

# # FIRST THINGS FIRST

Southeast Maricopa Region

# IMPACT REPORT 2021



[FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Southeast-Maricopa](https://FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Southeast-Maricopa)

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 Southeast Maricopa Region, there are **68,471 children** (under age 6) with **19% living in poverty**.

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

“Preparing young children for life by strengthening families and providing parents with the necessary resources for early literacy, quality child care and preventive health care builds vibrant and strong communities.”

**JoAnn Holland**

*Founder and CEO of East Valley Women*

## FTF Southeast Maricopa Region Strategic Priorities



### Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

Families are a child's first and best teachers. FTF programs in the Southeast Maricopa 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 Southeast Maricopa 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 Southeast Maricopa region by funding **developmental and sensory screenings** to detect vision, hearing and developmental issues and help prevent later learning challenges. **Oral health screenings** are also offered to protect children against childhood tooth decay, a leading cause of school absences.



## Gilbert Quality First center creates consistent classroom routine for boy with special needs

During infancy, Brody Parks started showing signs that he was behind. At 18 months old, his behavior spiraled because he had trouble communicating his feelings and became frustrated.

By 4 years old, Brody was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder with language delay and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

Lucy Parks, Brody's mom, knew about the importance of early education and how early brain development has a lasting impact on a child's ability to learn and succeed in school and life. She was a preschool teacher at A Child's Place at the Ranches Daycare and Preschool in Gilbert where Brody attended.

A Child's Place at the Ranches participates in the First Things First signature program, Quality First. The program works with child care centers and preschools across Arizona to improve early learning.

"I worked in early childhood education because 90% of brain growth happens before kindergarten," Parks said. "It's literally the most important thing, like the foundation of the house and the roots of the tree. And it's more than just meeting physical needs, emotional needs are important as well."

Parks said Brody's greatest problems were in public places and the classroom, where he struggled to play, interact and communicate with other children.

The Quality First team and teachers coordinated efforts to support Brody. Creating a consistent classroom routine helped regulate the OCD.

Teachers used a First and Then board to introduce a new activity in a way to help him understand and motivate him to complete it.

For example, the board had a card with the new activity, such as an art project as First, then an arrow pointing to Then and a card with a picture of toys. First the new task and then the preferred activity. Strategies like, First and Then, made expectations clear and simple.

In circle time, it was difficult for Brody to sit. By allowing him to sit nearby with toys, he could still comprehend the discussion and participate. Brody was just learning and processing in a different way.

Parks said Brody was ready for kindergarten academically but still had some social and behavioral struggles. Without the extra assistance, he would have fallen further behind.

"It takes a village," Parks said. "The support group – teachers, therapists, doctors, specialists, parents, family – worked together to give Brody tools and coping skills. And what he learned at school followed him home."

"Asking for help doesn't make you a bad parent. It makes you a better parent."

—Lucy Parks, parent

Brody was in a self-contained classroom in kindergarten, even though he already knew all his letters, sounds, shapes and even sign language. Today, he is in a regular first grade classroom with pull-out resource services. He has achieved a lot of milestones, showing no regression and has friends now.

Parks credits the coordinated efforts for Brody's success. She talks with other parents about First Things First and Quality First and encourages all parents to ask for help when needed.

"Asking for help doesn't make you a bad parent. It makes you a better parent," Parks said.

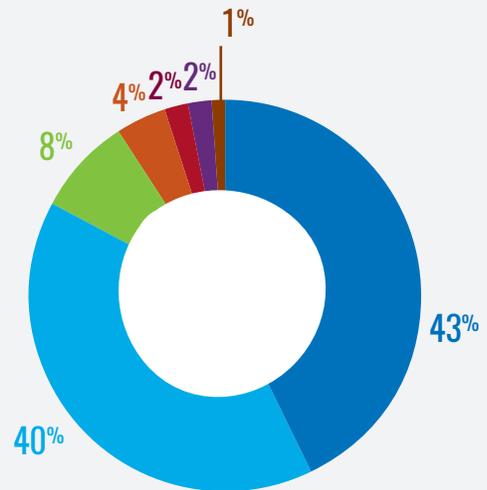
# FTF Southeast Maricopa Regional Partnership Council

The FTF Southeast Maricopa 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 programs in this region include Quality First, Nurse-Family Partnership and Creating Connections.

## FTF Southeast Maricopa SFY21 Total Regional Program Expenditures

|                                    |                     |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Quality Child Care and Preschool   | \$4,366,421         |
| Strengthening Families             | \$4,107,687         |
| Preventive Health                  | \$839,438           |
| Research and Evaluation            | \$356,806           |
| Workforce Development and Training | \$230,691           |
| Parent and Community Awareness     | \$184,984           |
| Coordinating Care                  | \$53,843            |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>\$10,139,869</b> |



## FTF Southeast Maricopa Regional Partnership Council and Staff

*Chair*  
**Shiloh Murillo**

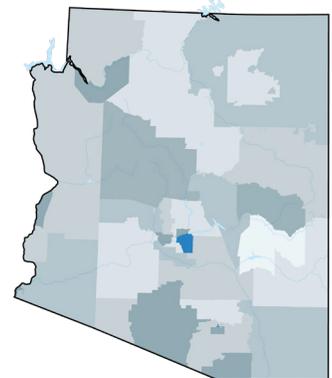
*Vice Chair*  
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*The FTF Southeast Maricopa Region is comprised of several communities within the southeastern portion of Maricopa County and includes Mesa and Gilbert, as well as the parts of Queen Creek and Apache Junction which lie within Maricopa County. It also includes some unincorporated areas adjacent to Mesa or Gilbert. The FTF Southeast Maricopa Region includes Legislative Districts 12, 16, 17, 25 and 26. (Legislative districts are not necessarily congruent with regional boundaries.)*

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