



FIRST THINGS FIRST

The right system for bright futures

Proposed Statewide Strategies for Education, Information and Resource Portals

Introduction

In March 2008, First Things First staff presented a proposal for statewide funding of a centralized web-based education and resource hub for families and the public. At that time, the Board requested additional research and information to address concerns about duplication, coordination, and cost.

After completing a research and discovery process, the FTF staff found there are a range of web-based sources of education, information, or resources on early childhood development and health. Currently, AZ 2-1-1 Online; www.az211.gov, is the only source with a comprehensive listing of statewide health and human services information. Arizona 2-1-1 describes thousands of child care, health care, senior services, counseling, and other health and human service programs and government resources. FTF staff engaged AZ 2-1-1 staff in preliminary informational sessions to identify opportunities to collaborate on the continuing effort to provide the right education, information and resources to parents, families, care givers and professionals involved in early childhood development and health in Arizona.

The FTF staff recommendation detailed in this paper is to develop and maintain two web-based education, information and resource portals, one for families and one for professionals to enhance the information and resources already contained on the AZ 2-1-1 site. Content on the professional's portal will be developed to address the needs of child care teachers and caregivers, medical personnel, therapists in the fields of health, mental health and early intervention, and related professionals such as social workers and those in child protective services. The two new portals, *Families First!* (azfamiliesfirst.com) and *Professionals First!* (azprofessionalsfirst.com) will build upon current resources and investments. This strategy can be best achieved with further development of the current FTF website at www.azftf.gov, and through significant collaboration and partnership with AZ 2-1-1. The content will primarily be comprised of links to already existing web-based information and statewide and regional resources. FTF and AZ 2-1-1 will continue planning and developing the components of these portals. A strong partnership with AZ 2-1-1 will minimize duplication while leveraging resources, such as the existing technology already in use by AZ 2-1-1.

Implementation of this portal strategy would enhance the early childhood development and health system infrastructure by bridging the information, education and resource system gap

across the state. It would also serve as a conduit for connecting families, communities, professionals and the public with related FTF statewide and regional efforts such as *Quality First! and Young Child Champions* (FTF Communications strategy for advocacy to build the early childhood movement).

First Things First Goals Addressed

Family Support Goal

- FTF will coordinate and integrate with existing education and information systems to expand families' access to high quality, diverse and relevant information and resources to support their child's optimal development.
- FTF will increase the availability, quality and diversity of relevant resources that support language and literacy development for young children and their families.

Professional Development Goal

- FTF will build a skilled and well prepared early childhood development workforce.

Communication Goal

- FTF will expand public awareness of, and financial and political support for, early childhood development and health efforts in Arizona.

Coordination Goal

- FTF will lead cross-system coordination efforts among state, federal and tribal organizations to improve the coordination and integration of Arizona programs, services, and resources for young children and their families.

Research Process

To fully develop this strategy proposal, staff reviewed discussions that occurred in FTF Family Support Workgroup meetings. Workgroup members identified gaps and inconsistencies in availability and families' access to information and resources, with a request that FTF consider the use of technology when developing family education and information strategies. Staff also reviewed recommendations from the *Building Bright Futures*, the FTF 2007 Needs and Assets Assessment Report, and engaged in additional discovery and research.

The *Building Bright Futures* report conveys "Arizona is challenged by the lack of a coordinated system that provides accurate early childhood information to families from many backgrounds and locations across the state. The high number of rural areas and significant differences in family needs create challenges for families seeking information regarding child development, parenting, and the availability of quality child care. Families often lack awareness and understanding of where to find the information they need, or it is in formats not easily understood by all who need it."

Research and discovery activities included:

- Preliminary meetings with AZ 2-1-1 staff to identify opportunities for coordination and collaboration.
- Ascertained which states have a similar gap in their system infrastructure and identified strategies they used to address it.
- Identified existing state and local providers of education, information, and/or resources about early childhood development and health, and conducted meetings with families, professionals, community members, and other stakeholders, including agencies already providing education and information through websites or telephone services, to determine current assets and needs regarding the provision of information and resources. Agencies contacted include Child Care Resource and Referral, and Southwest Human Development (Birth to Five Helpline).
- Consulted with FTF cross-division teams (Communications, Policy and Research, and Program and Business Systems) to discuss the implications and logistics of the development and implementation of the portals.
- Contacted and verified all the statewide resources listed in the Arizona Parent Kit Resource Guide.

Gaps and Findings in the Early Childhood Development and Health Infrastructure

- During meetings with AZ 2-1-1, representatives indicated support for this FTF portal strategy and were pleased with the proposed collaboration. AZ 2-1-1 has indicated they can share data and information already established in their database. FTF can supplement their data with new material not included on their site and by providing updates to material already on AZ 2-1-1.
- Community forums held during the summer of 2007 confirmed that there is a desire for a coordinated and comprehensive web-based system of education, information and resources specific to early childhood development and health.
- Websites and hotlines currently exist in Arizona to provide some of the desired education, information and resources. However, some providers only serve portions of the state, and there is no statewide comprehensive system for both families and early childhood development and health professionals.
- Several states, such as Indiana, Connecticut, Kansas, New York and North Carolina, have identified this gap and determined the best strategy was to develop a coordinated web-based system of education, information, and resources related to early childhood development and health.

- Developers in the FTF Programs and Business Systems Division have confirmed they are able to complete development (coding and programming), which is the most costly component for the two proposed portals, on the FTF website without additional cost or resources. The only financial outlay necessary for these strategies is for initial design (aesthetics), content management and public awareness.
- The FTF portals being recommended can build upon another statewide strategy, the FTF Arizona Parent Kits. The website portals also expand the audience for the information in the Parent Kit Resource Guide. For example, statewide resources are listed in the Resource Guide that, when also listed on the web, can be accessed by professionals or the public.
- Local resources can be accessed regionally through a direct link to the corresponding Regional Partnership Council web page.

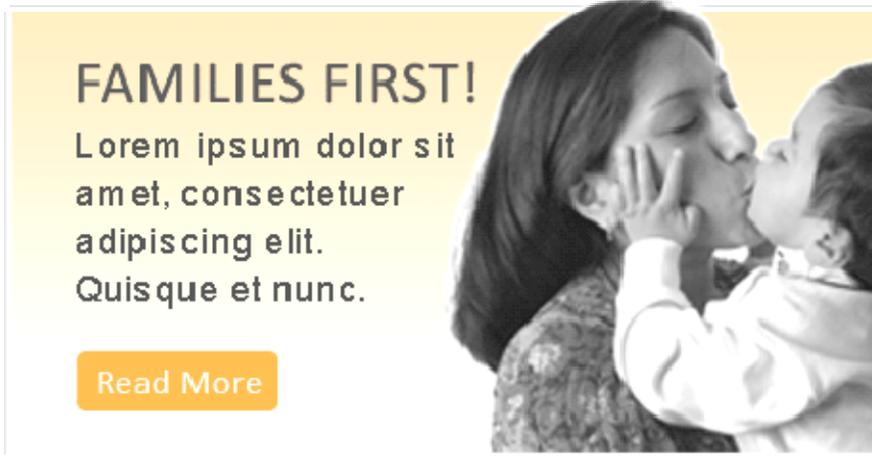
Proposed Strategy to Address Gaps in the Early Childhood Development and Health Infrastructure

Information for Families and Professionals on the FTF Web Site

Building upon current internal resources and investments in website development and establishing a strong AZ 2-1-1 partnership, we will be able to provide families and early care and health professionals with increased access to information and resources. Initially, this can be best achieved through expansion of the current FTF website. The following are examples of the visual portals proposed for development on the FTF website, which would be branded *Families First!* and *Professionals First!*. Each portal would contain topics and content specific for the audience, and links to other sites that provide information and resources. This proposal requires one dedicated web-content specialist, who will manage the FTF *Families First!* and *Professionals First!* sites. To maintain quality assurance, staff will develop criteria for the inclusion of website content and links and policies and procedures for monitoring.

FTF staff and AZ 2-1-1 staff will continue to coordinate planning and development and will maintain an ongoing partnership throughout implementation. The AZ 2-1-1 logo and link will be prominently displayed on www.azftf.gov and the *Families First!* and *Professionals First!* portals. A prominent link to FTF will also be included on the “Home Page” of AZ 2-1-1. The Communications Division will develop targeted public awareness campaigns on the value and easy access of the Families First! and Professionals First! sites.

Example of *Families First!* Education, Information and Resource Portal



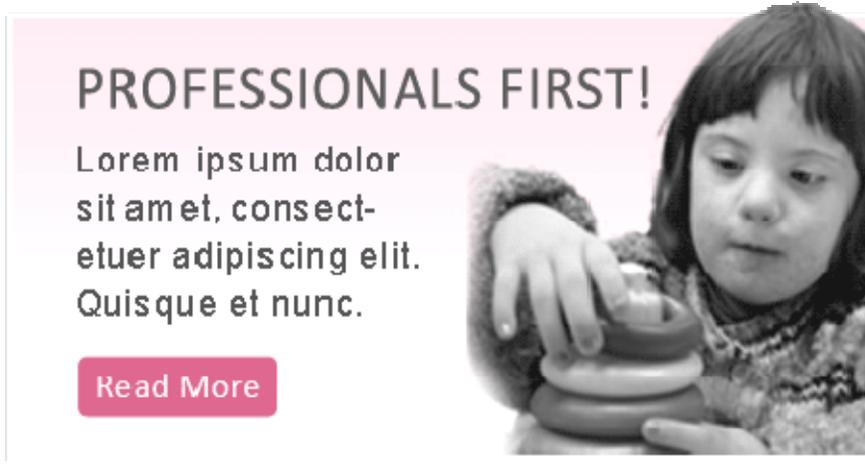
Families First! Education and Information

- Typical developmental milestones including early language and literacy
- Atypical development: what to look for and what to do if concerned about potential delays or disabilities
- Parenting Skills:
 - Tips and techniques to encourage social- emotional, physical, and cognitive development
 - Positive discipline and other topics of interest to families
- Preventative Health Topics:
 - medical and dental information, such as well-child visits, immunization schedules and oral hygiene
 - nutrition and feeding
 - safety practices

Families First! Resources

- AZ 2-1-1 Health and Human Services Information
- Child Care Resource and Referral
- Parenting Support Groups
- Statewide resource listing from Arizona Parent Kit Guide
- FTF Regional Partnership sites
- *Quality First!*

Example of *Professionals First!* Education, Information and Resource Portal



Professionals First! Education and Information

- Career Development Guidance
- Early Childhood Program Standards
- Arizona’s Early Learning Standards
- College and University Degree Programs
- Certifications, Licensure, or Endorsements

Professionals First! Resources

- *Families First!*
- *Quality First!*
- Job listings and postings

Proposed Budget for Education, Information and Resource Portals Strategy

❖ *May be modified based upon on-going discussions and planning with AZ 2-1-1*

Proposed Strategy	FY 09	FY 10	FY 11
FTF Families First! and Professionals First! Web Portals (includes Public Awareness Campaigns in FY 10 and FY 11)	\$120,000	\$370,000	\$220,000
TOTAL	\$120,000	\$370,000	\$220,000

Proposed Timeline

❖ *May be modified based upon discussions and planning with AZ 2-1-1*

30 days after board approval	90 days from board approval	120 days from board approval	90 day period: post-launch	120 days from initial launch
Planning and Development with AZ 2-1-1 completed	Initial Web development and design in collaboration with AZ 2-1-1 Web-Content Specialist position filled	<i>Families First! Professionals First! go live on web</i>	Ongoing content development, coordination of existing partners, quality assurance, and monitoring	Public Awareness Campaign

Additional Approaches to Provide Education, Information and Resources

First Things First recognizes that families and professionals access information in a variety of ways and that not all families or professionals have access to web-based information.

Additional approaches will include:

- **Written Materials for Distribution** - FTF will make available printed copies of materials developed for Families First! and Professionals First! to provide access to information to those without web access.
- **FTF Toll-Free Number** - Inquiries for information via phone conversation and/or through written materials will be managed through the toll-free number. Callers may leave a voice message, and the request will be routed to the appropriate FTF staff member for assistance.

FTF staff will continue to research other methods and formats for delivering education, information and resources to Arizona's young children, their families and professionals that provide services.