

Group offers support to male child care workers ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

The last thing Ron Blatz thought of doing after high school was working in the early childcare education profession.

But a friend who started the Discovery Children's Centre in St. James called up and offered the then 19-year-old a job.

"What does a farm boy know if he'd even enjoy working with children? I never baby-sat, and I never worked with kids as most men haven't," Blatz says.

"It just came at a time when I was planning on moving back from Regina to Winnipeg and a job is what I needed."

That job has turned into a more than 30-year career for Blatz, who is now the executive director of the DCC.

While Blatz has found enjoyment and fulfilment in the profession, the number of men in ECE is dwindling.

There is a 40-year decline of men in the teaching profession and males typically account for 3% or less of the ECE workforce in the U.S., he says.

In Manitoba there are 321 men working in a field of 6,885, which has actually gone up in the past five years.

That's one of the reasons why Blatz started a local support club called Men in Early Childhood Education that meets four times a year. It's an opportunity for men to reach out, support and inspire each other, but women are welcome as well.

"This is not a male thing. This is about children and what's best for them," Blatz says.

"Gender balance is good for kids. Women teachers bring a vast array of the human experience into the classroom and male teachers bring a vast array of human experience into the classroom."

Blatz says it's an inspiring collection of men in the group who all have the same passion for early childhood education.

"One guy that came to the last meeting said, 'I've known about this group for two years and I never came because I didn't think I needed it, but I'm so glad I did.' "

Blatz says current research shows that if men are connected to other men in the field they will stay in the profession longer.

"I know that most men in Manitoba are working as the only guy in their centre so I want them to know that they're not alone and there are others and that they can have friends working in other centres," he says.

-reprinted from the Metro

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