

firstplace®

A SNAPSHOT



First Place® AZ Vision & Mission: We have an unprecedented opportunity to pioneer innovative housing and community development across North America. Together, we can build a new market that transcends outdated ways of thinking and *ensures housing options for people with autism and other special abilities are as bountiful as they are for everyone else.*

Backed by 20 years of research, support from the Urban Land Institute and more than 100 collaborators, [First Place AZ](#) is positioned for transformational impact on how society approaches housing and community development for individuals with autism and other neuro-diversities. It represents new residential prototypes—allowing greater choice—based on individual needs and interests.

We're realizing this vision through our first major development, First Place—Phoenix, in the heart of the urban region. Three primary components of our model open doors to those seeking more independent living options. Residents of the **First Place Apartments** enjoy a suite of services and amenities, with all the benefits of community-connected living: transportation, healthcare, employment, continuing education and recreation. Participants enrolled in the two-year **First Place Transition Academy** learn independent living skills, helping them integrate into the fabric of the community as citizens, neighbors, employees and friends. The **First Place Global Leadership Institute** is our catalyst for advancing replicable options—a center where families, people with autism and thought leaders collaborate on housing solutions through training, education, research and public policy.

We are today with special populations where senior housing was 50 years ago. We have a burgeoning population in need of homes and services that must transcend outdated and limited models. We are focused on matching interests and needs of individuals with the right property location, design and amenities rooted in communities everywhere. A new generation of dynamic housing models is only possible by collectively tapping business, government and charitable interests.

Opening Doors to More Housing Options: First Place AZ is an independent nonprofit positioned for transformational impact on how society approaches housing and community development for individuals with different abilities. After an evaluation of more than 100 residential programs across the U.S. and focus groups involving 100 individuals with special needs and their families, the first new property broke ground in December 2016 on First Place–Phoenix, supported by a \$21.8 million comprehensive capital campaign comprised of public, private, philanthropic and nonprofit sources. Leasing has been growing steadily since the property welcomed 34 residents in 2018.

Led by market principles, First Place AZ promotes collaboration among all sectors and a sustainable, replicable model. First Place also serves as a catalyst toward advancing public policy focused on housing solutions for special populations. First Place AZ represents a new residential prototype for adults with autism and other special abilities, backed by research led by SARRC, the ASU Stardust Center for Affordable Homes, the Urban Land Institute and some of the most respected real estate concerns in the U.S.

Mixed-Use Development: First Place–Phoenix, a \$15.4 million development in the heart of Phoenix, is within walking distance of light rail and public transit near supportive, welcoming neighbors. The 1.4-acre site was strategically selected with proximity to Dignity Health St. Joseph's Hospital & Medical Center (SJHMC) and Barrow Neurological Institute (BNI).

(1) The First Place Apartments, with 55 studio, one-, two- and four-bedroom units, has a capacity of approximately 80 residents (housing with support services for residents, including ASU doctoral fellows and Teach For America alumni).

(2) The First Place Transition Academy, a two-year, tuition-based residential program for young adults with autism, is operated by the [Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center](#) (SARRC) and includes a two-year curriculum with 32 semester-length courses.

(3) The First Place Global Leadership Institute represents a faculty of experts from across the country focused on pressing concerns that open doors to more housing and independent living options for individuals with special needs. Its five centers facilitate the critical work and impact of First Place and include: the Maricopa IDA Center for Education, Training & Employment; Center for Real Estate & Community Development; Colonel Harland Sanders Center for Applied Research; Mulzet Center for Expression/Communication; and Daniel Jordan Fiddle Center for Public Policy.

More Independent, Healthier Living: First Place AZ is focused on developing new residential models that maximize independence, community integration, personal enrichment and quality of life by supporting adults with special needs to live more independently. At the same time, First Place is building on-ramps with community partners to increase capacity for members of this population.

Employment: First Place Transition Academy students experience paid internships and engage in volunteer activities, exposing them to different types of jobs while building their skills and resumes, reinforcing the value of individuals with autism and other special abilities in the workplace. The design of First Place AZ also promotes entrepreneurial pursuits and the property's location connects residents and students to competitive employment opportunities throughout the region.

Transportation & Community Connections: Engaging individuals with special needs with the broader community is a huge part of the First Place AZ mix as they gain access through the Valley Metro Transit System, including light rail and bus service connecting them to jobs, volunteer work, arts and culture, recreation and more.

Health & Wellness: From healthy daily living habits and regimens to a medical model empowered with subspecialty care through SJHMC/BNI, plans include patient-centered healthcare for adults.

Education: Focused on independent living, vocational and interpersonal skill development, the Learn4Independence® curriculum developed by First Place AZ and SARRC is currently offered to First Place Transition Academy participants at GateWay Community College in Phoenix. The goal is to offer curriculum access to other special learners in the future.

Housing Beta Site: Also known as “independent living classrooms,” residential opportunities have been offered for more than four years at 29 Palms, an affordable housing property in Phoenix co-locating 13 apartments for senior citizens who do not have autism with eight two-bedroom units for Transition Academy participants. A development of the Foundation for Senior Living (FSL) in collaboration with First Place AZ, SARRC, the Arizona Department of Housing and the Arizona Community Foundation, this property successfully served as a beta site for the First Place Transition Academy before the opening of First Place–Phoenix in July 2018. The property has demonstrated the benefits of combining seniors with a special needs population in an environment that encompasses supportive physical design, assistive technology and activities promoting neighborly interactions. Starting mid-2019, First Place Transition Academy graduates will have the option of living at 29 Palms. A second, similarly situated property is scheduled to open in early 2020 in collaboration with FSL.

PBS NewsHour Segments

- [Giving adults with autism the skills to build independent lives](#)
- [How Phoenix became the most autism-friendly city in the world](#)

Videos

- [First Place: Building Community](#)
- [ABC 15 Arizona: Story on First Place–Phoenix](#)
- [First Place Global Leadership Institute](#)
- [First Place Transition Academy](#)
- [Dylan's Day](#)
- [First Place Groundbreaking 2016](#)
- [First Place Overview](#)

Articles/Blogs

- [Overview: Community-based solutions for individuals with autism and other different abilities](#)
- Find other recent posts here:
 - [First Place Blog](#)
 - [Different Brains Blog](#)
- [First Place News](#)

Recognition

- First Place AZ is a recipient of the 2016 international “[Hero X House to Home Prize](#)” sponsored by Autism Speaks for our breakthrough idea in housing.
- The Arizona Department of Housing honored First Place AZ and FSL with its 2016 Most Innovative Property of the Year Award for our 29 Palms beta-site property.
- The Mayor’s Commission on Disability Issues recognized First Place–Phoenix with the 2017 Architecture of the Year Award.
- The AZ Cardinals honored First Place with its 2018 Community Quarterback Award.