

2014 ANNUAL REPORT



FIRST THINGS FIRST

Ready for School. Set for Life.

THINK YOU KNOW FIRST THINGS FIRST?

While many Arizonans recognize First Things First as a crucial partner in enhancing school readiness for young children, they may not realize just how much First Things First invests in local communities. That's because First Things First largely partners with successful programs to expand their capacity to strengthen families. Below is a sample of the community-based programs whose crucial work has been supported through funding from First Things First.



Arizona Kith and Kin Project

Information and support for relatives, friends and neighbors caring for young kids.

Arizona Parent Kit

Free information for all new parents to support their child's healthy development.

Baby Smarts

Voluntary, home-based parenting education and support.

Best for Babies

Improves outcomes for infants in the child welfare system.

Birth to 5 Helpline

Toll-free statewide hotline that answers caregivers' toughest parenting questions.

Bright Beginnings

Voluntary, home-based parenting education and support.

Building Bright Futures

Voluntary, home-based parenting education and support.

Early Steps to School Success

Voluntary, home-based parenting education and support.

Family Resource Centers

Community-based information, training and referrals for families.

First Teeth First

Oral health screenings and application of preventative fluoride varnishes.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Tools for grandparents raising infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

Growing Up Great

Community-based parenting classes for families of kids 5 and younger.

Healthy Families

Voluntary, home-based parenting education and support.

Healthy Smiles

Oral health screenings and application of preventative fluoride varnishes.

Healthy Steps

Developmental screening and tools to help parents meet their child's health needs.

Imagination Library

Tips for parents to promote literacy and free monthly books for young kids to take home.

KinderCamp

Kindergarten transition program for children who did not have access to preschool.

My Child's Ready

Voluntary, home-based parenting education and support.

Nurse Family Partnership

Voluntary, home-based parenting education and support.

Parents as Teachers

Voluntary, home-based parenting education and support.

Professional Career Pathways

Increases the skills of professionals working with infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

Professional REWARD\$

Stipends to reward longevity and keep the best teachers working with our youngest kids.

Quality First

Improves the quality of child care and preschool and provides scholarships for kids to attend quality early learning programs.

Raising A Reader

Highlights the importance of early literacy and gives parents tools to support language development.

Reach Out and Read

Partners with pediatricians to encourage early literacy.

Safety, Nutrition, Activity, and Care for Kids (SNACK)

Promotes nutrition and physical activity in child care settings.

Smart Support

Helps child care settings meet the social-emotional needs of kids in their care.

Smart Smiles

Oral health screenings and application of preventative fluoride varnishes.

T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Arizona

Increases the skills of professionals working with infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

Teen Outreach Pregnancy Services

Supports pregnant or parenting teens in a healthy delivery and effective parenting.

STRONG FAMILIES, STRONG COMMUNITIES

It is a generally accepted maxim that the easiest (and least expensive) problem to fix is the one you prevent in the first place.

Many Arizonans already know First Things First as a crucial part of an early childhood system that works to close the school readiness gap and improve outcomes for all children by ensuring that more kids arrive at kindergarten ready to meet our state's high expectations.

But, when Arizona found itself facing a child welfare crisis – brought about in part by skyrocketing reports of child abuse or neglect and a sharp decline in resources to help struggling families – First Things First's role in the broader prevention and early intervention system became more apparent.

The programs funded by First Things First – like scholarships that help more kids birth to 5 years old access quality early learning programs and keep them safe while their parents work; screenings that identify learning delays early on; and, voluntary, home- or community-based coaching to help parents and grandparents learn how to create stable, nurturing environments for their children – strengthen families and communities throughout Arizona.

The data and stories in this report highlight some of First Things First's successes in the past year. These are just a few examples of what is possible when we commit ourselves to ensuring that children have the support they need in their crucial early years.

This report also highlights some of the challenges faced by kids 5 and younger throughout our state – and the proven strategies that can turn those statistics around – for children and for Arizona.

First Things First looks forward to our continued partnership with families and communities across Arizona – and to the future collaborations that will expand this crucial work on behalf of young children. We all have a shared responsibility to ensure children arrive at school ready to be successful. By working together, we can build a brighter future for our kids and for Arizona.

Sincerely,



Janice L. Decker

Board Chair
First Things First



Sam Leyvas

Chief Executive Officer
First Things First

SCHOOL SUCCESS STARTS EARLY

The job of getting kids ready for school starts the day they are born. About 90% of a child's critical brain development happens before kindergarten. Because of this, a child's early experiences lay the foundation for their success in school and in life.

For example, did you know that gaps in children's vocabulary start to appear at the age of about 18 months, and that a child's vocabulary, attention and general knowledge at ages 3 and 4 are good predictors of reading comprehension at ages 9 and 10?

Study after study shows that kids with quality early childhood experiences score higher on school readiness assessments and do better in school. They are less likely to need special education or remediation services and more likely to graduate and advance in to college and successful careers. They also tend to be healthier and demand less from the public welfare system.

The snapshot on next page shows some of the economic, education and health challenges young children in Arizona face. Some of these challenges – such as poverty, lack of access to early learning, and unidentified developmental delays – have been shown to impact children's school readiness.

The good news is that all of these challenges can be overcome. By ensuring that families have the tools they need to feel confident in their role as their child's first teacher, expanding access to early education through quality child care and preschool, and identifying health and development issues early on, we can ensure that children are prepared to succeed in kindergarten and beyond!

First Things First State Board

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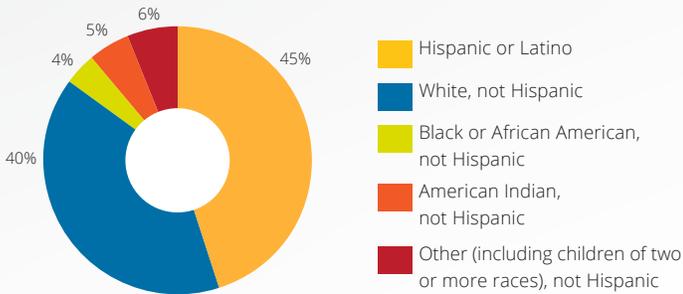


DEMOGRAPHICS

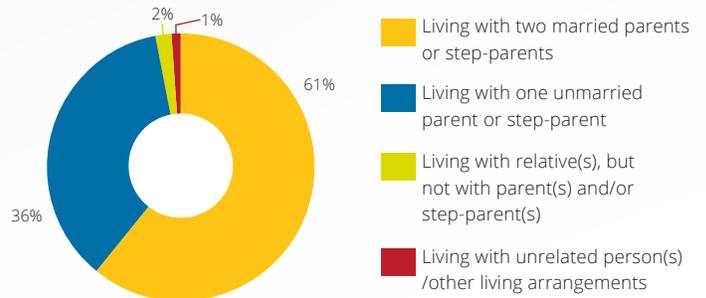
546,649 Number of kids under 6 in Arizona

384,441 Households with kids under 6

Ethnic breakdown of kids under 6



Living arrangements of kids under 6



EDUCATION

66% Percentage of 3-4 year-olds who don't go to preschool

23% Percent of 3rd grade students not passing AIMS in reading (2014)

25% Percentage of teens who don't graduate high school in four years



HEALTH

9% Babies born to teen mothers

25% Percentage of Arizona infants/toddlers with untreated tooth decay (2009)

<50% Percentage of children with developmental delays identified before starting school

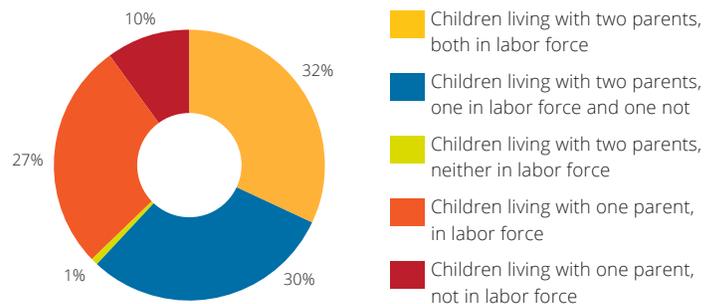


ECONOMICS

26% Percentage of young kids in poverty

139,423 Number of children (0-5) living in poverty

Employment status of parents with young kids



OUR PRIORITIES

Strengthening Families: Strong families are the building blocks of a strong society. First Things First's programs ensure that parents have choices when it comes to making decisions about what's best for their children. Programs are available in a variety of settings and at the level that meets the family's needs – from drop-in classes at community-based resource centers to more intensive, one-on-one support at home.

Quality Child Care and Preschool: Children exposed to high quality early education are more prepared when they enter kindergarten, do better in school, and are more likely to graduate and go on to college. First Things First works to improve the quality of child care and preschool. Through our website – QualityFirstAZ.com – parents can get information and tools to help them choose quality early learning settings that meet their families' needs. First Things First also funds scholarships that help more young kids access quality child care or preschool and keep them safe while their parents work.

Preventative Health: Undetected developmental delays or early childhood medical conditions that are left untreated can impact a child's development and learning later on. First Things First funds screening and outreach programs that help identify potential issues early on and refer families to resources that give them options for promoting their child's health and well-being. First Things First also funds oral health screenings and fluoride varnishes for young children – and education for their families – to prevent dental problems (a major cause of school absences later on).

Workforce Development and Training: A child's interactions with adult caregivers greatly impact brain development and school readiness. First Things First funds a variety of professional development opportunities to expand the skills of those working with infants, toddlers and preschoolers, including scholarships to increase access to higher education for child care professionals and incentives to keep the best teachers working with our youngest kids.

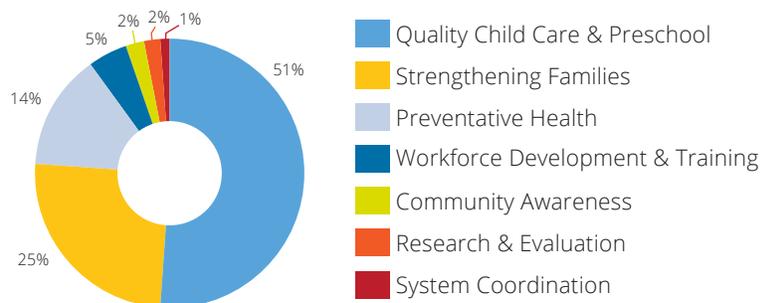
Community Awareness: We all have a shared responsibility to ensure that children arrive at school healthy and ready to succeed. First Things First works at the grassroots level to ensure that families and communities have the information and tools they need to actively support the education and health of their youngest children.



STATEWIDE FINANCIAL REPORT

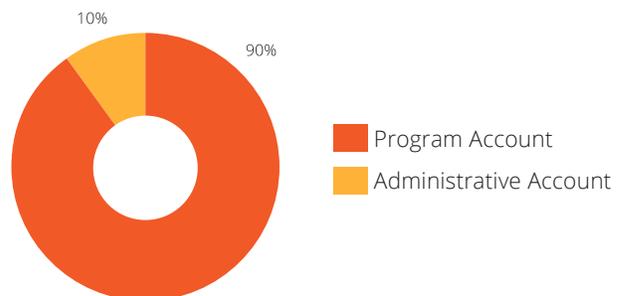
FY2014 Expenditures by Goal Area

Quality Child Care & Preschool	\$72,802,875.11
Strengthening Families	\$35,271,855.15
Preventative Health	\$19,824,335.34
Workforce Development & Training	\$6,771,912.08
Community Awareness	\$3,263,006.80
Research & Evaluation	\$2,517,579.51
System Coordination	\$1,455,922.69
Total	\$141,907,486.68



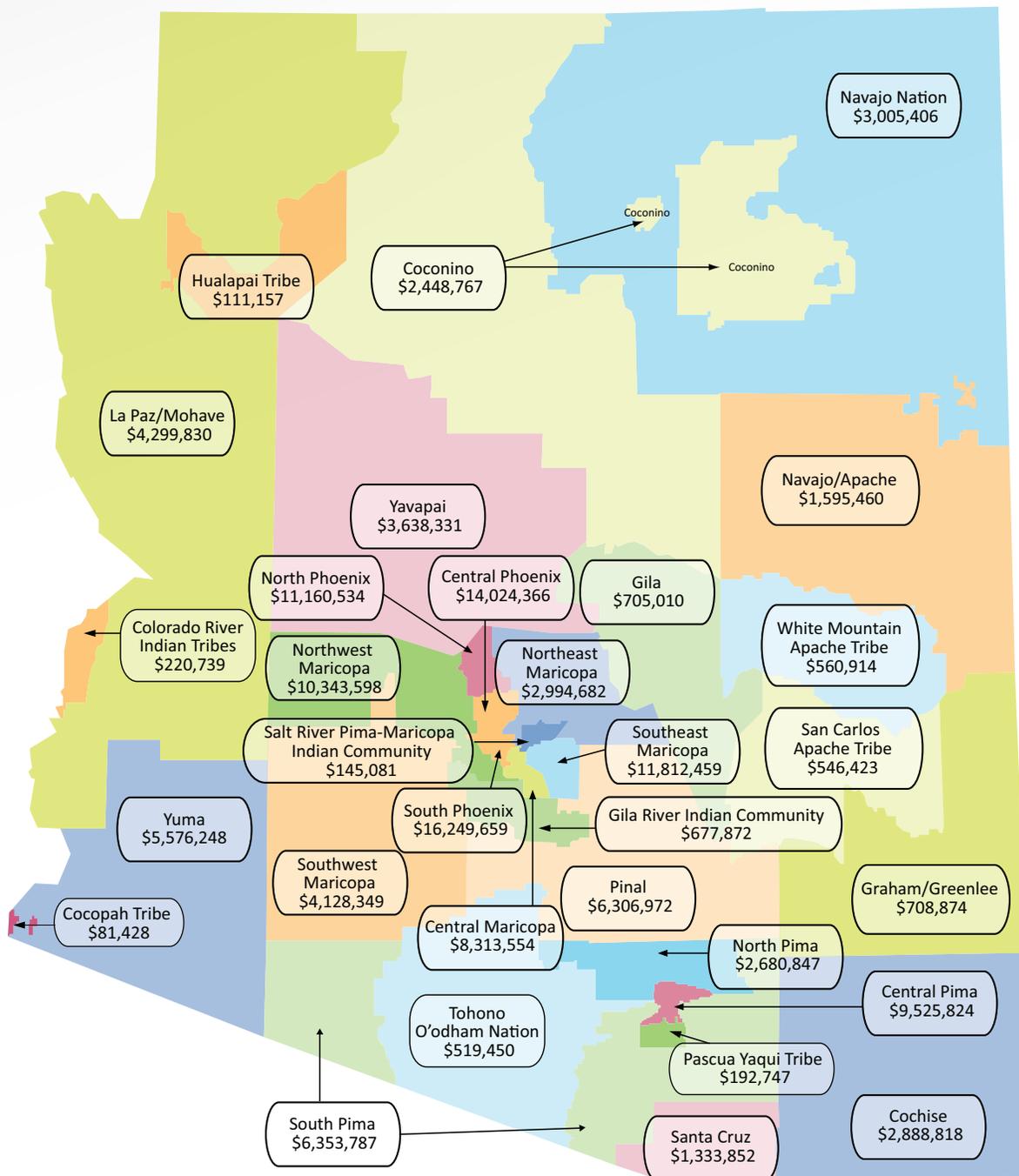
FY2014 Revenues by Fund

Program Account	\$117,555,239.80
Administrative Account	\$13,046,382.11
Total	\$130,601,621.91





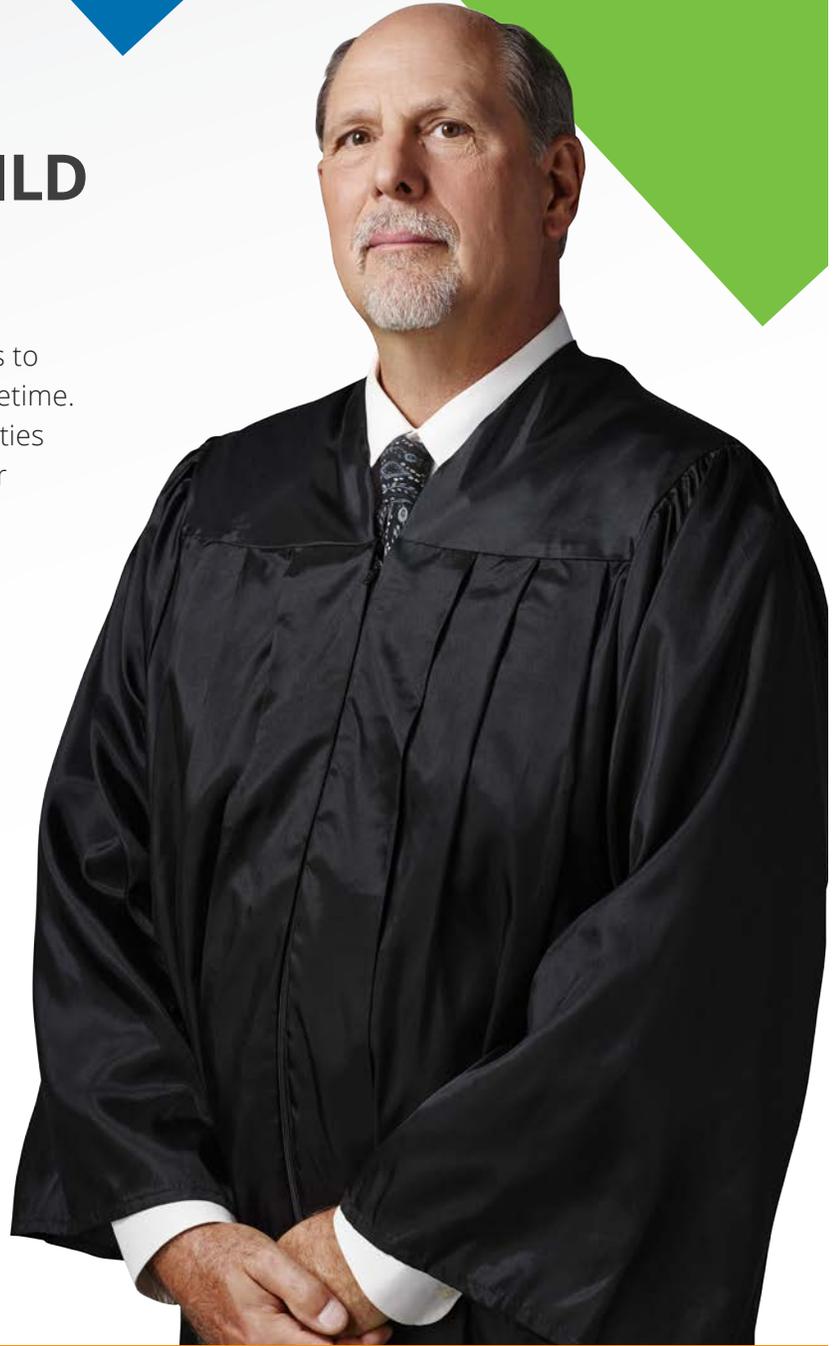
COMMUNITY INVESTMENTS



STRONG FAMILIES BUILD A STRONG SOCIETY

"As a juvenile court judge, I know that what happens to kids in their early years sets the foundation for a lifetime. That's why First Things First partners with communities across Arizona to strengthen families and empower parents in their role as their child's first teacher."

Judge Richard Weiss



FISCAL YEAR 2014 SERVICE NUMBERS

70,364 Parent kits distributed

66,786 Caregivers attended voluntary classes in community-based settings on topics such as parenting skills, child development, literacy and nutrition

IMPACT ACROSS ARIZONA

Foster Family Finds Support

Brian and Jessica* knew their 2-year-old foster son needed some help – he had delayed speech and would throw intense temper tantrums any time his routine was disrupted. When their son was found ineligible for services provided through the Arizona Early Intervention Program (AZEIP), their foster licensing agency referred them to Parent Coaching and Support Services (PCSS), a program funded by First Things First in eastern Maricopa County.

Through PCSS – which is administered by Southwest Human Development – a parent coach worked with the family to complete assessments on their son and get him started in occupational and speech therapy. Three months later, he was re-assessed and found eligible to receive early intervention services through AZEIP.

The parent coach also completed assessments on the family's 1-year-old foster daughter, who was unsteady in walking and running and had trouble with fine motor skills, like picking up small objects. In addition to the developmental screenings, coaches in the program also worked with the family during regular visits to the home to discover ways to help their children learn. The family also had the opportunity to participate in parent and child play groups and receive guidance on child development and common parental concerns.

"There's always room for improvement to help your child learn," said Jessica. "This program provides you the resources to be a better parent, especially if you have concerns about your child's development." Nadine, program manager for PCSS, said, "Parents should listen to their inner voice telling them that something is not right – because they know their child best – and seek out services."

*Names changed due to confidentiality concerns.



FISCAL YEAR 2014 SERVICE NUMBERS

7,453 Arizona families enjoyed stronger, more supportive parent-child relationships through home-based parenting education and support

101,114 Families accessed early childhood information, training or referrals through family resource centers

TEACHERS KNOW SCHOOL SUCCESS BEGINS AT BIRTH

"As a teacher, I know that crucial skills like motivation, self-discipline and focus take root in the early years. That's why First Things First helps many of Arizona's young kids receive the quality early education, health care and family support they need to be ready for school and set for life."

Nicole Teyechea McNeil
Teacher



FISCAL YEAR 2014 SERVICE NUMBERS

19,492

Infants, toddlers and preschoolers received scholarships to access child care and early learning programs

48,697

Children had access to a higher standard of early learning programs (child care and preschool) through Quality First



IMPACT ACROSS ARIZONA

Scholarship Keeps Preschooler Learning, Dad Working

How does a single father raise three little girls and hold a job? For one Safford dad, a Quality First scholarship made all the difference.

“Josh came into my office explaining he needed child care for his youngest daughter,” said Corrina, preschool director at First United Methodist Preschool Daycare Program. “His babysitter had bailed out on him, and he was actually bringing (4-year-old) Kylee to work with him. He was afraid of losing his job.”

The family was new to the community. Josh had taken a cut in pay for a new job that allowed him more time with his daughters since he would no longer have to work weekends. He found that there was room for Kylee in the preschool program and that the family also qualified for a scholarship.

Quality First Scholarships are available to qualifying families whose children attend child care and preschool settings that meet First Thing First’s quality standards. The scholarships help families earning below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level afford high-quality early learning experiences for their young children.

“As I drove away from the building on Kylee’s first day of child care, I stopped the car in the parking lot and just broke down,” said Josh. “I finally felt relief. My child was in a safe place with people who cared for her. I can’t describe the feeling. At last we were headed in the right direction.”

Josh is a believer in paying it forward. He noticed that the church had received new basketball equipment but had no court. Josh’s boss agreed to provide the equipment to build a court at no cost. Josh and other volunteers worked on Saturdays to build the court, which is also used for the preschool kids to ride their tricycles. “I feel so good about giving back to this program,” he said. “My family owes them so much.”



FISCAL YEAR 2014 SERVICE NUMBERS

1,552 Stipends to reward longevity and continuous learning among early childhood teachers

693 Early childhood teachers received scholarships to expand their skills working with infants, toddlers and preschoolers

90% OF A CHILD'S BRAIN DEVELOPS BEFORE KINDERGARTEN

"As a pediatrician, I know positive, nurturing experiences in a child's first five years lay the foundation for a lifetime. That's why First Things First partners with communities across Arizona to strengthen families and support the health and learning of our youngest children."

Dr. Lyndy Jones
Pediatrician



FISCAL YEAR 2014 SERVICE NUMBERS

16,721 Screenings completed to detect vision, hearing and developmental issues in young kids and prevent learning challenges later on

11,984 Children benefited from trainings for child care providers to help them meet the social-emotional needs of kids in their care



IMPACT ACROSS ARIZONA

Screening Reveals Need for Corrective Oral Surgery for Preschooler

A routine oral health screening led to oral surgery and changes in family food choices for one Navajo Nation preschooler.

An oral health screening sponsored by First Things First at a Tuba City preschool revealed extensive decay in the teeth of one preschooler. The child's family was referred to a dentist, who later performed oral surgery on the child due to the extent of the decay.

Many people are not aware that decay in first teeth can cause problems with jaw and language development, speech delays, nutritional deficiencies and, if left untreated, chronic absences when young kids enter school.

Preschool teacher Catrina said the child's mother told her that, without the screening, she probably would not have taken the child to the dentist.

Catrina said since the screening, the preschooler's family has committed to changing the child's eating habits to prevent future dental decay and practicing good oral health.

"It has changed their eating habits and the snacks (the child) brings to school," Catrina said.



FISCAL YEAR 2014 SERVICE NUMBERS

47,119

Oral health screenings administered to children statewide

42,057

Fluoride varnishes applied to protect against dental decay



MOVING FORWARD

First Things First relies almost exclusively on tobacco revenue to fulfill its mission to enhance or expand early childhood programs. Over the past five years, tobacco revenue has decreased by about 23%, meaning that the organization has \$39 million less to work with on an annual basis than when it started.

The statewide Board has taken several proactive steps to maximize the sustainability of these funds and look for new partnership opportunities. First Things First's thoughtful and strategic approach to budgeting – which is based on analysis of spending over the past five years, as well as projected future tobacco revenues – ensures the stability of a base level of funding for the next decade.

At the same time, First Things First will continue its efforts in the broader community to increase the resources available to support early childhood programs, including expanding promising public/private partnerships.

But, ensuring that the resources exist to fulfill Arizona's commitment to our youngest kids is more than any one organization can achieve. First Things First will continue to work with policymakers, educators, business leaders and philanthropic organizations to increase investment in areas that can yield the greatest return: the health and education of our youngest children.

Because everyone benefits when children arrive at school healthy and ready to be successful.



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