

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Gila River Indian Community Region

IMPACT REPORT

2021



FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Gila-River-Indian-Community

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 River Indian Community Region, there are **1,530 children** (under age 6) with **66% living in poverty**.

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

“Early childhood is extremely important for the physical, emotional and mental health of the child, which effects the greater community.”

Sandra Nasewytewa

Chair of FTF Gila River Indian Community Regional Partnership Council

FTF Gila River Indian Community Region Strategic Priorities



Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

Families are a child's first and best teachers. FTF programs in the Gila River Indian Community region give parents choices for how they want to support their child's health and learning. The region offers parents a voluntary **home visiting** program to provide comprehensive, one-on-one support for families with young children. 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 River Indian Community 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 educators can apply for an FTF **college scholarship** in pursuit of early childhood education certifications or degrees. 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 River Indian Community region by funding **developmental and sensory screenings** to detect vision, hearing and developmental issues and help prevent later learning challenges.



First-time mom finds guidance in caring for infant son in Gila River Indian Community

Kandie Anton gave birth to her son, Joseph, two months before the COVID-19 restrictions started in Arizona. She was 22 and worried about being a mother for the first time. Her anxiety amplified with the added challenges the pandemic created in receiving services and finding support.

"I needed the right guidance to raise a newborn," said Anton. "I felt like it would be a lot easier to know what to do, if I could directly talk to someone."

Anton signed up for the Baby Smarts program, funded by the First Things First Gila River Indian Community Regional Partnership Council. The program provides a parent coach who visits the family in their home and teaches parents about early childhood development, breastfeeding, infant sleep safety, using car seats and other information.

The coaches also connect parents to resources within the community, like the Arizona Healthcare Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) and the Arizona Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) benefits.

Cynthia Stone, a Baby Smarts home visitation coach, said the program helps parents of any age who need support and someone to turn to when the challenges of parenting become overwhelming.

"Many new parents don't have their own family to turn to," said Stone. "The younger parents are looking for an outside perspective and support to raise their children in a healthy way."

Stone worked with Anton and her partner, Joseph Garcia, through weekly phone calls, as COVID-19 restrictions prevented home visits, to teach them about attachment and bonding with their child. She also coached the couple on how to communicate with each other about taking turns watching their child. Stone encouraged them both to read and sing songs to their son, even if it was during diaper changes.

"I taught them how the sound and tone of their voices is important for brain development," said Stone.

Anton said the program provided information on development stages, appropriate toys and how to play with her son.

"It gave me a heads up about the changes and growth to look for every month," said Anton. "Knowing what was going on with his development made me feel less anxious and made things easier."

Stone coached Anton on healthy foods to feed her son, how much to feed him and how often. She also helped her to prepare questions to ask during doctor's visits and to have parenting strategies to deal with challenging behaviors, like tantrums.

"It definitely helped us reduce our stress," said Anton. "We can pinpoint what's going on with him and communicate between us about what we need to do to help him."

Now Anton and Garcia have a second son and continue to work with Stone.

"I needed the right guidance to raise a newborn. I felt like it would be a lot easier to know what to do, if I could directly talk to someone."

—Kandie Anton, parent

"It's been really helpful to have her there when I had questions," said Anton. "It was very helpful with COVID-19. If either of my kids gets sick, but it's not an emergency, I can text her questions and she gets back to me within the hour. She's been there when I needed someone right away."

FTF Gila River Indian Community Regional Partnership Council

The FTF Gila River Indian Community 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, Baby Smarts and family, friends and neighbor care program.

FTF Gila River Indian Community SFY21 Total Regional Program Expenditures

Quality Child Care and Preschool

\$243,942

Preventive Health

\$93,607

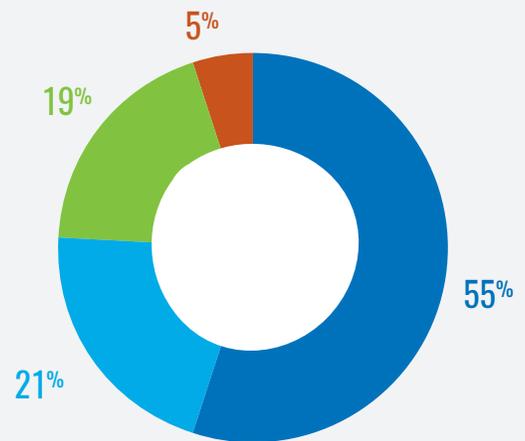
Strengthening Families

\$87,571

Research and Evaluation

\$18,846

Total \$443,967



FTF Gila River Indian Community Regional Partnership Council and Staff

Chair

Sandra Nasewytewa

Vice Chair

Elisia Manuel

Members

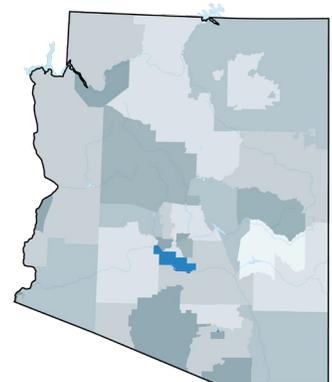
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*Geographically, the **FTF Gila River Indian Community Region** is located on 372,000 acres of land in south-central Arizona. The community lies south of the cities of Phoenix, Tempe and Chandler, and north of Casa Grande, and its east to west borders run from Coolidge to Tolleson. The FTF Gila River Indian Community Region includes Legislative Districts 8 and 27. (Legislative districts are not necessarily congruent with regional boundaries.)*

Learn more at

[FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Gila-River-Indian-Community](https://www.FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Gila-River-Indian-Community)