



YMEN PROJECT

“The YMen Project” is an initiative developed by Wellington Kindergartens in conjunction with the Ministry for Social Development through Work and Income New Zealand. The premise behind the project was first developed in 2008 by teachers and management within Wellington Kindergartens to address the chronic shortages of men working in early childhood education and high rates of unemployment among men under the age of 24 years. The latter is less about getting people off benefits and more about empowering young men and giving them the confidence to realise their potential. The project was designed to have reciprocal benefits for young children and the YMen by:

1. enriching children’s experiences by having young men working with them in kindergartens,
2. empowering young men through the experience gained from working with infants, toddlers and young children.

The YMen Project began as a pilot in July 2011 with eight young men, and ended in December 2011. During that time, the men undertook placements in different kindergartens working alongside qualified teachers four days a week. In the lead up to their placements, they underwent an intensive two week induction programme and spent every second Tuesday at the Association office undergoing training in early childhood education and career and cultural development. They were mentored by experienced male ECE teachers, and supported by a team of Senior Teachers (who provide the professional advice and support to our teaching teams). External careers and life skills specialists added to the personal growth aspirations of the programme.

The benefits of the programme were immediate and significant. Children, parents, whānau and teachers all gained from the involvement of the men – their energy and perspective enhanced the learning environment and provided new and interesting learning experiences for the children. On the other hand, the young men gained huge insight into how young children learn, about constructive and positive ways of communicating with young children and the adults around them.

Of the eight young men who graduated from the YMen Pilot Project, two have enrolled in other tertiary study and six have enrolled in degree programmes to become early childhood education teachers.

We are determined to repeat the programme again in July this year using learnings from the initial pilot project to enhance YMen 2012. However, repeating the programme is dependent on securing funding. We are actively seeking financial partners with a similar altruistic focus to work with us. Key learnings from the Pilot Project were:

- That young men are competent, talented, magical people with much to offer this world 😊
- That if you assume and expect the best, you’ll get the best out of people.
- That babies, toddlers and young children cherish and benefit hugely from the energy that young men bring. This energy isn’t just for playing games, but also the energy they bring when reading with children, comforting them, working on puzzles with them.

- The two week induction programme before going into kindergartens was vital – for understanding how children learn and for assisting the young men in working positively with young children and to clarify what our expectations were as an association (it was crucial that our responsibility for nurturing and educating children was understood, committed toward and ideally added to).
- Mentoring is vital – male teachers visiting them in their kindergartens, liaising with the teaching teams.
- Working alongside qualified, registered ECE teachers was essential: they learned by watching and having high quality interactions with children.
- Regular, ongoing training - every second Tuesday coming into the Association office, debriefing with qualified, experienced ECE professionals. Participating in workshops.
- Familial or social connections to the Association were important – the young men involved in the 2011 pilot were known by Association staff, not only did this provide some testimony to their character but also understanding on their part of the importance of the work that we do.
- The benefits far outweigh the challenges!!



Further information about the project will be kept on the Innovations section of our website, as we publish more of our learnings and discoveries.



For the article that appeared on the front page of the Dominion in January 2012, please see the link below:

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/6286907/Superheroes-sorting-out-a-kindergarten-problem>

