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With the goal to advance the quality of life and independence for adults with autism, two organizations have come together to create a revolutionary housing opportunity.

"It brings out kindness and purpose in people and truly connects us," says Denise D. Resnik (pictured), First Place AZ founder, president and CEO, about 29 Palms II, a very special residential project scheduled to break ground this fall. First Place AZ is a nonprofit that strives to advance the development and quality of life and independence for adults with autism and other neuro-diversities. With its vision and mission in mind, First Place AZ and the Foundation for Senior Living (FSL) partnered to create bountiful housing options that model and promote collaboration, fruitfulness and dignity for all for its residents and serve as a catalyst for advancing the current public policy on housing solutions for special populations. "What we are doing today is the culmination of 20 years of research, study and innovation and different properties will express different options for its prospective residents," Resnik says.

This partnership sparked from an introduction by Mike Traylor, director of Arizona Department of Economic Security. "He had worked closely with FSL and had great respect for their institutions. He understood our vision for First Place and thought that bringing these two populations together would create a winning formula, and indeed it has," Resnik says.

"We opened our first collaborative property, 29 Palms, in Phoenix [in] June 2014, and it's been very well received by the community," says Steve Hastings, chief of Real Estate Services at FSL. "It has become a great home to our FSL residents, created the opportunity for wonderful relationships between our seniors and First Place Transition Academy participants and illuminated the complementary needs and interests of purposeful living that can happen when we create this mixed population." 29 Palms II will also be located in Phoenix, at 21st and Missouri Avenues.

With this project, the organizations are striving to continue creating a positive outlook for these demographics and are hopeful that as a community they can demonstrate that each of their residents, no matter their circumstance, can be productive contributing members of society.

Working with FSL, First Place AZ is able to help broaden its participants' options of where they live, who they live with and how they live—which are choices they did not possess.

After studying trends of happiness and way of life within senior living communities, it was apparent that there has been an upward trend in the number of comfort choices they have acquired. "Today, when you look around, you see different locations, price points, options and amenities because there is not a one-size-fits-all for a senior just like there is not a one-size-fits-all for people who have special needs," Resnik says.

And the need for this type of housing development hits close to home for Resnik. "I am so committed to this is because our 26-year-old son is significantly impacted by autism," she says. Resnik says her son is why she co-founded the Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center 21 years ago; she wanted to ensure he had a rewarding future. She wanted to extend a hand for all other families who have newly diagnosed children and give them one less thing to worry about.

With First Place Arizona, "[parents] learn about a successful future [for their children] that includes jobs, homes, friends and a supportive community. That gives hope, and when you have hope for the future and can experience what that looks like, it makes getting through the next school day, year and even those long nights easier," Resnik says.

By 2025, together with other organizations, First Place AZ aims to create 1,000 job opportunities for people with different abilities as well as cultivate a variety of successful real estate options that achieve financial stability and demonstrate what is possible when people come together as a community.

To Learn More

First Place AZ firstplaceaz.org.

Foundation for Senior Living fsl.org.