

# # FIRST THINGS FIRST Gila 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 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 absolutely crucial, and I’m just so dang proud of Gila County initiatives that put books in the hands of our kiddos and encourage parents to read to their children—and read to them often! It’s the single most significant key to a child’s early education.”



**Tommie Martin**

*Gila County Supervisor, District 1*

## FTF Gila Regional Key Impact Highlights

[Fiscal Year 2020]



### Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

**378** Families of newborns received the Arizona Parent Kit, filled with tips and tools to help support their child's healthy development.

**183** Parents and other caregivers participated in evidence-based trainings designed to improve knowledge of parenting practices and children's development.



### Preventive Health

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



### Quality Preschool and Child Care

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

**61** Children birth to age 5 received a Quality First scholarship to attend high-quality preschools and child care programs.

**3** Early childhood educators received college scholarships to improve their qualifications for working with infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

### Additional Strategies

**16,596**

#### Books

were given to families with children ages birth to 5 years to encourage parent-child interaction and reading.

**208**

#### Children

received a screening to detect tooth decay, which left undetected and untreated could cause damage to permanent teeth, impair speech development and failure to thrive.



## Oral health program in Payson helps with 4-year-old boy's dental needs

When a young mom arrived with her three children, all under the age of 5, at a domestic violence shelter in Payson, shelter staff noticed the oldest, 4-year-old "Eric" was very thin and had difficulty eating.

The shelter, Time Out, Inc. partners with the First Smiles program through the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension in Pinal County to provide residents' young children with free preventive dental screenings.

The First Smiles program is funded by the First Things First Gila Regional Partnership Council to help support families in caring for their children's oral health. Children who suffer from tooth decay are statistically more likely to be absent from school. When oral infections go untreated it impacts a child's self-esteem, ability to speak and overall physical health. The program aims to increase oral care by educating children and families at child care centers, preschools, pregnancy classes and shelters like Time Out Inc., about healthy oral habits and provides dental screenings and fluoride varnishes as well as referrals and help with finding a dentist.

"Time Out does not have the funds for dental care, so First Smiles has been a great collaborator and resource," said Patti Ippolito, volunteer and education coordinator at Time Out.

"Because of our residents' situations, the need for good dental care is often not addressed."

During the visit, Twylla Gibbons, a dental hygienist from First Smiles, visited the shelter to give Eric, his siblings and other children a screening. Gibbons invited children to line up and take turns sitting in a child-sized chair. She handed them a large stuffed animal and played a counting game.

"We count the teeth of the stuffed animal and then we count the child's teeth," Gibbons said. "I try to make it a fun game. For Eric, we counted his sister's teeth and then it was his turn."

The screening revealed that Eric had three broken teeth from cavities, which made eating very painful. Young children often don't report having tooth pain to adults, because "they grow used to living with it and don't really know any better. However, it effects their ability to eat and can affect their behaviors," Gibbons said.

The program also helps parents create a plan to get their child to a dentist. In Eric's case, he had health coverage from the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). His mother didn't realize AHCCCS also covered dental issues, a common misconception, Gibbons said.

"I gave her a highlighted list of local dental providers that took her insurance," she said. "Usually, we work with the parents to establish a dentist, but due to significant privacy and safety issues, Eric's mom chose to make the appointment."

Gibbons also shared information with her about caring for toddlers and babies. "She had an infant and a 2-year-old, so we talked about teething and avoiding juice bottles at night to prevent decay."

"Because of that screening, he got the help he needed and now he can eat. As staff, we wouldn't have checked his mouth. His mom was really excited to get it taken care of, because it got him out of pain."  
- Patti Ippolito, volunteer and education coordinator at Time Out, Inc.

Eric's mom took him to get his teeth fixed, which involved minor dental surgery. After the surgery, he was able to eat without discomfort.

"Because of that screening, he got the help he needed and now he can eat," said Ippolito. "As staff, we wouldn't have checked his mouth. His mom was really excited to get it taken care of, because it got him out of pain."



Read more FTF stories at  
[FirstThingsFirst.org/Region-Stories](https://www.FirstThingsFirst.org/Region-Stories)

## 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 in this region include developmental, sensory and oral health screenings, Active Parenting: First Five Years classes and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

### FTF Gila FY20 Total Regional Program Expenditures

Quality Child Care and Preschool

\$363,883

Strengthening Families

\$197,512

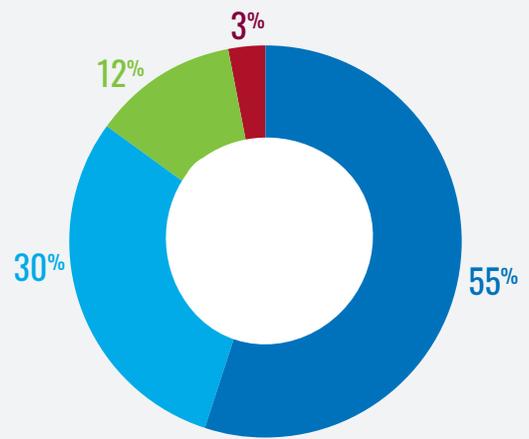
Preventive Health

\$85,236

Research and Evaluation

\$20,519

**Total** \$667,150



### FTF Gila Regional Partnership Council and Staff

Chair

**Fernando Shipley**

Vice Chair

**Sherry Dorathy**

Members

**Debora Bunney**

**Jeri Byrne**

**Debbie Leverance**

**Audrey Opitz**

**Charles Proudfoot**

**Melissa Ruff**

**Tashina Smith**

**Melisa Taylor**

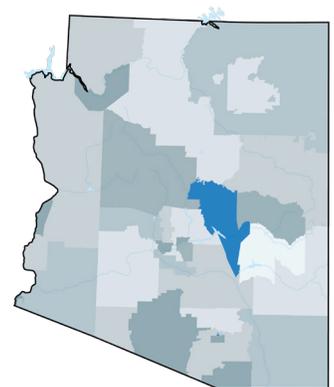
**Kristin Wade**

FTF Regional Director

**Carolyn Haro**

charo@firstthingsfirst.org

928.425.8172



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 city 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)