

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Cocopah Tribe Region

2020 Impact Report



From birth to age 5, a child's brain grows more than any other time in life.

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 Cocopah Tribe Region, there are **65 children** (under age 6) with **65% living in poverty**.

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

“As a Cocopah Tribe member, I have witnessed how diet changes have debilitated the health of the Cocopah Tribe members. I've observed the impact of the Let's Cook | Let's Eat | Let's Play program. It has brought our community together creating experiences for families that revitalize traditional values and food. Funding this program has created a powerful collaboration between tribal and non-tribal programs that goes beyond the reach of the funding.”



Wilana Ortega

Chair of FTF Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council

FTF Cocopah Tribe Regional Key Impact Highlights [Fiscal Year 2020]

Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

107 Resources distributed to families with young children at parenting activities offering education about the importance of early childhood.

87 Adults attended parenting activities to learn more about the importance of early childhood development.

14 Families with young children participated in voluntary home visiting programs proven to reduce parental stress levels, increase connections to community supports, and improve children's cognitive, motor, behavioral and social-emotional development.

Quality Preschool and Child Care

19 Children attended preschools and child care programs participating in Quality First.

Preventive Health

17 Children monitored to receive appropriate screenings to detect vision, hearing and developmental issues to prevent learning challenges later on.

Additional Strategies

7 **Parenting activities** were offered to families to provide information about the importance of early childhood development.

2 **Professionals** attended workshops to learn new tools and strategies to implement in their work with families.



Health awareness program helps Cocopah families try healthy foods to reduce obesity in young children

Jessica Serrano brought her 1-year-old daughter, Jyselle, to Cocopah Family Night with the hopes of learning some new cooking skills and preparing dinner with her daughter, for a change.

"I thought it was a good idea to cook the food in front of the audience instead of doing it behind the scenes, so everyone could get hands on experience," said Serrano.

Serrano was one of many Cocopah Tribe families who are taking the first step to healthier eating after attending the event aimed to reduce child obesity.

The Let's Cook | Let's Eat | Let's Play program presented at Cocopah Family Night, in collaboration with Project LAUNCH and Cultural Resources, is funded by the First Things First Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council. The program is designed to raise awareness among parents about healthy eating, body awareness and physical activity to promote health and reduce obesity in young children in the region.

FTF Cocopah Tribe Regional Director, Nohemi Ortega, said the regional council took a year of planning, researching, interviewing and strategizing to find the best way to help

families and their young children achieve better health.

"Our research showed that a lot of the families were not cooking meals at home," said Ortega. "The council was willing to address the issue and have conversations to find out what was stopping families from cooking."

Some of the concerns discovered were families lacked time and a basic knowledge of how to cook healthy meals. Parents needed simple, healthy cultural recipes that were easy to prepare at home.

In collaboration with Project LAUNCH, the awareness program promoted the theme, "Health is Tradition." They offered lunch meetings, where participants learned about healthy topics, parent and child interaction events, a YouTube cooking show and promoting healthy habits through social media.

On the night Serrano attended, families learned that, Kwapa, the original spelling of Cocopah and meaning River People, is indicative of a lifestyle and diet dependent on the river. Because of colonialization, the tribe has reduced fish from the general diet. Parents and grandparents commented at the event that they never served fish at home, because they didn't think their children would eat it.

"The event inspired me to cook a variety of different foods, especially fish," Serrano said. "I was surprised to see how the children enjoyed eating fish."

At the event, families learned how to cook a traditional dish of fish and corn fritters prepared in pumpkin seed oil. It also offered family fun time and an outdoor viewing of the movie, *Inside Out*, to learn to discuss feelings with children.

Since the COVID pandemic, the program has focused on social media postings to offer healthy eating awareness games, physical activities and recipes for parents to use at home.

"The program is helping families learn one recipe at a time, starting from traditional meals." - Nohemi Ortega, FTF regional director

"The program is helping families learn one recipe at a time, starting from traditional meals," said Ortega. "I'm very grateful to the council for taking the time to help build this awareness. More than half the community attended the Cocopah Family Night, and they all ate fish. They thought they didn't like fish, but now they know they do. Now they are open to trying new and healthier recipes. Change is possible."



Read more FTF stories at

[FirstThingsFirst.org/Region-Stories](https://www.FirstThingsFirst.org/Region-Stories)

FTF Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council

The FTF Cocopah Tribe 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 Early Steps Program, Quality First and Professional Development for Early Childhood Professionals.

FTF Cocopah Tribe FY20 Total Regional Program Expenditures

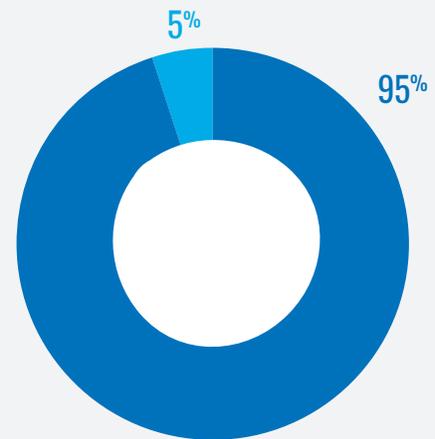
Strengthening Families

\$55,184

Research and Evaluation

\$2,942

Total \$58,126



FTF Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council and Staff

Chair
Wilana Ortega

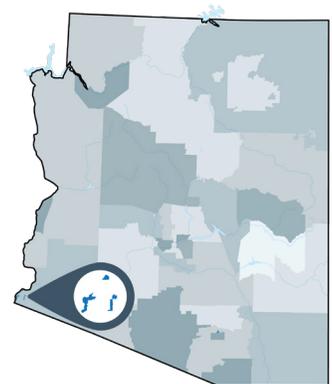
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The **FTF Cocopah Indian Tribe** is a federally recognized, sovereign tribe located in the most southwestern corner of Arizona, 13 miles south of Yuma and along the Colorado River. The Cocopah (Kwapa), also known as the River People, have historically lived along the lower Colorado River and delta. They are descendants of the Yuman-language speaking people that occupied the lands along the Colorado River. The current Cocopah Reservation is comprised of three noncontiguous regions: East, North and West Reservations. The boundaries of the First Things First Cocopah Tribe Region match those of the Cocopah Reservation. The FTF Cocopah Tribe Region includes Legislative District 4. (Legislative districts are not necessarily congruent with regional boundaries.)

Learn more at
[FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Cocopah-Tribe](https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/Regions/Cocopah-Tribe)