**ICMEO Conference, Luxembourg**

**Workshop 1 "Men and Childcare"**

Facilitators: Adrienne Burgess, Fatherhood Institute, UK; Eberhard Schaefer, Fathers’ Center, Berlin, DE

Date: Tuesday 18 October 2016-10-26

Start: 9:30 am

End: 12.00 hours

Break: 10:50-11:05

**The participants**

Approximately 50 people attended the workshop. There was a fairly equal gender balance between male/female participants. The proportion of practitioners was higher than in the conference as a whole.

**Structure and content**

At the beginning of the workshop, the workshop leaders briefly outlined the contents of the workshop, emphasising that the focus was on childcare by fathers AT HOME (5 minutes); and identifying input/participation by conference attendees as a main purpose of the workshop. The facilitators made clear that feedback and recommendations from the workshop are of great importance, as they are to be considered for inclusion n the final declaration of the ICMEO congress.

Then followed a short presentation by Eberhard Schäfer on the work of the Fathers’ Centre in Berlin and by Adrienne Burgess on the work of the Fatherhood Institute in the UK.

An ‘Ice-breaker’/ participation task followed: working in pairs, participants introduced themselves (and their work) to each other and exchanged their expectations / desired learning objectives from the workshop. Each person recorded their ‘top topic’ on a card; and the facilitator asked for short ‘feedback’ reports to the whole group. These were lively and interesting, some based on personal experiences, others on professional practice. After the discussion all topic-cards were collected by the Facilitators.

This was followed by a presentation by Adrienne Burgess on the benefits of

the engagement of men (fathers) in the care and upbringing of their children

- on children (well-being and development)

- on mothers

- on services (health, education and family professionals in particular)

- on society

- on fathers themselves.

The session was interactive, with Adrienne asking for evidence from the audience before offering some research findings. Again, there was substantial, positive interaction between the facilitator and the participants, whose contributions were reflective and illuminating, in both personal and professional terms.

At this point, there was a 15-minute ‘comfort break’ and networking opportunity. During this, the Facilitators read and sorted the topic-cards they had collected earlier, which identified participants’ expectations and learning goals.

The main themes that emerged, and were addressed in discussion after the break, were:

**(i) ‘Father inclusive services’:** fathers should be much more proactively included by professionals during the delivery of services to families before and after the birth, and in children’s early years.

**(ii) Work life balance for fathers / fathers in the working world:** fathers should be helped visibly to reconcile work and childcare. For this to be achieved, substantial change in employment policy, practices and attitudes is required: employer willingness; management understanding; policy change at the state-political level (paternity leave and parental leave with a reserved, well-paid, non-transferable element for fathers); flexibility in working practices, and so on.

**(iii) Fathers after separation:** ‘Shared Parenting’ (where children spend substantial time with both parents) should be the aspiration, and the ‘starting point’ for family lives when parents separate or do not live together. For ‘two homes’ to become the norm requires this aspiration to be accepted by politicians, with concomitant changes to legal practice and professional support. To optimise children’s wellbeing, parental post-separation conflict needs to be tackled and resolved, child-oriented counselling and mediation made widely available.

(iv) The existence and needs of **same-sex parents** should be acknowledged and treated as seriously as those of heterosexual parents.

Cards summarising these four topic areas were pinned on the felt display board.

Due to time constraints, the workshop had to be brought to a rapid conclusion: each participant was asked to distribute three coloured stickers onto the topic cards according to their own preferences as to the importance of, and urgency for, political change. There was again very lively participation and three recommendations for the Final Declaration of the Conference:

**RECOMMENDATION 1: ‘Father inclusive Services’:** all professional services to support parents, families and children should include and address fathers systematically and from the very beginning. This will contribute to gender equality and to better outcomes for children, mothers and fathers.

**RECOMMENDATION 2: Work life balance:** fathers should be seen as a target group for work life balance issues in relation to employers, employees and at state policy level

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** ‘Shared Parenting’ (‘Two homes’) should be the supported aspiration for family life after separation / divorce.

In addition, there was a concern (already included in the Draft Final Declaration) that men and fathers play a more substantial role than they have hitherto, in supporting gender equality.

**Assessment / observations / remarks**

The facilitators had intended the workshop to be highly participatory and vigorous, and this was achieved.

The simultaneous translation was excellent: there were no problems with communication, nor did the simultaneous translation slow down, or inhibit, discussion.

We would like to thank the organizers for their invitation and the opportunity to present this important topic at the ICMEO conference.

*Eberhard Schäfer & Adrienne Burgess, 26 October 2016*