

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Santa Cruz Region

IMPACT REPORT 2021



FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Santa-Cruz

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 Santa Cruz Region, there are **4,416 children** (under age 6) with **35% living in poverty**.

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

“ Solutions to future challenges are more likely to come from the brains of those whose childhoods were spent in an environment where early childhood education was a priority.”

William “Bill” Kirkpatrick

Chair of FTF Santa Cruz Regional Partnership Council

FTF Santa Cruz Region Strategic Priorities



Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

Families are a child's first and best teachers. FTF programs in the Santa Cruz region give parents choices for how they want to support their child's health and learning. **Family resource centers** in the region offer a wide range of family activities, programs and referrals to additional services, and voluntary **home visiting** programs 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 Santa Cruz 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 **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 Santa Cruz region by funding **developmental and sensory screenings** to detect vision, hearing and developmental issues and help prevent later learning challenges. **Fluoride varnishes** are also offered to protect children against childhood tooth decay, a leading cause of school absences.



Experienced mom gets support to parent 2-year-old daughter in Rio Rico

There's always more to learn as a parent. That's what Elizabeth Arrieta thought when she became pregnant with her daughter, Luisa. She had raised two kids with her husband in Rio Rico, but wanted to expand her parenting knowledge.

She signed up with the Santa Cruz County Superintendent's Office Los Padres son los Primeros Profesores (Parents are the First Teachers) home visitation program.

The First Things First Santa Cruz Regional Partnership Council funds the program, which provides parents with no-cost, in-home visits from a parent educator who teaches parents how to support their children's emotional, cognitive and physical development. The program supports parents with children from pregnancy up to age 5.

Arrieta worked with Melissa Gallegos, a Los Padres parent educator, on nutrition, safe sleep and other ways to help her daughter's development. When Luisa turned 2 years old, parenting got a lot more difficult.

Luisa could speak only one word at a time. She would get frustrated at being misunderstood and had frequent tantrums. Arrieta didn't know how to help her daughter and lost confidence as a parent. She asked Gallegos for coaching.

"I started with mom and helped her to feel empowered and know that she can make a difference with her daughter," said Gallegos.

Then Gallegos taught Arrieta how to help Luisa expand her vocabulary and manage her emotions.

Arrieta would include Luisa in everyday tasks by pointing and naming pieces of furniture, food and other household objects. She also taught Luisa to identify and name her feelings.

In a few months, Luisa went from speaking one word at a time to five-word phrases, and her number of tantrums declined.

"I love to recommend this program, because it helps with child development in a way that includes the whole family. It's great to have someone help you problem solve situations that worry you."

—Elizabeth Arrieta, parent

"I have seen astonishing progress in her growth and learning," said Arrieta. "She can carry a conversation and asks questions."

Gallegos said she's also seen a big change in Arrieta's relationship with her daughter.

"Luisa has completely improved on expressing herself, and it's made a 180-degree turn in their relationship," Gallegos said. "After Luisa started hearing more words and mom felt that she was supported, she helped make a change in her daughter's development."

Now the mother and daughter spend time doing activities and reading together. Arrieta is helping Luisa get ready for kindergarten.

"We have accomplished many goals in Luisa's development," Arrieta said. "Luisa can now count up to 10 in English and Spanish. She can draw pictures, use scissors, glue and finish activities and projects."

Luisa is also able to manage her emotions and can read.

"I love to recommend this program, because it helps with child development in a way that includes the whole family," said Arrieta. "It's great to have someone help you problem solve situations that worry you."

FTF Santa Cruz Regional Partnership Council

The FTF Santa Cruz 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 from 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, family resource centers and capacity building.

FTF Santa Cruz SFY21 Total Regional Program Expenditures

Strengthening Families

\$643,016

Quality Child Care and Preschool

\$400,666

Preventive Health

\$124,990

Research and Evaluation

\$44,208

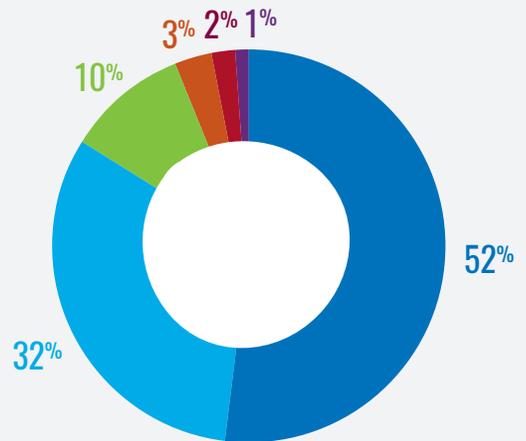
Parent and Community Awareness

\$19,141

Coordinating Care

\$8,239

Total \$1,240,259



FTF Santa Cruz Regional Partnership Council and Staff

Chair

William Kirkpatrick

Vice Chair

Laura Monarque

Members

Chris Ciruli

Darcy Dixon

John Fanning

Celina Landa

Melisa Lunderville

Norma “Erika”

Garcia Montañó

Karen Rovang

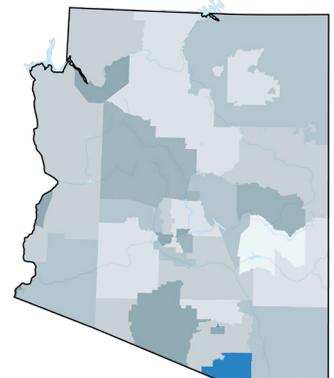
David Verdugo

FTF Regional Director

Francisco Padilla

fpadilla@firstthingsfirst.org

520.761.3012



The **FTF Santa Cruz Region** covers almost all of Santa Cruz County, the smallest county in Arizona. Situated in the Sonoran desert of southeast Arizona, Santa Cruz County and the Santa Cruz Region are home to six communities: Nogales, Patagonia, Rio Rico, Sonoita, Elgin and Tubac. Nogales is the county seat and is one of the largest ports of entry between Mexico and the United States. The area surrounding the Amado community in the northwestern corner of the county is assigned to the Pima South Region. The FTF Santa Cruz Region includes Legislative District 2. (Legislative districts are not necessarily congruent with regional boundaries.)

Learn more at

[FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Santa-Cruz](https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/Regions/Santa-Cruz)