

Short report on revitalizing the EU network Men in (early) childcare and education.

During the World Forum Meeting in Honolulu 2008 on Men in Early Childcare, some European participants felt the need to meet in Europe and revitalize the once existing EU network Men in (early) childcare and education and to find out what we need (to be successful again), with possibly more participation from other countries as well. Thanks to the generous gift of a sponsor of World Forum, Pademalon Press in Australia, we have been able to do so.

From 2003 till 2005 there have been 3 European Conferences – organized in England/Scotland - with contributions from different countries: Scotland, England, Flanders(Belgium), Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium and Hungary. Many papers were written and good work was done and published on the (English) Men In Childcare Website. Dissemination to other countries has nevertheless not been very strong and it has, to our knowledge, not enlarged its reach over more European Countries. This network kind of faded away, possibly by lack of finances and available energy.

In the meanwhile the situation is a little bit changing. Research shows the importance of men's presence in early childhood (not only, but especially in connection with safe attachment and a good and positive male role-identification).

In Germany there are several local and national networks in development and this year there is a second national meeting in Germany (end of October in Hannover).

In the Netherlands there was recently (15th april 2009) the first National Conference of Men Working in Childcare; the importance of men in childcare in the Netherlands is rapidly being recognized, also by the big institutions and organizations, but there are till now only 2-3% men in Early Childcare Institutions (with a few exemptions of institutions that have 10-15%). Main problems are: the isolation of the few men already working in the sector, public image of men in this sector, the tradition of women and their style and culture, the professional education for this work that is totally adjusted to female styles of working, communication, and raising children. To make their numbers grow will take a lot of organization. Soon a Dutch website will be launched as well.

In other countries there are some developments as well as we saw during our meeting in Brussels on the 23rd of April where 'The Academie for child and family' was our host, and offered us a free meeting place with lunch.

DONE SO FAR: After we have received in August 2008 the good news of funding of our initiative with 5000 AUD, we have had a lot of telephone calls and – after solving connection problems – also many email exchanges. I (LW) have studied the material from the previous conferences. The development of the initiative is the product of Kenny Spence, Jan Peeters, Lauk Woltring.

After a long period of looking for names, again lots of e-mails, telephone-calls, exchanging data, crossing agenda's and more of those time absorbing things, we have come together in Brussels where Jan Peeters VBJK was our host on 23rd of April 2009.

AGENDA 23rd of April 2009

In fact our agenda was quite simple (we are a small informal group, a lot of improvisation was necessary and fruitful)

1. Situation in the presented countries and national networks on the item 'Men in (early) childcare & education (what are the topics, what's the situation, what are the plans to improve men's position in this work, to get more men in the job etc.)
2. What can each participant bring to a European network (what can you – or your network- offer) and what would you like to get from the network (receiving end)
3. What is in your opinion a good website (if we need one) for an European network on men in (early) childcare?

It took a lot of time to 'match' the various concepts, in every country the field of child care and education is organized differently, even in translation the words have different meanings. We've had some discussion on the 'span' of our field, looking at the meaning of different words in the EU-countries with sometimes completely different institutions, concepts and structures, and we have finally decided to cover *both childcare and early education*. In these discussions we have covered many other items as well. In doing so a lot of practice was enlightened to each other.

Kenny Spence from Scotland and Anders Farstad from Norway showed us films made in their countries to illustrate and promote the role of Men in Early Childcare. Lauk Woltring from the Netherlands showed a film (DVD) that he has brought from his visits to Australia.