work force; and
- (3) Offering specialized training and certification programs to exponentially increase the number of high quality, well-trained and credentialed direct support service providers, making it a valued career and reducing turnover.

“Already, First Place is demonstrating impact through its Transition Academy beta site where high school graduates are being empowered to live full, more independent, healthier lives supported by a strong community network and lessons learned on the job through paid and volunteer student internships,” said Steve Chucri, Maricopa County Board of Supervisor (District 2) and a long-time supporter of SARRC and First Place.

Academy curriculum is taught through direct instruction, modeling and feedback in the GateWay Community College classroom, student apartments (aka ‘independent living labs’) and employment sites accessed through public transit.

This model allows faculty to support individuals as they transfer learned skills and apply them in natural environments. Plans to increase impact are underway as the GateWay classes become available to other special learners in spring of 2017 and online.

“We’re confident First Place will increase on-ramps to post-secondary and lifelong education and employment for the individuals impacted by autism as well as direct support providers and educators who serve this special population. When you have people working and engaging in the community, you have an economy and community that works,” said Shelby L. Scharbach, Executive Director, Maricopa County IDA.

Support from the Arizona Department of Housing

The Arizona Department of Housing is loaning First Place-Phoenix \$415,000 through the Arizona Housing Trust Fund to advance its capital campaign. The loan may be forgivable after a period of time if First Place meets certain requirements. According to

Michael Trailor, Director of the Arizona Department of Housing, “The best way to advance public policy is by doing, by innovating, by demonstrating new housing models with the capacity to expand and generate positive impacts across the board.”

More than three million Americans are living with an autism spectrum disorder. First Place responds to the ever-increasing population of a record number of adolescents with autism entering adulthood in the U.S., totaling 500,000 this decade alone. Most of the individuals will need some type of support throughout their lives. Unfortunately, adults are being faced with a disjointed adult service provider network, age-related medical issues, developmental regression and an aging parent population with fewer family and economic supports. Studies indicate that in the absence of appropriate intervention, many adults lose their skills.

First Place AZ is collaborating with 75 public, private and charitable organizations to create new outcomes by developing a transit-oriented site that addresses the complex issues of adults with autism and others with special needs.

“We believe First Place will be transformational for how we approach lifelong living, learning and working for individuals with special abilities, integrating physical properties and programs in a variety of community settings. Today, the number of housing choices for adults living with autism and related disorders is limited. We aim to change that,” Trailor noted.

The Department of Housing also made the First Place Transition Academy beta site a reality by leading the collaboration among FSL, SARRC and First Place. Through a Neighborhood Services Program grant, the multi-generational property that houses the Academy opened in early 2015.

Resnik recalls SARRC’s Annual Community breakfast from six years ago, when Trailor approached her immediately after the program. “Director Trailor told me we were going to ‘stop talking about this dream for a new residential property and were going to start building it.’ Indeed we have... and we are,” Resnik said.

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About First Place AZ

First Place® AZ is a nonprofit organization advancing innovative residential options for adults with autism and other special abilities. Led by market principles, First Place is creating replicable residential and post-secondary education models that promote collaboration among the private, public and nonprofit sectors, and serve as catalysts for advancing federal public policy focused on housing solutions for special populations. Recipient of the 2016 HeroX [Autism Speaks House to Home Prize](#) for its “belief-busting breakthrough” idea in housing and residential supports, FirstPlace celebrates neuro-

diversity, independent living and its belief that housing options for people with autism and other special abilities should be as bountiful as they are for everyone else. To learn more, visit www.firstplaceaz.org and check out these PBS NewsHour segments: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/giving-adults-autism-skills-build-independent-lives/> and <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/phoenix-became-autism-friendly-city-world/#>.