



FIRST THINGS FIRST

Ready for School. Set for Life.

Strengthening Families in Kaibab Paiute



As their children's first and best teacher, Tosh and her boyfriend, Derrick, know the importance of laying a strong foundation early in their children's lives.

Earlier this year, Tosh signed up for the Growing Up Great parent education classes offered at the Kaibab Early Learning Center in Fredonia. The program covers topics on bonding and attachment, caring for your family, social and emotional development and physical and brain development.

"It is crucial that families have the tools they need to support their kids with quality environments as they grow up," said Jeanne Crookston, kindergarten teacher at Fredonia Elementary School and facilitator of the Growing Up Great classes.

First Things First, a voter-created, statewide organization that funds early education and health programs to help kids be successful once they enter kindergarten, provides money to the Association for Supportive Child Care to run the Growing Up Great program. First Things First understands that a child's preschool experience comes in many ways, including through at home care from a trusted family member or friend. Growing Up Great is designed to serve parents with children 0 to 5 years old so families have the tools and the confidence to better support their child's health and early learning.

"When parents, caregivers and childcare centers can provide positive, nurturing and interactive learning experiences that makes a difference in how well a child does in school," Crookston said.

The first class, focused on brain development, showed Tosh and Derrick the importance of instilling good character. Once a week, for the next six weeks, Tosh and her two boys participated in the evening classes with seven other parents and their kids.

“The big goal is for him to be ready for kindergarten,” Tosh said, pointing to her son. Tosh is the Human Resources Director for the Kaibab Band of Paiute Tribe, so she knows that the key to her children’s success, in work and in life, starts with helping them be ready for kindergarten.

Kindergarten readiness means more than packing their backpacks and getting their school supplies. Since 90 percent of a child’s brain develops by age 5, the job of getting kids ready for school starts the day they are born.

She said she and Derrick are learning all they can about early childhood development and ways to be a stronger family for their children.

“This class is giving me more ideas to help him learn, to identify what his emotions are and place words to those feelings,” Tosh said.

The program offered child care while the parents were in class, then brought adults and children together to practice the techniques they were learning.

“Other classes that I have been part of tell you what to do and how to raise your kids.,” Tosh said. “This program gives you the opportunity to practice and do things with your kids.”

For Crookston, a recent recipient of the annual Caring for Children Award from the Coconino Coalition for Children and Youth, it is important for communities to support kids and families.

“It really does take a village. We cannot do it on our own,” said Crookston, who has been teaching Growing Up Great in the Fredonia area for the past three years. “As a parent and as a teacher, I have seen that kids who start behind often stay behind. If we want our kids to grow up strong, confident and with the skills to graduate high school, then we must all be part of their success.”



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About First Things First – First Things First is a voter-created, statewide organization that funds early education and health programs to help kids be successful once they enter kindergarten. Decisions about how those funds are spent are made by local councils staffed by community volunteers. To learn more, visit azftf.gov.