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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Fresno Chaffee Zoo Partners with Pal Experiences to Create an Inclusive Zoo Experience for Guests with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities

Fresno, California, April 10, 2019: Pal Experiences, a Phoenix-based non-profit, has partnered with the Fresno Chaffee Zoo to create free tools to help those with autism and other developmental disabilities enjoy their next trip to the Zoo.

The Fresno Chaffee Zoo is the first zoo location in the United States to become a Pal Experiences “Pal Place”. By doing so, they have taken steps to become more inclusive for those in the community that are impacted by autism and other developmental disabilities. In partnership with Pal, the Zoo has created a video social story showing guests what they can expect during a visit, along with an interactive digital guide to assist with communication and navigation around the zoo.

Families can watch the Fresno Chaffee Zoo Pal Video, featuring local Zoo visitor Junior, before they visit to know what to expect and get tips on how to plan around sensory sensitives. From parking and hearing the sea lions bark, to taking turns with the goat brushes and leaving without a souvenir, the video can be a tool to set expectations for a fun visit.

“Inclusion and accessibility are core values to the Fresno Chaffee Zoo because we strive to be a zoo for everyone. This partnership is so exciting because it allows us to offer tangible tools to families and kids in our community to enjoy the Zoo and further our mission to educate people about the natural world,” said Dean Watanabe, Chief Conservation Education Officer.

Just like a ramp or curb cut helps those in our community with mobility challenges, this unique set of tools helps accommodate the 1 in 6 children who are impacted by non-visible developmental disabilities to enjoy experiences in community. All tools are created with evidence-based best practices in behavioral therapy, but use Universal Design, making them an asset to any Zoo guest who likes to know what to expect.

“Some of my best childhood memories are from Zoos. The Zoo is for everyone, and thanks to this partnership, parents who were once reluctant to go because a family member is on the spectrum, has sensory sensitivities, or gets anxious over new places, can visit with the resources and confidence to make their own great Zoo memories. It is very rewarding.” says Melanie Isaacs, Pal Experiences Founder & Chief Inclusion Officer.

Pal Experiences and the Fresno Chaffee Zoo hope that this type of program will be socially transformative, and propel other businesses and entertainment venues in the community to recognize the need to accommodate this growing, exceptional community. The Pal partnership is part of a number of accessibility and inclusion programs being implemented at the Zoo in observance of Autism Awareness Month.

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About Fresno Chaffee Zoo: Fresno Chaffee Zoo inspires wonder of our natural world, provides an engaging learning environment, and creates a passion for conservation.

About Pal Experiences: Pal Experiences creates digital tools that connect individuals and families impacted by autism, anxiety and other developmental disabilities with businesses inspired to offer them a better customer experience. Learn more at PalExperiences.org, and connect with Pal on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).