

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Tohono O'odham Nation Region

IMPACT REPORT 2021



FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Tohono-Oodham-Nation

90%

of a child's brain growth happens before kindergarten.

Early childhood matters.

First Things First partners with families and communities to help our state's youngest children prepare for kindergarten and beyond.

Many young children in Arizona face challenges that threaten their healthy development and learning. In the FTF Tohono O'odham Nation Region, there are **1,180 children** (under age 6) with **69% living in poverty**.

Here is how FTF is working to support young children and their families in this region.

“ The regional council recognizes learning starts in the home with families. Children who are engaged in high-quality early learning see educational and health conditions improve long term, even during a pandemic.”

Kymerlii Tenario

Chair of FTF Tohono O'odham Nation Regional Partnership Council

FTF Tohono O'odham Nation Region Strategic Priorities



Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

Families are a child's first and best teachers. FTF programs in the Tohono O'odham Nation region give parents choices for how they want to support their child's health and learning. The region offers parents and caregivers assistance in finding and **coordinating services** for meeting the needs of their children.



Quality Preschool and Child Care

Children who attend high-quality early learning programs go on to do better in school and are more likely to graduate. The Tohono O'odham Nation region provides funding for child care providers and preschool programs to participate in FTF's **Quality First**. Providers benefit from training, coaching and a wide range of evidence-based supports to improve the quality of their early learning programs in ways that help children learn, grow and thrive. Early childhood educators living in the region can also apply to receive **college scholarships** to pursue an early education certification or degree. In addition, the region funds **Quality First Scholarships** to help families afford quality early learning for their young children.



Professional development program through Tohono O'odham Community College helps teachers get their students ready for kindergarten

In the First Things First Tohono O'odham Nation Region, 74% of the 3- and 4-year-old children are enrolled in early education services creating a demand for educated teachers and support staff.

Mariena Mendez and Danelle Jose are two students who recently graduated with valuable skills they acquired while in the Early Childhood Education program at Tohono O'odham Community College.

Mendez and Jose were part of the Tohono O'odham Community College Community of Practice, which is one of the 17 communities of practice developed by United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona's Great Expectations for Teachers, Children and Families.

First Things First funds the program, which provides early childhood educators with in-depth professional development that allows them to earn college credit and work toward degrees in early childhood. It's a part of the FTF Tohono O'odham Nation Regional Partnership Council's work to help boost the quality of child care provided to young children in the region.

The community of practice at the college called, A'al Ha-Mascam, which means "children and their learning" in O'odham, focuses on improving kindergarten transitions for children.

Danelle Jose serves as a community health representative for the Tohono O'odham Nation, and said she was able to find the connection between her current role and the resources offered through her college classes.

"[The program] helped give me the tools I needed to aid parents, especially young parents, with their individual needs when it comes to parenting," Jose said.

Mendez works as the family and community partnership specialist for all of the Nation's Head Start Centers. She plans to continue her education in social work.

During her time in the college's community of practice, Mendez appreciated the support of those in her cohort.

"I've always loved working with children, but with the help of my teachers, I was able to see there are so many career options within early childhood," she said.

Both agreed that the support they received from their teachers in the early childhood education program helped them to become better teachers.

"I've always had really good teachers throughout my life that have helped inspire me to be a teacher," Jose said. "I had a teacher's aide in preschool that I will always remember because she always made sure to impact us [students] positively every day and interact with us. I want to be the same way with the children I work with."

Now with early childhood education degrees under their belts, Mendez and Jose plan to continue their education.

"I've always had really good teachers throughout my life that have helped inspire me to be a teacher."

—Danelle Jose, early childhood teacher

"I plan to complete my associate degree in social work, and possibly join the early childhood education cohort at Northern Arizona University," Mendez said.

Jose plans to remain with her current position. However, after a short break from school, she wants to look into being a special needs teacher.

"Every time they asked us in school what we wanted to be, I always said, a teacher. I've just always known," she said.

Both now look forward to working with families to help their community's young children be ready for success in kindergarten and beyond.

FTF Tohono O’odham Nation Regional Partnership Council

The FTF Tohono O’odham Nation Regional Partnership Council is made up of volunteers who study the unique needs of the local community and decide how funds should be used to best support the healthy development and early learning of young children birth to age 5. FTF invests

in proven programs and innovative strategies through grants to community organizations that provide services to children and families. Some of the programs in this region include Quality First, family support coordination and professional development for early childhood educators.

FTF Tohono O’odham Nation SFY21 Total Regional Program Expenditures

Quality Child Care and Preschool

\$228,649

Strengthening Families

\$138,484

Workforce Development and Training

\$118,787

Parent and Community Awareness

\$50,000

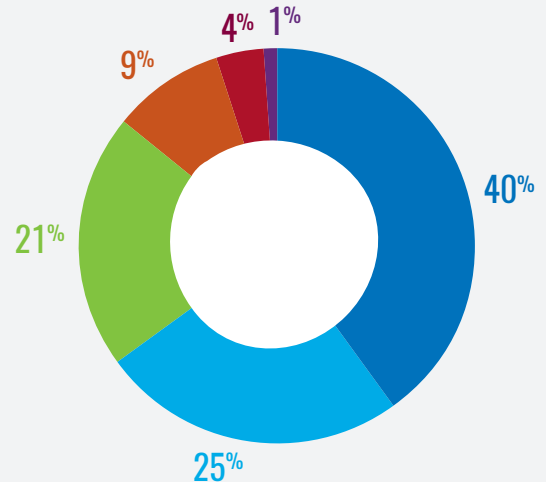
Research and Evaluation

\$17,935

Preventive Health

\$8,689

Total \$562,546



FTF Tohono O’odham Nation Regional Partnership Council and Staff

Chair

Kymerlii Tenario

Members

**Cheryl Conde
Joseph Mease
Jesse Navarro**

**Elsa Peterson
April Villalobos
Marisa Werner**

FTF Regional Director

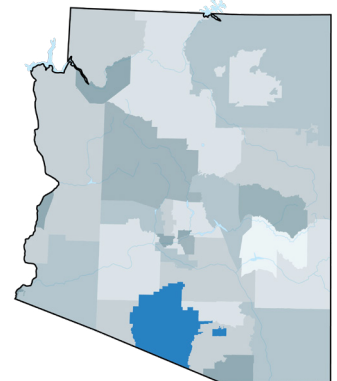
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The **Tohono O’odham Nation’s** lands are located within the Sonoran Desert in south-central Arizona. The boundaries of the First Things First Tohono O’odham Region are the same as the Nation’s federally recognized reservation boundaries. These include the noncontiguous San Xavier (Tucson) and San Lucy (Gila Bend & Glendale) districts; Florence Village, a small community outside the City of Florence in Pinal County; and the nine contiguous districts that make up the majority of Western Pima County and small southern portions of Maricopa and Pinal counties. They include Gu Vo, Hickiwan, Sif Oidak, Gu Achi, Pisinemo, Chukut Kuk, Sells, Shuk Toak and Baboquivari districts. The FTF Tohono O’odham Nation Region includes Legislative District 4. (Legislative districts are not necessarily congruent with regional boundaries.)

Learn more at

[FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Tohono-Oodham-Nation](https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/Regions/Tohono-Oodham-Nation)