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## SARRC helps create housing for adults with autism in Phoenix




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Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center and the Foundation for Senior Living have joined forces to open First Place AZ, a transitional residence for young adults with autism at 29 Palms Apartments in Phoenix.

The apartment complex houses 15 units for seniors and six two-bedroom apartments designed for adults with autism.

“These seniors 55 and older get to be live-in grandparents for the young adults that are living here and they get to create new families,” said [Guy Mikkelson](#), CEO of the Foundation for Senior Living, at the ribbon cutting ceremony June 17.



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The kitchen of an apartment at 29 Palms for autistic adults.

The project received a majority of its funding, \$3 million of the total \$3.7 million, from the Arizona Department of Housing and the federally funded Neighborhood Stabilization Program. Other funds came from private businesses, including LISC Phoenix and the Arizona Community Foundation. Dohrmann Architects Inc., DECCA Multi-Family Builders Inc., and Del Sol Furniture designed, built and furnished the apartments, respectively.

“It’s what we need more of,” said [Michael Trailor](#), director of the Arizona Department of Housing, “it’s a public-private partnership to solve problems in communities.”

The apartments at 29 Palms will act as a beta site for First Place’s planned campus, which is expected to break ground next year. The larger campus would include housing for young adults with autism, a two-year tuition based “transition academy” operated by SARRC, and a multiuse training facility for providers, professionals and physicians.

The six 29 Palms units are specially fitted to adapt to autistic adults’ needs. Air conditioning, refrigerators and dishwashers are extra quiet to account for sensory over-stimulation, and parents of residents can choose from an array of technology to tell them everything from if their adult child is getting out of bed, to if they’re opening the cabinets.

Autistic residents pay \$3,500 per month. The cost includes developmental training and additional services provided by First Place. The out-of-pocket cost, while high, is more like tuition than rent, said [Denise Resnik](#), co-founder of SARRC. First Place plans to establish scholarship opportunities in the future. Rent for seniors is \$550 for a one-bedroom unit and \$650 for a two-bedroom unit. The Foundation for Senior Living will pay utilities for senior’s and utilities are included in the fees for First Place residents.

Resnik said First Place should help fill the void left by a lack of services available to those with autism once they are out of school.

“When the school bus stops coming parents don’t know what to do,” she said.

Resnik, who has a 23-year-old son with autism, said filling the hours of a week without school can be a daunting task. But even more, she said adults with autism are able to have a future outside of family homes.

“Once we show people that adults with autism are good neighbors, we will be able to reach more communities,” she said.