Visit to Men in Childcare

24 April 2017

Meeting hosted by: Kenny Spence (Project Manager), Colin Chisholm (Project Coordinator), Nick Reynolds, Kevin Clifford (Practitioner), James Saddler and Ronnie Robertson

Members in attendance: Gordon Lindhurst

- Men in Childcare aim to increase the number of men working in the care and education of pre-school and primary aged children.

- Men in Childcare (MiC) provide SQA approved modules in Early Years Childcare, running courses in Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Lanarkshire and West Lothian. They have been funded since 2001 by Edinburgh Council, and for 3 years by European Social Fund and since 2007 by the Scottish Government.
  - Scottish Government funding has come through the Children and Families division and now through Equalities.

- Following taking the MiC course, 37 men have applied for the HNC in Early Education and Childcare (20 in Edinburgh and 17 in Glasgow). Many qualified men find work in the childcare sector.
  - Over the last few years there has been a dip in numbers of men completing childcare training. MiC thought this was partly due to the college amalgamations and many senior staff who had experience of working with the Men in Childcare project, leaving the sector.
  - Men begin the training by undertaking an entry module at SQA level. After two modules they can apply for a place on an HNC Course in Childhood Practice or SVQ3 in Childcare.
  - Vast majority who have completed an HNC in Childcare and who have wished to have moved into employment: it’s “fairly easy to get a job”

- Men make up 8% of the childcare workforce in Edinburgh; the Scottish rate is 4% which is above the rate in England.
  - Men in Childcare acknowledge that it is “still a bit of an unusual career choice” for men, but feel with the increased amount of new recruits to their courses that this attitude is changing.
    - Kenny Spence began in the field 25 years ago and was one of four men in Edinburgh working in childcare
  - MiC provided a link to the figures by local authority.
  - Their feeling is that the rate is higher in Scotland than England due to the work of MiC.
• They are now seeing men entering the field who may not have been on their programme, but who heard about it and about men working in childcare through word of mouth.
  o The men spoke of the benefits of a community of male childcare workers, and particularly appreciated that in their own nursery workplace.

• MiC recruit to the programme through media advertisement. They have found little success recruiting in schools.
  o The majority of users are in their twenties and older, seeing it as a career change rather than a first career.
    ▪ this is an important factor in terms of retaining those interested in the programme, as they are at a different life-stage from those who enter straight from school. Their cohort tends to have mortgage responsibilities and leaving work to re-train is a big decision.
  o many have a desire to work with children having had and raised their own
  o Some have taken the course after taking on a caring responsibility for grandchildren. They bring life skills to the job.

• MiC believe that children need to have men involved in their early years’ experience. Boys are failing throughout the system in terms of education and behaviour, and need more male models in their care. Children model their behaviour on what they witness on a consistent basis.
  o the men have found they are often role models for the children, but also a positive male figure in the lives of the mothers and grandmothers who use the nursery.
  o their nursery has a high proportion of single-parent families, and they see an impact on them when they can be a male role model in a child’s life.
  o they have also felt they are models for the fathers dropping off children who appreciate seeing men involved in childcare

• It has not been their experience that parents didn’t want their child cared for by a man. This bias has not been the experience of the men.
  o Kenny Spence said this was not something he had encountered in his 25 years in the field.
  o However, one instance was cited when at a conference a female nursery owner said that if parents questioned the use of male workers, she’d “take this into consideration”– but this was a hypothetical situation.
  o Kenny Spence spoke of the difference in how he was treated after having had his own child, but stressed that this was a very long time ago.
  o The men also spoke of a feeling of “trying to prove yourself” as a man in the field, but that their experiences were “only positive” and “people want more men.”
- on the day of the visit, Men in Childcare received an email from a nursery owner which supports this. The email is attached at the end of this note.

- The men spoke of a huge disparity between public and private sector pay, with one saying that he “wouldn’t work in the private sector because of the wages [being too low].

- MiC spoke of a misuse of the Modern Apprenticeships in Childcare SVQ Course; apprentices who are working in some private nurseries are deemed to be students. These students are employed for the duration of their programme and paid around £3.26/hour rather than the minimum wage. On qualification (when they are entitled to greater pay), they are then let go and new students are brought in.
  - MiC believe those undertaking an SVQ are employees and ought to receive the minimum wage.
  - Skills Development Scotland provide up to £6000 towards student costs whilst they work on their SVQ Level 3 but MiC’s view is that this is not making its way to ensure that the students have the minimum wage
  - MiC believe that guaranteeing a period of employment on qualification would also alleviate some of this practice.

- MiC would like to see a change, with perhaps an increase in trainee places, to allow people above the Modern Apprenticeship age group and including an increased proportion of men, to train toward SVQ3 qualification whilst receiving a wage in the workplace. They also feel they would be in a position to supply men who, having completed their two module studies at college, would have an underpinning knowledge to bring with them to a Trainee Placement

- The salary level for men is important as low salaries can have a negative effect on the ability to retain men in the programme, as they are often at a different life stage and need income support because of mortgages etc.

- International comparison: In New Zealand, early years educators are paid the same as teachers. However, the number of men in childcare is lower than Scotland.
  - In Norway, unqualified workers are allowed to work in childcare, in a specified ratio to qualified workers This could be a route that the Scottish Government considers to address the need for an expanded workforce by 2020.

- MiC suggested that Local authorities could have targets set for the number of male carers, targets being more acceptable than requirements.
  - funding could be contingent on targets
MiC do not feel that more needs to be done to encourage men to consider childcare as a career. Rather, they think that – accepting men tend to enter the field later in their lives – support needs to focus around financial help that can be given to men.

- The European Social Fund support allowed them to pay men completing the course a monthly stipend to help with living expenses while out of the job market
- Having support available for men at the point where they have to choose to commit to an HNC (one year full time or two years part time) would encourage men to remain with the programme, as this is the drop out point.

MiC think the question of “are guys interested” is not an issue anymore- what is needed now are more opportunities.

MiC cited the following article and study as of interest to the Committee:

https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2000/05/the-war-against-boys/304659/

The Effects of Father Involvement: An Updated Research Summary of the Evidence

Following the visit, MiC’s Project Manager received a request for a male carer at an Edinburgh nursery.

Hi Kenny

I wondered if you had any candidates who are looking for a placement with the possibility of full time employment among your students at the moment?

We increasingly find having men practitioners improves the quality of what we have to offer the children.

Would welcome any feedback.

Kind regards