

ELEMENTS LEARNING COLLABORATIVE



2021 ANNUAL REPORT





A MESSAGE FROM OUR CO-FOUNDERS

Elements Learning Collaborative is the work of a passionate community of educators and learners who believe in nurturing the holistic wellness of learners through hands-on education in an environment that feeds the mind, body, and soul. Using the natural landscapes of Southeastern Massachusetts, we help the new generation connect with the real world in more meaningful ways.

Our programs continued to bring so many memorable educational experiences to learners of all ages in 2021. Educational experiences that create a lasting impact! Within each program we incorporate outdoor learning with the interconnection between social, emotional and academic skill development. Over the course of the seasons, we hatched chicks and raised chickens, built garden beds & mini-greenhouses, grew fruits & vegetables, and milked cows & goats on the farm. Our learners in our Elements Nature Program were inspired to produce the first-ever Elements play, "Acorn". Working with ELC guides, learners took responsibility for each aspect of production, writing the lines, acting in the roles, directing the vision, and designing the sets. In the community, we supported families through educational parenting workshops and continued to offer homeschool support. Throughout the year, our learners followed the calendar of global holidays and in person cultural "show and tell" to broaden their scope of world cultures, and the peoples beyond our relationship circles.

At ELC we carry a commitment to lifelong learning. We provide a deep sense of community for our young learners and their families rooted in equity, empathy, and cultural awareness. The demand for holistic and nature-based programs for our local children has consistently increased each year with 63 children on program waitlists across 2021. Our team understands the concept of nature-based learning is straightforward. At the same time, we recognize that the systems in place make it almost impossible to access for some. We are dedicated, and send out a call for support, to further expand our ability to provide an even more diverse community of learners with a holistic, joyful, and child-centered learning experience in nature; A learning experience that simultaneously fosters social and emotional development, responsibility, and independence.

In 2022 we will work to mitigate the barriers to accessing our services for those in our community who have historically been left out of mental wellness support, summer camps, green spaces, and access to fresh food. We will strive to employ more caring and supportive adults who are representative of our learner's identities with the goal of creating a more integrated learning community. At Elements, we stand as a solution and a means to delivering educational experiences that focus on and nourish the whole person. We aim to inspire your support in extending this opportunity to more members of our community.

CRISTY O'BRIEN & RACHEL MEDEIROS

OUR STORY

Elements Learning Collaborative (ELC) is an independent, non-profit, nature-based educational organization in Southeastern Massachusetts. ELC programs run year-round and provide an affordable alternative education option for the children and families of our community. Elements is committed to helping children grow in a holistic, multifaceted manner. Programs nurture and support learners' interests, multiple intelligences, and social-emotional development alongside their academic foundations.

Since 2018, ELC has operated on Round the Bend Farm in South Dartmouth. With the support of Elements' educators and Round the Bend teammates, our partnership on the farm provides our participants with the perfect setting to grow and learn in nature. Learners are exposed to a variety of world views and unique opportunities with a working farm as the backdrop of their Elements' experience.

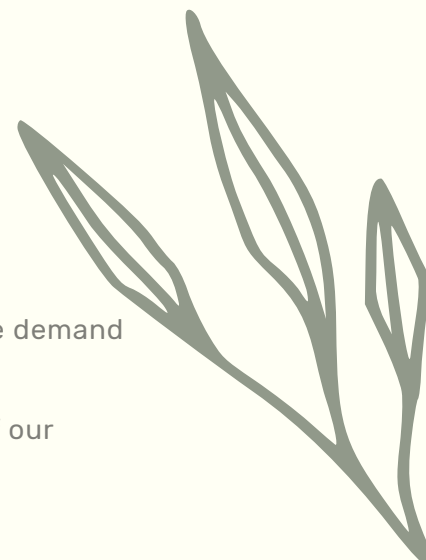
Our 4 distinct programs and services aim to meet the diverse educational needs of our community. All of our programs work with the cycle of the seasons and the natural elements of life. Children and families at Elements enjoy authentic experiences that connect them with themselves and their world as a place of learning. Our Programs offer an alternative option to traditional schooling. Our learners include homeschooled children whose families choose Elements as a supplement to their education. Other participants are traditionally schooled children whose caregivers seek to bolster their education with hands-on, project-based learning experiences.

OUR MISSION AND VISION

Our mission at ELC is to provide children of diverse backgrounds with a holistic, joyful and child-centered learning experience in nature, while fostering social and emotional development as well as responsibility and independence. We envision learners utilizing nature and their community as an open-ended resource to foster learning and growth. We imagine diverse communities of mindful lifelong learners and teachers who continue to explore, connect and contribute their love to the world.

OUR 2022 GOALS

- Further diversify funding streams to secure \$20,000 through donations, sponsorships, and grant awards to fund existing programming needs, further develop our teaching capacity and strengthen our scholarship fund
- Continue to build and educate our teaching and administrative team to meet the demand for our current and future programming
- Increase the diversity of program participants to align with the demographics of our nearest city, New Bedford, through community outreach.
- Increase the number of scholarship recipients by 50% at minimum.



OUR TEAM

Our experienced educators are a dedicated group of individuals who are committed to ELC's philosophy of holistic education which aims to guide children as they find their personal identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, the natural world, and humanitarian values such as compassion and peace.



ELC TEACHERS



CRISTY O'BRIEN CO-DIRECTOR

Cristy (she/hers) holds that it is the innate wonder and curiosity of each child that guides learning. At Elements she instills trust and fosters connection through cross curriculum lessons, always keeping mental and physical wellness at the forefront. She carries mindfulness into each activity, event and personal interaction she has with ELC participants.

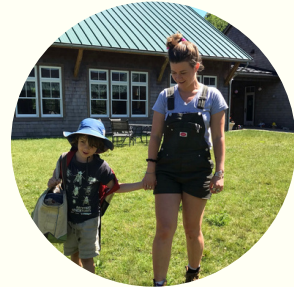


RACHEL MEDEIROS CO-DIRECTOR

At Elements, Rachel (she/hers) embraces children's natural curiosities and supports their innate ability to learn. While guiding children across ELC programs, Rachel can be found playing math games, supporting children in safe foraging practices, sharing celebrations from around the world, and empathizing with and supporting children through their big feelings.

J TERRY ELC TEACHER

At ELC, J (they/them) teaches a social emotional curriculum through storytelling, singing, yoga, and exploring around the farm. J loves creating and holding space for all learners to be their most genuine selves, ask big questions, imagine big ideas, create together and spread more love and kindness in the world. J believes the seeds planted at Elements are critical for the growth we hope to see in our future.



MARISOL ROSA ELC TEACHER

Marisol (she/hers) resonates deeply with the philosophical approach of ELC. Marisol's focus is supporting ELC participants to walk their journey of self exploration and self actualization in order to reach their fullest and greatest potential.



SARAH "SEA" ASHELY ELC TEACHER

Sea (they/them) brings their love for community and growing together to ELC. Sea aims to guide ELC participants to develop respect for self, others and our planet. They are a holistic mental health counselor and a parent of and ELC learner.





OUR BOARD

ELC's Board of Directors & Officers is composed of community members, parents, educators, and entrepreneurs. They are mission-driven and work to have a positive impact on the community, pedagogy in education, and our future.

OFFICERS

Cristy DeFusco
Rachel Medeiros

DIRECTORS

Nate Sander
Dena Haden
Lori Chaput
Carissa Wills-DeMello

FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE

Katie Mannix
Carissa Wills-DeMello
Louise Aliberti

Love and Praise for Elements

"My favorite part of Elements is knowing my child is in a loving, capable environment and learning in a non conventional way."

-Elements Parent

"Elements is the best school ever! I get to learn about nature, play outside, and I don't have to sit at a desk all day!"

-Elements Nature Program Learner, Age 6

"[My children] like being a part of the farm duties and the hands on projects/creating!"

-Elements Parent





ELEMENTS PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

Elements Nature Program

provides a drop-off, year round alternative to traditional school. Children between the ages of 4 and 10 are dropped off to spend the day guided through exploration-based learning. ENP is intimately aligned with the seasons and provides a deep exploration of our local ecosystems, art, literature, mathematics, science, music, and social thinking. Each day ENP learners arrive ready to explore the natural setting of the Round the Bend Farm and lead their learning.

Family Days

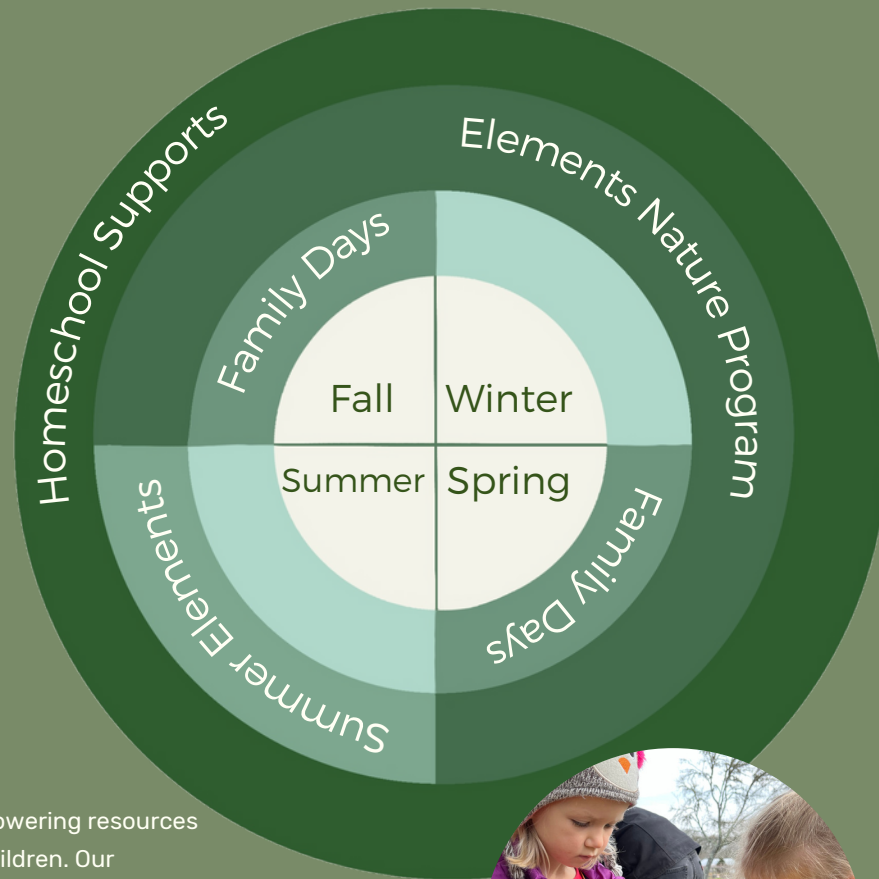
offer a nature-based learning experience for the entire family. In the Spring and Fall families gather in either morning or afternoon sessions each Friday. Family days provide safe, healthy, and open-ended opportunities for families to connect and learn together and develop a deeper sense of community.

Elements Summer Camp

runs Tuesday - Thursday for 8 weeks through July & August. Campers spend 100% of their time outdoors fully immersed in hands-on learning. Our Summer curriculum explores the sciences through a holistic lens that promotes social & environmental justice. We spend time at camp close to the earth, noticing the sounds, texture, colors, smells, and tastes of nature.

Home School Supports

ELC offers a litany of homeschooling supports to provide empowering resources to the community of parents choosing to home school their children. Our homeschooling supports are developed to reach these parents across the country. Close to home, we provide local meetups for homeschooling families.





ELEMENTS NATURE PROGRAM

2021 was our very first winter in our Round the Bend (RTB) classroom! As the fall ended and the winter set in we were able to move indoors for a portion of our day and had ample opportunities to warm up as we explored the slow, sleepy farm and got our sleds out! We had the opportunity to be present for RTB's goat kidding season which led to a great deal of wondering, deep reflections, and a whole lot of fun. In 2021 we collaborated to produce the very first Elements play, *The Acorn Story*. ENP Learners teamed up with ELC guide, J, to co-write the story. The main character mobilized their community to save the local woods near their home. After completing the writing process learners chose roles, developed a script and rehearsals started. In June we held two performances that were well received by our community partners, families and friends.

In 2021 we also...

Hatched and raised chicks to contribute to mitigating the tick population in RTB fields. After taking great care of the chicks during their incubation period, ENP learners were responsible for feeding and watering the flock, moving the coop, and collecting eggs.

Tended the ENP gardens. Learners really dug in as they designed various garden beds like pizza, fruit, greens, and soup beds. They planted, watered, weeded, harvested, and processed the food from their gardens. Together we enjoyed freshly made strawberry jam, fresh tomato & parsley dip, squash pancakes, and kale salad. There was even enough to send home for our families to enjoy!

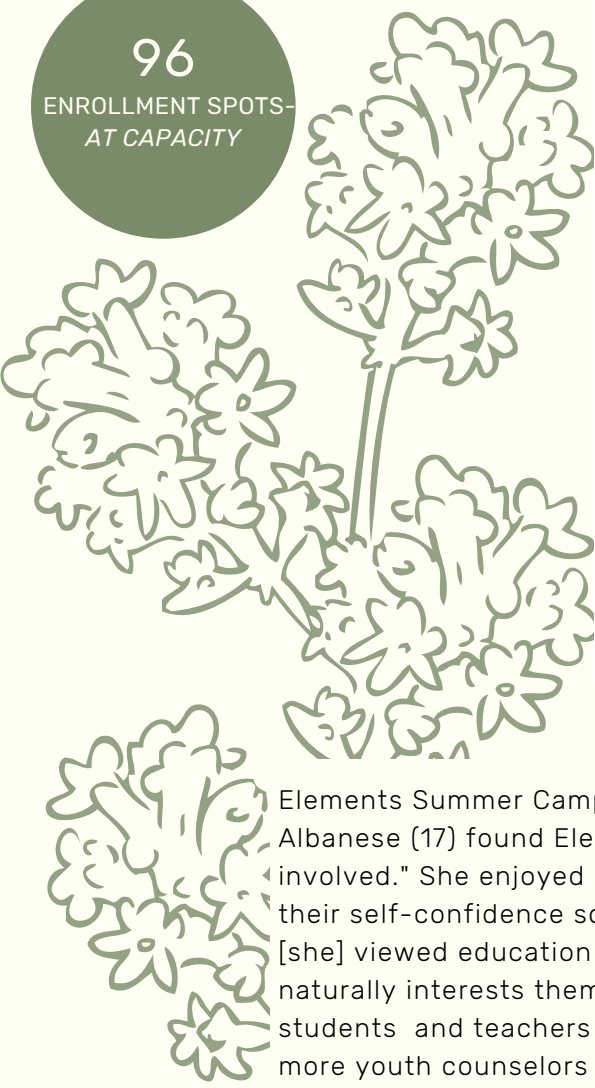
12
ENROLLMENT SPOTS-
AT CAPACITY





SUMMER ELEMENTS NATURE CAMP

96
ENROLLMENT SPOTS-
AT CAPACITY



This past summer campers spent their days moving through RTB fields, estuaries, and woodlands learning about the nature around them as they engaged. Daily campers explored the garden where their 5 senses were ignited. Incorporated into this play was the shared knowledge of composting & healthy soil, nutrient rich vegetables, greens, flowers, and fruit, and honorable harvesting methods. Campers carried their wondering minds into the outdoor kitchen to prepare & eat the food they grew themselves! Individually we got creative as we collaborated to solve problems exploring loose parts play, building together, and expressing ourselves through expressive arts and literature. Always in our time together at camp guides support campers as they develop their emotional intelligence and mindfulness. Campers are encouraged to connect and accept their big emotions as they arise and are supported as they learn skills in conflict resolution, practice yoga, and take mindful moments.

Elements Summer Camp hosted two camp youth counselors. Local high school student Amelia Albanese (17) found Elements Summer Camp "an extremely impactful experience for everyone involved." She enjoyed working with campers as they learned directly from nature, and watched as their self-confidence soared. Amelia's time working with Elements Summer Camp "shifted the way [she] viewed education as a whole. There is so much power in allowing kids to follow what naturally interests them. Elements showcases how positive and thoughtful relationships between students and teachers impact learning and the overall experience." We are excited to welcome more youth counselors for Summer Elements 2022!



FAMILY DAYS

ELC led 8 family day cohorts in 2021 with a focus on nurturing a family identity of 'Nature Explorers'. In its second year, turnout was strong with each cohort meeting capacity. Each week, families arrive eager to see one another and continue to explore the natural ecosystems of RTB.

Spring of 2021 brought the RTB TerraCorps team who worked alongside the ELC Team. Together families were led in engaging activities such as; dying fabric with plant dyes, composting, and exploring seed diversity. In the Fall we connected once again welcoming new and old friends alike. We dove into a pollinators exploration where we identified squash varieties and hand-pollinated big beautiful squash flowers.

As Fall's cold temps approached, we discussed and acted out how the animal and plant world adapts. We celebrated our last day of the Fall season, bundled up with our friends drinking pine needle tea, and making wreaths with vines and evergreens collected on site. In the year ahead we aim to increase the number of available enrollment spots to increase our impact.

Love and Praise for Family Day!

"[My daughter] is starting to improve her social skills, and beginning to learn how to play fairly with others without always being in charge. For me, I love learning about different plants and talking with other adults."

"I love watching how well Rachel interacts with the children and helps them avoid conflict. She encourages listening without interrupting, and knows how to ask them questions about what they are feeling when they are upset."



81
ENROLLMENT SPOTS-
AT CAPACITY



HOME SCHOOLING SUPPORTS

Homeschooling Supports offered by ELC in 2021 included:

Elements At Home Nature Lessons as a downloadable comprehensive curriculum designed to inspire and guide nature study at home. Lessons are easily modified for the needs of individual learners and families and include parent guides, video lessons, printable activities, resource pages, and curriculum connection suggestions.

Homeschool Discussion Groups as community building gatherings where experienced homeschooling adults, newly homeschooling adults, and curious homeschooling adults from across the spectrum of homeschooling and unschooling styles meet locally to discuss topics of interest, share resources, and develop relationships.

Homeschooling Framework serves as a workbook where families can define and organize their values, resources, and needs. The framework provides a personalized guide for new or experienced homeschooling families. Included are example schedules, a kids questionnaire, evidence-based practices, goal setting guides, curriculum resources, and more. The Homeschooling Framework supports families as they build a holistic and joyful home-based learning experience for their children.



Homeschooling families had a lot to say about our supports and resources!

"Begin able to go outside and have a simple set of materials has been so helpful."

"I am SO loving the curriculum and truly beyond impressed by the depth and care you've put into these lessons."

"I appreciate that this is a document I can share with my partner; it can help us frame our conversations."

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

"Our Community Partnerships offer a wellspring of resources for educational opportunities. At Elements we are committed to fostering a connection with the community and celebrating the diverse perspectives, skills, and beauty available." - Cristy O'Brien



Round the Bend Farm

Elements celebrates our symbiotic relationship with RTB farm. We work together to nourish our community of learners and help each other grow. The natural beauty and ecology of the land and working farm offer a unique space for children to explore, play, and thrive. RTB's diverse group of teammates provide regular lessons in their areas of expertise. Both the children and RTB teammates get so much joy from these collaborations. RTB is a living laboratory that offers endless learning opportunities for place-based, hands-on learning.

Bristol Community College's Parenting Advancement Pathways

In 2021 ELC partnered with Bristol Community College to work with the parents enrolled in the college's Parenting Advancement Pathways. ELC created '[Holistic Support for Parenting Students](#)', a supplemental course workbook highlighting organizational tools, goal setting, mental and physical wellness, parenting foundations, and balancing work and school. Cristy and Rachel led a one hour workshop for 25 BCC student parents. Feedback from the community was positive. PAP program lead, Elisabetta Misuraca shared that "Students who attended, as well as those who watched the recording, expressed that the Holistic Education workshop was exactly what they needed and that they were able to apply it to their everyday busy lives as parenting students." ELC plans to continue partnering with BCC in 2022.

TerraCorps

RTB partnered this year with TerraCorps who provided 3 interns to focus on developing and leading a social justice curriculum and our gardening curriculum with ELC learners. TerraCorps Interns Beth, Laurel, & Hallie allowed us to create a yearlong anti-biased garden curriculum rooted in our project-based teaching methods and in relation to our academic curriculum. Through this project interns worked with ELC learners to build "low tunnels" over the raised garden beds creating "mini-greenhouses". ENP participants continued growing even through the coldest winter months.



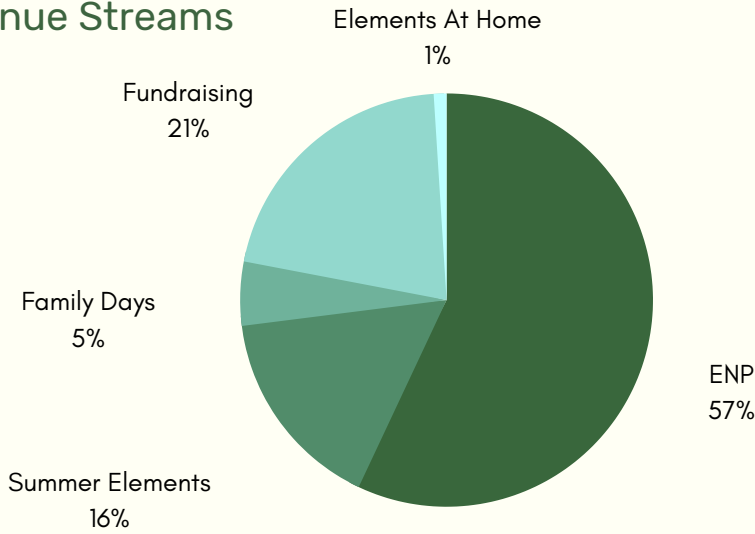
Community Vibrations at Haskell Gardens

The Elements Teaching Team joined Another Conscious Evolution for a day of free music, yoga, art, meditation, and dance in the beautiful Haskell Public Gardens in New Bedford, MA. Community members of all ages attended to share a sense of community and joy during the summer of 2021. Our Elements Team guided T-shirt tie-dyeing using Elements Nature Program T-shirts and made up-cycled crafts.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

In 2021, ELC's revenue was higher than any year prior- up 74% from 2020. While revenue has grown from new programs and eager participants, there is much cost to operating these programs. We are committed to diversifying our revenue streams and developing our fundraising strategies to continue to provide holistic, meaningful programs.

2021 Revenue Streams



2021 Revenue and Expenses

Programs	\$69,968	Programs	\$79,291
Fundraising	\$18,848	Administrative	\$12,564
Total Revenue	\$88,816	Fundraising	\$2,031
<i>SBA Loan (liability)</i>	<i>\$13,262</i>	Total Expenses	\$93,885



Fundraising

Our 2021 fundraising efforts raised \$18,848. These funds will be leveraged in 2022 to provide scholarships, subsidized cost options for families in need of financial assistance and programs. In 2021 we provided scholarships and subsidized costs to 17 families, reaching 20% of program participants.

Outdoor Dinner & Movie Nights

Families gathered under the night sky at RTB and enjoyed a locally sourced dinner fresh off the grill. Movies were carefully selected to promote cultural and environmental awareness.



Paint Parties

Lidia Macedo, of Paint Party with Lidia, hosted two fun-filled events guiding participants to create unique works of art, at The Co-Creative Center, and Partners Insurance.



Winter Wreath Making

Local horticulturist, Jessica Cook, of Quintessential Gardens led our guests to create beautiful winter wreaths, using locally and sustainably harvested greenery.





128

NUMBER OF UNIQUE
INDIVIDUALS SERVED

63

TOTAL NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS
ON ELC PROGRAM WAIT LISTS

73%

PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS WHO
RETURNED FOR A SUBSEQUENT
PROGRAM IN 2021

Thank you to our 2021 Donors!

KRISTEN AND ERIC BRITTO
DEE LEVANTI & BILL BRAUN
SOUTHCOAST HEALTH
JULIE HAGAN
ELIZABETH & TOM SULLIVAN
STONE-KOWALSKI FAMILY
JOHN & LISA LOFBERG
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PAINT PARTY WITH LIDIA
RYAN & MICHELLE MEDEIROS
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doing, become a donor today!

Scan the code and make an impact.

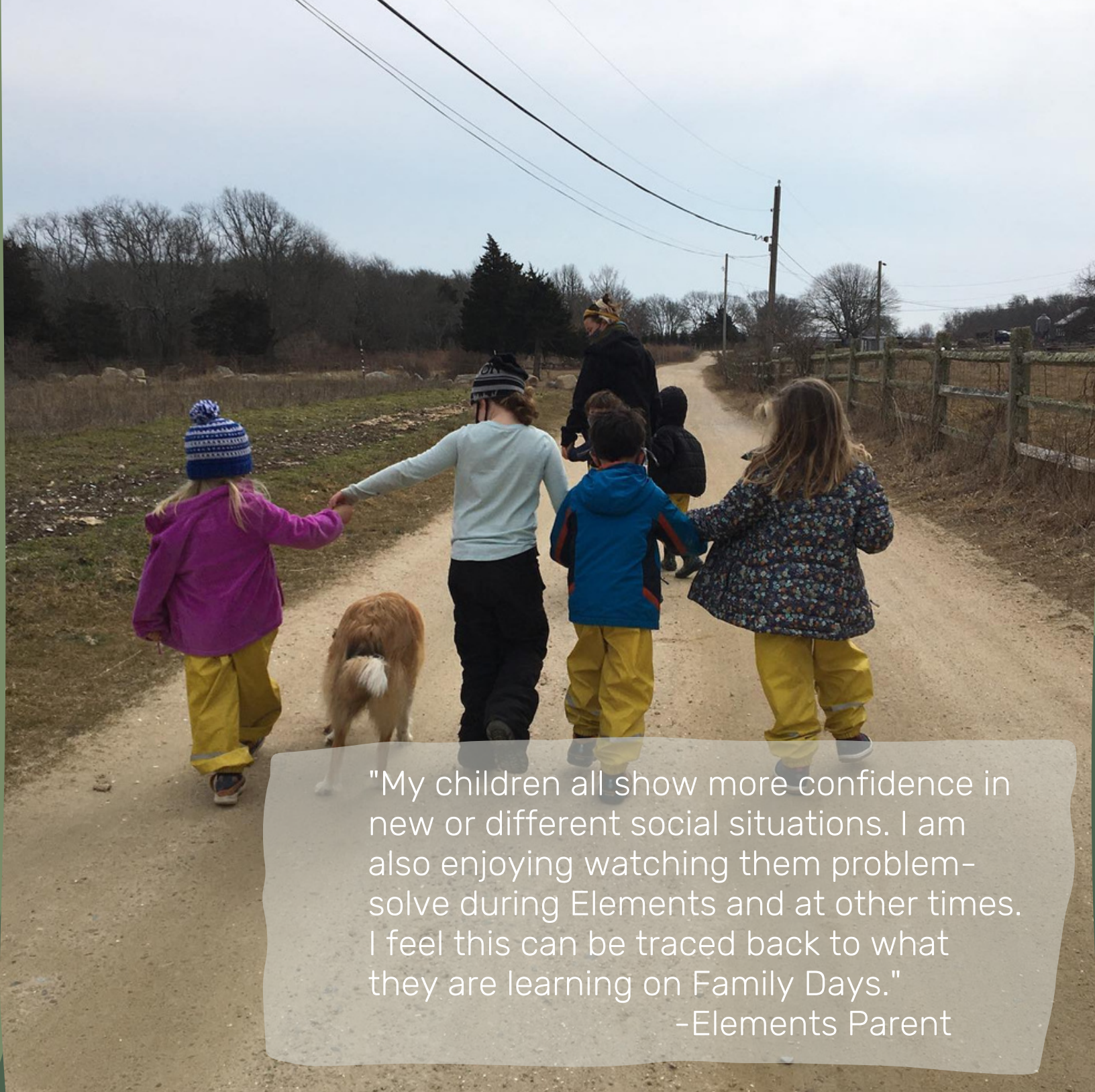


Thank you to our 2021 Donors!

ROOTS FAMILY FARM
KELLI & MIKE ROBERTS
HANNAH WYLIE & TYLER SEE
THE SYMPHONY MUSIC SHOP
JESSICA & PHIL COOK
QUINTESSENTIAL GARDENS
PLYMOUTH ROCK ASSURANCE
BOB SZALA & LAURA BROEKEL
DOWN TO EARTH NATURAL FOODS
WILLIAM LENDERKING & LILA TERRY
JARED DEW & MICHELE MARCUS-DEW
FIRST CITIZENS FEDERAL CREDIT UNION
MARY ANN BUCKLEY & CHRIS CHAPUT
RENEGADES RISING
SHAUN VAN LAARHOVEN
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NOMADS HEMP WEAR
GLENN AMBER
GEOFF KINDER
CLEIDE ART
HERTLING
JEFF & ANNE-MARIE HARDEN
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NOPPAWAN SAWANG
BRIE BORTMESS
MARKET BASKET
STOP & SHOP
CO-CREATIVE CENTER
ELLYN GASPARDI





"My children all show more confidence in new or different social situations. I am also enjoying watching them problem-solve during Elements and at other times. I feel this can be traced back to what they are learning on Family Days."
 -Elements Parent



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www.elementslearning.org