community development partnership

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A Rooted in Care: How One Educator Built a Community-Focused Preschool on the Outer Cape



Photo credit: Provincetown Independent

When Nola Glatzel returned to Provincetown in 2018, it wasn't just a move home—it was the beginning of a mission. A former NYC public school teacher, Nola came back to be near family just as her sister had her first child. What she found was a lack of care options for children under three—and an opportunity to fill a growing gap.

"There weren't a lot of options here for kids that age," she said. "That's when I knew I had to do something."

That "something" became Earthstar Play School, a play-based early childhood program she launched in Truro. What began with a few parent volunteers is now a thriving preschool serving twelve children ages two to four—with more still on the waitlist.

While Provincetown offers a small public early learning program, it's limited in capacity and prioritizes residents. Truro has even fewer options, and nearby centers are already stretched. As Nola pointed out, the shortage of care often forces one parent—usually the mother—to stay home, affecting family income and limiting opportunities for women to reenter the workforce.

"There's such a huge need," Nola said. "Especially for infants. I don't take them yet, but I'd like to with the right staff. There just aren't enough spots anywhere."

But the shortage of care wasn't her only motivation. After years in the public school system, Nola grew disillusioned with the increasing push toward academics at younger and younger ages. She envisioned something different—something rooted in childhood itself.

"They don't need to be rushed," she said. "They need room to explore and grow." At Earthstar, learning happens through play, care moments, and meaningful daily routines. Children learn how to put on their coats, clear their tables, and take care of their belongings—small tasks that build confidence and independence. "I love this age," Nola said. "They're just beginning to discover who they are."

Becoming a small business owner, however, was new territory. "I'm a teacher who happened to start a business," she laughed. "I didn't even have a separate bank account in the beginning."

She found help at the CDP. Through their GROW Program, a program partnership with WE CAN, Nola learned core business skills—from tracking cash flow to marketing. When the pandemic hit, CDP helped her apply for a PPP loan, secure grant funding, and later, transition her school into a nonprofit.

"CDP has supported me every step of the way," she said. "Pam Andersen in particular has been incredible—helping with everything from QuickBooks to fundraising materials."

The nonprofit shift allowed Nola to avoid raising tuition despite rising costs—and even increase wages for her assistants. "Stability matters in early childhood. Kids need consistent adults they can trust. Paying my staff well is essential."

Though fundraising was once out of her comfort zone, she's finding her rhythm. A community ice cream social and year-end letter campaign brought in donations from local businesses, past parents, and even a Truro resident who said seeing the children outside brought them joy.

"It's been amazing to feel so supported," she said. "People really value what we're doing."
The name Earthstar reflects that grounding. Inspired by a tiny mushroom native to the dunes of Provincetown and Truro, the Earthstar lies dormant until watered—then opens, anchoring and nourishing the ecosystem. It's a symbol, Nola says, for the quiet power of young children and the importance of tending to their early years with care.

This year, Earthstar partnered with the Wellspring Project at Cape Cod Children's Place for professional development in social-emotional learning—helping Nola and her team support children through challenges and foster resilience. "It can be isolating doing this work out here," she said. "Having mentors and other educators to learn from has been such a gift."

"I never meant to become a business owner," she said, "but I've learned how to ask for help, how to grow something real, and how to talk about why it matters—because it does."

At the CDP's Annual Meeting on May 7, Nola was recognized with the 2025 Norm Edinberg Award for Excellence in Entrepreneurship—an honor given annually to a Lower or Outer Cape business owner who has engaged with the CDP's business and credit services and demonstrates a deep commitment to community through social responsibility, sustainability, or service. Surrounded by family and friends, Nola accepted the award as a testament to what *Earthstar* has become and the impact it continues to make.

"I'm just so grateful," she said. "To the families, to the community, and especially to the kids—because they're the reason I show up every day."

In recognition of her entrepreneurial spirit, her unwavering commitment to children and families, and her partnership with the CDP, we are proud to present Nola Glatzel with the 2025 Norm Edinberg Award for Excellence in Entrepreneurship.