



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**First Place<sup>®</sup> Transition Academy Adding  
Neurodiverse Adults to Workforce**

*70% of recent graduates employed at graduation*

**PHOENIX (March 7, 2023)** —The First Place Transition Academy program—along with experiences from daily life in apartment homes and out in the community at large—helps adults with autism and/or intellectual/developmental disabilities (A/I/DD) build the life and job-readiness skills they need to enjoy purposeful, independent lives. Of its most recent graduates, 70% are employed and 90% are meeting their own health and safety needs with little or no assistance.

The 2023 Transition Academy cohort begins August 1. On Thursday, March 23 from 4:30 to 7 p.m., First Place–Phoenix (3001 N. Third St. Phoenix) will host a Transition Academy Discover Day for individuals and their families interested in learning more about the two-year residential program and life at First Place–Phoenix.

During the Discover Day, attendees will learn about the comprehensive, 32-course Learn4Independence<sup>®</sup> curriculum, tour the state-of-the-art property and speak with instructors and current students.

“A life of independence is a big step for many of these individuals,” says brad herron-valenzuela, managing director of the Transition Academy. “In addition to gaining crucial independent living skills, the Transition Academy can help them engage in self-determination to better understand their own needs and interests, and connect with the community at large.”

With clinical services provided by the Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC), the Transition Academy program is taught on the GateWay Community College campus in Phoenix. Sixteen students live in four four-bedroom apartments at First Place–Phoenix and

commute to GateWay five days a week. In addition to classes, they are busy with volunteer work, jobs and community life activities.

“Students leave this program with skills to lead independent lives, and notably, help shape more inclusive communities in which they live and work,” says Bethany Chadd, director of clinical services at SARRC.

Since 2015, more than 100 autistic individuals have graduated from the Transition Academy.

“Many of our graduates have gone on to community college and university programs and are living on their own, while others continue living more independent lives right here at First Place–Phoenix,” says Herron-Valenzuela. “Wherever they go in life, they take with them the skills and confidence gained from their Transition Academy experience.”

RSVP to the March 23 Discover Day [at this link](#).

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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).