

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Graham/Greenlee Region

IMPACT REPORT 2021



FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Graham-Greenlee

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 Graham/Greenlee Region, there are **3,903 children** (under age 6) with **25% living in poverty**.

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

“Early childhood development and health are the most important areas to which any community can and should dedicate resources. The research is overwhelming that what happens during the first few years of life has significant impact on later aspects of an individual's life.”

Dr. Susan Wood

Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, Eastern Arizona College and 2021 FTF Graham/Greenlee Champion for Young Children

FTF Graham/Greenlee Region Strategic Priorities



Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

Families are a child's first and best teachers. FTF programs in the Graham/Greenlee region give parents choices for how they want to support their child's health and learning. Parents can attend educational **family activities** to help support their child's healthy development and improve their parenting skills. The region also offers voluntary **home visiting** programs that provide comprehensive, one-on-one support for families with young children. The region **distributes books** to families with children from birth to age 5 to encourage parent-child interaction and reading. And families of newborns throughout the region and across the state can receive the **Arizona Parent Kit**, with helpful information and resources for 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 Graham/Greenlee 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. And because children learn through consistent relationships, early childhood educators can receive **financial incentives** for advancing their education and continuing employment with the same program for at least 12 months. 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 Graham/Greenlee region by funding **mental health** and **developmental and sensory screenings** to detect and help prevent later learning challenges.



Safford library storytime helps young Solomon boy prepare for a lifetime of learning

“Goodbye friends...It’s time to say goodbye.”

These are a few of the words to Christopher Munoz’s favorite song from Story Time at the Safford City-Graham County Library. The words are fitting as he says a final goodbye to his favorite online celebrity, Ms. Retha.

Retha Russell was the library’s early literacy coordinator and retired in July 2021. Over the years Russell impacted hundreds of children in Graham County.

She holds a special place in Christopher’s heart. The friendship between Russell and Christopher began when he was only 3 years old. He first attended the library’s storytime with his cousin. He was hooked. Since his sister is 15 years older, playmates are hard to come by and storytime quickly became a highlight of his week.

The First Things First Graham/Greenlee Regional Partnership Council funds early literacy programs, like Story Time at the Library, to help families foster language development and a love of reading in their babies, toddlers and preschoolers.

Christopher lives in the small Arizona community of Solomon and is fortunate to have his grandma, Delfina Espinoza, living next door. She takes care of him during the day while Christopher’s mother teaches math at the local elementary school.

As an educator, his mother knows the importance of quality early childhood experiences, so she put together a preschool curriculum for Espinoza to do at home with Christopher. The only thing missing was the social aspect. That’s where storytime came in. The weekly library event helped Christopher learn new words and colors, but also how to interact with peers, learn to share, take turns and raise his hand to ask a question.

The COVID-19 pandemic shut down in-person storytime, but it didn’t take long for Russell and her library team to find a creative solution. They used an online platform so storytime could continue.

Every Thursday morning at 11, Christopher and his grandma would gather around the computer in the living room with their egg shakers and scarves to participate in the virtual storytime.

“Even though we weren’t there in person, I would type his name in the chat, and he would get so excited when Ms. Retha would say ‘Well, hello, Christopher! We’re glad you’re here today!’ It helped us feel connected and a part of something familiar,” Espinoza said. “It gave us something to look forward to.”

In July 2021, Christopher returned to the library for the first time in over a year. His eyes sparkled as he looked around to the different play and book stations set up. A bit shy at first, he looked awestruck when he saw Ms. Retha. Then she saw him. She said, “Christopher!” as she put her arms out and he walked into a big hug. He was holding a small succulent as a retirement gift, but was still able to wrap his arms around her neck.

“Even though we weren’t there in person, I would type his name in the chat, and he would get so excited...It helped us feel connected, and a part of something familiar. It gave us something to look forward to.”

—Delfina Espinoza, grandparent

Russell started her retirement that day, and Christopher started kindergarten in August. Thanks to the skills he has gained through in-person and virtual storytime, his family is confident that he is prepared to continue a lifetime of learning.

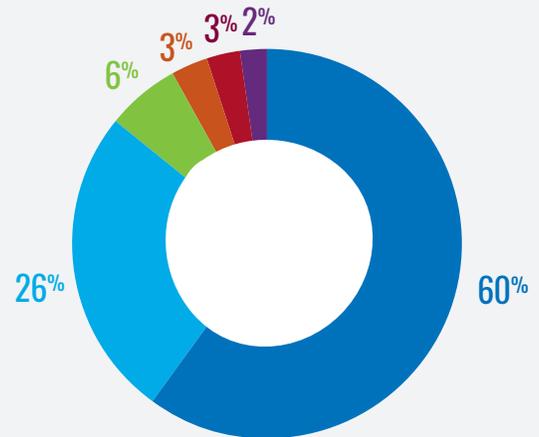
FTF Graham/Greenlee Regional Partnership Council

The FTF Graham/Greenlee 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 Healthy Families, Smart Support, and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, and other literacy programs.

FTF Graham/Greenlee SFY21 Total Regional Program Expenditures

Quality Child Care and Preschool	\$517,450
Strengthening Families	\$227,112
Preventive Health	\$48,793
Parent and Community Awareness	\$32,228
Research and Evaluation	\$29,845
Workforce Development and Training	\$21,201
Total	\$876,628



FTF Graham/Greenlee Regional Partnership Council and Staff

Chair
Laurie Smith

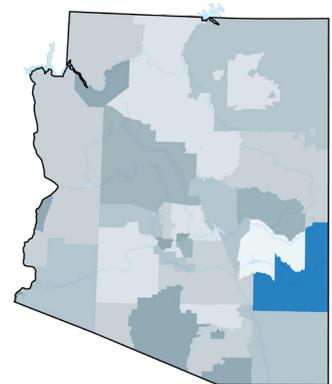
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The FTF Graham/Greenlee Region is defined as the combined area of the two counties, not including the lands belonging to the San Carlos Apache Tribe within Graham County. Legislative districts include: 14. (Legislative districts are not necessarily congruent with regional boundaries.)

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