

# # FIRST THINGS FIRST

Navajo Nation Region

# IMPACT REPORT 2021



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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 Navajo Nation Region, there are **10,894 children** (under age 6) with **51% living in poverty**.

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

“Children use the gifts bestowed upon them to investigate and be inquisitive, therefore, it is imperative children be nurtured holistically. It is our sole responsibility to nurture them into honorable adults.”

**Delores Noble**

*Principal of Kin Dah Łichí'í 'Ólta' elementary school*

## FTF Navajo Nation Region Strategic Priorities



### Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

Families are a child's first and best teachers. FTF programs in the Navajo Nation 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. The region also **distributes books** to families with children from birth to age 5 to encourage parent-child interaction and reading.



### 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 Navajo Nation region provides funding for child care providers and preschool programs to participate in FTF's **Quality First program**. Providers benefit from training, coaching and a wide range of supports to improve the quality of their early learning programs in ways that help children learn, grow and thrive. 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 Navajo Nation region by funding **developmental and sensory screenings** to detect vision, hearing and developmental issues and help prevent later learning challenges. The region also **provides food boxes and food vouchers** to give families with small children access to nutritious meals.



## Kith and Kin classes benefit youth caregivers on Navajo Nation

The youth at the Klagetoh Chapter House in Klagetoh aren't the typical clientele for early childhood development training. The teens are employed for the summer through the Navajo Nation government, as a means of financial support and to provide opportunities to learn new skills, as they help their community.

In addition, the youth take a variety of courses, which this summer included one on early childhood development.

Edward Clark, Jr., the chapter house service coordinator, and Sharissa Ben, a Kith and Kin program specialist, soon learned that most of the youth working at the Klagetoh Chapter House were caring for younger siblings at home. Or in some cases, they were helping their teenage or college-age friends care for their young children.

Kith (neighbor) and Kin (friend) child care is a common form of caregiving. It usually includes family, friends and neighbors caring for children in their home.

The First Things First Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council funds the Kith and Kin Project for family, friends and neighbors who provide home-based child care. The program, through Candelen, is designed to provide training and support to people who look after children other than their own, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors and friends.

Ben started the Kith and Kin training for the nine youth participants with an overview of the rapid and critical brain development that happens to a child in their first five years.

She talked to the teens about the five senses and how strong connections are made in the brain when using all the senses. Ben asked the youth participants what type of game requires the use of a child's whole body. One teenager answered, "Hopscotch."

So Ben provided sidewalk chalk to all the participants and instructed them to draw hopscotch squares on the sidewalk.

"I asked them what concepts could be learned from the game, and they replied, 'Shapes, colors, numbers, counting, taking turns, building muscles and coordination,'" Ben said. "One teenager told me, 'I didn't know you could learn that much from a game!' Now he said he plays hopscotch with his little brother to help further his development."

During the topic of daily schedule planning, the youth participants discussed the importance of schedules, routines and consistency for young children in their care. The participants wrote down their schedules and compared them to a schedule for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

I know that the young children in their care, as well as the community, will benefit greatly from their new knowledge in early childhood."

—Edward Clark, Jr., Klagetoh Chapter House service coordinator

Ben told the teens that toddlers can be introduced to a simple schedule, and preschoolers can have a more detailed schedule.

"I told them that routines are important because they help children feel safe, create expectations and can build critical thinking skills," Ben said. "Also, schedules help to coordinate care between the Kith and Kin caregiver, the child and parents."

At the end of the six session training, youth participants told Ben and Clark that they increased their early childhood development knowledge and are using what they learned, including creating developmentally appropriate activities for different age groups and implementing practices in their families' homes to keep the children in their care safe.

Clark, who works with the teens, said he believes many of the youth participants will continue on a career path in early childhood development.

"I know that the young children in their care, as well as the community, will benefit greatly from their new knowledge in early childhood," said Clark.

## FTF Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council

The FTF Navajo Nation 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 Parents as Teachers, Kith & Kin and Smart Support.

### FTF Navajo Nation SFY21 Total Regional Program Expenditures

Quality Child Care and Preschool

\$1,896,801

Preventive Health

\$974,787

Strengthening Families

\$621,991

Workforce Development and Training

\$230,855

Parent and Community Awareness

\$141,519

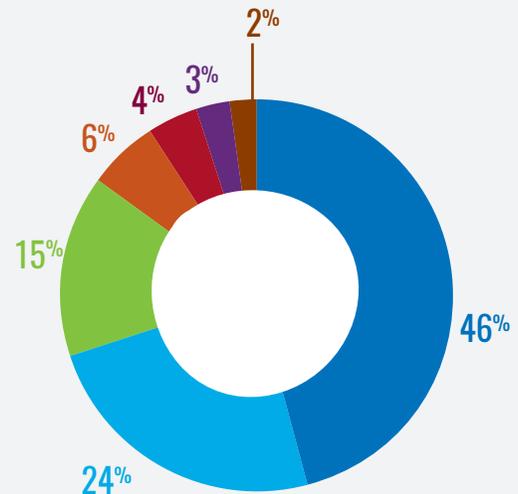
Research and Evaluation

\$130,453

Coordinating Care

\$96,937

**Total** \$4,093,344



## FTF Navajo Nation Regional Partnership Council and Staff

Chair

**Cotillion Sneddy**

Vice Chair

**Rhonda Etsitty**

Members

**Benjamin Barney**

**Victoria Begay**

**Yvonne Kee-Billison**

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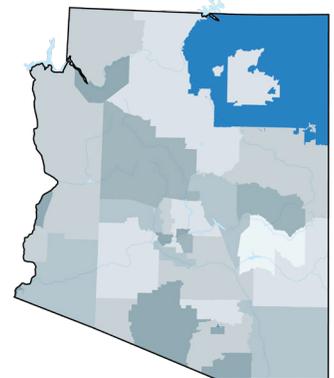
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The **FTF Navajo Nation Region** is defined as the Arizona portion of the Navajo Nation. The region covers nearly 16,000 square miles in the northeast corner of the state, stretching across Apache, Navajo and Coconino counties. The entire nation, which dates to the Navajo Treaty of 1868, also includes lands in Utah and New Mexico. The FTF Navajo Nation Region includes Legislative District 7. (Legislative districts are not necessarily congruent with regional boundaries.)

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