



**For Immediate Release**

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**First Place Receives \$50,000 Grant to Launch  
360 Health & Wellness Initiative**

PHOENIX, Ariz. – January 26, 2016 – [First Place](#)®, an Arizona-based nonprofit serving adults with autism and other special abilities, has received a \$50,000 grant from the Phoenix-based Board of Visitors to launch the 360 Health & Wellness Initiative, increasing health independence.

The initiative will establish a continuous spectrum of health within a community framework through the creation of 30-40 learning modules for individuals with autism, their families and support providers, and health care professionals.

Far too often medical issues are addressed through the lens of autism, such as viewing frequent drinking or urinating as obsessive and repetitive rather than as possible signs of diabetes, or framing irritability as increases in autistic behaviors rather than as potential underlying G.I. distress or other pain.

“Early detection of health issues is frequently missed due to the core characteristics of autism, which include social impairments, communication difficulties, and restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior,” said Denise D. Resnik, First Place president, Board chair and founder. “Through targeted education, the 360 Health & Wellness Initiative will increase independence for individuals with autism, improve healthcare access and empower families.”

More than 1.5 million Americans are living with an autism spectrum disorder, a number on the rise. The increased prevalence from one in 2,500 a few decades ago to one in 68 today (CDC Prevalence Study) is producing a growing population of children with autism now entering adulthood. More than 500,000 U.S. children with autism are transitioning to adulthood this decade.

First Place is teaming up with the Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC) to spearhead and implement the 360 Health & Wellness Initiative. Composed of curriculum, toolkits and assessment strategies, the initiative is poised for a broad and cumulative impact, beginning with early adopter students and residents of First Place-Phoenix, a new residential model breaking ground in 2016; expanding to the greater community of special learners within Metropolitan Phoenix; and then pushing out to a national audience through online education.

The Board of Visitors is the oldest charitable organization in Arizona, serving the healthcare needs of women, children and the elderly. The Board of Visitors has distributed more than \$17 million to nonprofits in the greater Phoenix area since 1908.

“The Board of Visitors, the oldest charitable organization in Arizona, is proud to support the work being done in our community by First Place and their ‘360 Health & Wellness Initiative.’ The program, which meets our mission statement of serving the healthcare need of women, children and the elderly, will have a positive impact on individuals with autism and provide support to their families,” said Sydney Fox, chairman of The Board of Visitors.

360 Health & Wellness Initiative collaborators:

**Project Lead/Manager: Valerie Paradiz, Ph.D.**, First Place curriculum specialist and Director of the Autistic Global Initiative, a division of the Autism Research Institute. Dr. Paradiz serves as an NGO representative to the United Nations and brings many years of curriculum design, technical assistance and strategic planning to the team through her national work with schools, universities, corporations and agencies that support individuals with autism and related disabilities.

**Medical Consultant: Raun Melmed, M.D.**, is director of the Melmed Center and co-founder and medical director of SARRC. He has set up physician training programs for the early identification of infants and toddlers with developmental and behavioral concerns and authored a program geared toward the early screening for autism spectrum disorders.

**Medical Consultant: Javier Cárdenas, M.D.**, is the director of the Barrow Concussion and Brain Injury Center, a multidisciplinary clinic that is nationally recognized for comprehensive patient care. He is also the director of the Barrow Concussion Network, the most comprehensive concussion program in the United States. He serves on the NFL's Head, Neck & Spine Committee, is chair of the Arizona Interscholastic Association Sport Medical Advisory Committee, and chair of the Arizona Governor's Council on Spinal and Head Injuries.

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**About First Place:**

First Place AZ is a nonprofit organization advancing innovative residential options for adults with autism and related disorders. 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 a catalyst for advancing federal public policy focused on housing solutions for special populations. First Place AZ celebrates neuro-diversity, independent living and a path toward opening doors for more real estate options. For more information, visit [www.firstplaceaz.org](http://www.firstplaceaz.org).