

Speech given by EEO Commissioner Dr Jackie Blue to the 2014 National Summit on Men in Early Childhood Care and Teaching. Wellington, 7th March 2014.

Thank you for the invitation to the 2014 Summit.

I am truly delighted to be here.

I would like to congratulate you on this conference which importantly will give you the chance to network, refresh and re-invigorate yourselves in your goal of achieving gender equality in your profession.

I would like to acknowledge the men here who have worked with the Commission on breaking down gender stereotypes, Garth who featured in our DVD which introduced our project the National Conversation about Work, Stephen who provided feedback on an early draft of this speech and the Christchurch men's group who shared their stories with the Commission.

The Christchurch group talked about a number of public myths about men in early childhood education that needed to be dispelled.

They included public perceptions about low pay and low status, the risk of accusation of child harm and fears about self esteem. They said that pay parity with primary and secondary school teachers had made a difference. They emphasised that men needed to be invited and made welcome in early childhood centres. They needed to know how fantastic the job is.

A common pathway for most of the group was their involvement in early childhood as fathers of young children.

The majority of men in early childhood education became teachers as a second career after they had had children.

Training to become a teacher was financially difficult for some families.

The group was active in promoting men as early childhood teachers, producing posters and going to secondary schools to talk to career advisers and students about their jobs.

They also encouraged young men considering career options to go and see early childhood centres. The group supported affirmative action to increase the number of men in the sector.

Following our interviews with the Christchurch men's group we recommended active EEO programmes including scholarships to encourage and support men to work in early childhood education.

Since then scholarships have now become available .

It reminds me of the girls can do anything campaign in the 80s.

Why does increasing the number of men in early childhood matter? Let me count the ways

The education sector is unquestionably female dominated – teachers in early childhood, primary school and secondary schools are mostly women.

The job is now seen as 'women's work' and by extension education centres are arguably a "women's world."

This limits young boy's views about what they want to be and do when they grow up.

It limits their ideas about what men do and what women do.

It reinforces gender stereotypes that so limit the lives of both men and women.

You are all role models for future male ECE teachers.

I totally agree with Alex Williams when he observes that the low numbers of men in the profession is ultimately about gender stereotyping and traditional gender roles and that the social beliefs that maintain these stereotypes are unhelpful and restrictive for both men and women.

Boys and young men's achievement and even participation in education is slipping backwards relative to girls and young women.

Boys and young men need to see that education is an environment that they belong in.

You show by example that schools and education is not a "girl thing".

Young children, both boys and girls need to see men in nurturing roles.

Garth in his delightful interview for our DVD emphasised the difference that men brought to the role of early childhood educator.

He made it clear that male kindergarten teachers are different, just as competent, just as good at their job "but in their own male way".

You help boys and girls see a broader range of what being a man means. Children need role models of both genders.

But it's not only about the positive effects on children.

It's about equality and freedom from discrimination.

Equal Employment Opportunities or EEO is about the rights of all people to free choice of employment.

An occupation which is 98% women and 2% men or 98% men and 2% women is an outcome that raises deep questions about stereotypes, about barriers to participation and certainly provides a compelling reason for special measures (that's human rights language for affirmative action) to address the balance.

I am the Equal Employment Opportunities or EEO Commissioner and Human Rights Commissioner for Women. I have been a GP, a breast physician and an MP.

I am a mother first and foremost. My two daughters both attended ECE from the age of 3 months and haven't looked back.

My eldest daughter started ECE in 1990, the youngest in 1996.

There was still debate around whether full time ECE from such a young age was detrimental but as guilty as I felt leaving them each day, I instinctively knew that they were benefiting immeasurably in many other ways.

Time has proved me correct. They have turned out to be independent and confident women.

I know from personal experience that the early years are critical in a child's development and I don't need to tell you that my observation is well supported by the evidence.

To quote William Wordsworth "the child is father of the man."

There is no doubt in my mind that men have an absolutely vital role to play in the ECE sector.

As role models for boys and girls about what men can do, as role models for father's greater involvement in their child's lives, to affirm the identity of all the children attending ECE and to contribute as Garth put it "their own male way of doing things."

The evidence that the returns from quality early childhood education are high and long lasting is undeniable and is at last being recognised in public policy.

ECE is one of the most important investments a country can make.

Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realising other human rights.

Education is essential for the development of human potential, enjoyment of the full range of human rights and respect for the rights of others.

One of the core elements of the right to education includes entitlement to free and compulsory primary education.

Quality ECE has a very significant impact on a child's achievements at primary school.

As a Commission we regularly provide statistics about the representation of women at the top table – only 14% company directors, only one in four chief executives in the public service, only 28% of the judiciary, only 16% in the defence force.

Female dominated occupations have very few men. Only 2% early childhood teachers, only 8% carers in the aged care sector are men.

Yet the learners in ECE, the recipients of your services are 50% male, and there are more women than men receiving

residential aged care services, around 30% of those in residential care are male.

Over the almost ten years my girls were in ECE I never saw a male teacher. With only 2% male ECE teachers at most, that will still be the experience of many families. It's not good enough.

It is a scandal that New Zealand has one of the lowest male participation rates in the western world.

Even so the international stats for men in this sector while better than ours, are not inspiring - Norway 8%, USA 5.5%, Scotland 10%, and Australia 5.6% male teachers.

Our interviews with men in the aged care sector workforce bear some parallels with your story.

The reasons given for low numbers of men in aged care were: low pay; low status; gender expectations and client preferences.

We concluded that the absence of men in paid caring work is primarily due to pay, status and stereotyping that it is woman's work.

We recommended an active recruitment campaign aimed at increasing the number of male carers – and pointed at the work you have initiated for early childhood education.

You have achieved pay parity with primary teachers and secondary teachers, this was and is a major victory for pay equity.

It was hard fought and must be continually defended. The pay equity argument was based on a teacher is a teacher regardless of the shoe size of the children being taught.

The underlying gender basis of the disparate pay was not an overt part of the campaign. But it lurks there. Work mainly done by women or traditionally done by women is often undervalued.

I am hoping that the “Equal Pay Case” will put the spot light squarely on this issue and in one way or another tackle the real issue of pay equity where women and men receive the same pay for equal work and for work that is different but of equal value.

The ‘Equal Pay Case was lodged by Kristine Bartlett in 2012 an aged care worker who despite working in the aged care sector for over 20 years is still receiving just above the minimum wage.

The defendant her employer argued that as there were four men in the workplace receiving the same wage, there was no discrimination involved.

This case is about what has been traditionally as “women’s work” and how “women’s work” is valued.

The Equal Pay Case will test whether the 1972 Equal Pay Act which everyone believed to cover just equal pay for men and women doing the same work in fact covers equal pay for work of equal value.

If proven it will have huge implication in other female dominated, low paid professions. I dare say it will have repercussions in ECE.

There are two strategies to address pay equity and they are not mutually exclusive.

One is to **break down gender stereotyping** so that women's work and men's work is seen as a quaint idea from an unenlightened age.

One of the strategies promoted by both us and the Ministry of Women's Affairs is to get women into male dominated occupations.

We called one particular publication about women trades – Give Girls A Go. Perhaps there is a need for a publication aimed at giving men a go.

The other strategy is to **emphasise equal value**.

Perhaps there will always be jobs that are done predominantly by men or by women.

In an equitable society the value placed on those jobs will not be determined by gender but by other factors – skill, effort, contribution.

My EEO team and I have been doing some work looking at the barriers faced by groups such as women, Maori, ethnic minorities, and persons with disability in the Public Service.

We looked at the numbers employed in the workforce, in senior management teams, the salary and pay gender gap, recruitment and promotion pathways along with professional development.

We found to our amazement that Corrections was a shining star! They had virtually no gender pay gap, 44% women employed with 51% of women in the senior management team.

When we met with the executive team they re-iterated the importance of having gender balance.

They had an active recruitment programme to ensure that this was the case.

One of the critical messages is that if you want more men, women, Māori, people from other ethnic backgrounds, people with disabilities or whoever you are missing in your workforce, you have to go out and get them.

Importantly they said having both male and female correction staff at men prisons and women's prisons made the job easier. Their focus is on rehabilitation and a gender balance on the staff reflected the gender balance in the community and therefore also helped with the re-integration of prisoners back into the community.

Our young girls and boys need to see all of the community reflected in early childhood settings.

Men must be made welcome, and actively recruited into the sector.

I want to thank you for the invitation to be here today. I support your efforts to achieve gender equality.

You must keep going.

I wish you all the best for the conference.

Kia Kaha