



Southeast Maricopa Region

# 2022 Impact Report



**From birth to age 5,**  
a child's brain develops more than  
any other time in life.

90%

of a child's brain grows before kindergarten.

## Early childhood matters.

First Things First (FTF) 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.



Every child in our community deserves to be seen as a vital part of our future. When we invest our resources and time for these children, we advocate for strengthening our society at the earliest stages of growth. It sends a powerful message that children matter. Our greatest investment is helping support the parents and families who raise our children, and that is priceless!"



**Shiloh Murillo**

*Chair of FTF Southeast Maricopa Regional*

## FTF Southeast Maricopa Regional Key Impact Highlights [State Fiscal Year 2022]



### Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

8,568

Families of newborns received the Arizona Parent Kit, filled with tips and tools to help support their child's healthy development.

1,053

Families or caregivers served by receiving referrals or by participating in activities at family resource centers.



### Quality Preschool and Child Care

2,581

Children attended preschools and child care programs participating in Quality First.

519

Children birth to age 5 received a Quality First scholarship to attend high-quality preschools and child care programs.



### Preventive Health

1,711

Children received a screening to detect tooth decay, which left undetected and untreated could cause damage to permanent teeth, impair speech development and failure to thrive.

518

Children monitored to receive appropriate screenings to detect vision, hearing and developmental issues to prevent learning challenges later on.

### Additional Strategies

468

#### Families with young children

participated in voluntary home visiting programs proven to reduce parental stress levels, increase connections to community supports, and improve children's cognitive, motor, behavioral and social-emotional development.





## Mesa resource center helps family create quality early learning experiences for sisters

Catherine Morales knew the importance of the early years because she had worked as a family support specialist before deciding to stay home with her children.

Four years ago, she was pregnant with her second child, and her daughter, Susanna, was 2. Morales wanted to find a program that provided constructive activities to help her kids learn and prepare for kindergarten.

She also needed a program that was free and close to home. In addition, she wanted social interaction for her kids to spend quality time together and a parent support system.

"There's a large stretch of time that I can spend with my kids, and I want to make the most of it," Morales said. "Since the early years are essential, what they learn at home is what they will take to school. As a parent, I'm the catalyst to help my children learn and provide them with those opportunities."

Morales found the Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest Family Resource Center in west Mesa. The First Things First Southeast Maricopa Regional Partnership Council funds the center to provide a community hub of services, programs, guidance and support for families of kids birth to age 5.

The center provides families access to resources, referrals to support services and educational programs to ensure healthy growth and development for Mesa's youngest learners and their families as they grow and thrive together.

Morales frequently started visiting the center and quickly learned how to create quality early childhood experiences for her children. The family participated in activities such as Little Rembrandts, an early-learning activity introducing children to art techniques. This open-ended art focused on the process rather than the product.

This helped Morales realize that not all activities need a plan. She could provide her children with materials and allow them to explore to promote fine and gross motor skills, creativity and even problem-solving.

In March 2020, Morales found out she was pregnant again right before the world entered into COVID-19 lockdown. Susanna was now 4, and preschool moved to online.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the center started delivering take-home activities to families, and each week targeted a school readiness domain, like language and literacy development. The boxes included descriptions of how the activity affected child development.

"These provided a check-in and no contact way to support families," Morales said. "My kids were so excited to open the box, and the educational activities were a huge support since Susanna attended online preschool."

Morales also attributes family coaching as contributing to prepping Susanna for kindergarten. Through the program, the family coach helped her set a goal for Susanna, who needed help counting to 15 and provided support to complete the goal.

When it came time for kindergarten, Susanna was ready.

She's moved on to first grade, but Morales credits her daughter's success to the foundation established from programs at the LSS-SW Family Resource Center.

"The center has made such a difference for our family," she said. "The support is amazing, and the coordinators make it very clear that parents aren't alone."

 Read more FTF stories at  
[FirstThingsFirst.org/Region-Stories](https://www.FirstThingsFirst.org/Region-Stories)

## FTF Southeast Maricopa Regional Partnership Council

FTF regional partnership councils are made up of volunteers who study the unique needs of the local community and inform 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, Quality First and First Teeth First.

### FTF Southeast Maricopa FY22 Total Regional Program Expenditures

Quality Child Care and Preschool

\$3,799,578

Strengthening Families

\$3,953,472

Preventive Health

\$849,932

Research and Evaluation

\$306,324

Workforce Development and Training

\$306,086

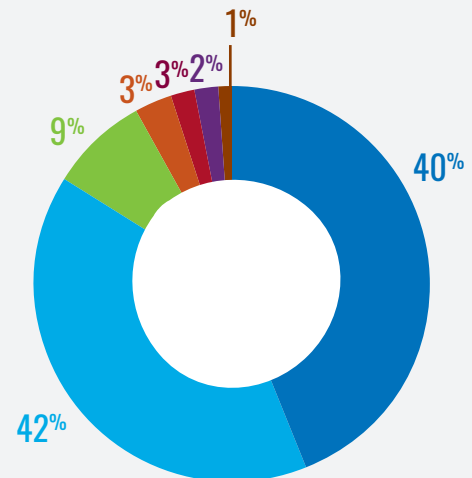
Parent and Community Awareness

\$170,631

Coordination

\$55,514

**Total** \$9,441,536



### FTF Southeast Maricopa Regional Partnership Council and Staff

Chair

Shiloh Murillo

Vice Chair

David Crummey

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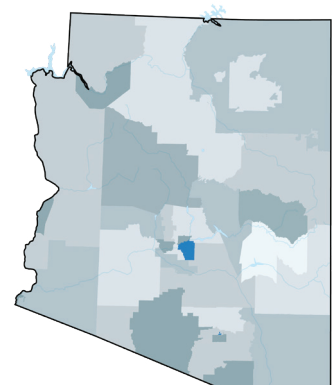
Kimberly Hatt

Stephanie Montez

Katie Thomas

Mariko Whelan

Jeffrey Zetino



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.

Learn more at

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