December 2006
Welcome to our Winter newsletter.

In this issue, we are pleased to enclose details of our Spring training programme for play workers and early years practitioners, along with details of our most recent projects and events.

Claire Mills
Director

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The Collectors at Large!

The Collectors, playtrain’s latest creative arts project, is designed to engage children and young people as decision makers in our own organisation. We are exploring their experiences as children growing up in Birmingham and what they think the future holds.

The project is very much underway and creative sessions are a hive of activity as the children and young people involved devise, design, create and construct.

Examples of the work in progress include a man visiting from the future; a set of a teenager’s bedroom and designs of their fantasy worlds, large canvases of 2-5 yr olds artistic work; a film called South Birmingham Side Story and a play about a young woman with specific needs called Being Vicky.

The exhibition, 9th-18th March at the Custard Factory, promises to be an exciting and professional affair - entirely led by the children and young people involved. You are warmly invited to come along to celebrate the best of Birmingham’s young artists.

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WOW! this is big

How can young children inform the development of arts, culture & leisure services?

playtrain is delighted to be delivering WOW! this is big, the first national exhibition and conference to demonstrate how children aged 5 and under can be actively engaged in decision making to improve public services.

WOW! this is big, taking place at The Custard Factory in Birmingham, will share the findings from playtrain’s innovative early years consultation research project with two significant regional cultural venues.

The event will launch with a conference on 8th February 2007 featuring key note presentations from the researchers and partners involved.

There will also be an opportunity to participate in workshops and creative activities that demonstrate good practice in working with young children and explore issues connected to young children’s participation.

The exhibition will be open to the public from 9th - 12th February and will feature images from the project and information about children’s participation. There will be a variety of events and activities taking place at the exhibition during this period for children & families, early years workers, artists and gallery staff.

To request booking information please go to www.playtrain.org.uk/wowthisisbig or call Claire at playtrain on 0121 449 6665

Dudley Children & Young People Have Their Say

From Breakfast Clubs to Youth Groups, and Nurseries to Childminders—playtrain have been creatively engaging with 100’s of children & young people of all ages across Dudley Borough to find out what they think of existing childcare services and their ideas for future provision. Choice, free-

dom, flexibility, safety, age appropriate activities, affordability, accessibility, excitement, challenge and access to information are all high on the list of priorities for these children & young people.

Dudley Children’s Services, who commissioned the consultation, are taking the children’s views and recommendations forward in their planning and are committed to continuing to involve young people in how childcare services are developed & delivered.

Contact Claire for more details.

In Brief...

Art of Play

playtrain is now able to announce its latest Art of Play mentored placement. This is an Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council supported bursary for an emerging artist to facilitate creative sessions with newly arrived children in an after-school club.

The sessions will take place between January and March 2007.

For more information on how to apply please contact Ruth.

Newly Arrived Children

Thanks to playtrain’s partnership with Birmingham City Council’s Study Support Team, we are currently embarking on our first outreach Collectors project.

Artist Mat Beckett will be working with a Handsworth based group of newly arrived children and young people on a visual and sound orientation project. The outcomes will be exhibited at The Custard Factory, in Birmingham from 9th–18th March 2007.

Learning My Way

playtrain were pleased to be invited to deliver a ‘Creative Activities for Childminders’ workshop at the recent ‘Learning My Way’ conference organised by the Dudley Council Early Years team.

“Thank you again for your unique and inspiring workshop, we will definitely be inviting you back.” (Early Years Adviser)

The conference explored child initiated learning for under 5’s.
Spring Course Programme 2007

Back to Play Training
playtrain’s Spring Course Programme is designed especially for early years and play practitioners, childminders, emerging artists and anyone else wanting to explore the benefits of offering creative play sessions to children and young people. For more details and to book your place, please contact Ruth or Claire at playtrain.

The Big Play Day
Friday 2nd February, 2007 (10-4pm) at playtrain offices Cost: £20 - lunch included
Packed with creative activities linked to music, dance, visual arts, games, drama and much more, this day will provide plenty of opportunities to play and lots of brilliant ideas to take away.

101 Things to Do With a Cardboard Box
Friday 16th February, 2007 (10-4pm), at playtrain offices Cost: £20 - lunch included
This day provides plenty of engagement activities designed to explore the many opportunities for creative play using a cardboard box - cheap and yet priceless!

Big It Up—Making Day
Friday 23rd February, 2007 (10-4pm), at playtrain offices Cost: £20 - lunch included
How to make large scale structures and create different play environments using cheap everyday materials—this day provides activities and advice for 'bigging it up' in your setting - be prepared to get messy and have lots of fun!

Playing with Dance & Movement
Friday 2nd March, 2007 (10am-1pm), at playtrain offices Cost: £20 - lunch included
This day will give you all you need to get moving with your group of children or young people.

Playing with Sound
Friday 9th March, 2007 (10-4pm), at playtrain offices Cost: £20 - lunch included
Not musical? Perfect! This day demonstrates how simple games, storytelling and rhythm activities can lead to amazing musical play sessions.

Playing with Drama & Games
Friday 16th March, 2007 (10-4pm), at playtrain offices Cost: £20 - lunch included
Join us on an inspiring journey into the imagination as we voyage on adventures into the unknown - this is not drama as you know it but merely tapping into your inner child and letting them come out to play!

Playing with Natural & Recycled Materials
Friday 23rd March, 2007 (10-4pm), at playtrain offices Cost: £20 - lunch included
Another messy play session designed to demonstrate how everyday household & garden items and a few simple starter activities can lead to open ended creative play sessions where the results are limitless.

Monday Twilight Sessions
Evening sessions designed to support successful relationships with children and young people.

Reflective Practice & Documentation
Monday 12th February, 2007 (6-9pm), at playtrain offices Cost: £12
Introducing participants to reflective practice and exploring the power of images to convey children’s expressive languages and communicate experiences.

Promoting Positive Behaviour
Monday 26th February, 2007 (6-9pm), at playtrain offices Cost: £12
An opportunity to reflect on some of the causes of challenging behaviour & to develop strategies for promoting positive behaviour.

Disability Equality & Inclusion
Monday 12th March, 2007 (6-9pm), at playtrain offices Cost: £12
Delivered from a social model perspective of disability and suitable for anyone who wishes to raise their own awareness in order to work positively with disabled children.

Children’s Participation: Past, Present & Future
Monday 26th March, 2007 (6-9pm), at playtrain offices Cost: £12
Covering the political background to children’s rights, the current state of play and what the future holds for those working with and for children and young people.

All courses are part subsidised by Arts Council England
playtrain

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playtrain is the leading provider of hands on training, creative children’s consultations and research for organisations working with children.

We aim to promote the creative potential of children to help make childhood an inspiring journey of discovery.

playtrain works with play and early year’s services, the arts, statutory sectors, community groups and anyone wanting to work creatively with children.

Meet the Team!

Ruth Harrell — playtrain Development Manager

I was around 22 when I seriously started to consider a career working with and for children and young people. During this time I was working at Midlands Arts Centre with Stage 2 Youth Theatre and delivering drama sessions for mac’s Education department.

I then started a teacher training course and was advised to participate in some creative training with playtrain. This was to change my practice forever. It seems silly now but I had never really considered the value and benefits of adopting a child and process led practice - I felt liberated!

I was fortunate enough to develop a successful freelance career - delivering process led creative sessions with children and adults, working in schools and play settings and directing youth and professional shows. I also continued to perform and delivered creative training on behalf of playtrain - essentially getting paid to play!

When the post of playtrain Development Manager came up I knew I had to go for it - I was head over heels in love with the company and the values it holds strong and I knew I wanted to play a bigger part in it.

Nine months in and I am amazed at our achievements (this has been our most successful financial year to date), can’t wait to see what the future holds and am really pleased to be part of such an inspiring organisation - thank you playtrain!

The End Game

Aaahh….the joy of games!

Games are an essential part of working with children of all ages. They can encourage co-operation, team work, healthy competition, and a great deal of fun and laughter! Here’s one or two of our personal favourites...

Snow Balls

Split the group into two equal teams. Mark a line down the centre of the room and scatter scrunched up newspaper balls across the playing space.

Each team has one minute to empty their side of ‘snow balls’, by throwing them at the opposing team.

The team with the least balls on their side at the end of the minute wins! Good as a quick and energetic ice breaker.

The Sun Shines On...

Everyone sits in a circle apart from one person who stands in the middle.

The person in the centre says, “The sun shines on ...(something of their own choice like—“everyone who has a brother”). Everyone with a brother then swaps seats. The person in the middle has to try to get a seat. The game goes on with new people coming into the middle when they loose their seat. Great for getting to know a group.