



## JOBS FOR THE BOYS?

### Evaluation of a feasibility study to recruit young disadvantaged males onto childcare courses in East London

EARLY YEARS EDUCATION

**Bet you never thought of working with kids!**

“It doesn't feel like a job, and I can already see **great possibilities ahead.**”

Tariq, Nursery manager

## Background

From the 1970s, repeated attempts have been made to encourage girls to take up strongly masculine-identified employment. Despite these efforts, despite the fact that “boys’ jobs” are often better remunerated and of higher status than “girls’ jobs”, and despite the fact that there is now very little gender difference in take up of, and achievement in, core STEM GCSE subjects, women accounted for only 3.8% of Engineering Apprenticeship starts and 1.7% of Construction Skills starts in the UK in 2013/14. Today women make up just 6% of registered UK engineers and technicians; and the proportion of young women studying engineering and physics has remained virtually static since 2012<sup>1</sup>.

How much more challenging, then, should it be to attract males into the heavily-female-identified “girls’ jobs” of caring for young children, given that these are generally lower paid and of lower status than many traditionally male jobs. The situation in early years in the UK is dire: half of all nurseries are struggling to recruit candidates with the right qualifications and experience<sup>2</sup> with the London Borough of Newham joining Hull and Shropshire as one of the three districts in which pre-schoolers in independent settings are least likely (20%) to have access to even one qualified nursery teacher<sup>3</sup>. Yet despite this crisis in recruitment and delivery, the proportion of males employed in nurseries in England and Wales persists at less than two per cent<sup>4</sup>; and 1:4 of our primary schools has no male staff at all. In effect, we are recruiting early years staff from only 51% of the population: women. And while few people in positions of power and influence would argue against aiming for greater male participation in this vital industry, we are no closer to achieving this than we were a generation ago<sup>5</sup>.

Interest in attracting men into childcare is not new. Following recommendations by the European Commission Network on Childcare, the gender composition of early childhood services was raised as an issue in Europe from the early 1990s; and in 1996 a Europe-

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wes.org.uk/statistics>

<sup>2</sup> NDNA workforce survey, 2015

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/2016-11/new-report-highlights-acute-shortage-nursery-teachers-across-england>

<sup>4</sup> NDNA workforce survey, 2015

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/opinion/1155693/time-for-action-on-men-in-childcare>

wide target of 20% male workers by 2006 was set, with the deadline subsequently extended to 2020. Norway has made the most sustained efforts through a national campaign, but even in that country gains have been modest: the proportion of men undertaking core work with children in Norway's nurseries rose from 5.3% in 2003 to 8.8% in 2015. Many of these workers are concentrated in open-air and 'Forest School' nurseries, leaving half (49%) of Norwegian nurseries still with no male core pedagogical staff at all<sup>6</sup>. However, we were not able to establish the detail of Norway's campaign: was it restricted to a campaign that only sought to challenge and change social norms? Or was it also strategic at local level, embedding change in training and services?

In the UK, in 1998, the National Childcare Strategy set a target of 6% male practitioners by 2004 but, with no supporting policies, strategies or ring-fenced funding, progress was non-existent and the target was dropped. A small body of thoughtful and well-evidenced UK research has explored, and continues to explore, reasons for the extreme gender imbalance in this sector<sup>7</sup>. In Scotland in 2000, a third sector organisation Men in Childcare established men-only early years training courses. These continue. However, there is no data on the employment of men in Scotland's early years services, so progress or otherwise cannot be identified. Peer support initiatives come and go: in 2013, the London Early Years' Foundation's London Network of Men in Childcare was supporting 70 men, although this network has been less active recently; and the Southampton Men in Childcare Network supports local practitioners. Members have occasionally spoken at careers events in schools.

In the City of York during 2013/14 the Fatherhood Institute, through a programme of exploratory work identified the need for micro-level action-research to explore the feasibility of (a) enrolling males in existing childcare courses; and (b) tracking their transition from training to employment in early years.

**Learning from this brief review** includes that no known initiatives have had significant short-or long-term positive impacts on encouraging substantial numbers of men into professional childcare in traditional nursery settings; and that unfunded networks of practitioners, which are not task-oriented but are conceived of mainly in terms of mutual support, tend not to remain active for any length of time. Nor do we know the extent to which campaigns that challenge social norms must go hand-in-hand with detailed strategy at institutional level, to increase gender diversity in the early years workforce.

### **The Men in Childcare Project**

Accordingly, the Institute, in partnership with the East London FE college, City Gateway, obtained two year funding (January 2015-January 2017) from Trust for London to develop, deliver and evaluate a systematic multi-agency approach to encouraging young men to access training, volunteering and career opportunities in early education and childcare in Tower Hamlets; and to test these approaches with excluded/poor young men in the district, working closely with them to adapt the project throughout. The overall concern was with poverty reduction.

The four major goals of this Men in Childcare project were for twelve young disadvantaged men to gain a Level 1 childcare qualification from the local City Gateway College, six of them to progress to and complete Level 2 training and four to be employed in childcare by the end of the project. They were to be supported by twenty local workplaces offering volunteering opportunities/ work placements to young men. While the last of these goals was easily fulfilled (see Men in Childcare Forum, below), no males completed City Gateway childcare courses during the study period. The course was only 18 months old at the beginning of the project, and CG staff reported that there had been “one expression of interest last year which came to nothing when he knew ‘it would be a room full of girls’ ”. During the two years of the Men in Childcare project, there were several more expressions of interest, for example from careers fairs (more about this below); and one male registered for the September 2015 course. He failed to attend, however, and investigation established that: “This learner essentially only wanted to do the course because his girlfriend was going to do it. He dropped out because she didn't want to come back to City Gateway.” In Year Two of the Men in Childcare project, a male registered for and started the Level 2 course in January 2016 but dropped out after a term. Vigorous attempts to contact him to explore his experience were not rewarded.

Despite this lack of success, **the learning from this project was very substantial**, and has resulted, among other things, in the design of a *schema* likely to deliver more success in the future. This is presented as an (Appendix E) to this report. But first – what happened during the two years that City Gateway, the Fatherhood Institute and Tower

Hamlets explored ways of encouraging young disadvantaged men to train for, and work in, the childcare sector in East London? What can be deemed feasible for new initiatives? And would such initiatives be likely to reduce poverty in the families of the future?

### **Baseline data collection: attitudes**

A parallel issue, in which the Fatherhood Institute has substantial experience (and on which It was able to draw for the Men in Childcare Project), is encouraging men (usually fathers) to engage with health, education and family services. While men are less likely than women to engage proactively, it is now generally agreed that a great deal of the responsibility for lack-of-engagement lies with the services themselves, which may be explicitly or implicitly female-oriented, and may even be consciously or unconsciously resistant to male participation.

It therefore seemed reasonable to start by analysing the attitudes and behaviour of those who would be recruiting males onto the childcare courses, and engaging with them during training. Did the professionals' attitudes and behaviour need addressing, along with developing specific strategies to encourage young disadvantaged males to register for courses? In particular, to what extent did the professionals involved in the study understand *why* recruiting men into childcare matters, and *how* to achieve it?

At baseline, stakeholders' attitudes and behaviour were assessed through face-to-face and telephone interviews with, and questionnaires distributed to, stakeholders; and through group discussions during meetings of the project Steering Group and the Men in Childcare Forum for local practitioners, which was set up as part of the project (more about this below).

Sixteen individuals returned questionnaires: nine men working in local nurseries; and seven City Gateway and Tower Hamlets staff. All agreed that, in theory, it was important or very important for men to undertake this work, with the men employed in service delivery more likely to rate this 'very important'. However, understanding of the value of this work to individuals and society was limited. The three most commonly perceived

benefits *to children* were that they would experience men as caring ‘role models’; and would benefit from ‘differences’ in play and other ways of thinking and behaving associated with male socialisation; and that children growing up without a co-resident father or father-figure would see particular benefits. Two respondents believed that children’s learning and development would be enhanced, with one specifying boys’ literacy skills.

Responses to a question about the benefits *to young men themselves* were less confident: seven (out of 16) respondents seemed unable to think of even one benefit to men themselves, or they misread the question, perceiving it as being a repeat of the question about benefits *to children*. Where benefits to men were suggested, these were: unspecified career opportunities (five responses – including only one from the nine males currently employed in the sector); and personal benefits (seven responses, mainly from the nine employed males), such as confidence/wellbeing, the job being ‘rewarding’ or learning skills that would make them ‘better fathers’.

Only five respondents (including men already working in the sector) were aware that to attract men into childcare training or employment, specific steps would need to be taken. And only one (a Tower Hamlets’ employee) had proactively sought to include men during the previous twelve months, by including pictures of men when advertising a position, and making clear that male applicants would be welcome. When asked what strategies would likely result in more males taking up early years’ training or employment, all respondents focused on informing and motivating men to apply. Not one, other than the Tower Hamlets’ employee, suggested that their own organisation would need to review policies, practices or professionals’ attitudes or behaviour.

How confident did City Gateway staff involved in recruiting students feel about seeking to recruit males to their childcare course? One staff member said she might suggest the course if a young man seemed unsure of his options. However, most felt they would only be comfortable talking about the childcare course with a young man who had actively requested information; and even if he had done so, a response might be: ‘it would be female-heavy – how would you feel about that?’ From CG’s point of view, this

is a very reasonable response: It is not in CG's interest to sign up individuals to a course from which they are likely to drop out quickly.

Did attitudes change over time? By the end of the project, individual CG staff expressed greater interest in recruiting males to the childcare course, and acted on that interest. However, because most of the staff who had been interviewed early on or had answered questionnaires had left the organisation before the end of the two years, the greater interest expressed later on may have been a function of the pre-existing attitudes of new staff members, rather than attitude change within the organisation. It was similarly impossible to assess attitude change among the members of the local Men in Childcare Forum, as there had been considerable 'churn' in that group as well (see below).

**The learning from collecting the baseline data on attitudes and behaviour** was substantial. It demonstrated starkly that few of the stakeholders, even when professing, or genuinely holding, a positive attitude to encouraging men's employment in childcare, had any real understanding of why this might matter or how it could be achieved, or even that 'special steps' would be needed to be taken to challenge the gender homogeneity of the workforce.

## Early activities

The primary partnership in this project was between the Fatherhood Institute and City Gateway College. A Steering Group was established immediately. Discussion at Steering Group meetings was sophisticated, and important issues were addressed. However it soon became clear that the timing of the start of the first year of the project meant that a crucial *marketing window* had been missed: the project was unable to market the City Gateway Level One course to children attending school in the relevant school academic year/s (Years 9 and 10) in time to enroll them on the September 2015 course.

## Strategies for promotion: the first leaflet

Following a review of the manner in which the CG childcare courses were being promoted, an urgent requirement seemed to be for a brochure to display the College's interest in recruiting male students to these courses. The College was open to the idea of a leaflet being produced that would target the course at boys and young men. The

Steering Group drafted this (see Appendix A) on the understanding that it would be used alongside CG's existing leaflet, which, while theoretically gender-neutral, was female-directed. The Steering Group's Men in Childcare leaflet was well received and distributed widely across the Borough, and for a while was also used by City Gateway. However, it subsequently emerged that the print run of their usual leaflet had finished and no new leaflet had been produced. For a time, only the male-directed leaflet was used. However, not unreasonably, staff became uneasy about using only that, and stopped using any leaflet at all.

### **Wider promotion**

From early on, a communications strategy was established to publicise the initiative within the Borough (Tower Hamlets) and raise awareness of the issue across London and nationally, and these met with some considerable success: articles were published in Children and Young People Now, Nursery World and the London Evening Standard as well as the local Tower Hamlets magazine. A social media campaign was also developed to promote the issue widely.

A tenet of effective engagement with males is to 'go to where they are', and accordingly FI contacted 150 local organisations and groups where young men might be found: youth arts, young NCB, children's centres (where the targets were older siblings and young fathers), churches and mosques and so on.

### **Getting the messages right**

To inform promotion of Men in Childcare locally and in the media, it was necessary to define the benefits to men, women, children, the childcare sector and the wider society. From in-depth discussion at Steering Group and Forum meetings, the following emerged:

- If children only see women looking after them in childcare settings, they think this is something only women do. This holds back gender equality. Conversely, if they see substantial numbers of males in these caring roles, this may broaden their perspective.
- Visibility of males in early childhood services is likely to strengthen the growing cultural acceptance of the key roles men, particularly men as fathers, play in children's lives.



- Such employment offers important new career opportunities for men (including men in disadvantaged communities), which are likely to become more and more important as rapidly increasing automation strips out other employment.
- Mixed-sex workforces tend to function at a higher level, and can draw on a wider pool of talent and experience.
- Men already employed in the sector commonly report finding the work extremely rewarding on a personal level.
- In many homes, children interact far less frequently with men than women: their fathers may live/work away or may not be alive; their parents may be separated and the children may live mainly or exclusively with their mother; their dads may work long hours. Many crave interaction with males, and providing safe opportunities for such interactions within childcare settings may be of value to them.
- Although there are as many within-sex as between-sex differences in parenting, nurturing and developmental interactions with children, men and women are differently socialised and may have different interests, although these will always be subject to other influences such as age, ethnicity, education and environment. Some men's and women's play styles and chosen play activities may be different: for example, fathers (in most cultures) engage in more rough-and-tumble play than mothers, are more likely to choose to engage in outdoor activities with their children (subject to opportunity), and may be less likely to sing to, and dance with, young children. Men and fathers tend to use longer and less familiar words when talking with children, and may 'talk around' stories when reading, whereas women may be more likely to stick to the text. Children benefit from dealing with difference; and a range of perspectives and interaction styles enriches their development.
- Children also benefit from engaging with both men and women who do not behave 'stereotypically' – for example, with men who sing and dance with them, and with women who engage in rough-and-tumble play and promote adventurous behaviour and self-reliance. A mixed-sex workforce may promote such diverse within-sex behaviour, which may usefully be observed and copied not only by children, but also by mothers and fathers who witness it within the setting.
- The presence of more male staff in early years services may help them to engage more effectively with fathers. Male staff members tend to be more proactive in seeking to engage fathers; and the simple presence of male workers in the setting may help fathers feel that they are entitled to be there, too.
- Fathers who feel more comfortable in a setting, are likely to spend more time there, interacting with the children and staff. This provides the whole team with opportunities to learn more about the family, to better assess the fathers' and families' strengths and needs, and to encourage positive father-child interactions.
- When fathers see males interacting with children in positive ways in an early years setting, they may (due to the power of same-sex-modelling) more easily learn from them than from the behaviour of female workers. They may also feel empowered, and may become more involved with their children at home.

- Children (and women) who have had negative experiences with men may benefit from engaging with 'safe' males who are members of the childcare team.

**The learning** from these early activities (the development of the flyer/leaflet, and the process of 'getting the messages right' through discussion and debate) included that:

- With the right opportunities to learn, discuss and reflect together, stakeholders can be supported to understand the importance of men's employment in childcare, differences and similarities within, and between, the sexes when engaging with young children; and the value of both sexes' engaging with children in diverse and non-stereotypical ways.
- The topic of men in childcare is a critical element of any project in early years, adding reach, credibility and impact, and building the leverage necessary for broader policy conversations – including about wider and more positive engagement with fathers and 'whole families' in early years service provision.
- Despite a dearth of stock images of men working with children (particularly BaME men), striking male-focused materials can be produced easily, and prove popular and impactful.
- There is a need to develop a library of images of a range of men engaging with children in a professional capacity.
- 'Men in childcare' is of substantial interest to the media, both widely and in the trade press.

## The partnerships

Leaflets and media activity are, however, only 'calling cards': if an initiative is to succeed 'on the ground', systematic and sustained activities and processes must be developed and embedded. This would prove challenging.

### The City Gateway/ Fatherhood Institute partnership

As the project developed, it became clear that there were discrepancies between the culture of the Fatherhood Institute and that of City Gateway more broadly. For example, the CG on-site nursery was, unusually in the sector, a space restricted to 'women only': their young male children could attend, but there were no male staff, and fathers could not enter. It was immediately apparent that no male volunteering or work placements would be offered at City Gateway. Furthermore, on the CG website, the childcare course was promoted only to women and remains so to this day: in December 2016, the only mention of the childcare course on the City Gateway website is under 'Women's Programmes' <https://home.citygateway.org.uk/services/women-s-programmes>

In addition, while not immediately apparent, it emerged over several months that the Fatherhood Institute and City Gateway did not share a common view of the division of roles and responsibilities in the project. For example, some key City Gateway staff (but not others) had assumed that the Fatherhood Institute would recruit and deliver the male trainees, and that CG's sole responsibility would be to train them, without further input from the FI. FI staff, by contrast, while planning to engage widely with relevant organisations in the district to try to recruit young disadvantaged males onto the CG childcare courses, had assumed that recruitment would also take place in partnership with CG during, for example, visits to schools and career fairs; and that retaining males on the courses would involve reviewing not only the college recruitment processes but also the childcare course content and mode of delivery. The Fatherhood Institute saw training the CG staff to address attitudes and behaviour as a priority. However, the capacity of the City Gateway team to undertake training was limited, and represented a low priority amidst many other competing demands.

Chief among these were challenges experienced from significant changes at CG during the life of the project. Some of the key CG staff that engaged with the FI early on left City Gateway, which subsequently undertook a major re-structure; and the childcare course tutor changed, with a new tutor appointed so close to the beginning of the academic year that it was not realistic to consult with him on course content and delivery in time for changes to be made. As can be imagined, the restructuring put particular pressures on new and existing staff.

**The learning from this experience** is that clarity of roles and responsibilities needs to be set out *in great detail* when a partnership is proposed; and where possible the stability of partnership organisations in terms of structure and staffing needs to be transparent.

### **The Fatherhood Institute/City Gateway partnership: recruiting male students**

Most recruitment to City Gateway courses is self-referral through local awareness and/or advice from school careers advisors, although CG staff members also visit local schools, as well as attending careers fairs to engage proactively with potential students. Opportunities to promote the childcare course to males as part of City Gateway's

standard recruitment activities proved to be limited. Not unreasonably, CG recruitment staff felt their brief was to promote all courses. Nor were most of them willing for FI staff or other advocates to accompany them to career fairs or on visits to schools. This changed later and FI staff and some CG staff worked together at careers events, but by then the vital early opportunities to recruit young men onto the childcare courses had been missed.

When both FI and CG staff promoted the course to males together, what happened? Interest was immediately generated. For example, in October 2015, a CG staff member (male) took a Fatherhood Institute staff member (also male) with him to a careers' fair. While promoting all the City Gateway courses, they displayed the male-focused childcare leaflet prominently, and proactively mentioned the course to young men who approached their display stand. Two registered for the childcare course on that day: one had approached with that specific interest; the other's 'presenting' interest was IT but he was easily engaged in discussion about the childcare course when the topic was broached. The City Gateway staff member was amazed at this easy result and felt that sharing information about the course with young men at careers events, whether or not they had volunteered interest, would be worthwhile, but that he would need support: "I would greatly appreciate having someone from FI or one of the local volunteers identified through the Men in Childcare Forum, beside me at the forthcoming fairs. A volunteer from the Forum would be brilliant."

While neither of these two young men ultimately registered for a CG childcare course, had such activities been routinely carried out from the outset during this Men in Childcare project, the numbers of young males recruited onto CG childcare courses may have approached those set out in the KPIs. However opportunities for such proactive recruitment were rare. Most of the CG staff who were recruiting students to the childcare course were not motivated to make any special effort to include males. Their attitude was perfectly reasonable. The financial incentives offered by the project (a *per capita* payment to City Gateway for every male participating) had no resonance among the front-line recruitment staff. Their objective was to fill all the places on the childcare courses – and this could easily be achieved through recruiting girls. The learning here is that commitment by all partners needs to be established at all levels within the

organisation, ‘lead from the top’ but with understanding and ‘buy-in’ from frontline staff.

**Learning from FI/CG joint recruitment activities** suggested that if childcare courses are routinely promoted to boys and young men in schools and at careers events by staff confident about, and committed to, recruiting men, and with back-up materials that promote the benefits to all and show men engaging with children, recruitment of some males is likely to be successful. Whether the sex of the recruiter is significant is not known, but should be tested. Male volunteers who already work locally in the childcare sector accompanying college recruiters might well add value, and could provide such men, particularly if they are members of a local Forum and could later reflect on the experience, with a volunteering activity that to value and learn from.

### **The City Gateway childcare curriculum**

The Fatherhood Institute had expected that City Gateway staff would accept training – not only to enable them to seek to recruit male students in their routine recruitment activities, but also to review and, if necessary, make changes to their childcare curriculum and mode of delivery, to ensure that these were male friendly. Again there was no built-in motivation for busy CG staff to address these issues: they felt their course and delivery were ‘gender neutral’ and that males who signed up would be adequately addressed. “We feel confident that nothing in our resources will cater for a female-only audience” wrote one.

In a sense, they were quite right: the curriculum focuses mainly on child development and this content is equally relevant to male and female trainees. However what is missing from the CG curriculum (and, we heard from Forum members, other early years training, including Montessori) is any content that addresses issues arising from male employment in this female-dominated area, or promotes discussion about this. This leaves various elephants in the training room, not least safeguarding policies and the vulnerability of male staff in particular to allegations of sexual abuse. It takes quite a sophisticated understanding of gender processes, to grasp that where a situation is highly gendered (as is the case with childcare courses), taking a *gender-neutral* approach only serves to reinforce gender inequalities; and that to bring about change requires specific strategies to challenge the gendered situation. Further, we heard anecdotally that tutors delivering the early years curriculums would often talk about parents as

'mum', excluding fathers as well as male colleagues from consideration. To challenge and change this would clearly need awareness-raising training, as well as additions and some changes to the course content and notes for tutors.

Out of the Steering Group and Men in Childcare Forum discussions, NOTES FOR TUTORS were produced to help the City Gateway course tutor talk about workforce gender with trainees. It was emphasised that this was important *whether or not there were any male trainees on the course*. Female students need a grasp of these issues if they are to engage with male colleagues once they begin work; and if they are to welcome fathers in nurseries and other early year's settings.

Learning from reviewing the CG childcare curriculum and anecdotal evidence in relation to both the content and delivery of other childcare courses offered in the UK, suggests that if these are successfully to include males and prepare females to work alongside men in childcare, modifications will be needed. At the very least, additional NOTES FOR TUTORS should be provided, together with gender-awareness-training.

## **Other partnerships**

### **(i) The Fatherhood Institute/ SMART partnership**

Recognising that the challenges facing the CG/FI partnership were likely to continue, despite some excellent working relationships and shared commitments, FI staff identified another local childcare training provider SMART <http://www.smart-training.com/childcare-training>. Initial discussions were encouraging. High-level people within SMART seemed to grasp the main issues immediately and felt there was scope for a partnership. However, ultimately, any potential partnership with SMART was de-railed through other huge demands placed on that organisation. An additional problem was that the structure of funding for childcare training changed nationally during the project period, leading to uncertainty around funding for SMART as well as City Gateway.

### **(ii) The Fatherhood Institute/ Tower Hamlets partnership**

A significant partnership in the Men in Childcare project, was between the Fatherhood Institute and Tower Hamlets Local Authority, and this remained stable. This partnership was fruitful throughout the life of the project (see, in particular, the **Men in Childcare**

**Forum** below), and led to much shared learning and to ongoing commitment from the Local Authority to continue its interest in and emphasis on recruiting men into childcare in the Borough.

### **(iii) Less intense engagement with other local partners**

The Fatherhood Institute also approached a number of other local organisations including job search organisations, Job Centre Plus, youth organisations and youth councils and clubs such as the Bangladeshi youth organisation, individual local schools and local politicians. One hundred and fifty stakeholders in such organisations were contacted, using a specially designed leaflet (see Appendix B) and covering letter, followed up individually in some cases. In the event, none of these organisations turned up individual young men who wanted to undergo training. However, in and of itself, the activity is likely to have contributed to general awareness-raising which is a critical element of long term culture change. More sustained and repeated engagement with such stakeholders may have been productive, had this been possible within time and budget constraints.

**Learning from attempts at local partnerships** includes the value of establishing links with more than one key partner from the outset, in very good time and with sufficient opportunities for preparation and 'getting to know you'. Among other things, this will spread risk. Wider partnerships/local engagement may also be valuable, with ongoing investment in those relationships, and a meaningful budget and personnel allocated to this. The need to employ a local Implementation Manager is becoming clear: such an individual must already work, or have worked recently, in the Borough and have good contacts with education and employment organisations, and other appropriate local organisations. **Learning from the successful Fatherhood/Institute Tower Hamlets partnership** also demonstrated the importance of objectives that are strategic, aligned and sustained when partnerships are envisaged.

### **The Men in Childcare Forum**

One of the clearest successes of the project was the Men in Childcare Forum. The Forum enhanced the marketing of the project and established a cohort of nine, committed, volunteer mentors for male-students-in-training; it also provided a test bed for the recruitment and training materials and the communications strategy. The effect on some of the men who took part was significant. Some, having participated in Forum discussions about progression routes, went on to study for higher level qualifications

Initially conceived of as a support group for an average of six male early years workers/managers to attend quarterly, numbers far exceeded six (meetings of 10-14 participants were common) and Forum members strongly desired not only to support each other but also to contribute to recruiting other men into childcare/early years and support them in that career choice. They were willing to take on responsibilities as mentors and role models, offer themselves as case studies, and provide work placements, apprenticeships and training. Thus, had young men been enrolled on the CG Level Two Childcare Course, there would have been a substantial cohort of local male mentors to support them and offer them placements, as had been envisaged, in settings already employing at least one male worker.

In addition to practical support, the Forum members' shared wisdom helped FI and CG develop support and training materials, identify and refine key messaging likely to draw males in, and explore key policy and practice issues. Safeguarding was one of these. This was not consistent across settings: some male workers had no qualms about hugging children and engaging in rough-and-tumble play; in other settings the policy was 'hands off', and men could be comfortable with this, too. Safeguarding emerged as an important issue that should be openly addressed in future projects, national and local.

Another topic which was repeatedly discussed was the extent to which male workers were of value because they 'contribute something different' in styles of play or caretaking. This stereotype did not receive support, once it had been aired and discussed: while the men felt that what they offered was inherently different *from the child's point of view*, simply because they are males, they did not believe that their behaviour in the nursery differed significantly from the behaviour of female colleagues: all provided holistic care and nurture, and children benefited from that.

A number of Forum members seemed stimulated to engage in further training, including obtaining new qualifications. In some cases this took them out of the geographical area, contributing to very legitimate 'churn' from the group. While one must be cautious in claiming that participation in the Forum lead to such outcomes (comparison with the career trajectories of comparable non-participating male workers would have to take place for causality to be clear, some Forum members explicitly credited their



participation in the group as influencing their decisions to improve their qualifications. Tower Hamlets are continuing with this Forum beyond the life of the project, with the support of FI, and are seeking to engage more managers (women welcome) to enhance its power and influence. It is felt that a strategic and task focused agenda will contribute to engaging more men in childcare within the district and enable

Learning from the Forum activities included recognition of safeguarding policy as an important issue that male workers want to discuss; and differences/similarities in male/female nurturing and child-developmental activities as a valuable topic of discussion for both male and female workers. Men in Childcare Forums may also usefully support male workers' career trajectories, through providing information and support to the men.

change.

## Future directions

### Entry points for recruiting men into childcare

Should future initiatives to support men into careers in childcare be limited to attempting to recruit school-leaving-age males onto childcare courses? Almost all of the young men CG/FI engaged with at recruitment fairs for Year 9 and 10 children, already had clear views about what kind of training or career they were looking for, even if this would prove ultimately unobtainable. Childcare had not been on their radar. This indicates that beliefs about which careers are suitable for men become established early on in the lives of young people. Thus a fruitful long term approach to engaging young men may, in association with recruitment at Years 9/10, be to undertake work with primary school aged children to examine gender socialisation and broaden the perceptions of boys and girls about their possible future roles. This approach has been piloted on a small scale in Scotland as part of a government funded primary school project about the Gender Equality Duty 'Making the Gender Equality Duty Real'. This early approach is also one used to encourage young girls to study STEM subjects and includes visible national campaigns (via Cinema adverts and social media) such as EDF's 'I'm Pretty Curious' campaign <https://www.edfenergy.com/prettycurious>. In Sweden

early years settings are tackling issues about gender identity and perceptions of roles very early <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2016/feb/02/swedish-schools-gender-alien-concept>.

Throughout the project, we gathered information on the pathways into the profession of the men we met who were already working in childcare in Tower Hamlets. Only two had trained in childcare early on, and both had mothers who worked in the sector. The others had moved into childcare after other employment, which had included construction and sports coaching, and because of positive conversations with other men who already worked in the sector. Two had arrived relatively recently from Eastern Europe, and for them immersion in English was an attraction and they had learned quickly! Several came to the work after becoming fathers, others because their wives were involved, and others because they came to a point in their lives where they thought working with children could be 'a good thing'. Apart from the two men mentioned above, all began their work in childcare without qualifications – and then obtained them. The trajectories the Tower Hamlets men followed mirror the experiences of men participating in the Men In Childcare project run in Edinburgh: that project attracts slightly older men who might not have selected or been directed towards a career in childcare when they were younger, who are open to a career change often from quite stereotypical male employment, such as labouring, gardening, or refuse collecting. The individual experience of fatherhood or grandfather-hood, or chance encounters or conversations with mentors or with men in this role can be pivotal in enabling a new choice to be made <http://www.meninchildcare.co.uk/index.htm>

### **Remuneration**

As part of the Men in Childcare project, the Steering Group researched and reported on pay levels. It was discovered that entry-level wages for other employment that disadvantaged males might realistically access (e.g. catering, retail, warehouse work), are no higher than the (very low) entry-level wages for childcare. However, it seemed likely that entry-level wages in childcare would have to be *higher* than in other employment areas to attract the males' attention. The boys who spoke to City Gateway and Fatherhood Institute staff at career fairs clearly perceived themselves, however unrealistically, as breadwinners of the future. They were concerned not only about

entry-level wages but also about earnings further down the line, which, in childcare tend to be very low: a manager at B & Q will earn more than a manager of a nursery.

‘Mannies’ (male nannies) are reportedly becoming more common, are popular with parents and may be an early or interim career choice for young men. This could have implications for early years training, if providers emphasise this career pathway, which can be relatively well paid. While this may not offer as many opportunities to young disadvantaged men, some of those who showed interest at career fairs were interested in a much higher level of childcare qualification, such as Level 3. City Gateway, and this Men in Childcare Project, was focusing on the much lower qualified.

**LEARNING POINT:** To attract men into childcare in large numbers, wages-for-childcare at entry level *and beyond* need to be equal to, or higher than, wages in other comparable-skill-level occupations. Career pathways need to be well researched and presented with remuneration levels and the qualifications needed, clearly set out. Schools should help quite young boys and girls think about and understand non-traditional occupations, and should continue these conversations as career- and subject- choices loom. Recruitment of men into childcare should not be limited to young men, but to men considering employment throughout the life cycle.

### **A national campaign?**

From an early stage in the implementation of the project in Tower Hamlets, FI felt it important to acknowledge that most of the obstacles to recruitment faced locally and across London were in fact faced nationally, and even internationally. Members of the MiC Forum in the Borough felt that in order to bring about change for the future, we should be raising awareness of these challenges both within and beyond London.

With this in mind, in May 2016 FI created an embryonic campaign called MITEY (Men in the Early Years), aimed at promoting a growth in the numbers of men working in the early years and childcare sector. The aims were, given sufficient time and resources:

- To raise awareness in the early years and childcare sector, of the benefits of a more gender-balanced workforce
- To raise awareness of the benefits of more men working in early years and childcare, among parents and the wider population

- To provide managers and frontline staff in the early years and childcare sector with resources to assist them in recruiting men
- To promote early years careers to men
- To signpost men who work in the early years and childcare sector, and those considering such work, to further support.

Through MITEY FI hoped to open up a space in which it could act as a coordinating body for efforts to progress the men-into-childcare agenda – in London but also across the country. The aim was to start to fill a gap left by the many small and locally focused men-into-childcare initiatives which have emerged around the country in recent years. These include FI's own Tower Hamlets Forum and a longer-standing network coordinated by the London Early Years Foundation, SAMEY (Southampton Area Men in Early Years) and BMIEYN (Bristol Men in Early Years Network).

Each of these groups has developed largely out of a desire to provide support for the small number of men working in the field; there is an awareness of the need for change nationally but little policy campaigning expertise, and a tendency to reinvent the wheel.

The MITEY approach has been to work collaboratively with such groups, to widen their networks, link them in with high quality resources that might help them be more effective in pursuing their goals, and harness them together to form a more national drive for the shared cause of getting more men into childcare.

So far MITEY's progress has been substantial and there is clearly scope to develop that campaign across London and nationally. The MITEY campaign consisted of the following elements:

- Creation of a MITEY campaign page <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2016/men-in-the-early-years-mitey/> including a simple logo and #MITEY hashtag to help spread the word on social media.
- Creation of a MITEY database, which people can join via the MITEY campaign page. Everyone who joins is sent a PDF of a MITEY campaign pledge, to print and display. There are currently 52 members.
- Ongoing social media activity to promote the MITEY campaign (see attached Storify summary – APPENDIX C) via the Fatherhood Institute Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Engaging more widely via the MITEY route led to opportunities to participate in other high level activities. This include a London based Men in Early Years summit meeting, hosted by London Early Years Foundation (LEYF) in October 2016; plus a subsequent written submission to help call for more support for men-into-childcare policy by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Women, Equalities and Early Years at the DfE. FI also presented at the London Childcare Challenge event in November 2016, hosted by LEYF with London deputy mayor for education and childcare, Joanne McCartney. There has been extensive press coverage of the MITEY campaign (see Appendix D) including London press, trade press and live radio:

- ‘Training drive to raise the number of men working in childcare’ in Evening Standard, 29 April 2015.
- Lepper, Joe (30 April 2015) ‘Disadvantaged young men to train in childcare’ in Children and Young People Now <http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1151112/disadvantaged-young-men-to-train-in-childcare>.
- Morton, Katy (1 May 2015) ‘New drive to increase number of men in childcare’ in Nursery World <http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/news/1151122/new-drive-to-increase-number-of-men-in-childcare>.
- Mention for MITEY campaign in interview with FI head of communications Jeremy Davies for LBC Robert Elms show, 14 June 2016
- FI head of training Jeszemma Garratt interviewed for Albert, Angeline (11 November 2016), ‘Why so few men in childcare and who are the Gingerbread men?’ on Daynurseries.co.uk <http://www.daynurseries.co.uk/news/article.cfm/id/1579855/preview/true>.

**LEARNING POINT:** The development of the MITEY campaign and the interest it generated added a valuable element to the on-the-ground work of the project, setting in context the challenge of recruiting young men into careers that are often perceived as the domain of women. Using social media to raise awareness of the wider significance of the issue and challenge the cultural and societal assumptions that lead to the exclusion of men from this sector serves to build momentum towards change, join up local projects that are attempting similar things and encourage individual men.

### **Conclusion:**

There is much valuable learning from the pilot of the Men in Childcare project, not least, about the creativity required to sustain a project amidst the small scale turbulence of

organisational change and the wider uncertainty created by changes to funding priorities for training for young people which both CG and SMART had to contend with. At a local level the project has established a strong working relationship with Tower Hamlets and an ongoing commitment to continue to work on this issue. It also leaves a legacy of learning, including a schema (see Appendix E) which describes the key elements of a successful project, and the means to disseminate it. Through MITEY the project has begun the process of engaging individuals, peer organisations and policy makers in a national conversation which may build momentum to renew policy and establish new aspirations for increasing the number of men in the early year's workforce.

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