

---

# M EET OUR COVER DIRECTORS FROM THE SIX LARGEST CHAINS

*Exchange asked the corporate offices of each of the six largest for profit chains of child care centers in the United States to select a center for us to visit in the Seattle area. They chose to honor the following directors and their programs.*

## LITTLE AVIATORS CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER CHILDREN'S DISCOVERY CENTERS



**MARY BUCKLEY-HALL**  
Renton, WA

My career in child care began nearly 18 years ago as an assistant toddler teacher in a Montessori school. I knew nothing about child development, developmentally appropriate practice, or child psychology. All I knew

was that I loved children and wanted to work with them. It didn't take me long to return to school and receive my Montessori certification. I then became a lead teacher in a preschool room. Eventually, I went back to school again and earned an AA in early childhood education, a BA in human development, and an MA in human development with a specialization in leadership in education.

My priorities have changed somewhat over the years. I have spent at least half of my life as a parent, being a single parent. This has opened my eyes to the difficulties faced by single moms. To this end, I have facilitated single parent support groups and workshops to help women identify job skills and potential employment. I have also taught parenting classes at a homeless shelter for women and children, as many times parenting skills fell by the wayside as women dealt with all of the other difficulties they were facing. I wrote my thesis on this topic, interviewing women in this situation and making suggestions for better outcomes. It was a difficult decision for me to stay in child care after these experiences, but I didn't feel my work was done there, either. I was delighted to find I could still be a support to these women as a director, by helping them receive financial assistance for their children's tuition, finding alternate ways to pay their bills, and just providing an understanding ear for their situations.

My goal at this point in my life is to continue to teach, but this time to teach adults. Ultimately, I would like to teach child development at the college level. But I can also accomplish this by doing staff training and mentoring on my job, by working with parents to hone their parenting skills, and by advocating for better wages, benefits, and respect for the early childhood profession at every opportunity.

Right now I am working toward making Little Aviators one of Children's Discovery Centers' models for quality child care. If I can accomplish this, I will feel that I have made a difference in at least one small part of the child care world, and that will make me happy.

## LA PETITE ACADEMY



**PENNI ESTLICK**  
Redmond, WA

I have been with La Petite Academy since 1991 and have a background in early childhood education. Since coming to La Petite, I have held many positions, from working as a toddler teacher to my current

position as Academy director. I chose La Petite because I truly feel they stand for what I believe in and that is doing what is best for children.

The thing that I like most about being a La Petite director is the interaction with the children and their families. I have over 100 children at my school and would take every single one of them home! It is so exciting to see the children learning, having fun, and building a strong foundation for school. The company's recent focus on preschool has also been a positive experience. We have a strong curriculum that is

developmentally and age appropriate: we are teaching children school-readiness skills and many Academies such as mine have received equipment upgrades and enhancements in the classrooms. It is a very exciting time to be at La Petite!

At the Academy level, we strive to partner with our parents in caring for and educating their children. We offer benefits such as written progress reports, free absence days, and six free holidays. Most importantly, our door is always open to parents. Our commitment is to both the children and their parents.

If I had to give advice to a new director or someone who was looking to enter this field, I would say that you have to be in it for the right reasons. To me, the right reason is to be focused on offering children a quality education and quality care because there is so little of it out there.

#### CHILDTIME LEARNING CENTERS



**MARIE B. GONZALES**  
Silverdale, WA

My knowledge of early childhood has come from experience working in the field. Through my husband's military career, I have had the opportunity to work throughout the country and in Japan

for various private, corporate, non-profit, and for-profit child care programs. I have a degree in business administration and many classes and seminars in early childhood development.

My success is due to my commitment and dedication for quality child care. It began when I had my own children and searched endlessly for a program that I felt was safe, secure, and filled their day with developmental growth and love. Daily, I remind myself to see things through the parents' eyes. Parents contribute to a program's success by demanding the care they expect for their children. As a director, it is my number one priority to meet the parents' expectations by delivering a program that is safe, healthy, and effectively meets the developmental needs of each individual child.

To meet the needs of all children, a director must have a team. I commend the dedication of my staff for their

outstanding efforts to create an environment of positive social growth, learning, and love. To create this team, I believe in accepting each individual for who they are. Each team member has positive attributes to share and we grow together through training to become better educated in early childhood practices.

Experience as a parent and a teacher has helped make me a better director. It has allowed me to more effectively address concerns and issues of parents and staff. Working in military communities has helped me grow to understand the challenging needs of a diversified population. Completing NAEYC accreditation has educated me in providing a developmentally appropriate program. Each day is a new experience that touches my heart with love.

#### KINDERCARE LEARNING CENTERS



**FIONNA E. INGRAM**  
Bremerton, WA

Recently, a parent paid us a great compliment. She said, "It always looks as if you all are having a great time here!"

As child care professionals, it is our challenge to make each day a positive one for every child. We need to provide the kind of nurturing environment where parents can leave their children, confident that they are in the best of care.

I chose this field because the early years of a child's development are the most crucial. We are responsible for equipping them to be successful in the world. As educators, we have a long-range impact which cannot be understated.

I have been with KinderCare for over eight years now, and have been fortunate always to have worked with talented, knowledgeable people. Being part of a team has helped me to grow as an educator and administrator. Bremerton KinderCare achieved NAEYC accreditation in August 1996.

Over my 25 years in this field, I can say I have seen children's needs change in some respects, but their hearts remain the same. Children still take delight in every new discovery, and I still take delight in guiding them through each new experience.

Every day is truly a new adventure!

---

## CHILDREN'S WORLD LEARNING CENTERS



### WENDY NEWBY

Puyallup, WA

I have served as the center director at the Puyallup Children's World Learning Center for the past ten years. In this capacity, I oversee all the day-to-day management of the center as well as monitoring

the programs and curriculum quality.

During my tenure at the Puyallup center, enrollment has increased to 90%. We have also added a variety of enrichment activities to the center, including swimming, dance, and gymnastics classes. In addition, I have been instrumental in the opening of two before- and

after-school programs at local elementary schools and have developed district program trainers for school-age and pre-kindergarten programs.

I have experience in coordinating and staffing off-site child care for conventions. In addition, I have organized the child care services for the 1998 PGA Championship Golf Tournament (for children of the golfers) and have developed a Scouting Post at the Puyallup center for teens who are interested in working with children.

In addition to my current position as center director, I also have served as a teacher and a teacher trainer with Children's World. Prior to that, I served as a teacher for another child care center.

I hold a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Eastern Montana College and am continuing my education through classes at Edmonds Community College and Bates Voc Tech.

---

## BRIGHT HORIZONS FAMILY SOLUTIONS



### CINDY OLSON

Everett, WA

I graduated from St. Cloud University with a degree in elementary education and a minor in early childhood. I started my early childhood career as a toddler teacher for six months and then moved

into a management role after that. I have been in management since 1992 and have loved every minute of it.

I love motivating staff, watching children develop, and building relationships with families. I am a very customer service oriented manager — the Why Not? approach — even with my staff when they come to me with suggestions. I have been very impressed with the Bright Horizons Family Solutions approach to staff retention. This company truly values their employees. They are always trying new things to improve our work environment — that is a big reason why I joined this company. I believe that if we can make our employees happy we can make our families happy. Also, Boeing has provided us with a state-of-the-art facility — anyone who has seen our building is in awe. We really have support from Boeing — Carol Larson, our liaison, has been a tremendous support. As Carol has told me several times, she feels Boeing has the best of both worlds now that CorporateFamily Solutions and Bright Horizons have merged — we really are the best!