Early Years – A valid career choice for our young people?

The early year’s period is a critical time for child health and wellbeing. Where children grow up with secure relationships, a safe home and positive learning environment, adequate housing, good nutrition the probability of a successful career and lasting positive health and wellbeing is strong. On the other hand, adverse childhood experiences in the early years such as poverty, child abuse and neglect, or parental substance misuse, not only impacts negatively on children’s health and wellbeing but can effect a wide range of future outcomes including learning, anti-social behaviour, and premature ill-health and death. Evidence clearly shows that an additional important influence on the outcomes for children at the age of sixteen and their career choices at seventeen is the quality of the early year’s provision they attend (OECD, 2017). Good quality early years education contributes to children from all backgrounds including children from disadvantaged backgrounds having better self-regulation, pro-social behaviour, be less disposed to hyperactivity and achieve higher outcomes at GCSE’s. Attending early years’ education also provides a strong influence on the academic route chosen by children aged seventeen (OECD 2017; EPSIE, 2015; Sammons, Toth, & Sylva, 2015). Yet, although we understand the importance of this influence in the Early Years, Early Years is a profession that is currently struggling to recruit practitioners to the profession, despite the many options available through apprenticeships, level two and three courses, to the wide variety of degree courses available to our young people.

In 2016 a Workforce Strategy consultation meeting highlighted multiple issues within the sector which included; the recruitment of students, quality of level 3 qualifications, retention of practitioners, pay, perception of the professionalism, and the requirements for GCSE English and maths (which has now been removed but requires a minimum of functional skills), being barriers to this profession. The Workforce Strategy Task Group is currently working to attempt to address these issues through working with qualification providers, promotion of early years with the careers centre, and the option of a more gender equal profession, thus widening the demographics of this important profession though promoting Early Years as a valid option for men. One of the ways in which we can do this is through also highlighting the career development routes for young people choosing Early Years as a long term career, a few examples of these include; nursery practitioners, leadership and management roles, progression to work in the community with the Health Visiting teams, to offer Family Support, to become early years teachers or further education and higher education lectures and Early Years sector advisors.

Therefore, when you are supporting the young people in your schools to choose a career pathway, please consider the promotion of a career in Early Years as a valid choice.

For more information about Early Years Career pathways contact: CK Careers: enquiries@ckcareers.org.uk

To become involved with or for more information about the Early Years Workforce Strategy contact: email: QISO@calderdale.gov.uk