

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Cocopah Tribe Region

IMPACT REPORT 2021



FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Cocopah-Tribe

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.

“Children are sacred. Adults and elders of our community mentor and guide our youth to be courageous Cocopah and world citizens, connected to the past, present and future.”

Elizabeth Renaud

Vice Chair of FTF Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council

FTF Cocopah Tribe Region Strategic Priorities



Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

Families are a child's first and best teachers. FTF programs in the Cocopah Tribe region give parents choices for how they want to support their child's health and learning. The region offers voluntary **home visiting** programs that provide comprehensive, one-on-one support for families with young children. Parents can attend educational **family activities** to help support their child's healthy development and improve their parenting skills.



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 Cocopah Tribe 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. The region also funds a **transition to kindergarten** program so children can learn how a classroom works and how to prepare for school.



Preventive Health

Children need proper nutrition and exercise to be healthy and thrive. The region funded a **nutrition and physical activity awareness** campaign to teach parents about healthy eating, body awareness and physical activity to promote health and reduce obesity in young children in the region. The information is delivered through workshops, family nights, cooking shows and social media.



Cocopah Tribe girl transitions to kindergarten by developing social skills and healthy eating habits

Roxanna White and her daughter, Miiracle, did almost everything together. They shopped, read, cleaned the house, worked on creative projects and visited friends together. When it came time to go to school, White felt a little unsure about Miiracle being on her own in a classroom for the first time.

“Her being my only child, she had attachment issues,” said White. “I wanted her to see what it’s like to be in a classroom setting with a teacher, but also have me being nearby. It gave us both a chance to adjust to the school routine.”

White enrolled her in the PBS transition to kindergarten camp. The First Things First (FTF) Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council funds the three-week camp to help prepare children to succeed in kindergarten by developing their social skills and ability to read. The camp uses the cartoon character Super Why! to learn to recognize sounds, letters and meaning of words.

The camp also partnered with another FTF-funded program, Let’s Cook | Let’s Eat | Let’s Play. The program teaches families about healthy eating, body awareness and encourages physical activity to promote health and reduce obesity in young children.

White brought Miiracle to the first week of camp at the Cocopah Museum and Cultural Center, where the kids and parents would learn together through songs, arts and crafts and games.

Upon entering kindergarten, Cocopah children must attend school outside the reservation. Ana Bribiesca, PBS program manager, said they picked the cultural center to begin in a less intimidating setting.

“We start in a safe place in their own community, and then slowly move to a more structured kindergarten environment,” she said. “It was a great experience for kids to feel comfortable.”

At the cultural center, they would also have healthy snacks together through the Let’s Cook | Let’s Eat | Let’s Play program.

“They had us try all of these different foods, like broccoli and hummus,” said White. “I became addicted to hummus. I had never had it before. Now Miiracle likes hummus. We tried all different vegetables and fruits. They taught us how to make veggie pizzas and fruit pizzas. We made cauliflower hot wings.”

“I could tell the transition was going well, because in the beginning, she would want me around. But it got to the point where she would push me out of the classroom.”

—Roxanna White, parent

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, Let’s Cook | Let’s Eat | Let’s Play Director Josie Chavez would teach parents to dance with their kids after providing a healthy snack.

“We taught them Hawaiian dance and other dances,” said Chavez. “We made sure the food we provided was related to the exercise and PBS curriculum.”

White and Miiracle enjoyed the physical activities.

“We had the snack and then would dance with them for 10 to 15 minutes,” said White. “The parents were huffing and puffing. The kids had so much fun. It was a bonding and exciting time. I loved it.”

In the third week, the camp then moved into the Valle del Encanto Learning Center, which is an elementary school in Somerton. The same schedule continued, but kids and parents got to eat lunch in the cafeteria and explore the playgrounds and classes.

The camp would have the parents and kids do activities together and then separate them so each would go to a class. The parents learned about early childhood development, how to read to their children, how to be emotionally supportive and other parenting tips. The kids would learn to socialize, how to behave in a classroom and explore the formal classroom setting.

“I could tell the transition was going well, because in the beginning, she would want me around,” said White. “But it got to the point where she would push me out of the classroom.”

Now White and Miiracle are both ready for school to begin.

“I know that she’s ready,” said White. “Both her and I start classes on the same day. I start medical school and she starts her class. I’m going to be so happy, because she’s going to learn so much more.”

 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 Transition to Kindergarten, Let's Cook | Let's Eat | Let's Play and Early Steps Home Visiting Program.

FTF Cocopah Tribe SFY21 Total Regional Program Expenditures

Strengthening Families

\$69,498

Quality Child Care and Preschool

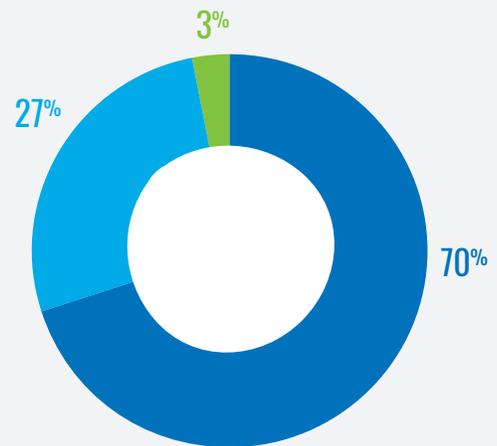
\$27,502

Research and Evaluation

\$3,508

Total

\$100,507



FTF Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council and Staff

Chair

Wilana Ortega

Vice Chair

Elizabeth Renaud

FTF Regional Director

Nohemi Ortega

nohemiortega@firstthingsfirst.org

928.343.3020

Members

Alex Bejarano

Josefina Mercado Chavez

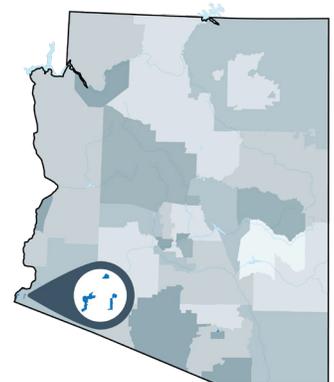
Esteban Escobar

Elizabeth Garcia

Paula Twist Koolick

Paul Soto

June Stillings



The **FTF Cocopah 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)