

PLAYTRAIN TIMELINE (THE FIRST 20 YEARS)

1979:

- National Playing Fields Association launches Play Resource Centre in Ward End Park House (peppercorn rent negotiated with the City Council). Rocky Sharrock leads as Resources Officer, and Harry Shier as Assistant.

1980:

- As the piles of reusable scrap mount up, Harry is concerned that many adults working with children lack both skills and imagination to make good use of them. West Midlands Arts provides funding for a pilot series of “junk crafts” workshops at the Resource Centre.

1981:

- With the success of the pilot, WMA funds two-thirds of a salary for an “Arts Training Officer” and the City Council finds the other third. Harry gets the job and calls the new project “PLAY-TRAIN”. Regular workshop programmes are run throughout the year.

1984:

- WMA increases funding and PLAY-TRAIN starts to generate income. A second post is created and Janette Bushell joins. As well as the workshop programme in Ward End, PLAY-TRAIN travels throughout the West Midlands taking creative play workshops where they are needed.
- PLAY-TRAIN runs a way-ahead-of-its-time kids’ computer programming project with robot turtles, 30 years before the emergence of Coder Dojos

1985:

- PLAY-TRAIN gets sponsorship (and free equipment) from Yamaha to run a ground-breaking kids’ electronic music project, and hires Cara Tivey, keyboard player with Everything but the Girl (who also had a UK number one with Billy Bragg), to take the lead.

1986:

- Without warning NPFA closes the Resource Centre and makes all staff, including Play-TRAIN, redundant (they expected the City Council to take it on, but the Council called their bluff and let the staff go, then opened their own play resource centre on the same site). Harry and Janette launch a campaign to keep PLAY-TRAIN going.

1987:

- Volunteers agree to form a management committee with Tom Pettit as chair. A new independent charity is created and WMA agrees to transfer the PLAY-TRAIN grant from NPFA to the new charity, so the new independent PLAYTRAIN is born. The City Council offers PLAYTRAIN a new home in Sparkbrook Community Centre.

1988:

- Janette leaves and Haki Kapasi joins
- Jacqueline Contré joins as PLAYTRAIN’s first Administrator.
- Sue Smith joins as third Training Officer.

1991:

- PLAY-TRAIN launches Asian Children Play researched and written by Haki Kapasi.

1993:

- World Play Summit in Melbourne Australia. Harry and Haki attend to present the findings of Asian Children Play. Harry learns about A31.

1994:

- Article 31 Action Pack published
- Harry and Haki attend the International Play Association (IPA) USA conference in Birmingham Alabama, and subsequently visit innovative anti-racist projects around the USA, where Haki meets Jack Guillebeaux and learns about “More is Caught Than Taught”.

1996:

- Article 31 Action Network launched
- Jack Guillebeaux visits the UK and facilitates the More is Caught Than Taught conference and Training Black Trainers workshop.

1997:

- First pilots of the Article 31 Children’s Consultancy Scheme at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and Walsall Museum and Art Gallery, West Midlands.

2000:

- Haki leaves to launch Inspire Consultancy.
- PLAYTRAIN coordinates “Playfest 2000”, a millennium celebration project bringing together children from the five countries of Britain and Ireland in a creative celebration of the right to play. The kids seized control of Cardiff Town Hall for a weekend.
- Harry leaves and moves to Nicaragua, Central America.
- Claire Mills takes over as PLAYTRAIN’s first Director.