

# # FIRST THINGS FIRST

Gila 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 Gila Region, there are **2,688 children** (under age 6) with **36% living in poverty**.

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

“ The 2021 year brought about new implementations with our grant partners navigating through the pandemic. It has been a time of innovation, compromise and learning how to continue to provide the best services possible to the children in the Gila region. We have seen improved virtual attendance in the parenting workshops, gotten back on track with in-person screenings, continued to deliver oral health screenings, provided scholarships in quality first programs, and kept literacy as a top priority in our region. We are grateful to our community, our partners, families and numerous agencies who continue to prioritize early childhood development. We are looking forward to continuing our work and dedication to advocate for our children.



**Dr. Kristin Wade**

*DMD, FAGD, Chair of the FTF Gila Regional Partnership Council*

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

### Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

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

**143** Parents and other caregivers participated in evidence-based trainings designed to improve knowledge of parenting practices and children's development.

### Preventive Health

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

### Quality Preschool and Child Care

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

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

**1** Early childhood educators received college scholarships to improve their qualifications for working with infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

### Additional Strategies

**16,420** **Books** were given to families with children ages birth to 5 years to encourage parent-child interaction and reading.

**161** **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.



## Library program fosters children's love of reading

Carolyn Larsen and her 2-year-old daughter, Adelaide, check their mailbox just about every day.

When a children's book addressed to the toddler finally arrives, the girl bursts with excitement.

"She has her own little library in our living room," Larsen said. "There's a box full of all the books, and she has her little special area."

Adelaide's books come from the Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which seeks to inspire a love of reading by providing free books to children from birth to age 5 with support from local community partners. The First Things First Gila Regional Partnership Council funds the program through the Gila County Library District.

Larsen, whose family lives in Globe, had heard about the program before she had children, so she enrolled her daughter in it soon after she was born. And this year, Adelaide's little sister, Scottie, followed her footsteps and recently became a member of the Imagination Library at just 4 weeks old.

"I'm hoping that they are able to become avid readers," the girls' mother said. "That will help them in so many aspects of their lives."

With each book Adelaide gets, Larsen can see that her daughter's joy of reading grows. "She will go and sit in a corner – even when she turned one – she would go and sit in a corner and grab the books that we got from the Imagination Library and just sit and read them by herself," she said.

Nowadays, Adelaide also reads books in her own toddler language to her mom.

"She actually has a little bit of a speech delay, so the books are really great for us because they're age appropriate, and we can work on some of her speech needs to help her," said Carolyn Larsen.

Scientific research has shown that the experiences of children between birth and age 5, when the brain develops rapidly, will have a lasting impact on their lives. It is during those early years that the Imagination Library encourages children to read 1,000 books before they enter kindergarten, which usually happens at 5 years old.

Children who participate in the program can get picture frames and stickers to place on them at their local library. They also get a sheet where they can list up to 100 books that they've read. With a little help from her mom, Adelaide has finished reading 300 books.

"The goal is to get like 10 stickers, and then you will have read 1,000 books before kindergarten," Larsen said. "The stickers go all around the picture frame, and then you can put your child's picture in it when they've completed it."

Like her big sister's, Scottie's first book to arrive in the mail will be "The Little Engine That Could." Then a variety of titles will arrive subsequently, one each month. Larsen has only praise for the program.

"It's so great, especially for the rural communities that don't have access to a lot of resources," she said. "And so, I feel very lucky to be a part of it and to have access to it."



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

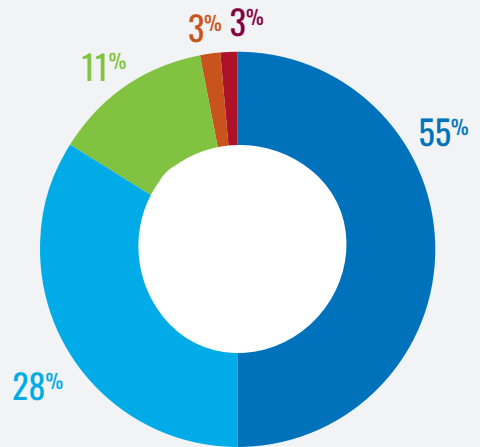
# FTF Gila Regional Partnership Council

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 developmental, sensory and oral health screenings, Active Parenting: First Five Years classes and the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

## FTF Gila SFY22 Total Regional Program Expenditures

Quality Child Care and Preschool	\$396,490
Strengthening Families	\$202,032
Preventive Health	\$77,118
Research and Evaluation	\$21,005
Parent and Community Awareness	\$17,938
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$714,583</b>



## FTF Gila Regional Partnership Council and Staff

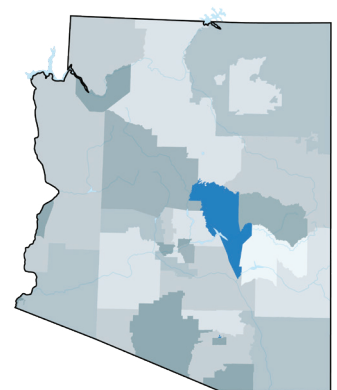
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The **FTF Gila Region** is defined as Gila County, not including the lands belonging to the San Carlos Apache Tribe and the White Mountain Apache Tribe, which are their own First Things First regions. The Gila Region's population is located in the small towns of Globe, Payson, Miami, Hayden/Winkelman, Pine/Strawberry, the unincorporated areas of Tonto Basin and Young, and a number of rural unincorporated communities. The Tonto Apache Tribe is located within the Gila Region adjacent to the city of Payson.

Learn more at  
[FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Gila](https://www.FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Gila)