



For Immediate Release

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**Arizona Dept. of Housing Honors First Place® AZ with 2019 Housing Hero Award
for Innovative Supportive Housing Program or Service**

PHOENIX (August 22, 2019) — The Arizona Department of Housing has honored [First Place® AZ](#) with the 2019 Housing Hero Award for its Innovative Supportive Housing Program and pioneering approach to housing for special populations, specifically for adults with autism.

First Place AZ is revolutionizing residential models and creating lasting social impact on a global scale through a visionary goal to ensure that housing and community options are as bountiful for people with autism and other neuro-diversities as they are for everyone else.

“First Place AZ represents the best efforts of local champions who are committed to creatively solving housing problems in Arizona,” says Carol Ditmore, director of the Arizona Department of Housing. “First Place’s approach to fostering a community, empowering residents to become more independent and engaging public, private, philanthropic and nonprofit sectors to fuel a new wave of housing options for this population is truly innovative.”

First Place–Phoenix, the nonprofit’s new, 81,000-square-foot, \$15.4 million residential property in the heart of midtown, opened mid-2018. Ushering in a new era of housing options for special populations, First Place is combining apartments, the residential Transition Academy life skills program and the Global Leadership Institute to advance more independent and community-integrated living options. In addition to 55 apartments, First Place–Phoenix offers residents a suite of supports and various amenities, including a sports pool, culinary teaching kitchen, game room, fitness room and LEGO lounge.

“With a bold vision decades in the making, our board and team are humbled by this award recognizing First Place AZ as both a real estate and community developer,” says Denise D. Resnik, First Place founder, president and CEO. “It is gratifying to see our first residents living their dream of new friends, jobs, increased independence and a supportive community offering all kinds of opportunities.”

Resnik adds, “Community is best defined by the people in your life you do not pay to care about you—and the only way they can care is if they get to know you, which is why First Place is firmly integrated into the heart of our urban region, also recognized as the most autism-friendly city in the world.”

The increased prevalence from one in 2,500 children 20 years ago to one in 59 today illustrates a growing population of young people with autism and other neuro-diversities—more than 60,000 annually in the U.S.—now entering adulthood. This poses an increasing dilemma for parents wondering who will care for their adult children when they are no longer able.

First Place–Phoenix is poised to serve as an international model, demonstrating purposeful, independent living—and supportive neighbors—for individuals with special needs. RSP Architects and hardison/downey construction, inc. led the design and construction management, together with several local and national collaborators. Financing through a New Markets Tax Credit transaction was led by Dudley Ventures, Clearinghouse CDFI and U.S. Bancorp.

More than 6.5 million Americans are living with an intellectual disability. About 835,000 are living with parents ages 60 and older. While designed to attract a population in need of the supports and services offered, the specific design of First Place responds to the largest disability segment in the U.S.: autism. More than three million Americans are living with an autism spectrum disorder.

First Place AZ also received the Housing Hero Award for Outstanding Affordable Housing Initiative in 2014 for First Place’s former Phoenix beta site, 29 Palms, developed in collaboration with FSL.

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

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About First Place® AZ

First Place AZ is a nonprofit organization advancing innovative residential options for adults with autism and other special abilities. First Place is creating replicable residential and post-secondary education models that promote collaboration among the public, private, philanthropic and nonprofit sectors, serving as a catalyst for advancing public policy focused on housing solutions for special populations. First Place celebrates neuro-diversity, independent living and the belief that housing options for people with autism and other special abilities should be as bountiful as they are for everyone else. First Place–Phoenix, the nonprofit’s first new property, opened in 2018. Leasing is underway. View PBS NewsHour’s two-part series about First Place at [“Giving Adults with Autism the Skills to Build Independent Lives”](#) and [“How Phoenix Became the Most Autism-Friendly City in the World.”](#) Learn more at firstplaceaz.org.