



NEWS RELEASE – For Immediate Release

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**Stardust Foundation Grants \$1 Million to First Place®AZ
Capital Campaign Advances as Construction Begins**

PHOENIX (Feb. 27, 2017) — First Place®AZ announced today the charitable investment of \$1 million by long-time philanthropic champion Jerry Bisgrove, chairman and CEO of Stardust Foundation.

First Place AZ is a 501(c) 3 non-profit working hard to ensure that housing options for people with autism and other special abilities are as bountiful as they are for everyone else. The inaugural First Place property, First Place-Phoenix, broke ground in December 2016 and is slated to open Spring 2018.

“This gift leverages more than a decade of patient counsel and contributions by Stardust and Jerry, who impressed upon us early the importance of connecting the dots needed to build a supportive, engaged community,” said Denise D. Resnik, First Place AZ founder and president/CEO and mother of Matt, a young man living with autism. “Active engagement and involvement with our neighbors and greater community transforms houses into homes, enabling people with different and not so different abilities to thrive.”

In recognition of this contribution, the Stardust Garden is being designed as a central feature of First Place-Phoenix. It will include organic gardens used in the culinary teaching kitchens and colorful, flowering plants.

The Stardust Foundation looks critically for strategic charitable investments that produce powerful impact. “I have followed the evolution of First Place for a very long time. Incubated early on through the Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC), and now becoming a physical reality in Phoenix, First Place demonstrates we should never underestimate what our community can make possible through vision, connections, collaboration and smarts,” said Bisgrove.

Stardust's \$1 million contribution is advancing a \$21.3 million comprehensive capital campaign of which \$15 million is dedicated to the development of First Place-Phoenix. The campaign represents charitable, private and public sources and also includes start-up operational funding, and fellowships for Teach For America alumni and Arizona State University doctoral and post-doc students.

First Place-Phoenix, an 81,000-square-foot property located in the heart of the urban area at 3001 N. Third Street, will feature three main components:

- [First Place Apartments](#): 56 studio, one-, two- and four-bedroom units for lease by residents, supported by a suite of independent living services and amenities
- [First Place Transition Academy](#): A two-year, tuition-based residential training program for participants focused on independent living skills, career readiness and interpersonal relations
- [First Place Leadership Institute](#): A national training center for professionals, direct service support providers and medical personnel, a robust site for research and public policy advancements

"Jerry has taught us invaluable lessons, which have informed the many dimensions and components of First Place AZ. On a more personal level, he's also taught me to never underestimate a friend and donor," added Resnik.

For more information or to become involved, email info@firstplaceaz.org or visit www.firstplaceaz.org.

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 that serve as catalysts for advancing 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, First Place 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 2016 PBS NewsHour segments: ["Giving Adults with Autism the Skills to Build Independent Lives"](#) and ["How Phoenix Became the Most Autism Friendly City in the World"](#).

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