



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

OCTOBER 2008

Michael: A Total Blessing DOWN SYNDROME AWARENESS MONTH

My doctors suspected our baby had Down syndrome when I took the pre-natal blood test. When we walked out of the office that day, I felt like the world had just ended for me. I was completely distraught, angry at God, asking questions like, "how could this happen to me, why me?" I was very emotional and very scared about the future and the future of the baby.

We walked out of the office with books and paperwork so we could make the decision whether or not to keep the baby. The paperwork directed us where and how to get an abortion. We went home to discuss our options. We did a lot of talking to each other and to God. Our talking often broke down into fighting. On the day I was to call the hospital and give them our decision, I cried and cried. That was the day Nancy called me.

The geneticist had warned me,

"Don't believe what parents of children with Down syndrome say. Parents paint a rosy picture, you can't believe them." Nancy broke down the wall constructed by the geneticist when she provided a balanced perspective of life with a child with Down syndrome. She told

me about her daughter and her struggles. She never said raising a child with Down syndrome is easy but it is rewarding. I had to trust that God was going to take care of my baby and my family. That day, I called my doctor and told him that I was not going to have an abortion. This

was the first time since the first blood test that I had a spark of hope that this was not going to be as bleak as what all the professionals wanted me to believe. I knew there would be obstacles and challenges but we are going to be ok.

It took me about three weeks to

muster up that courage GiGi's Playhouse and just look around. They were having Open Play that day and I was able to watch parents interacting with their kids; moms with their babies. I remember thinking they were so happy. They seemed so at peace. I remember a baby only a couple of months old with his siblings loving on him. Everyone in the family was so happy! It definitely was not how I thought life with a baby with Down syndrome would be.

I want other expectant moms to see what it is like to have a child with Down syndrome before they make any decisions. I can't express the hope I felt after seeing other mothers with their children with Down syndrome. How I felt that if they can do it, I can do it too. Before visiting GiGi's I felt so alone. Seeing other mothers and their families loving, and embracing them, gave me the strength and hope and eventually joy to have my own.

If I could, what would I change about Michael? Absolutely nothing.



GiGi's in the News!

This has been a busy month for GiGi's Playhouse! In July, our friend Karen Meyer from Channel 7 came to the Chicago Playhouse to see the new location!

She was so impressed with the growth of the Playhouse and said



"This is the fastest growing non-profit in the Chicagoland area!"

Then after Governor Palin's speech, Channel 2 came to the Hoffman Estates Playhouse to interview parents on their feelings about having an advocate in office. Regardless of political views, it was great awareness about Down syndrome! Besides these newscasts, GiGi's has been featured in several articles this summer. Go to www.gigisplayhouse.org and

click on News-Press to see and read all about it!



McHenry Location

Before McHenry's Playhouse Was Here

by Chris Newlon,
Volunteer and Rebecca's Mom

I heard about GiGi's Playhouse long before it came to McHenry. I received the newsletters but felt it was too far away, especially since it meant juggling the other 4 children's schedules to get Rebecca there for a play group. When I heard that a McHenry area facility was being considered, I was very excited. When I heard that it all fell into place in what seemed like record time, I CRIED... I called the main number, offered my help and began telling everyone who would listen all about the new DS awareness center that was coming. Rebecca and I came by to offer our help and see what GiGi's was really about. What was there for her at age 5? How could she fit in? Well, I couldn't have been more pleased with everything we have



encountered. Rebecca feels right at home. She knows where the toys, books and games are kept, where the potty is, and even tries to sing with the karaoke machine! The most unbelievable thing that has happened since we've become involved has been the Literacy Program. Rebecca LOVES the books! She drags her full bag of books and plops them down in front of us at all hours of the day. None of us can resist when she wants to learn! She even nabbed a few of her sibling's friends to help (which they quickly learned how to comply.) You can see the pride Rebecca feels when she gets her words right. We have noticed a huge jump in her verbal skills, in particular in combining two to five word sentences. How the rest of the family has benefited from GiGi's Playhouse is that we KNOW Rebecca will always be accepted for who she is and no one will try to change her.



Plainfield Location

'Successful Teaching' Meeting... a Big Success

On August 21st GiGi's Plainfield hosted a meeting entitled "Successful Teaching Modifications for Students with Down Syndrome". With over 50 teachers and parents in attendance, Sharon Tate, Assistant Superintendent from D204 in Naperville outlined the learning style and curriculum modifications that work best for our kids. The meeting was a huge success with attendance from teachers & parents

of 12 different school districts! Due to the positive response, Hoffman Estates is planning on hosting a similar education meeting in the near future. If you would like a copy of the presentation to give to your school team, please email a request to mptaszek@gigisplayhouse.org.

A special thank you to our presenters:
Sharon Tate D204 • Linda Griffin D203
Suzie Hansen D204 • Beth Spenadel D89
Michele Ptaszek D204



Educator & Therapist Open House Wed., October 8th at 7pm

Therapists and Educators — come to GiGi's Playhouse to learn about some of the ways a child with Down syndrome learns to read and hear about the educational and therapeutic programs we have to offer. We can support your efforts in your work with children with Down syndrome!

**Oct.
8th**

free

Please RSVP at
info@gigisplayhouse.org
or **847.885.7529**

Camp GiGi A Huge Success!



Singing, dancing, splashing in the water during the Beach Party, a gold hunt on Wild West day... Camp GiGi was a blast!

Hop, Skip & Jumpers

They had an Olympic theme on a recent Saturday morning. The kids had lots of different competitions, including dancing, singing, ball kicking and racing. They all made gold medals to celebrate their victories!



Visitors from Iowa City joined us — the Pasley family. They are involved in a Down syndrome awareness organization in Iowa and joined in our fun.



Letter from Dave:

We did very much enjoy getting to meet all of the families that were there when we visited and to see the facility. Everything was very impressive. What a wonderful place for families to meet and play together. I found it amazing that a few seconds after entering the place we were surrounded by friends! And before that we had never even met one of the families there. Keep up the good work and we all look forward to another chance to come visit.

Sincerely,
Dave Pasley and Family

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 preschool 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

Our August Kid's Club

We had an awesome time with all the new kids that showed up.

They learned some new dances, did obstacle course, made ice cream sundaes, enjoyed some social time and Karaoke time. New friendships were made and fun was had by all!

Check with your local playhouse for place and times.

Bookmaking Party

Camille, one of the Hoffman Estates tutors, recently hosted a bookmaking party for our Literacy Program. The group produced a total of 70 sets of flashcards and 12 A-Z books! Thank you everyone who gave part of their weekend for our literacy program!



Epsilon Team Group



























A team from Epsilon spent an evening creating books for our literacy program! They heard about GiGi's Playhouse from one of their employees, Wendy. Wendy's daughter has participated in some of the programs in Hoffman Estates, and the team was excited to learn more about GiGi's Playhouse. Jenie Carey from Epsilon talked about their evening. "We were very impressed when we arrived at the facility; it's very welcoming and



absolutely adorable. Our team as a whole was very excited to take part in the bookmaking session and to hear about the actual literacy program. During our visit, our team worked on creating a variety of books for the

Literacy Program. This included laminating, pasting, cutting and assembling the final product. It went very well! We were determined to achieve our goal to make 12 sets of 2 different books. We are very impressed with the programs available for all of the parents and children involved and that all the programs were provided completely free of charge. GiGi's Playhouse is an amazing resource." Epsilon is looking forward coming back for another bookmaking evening, and enjoyed giving back to the community as a team.

HOFFMAN ESTATES

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
October			Literacy 10am-3pm Special Intentions 7-9pm 	Open Play 12:30-2pm Literacy 5:30-7:45pm 		Literacy 3-6pm 
GiGiFest Noon-3pm 		Literacy 1-4pm 	Literacy 10am-3pm Educator Open House 7-9pm 	Open Play 12:30-2pm Literacy 5:30-7:45pm 		Crawlers 9-9:45am 2 & Under 10-11:30am Hop, Skip & Jumpers Noon-1:30pm Literacy 3-6pm 
Nuestros Angeles Hispanic Playgroup 11am-1pm 		Literacy 1-4pm 	Literacy 10am-3pm Private Event 5-7pm 	Open Play 12:30-2pm Literacy 5:30-7:45pm 		
	Literacy 10am-3pm Meeting Executive Board 7pm 	Literacy 1-4pm 	Literacy 10am-3pm 	Open Play 12:30-2pm Wendy's Fundraiser 5-9pm Literacy 5:30-7:45pm 	Friday Friends 7-9pm 	Halloween Party 1-3pm Literacy 3-6pm 
Polish Group 11am-1pm 	Board Meeting Hoffman Estates 7pm 	Literacy 1-4pm 	Literacy 10am-3pm Literacy Nite 6:30-8:30pm 	Open Play 12:30-2pm Literacy 5:30-7:45pm 		



Friday Friends

Our 18 & older group had a softball game in August and celebrated afterward with ice cream sundaes! We had a great turnout as usual for the softball game and the ice cream social was just the cherry on top!!!! Hey Friday Friends — join us this month on September 26 for Movie night.... we'll supply the popcorn and munchies!!!! Mark your calendar for **October 24th** (Halloween Party) and **December 19** (Holiday Bowling party). We are not meeting in November.



Hop, Skip & Jumpers

We need your help one Saturday a month, from Noon-1:30pm! 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.



Open Play

We enjoyed pizza, played duck, duck, goose and had a great time together! Once a week, families network and learn from each other while kids play and enjoy a slice of pizza. This is open to everyone (parents, grandparents, therapists, siblings) so stop by between 12:30-2pm on any Thursday to meet other parents and join the fun.



Join Our Newsletter Team!

Lou, Mary, Angie and Elsbeth are some of our great volunteers that help make the monthly mailing possible! Spend a few hours once a month to get this wonderful monthly newsletter out to hundreds of people. Email Sara at svandahm@gigisplayhouse.org or call **847.885.7529**.

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 **847.885.7529**.

PLAINFIELD

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
October			Literacy Program 1 4-5pm 	Literacy Program 2 4-6:30pm 	3	Literacy Program 4 8:30am-Noon 2 & Under 9:30-11am 3-4 Year Old Playgroup 11am-Noon 
GiGiFest Noon-3pm Hoffman Estates location 5	6	Literacy Program 7 3-6pm 	Literacy Program 8 4-5pm 	Literacy Program 9 4-6:30pm Wendy's Fundraiser in Plainfield 5-8pm 	10	Pre-Walkers 9-10am Walkers 10-11am RSVP 630.423.4035 Literacy Program 8:30am-Noon Daddy & Me 3-4:30pm 
12	13	Literacy Program 14 3-6pm 	Literacy Program 15 4-5pm 	Literacy Program 16 4-6:30pm 	17	Playhouse Pals 2-4pm Literacy Program 8:30am-Noon 
19	20	Literacy Program 21 3-6pm 	Literacy Program 22 4-5pm 	Literacy Program 23 4-6:30pm 	Evening Open Play 6-8pm Come in costume 	24 Pre-Crawlers 9-10am Crawlers 10-11am RSVP 630.423.4035 Literacy Program 8:30am-Noon 
Nuestros Angeles Hispanic Playgroup 11am-1pm 	27	Literacy Program 28 3-6pm 	Literacy Program 29 3-6pm 	Literacy Program 30 3-6pm 	31  Halloween	

THANK YOU!!!

When Joe Hauge from the Harsh Winters VW Club met Manny, a young boy with Down syndrome, he was so touched by Manny that he felt that the charity they wanted to support this year was going to be for Down syndrome. Manny's family told him about GiGi's Playhouse. Joe, Casey, and Tim came to our open play in August to see what we were all about. They were greeted by many little people running around! We got to



share our stories and what our hopes and plans are for the Playhouse. The VW Club held their 5th annual Bug-A-Palooza on Sunday August 24th. It was a beautiful day! The kids had fun looking at the cars, bouncing in the jumpers, and playing with the hoola hoops. The people who attended stopped to see what we were all about and were full of kind words. Joe and his club helped raise \$2000 for the playhouse. We are so very thankful for people like Joe who

stop to see the goodness in people with Down syndrome. He took his experience and found a way to help support programs that will help improve the lives of many with Down syndrome. Thank you for supporting our future!

Friday Open Play

Come join us for some SPOOKY fun on Friday, October 24th from 6-8pm! Feel free to wear your Halloween costume! Please RSVP to Genia at glatka@gigisplayhouse.org.



Karen Golding Remembered

Karen Golding was a GiGi's Playhouse Plainfield volunteer and grandmother to a beautiful little girl with Down Syndrome. Karen was instrumental in Plainfield's fundraising efforts in 2005 by arranging concession shifts at the Joliet Speedway during several race weekends to earn profit for the Playhouse. In May 2008, Karen was involved in a car accident. One week prior to the accident, Karen told her





daughter, "If anything should happen to me, I would like donations made to GiGi's Playhouse." Karen Golding's loved ones have respected her wish and have generously donated over \$1000 to GiGi's Playhouse in her memory. We are grateful to the Golding family, to Karen's husband Stan and daughter Patti for the gifts that Karen will continue to bring to the families that belong to GiGi's Playhouse.

Special Thanks

A Special thanks to Katlyn Mueller from the Plainfield GiGi's group. Katlyn has been a wonderful volunteer this summer and everyone appreciated her help.

Playhouse Pals

Our group for 1st-3rd graders, is starting back up this fall at a new time. We will meet on the third Saturday of the month from 2-4pm.

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
October			1 Literacy 4-7pm Sign 'til Dawn 5:30-6:30pm RSVP 	2 Literacy Noon-3pm 	3	4 Literacy 12:30-3:30pm 
5 GiGi Fest Noon-3pm at Hoffman Estates location	6 Literacy 4-6pm 	7 Open Play 10am-Noon Literacy 4-7pm Brian Rubin 7-9pm RSVP to Nikki 847.842.8103 	8 Literacy 4-7pm 	9 Options & Advocacy Playgroup 10-11:30am Literacy Noon-3pm 	10 Teen-Tastics 7pm 	11 2 & Under 10:30am-Noon Literacy 12:30-3:30pm 
12 Literacy 4-6pm	13 Literacy 4-6pm 	14 Open Play 10am-Noon Literacy 4-7pm Wendy's Fundraiser Night 5-8pm 	15 Literacy 4-7pm Sign 'til Dawn 5:30-6:30pm RSVP 	16 Literacy Noon-3pm 	17 Kids Club 6-8pm 	18 Open Play 10-11:30am Literacy 12:30-3:30pm 
19 Literacy 4-6pm	20 Literacy 4-6pm 	21 Open Play 10am-Noon Literacy 4-7pm  	22 Literacy 4-7pm 	23 Literacy Noon-3pm 	24 Friday Friends Halloween Hoopla 7-9pm COSTUMES REQUIRED 	25 Hop, Skip & Jumpers 10-11:30am Literacy 12:30-3:30pm 
26 Daddy & Me 9-11am 	27 Literacy 4-6pm 	28 Open Play 10am-Noon Literacy 4-7pm  	29 Literacy 4-7pm Sign 'til Dawn 5:30-6:30pm RSVP Book Making Night 6:45-8:45pm 	30 Literacy Noon-3pm 	31 Halloween 	

NEW to McHenry... SIGN 'TIL DAWN

Does your child know all the basic signs and has moved on to learning sentence structure? McHenry GiGi's is now offering a signing class for parents and children to learn full sentence structure, to help facilitate proper language usage and sentence structure. Come learn an interactive way with others. Space will be limited for maximum learning. R.S.V.P. to the McHenry Playhouse **815.385.7529**. Starting October 1st, every other Wednesday from 5:30-6:30pm.

Memorial Donations

The McHenry Playhouse is honored to receive Memorial Donations in the name of Patricia A. LeBaron, Great Aunt to MH Board Member Amy Sachs. Our heartfelt wishes of sympathy are extended to Amy and her family.



FINDS Annual Family Picnic

MH Playhouse attended the FINDS Annual Family Picnic on August 8th for some great networking with our partnering organization. We are happy to grow our relationship with the FINDS group to help Spread the Love!

Help Wanted - Volunteers!!!

The heart and soul of our work is completed by the unconditional love and support of people wanting to make a difference. We have formed our Playhouse committee structure and are eager to welcome volunteers to help support the growth and development of the Playhouse!



Tues, October 7th 7-9pm

Attorney Brian Rubin will present to parents about Special Needs Trusts and Future Planning. Space is limited Please RSVP to Nikki at **847.842.8103**

Tues, October 14th Eat at Wendy's & Help GiGi's 5-8pm

at Wendy's Restaurant in McHenry located at 2433 N. Richmond Road (by the Home Depot)

Sun, November 16th GiGi's 1st Annual Holiday Fashion Show & Luncheon Noon-4pm

Call **815.385.7529** to register at D'Andrea Banquets & Conference Center 4419 Northwest Highway Crystal Lake, IL 60014 The cost is \$40 Adults/\$20 Children

CHICAGO

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
October			Private Class 9am-1pm Literacy Noon-1pm 	Literacy 3-7pm 	Private Class 9am-1pm	Open Play 10:15-11:30am Teen-Tastic Noon-1:30pm 
Nuestros Angeles 11:15am-1:15pm Hispanic Playgroup GiGi Fest Noon-3pm at Hoffman Estates	Literacy 1-7pm 	Private Class 9am-1pm Literacy 4-7pm 	Private Class 9am-1pm Literacy Noon-1pm Town Hall Meeting 6:30-8:30pm 	Literacy 3-7pm Volunteer Night New Parent Packet Creation 6:30-8:30pm 	Private Class 9am-1pm	Playhouse Pals 11:15am-12:45pm
Daddy & Me 11:15am-1:15pm 	Literacy 1-7pm 	Private Class 9am-1pm Literacy 4-7pm 	Private Class 9am-1pm Literacy Noon-1pm 	Literacy 3-7pm Wendy's Nite 6-8pm  	Private Class 9am-1pm Friday Friends 7-9pm 	Open Play 10:15-11:30am Kids Club Noon-1:30pm 
Polish Play Group 11:15am-1:15pm 	Literacy 1-7pm 	Private Class 9am-1pm Literacy 4-7pm 	Private Class 9am-1pm Literacy Noon-1pm 	Literacy 3-7pm 	Private Class 9am-1pm	Crawlers 10-10:45am 2 & Under 11am-12:15pm Hop, Skip & Jumpers 12:30-2pm 
	Literacy 1-7pm 	Private Class 9am-1pm Literacy 4-7pm 	Private Class 9am-1pm Literacy Noon-1pm 	Literacy 3-7pm 	Private Class 9am-1pm  Halloween	

My mom, who drives Veronica to "camp" everyday, came home one afternoon quite upset as to what another student said about Veronica. A little girl came up to my mom and said "My mommy says that Veronica has no brain?" Long story short, this child's mother, who is a psychologist, explained to her daughter that those who have Down syndrome don't have a working brain and are stupid. After my anger subsided (and I used every bad word in the dictionary), I drew on my strength that I get from Veronica and from the strength I get from the Playhouse and I realized I need to explain to both this child AND her mother even though she wears her diagnosis on her face and may look different from other children she is the same in so many ways. I have been so focused on bringing awareness about Down syndrome to her peers I guess I forgot I need to bring this fact to the



Heidi Aldama,
President
and proud mom of Veronica

parents of these children as well! Needless to say I came armed to school with brochures about the Playhouse and with Activity Booklets. While I feel so much has been accomplished in the less than 5 years the Playhouse has been open but that so much more needs to be done. I am so glad to have the Playhouse in Chicago so other families can now find strength to become their child's advocate.

Town Hall Meeting Everyone Welcome

Calling all parents, principals, teachers and therapists! On October 8 we are having a Town Hall Meeting. Learn more about GiGi's Playhouse, our programs and get any and all questions answered. 6:30-8:30pm.

First Taste of GiGi's Playhouse—Chicago

On August 16 the Chicago Playhouse had its First Taste of GiGi's Playhouse at the Logan Square Auditorium. It was an exciting time that was filled with great food and even better karaoke singing. People bid on individuals to sing in the "Not So Silent" Auction where the highest bidder gets to choose the song to be sung. We had some great versions of Bon Jovi's Living on a Prayer, Madonna's Material Girl, Neil Diamond's Sweet Caroline and Ozzy Osbourne's Crazy Train. There were definitely a few people who were living out their dream of being a rock and roll star. Attendees were able to few the "I have a voice" video and the traveling gallery.





NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SCHAUMBURG, IL
PERMIT NO. 93

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

Save the Date!



Oct. 25th

It's time for our Halloween Party!

Wear your costume and come to the Hoffman Estates Playhouse on **Saturday, October 25th, from 1-3pm.**



October is Down Syndrome Awareness Month!

And the Playhouse has lots of materials for you to use to spread awareness!! We have custom made activity books that show your child's peers and parents that your child with Down syndrome is just like the other kids! We have a Creed bookmark that can be placed in goodie bags, holiday cards and more — we even have it in Spanish! We also have posters that you can put up at your school, in the principals office and more. Call your local Playhouse!

GiGiFest!

**Sun., October 5, 2008
Noon-3pm**

Where: Hoffman Estates

Join us for a fun filled family day of games, music, and awareness! This is the day we thank the community and families for all their support throughout the year!!! Come out and see the 2009 Calendar Models walk down the red carpet!!



Oct. 5th



2009 Calendar!

Are you ready to be inspired? Then order your 2009 calendar today. This makes a great holiday gift for teachers, educators, therapists and anyone else!

Call your local Playhouse or go to **www.gigisplayhouse.org** to order yours today.

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