



# WANTED: MORE MEN IN ECE

*A lack of men in early childhood education is not optimal for the profession – or the children.*

There is a very real need for more men in the field of early childhood education (ECE) in this country. According to Childcare Canada, women outnumber men in the field by an almost 99 to one ratio.<sup>1</sup>

While that might not sound off any alarm bells, a closer look reveals that this kind of gender imbalance is not ideal for anyone: caregivers, children, or the profession at large.

“We see it here at Family Day,” says Chris Wagner, Talent Management Coordinator. “We estimate that only about three per cent of our ECEs are men, even though our hiring practices are the same for men and women.”

Chris and his colleague Hakima Berrada, Talent Management Generalist, say a balance of men and women would be welcome. “We consider everyone equally here, and everyone is screened on merit, education and experience,” says Berrada. “But we are not seeing men applying.”

### WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

The low numbers are disappointing, particularly given the research showing that both male and female educators are capable of taking care of children, interacting sensitively with them, and teaching them well.<sup>2</sup>

Further, research suggests that gender-integrated care environments are better for children. According to Noam Shpancer Ph.D., these integrated environments are more likely to help children learn that

caring is part of both masculinity and femininity. He says a more gender equal workforce allows children to grow in an environment that resembles the larger one into which they are already being socialized.<sup>3</sup>

So, if the research is there and the profession would welcome more men, why are there so few males working in the field? In part, it has to do with the stereotypes that have been ingrained in our culture over the years.



### WHY DO THEY STAY AWAY?

Something we often hear is that taking care of children is not a “manly” or masculine occupation.

“There is a stereotype that it is mostly women who take care of children,” says Kirushanth Kirupakaran, an RECE

who is known fondly as “KK” at Family Day’s Thornhill centre. “It can be very intimidating – it took me two years after graduation to even put in an application.”

Matthew Hayes, Assistant Supervisor at Our Lady of Providence Child Care & Holy Spirit, echoes KK’s sentiments. “I’ve always wanted to work with children,” says Hayes. “I thought I’d be a teacher, and then once my nephew was born, something sparked in me and I decided on ECE. But it’s not always easy. Some people wonder why a man would want to take care of children.”

And more than just wondering why a man wants to do a “woman’s job”, there is a darker stereotype at play. In this line of work, male caregivers often face questions about their motives, with some parents fearing they represent a threat.

“A male in child care isn’t the norm in society, and with all of the negative stories heard in the news it overshadows the impact that the good males have on children’s lives and development,” says Justin Peterson, Supervisor at Family Day’s Willow Way and St. Raymond centres.

“That’s not to say that the media shouldn’t broadcast the negative happenings,” says Peterson, who has been working at the agency for 14 years. “But the amount of time and energy put into those stories should be the same put into the positive stories.”

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continued from page 1

### SHOW ME THE MONEY

Another reason identified in the research for males' absence from ECE has to do with the job's low wages. This is not just a male problem, as it affects the field in general. We all know what an important role ECEs play in children's lives, but their pay has not caught up to their significance. However, this certainly has an impact on how men see the job.

"I was asked: 'Can't you make more money somewhere else?'" recalls Heyes. "The reality is that if you are going to be working as an ECE you can't be concerned with the money. You need a passion to work with children and shape the future of the next generation."

KK agrees, noting that in his ECE course in college "there were three other men out of a class of 30. But, not a single one went into the field after graduating." It's hard to know what the reasons are, but he notes that money is a factor.

### POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

Yet, without men, we are missing vital perspectives in our child care programs. Men bring a lot to the ECE table.

"It's more than just an ability to run around and play sports in a gym with school agers because women have those capabilities too," says Peterson. "It's the consistency of positive male roles in the field who can add to the impact of how children grow and develop."

According to Dr. Shpancer, the presence of male ECEs may provide particular benefits for boys from father-absent homes.

Peterson agrees: "I grew up with a single parent and, being raised by all women, rarely was there a male perspective or impact on my life. And with the rise of single mothers out there I feel like the male perspective in the field is very important."

### MOVING FORWARD

As we move forward, there is hope in the ranks that more men will come on board and join their fellow male ECE counterparts.

"Human beings are, by nature, a bit judgemental until you prove them otherwise," says KK. "I am here to break norms. I don't just want to be a role model to children, but to other men contemplating working with children."

Of course it goes both ways. It's not just men facing gender stereotyping; women experience plenty of bias in male-dominated workplaces. But if we value diverse and inclusive workspaces in our society, gender equality is a goal we should all be seeking.

1: Aleisha Legair, *Children need more male role models from ECE programs, Etcetera*  
2, 3: Noam Shpancer Ph.D., *No Man's Land, Psychology Today*



MESSAGE FROM  
DIANE DALEY, CEO

## CELEBRATING MALES IN ECE

Each day across our agency, our dedicated educators work to create a sense of belonging, well-being, and engagement for the children in our programs. The majority of this work is carried out by females, but in this edition of FOCUS we highlight a small but growing change in child care: males working in the sector.

When I was a child, most of the caregiving was provided by women. However, in our sector today we do see more males choosing early childhood education as their career path.

And we are seeing changes in society

at large. The Vanier Institute of the Family reports that men are increasingly becoming involved in the caregiving of their children. Vanier's research shows that more fathers are taking time off or flexing their work schedules to care for their children, and are embracing more traditional household management responsibilities.

When men work in the ECE field, young children have an opportunity to see caring and dedicated male role models taking on a variety of duties in the classroom. They see them taking on nurturing work and they observe collaborative teaching

teams that demonstrate positive male and female interactions. Children raised in families where a father figure is not represented can gain additional benefits from male caregivers in their programs.

As an agency with a strong commitment to social inclusion, we encourage conversations about gender roles, and challenge myths and negative stereotypes. And we celebrate the males who have chosen ECE as their career path. We are happy they have chosen Family Day as a place to work and welcome their contributions to promoting high-quality child care.

# THE JOY OF OUTDOOR WINTER PLAY

Playing outside in the snow is more than just a lot of fun. Getting outside in winter can greatly contribute to children's health, development, and well-being. Here's how:

## SEEING THE OUTDOORS THROUGH A NEW LENS

During the summer months, children become used to the warm, green climate. After the change in season or the first snowfall, children view their environment through a different lens: fallen leaves, brown grass, snow, and ice. This new lens enables them to imagine the outdoors in different ways, and to be creative in their play.

## UPPING EXERCISE AND USING DIFFERENT MUSCLES

The winter months provide children with different ways of moving their bodies, such as sledding, or walking up a snow hill. Their larger muscles are put to great use in the winter months due to the challenges that snow provides. This large-muscle use and increase in physical activity supports children's gross motor development and overall health.

## GETTING FRESH AIR AND AVOIDING BACTERIA

Some people associate the winter months with getting sick. However, it is not the cold weather that necessarily causes colds and flus – it is increased exposure to indoor environments where bacteria and viruses live. Those who spend long periods of time in a heated and poorly ventilated home, without exposure to fresh air, can easily pass germs to one another.

## NEW CHALLENGES AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

Winter provides environments and materials that are inspiring and fun, and gives children new challenges, such as climbing a snow hill. Engagement with outdoor environments in the winter provokes new problem-solving skills such as: "How can I slide down this ice patch without falling?"

## VITAMIN D EXPOSURE

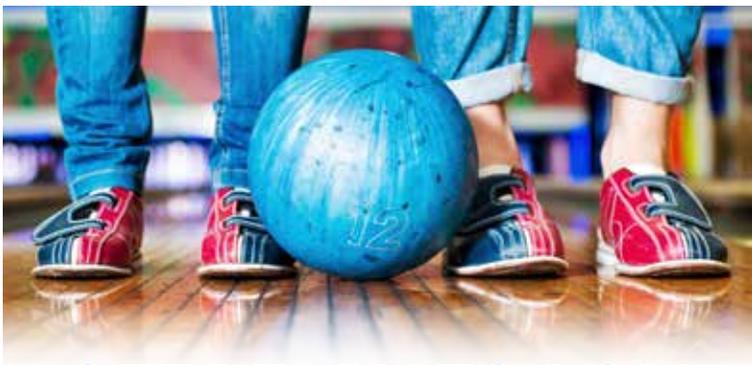
When children stay indoors during the winter, they are missing out on the necessary vitamins the outdoor environment provides. Children get vitamin D through sun exposure, and absorb it even though the sun is not as warm in the winter. Vitamin D helps regulate moods and emotions by increasing serotonin levels in the brain.

*Information from "Bundle up and Get Outside," (fix.com)*



## AGM focuses on nature education

Family Day's 168<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting took place on Tuesday, September 24 at the BMO Institute for Learning. The evening included a special keynote address by Marlene Power entitled "Educators as Innovators in Outdoor Learning." Marlene is the Executive Director of the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada (CNAC) and specializes in the pedagogy and practice of nature-based education.



## GET READY TO ROLL

Mark your calendars! The eighth annual Bowling for Family Day will take place on Saturday, April 18, 2020 at two locations: Markham Bowl and Brunswick Zone Bramalea. Staff members are thinking of some innovative ways to fundraise this year and your participation is always appreciated. More information will be available in the months to come.



**United Way**  
Greater Toronto

## UNITED WAY CAMPAIGN UNDERWAY

Family Day has kicked off its 2020 United Way Campaign. Our annual campaign raises money for the charity in a variety of ways, including dance-a-thons at every centre and an annual CN Tower Climb. Thanks to your generous donations, Family Day's 2019 campaign was a success, and we hope 2020 will be just as positive.

## OPEN DOORS A GREAT SUCCESS



OPEN DOORS  
FAMILY DAY OUTDOOR  
LEARNING ADVENTURES

Approximately 600 people attended our second annual OPEN Doors event, held Saturday, October 5 at the Kortright Centre. Family Day staff, caregivers and families from our programs were treated to a day of hands-on, nature activities in the forest. Thank you to everyone who came out to make the day a special event. Special thanks to Lianne Terry (our outdoor learning champion), the OPEN Doors committee, and our EarlyON staff.



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**FAMILY DAY**

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- Child Care Centres
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- EarlyON Child and Family Centres
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### FOCUS Newsletter

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*For countless families, Family Day is the only way!*