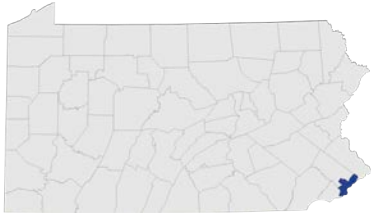


# My Story



## An Oasis in the City

The Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education

By Nicole Brin, Nature Preschool Teacher

*“When a child greets me in the morning with a giant smile and wide eyes, I know that*



Rows of stuffed animals--bears, bunnies, dogs, lions--all lined up in the grass of my suburban Connecticut backyard as they got ready to start their school day. Their teacher, eight-year-old me, prepared to teach them all the things that I already knew in the wisdom of my



**Keystone Fund Investment:** \$750,000

**Total Public/Private Investment:** \$40

few childhood years. I made attendance sheets, created lessons, and planned field trips to the garden behind our shed. I knew that one day I'd be a real teacher, sharing all the cool things I loved about life.

Fast forward fourteen or so years. I was fresh out of college with my teaching degree and my first job. I still felt the same joy sharing my love for learning, but this time alongside actual real-life students in a classroom. Despite this, I couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't quite right. Was this really

what I wanted to do? Fast forward a few more years. After an impromptu move to Philadelphia, I was well on my way to becoming a city girl. I loved the tall buildings, I lived in a row home, and I fought for street parking if it was after 5 pm. I was working in a restaurant when

I accidentally stumbled upon the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education. Still looking for the right job, I applied to be a summer camp educator. The Center became my oasis. When I wasn't working I'd go for hikes on my own as I learned every bit of the property. I was amazed that 340 acres of preserved forest was right here in my new city. When I found out the Nature Preschool was opening in the fall of 2013 I knew that was where I had to be.

**Learn more at [KeystoneFund.org](http://KeystoneFund.org).**

The past four years working as a Nature Preschool teacher have been incredibly eye-opening. The benefits of getting kids outside unfold right before my eyes. I've learned



that the best type of learning happens organically. It is meaningful, relevant, and exciting. True learning happens when you discover answers to your questions first hand. At Nature Preschool we work to do just that. We use the trails, ponds, streams, leaves, and every little crevice under a log to learn. We not only grow our cognitive capacities, but our social, emotional, and physical well-being at the same time. As teachers, our goal is to take the natural curiosities of the children and help them develop into the skills needed for kindergarten and beyond. This can come in many forms. Imagine a calm moment of reflection under the trees, a group lesson on insects in the grasses of the meadow, or navigating the ins and outs of friendships while constructing a magical fort. The children are making memories that will last a life time, and we are fostering the next generation of stewards who are learning to love our earth.

Growing up I was always outside--I have my parents to thank for that. It wasn't until much later that I realized working out in nature could actually be a profession. When a child greets me in the morning with a giant smile, wide

eyes, and the eagerness to know where we are going on our hike for the day, I know that we are doing something right. Now I understand that my original vision of education also involves a strong connection with the natural world—and I have the Schuylkill Center to thank for that.

**Learn more at [KeystoneFund.org](https://www.KeystoneFund.org).**