



Interview of the Month **MÄNNER.CH**

*Interview with Markus Theunert
Director, Männer.ch
Program Manager, MenCare Switzerland*

INTERVIEWED BY VIBEKE THOMSEN, SHECANHECAN

1) Männer.ch is a Swiss organisation working with men and fathers to promote gender equality and challenge gender norms. Could you tell us more about your mission and objectives?

Gender politics are complex but we put it quite simple: We are the association of progressive men and fathers in Switzerland, gathering together professionals, researchers and activists as well. Everyone who shares the vision that men must shoulder half of unpaid (care) work is part of this progressive alliance. (Of course that means at the same time that women must have half of political and economic power.)

Within this framework we do advocacy work fostering a fair share of burdens between genders. A few weeks ago we were celebrating our probably biggest success so far: Thanks to our work, the Swiss population was able to vote about the introduction of a paternity leave in Switzerland. 60% of the Swiss population said YES. That shows once again that the population backs gender equality more than political institutions. In parallel, we consider our organisation as an umbrella of professionals working with boys, men and fathers in a gender sensitive and transformative way. What is crucial for our identity: Our advocacy work has to be evidence based – and not ideology based.



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2) What lessons can we learn from the Covid crisis and how working from home has impacted parents differently? What positive outcomes, if any, do you hope to see for parents from this crisis?

First of all: Covid taught us once again that we imperatively have to consider class while reflecting gender. What I want to say: There is not THE Covid experience. If you have a job and if that job can be done from home as well you are extremely privileged – regardless of your gender.

Empirical findings in the german speaking part of Europe are contradictory. Personally, I think that inequalities concerning unfair distribution of childcare and domestic duties haven't really changed. Couples who did share fair continued to share fair during lockdown. But if there are many men who made new care experiences that didn't take their half of the responsibility before...I wouldn't be so sure.

To make it short: Covid-19 is not the big game changer in terms of gender equality from my point of view - neither in a conservative nor a progressive way.

3) What measures can be taken concretely at state level to encourage fathers to be more involved with childcare duties? What are the lessons and shortcomings of the Scandinavian models for example?

Research and international experiences seem quite clear to me:

- Introduce mandatory parental leave for fathers (well remunerated);
- Ensure that childcare services are available, of high quality and affordable; and
- Install a gender equal tax system.

Governments don't have a lack of knowledge of what would work. They have a lack of political will to implement what would really work as a game changer!



Don't underestimate what it takes to make men a target group to promote gender equality.

4) Can you tell us more about your MenCare Program, including the advice provided by männer.ch to companies who want to create an inclusive family policy?

Our national program MenCare Switzerland is just preparing to launch the new phase 2021-2024 in January 2021. We act more focused compared to the phases 2014-2017 and 2017-2020.

Our center of attention: men who become fathers. We try to scale up trainings for them – at the workspace as well as in hospitals. In companies, it is the first step to consider male employees as target group when it comes to the foundation of a family.

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5) Research indicates that domestic violence increased during lockdown in most countries. Männer prepared a toolkit for 'men under pressure'. According to you, what concrete actions have worked to decrease violence against women? What would it take to see an end to it?

To end violence against women means to transform masculinities and to change social norms. Everyone has to know: It's NOT normal if men want to dominate themselves and others. It's NOT normal be violent towards yourself and others. It's NOT normal to take more than you give.

We have to anchor a new normality: Men being connected with themselves and others, men living sustainably, men living in meaningful and violence-free relationships, men exploring their full human potentials....that's normal.

6) What main change have you witnessed in the last 10 to 20 years in terms of shared duties during parenthood? What advice would you give to young fathers today?

The social norms have changed...but not fully. Young men are today expected to be involved fathers...but they are expected to remain breadwinner as well. These expectations are highly contradictory and that's why you can only fail if you want to meet both of them. That's why it's so important to encourage (young) men to speak out loud and to refuse these unrealistic expectations. Many men still suffer too long and too silently.



Find out more:
www.maenner.ch
www.facebook.com/maenner.ch



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