



Fatherhood Institute (MITEY) & Kids Planet Day Nurseries

Recruiting men into early years apprenticeships: a project summary

About the project

Our project, which ran from 2020 to 2022, was a collaboration between the Fatherhood Institute, which leads the MITEY (Men In The Early Years) campaign; and Kids Planet Day Nurseries; with funding from Greater Manchester Combined Authority, as part of its [Removing Barriers to Apprenticeships](#) initiative.

The project aimed to support Kids Planet to prepare for, recruit and support a cohort of 12 men through its in-house Early Years (Level 2) apprenticeship, working in pairs across six of its 52 settings. The target audience for our programme was male career changers and school leavers.

Background

Men are extremely poorly represented in the Early Years education workforce, making up just 3% of the total nationally, and the same proportion within Kids Planet. This lack of men is both a symptom and cause of gender inequality: looking after educating young children should be a job for everyone, not just women – and we should be modelling this clearly to the children and families in our care.

Reasons for men's low participation include:

- Gender-based stereotypes (including beliefs that Early Years education is women's work; that women are 'naturally better' at caregiving; and that men who work in nurseries must be gay)
- 'Risk anxiety' around allegations of paedophilia
- Low pay and status, and
- Lack of access to information about Early Years careers and opportunities.

The goal for the project was for FI/ MITEY to support Kids Planet to audit its processes and materials and provide training and support to help it transform itself into an organisation that engages systematically, positively and effectively with men. In doing so, we hoped to put the organisation in as strong a position as possible to recruit and retain 12 male apprentices, providing them with a comprehensive, tailored induction programme and ongoing support; and to develop and sustain a more gender-diverse workforce moving forward.

Scope of the project

Our plan, as outlined in our successful funding bid, was for:

- FI/ MITEY to provide key managers and staff across the organisation - including central office functions (including HR, marketing and training) and managers/ staff at the settings intended to host the male apprentices - with gender-sensitisation training, as well as structured support around recruitment and retention.
- Kids Planet to review its HR processes to reflect a systematic focus on recruiting men as an under-represented group; develop compelling, male-inclusive marketing materials; reach out proactively to the target groups and

use 'positive action' approaches (e.g. male-only open days and 'taster' sessions); and support existing and new male staff and apprentices themselves to value and advocate for gender diversity, adding an authentic male voice to the programme.

- The 12 male apprentices would be hosted in pairs in six settings, creating opportunities for peer support, underpinned by a co-created, organisation-wide Kids Planet/MITEY male practitioner support group, with a dedicated male pastoral support worker and social media network.

By working together to develop and deliver a really well-planned and executed male apprentices programme, our aim is to put Kids Planet firmly on the map as a gender diversity innovator.

But to get there, we need to do some groundwork...



Our aim was to audit key processes, materials and approaches, and – drawing on the findings of this exercise – to deliver two sets of training for key staff within Kids Planet. One would focus on leaders and setting managers, to equip those responsible for leading and implementing the male apprentices project with the skills, understanding, confidence and practical know-how

needed to do the best possible job of systematically opening the organisation up to men; the other would focus on male staff across the organisation, to foster links and peer support, and equip men to value and advocate for gender diversity within their own personal networks; with parents of Kids Planet children; and more widely (including with potential recruits).

Building on the learning from the audit and training, we would help Kids Planet maximise its male recruitment and retention, developing assertive outreach strategies in each of the six settings, underpinned by oversight and support from Kids Planet Training Academy and FI/MITEY, alongside male-inclusive communications strategies.

Implementation

At the start of the project we used our new MITEY Audit Tool to assess Kids Planet's processes, attitudes and systems around gender, in order to provide a framework for the organisation to assess its ongoing work to build a more gender-diverse workforce. The Audit Tool, the first such tool to be developed in the UK, draws on latest research, including the [GenderEYE study](#) (on which we were co-investigators).

We surveyed staff across the organisation via an online survey about gender attitudes and behaviours (this was completed by 173 individuals); we also conducted interviews with 14 key informants across the organisation, including: CEO, training manager, HR manager, marketing manager, area managers, and managers at the six settings which were expecting to host the male apprentices; and we held interviews with existing male staff (11 men from across the organisation).

We fed evidence from this 'snapshot' research into the audit tool, assigning scores in four domains – with each featuring pre-defined criteria and identifiers:

- Leadership: How effective the leaders in the organisation are at setting and implementing a gender-inclusive agenda (four criteria assessed)
- Gender policy: How well the organisation engenders a gender-inclusive ethos within/for the team (four criteria assessed)
- Recruitment: How well the organisation develops processes and systems that can create/support a mixed gender workforce (three criteria assessed)
- Communications: How well the organisation communicates its gender-inclusive ethos (three criteria assessed).

We provided feedback for the organisation based on scores within each domain, and overall descriptors from our MITEY maturity scale, and identified some recommendations. We fed these into the development of training courses and support offered for the remainder of the project – our aim throughout being to support confident leadership around gender diversification, underpinned by systematic, gender-disaggregated data monitoring; male-inclusive marketing and communications; and gender-sensitive support for staff teams.

Our key recommendations included:

- Developing a clear, written strategy for creating and supporting a mixed-gender workforce – and the processes to support this
- Building a proactive 'outreach' approach to recruiting male apprentices, to help build a sustainable pool of men
- Agreeing individualized action plans for key leaders, with clearly defined expectations and lines of accountability
- Supporting staff across the organisation to discuss and develop their thinking on gender

Unfortunately, the timing of the project was such that it was impossible to avoid the unprecedented negative impacts of the Covid19 pandemic on the early years sectors, including:

- reduced ability to develop face-to-face and outreach recruitment activities, induction and support for male recruits
- pressure on setting managers to focus on keeping settings open with the right number of staff, and keeping everyone safe
- staff sickness, impacting on capacity to develop and implement recruitment and retention plans, and uptake of training opportunities
- heightened challenges for the early years sector to compete for potential recruits, fuelled by recruitment crises in other sectors such as hospitality and retail.

The result of all this for our project was a dramatic reduction in opportunities for managers and staff to attend training events; and subsequently to focus on designing and implementing the kinds of recruitment and support activities we recommend to help attract male recruits – such as male-only open days, and proactive, face-to-face marketing undertaken in community spaces popular with men

(at the most basic level, conversations with parents at drop-off and pick-up, and ranging up to handing out leaflets in gyms, shopping centres, barbers' shops, outside football matches etc).

We delivered all staff training online, and evaluations were overwhelmingly positive. However, attendance at some of these training events was low. Male practitioners' appetite for focused support and training was also disappointing, although it is worth nothing that this chimes with evidence (highlighted in our audit tool and training courses) of prevalent belief, in the early years sector, in 'genderless' approaches, which may lead to resistance to gender-differentiated actions aimed at supporting male practitioners, on the grounds that "we're all the same"¹.

In recognition of the unprecedented impact of Covid19 restrictions on the organisation's ability to do the kinds of intensive, face-to-face local recruitment activities mentioned above, and therefore to maximise opportunities to recruit and retain male apprentices as envisaged in the original project plan – and in view of the continued expansion in numbers of Kids Planet settings during the project² – we shifted the focus of training sessions away from setting-specific action planning, and towards organisational awareness-building.

We also created a slimmed down, recorded version of a MITEY training session, incorporating interactive exercises, which the Kids Planet Training Academy will be able to use when inducting new staff on an ongoing, ad hoc basis.

Challenges and successes

Kids Planet received an increase in apprenticeship applications from men during the project – and several men started the course – but none had completed it by the end of the project. In one case a male apprentice left for disciplinary reasons; others cited a mixture of reasons for not staying on the course, including finding other work.

Barriers to success of the project included:

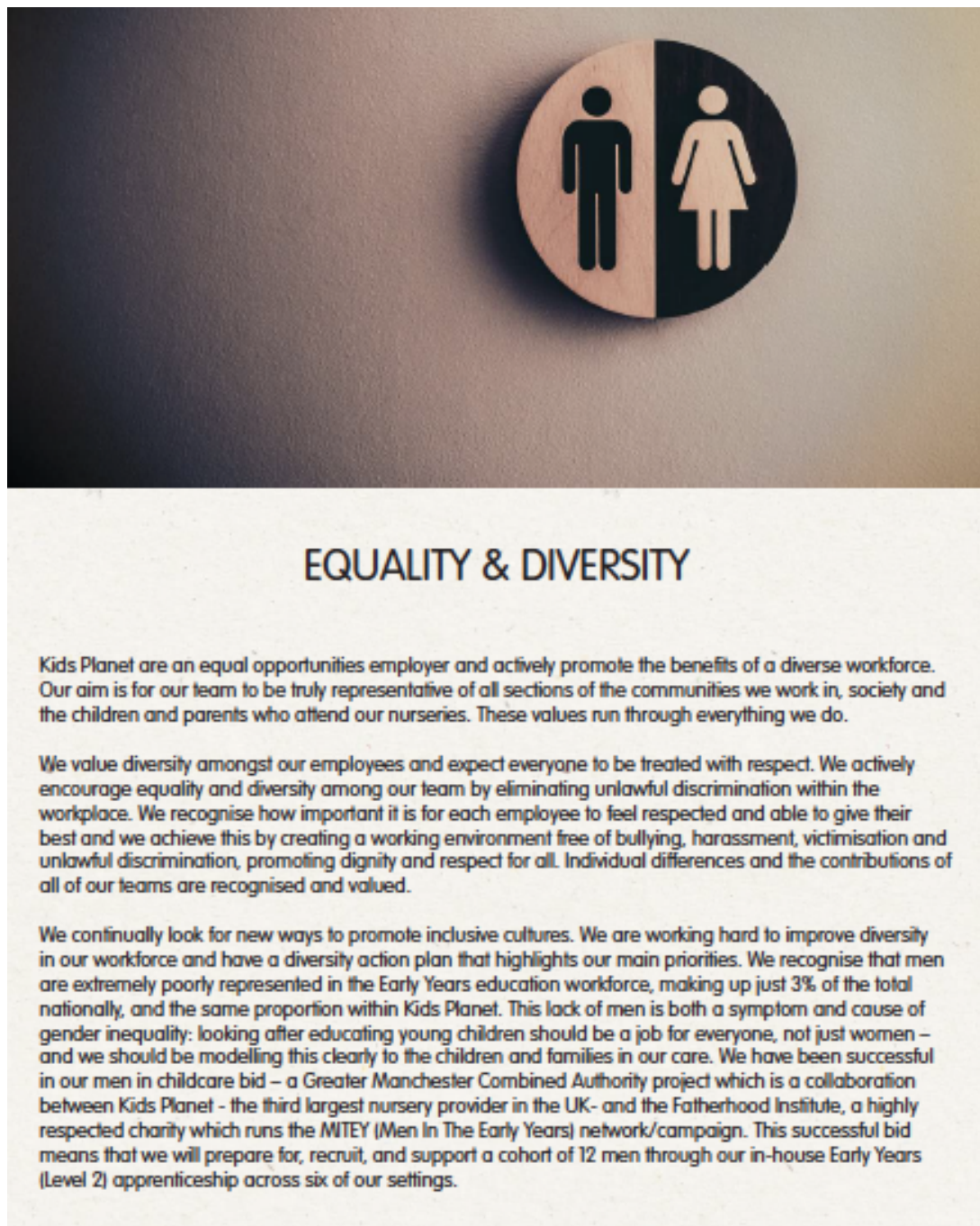
- An inability to focus efforts on providing close, targeted support for male recruits during the pandemic
- Reduced capacity for assertive outreach to identify and support potential recruits through what can feel like difficult, challenging early weeks
- Lower-than-expected interest from male recruits within the Greater Manchester area (again, likely to have been caused partially by pandemic-related recruitment issues, including increased competition from other sectors such as hospitality and retail), making it impossible to 'buddy up' neatly in the six identified 'host' settings – thus protecting against alienation and decisions to 'jump ship'.
- Sector-wide challenges to early years recruitment.

¹ Findings relating to 'genderless' vs 'gender-sensitive' settings were explored in depth in the [GenderEYE study](#), and underpin MITEY training.

² The number of Kids Planet settings has grown from 52 (March 2020) to 125 (July 2022).

During our partnership, Kids Planet has made consistent progress at building male inclusion into its promotional activities. This has included making use of imagery showing men in caring roles across its websites and social media; developing a [male-focused recruitment video](#); and publishing testimonies from male staff, trainees and blogs on the Kids Planet Training Academy website.

Gender diversification is now mentioned prominently in the organisation's careers brochure (see image below, for example).



A regular 'Men Monday' series of Facebook posts has helped heighten the visibility of men already working in the organisation, and has garnered overwhelmingly

positive feedback from parents about the benefits of their children being educated and looked after by male staff.

In each case, a photo of the male practitioner is accompanied by a short summary of their route into, and experience within, early years education and Kids Planet. Men featured recently have included Kieron Heron (July 2022); Ian Liptrot (May 2022); Jordan Farrell (February 2022); Daniel Meyler (January 2022). Examples of feedback from parents (usually mothers) have included the following:

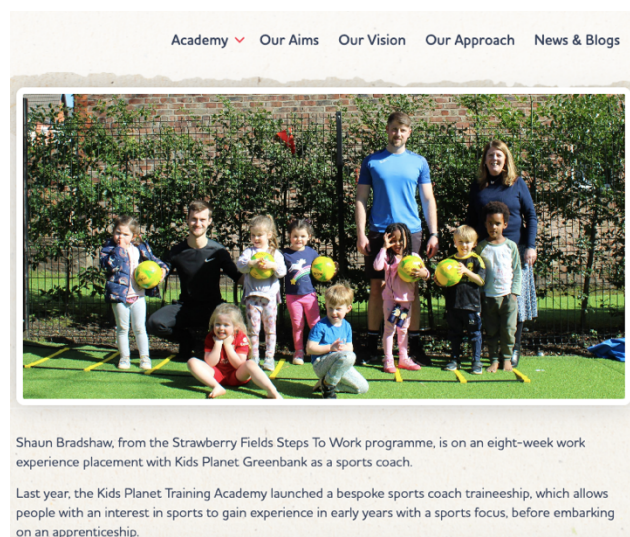
“My Daughter thinks the world of Dan 🤗 so nice to see men being appreciated in these roles (as well as the women of course).....takes a big heart to shape little minds ❤️”

“Ian is talked about daily at home and with much affection- thank you for all you do and bring to the role day in and day out Ian - especially for our little whirlwind 🌀”

Kids Planet has also developed innovative partnerships, in an attempt to widen the routes through which men can join the organisation.

These have included launching a [sports coaching traineeship option](#) – a 10-week programme for 19- to 24-year-olds incorporating work experience, functional skills and IT training.

Existing male practitioners who came into early years education via employment as sports coaches and subsequently undertook Level 3 training with Kids Planet, have been involved in promoting this career route, including via careers talks in schools.



Dissemination and impact

- Our project won a [Diversity and Inclusion award](#) from World Skills UK, sponsored by Coca Cola Europacific Partners and Toyota UK.
- We produced [a short video](#) for National Apprenticeships Week (2021)
- Jeremy Davies and Gill Mason featured in a recent [Kids Planet podcast](#) giving an overview of the Men in Childcare campaign.

- In a separate episode, a group of male practitioners also shared their experiences (see image below)



EPISODE 4 - MEN IN CHILDCARE

In this fourth episode of *All Things Early Years*, we're chatting to male childcare practitioners about their experiences working in a female dominated industry and why they think it's so important to challenge some of the stereotypes that currently exist. Featuring Jason Holmes, Tom Ward and Carl Hathway.



- Jeremy talked about the MITEY/Kids Planet partnership in a [podcast series with PACEY](#).
- Fatherhood Institute trainers have been citing the project in MITEY training courses commissioned by various local authorities, including for Vale of Glamorgan and Cheshire East Councils.
- Jason Holmes shared his personal career journey as part of a [MITEY careers event](#), co-produced in December 2021 by the Fatherhood Institute and Sheffield Hallam University.

Summary of key outputs

- Development of the MITEY Audit Tool
- Bespoke survey of nearly 180 staff
- Bespoke training programme developed and delivered
- Male-inclusive marketing and promotion programme
- Shifts in awareness and knowledge for staff
- Male-inclusive recruitment policies developed and disseminated
- Innovative sports coaching in early years trainee programme developed

Get in touch

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