

# # FIRST THINGS FIRST

Cocopah Tribe 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 Cocopah Tribe Region, there are **65 children** (under age 6) with **65% living in poverty**.

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

“As we begin our healing process with the impact of the pandemic, we have never lost sight of our children, families and their overall wellbeing. This deep rooted need to offer consistent support for our families has always been a part of who we are as a people. As it was from the beginning of time to now, let's continue raising strong and healthy generations that will never forget who we are as Cocopah People.”



**Wilana Ortega**

*First Things First Regional Council Chair*

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

### Strengthening Families and Early Literacy

**157** Resources distributed to families with young children at parenting activities offering education about the importance of early childhood.

**5** Adults attended parenting activities to learn more about the the importance of nutrition and physical activity in young kids.

**18** 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.

### Quality Preschool and Child Care

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

### Preventive Health

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

### Additional Strategies

**3** **Early Education Educators** received college scholarships to improve their qualifications for working with infants, toddlers and preschooler

**6** **Professionals** attended workshops to learn new tools and strategies to implement in their work with families.

# Cocopah Early Steps guides father and children to new milestones

As his two children got older, Rigo Mendoza grew concerned about their development. At 3 and 4 years old, Leia and Xander did not speak and were deeply shy around other people.

Mendez knew it was time to seek help.

Soon, the two children were enrolled in the Cocopah Early Steps Program, which supports families through voluntary coaching and in-home visits that offer family support.

“Basically, when I stepped into the program was when it really started the process of trying to get them help,” Mendoza said.

The First Things First Cocopah Tribe Regional Council funds the home visitation program, which offers weekly and bi-weekly visits from a trained parent educator who provides parenting information and models ways to support healthy development in the young child.

Steffany Ritchie, a former Early Steps specialist who held regular visits with the family, said neither child was verbal at first. They also became anxious when their father was out of sight.

“They were having attachment issues,” she said. “Dad could not be away from their side or even in another room, they were not comfortable around strangers.”

After several months of home visits, the program referred the siblings to other community resources. Leia and Xander underwent evaluations and received an autism diagnosis. They then were able to connect with services that provide treatments such as speech therapy.

“We also got them enrolled into the public preschool system for children that are developmentally behind to try to help also get them on track before school age,” Ritchie said.

Mendoza, a widower, credits the program for “really getting my kids through the initial stages of being more social and accepting of other people. They don’t fear people anymore.”

Since his children first arrived in the program, their communication skills also have improved markedly. Leia has started to say some words and both children are using sign language.

“They effectively communicate their needs and wants now,” the father said. “But again, all that’s a work in progress because there’s still a lot of things that they need to work on, but that’s what stands out, their communication is better. I’m still learning every day too, learning how to do better with the kids as far as communicating with them, setting up activities.”

Preschool, which the siblings began attending separately some months after the start of home visitations, has been another milestone for the children. Xander, now 5, eagerly hops on the school bus every morning and Leia, 4, does the same in the afternoon.

“If we had tried that in the beginning stages, that separation would not have probably happened at all,” Mendoza said.



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

## FTF Cocopah Tribe 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 Early Steps Home Visitation Program, Quality First and Professional Development for Early Childhood Professionals, Cocopah Transition to Kindergarten Program, and Let's Cook, Let's Eat, Let's Play.

### FTF Cocopah Tribe SFY22 Total Regional Program Expenditures

Strengthening Families

\$70,003

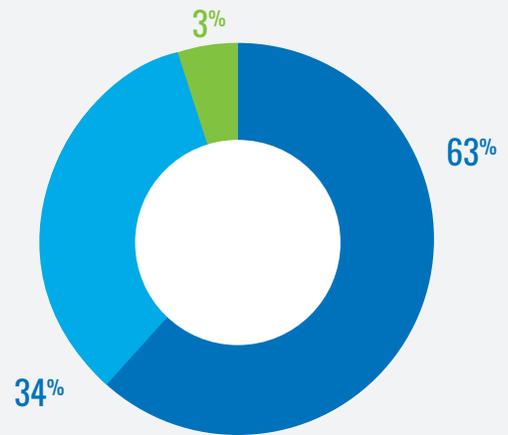
Quality Child Care and Preschool

\$37,320

Research and Evaluation

\$3,012

**Total** \$110,335



## FTF Cocopah Tribe Regional Partnership Council and Staff

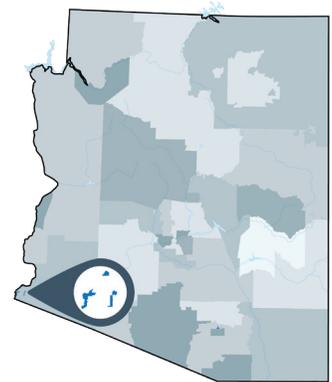
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The **FTF Cocopah Indian Tribe** is a federally recognized, sovereign tribe located in the most southwestern corner of Arizona, 13 miles south of Yuma and along the Colorado River. The Cocopah (Kwapa), also known as the River People, have historically lived along the lower Colorado River and delta. They are descendants of the Yuman-language speaking people that occupied the lands along the Colorado River. The current Cocopah Reservation is comprised of three noncontiguous regions: East, North and West Reservations. The boundaries of the First Things First Cocopah Tribe Region match those of the Cocopah Reservation.

Learn more at  
[FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Cocopah-Tribe](https://www.FirstThingsFirst.org/Regions/Cocopah-Tribe)