

# # FIRST THINGS FIRST

Gila Region

# IMPACT REPORT 2021



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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 Gila Region, there are **2,688 children** (under age 6) with **36% living in poverty**.

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

“Early childhood education is the springboard for a successful school career. The opportunity to participate in a preschool will assist our children in being ready for school and successful throughout their years in school.”

**Sherry Dorathy**

*Superintendent of Miami Unified School District #40*

## FTF Gila Region Strategic Priorities



### Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

Families are a child's first and best teachers. FTF programs in the Gila region give parents choices for how they want to support their child's health and learning. The region provides parents with free **evidence-based trainings** designed to improve knowledge of parenting practices and children's development. The region also **distributes books** to families with children from birth to age 5 to encourage parent-child interaction and reading. Families of newborns throughout the region and across the state also receive the **Arizona Parent Kit**, with helpful information and resources to support new parents.



### 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 Gila 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 could apply to receive **FTF College Scholarships** to pursue an early education certification or degree. The region also funds **Quality First Scholarships** to help low-income families afford quality early learning for their young children.



### Preventive Health

Undetected or untreated health issues can impact learning later on. Left unaddressed, developmental delays and chronic medical conditions can contribute to serious learning problems. FTF works to support the health and development of young children in the Gila region by funding **developmental and sensory screenings** to detect vision, hearing and developmental issues and help prevent later learning challenges. **Oral health screenings** are also offered to protect children against childhood tooth decay, a leading cause of school absences.



## First time mom and dad get boost of confidence from parenting class in Miami

In the mining town of Miami, Lucy Struck gave birth to her first daughter, Violet, in 2019. Struck and her husband, Frank, learned everything they could about parenting. But when Violet became a toddler, they felt they needed more knowledge.

"Toddlers are so active and have these big personalities," said Struck. "My husband and I heard about the parenting class, and decided if we have the help, why not take it?"

The Arizona Youth Partnership's (AZYP) Gila County parenting education classes are offered for free to local parents and caregivers through funding provided by the First Things First Gila Regional Partnership Council.

Parents attending the in-person, four-week class learn from parent educators that use the Active Parenting's First Five Years™ curriculum. Topics covered include early childhood development, parent-child bonding, encouraging positive behavior, literacy, healthy discipline and getting children ready to succeed in kindergarten.

Sara Wildenborg, the partnership's program director, said during the COVID-19 pandemic the class turned virtual and parent educators provided extra support to parents through text, email, Facebook messaging and phone calls.

"Our educators provided information about COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites, food box and clothing distributions, and other emergency resources to support our parents," said Wildenborg. "This support was needed more than ever with families experiencing so much loss with COVID-19 related illness and death, the fires and the floods."

As Struck parented her toddler during the COVID-19 pandemic, she needed the ideas presented in class to help with stress but wondered if virtual would be a good fit for her.

"They started doing the virtual classes, and I thought it was going to be different, but honestly it worked," Struck said. "Everyone joined and interacted as they did when it was in person."

She learned how to provide healthy discipline for her child and to manage her own stress. She learned to take a deep breath and assess the situation.

"If we went to the store, and she'd throw a fit, I tried yelling. People would tell me to spank her," Struck said. "The class taught me how get down on her eye level and talk to her. I know if she's crying, she needs help from me. She might be tired, hungry or needing something else. The class teaches you how to communicate with a child who can't talk. If you yell at them, you make them meaner and frustrate them more."

The class also taught her about the importance of reading with her daughter for improving language, bonding and getting her ready for kindergarten.

"We teach parents to make reading a bonding moment," said Charlene Becker, an AZYP parent educator. "Make it a special time by finding a cozy and comfortable place to read and have dad join in, too. Lucy is bilingual as Spanish is her native language. I encouraged her to teach Violet the English and Spanish languages, as it would be advantageous for her to learn both."

**"You've got to get your kids ready for school and this class has helped... Parenting is always going to be hard, but it (the class) can make it easier for you."**

**—Lucy Struck, parent**

Struck said she and her husband try to follow all of the parenting tips they've been taught and find that the advice is working.

"You've got to get your kids ready for school and this class has helped. My daughter loves books," she said. "Even if you have help, the class can help you a lot more. Parenting is always going to be hard, but it can make it easier for you."

## FTF Gila Regional Partnership Council

The FTF Gila 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 funded in this region include First Smiles, the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, developmental and sensory screening, Starting Out Right-Active Parenting, and First Five Years.

### FTF Gila SFY21 Total Regional Program Expenditures

Quality Child Care and Preschool

\$438,599

Strengthening Families

\$203,183

Preventive Health

\$76,820

Research and Evaluation

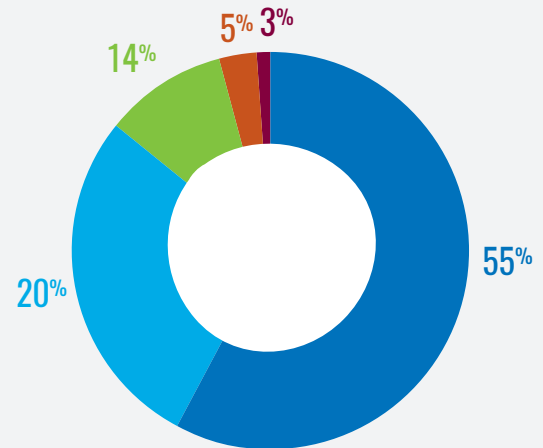
\$24,467

Parent and Community Awareness

\$10,000

Total

\$753,069



### FTF Gila Regional Partnership Council and Staff

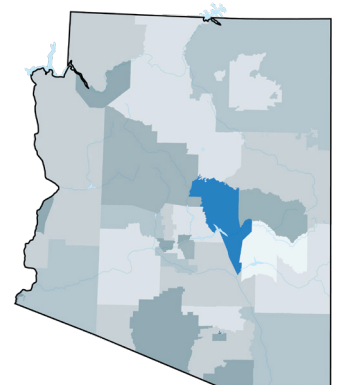
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The **FTF Gila Region** is defined as Gila County, not including the lands belonging to the San Carlos Apache Tribe and the White Mountain Apache Tribe, which are their own First Things First regions. The FTF Gila Region's population is located in the small towns of Globe, Payson, Miami, Hayden/Winkelman, Pine/ Strawberry, the unincorporated areas of Tonto Basin and Young, and a number of rural unincorporated communities. The Tonto Apache Tribe is located within the FTF Gila Region, adjacent to the town of Payson. The FTF Gila Region includes Legislative District 6. (Legislative districts are not necessarily congruent with regional boundaries.)

Learn more at  
[FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Gila](https://www.FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Gila)