

Newsletter Spotlight
Me & Men in Childcare – Tim Moran



Tim Moran

My name is Tim and I'm a childcare worker – a childcare professional as we are beginning to call ourselves in the ACP. In September of last year I marked 20 years working with children of all ages really. I started working in a private preschool in Oakland, CA, as a classroom assistant in a room with ten 2-yr olds. In March I marked 10 years working at [Wallaroo Playschool](#) in Cork, where I am currently the manager in the Afterschool, age 4-12. I suppose that 'untypical' is the better word to describe the fact that I am both a man and an Early Years professional – much better than 'unusual' at any rate! All over the world the numbers of men working with young children are small. It is estimated that Ireland has a very low percentage of men in this workforce – 1 to 2 %. The exact number is irrelevant really, the important point is, 'There could be more.'

About 10 years after I received a university degree in Literature and History, I stumbled into childcare, invited by a friend who ran that classroom of 2yr olds, who was desperately in need of sick cover. I began my career without any qualification but I was able to start my training in this field immediately. I soon discovered that I had entered a world that had been virtually invisible to me up to that point in my life – the section of human development that is probably the most remarkable: the beginning. I recognized very early that the scope of my new profession was indeed vast. Care and Education of the young child encompasses all social, physical and emotional learning; cognitive development and language; understanding and accepting our differences. If you're reading this you know exactly what I'm talking about..



Wallaroo Playschool

MENTEACH



[Men in Childhood Education video UK](#)

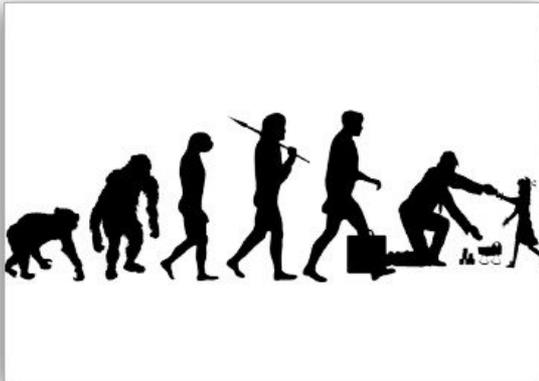
If the family is the first place a being learns how to be a human, then the playschool is the first place we learn to become citizens, 'following our bliss', a Joseph Campbell says, while learning to share the world with those next to us.

Through my training and my work colleagues in my first years in this field, I attended many workshops and conferences. At one, in Seattle, one of the dozens of workshops offered was for men working in childcare. I was curious and went along. We were a small group, not more than 6, and rather than a presentation, we enjoyed an informal discussion about ourselves and our jobs. What was it actually like being the only man in our centres? I had actually worked with other men before. Like me, I suppose, they were friends of someone at the centre who were 'trying it out'. But never before this moment had I thought directly on what my experiences were as a man in a field without other men. The support of co-workers came up, as did the reaction of parents, sexual politics in the workplace. Some of our experiences were shared, not all. The men told me of their annual camping get-togethers, to which I was invited. It sounded fun. But before the date of their next trip, I was to move to Ireland, to begin life with my new wife from Cork..

When I arrived in Ireland, thinking that I may have difficulty in landing a job – both as a man and as a foreigner – I enrolled in two childcare training courses my first year. Having had success (though perhaps lacking direction) previously in education, I was at home in a classroom setting and felt that I was easily accepted as an equal by the other students – needless to say, all women. Within a few years I had landed a few jobs working in my profession of choice.



The Men in Childcare Team



Men in Childcare Logo

BEGINNINGS OF THE NETWORK

In 2004, there was a conference hosted by the Kilkenny City Childcare Company on the topic of Men in Childcare. Naturally, I was interested in the topic, so I went, along with the project coordinator of our centre and the manager of another centre. I was identified as one of the few actual men working with young children at the conference. That day I met Mick, the only other male Early Years worker who could be found at the conference. So when I got an invite a few months later, to set up a network of men, again in Kilkenny, I was eager to join. This time, 5 men set around a table, at a meeting facilitated by a tutor from UCD who was from Sweden where he had worked in Early Years himself. Mick was there, and a Peter who was in the process of opening his own playschool service near the beach in Gorey, Co Wexford. This was the beginning of the Men in Childcare network in Ireland. Early on, some academics supported us, attending our first meetings and advising us. And before long a few City and County Childcare Committees pledged a small part of their budget to support us (this was when there was money) It was decided to spend a bit of this money to draft an Action Plan, something every organization has to do in the beginning, put into words exactly what we wanted to do and what we stood for. I've always felt that in MiC we've been making it up as we go along. But that hasn't been as bad as it probably sounds!

MEN IN CHILDCARE NETWORK IRELAND



Why choose childcare as a career?

IT'S REWARDING... IT'S CHALLENGING...
IT'S FLEXIBLE...
IT'S FUN... IT'S PROGRESSIVE...

Children are growing up in a society that is focusing more than ever on equality between men and women. All children can benefit from having a positive male role model in their lives. However many children will spend their time in a childcare setting with little or no contact with men throughout their day.

There is a growing number of men now working in the early years and childcare sector in Ireland. It is broadly recognised that childcare represents an important profession and that it has a real role to play in shaping future generations.

Childcare is also a fun and active career and there are plenty of opportunities to develop your career through training and experience.

Possible career opportunities, subject to the relevant education and experience include:
Childcare Associate, Childminder, Leader, Manager, Mentorship Teacher, Co-ordinator, Project worker, Tutor/Lecturer, Advisor, Specialist, - Support/Grade 10
Childcare Training Partner
(Limerick City & County Childcare Committee and North Tipperary CCC)

COULD IT BE FOR YOU? CONTACT US

Text or Leave a message in our Mailbox:
087 2299208

www.facebook.com/meninchildcare
Email: meninir@gmail.com

Men in childcare Ireland DVD -
"The Role of Men in Childcare"
is available on request



In order to make a mission statement, we had to identify what were the questions that we could answer and what is actually going to be possible for a small mostly voluntary organization to accomplish?

- Why aren't more men working with young children
- Should men be working with young children
- Why should men be working with young children
- What are the barriers for men becoming part of the Early Years workforce

I actually enjoyed this bit of work myself very much. We had to face up to what we could accomplish. Could we indeed change society? What actually was our task, to change society, or to change men themselves? We threw around the question, '*Is society ready for more men working with young children?*' But we soon realized that we ourselves were the proof – we had been accepted by centres, by our classmates in training courses, by parents and by the children themselves. One of our conclusions was that men don't see themselves as Early Years workers or childcare workers – even when they are already actually doing this work themselves, with their own children, and relatives, as coaches and mentors in activities like sports and scouting. We decided that our mission would be to support men who are already working in the profession, and to encourage and support men who would be considering entering the profession. One of the key actions we chose was to increase the visibility of men already doing this work. If our profession is largely invisible to (and certainly undervalued by) the rest of society, then the few men who work in it are really next to invisible.



Damien Walshe – Men in Childcare
'Changing Ireland Blogspot'

EARLY YEARS OF MiC

Once we had finally somewhat wrestled these ideas onto paper, we undertook to declare ourselves to be: we printed our first leaflet, got an email address, and a mobile phone contact, and invited men and other interested parties to contact us. This we did at a conference in November in Waterford City in 2006. In the early days, we would be contacted by some men 'in the wilderness', who actually worked with children themselves and were glad to know there were other men like them. But they were very few. When we would try to set up regional network meetings, to meet some of these men face to face, these proved much more difficult. I remember such a meeting in Kilkenny, with the promise of a few men attending, but only attended by women, and one who was just passing by, in the centre for another reason altogether.

Interestingly a good percentage of our early contacts were 3rd level students wanting some information on the topic of men in the Early Years sector for research projects. This told us that we were on to something; people were at least interested in the question.

THE MIDDLE YEARS

One of our early ideas was increase the visibility of men in the Early Years and we decided to make a DVD for distribution showing actual men working with young children and talking about what they liked in their careers. This was undertaken in 2007 and finished in 2008, just in time to be brought to the first World Forum Conference exclusively on Men in Childcare in Hawaii.



An insightful interview with male practitioners, female practitioners, parents and employers regarding the apparent shift in attitudes to men working in Early Years. A recent survey shows that nearly 98% of parents whose children go to day nurseries are now in favour of men working with young children. [Click here to listen to the interview](#)

Subsequent to this conference there was a revival of the European Network of Men in Childcare, in Belgium. MiC Ireland was able to participate in that, attending a further meeting in Norway and hosting the last meeting here in Ireland, November 2011. One of the important actions of the European Network is to share strategies for promoting the potential of men and the positive role men play in Early years in some countries.

THE GREAT DEBATES

Through the years, since we have declared what we are about, many questions and debates have pushed themselves into our path. I refer back to some of the questions we faced in during our inception: why should men work with young children? Do young children need a male influence? The answer is - of course. Children need to be with anyone who can really provide them with the type of care and affection they so desperately need during this utterly important period in their development. In many families men can and do provide this care, and therefore in early years settings it is only natural that men can do this job. We are often drawn into this debate about 'do women and men do things differently regarding their interactions with children?' Within the network we are not all in agreement, but I personally believe these arguments are irrelevant. I argue from an opposite point: anyone who has a genuine, sincere and acute interest in the welfare of children and their development is someone who should indeed be involved directly in the lives of children.

How can male childcare workers be supported by childcare center?

- Be pro-active and communicate the positives to parents and staff and make it a fact that men are involved with your program.
- Consider men and women in an equal and positive way.
- Have policies and procedures in place for the protection of all i.e. the children and the childcare workers.
- Men are usually working in isolation from other men and they may need specific support from their supervisors to feel they are doing a good job and are included in the childcare team.

Why choose childcare as a career?

IT'S REWARDING: A job that involves working with children has many rewards. You will have the enjoyment and pleasure of working with children and the satisfaction of being involved in a child's physical, intellectual, social and emotional development.

IT'S FLEXIBLE: A job in childcare or early education can also offer flexibility of hours which would allow you to work around family or study commitments.

IT'S CHALLENGING: Working with children also provides constant challenges, personally and professionally. You could be offering a curriculum, a care plan, a day trip or working with parents, the job will vary day-to-day. Every day is different.

IT'S PROGRESSIVE: There is also plenty of career progression offered in a job in childcare or early education. You can start your career with very little experience and study for a qualification while you are working. You could also climb the career ladder by gaining higher qualification, and becoming a supervisor or manager/coordinator. Once you have gained the qualifications and experience you may even want to set up your own preschool or after school club.

IT'S FUN: A job working with children, whether in a preschool, after school club or as a child minder, is primarily a fun one. You will be helping children learn through play and help them to discover the world around them.

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT
 Leave a message in our Mailbox: 087 2006000
 Text to: 087 2006009
 Email to: meninchildcare@childcare.ie

Men in Childcare Network
 IRELAND
"Support and encouragement for men interested in a career in childcare"

F&S
 Fostering & Support Services

MIC Ireland

'How you can support male colleagues' – childcareonline.ie

I see this whole debate as a distraction. The fact is that men can make excellent childcare workers. The ability to care for our young is not genetically disposed to women only. Indeed the reason we have our particular place on the planet within the spectrum of living things because of our remarkable brains. We can learn just about anything – and men can learn how to look after young children the same as women. One of the reasons is that we have the very same teachers – the children themselves. Another thing this debate does for me is to oppose men to women, and I believe this is dangerous, and certainly counterproductive at the very least. In so much as I have succeeded in my career it has been because I have been accepted and supported and taught and mentored. And the people that have done this for me have been women. They did it I'm sure because they recognised in me someone who could help them in their work, someone who believed in the very same things they did – that children need the best care and opportunity in this period in their lives. So for me, childcare will always be about the partnership between men and women, and as for any discipline, it will hinge on the ability of those with expertise to share their experience and nurture the next generation of carers, whatever be their gender.



THE FUTURE

Everyday I go to work I get confirmation that I am in the right job. Sometimes it's when I help two children to resolve a conflict they're having about a toy, sometimes it's when I think up some brilliant (modesty!) arts and crafts activity and offer it up to the children. Sometimes it's just when I can listen to something a child desperately wants to tell me. And sometimes it's when I make a realization about a child's particular needs that will help me tomorrow to provide for that child's development.

As men become involved in childcare we will be asked to stand shoulder to shoulder with women to help to professionalise the childcare workforce, which has much to do with the way we all see ourselves, and the respect that we ask from society. This has become part of our message to the men we meet who want to enter the field.

We have grown from some of our disappointments, and patience has paid off – last month in Cork, we had 9 men sitting around a table sharing their stories, all either working in childcare or completing their training. And for me it was a return to what has always seemed to me to be our core role – to offer support to each other. We hope to have our next meeting in a new outdoor childminding space recently set up by Peter in Crosshaven. And I'm already looking forward to the camping trip!

