



Owner Bios

Danielle Dehmler-Buckley, CFO & handywoman

Armed with an MBA in entrepreneurship from Babson College and a working knowledge of power tools and P&L statements, Danielle sought to open The Cedarhouse School in order to spend more time with her children, Lucy and Owen. In 2000, she successfully sold her first business, The Big Backyard – Denver, Colorado’s first dog daycare. (She opened that business in order to spend quality time with her first baby, Riley, a yellow lab!) Between these two successful ventures, she worked in finance as a technology analyst at a Denver investment management firm and in market research at a Richmond marketing company. Days at the Cedarhouse involve everything from fixing toilets to planning the marketing calendar. The toilets are easier.

Elizabeth Bale, CEO & cruise director

Elizabeth “Lisy” Bale, was dragged kicking and screaming to this idea (she’s a little risk averse) by her partner and now can’t imagine doing anything else, except maybe getting a little more sleep. With an MBA in human resource management from the University of Maryland and five years consulting experience in workforce management, communication strategy and productivity initiatives, she brings a wealth of knowledge in process management. She also brings with her a team of “experts” in childcare, her son Conner and daughters Megan and Katherine. Lisy’s days are spent managing the ever-growing enrollment waitlist, developing the mammoth operations manual for the Cedarhouse, stopping for a spontaneous hug and kiss from Katherine and doing the occasional science experiment in the classrooms with hairdryers and ping pong balls. Don’t ask.

Corporate Story

In the fall of 2003, both Elizabeth and Danielle had recently enrolled their children in a local, reputable childcare center. It wasn’t long after that they began discussing their children’s experiences at the center. Both mothers admitted a nagging feeling of discontent with the program. Call it mother’s intuition. Over the next several months and through an organic process of research and conversation, they discovered the source of their discontent, which also seemed to be the piece of the puzzle that most other centers were missing – the idea that a child’s physical environment is as important to her growth and development as other factors.

When, in the early 1970s, childcare centers first came into being, they were based on a custodial model—babysitting, if you will. Some 15 years later and out of that model arose a much needed education-based model, which promoted an approach to childcare that emphasized health, safety AND cognitive growth. This education-based model was a welcome improvement to the

custodial model. However, many early education experts highlighted the notable lack of consideration for children's physical needs in the design of these centers. Subsequent research studies pointed to the importance of the physical space in a child's emotional, social and intellectual development. The most passionate advocate for children and arguably, a leading expert in the field of facility design was Anita Rui Olds. Until her death in 1999, Ms. Olds ran the Harvard School of Childcare Design, educating countless professionals on the critical nature of physical space for children.

Only now, another 15 years later, is it becoming clear to the general public how critical it is for center-based programs to consider the design of the physical space in the operation of a program.

It was out of this process of discovery that the idea for the Cedarhouse was born. Elizabeth and Danielle assembled a small, but highly educated and experienced board of advisors, conducted research with hundreds of parents, interviewed teachers, wrote a detailed business plan and spent 18 months in the design and construction of a new facility in Midlothian, VA. The design of the Cedarhouse was based, in large part, on Anita Old's in depth examination and prescription for high quality centers. Every detail of the center was considered and chosen deliberately from the color on the walls and the lighting to maximizing the square footage per child.

The program opened its doors on September 6, 2005 to rave reviews from parents and educators alike. Both owners and staff remain committed to the continuous improvement of a program that boasts a qualified and passionate staff, an experiential and developmentally appropriate curriculum and a spacious and comfortable environment full of possibilities for children!