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## First Place Recruits Adults with Autism

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Posted By [Cory Galvan](#) on November 26, 2014



Adults with autism, 18 years and older, now have a new post high school option. It's called First Place and it's being advanced in collaboration with the Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC). Students are now enrolling in the two-year First Place Transition Academy, which focuses on independent living skills, continuing education opportunities, vocational training and employment.

The First Place Transition Academy is being launched through a beta site at 29 Palms Apartments in Phoenix, which co-locates six two-bedroom apartments for adults with autism and 15 affordable housing units for seniors. Residents will live at the beta site for two years and then transition into the community to live close to their family or job. They will also have the option to live at the First Place Apartments, expected to break ground in 2015 and open in 2016, in Phoenix.

"This program is a comprehensive educational opportunity that focuses on functional life skills, paid work experience and course work to prepare the individual for a successful independent adult life," said Jeff Ross, First Place executive director.

Ross founded the nationally recognized Transition to Independent Living program at Taft College in California. Documented outcomes of the program include that 95 percent of graduates live independently, 89 percent are employed and 88 percent of graduates pay for all of their living expenses.

Orientation for living at 29 Palms begins in December. Classes begin in early January. The program at 29 Palms, overseen by SARRC, has three major components: teaching functional life skills on site, paid work internships throughout the community and independent living courses at Gateway Community College beginning in fall 2015. Students must be accepted to the tuition-based program.

"Our focus is to help adults learn the skills they need so they may live where they want and as independently as possible with access to the people, places, jobs and activities they prefer and that make them happy," said Daniel Openden, president/CEO of SARRC.

**Special features of 29 Palms for adults with autism include:**

- Quiet, visually calm environment
- Secure doors and windows; safety glass; perimeter fence
- Formaldehyde-free cabinets and doors
- Adequate natural ventilation
- Indirect lighting
- Acoustical grade windows and doors
- Sound absorption panels
- Daily task scheduling and assistance

Interested applicants apply online and then undergo a life skills assessment conducted by SARRC and First Place. Annual tuition, which covers rent, classes, individualized services and activities, is \$3,500 a month.

Developed by the Foundation for Senior Living and in concert with First Place and SARRC, 29 Palms was designed and renovated to meet the needs of individuals with autism. The renovation was made possible through a grant from the Arizona Department of Housing, a loan from the Arizona Community Foundation and other charitable sources. Del Sol Furniture is providing interior furnishings for the Transition Academy units. The Arizona Department of Housing recently presented 29 Palms with the Brian Mickelsen Housing Hero Award for Outstanding Affordable Housing Initiative.

Adults with autism will live and learn at the beta site while the First Place mixed-use development is being completed. Envisioned as a replicable model to offer innovative housing, educate adults with autism on life skills and train service providers and other professionals, First Place combines three complementary components: First Place Apartments (for residents), First Place Transition Academy (for students), and First Place Leadership Institute (a 10,000 square-foot facility for service providers, professionals and physicians).



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"Backed by 15 years of research, First Place celebrates diversity, independent living and a path toward opening doors to more real estate options for individuals with autism and other special abilities," said Denise D. Resnik, First Place founder and Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC) co-founder.