



GiGi's Playhouse™
Down Syndrome Awareness Centers

www.gigisplayhouse.org

GIGI'S NEWS

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

Hoffman Estates

Plainfield

McHenry

Chicago

Now Serving **4** Locations

DECEMBER 2008

Dear Conor,

It has been just over a year since you were born. A moment I looked forward to with fairly unadulterated joy. Your dad hovered around you, and the doctors were speaking quietly to him. I don't remember much of what they said, because I was busy holding you. You were beautiful. Perfect hands, perfect fingers, perfect eyes.

We were lucky that the first messages we heard were of love and support and congratulations, unlike so many of the stories I have heard and read. Within a couple of hours, the genetic specialist was in my room telling me about all the things that you would be able to do. Yes, I did grieve, and still struggle with moments of great sadness, but more for the cruelty, both overt and subtle, that you will experience in the world, than for any loss on our part. The subtle message of "less than" is so palpable these days, and so hard to hear, especially given the richness you have brought into our lives. But sitting in the NICU for the week you were there slammed things into perspective pretty quickly. You were here, you were healthy, and, unlike some of the other little ones, you would be coming home



Ellen's Story

in a couple of days. You would be okay, and so would we.

There are a lot of challenges. Yet, so far, none of these challenges have not offered a commensurate gift worth far more than the struggle. Initially, the challenge was to see you cleanly, without the diagnosis dancing over and over in my head. To appreciate your smiles and giggles without measuring them against a timetable. To hold you without focusing on what developmental steps might be difficult for you. To just play with you without

thinking about whether I was stimulating your neurological development enough. Your sister has been a good teacher in that. Watching her push your stroller at breakneck speed down a grocery aisle — just to see if you will giggle again — serves as a great re-minder of what is really important.

The challenge was to learn what the diagnosis meant for you. You have low muscle tone, so it will take longer for you to be physically able to negotiate physical challenge. You will take longer to learn things, but you will learn. You will learn to read, but in a different

way. Every day, I learn more.

The truth is that with your birth things started to shift drastically for me. I'm not sure where things will end up, but I find that I am, at least in some ways and some of the time, slowly becoming the person I have always wanted to be. I have received gifts far beyond what I could have ever expected.

I am a better, happier person because of what I have learned and what I expect to continue to learn from you.

I love you, my darling boy.

Love,
Mommy

Wow! What a beautiful letter from a mother to her son! GiGi's Playhouse is so proud of all the families that we serve—the power, the passion and the hard-work that every single mom, dad, sibling, grandparent and friend displays on a daily basis is inspiring! As this year draws to a close, we want to say thank you to all the families touched by Down syndrome that continue to be the inspiration for GiGi's Playhouse. You are the reason we do what we do! 2008 has been a great year! So many wonderful things have taken place! Two new Playhouses have opened, the 'i have a voice' project was born, and our educational programs are reaching more families than ever!

Thank you and Happy Holidays!

2009 Spread The Love Gala

You are cordially invited to attend our 3rd Annual Spread the Love Gala.
Enjoy an evening of excitement & inspiration to benefit
GiGi's Playhouse, Down syndrome awareness centers.

Hosted by CBS 2 News Anchor, Rob Johnson

Saturday, February 7, 2009 at 7pm

Black Tie Optional

cocktails • hors d'oeuvres • dinner station • dessert bar • music • dancing • silent auction

Martini Bar sponsored by Ketel One



Belvedere Banquets

1170 West Devon Avenue
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007
847.534.0600

Rooms available at:
Country Inn and Suites
847.985.0101

To purchase tickets, please go to www.gigisplayhouse.org by January 15, 2009
For more information, contact the Hoffman Estates Playhouse at 847.885.7529



i have a voice

Tom Cruise said it best in the 1996 movie Jerry Maguire, "help me, help you." Such was the case when Bloomington, Indiana recently played host to the 'i have a voice' Traveling Gallery. Whether it was the Down Syndrome Family Connection, a fledgling area parent support group, helping GiGi's Playhouse with their national effort to spread positive awareness of Down syndrome, or the other way around, is a bit of the chicken and egg conundrum. One of our personal goals in arranging to bring the exhibit here was to help educate our local community — to humanize an often sterile medical diag-



nosis. GiGi's Playhouse provided a unique opportunity to make a dramatic, highly visible statement with a massive, museum quality showpiece. Wow, awesome, beautiful, and speechless were only some of the comments that we received. It was a privilege to help, even if only in a small way, the effort to publish the companion book. It is said that every great oak tree grew from a tiny acorn. Who knows what great things lay ahead for our child? See into the eyes of the children featured in the exhibit. Read and feel their stories. Your answer, your inspiration, your motivation only begins there.

Here's what people are saying after seeing the Gallery in Bloomington, Indiana:

"WOW!!!
This is awesome and gives us even more of a 'connection' to other communities in the nation!"

"I have a granddaughter who happens to have Down syndrome and this was such a special tribute to her and all persons with Down syndrome. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!"

"I am speechless....
how beautiful."

Halloween Evening Open

We had an amazing turn out for the Halloween party! Many princesses and super heroes

came out to play, eat pizza and make a goodie bag for trick or treating.



We are Moving!!!!

The Plainfield location is on the move. We are growing and need a new place to call home. We will be moving into our new location in early 2009. We will be located next to the Fox Valley Mall (behind Toys R Us). We are planning lots of new programs for 2009 and will need your help. Please contact us if you are interested in volunteering with any of our programs, special events or assisting with the move. We will need assistance with some demolition in the current location as well as some construction of the new building. Many hands make light work. Call the Playhouse if you can help, **630.778.PLAY**

Programs & Activities!

Look at all of our free educational programs and activities! Check your local Playhouse calendar to see times and dates.

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

Crawlers ♦ This group focuses on crawling skills as well as fine motor skills, social interaction with peers in a semi-structured environment.

Walkers ♦ This group focuses on post walking skills with peers to prepare children for school activities (balance beam, kicking, throwing, jumping, etc.).

Hop, Skip & Jumpers ♦ This program helps promote friendships, social skills, and interactive play through fun creative activities! For pre-school and kindergartners (3-5yr olds).

Playhouse Pals ♦ This structured playgroup focuses on developing friendships and confidence all while having a great time! 1st -3rd grades (6-8yr olds).

Kids Club ♦ This fast paced group incorporates social, communication and confidence-building skills and activities! 4th-8th grades (9-12 yr olds)

Teen-Tastic ♦ What a party! We order pizza for dinner and have lots of fun watching movies and playing games with each other. 9th-12th grades (13-17 year olds).

Friday Friends ♦ Karaoke, dances, softball games — the fun never ends! Adults 18 + over.

Nuestros Angeles ♦ Spanish speaking families gather for food, fun, friendship and education!

Polish Group ♦ What a party! Many Polish speaking families attend this group each month to meet other families and have a great time together!

Open Play ♦ Come on over for pizza, pop and fun! Everyone is welcome to this weekly gathering of networking and friendship building.

Literacy ♦ Our free Literacy program teaches kids with Downs syndrome how to read the way that they learn best!! This is by appointment only — call your local Playhouse for more info.

Daddy & Me ♦ Dads, bring your kids and meet other fathers in your area! What a great time to hang out with your kids while meeting new people.

Reserve it! ♦ The Playhouse can be reserved for any Down syndrome function or other special needs group. Call your local Playhouse for more info.

*Children must always be accompanied by a parent/adult



Therapy Dogs

We had so much fun reading to Ausie and Groovy, the therapy dogs who came visit! They were great listeners!



Just a Quick Note

The Westmont Literacy Program was presented a check from Thrivent Financial along with a blessing for the program, tutors, and families. The Church graciously nominated our fundraiser last July for this matching grant and helped process the paperwork. The fundraiser at The Grape restaurant raised \$2,647.70. The matching grant from Thrivent Financial provided an additional \$1,324 for a total of \$3,971.70. The sales of the

paintings helped the artist, Michael Johnson, purchase paints and supplies for a show he is doing in Washington, DC and for several Buddy Walks — creating a chain of giving and awareness that touches far beyond our little room in a Church. Thanks to this generosity, we have ordered a Dell 17" screen laptop for the literacy program. It makes a great addition to the literacy program. Thank you for your continued support.

*Diane Compton,
Literacy Coordinator, Westmont*

Literacy Tutors Needed!

Help our kids learn to read! Tutors can be parents, teachers, or anyone willing to help our kids, 18 and older. Training is provided, and the 16-week session with parent and child lasts about 45 minutes. Your students are scheduled around your availability. Call your local Playhouse!

HOFFMAN ESTATES

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
	Meeting 7pm 1	Literacy 1-4pm 2	Literacy 10am-2:15pm Literacy 3:30-5:15pm Special Intentions 7-9pm 3	Open Play 12:30-2pm Literacy 5:30-7:45pm 4	5	Literacy 3:30-5:45pm 6
7	Hoffman Estates Board Meeting 5:30-8pm 8	Literacy 1-4pm 9	Literacy 10am-2:15pm 10	Open Play 12:30-2pm Literacy 5:30-7:45pm 11	12	Breakfast with Santa 9:30-11:30am All Playhouse families welcome, please RSVP 13
Nuestros Angeles Hispanic Playgroup 11am-1pm 14	Literacy 10am-2:15pm Meeting Executive Board 7pm 15	Literacy 1-4pm 16	Literacy 3:30-5:15pm 17	Open Play 12:30-2pm Wendy's Fundraiser 4-8pm Golf & Roselle Rd. Literacy 5:30-7:45pm 18	Friday Friends 7-9pm 19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	Kids Club 10-11:30am Literacy 3:30-5:45pm 27
Winter Begins				Christmas		
Polish Group 11am-1pm 28	29	30	New Year's at Noon Party 11am-1pm Everyone Welcome! 31	December		

Our Halloween Party was fun with lots of witches and ghosts and goblins! We played guess the number of goldfish crackers, witches ring toss, bucket toss, did some photo decorating, coloring and face painting. Thank you, Gary and Ellyn, for hosting a great party!



Moms Night Out ...a huge success!

We enjoyed an evening of food, fun and socializing. We tasted products from Wildtree, and 30% of the profits came back to the Playhouse!

Assurance Bookmaking Team



Thank you to Assurance for sending a wonderful team to create books for our Literacy Program! Our Literacy Program is free for our families, but it takes time to create materials and we love to have help from our friends at Assurance!

Hop, Skip & Jumpers

Hop, Skip and Jumpers are a fun group for 3-5 year olds and their parents. This program helps promote friendships, good social skills and interactive play through fun creative activities. Join us from Noon-1:30pm on December 13th.

A Special Thank You

Goes to Assured Services, who keeps the Hoffman Playhouse carpets clean! Call Assured Services at **847.870.9960** for your carpet cleaning!

Polish Group

Our Polish group talked about school and education, and after school activities. The kids enjoyed lots of singing and dancing! Join us on December 28!

Spanish Group

Parents have a great time connecting with each other during Nuestros Angeles while the kids play games and read books. Join us next month! We meet on the second Sunday of every month at 11am!

PLAINFIELD

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
	Literacy Program 1 4:30-5:30pm 	Literacy Program 2 4-5:30pm 	Literacy Program 3 4:30-5pm 	Literacy Program 4 4:30-5pm 	5	Literacy Program 6 8:30-9:30am Infant & Tot 9:30-11am 3-4 Year Old Playgroup 11am-Noon 
7	Literacy Program 8 4:30-5:30pm 	Literacy Program 9 4-5:30pm 	Literacy Program 10 4:30-5pm 	Literacy Program 11 4:30-5pm Wendy's Fundraiser in Plainfield 5-8pm 	12	Literacy Program 13 8:30-9:30am Walkers 9-11am RSVP 630.423.4035 Daddy & Me 3-4:30pm 
14	Literacy Program 15 4:30-5:30pm 	Literacy Program 16 4-5:30pm 	Literacy Program 17 4:30-5pm 	Literacy Program 18 4:30-5pm 	Evening Open Play 6-8pm RSVP 	Literacy Program 20 8:30-9:30am Hop, Skip & Jumpers 10:30am-Noon RSVP 630.335.4824 Playhouse Pals 2-4pm 
Nuestros Angeles Hispanic Playgroup 11am-1pm  Winter Begins	Literacy Program 22 4:30-5:30pm 	Literacy Program 23 3-6pm 	24	25  Christmas	26	Literacy Program 27 8:30-9:30am 
28	Literacy Program 29 4:30-5pm 	Literacy Program 30 4:30-5pm 	31	December		

Tour de GiGi's ...a huge success!

We want to thank all of the people who made our first annual Tour de GiGi's such a wonderful event. We had a great turn out and the weather was absolutely beautiful. Everyone said they had a great time and one gentleman expressed his appreciation by saying "I am an avid biker and when I can help raise money for such a great cause it makes it all worth while". We had 64 riders and about 56 of them had never been to the Playhouse before. We raised a lot of awareness that day. We heard comments like "this place is amazing!", "the children are beautiful", and "I will be back next year for sure".

We would like to say a special thank you to our sponsors that provided food donations as well as sponsorships. They include **Starbuck's, Big Apple Bagel, PepsiCo, Dominicks, WalMart, and Molex.**

We had one young rider that completed 11 miles of the course and he is only 6 years old. We were so proud of him, way to go Pi! There was even a dog that road in a basket on one of the bikes, enjoying every minute of it. Some traveled a long way to join our efforts and we thank each and every one that came out to support us that day. Thank you also to the volunteers who helped us spread awareness, set up and tear down, and take care for our riders. We couldn't have done it with out you!

We are planning the 2nd Annual Tour de GiGi's on Sept. 19th, 2009. See you there.



Wendy's Fundraiser

Second Thursday of every month located at the corner of 59 and 134th street in Plainfield. We will get 15% of all sales during the hours of 5-8pm. If you mention GiGi's Playhouse you will also get a free kids Frosty.

Evening Open Play

Come join us Friday, December 19th for our Holiday Party at our Evening Open Play. We will have pizza, fun, and create a holiday craft. Hope to see you there! Please RSVP to Genia at glatka@gigisplayhouse.org.























Hop, Skip & Jumpers

Plainfield Playhouse participated in their 1st "Hop, Skip, & Jumpers" program on Sat., Oct. 25th. The children dressed in their Halloween costumes and had fun listening to "spooky story-time", dancing to 'The Freeze' and making Halloween inspired crafts.

Hop, Skip, and Jumpers is a program designed for 3-5 year olds. It helps promote friendships, enhance social skills and encourages interactive play through fun creative activities such as songs, stories, crafts, cooking & games.

We hope to see you there! For questions and to RSVP contact Darci Hill at **630.335.4824**.

McHENRY

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
	Literacy 4-6pm 1 	Open Play 10am-Noon 2 <i>all ages/siblings welcome</i> Literacy 3:15-7pm 	Literacy 4-7pm 3 	Literacy 10-11am 4 Literacy 1:30-2:30pm 	5	6
7	Literacy 4-6pm 8 	Open Play 10am-Noon 9 <i>all ages/siblings welcome</i> Literacy 3:15-7pm 	Literacy 4-7pm 10 Sign 'til Dawn 5:30-6:30pm <i>Please RSVP</i> 	Literacy 10-11am 11 Options & Advocacy Playgroup 10-11:30am 	Friday Friends 12 <i>Ages 18 & Over</i> 7-9pm Christmas Tree Decorating Party <i>Bring an ornament for our tree</i> 	13
Holiday Party 14 2:30-4:30pm <i>Everyone Welcome!</i> RSVP to Playhouse 815.385.7529 	Literacy 4-6pm 15 	Open Play 10am-Noon 16 <i>all ages/siblings welcome</i> Literacy 3:15-7pm 	Literacy 4-7pm 17 	Literacy 10-11am 18 Literacy 1:30-2:30pm 	19	20
Daddy & Me 21 9-11am  <i>Winter Begins</i>	Literacy 4-6pm 22 	Open Play 10am-Noon 23 <i>all ages/siblings welcome</i> Literacy 3:15-7pm 	Literacy 4-7pm 24 	25  <i>Christmas</i>	26	27
28	Literacy 4-6pm 29 	Open Play 10am-Noon 30 <i>all ages/siblings welcome</i> Literacy 3:15-7pm 	Literacy 4-7pm 31 	December		



Friday Friends Halloween Hoopla

We had a wicked good time at our October Friday Friends Halloween Hoopla with Celion Dion, two Cats, an Angel, a Pirate Lady, a Fire Fighter, a few witches, a Shaman, a Gypsy and a Queen of Hearts. The Halloween jokes had us laughing and the pumpkin cookie decorating got a bit messy.



McHenry Fashion Show

There are a million reasons to believe in the magic of the holidays and what a magical day we had!

The kids had so much fun and looked fabulous in their outfits. Some of them did not want to leave the spotlight, and some could not get out fast enough. It was amazing to see all of our biggest supporters in the audience, the families and friends of all of our beautiful models, the happy smiles along with the happy tears as they viewed the McHenry video scrapbook created by Cathy Snyder and Michele Gehrke. The room had the atmosphere of a big family wedding. We even had the Northwest Herald stop by and take some pictures. Thank you to every volunteer, sponsor, vendor and to ALL the families and friends who

made this a special day! A great big thanks to Rob Sachs, Sue Dubois, and Michele Gehrke for putting their heart and souls into making it all happen.

"We had a great time! We bought holiday presents from the vendors, we won some great prizes, we had a terrific lunch and good company. You all did a wonderful job and we are looking forward to next year already!"



Save these Dates

Holiday Party

Sun., Dec. 14th
2:30 to 4:30pm
Everyone Welcome!!
RSVP to Playhouse at
815.385.7529

Christmas Tree Trimming Party






























Friday, December 12th
Friday Friends (18+). Please bring an ornament for the tree. RSVP to Playhouse **815.385.7529**



Volunteer Opportunities for the New Year

Looking for Volunteers and Hosts for a Crawlers and a Walkers group at the McHenry Playhouse. These are 45 minute to 1 hour programs, one Saturday a month. If interested in these or any other volunteer opportunities please call the McHenry Playhouse at **815.385.7529**.

CHICAGO

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
	Literacy 1-7pm 1 	Literacy 4-7pm 2 	Literacy 11am-5:30pm 3 Open Play 5-6:30pm  	Open Play 11:30am-1pm 4 Literacy 3-7pm  	5	Open Play 11:15am-12:30pm 6 GiGi's & Baker School "Rock the Playhouse" 2-4pm 
Nuestros Angeles Hispanic Group 11:15am-1:15pm 7 	Literacy 1-7pm 8 	Literacy 4-7pm 9 	Literacy 11am-5:30pm 10 Open Play 5-6:30pm  	Literacy 3-7pm 11 	12	Playhouse Pals 11:15am-12:45pm 13 Private Party 4:30pm 
14	Literacy 1-7pm 15 	Literacy 4-7pm 16 	Literacy 11am-5:30pm 17 Open Play 5-6:30pm  	Open Play 11:30am-1pm 18 Literacy 3-7pm Volunteer Night New Parent Packet Creation 6:30-8:30pm	19	Gingerbread Workshop 10:15-11:30am 20 Kids Club Noon-1:30pm 
 Winter Begins 21	Literacy 1-7pm 22 	Literacy 4-7pm 23 	Literacy 11am-5:30pm 24 Open Play 5-6:30pm  	25 Christmas 	26	27
28	Literacy 1-7pm 29 	Literacy 4-7pm 30 	Literacy 11am-5:30pm 31 Open Play 5-6:30pm  	December		

As a Parent...

As a parent of a child with Down syndrome it goes without saying that I am my daughter Veronica's, biggest advocate. I talk to anyone and everyone about how wonderful she is; how she has unlimited potential; how she can and will be anything she puts her mind to. But when someone says the "R" word all those positive feelings are quickly replaced with sadness and anger.

Recently a woman I know used the "R" word in conversation. Some of my friends stepped in and explained to her the hurt this word can cause when used incorrectly. The surprising thing was she did not even realize she was using the word in her everyday conversation. She was most apologetic and determined to no longer use this word. Going forward, she is committed to speak about the destructive and negative connota-



tions associated with the "R" word to everyone she hears using it.

We have made great strides in generating awareness of our children's potential, but there is still much more work to be done. Even if it is one person at a time — we will get there!

Welcome!

The Chicago Playhouse would like to welcome our new volunteer site coordinator, Erin Meyer. Erin first read about GiGi's only a few weeks before she began volunteering and was immediately interested in learning more. Erin states, "It was an easy decision to become a part of the Playhouse!" She is enthusiastic about helping the playhouse in any way needed. Erin is a wonderful addition to our "family".

Save these Dates

Rock the Playhouse Saturday, Dec. 6th, 2-4pm

Families from GiGi's and Baker School will gather at the Chicago Playhouse to share music, laughter and friendship. Join us and help spread the message of tolerance and acceptance. It promises to be an afternoon filled with fun and friendship. For more information please contact the Chicago Playhouse.

Gingerbread House Workshop Sat., Dec. 20th, 10:15am

A pastry chef from the Le Cordon Bleu Culinary School will be conducting the workshop at the Chicago Playhouse. This will be a hands-on event and EVERYONE will get to participate.

YOGA

We are going to have a 6 week kids yoga class starting Sundays from

January 4 thru February 8.

The class is free, but please RSVP so we know how many people are com-

ing. It will be for all kids ages 4 and up and will be from 11:30am-Noon. Mats will be provided.



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Hoffman Estates
1069 W. Golf Rd.
Hoffman Estates, IL 60169



save the date
Spread the Love Gala
Saturday, Feb. 7, 2009

Come Caroling with Us!

Join us on **Thursday, December 4th,** 7pm at Friendship Village Retirement Home to sing for our biggest fans! Bring your whole family to celebrate the holiday season.



Meet us in Assembly Hall at Friendship Village, which is located at 350 W. Schaumburg Road in Schaumburg. RSVP to the Hoffman Estates Playhouse.

Assembly Hall at Friendship Village, which is located at 350 W. Schaumburg Road in Schaumburg. RSVP to the Hoffman Estates Playhouse.

Breakfast with Santa

All Playhouse families are invited to join us for Breakfast with Santa. Please RSVP to **info@gigisplayhouse.org**.

Saturday, December 13th, 9:30-11:30am at the Hoffman Estates Playhouse. Check out your local Playhouse calendar to see all the FUN Holiday Parties Planned!



Holiday Raffle

Our annual raffle has started!! Call your local Playhouse for raffle tickets! Prizes include exotic trips, jewelry and cash! Tickets are \$100. Please go to **www.gigisplayhouse.org** or call your local Playhouse to purchase them!

Sibling Contest!!

Be sure to send in your sibling story, detailing how your brother or sister with Down syndrome has touched your life! For a chance to be featured in our Sibling Video, e-mail your story to **info@gigisplayhouse.org** Deadline is **December. 8th!**

'Tis the Season...

Do you have someone on your holiday list who is hard to buy for? How about a donation to GiGi's Playhouse in their honor? Contact your local Playhouse!

Hoffman Estates

1069 West Golf Road
Hoffman Estates, IL 60169
847.885.PLAY

Plainfield

10052 South Bode Road, Unit D
Plainfield, IL 60585
630.778.PLAY

McHenry

1720 North Richmond Road
McHenry, IL 60050
815.385.PLAY

Chicago

3660 West Irving Park Road
Chicago, IL 60618
773.583.PLAY

Locations

4 to serve you

