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## First Place AZ appoints Paradiz to serve as National Leadership Institute Director

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*Val Paradiz (submitted photo)*

First Place 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, has appointed Paradise Valley resident Val Paradiz, Ph.D., to serve as the director of the First Place National Leadership Institute.

During her transition to First Place, Dr. Paradiz will continue to serve as director of the Autistic Global Initiative of the Autism Research Institute in a part-time capacity, completing her service there in December 2016.

Dr. Paradiz is a National Board Member of Autism Speaks where she serves as Chair of its Family Services Committee. She writes a regular column, "Home Truths," for the Simons Foundation Autism Research Institute's Spectrum News, according to a press release.

First Place is advancing new residential options for adults with autism and related disorders and is underway on First Place-Phoenix, a transit-oriented property sited in the heart of the city at 3rd Street and Catalina. Groundbreaking is expected in 2016, the release stated.

*"A nationally recognized leader in the autism field, Dr. Paradiz is well respected, has strong relationships with key collaborators and brings a wealth of personal knowledge and experience," said Denise D. Resnik, founder and president/CEO of First Place, in the release. "We are thrilled she is leading the important work of the First Place National Leadership Institute."*

As director, Dr. Paradiz will oversee the institute and its five centers as it develops a field of leaders advancing policy, applied research, and promising and evidence-based practices that support adults with autism and other special abilities through education, training and research.

The Center for Training, Education and Employment offers specialized training and certification programs, such as the Building Independence for Lift Training developed by Dr. Paradiz during her tenure at the Autism Research Institute.

Additional capacity-building training and education programs are nearing completion under Dr. Paradiz's watch, including 34 semester-length courses devoted to practicing and learning a multitude of competencies in independent living, from personal finance, conflict resolution and meal preparation, to pursuing, gaining and retaining employment, and navigating public transportation, the release stated.

Dr. Paradiz has also led the creation of the First Place 360 Health and Wellness training series, which aims to bring health care professionals, individuals with autism and families together as partners in building capacity, medical literacy and independence in the adult health arena.

"All five centers of the National Leadership Institute are firing away with active projects as we speak," said Dr. Paradiz in the release.

These include the Centers for Education, Training & Employment, Real Estate, Public Policy, Applied Research and the Center for Expression, which serves as a communication arm of the Institute.

"I'm thrilled to join the First Place team in this expansive, forward-looking project. It is a fresh approach to addressing adult life on the spectrum in all its important facets," Dr. Paradiz said in the release.