

Gigi's Playhouse
Down Syndrome Awareness Centers
www.gigisplayhouse.org

GIGI'S NEWS

Serving two locations

Loving a child with Down syndrome is contagious... Help us spread the love!!

Hoffman Estates
 1069 W Golf Rd • Hoffman Estates, IL 60169
 847-885-PLAY • www.gigisplayhouse.com

Plainfield
 10052 S. Bode Rd, Unit D • Plainfield, IL 60585
 630-778-PLAY • www.gigisplayhousetoo.com

April 2007

Proud Families

Tune-in to Channel 7 to see our adoptive families share their heartfelt stories!

Karen Meyers from ABC 7 News came to Gigi's Playhouse to interview three families, each of whom have adopted a child with Down syndrome. The differences amongst the families were obvious--a single mother, first time parents, and parents of seven children. But the common thread they each shared was stronger than any difference--their love for a child with Down syndrome. As they spoke about their decisions to adopt, their smiles gave away the joy they have come to know through their child. While each had their own reasons for the unconventional choice of special needs adoption, their outlook was the same. In response to Karen's question about the challenges of raising a child with Down syndrome, one proud father responded, "I struggle to get her coat on in the morning. But so do my brothers and sisters with their own kids!" A theme throughout the interviews was



the fact that these children are just that--children! Gigi's Playhouse was proud to have played a part in two of these adoptions and now in helping them share their stories!! The segment will be shown on ABC 7 News on either Sunday March 25th or Sunday April 1st at 8:00 a.m.



THANK YOU COM ED EMPLOYEES and United Way!!!

A special Uncle breaks records!

Little Nathan Kathera's Uncle John went above and beyond for Down syndrome awareness (and his nephew too)!! John works for Com Ed and every year the employees raise funds for local charities through United Way. Each division organizes various events hosted by the Com Ed employees. The point is to have fun while raising funds and awareness for local charities. John was on a mission!! Armed with our presentation board and numerous awareness materials, John set up camp at each event and showed everyone what the Playhouse was all about!! His hard work paid off!

They raised more than they ever have for a local charity and United Way matched it!! Together they raised OVER \$20,000!!! When they came to the Playhouse to present us with the check, you could see the pride in their faces. They all worked hard, but John went above and beyond by lugging that big presentation board around—and his effort came from the love of his nephew. What an incredible way of showing his support and pride of having a nephew with Down syndrome. John not only raised an incredible amount of money but he opened up so many people's eyes to the incredible potential of children with Down syndrome. Nathan is such a lucky little boy to have an uncle so willing to help pave the future for him and all of his friends with Down syndrome.

Thank you to John, the Kathera family, United Way and all of the amazing Com Ed employees! It was so great to have all of these incredible people at the Playhouse. It was clear that they had learned about the potential of our kids and were ready and willing to share their knowledge with others.

When this project started we looked at this as a great awareness opportunity. We were just hoping to raise \$1,000 to help pay for our new carpeting! Imagine our surprise when they not only raised awareness but \$20,000!! Thank you, Thank you, Thank you!!!



HOFFMAN ESTATES LOCATION



our weekly open Play group is awesome!!

Check out this gang!! Open Play is every Thursday from 12:30 to 2 p.m. We have pizza, volunteers and fun for all! Siblings and friends are welcome!!!



Friday friends welcomed new friends Bridget, James, Erika, and Tim from

Naperville last month to our dance

party. We had a great time line dancing and showing our moves. We've got great things coming up this year from our BBQ to our softball game so mark your calendars on the fourth Friday of the month!



Our walkers and crawlers programs are a big hit!! Both are facilitated by therapists and both classes are getting rave reviews!! Check the calendar for program times at both locations!!!

The second Saturday of the month is action packed!!

9 to 9:45 a.m. -- The new

Crawlers group

10 to 11:30 a.m. -- The 2-
and-under group

12:30 to 2 p.m. -- The
Hop, Skip and Jumpers
(3-6)

We will also be squeezing the new Saturday morning tutoring in there for the literacy program!!

Open Play is a great time for parents, grandparents or extended family to network with each other. This crew of 1-year-olds learns so much from each other and so do their parents! They were all eating pizza together (which of course brought up choking stories and good strategies to help you through it). Some are first babies and others are number five or six (hence the big pizza crust in their mouths!!)

We have been getting a lot of requests regarding a baby sign class so if you know anyone or if you yourself would like to facilitate this much needed class please contact Katie Renner at 847-885-PLAY.

Here is a picture of the walkers group. Max in the front row joined us for the picture after his first day of the new Saturday morning tutoring for the literacy program!!!

Open Mic night is a great chance to make new friendships! Open Mic features equal number of peers with Down syndrome as without. Karaoke, jokes, dancing...you call it!! Every second Friday of the month from 7 to 9 p.m. Please RSVP so we have enough volunteers and food!!











We would like to welcome Jenni Von Tobel to the Playhouse as our new Site Coordinator and Literacy Director. Jenni comes to us from Lambs Farm and over 14 years experience in helping those with special needs. We are very excited to have her aboard. Welcome!!!



HOFFMAN ESTATES LOCATION

April 2007

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2 Literacy Program 10:30 - 5:30 	3 Literacy Program 9:00 - 12:00 3:30 - 6:30 	4 Literacy Program 10:00 - 2:00 	5 Open Play 12:30 - 2:00 Everyone welcome! 	6 Reserved 2-4	7 Literacy Program 8:00 - 10:00
8 Hispanic Play Group 11am-1pm	9 Literacy Program 10:30 - 5:30 	10 Literacy Program 9:00 - 12:00 3:30 - 6:30 	11 Literacy Program 10:00 - 2:00 Special Intention Group 	12 Open Play 12:30 - 2:00 Everyone welcome! 	13 Reserved 2-4 Open Mic Night 7-9pm High School Ages	14 Crawlers 9-9:45 am 2 & Under Group 10:00 - 11:30 HOP, SKIP & JUMPERS 12:00 - 1:30 
15	16 Literacy Program 10:30 - 5:30 	17 Literacy Program 9:00 - 12:00 3:30 - 6:30 	18 Literacy Program 10:00 - 2:00 	19 Open Play 12:30 - 2:00 Everyone welcome! 	20 Reserved 2-4	21 Literacy Program 8:00 - 10:00 Walkers Group 9-9:45am RSVP required Leaps & Bounds 10:00-11:00
22 Polish Play Group 11am-1pm	23 Literacy Program 10:30 - 5:30 	24 Literacy Program 9:00 - 12:00 3:30 - 6:30 	25 Literacy Program 10:00 - 2:00 	26 Open Play 12:30 - 2:00 Everyone welcome! 	27 Reserved 2-4 Friday Friends 7pm 18 and up	28 Literacy Program 8:00 - 10:00
29	30 Literacy Pr 10:30 - 5:30 					

Open Play-Every Thursday! Everyone is welcome! Stop by for pizza, pop and fun! We have volunteers to assist with the kids so the parents can hang out! It is awesome!!!!

The literacy program- GiGi's Playhouse provides FREE private tutoring to children with Down syndrome. Customized materials are provided for each individual student. The program also assists teachers and parents on how to tutor their children.

"Future" Friday Friends- Ages 6-8 only. Kids create lasting friendships through facilitated interactive play, while promoting good social skills. Each session ends with a pizza dinner in which social skills and table manners will be encouraged.

Friday Friends- Ages 18 and up only. Party with the gang! Equal numbers of peers with Down syndrome as without. Karaoke, dances, laser tag, bowling, prom, movie nights, friends and fun!

2 and under group- Families with kids 2 and under get together to play, and have fun while the parents network with each other!

Hop, Skip and Jumpers- For 3-5 year olds, this program will help promote friendships, good social

skills and interactive play through fun creative activities!

Hispanic Group- Spanish speaking families gather for food, fun, friendship and education.

Polish Play Group- Polish speaking families gather for an afternoon of fun and friendship.

Reserved- Playhouse may be reserved for private play groups, parties or support groups

GiGi's Crawlers: This group focuses on crawling skills as well as fine motor skills, social interaction with peers in a semi-structured environment. Children need to be crawling and are accompanied by a parent/adult.

GiGi's Walkers: This group focuses on post walking skills with peers to prepare children for school activities (balance beam, kicking, throwing, jumping, etc.) Children need to be walking and must be accompanied by a parent/adult.

The Playhouse can be reserved for any Down syndrome related event.

When it is available it may also be used by other groups with special needs.

Everyone is welcome at GiGi's Playhouse!

Due to the need for scheduling volunteers and acquiring supplies, reservations are greatly appreciated. (847) 885-PLAY, or you can e-mail nancy@gigisplayhouse.org. Feel free to leave a message!

Check the website for constant updates and to see pictures of the activities
www.gigisplayhouse.org!

GiGi's Playhouse is located 3 miles West of Woodfield Shopping Mall next to Schaumburg Toyota in the Brandess Center at
1069 W. Golf Road
Hoffman Estates IL, 60169
847-885-PLAY!

PLAINFIELD LOCATION



February Birthday Party

The birthday party on Feb. 17 was another huge success! The winter birthday kids celebrated with cupcakes, goody bags and presents.



Thank You, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Some wonderful young gentlemen from Good Shepherd Lutheran Church volunteered over Presidents' Day weekend to help the reading program assemble books and flash cards. Thanks for taking your vacation time to help us. We do appreciate it!



Save the Date!
2nd Annual Golf Outing
Monday, July 30th



Reading Program Training Session

Shari Andress, our in-house reading expert from the Hoffman Estates location, provided a training session for our parents on February 16. Shari gave us a wealth of information to help us start reading with our children. The training was provided for those families that have been on our waiting list because we are still in need of tutors at the Plainfield location. Thank you, Shari, for the skills to begin teaching our kids to read.

Let's Party!

Celebrate With Us At Our Spring Party!

Get out of the house and come out for our Spring Party at the Plainfield location on April 29 from 3-5 p.m. We'll have snacks, beverages, and games. Everyone is welcome! Please RSVP by April 26 by calling the Playhouse at 630-778-PLAY. A minimum number of RSVPs required.

Say CHEESE!...It's Picture Time!

Come out and celebrate the start of Spring with us! And what better way to celebrate a fresh beginning than updating the pictures in the lobby at the Plainfield location! We'll have a photographer on hand to take pictures of your child, free of charge, to hang on our lobby walls. The pictures will be taken in conjunction with our Spring Party on April 29 from 3-5 p.m. Please RSVP by calling the Playhouse at 630-778-PLAY.

This year we decided to have our son Nolan's birthday party at GiGi's Playhouse Too. It was a blast!













Many family members joined the celebration, along with some of Nolan's friends. It was the perfect place for the party. Not only did everyone have a great time, but it was also a chance to educate our families about Down syndrome. Nolan's friends John, Matthew, and Savannah were able to join us for the celebration. They also have Down syndrome. Our families are used to seeing Nolan, but get little exposure to other people with Down syndrome. We wanted to show them that people with Down syndrome are actually more like their peers than they are different. Of course they spent much of the time commenting on how beautiful our children are, and how well they are doing. Nolan is two now and is very much like a typical two year old....getting into everything and whining when he doesn't get his way. I guess that's part of the terrible two's. We are very happy with our lives and wish everyone could see that a life with Down syndrome is worth living! It's true, loving a child with Down syndrome is contagious!



Sean and Catherine Finn

PLAINFIELD LOCATION

April 2007

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i> 	3 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i> 	4	5	6 <i>Private Play Group</i> 12-2 pm Teen-Tastic 7-9 pm	7 2 & Under 9:30-11:00 am Literacy Program 10-11:30 am 3-4 Playgroup 11:00 am-12:30 pm 
8	9 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i> 	10 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i> 	11	12 Come Sign with Us 6-7 pm	13 <i>Private Play Group</i> 12-2 pm	14 Daddy & Me 3-4:30pm Pre-walkers 9-10 am Walkers 10-11am <i>RSVP to 630-423-4035</i>
15	16 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i> 	17 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i> 	18	19	20 <i>Private Play Group</i> 12-2 pm Signing Time 4:30-5:30 pm	21 Literacy Program 10-11:30 am
22	23 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i> 	24 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i> 	25	26 Come Sign with Us 6-7 pm	27 <i>Private Play Group</i> 12-2 pm	28 Pre-crawlers 9-10 am Crawlers 10-11 am <i>RSVP to 630-423-4035</i>
29 Hispanic Group 11 am-1 pm Spring Party 3-5 pm 	30 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i> 	Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i> 	All Events are Free unless noted. *RSVP to 630-778-PLAY Bring a friend who doesn't have Down syndrome			

2 & under playgroup: Families with children 2 and under get together and play while the parents network with each other. Siblings always welcome.

3-4 year old playgroup: Families with children ages 3-4 get together and play while the parents network with each other. Siblings always welcome.

Pre-crawlers/Crawlers: This group focuses on crawling skills as well as fine motor skills, social interaction with peers in a semi-structured environment. Pre-crawlers is for children who are just starting to crawl and the Crawlers is for children who are crawling on all fours. Children must be accompanied by a parent/adult.

Pre-walkers/Walkers: This group focuses on post walking skills with peers to prepare children for school activities (balance beam, kicking, throwing, jumping, etc.) The pre-walkers is for children who are just starting to walk

independently and the Walkers group is for children who are walking independently. Children must be accompanied by a parent/adult.

Teen Tastic: This group meets from 7-9 pm. We order pizza for dinner and have lots of fun watching movies and playing games with each other. 6th-12th grades.

Hispanic Group: Spanish speaking families gather for food, fun, friendship and education.

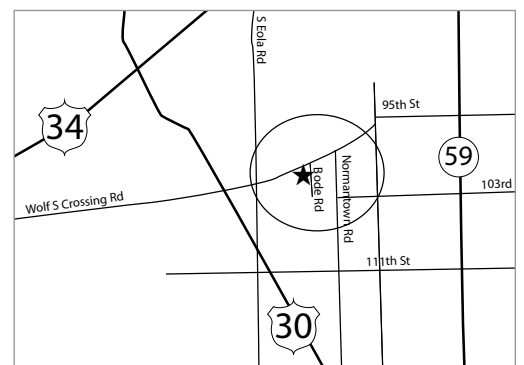
Come Sign with Us: Come with or without your children to learn basic sign language skills. New words introduced each session.

Signing Time Group: Learn sign language by signing along to the songs from the TV series. All ages are welcome.

Daddy and Me: Dads get out with the kids and get together with other dads. All ages.

Birthday Party: All ages

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www.gigisplayhousetoo.com



GiGi's Playhouse FREE "Learn to Read" Literacy Program Update over 200 books made!

Thanks to the generous help of a group of volunteers who came to our Literacy Night at Hoffman, over 200 books were created! These books, of all levels and topics, will be given to the children and adults in our literacy program. Our volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds—parents of children with Down syndrome, students, people from Assurance Agency, and friends of the Playhouse. Together they folded, laminated, stapled, bound and cut for two hours! Through their efforts, our tutors will be able to provide the appropriate books for each child during their tutoring session. The literacy program has over 100 individuals with Down syndrome enrolled and more on our waiting lists. Our Literacy Night will be the last Wednesday of each month at the Hoffman location from 6:30 to 8:30pm. Due to Spring Break in March, our next Literacy Night will be April 25th.

Thank you, Volunteers! We couldn't do what we do without YOU!! See you on April 25th!

We have six new tutors starting for the spring with Saturday hours and more evening hours too!

If you are interested in registering your child for the program or becoming a literacy tutor, please call Jenni at the Playhouse, 847.885.PLAY.



Who wants to READ?? I DO

The literacy program is very versatile and can be customized for your child!

There is group tutoring, individual tutoring, computer learning, spanish and more!!



Calendars - the Fun's not over Yet!

We would like to thank all those who sold calendars for us this year. Our volunteers sold them to friends, family, co-workers and anyone else that needed to know the day of the week! We even ran out and had to order an extra 1,000 in December! If you were a patient customer who had to wait for that delivery, we thank you, as well! To date, we have sold a total of 5,200 and still have more in stock. They make thoughtful gifts for only \$10, and many who receive them then turn around the next year and give them as gifts. It is a wonderful chain that grows with each new edition we produce.

We reserve a portion each year to be given out for FREE to schools, doctor's offices, libraries, hospitals, and anywhere else that you would like to increase awareness. If, for example, you are heading to your local park district, give us a call and we will put together a little packet for you to give them. All you need to do is stop in at the Playhouse and pick it up! It will contain a calendar, a poster and a letter. We need help distributing them far and wide, so please keep us in mind when planning your weekly errands.

These calendars do so much more than help us coordinate our hectic lives. They get our children's faces out there in a celebratory way that shows them living their lives to the fullest. It directly defies common beliefs about individuals with Down syndrome and their abilities. And, as we all know, the more that people see our children, the less they appear to be different.

Last week, we received an e-mail from Julaine Kluever of New London, WI saying "I just wanted to let you know how much we enjoy the yearly calendars. Our family, co-workers, and Holden's daycare center has them as well. Actually, Holden's daycare pasted up last year's pictures around the center. This is our third year of calendars and it is wonderful to see how much these children are growing up!"

We really appreciated Julaine taking the time to let us know that she enjoys the calendar, as well as let us in on the innovative way the daycare center raises awareness and recycles the calendar at the same time!



AUTHORS VISIT COMING SOON!

West Suburban Parent Support Group for Down Syndrome Presents: Bryan and Tom Lambke, formerly of Lombard and co-authors of I JUST AM ... a Story of Down Syndrome Awareness and Tolerance, will be visiting Congregation Etz Chaim on Thursday, April 19. I JUST AM is a true story of how Bryan feels about his disability, Down syndrome, and how he perceives others think about him and his friends. The book includes facts about Down syndrome that most people should know, but many do not. This informative, hard cover book contains numerous pictures of Bryan, his family and his friends in everyday activities, and Bryan's thoughts. Tom is also the author of SPIRIT, COURAGE and RESOLVE ... a Special Olympics Athlete's Road to Gold.

When: Thursday, April 19 at 7:30 p.m.

Where: Congregation Etz Chaim, 1710 S. Highland Ave, Lombard.

RSVP: Since our speakers are coming in from out of town, we must have your response by April 12th to have adequate materials on hand. THANKS! Contact Bonnie Taylor at bonnietaylor@wideopenwest.com or (630) 579-8682.

¡Hola a todas las familias hispanas! GiGi's Playhouse ofrece un grupo bilingüe para familias y sus hijos que tienen Síndrome de Down. Hermanos y hermanas son bienvenidos y invitados a participar. El grupo se reúne mensualmente el segundo domingo de cada mes. Estamos buscando ideas creativas por el nombre del grupo. Por favor, llame GiGi's Playhouse y pida hablar con Jenni o puedes escribir por correo electrónico sus ideas a jenni@gigisplayhouse.com.

¿Sabía usted que tenemos un programa para enseñar sus hijos con Síndrome de Down como leer? ¡Este programa es gratis! Si esta interesada, llame GiGi's Playhouse y pida hablar con Jenni para mas información.

By our intern Nicole Smith

Spread the Word

My niece was having her appointment with her developmental therapist when her therapist asked my sister if GiGi's Playhouse had a group for Spanish speaking families. She said that a family she is working with asked her to help them find a group for them and their 18-month-old son with Down syndrome that caters to Spanish speaking families. This boy is just starting to sit up at 18 months. He is having difficulty with speech as well and his parents only speak Spanish. My sister told her about the different programs

offered by the Playhouse, including the Spanish-speaking support group and the literacy program. The therapist said she would pass on the information to the family. It got me thinking of how this could end up changing this family's life. They probably feel quite alone right now, but if they come to the Playhouse, it could open a whole new world for them. I think this speaks to the power that lies within all of us. So I ask you to continue to spread the word and, as always, spread the love!



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4TH ANNUAL GIGI'S PLAYHOUSE FUN RUN AND WALK!!

Save the date...

**GiGi's Playhouse 4th Annual Fun Run and Walk
June 10th, 2007 at 9 AM**

At the beautiful Village Green in the Prairie Stone Complex in our own backyard of Hoffman Estates.

Bring your family, friends, neighbors and co-workers to this amazing event. We promise to make you proud!!

Not only will you raise awareness by being a part of the best finish line in town but the morning will be filled with family fun activities and entertainment.

So get your team together and join us for this memorable and inspirational day.

We have many sponsorship opportunities available so contact us at 847-885-7529.

Check our website for more information and registration!!!

All proceeds will benefit the GiGi's Playhouse FREE "Learn to Read" Literacy program.



Spring is in the air!!

Come join us for an Easter egg hunt at Hoffman Estates on Saturday April 7 from 10-12 am! Get your pictures taken with the friendliest bunny in town!! Everyone gets a basket!!

Join the Spring Party April 29 at Plainfield.

