



**For Immediate Release**

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**First Place® AZ and Maricopa County Sheriff's Office  
to Conduct Autism Awareness Training on March 10**

*Individuals with autism will role play a traffic stop*

**PHOENIX (March 6, 2023)** — An autism awareness training at the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office Training Center is happening Friday, March 10 in collaboration with [First Place® AZ](#), an Arizona nonprofit with the vision of ensuring housing, healthcare and community options are as bountiful for people with autism and other neurodiversities.

The March 10 event is a continuation of a series of educational training activities to teach individuals with autism how to better interact with law enforcement and to help law enforcement better understand and serve individuals with autism. Behavioral traits of the neurodiverse population are sometimes mistaken for intoxication, criminal behavior or even mental illness.

Last year's training was onsite at First Place-Phoenix, where officers were also given an opportunity to tour the property and get to know the residents through various ice breaker activities. The shift to the MCSO Training Center will provide an in-depth and interactive experience with law enforcement, including training officers and various vehicles. Sheriff Paul Penzone recently joined the First Place AZ board of directors. He plans to attend the March 10 event.

Sheriff's deputies and employees will role-play scenarios:

- **Role-Playing Scenario 1:** Traffic stop with individual with autism acting as a passenger
- **Role-Playing Scenario 2:** Individual with autism reporting an incident/accident/calling 9-1-1
- **Role-Playing Scenario 3:** Individual with autism disclosing autism diagnosis to law enforcement

**WHAT:** First Place® AZ and Maricopa County Sheriff's Office to conduct autism awareness training

**WHEN:** 9:45 a.m. - 11 a.m. Friday, March 10

**WHERE:** Maricopa County Sheriff's Office Training Center, 2627 S. 35<sup>th</sup> Ave., Phoenix 85003

**VISUALS:**

- Individuals with autism will sit in law enforcement vehicles and role play a traffic stop with a law enforcement officer talking with them.
- Individuals with autism and law enforcement will interact closely together.
- The sheriff's Training Center will have numerous law enforcement vehicles on hand such as a marked sheriff's car and unmarked sheriff's car, large transportation vehicle and sheriff's helicopter (pending any emergencies).

"The more we collaborate with and learn from unique communities, the better we serve the needs of all. First Place is a special place and we are grateful for their leadership," said Maricopa County Sheriff Paul Penzone.

First Place—Phoenix, First Place AZ's \$15.4 million, 81,000-square-foot, 63-unit apartment property, is a residential community with a suite of supports and amenities for individuals with autism, Down syndrome, traumatic brain injury and other neurodiversities. Ushering in a new era of housing and community options for special populations, First Place combines apartments, the Transition Academy residential life skills program and the Global Leadership Institute to expand more independent, community-integrated living options.

For more information or to get involved, email [info@firstplaceaz.org](mailto:info@firstplaceaz.org) or visit [firstplaceaz.org](http://firstplaceaz.org).

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### **About First Place® AZ**

First Place AZ, a charitable 501(c)(3), is advancing innovative residential and community options for adults with autism and other neurodiversities through its vision for fueling a new wave of real estate and community development. First Place—Phoenix, the nonprofit's flagship property, is an 81,000-square-foot apartment community set in the heart of the urban area and recognized by PBS NewsHour as "[the most autism-friendly city in the world](#)." The First Place Global Leadership Institute leverages this award-winning property to serve as an R&D site,

supporting the replication of residential and post-secondary education models and fostering collaboration among the public, private, philanthropic and nonprofit sectors. Learn more at [firstplaceaz.org](http://firstplaceaz.org).