

First Focus on Kids

2013 Highlights

With support from: *The Diamond Family and First Things First*



Summer 2014

First Focus on Kids	1
School Readiness	2
Partner Select Activities	3
Quality First	3
Professional Development	3
Family Support	3
Community Mobilization	4
Collective Impact	4



First Focus on Kids...

We Keep on Growing!

In 2013, First Focus on Kids (FFK) completed the seventh year of the Diamond Challenge. FFK seeks to ensure that young children in our community enter school healthy, eager to learn and ready to succeed. FFK's focus on young children is consistent with research that indicates that quality early care and education investments for children and families result in improvements in academic-related achievements for children in their first few critical years in school. With ongoing quality supports and education, these initial achievements can be sustained along with important outcomes such as improved grade-level reading proficiency, fewer children needing special education services and improved graduation rates. Under the guidance of the First Focus on Kids (FFK) Coalition, a broad range of strategies collectively improve the well-being and school readiness of children in Pima County.

The Coalition's more than 100 community volunteers include early childhood professionals, business leaders, educators, early childhood literacy experts, youth and family development agencies, state and local government representatives, parents, and United Way staff.

FFK members participate in one or more strategy groups:

- Quality Improvement
- Professional Development
- Health
- Early Childhood Awareness
- Family Support

FFK's primary focus on school readiness arises from estimates that 33 percent of the children in our communities enter kindergarten without skills essential for school success. FFK supports multiple school readiness efforts based on research and best practice.

The Mission of First Focus on Kids

All young children ages 0-8 in Tucson and Southern Arizona are in safe and supportive environments that promote their cognitive, physical, social and emotional well-being.

FFK and School Readiness

Read On Tucson, a school-readiness initiative, focuses on three priority areas identified by the Annie E. Casey Foundation for reading proficiency: the readiness gap, the attendance gap, and the summer slide (summer learning loss). The initiative aligns strategies to decrease reading proficiency gaps such as: extended day for struggling readers; summer kindergarten readiness programs; public preschool instructional support; My Summer Library, Imagination Library; volunteer reading tutors; school day attendance campaign; high quality early childhood education and K-3 out-of-school time programs; parent and public awareness for early literacy; and other innovative opportunities.

"Academic success, as defined by high school graduation, can be predicted with reasonable accuracy by knowing someone's reading skill at the end of third grade. A person who is not at least a modestly skilled reader by that time is unlikely to graduate from school."

-The National Research Council

The major Read On Tucson goal is to increase to 85% by 2020 the proportion of children meeting or exceeding reading-level standards. In 2013 75% of Pima County children in third grade meet or exceed the standards. Read On Tucson is

partnered with 19 high-need elementary schools, serving more than **9,000** children. We are excited to work with and support our educators, parents and others to meet the Read On Tucson goals.



Supplying children with books and exposing families to literacy activities is a collaborative effort which includes partners such as: Make Way for Books, Literacy Connects, Reach Out and Read Southern Arizona, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, Flowing Wells Book Project, Women Leading United, and Tucson Unified School District.

In 2013, **79,879** age-appropriate books were distributed to young children to add to their home libraries; 19 schools in four school districts serving **8,127** children are part of Read On Tucson and **2,500** United Way Literacy Guides in English and Spanish were distributed to parents and caregivers.

Did you know? Each new graduate from high school confers an estimated net benefit to taxpayers of \$127,000 over the graduate's lifetime. What does this mean for our community? Collective impact efforts, working closely together with educators and other stakeholders, that cut the dropout rate for Tucson Unified School District (TUSD), from 570 to 447 youth (.05%), would result in approximately \$15,621,000 in net benefits, over time, to taxpayers! We can do this! We know that one of the most effective ways to decrease dropout rates is through high quality early care and education for children and effective supports to young families.

FFK and Partner Select Activities

Since 2006, FFK and the Diamond Challenge Fund have raised over \$51 million to improve the well-being and school readiness of Pima County's most at-risk children. In 2013, a total of \$223,202 was raised from private sources and more than \$7.8 million dollars secured through government sources with significant funding from First Things First.

Quality Improvement

Providing support to early education programs to improve quality is a key component of early childhood education. As a Quality First contractor for coaching and incentives, United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona works with partners Child & Family Resources and Easter Seals Blake Foundation to support quality improvement efforts. In 2013, **194** child care and preschool programs in Pima County have achieved a 3, 4 or 5 star Quality First rating. In addition, **1,892** young children attend early education programs that promote healthy habits (nutrition and physical activity). Finally, the number of children in programs actively working on improving quality in 2013 was **9,986**; up from just 170 in 2000!

Professional Development

FFK has worked over the past decade to support professional development and degree attainment for early care and education professionals. More and more professionals receive important professional development each year. The growth continues in 2013:

- 47 students completed Associate Degrees in Early Childhood at Pima Community College;
- 33 students completed an Early Childhood Studies certificate at Pima Community College;
- 32 students completed a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education at The University of Arizona;
- 393 early childhood professionals received a REWARD\$ stipend for advancing their educational qualifications and remain employed at their child care site; and
- 5,050 individuals learned new developmentally appropriate early childhood education, family support and systems building skills.

Family Support

FFK's Family Support Alliance (FSA) continues to expand its work through partnerships with many community agencies to provide direct services to families that are either expecting or parenting children.

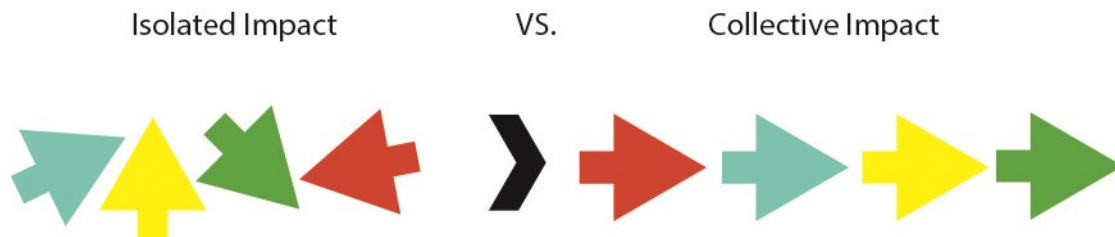
In 2013:

- **4,924** families received guidance for raising and nurturing their child either in the home or at community-based settings; and
- The Nuestra Salud (CHIPRA) partnership enrolled approximately **786** children into AHCCCS or Kids-Care.

Community Mobilization

FFK works to raise awareness of the importance of early childhood development and education. Business community members learn about the link between nurturing, positive early childhood experiences and academic and workplace success. FFK and partners host the Business Breakfast where in 2013, **256** people, including **157** business and community members raised \$9,915 to support Read On Tucson. Ongoing work includes service coordination across all areas of Pima County. In 2013, more than a dozen organizations provided new, more effective coordination of services in the rural areas of Southern Pima County.

First Focus on Kids - 2014 and Collective Impact



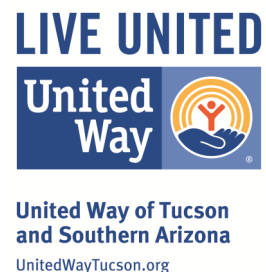
Looking ahead to 2014 and beyond, FFK embraces a collective impact approach that will further gains and offer new ways to address complex issues such as improving children's literacy skills and supporting all our families with young children. A collective impact approach involves creating and implementing a coordinated strategy among aligned stakeholders. The history of successful FFK efforts will enable common agenda setting, shared measurement strategies, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and effective United Way "backbone" support. We look forward to 2014 and beyond with great anticipation and high expectations!

For more information:

Visit www.firstfocusonkids.org or contact Allison Titcomb, Assoc. VP Community Development, United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona at 520.903.3916



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