



It's not just
child's play

Nursery manager Tim Clarke wonders why more men don't think about a career in early years teaching and childcare

My job involves interacting with the children helping them to learn and build their confidence. As well as this my role as a manager also gives me the opportunity to have a more strategic input on the best ways to encourage the children's development through different activities and play work. So why did I choose the profession?

Throughout my childhood my parents had fostered children of all ages from all backgrounds, so a career in childcare seemed a natural step for me. After I completed my GCSE's I progressed on to my AS Levels studying part time in Geography, English, Psychology and Business Studies - the rest of the time I worked in my local nursery. However after the first year working part-time in the nursery, I knew it was what I wanted to do and took up a full time position.

I knew I was in the right job one Monday when I was driving to work, in a Monday mood, and I saw the person in the car next to me wearing their suit and off to their office. I realised that actually I spend my Monday painting with 2-year-olds, and that I wouldn't swap with him for all the tea in China!

My day-to-day job is...different!

I always try and muck in and lead by example, I enjoy spending time with the children, planning activities and watching them succeed (or fail!). I always try to be available to talk with parents, to deal with any problems the staff might have and also try to balance my time on the 'front-line' with time keeping paperwork up to date and trying to make things progress.

Following A levels, and an NVQ award in Early Years work, I moved to my current position as manager busy day nursery, which I have held for the past two years. I am also currently completing a Foundation Degree in Early Years, and have applied to continue to complete a BA Honours degree next year.

The best thing about my job is...

... how rewarding it is to have such a tangible effect on the lives of children and their families. I enjoy holding a position where I am able to implement my own ideas in an attempt to develop the quality of the setting as a whole.

I find my work extremely challenging, because the only way I can enjoy it is if I know the setting as a whole is running effectively, I am grateful that the owners have had enough confidence in me to allow me enough autonomy to influence the ethos and philosophies of the nursery. I also love the fact that I go to a house everyday and play with some really brilliant children whilst other people put on a suit and sit in front of a computer screen!

The worst thing about my job is...

It used to be the fear of other people's perceptions, both within and outside my workplace, but they were just that, fears. I have never encountered any real problems with people regarding my work and I think you just grow out of caring, but that you benefit from overcoming it.

More recently the time demands have been a challenge, I'm juggling a full degree course and a full time management role with a family and home to look after, that means that sometimes I'm left disappointed that I don't achieve all I want to achieve in one of those areas. Sometimes I'd love to be at the zoo with my daughter on a Saturday, but I have to bury myself in books and write a 5,000 word report! I think she understands though!

My advice to someone starting out

I would suggest that anyone thinking of entering this sector try out voluntary or part time work before they dive in. I have seen

countless people dive straight into full time positions and disappear within a few weeks as they are shocked at the demands placed upon them.

It may not be the job for everybody, but equally I have worked with countless numbers of people who wouldn't change their role for the world. I would also recommend the vocational training entry route: I have been able to progress with my career whilst starting a family and buying a house, rather than worrying about student debts or how I'm going to apply theoretical knowledge about a very practical job.

A common misconception

Some people seem to think that working in early years and childcare is a suitable job only for women. This is simply not true - it's a great job for men as well!

I am proud that I challenge the perception that men are not suited to career in childcare, and it's an important challenge because positive male role models in a child's early years are very important in their overall development. As a man working in a predominantly female working sector I make sure that the children I work with get a balanced view of gender, so not only do I play football with the kids I also get involved in activities which they may think their mummy would normally do, such as cooking and sewing.

Early years and Childcare is an expanding and dynamic sector. It's also an important career, as those who work in it play an incredibly valuable role in shaping the lives of future generations. It's a career you can be proud of.

For more information visit the dedicated website at www.childcarecareers.gov.uk or call 0800 99 66 00