

## He's in charge: Mannies tend kids, are role models

Move over, Mary Poppins.

Families - especially single parents with sons - are opening up to the idea that a good nanny doesn't have to be female. Enter the manny, a caregiver willing to not only change diapers and whip up mac 'n' cheese, but also throw a football, wrestle and play video games.

"I'm not afraid of any challenges," said Michael Listermann, a 21-year-old male nanny in Sherman Oaks. "I have no problem driving to Disneyland and taking the kids. I'm young enough to have fun, but I'm responsible."

During his eight months working for a Hollywood family with two boys and a girl, all under 8, Listermann made a point of getting the kids outdoors for plenty of exercise.

"They ate McDonalds. The family was busy and didn't have time to cook. I'd tell them, OK, we're going to do 20 minutes of homework and then we'll go outside and play basketball."

To be sure, mannies are still very much the minority among kid-minders.

Katie Vaughan, owner of Beverly Hills-based Westside Nannies, said about 95 percent of her working recruits are women, and 5 percent are men. But even with such a small percentage of male recruits, she can't place all of them - something she hopes will. In fact, in some cases male nannies might even have an advantage in the job market.

"Many times men can fit the family situation better, where there may not be a father in the home, or there are preteen boys," she said.

An abundance of boys is what helped Mason McCulley, an aspiring actor from Alabama, land a job as a manny for a family with two boys in Beverly Hills. Even though all of his friends have office jobs, McCulley said he feels right at home as a manny.

"I play sports and play outside with them. Playing the games takes me back," he said.

And forget about Mr. French - the portly, genteel butler who found himself caring for a trio of kids on TV's classic "Family Affair."

As an athletic 24-year-old, McCulley fits the active older-brother image of the modern manny families seek out.

Nicole Weiler, a mother of five in Woodland Hills, used a neighborhood boy named Bobby as a baby sitter for several years starting when her boy/girl twins were 2. She and her kids, who are now in high school, remember their male minder fondly.

"He'd do more fun things, like play on the trampoline. The girls (baby sitters) were all delicate and were always on the phone," said Weiler's daughter, Megan, who is now 17.

Aside from providing more rough-and-tumble play than female nannies, mannies have other advantages.

Marcia Campbell, co-owner of C&C Nanny Referral, an agency in Studio City, said she finds mannies generally take their work more seriously than nannies.

"They're more committed," Campbell said. "You get all kinds of female nannies, but for the guys, it's a career."

That's especially true for mannies who have been trained abroad, she said.

Allison Myerson, mother of 14-month-old Benjamin, hired her grandfather's former caregiver as a manny for her son. Michael Dealo, 34, is from the Philippines. When he's not taking Benjamin to Universal Studios or the park, Dealo cooks and cleans for the Myersons, all for \$200, three days a week.

"I enjoy it because I treat them as my family in L.A.," said Dealo, who has three daughters in the Philippines. He is hoping to bring his family to California within the next several months.

Campbell has had some success introducing the manny idea to families with boys. For instance, she got a call from a single father with three sons looking for care.

"He hadn't even thought of it," she said. "He was kind of worried because he has a son who is 17 and he didn't want someone who was too young. He said, 'She can't be too cute.'"

The father was thrilled when Campbell offered up one of her live-in men who cooks, and the manny has an interview with that family next week.

Still, she said she has a very difficult time placing her men. Part of the problem is the "new" factor, as in, "Do you want to be the first to hire a man on the block?"

And then there's the widespread concern that a man would be much more likely to abuse a child.

"I would never hire a male nanny or baby sitter," said Susan Greene, a criminal prosecutor and

mother in Thousand Oaks. "The reality is that men are so much more likely to be sexual predators than women."

Other moms argue that hiring a female nanny isn't a guarantee against trouble.

"You don't need (to be a man) to abuse a child," said Weiler, the Woodland Hills mom. "There are plenty of stories of women doing horrible things."

Still, Weiler said she would probably not hire a nanny for her 18-month-old baby girl, despite the positive experience with her boy baby sitter years ago.

"I don't feel for a girl that is going to be the best situation," she said. "It would depend on the person. I'm probably a little more choosy because our news media has done a good job about publicizing all the bad stuff out there."

barbara.correa@dailynews.com

(818) 713-3662