

## THE MALE CHILDCARE WORKER

Mates would think twice before ribbing Matthew Hochstetter about his choice of career, knowing the passionate childcare worker played soccer for South Africa as a teenager. Hochstetter, 25, came to Australia three years ago, and works at the Top Ryde Early Learning centre in Sydney, where he enjoys sharing his love of sport with the children.

Statistically, he's in the minority, with ABS figures showing about 95 per cent of the childcare industry's 85,000 workers are female. "I was the only male here a couple of years ago," he says. "Now there are four men at this centre – one of them is my brother-in-law." (It seems to be something of a family business. Hochstetter's wife is director of another childcare centre.)

Still, the pioneer needs his broad shoulders

to ignore the assumptions of those who are surprised to come across a man working with young children. He finds it disheartening, but believes attitudes are changing across the board, and particularly among single-parent families who love the fact he's a positive male role model. "In fact, through word-of-mouth, we now have families seeking us out because of that."

Hochstetter's passion for helping children learn and develop has been around since his teenage years, and yet there was still some shock among friends when he eventually went into childcare. Luckily, not everyone is as blinkered: "My family understands and supports what I do."

And, while he's currently studying for a degree in education, his plan is to continue working in early childhood teaching. "It's not the highest-paying career; I think that's probably what deters a lot of men," he admits. "For me, though, it's the right career choice. I wouldn't change it for the world." >

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Matthew Hochstetter takes pride in being a positive role model to the kids in his care.