

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

Hoffman Estates

Fox Valley

McHenry

Chicago

Sioux City

Now Serving 5 Locations

APRIL 2009

Before Iowa was even open, a surprise came in the mailbox. As we were working one day prior to the Grand

Opening... the mailman dropped off the day's mail. We were surprised to see a check from a local car dealership. The employees of Knoepfler Chevrolet had gotten together to have a "Dress Down for Down

Syndrome Day" with all of the proceeds going to GiGi's Playhouse in Sioux City. We were so touched by this because there were no personal connections with them that we knew of. They had seen a news clip about the opening of GiGi's Playhouse in Sioux City and decided to have a fundraiser for us! It was truly a gift from the heart!

How fitting that on March 21st, World Down Syndrome Day, GiGi's opened its 5th location in Sioux City, lowa! More than 200 people came to the opening and showed their support for a GiGi's in this new location. In fact, GiGi herself made an appearance!

> The Iowa location has already touched hundreds of new families, brought awareness to the community and continues to spread the mission of GiGi's!

The BOD and volunteers at the GiGi's in Iowa has already been fulfilling the mission of spreading awareness



about Down syndrome before they even opened their doors! They have been on multiple news segments, newspapers, and other media! They have already sent out new parent packets to new families with a child with Down syndrome. And they have already

trained their volunteers to become literacy tutors so that they can teach kids

> how to read! Thanks lowa, we are so proud to have you join our Playhouse family!



GiGi's on Channel 7!

GiGi's on the News!

On May 10th, Mother's Day, GiGi's Playhouse will be featured on ABC channel 7! Karen Meyer and her crew came to visit the Chicago Playhouse and interviewed parents and kids! Be sure to tune in on Mother's Day! Watch during the 8am news!



WGN-TV Spreads Awareness **About Down Syndrome!**

Did you see it? WGN's morning show came to see GiGi's in action! They saw the educational activities take place including creative play, the Literacy program, and of course, freeze dance!

Thanks WGN, by spreading awareness about Down syndrome on the air, you are making a difference!

An Amazing Advocacy Day on Capitol Hil

Over 300+ attendees from 85 organizations representing 34 states made the first-ever, full-scale Down Syndrome Advocacy Day on the Hill an amazing success. Nearly 200 meetings were held with members and staffers, helping us advance legislative priorities impacting the members we serve. There were 3 groups from the Chicago-



land area, GiGi's, NADS, and Ups for Downs that went together and spoke with a united voice to all of the Illinois legislators. What an amazing experience! We were inspired by Congresswoman McMorris Rogers who has a 2yr old with Down syndrome, and heard from Patrick Kennedy as he encouraged us to keep fighting the good fight and that we truly are making a difference. If you are interested in being part of the legislative work regarding advocacy for Down syndrome, be sure to contact GiGi's and join the Chicagoland organizations as we advocate for our loved ones with Down syndrome!

Get Those Teams Together

Get ready to run, walk or dash for Down syndrome! Our 6th annual 5K Run and 1 mile walk will take place on **June 14th**. Back by popular demand is our Dash for Down syndrome! You can register online by going to **www.gigisplayhouse.org** and click on register. There will be prizes for the top TEAMS so get together and start training! Want to help on the 5K com-

mittee? Call your local Playhouse for more info! This will be the biggest year with the biggest teams! Don't have a team? Go to the website and join one!





Two Educational Speech Seminars by Lora White, SLP, Coming to GiGi's! Join us the 1st Mondays of the next 2 months Speech Development

Join us the 1st Mondays of the next 2 months
Speech Development
in the Early Years
Have a child 2 or under? Come to

learn ways to communicate with your child, enhance their communication, and ensure that you are not hard wiring certain speech abilities.

Birth - 2years, **May 4th, 7-9pm** at the Hoffman Playhouse

Language & Communication

Lora White, SLP, states that she is finding that the Early Intervention speech pathologists have a higher likelihood of discussing the oral motor and feeding issues with parents, but once the child is three and moves to an early childhood classroom the focus frequently moves to an educational base treatment plan. The goals are more focused on the child's communication (signing, picture communication, etc.). Communication development is an important piece to the child's development, but frequently if the child has oral motor delays it is not addressed, which equates to building a house without a foundation. Many parents are unaware of the importance, or never received the right information when their child was in the El program. Bring your questions to this meeting!

3-6 year olds, **June 1st, 7-9pm** at the Chicago Playhouse

After Marlee was born, we were advised by

the cardiologist to keep her close to home. Then she went into heart failure and had surgery at two months. I was plunging into depression and overwhelmed about laundry, Down syndrome, winter, and the fact that I was only averaging two showers a

week, then we finally made it to GiGi's in January. I didn't know what to expect..... but it was SO warm and welcoming. It felt good to have people coo'ing over Marlee, and the parent network and advice has been invaluable! I'm a better Mommy when we leave the house! It gives us all something to look

forward to. I've been searching for friends since we moved to Chicago, so it's nice to be included in the GiGi's family.

I wouldn't trade Marlee for the world, but I have thought to myself

Marlee

that I'd give away the Down syndrome in a heart-

beat.... and yet, even as I say that I'm overcome by the realization that Down syndrome is a part of Marlee. It is a beautiful small part of my Darling Marlee... just like her dimple, her smile, her little toes. I cannot separate Marlee from her brown hair,

twinkly eyes, or Down syndrome; yet she is not defined by any of those singular things. Down syndrome doesn't color our world. Rather it gives our family a whole new set of paint brushes to reach out with and color the world around us. With Marlee in our family we can paint the sky with a rainbow of encouragement, compas-

sion, understanding, fun, silliness, smiles, triumphs, respect, and love.
Marlee is here to help us make the world a better place. The world needs her rainbow of love. We couldn't have asked for a better gift.



We Love Literacy Tutors!

Summer is approaching. Will you have a little extra time on your hands? Change a life by helping a child learn to read! We are currently recruiting and training tutors for all 4 of our Chicagoland locations. If you or someone you know would like to donate a little extra

time each week to tutor children in literacy please visit our web site and fill out a volunteer application. You may also contact our literacy director, Ashleigh at **literacydirector@gigis-playhouse.org**. Make a difference today and help us spread the LOVE!

i have a voice

The Travelling Gallery finally came back to Illinois! Special thanks to the Ela Area Public Library for hosting the "i have a voice" gallery for the entire month of March, sponsored by the Friends of Ela Library. Christy Wagner, Ela Area Library's Outreach Coordinator, from the library contacted us last year and planned a wonderful event around the exhibit. Christy was great to work with and the graphics department at the library did a wonderful job with advertising and materials. The opening day consisted of live harp music playing throughout the afternoon, opening remarks from Nancy, dancers from the Center Stage Performing Troupe and a performance from the Metropolis Performing Arts Center's Flourish in the Footlights. The room was filled with families from GiGi's, special groups that came in to specifically see the exhibit and many others. It was a great afternoon that was filled with awareness, acceptance

and bright futures. The Ela Area Public Library is continuing to publicize the event and has said that there has been a tremendous amount of interest in the exhibit.

This Gallery has already been across the country and continues to spread the message that individuals with Down syndrome have a voice. If you listen to that voice, you will hear the dreams, aspirations, and personality of these individuals! With these largerthan-life portraits, you can't help but hear their voice!

We are currently forming a committee to keep the gallery moving, please contact Lisa Schuh if you are interested in helping or if you have an idea of where the Gallery can go next.

We are also looking for sponsors to help us to get the book printed and published, if you have any contacts that would help us get the book out there, please contact Lisa Schuh at

schedule@ihaveavoice.com







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 confidencebuilding 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 build-

Literacy ♦ Our free Literacy program teaches kids with Down 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

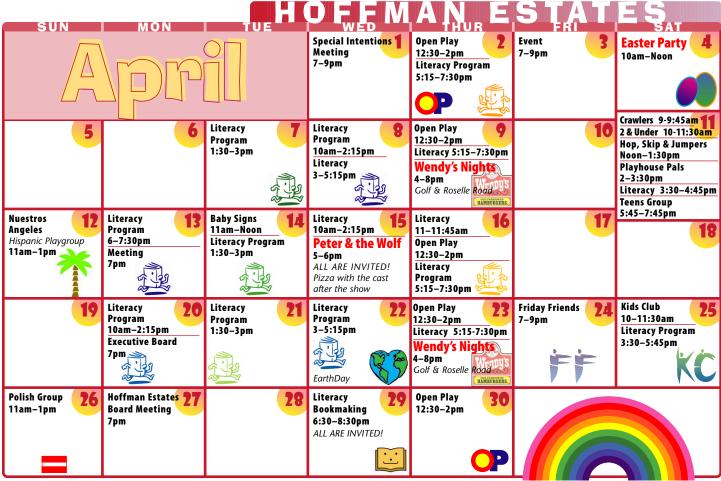
Inspirational Calendars Go on Sale!

Our 2009 INSPIRE calendars are on sale for \$8! Call your local Playhouse to purchase these incredible awareness materials! Each page challenges you and your family to be a better person! With check boxes for you to track your progress, it's a motivational tool that will bring your whole family together. These can also be given to schools, hospitals, your therapists etc!

To order yours today, go to www.gigisplayhouse.org



metamorphosisphotography.com



Literacy & Phonics

Dawn Sharbaugh, Hoffman Estates Board of Directors, piloted a new phonics program over the summer. The Hoffman tutors have all undergone training to learn how to integrate phonics into the current Literacy program when it is appropriate. "The phonics program is a great addition to the literacy program because it continues to build the child's reading skills to help them reach outstanding potentials. The phonics program con-

philosophies of the current literacy program, making it a great transition for the children."

Beth Spenadel, one of our Hoffman Tutors, has utilized Phonics with Katie, and said "Katie is TALKING during literacy now! Recently, we read several short books. She repeated after me and/or read words on her own. She is doing the Brand New Readers books. She did so well, that we called her dad at the airport and had her tell him that she wants ice cream when he comes home! This was a huge accomplishment!"

Friday Friends

tinues to build upon the ideas and

Back by popular demand, we are having an April Jam Session with Rick Renner and friends! Bring your instruments. **Fri., April 24th!** No meeting in May.



Easter Party

Color Easter eggs, have breakfast

with the bunny and go on an Easter Egg Hunt! RSVP to info@ gigisplay-house.com and let us know how many adults and kids are attending.



Programs Update

April's theme will be a "somewhere over the rainbow" theme for both **Playhouse Pals** and **Hop, Skip & Jumpers**. April will mark the first very sensory structured playgroups, and will integrate sensory play that will touch on each one of the senses; movement (vestibular system), sound, touch, music, hand-eye coordination, and fine motor planning. Guests from other Playhouses are encouraged to attend! Please make sure to wear your favorite color of the rainbow!

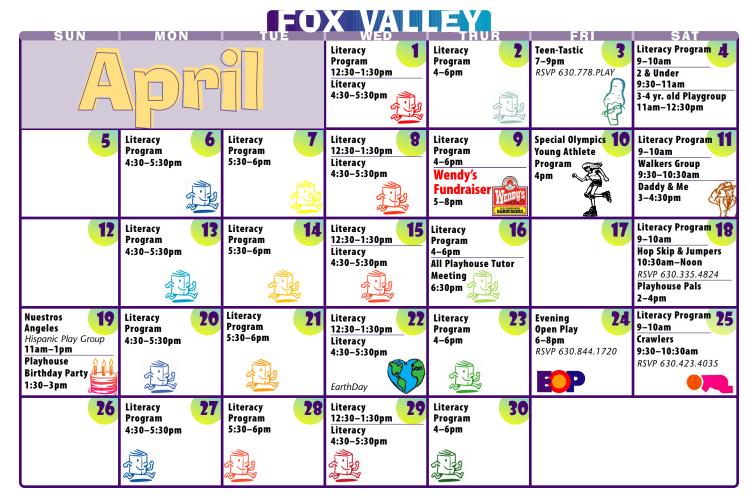
The **Teens Group** will have a Beach Party, make their own snacks, work on team building and meet teen peer buddies.

Baby Signs Class

The Baby Signs program teaches simple movements that babies can use to communicate. **Tuesdays, 11am-Noon** at the Hoffman Playhouse.

April 14th theme: Mealtime
May 12th theme: Bedtime
June 9th theme: Bathtime

Registration required, space is limited RSVP to info@gigisplayhouse.com



Thank You

GiGi's Fox Valley would like to express gratitude to our new landlord, Steve Dawidiuk. When we first contacted Steve about adding the Playhouse to his strip mall, he was thrilled that we would fit in with the other kid-friendly businesses like Enchanted Castle, my Gym, and Toys 'R' Us. Steve is truly a Playhouse miracle since he welcomed us with open arms and has fulfilled our every request. He has also taken the time to learn about Down syndrome and has shared many suggestions about spreading awareness to the community. The Playhouse families love the new location.

Thank you Steve!



More Thank You's

We would also like to thank the team of contractors and companies who donated supplies. Thank you for making our Playhouse such an attractive and functional space. Special thanks to:

Harrison and Son's
Charles Hinton Electric
RJ O'Neil plumbing
Sprovieri's Custom Counters
Paintech
Carpet Brothers
Best Buy Carpets
Joliet Cabinet Co.
Duke Construction - John Cahill

GiGi's Fox Valley Ribbon Cutting

GiGi's Fox Valley is grateful to the city of Aurora and to our families for making our Ribbon Cutting in March

such a huge success. Now that we have moved to a more visible location, we have welcomed eight new families to the Playhouse. We hope to welcome many more new families and volunteers to the Playh

and volunteers to the Playhouse in the months and years ahead.

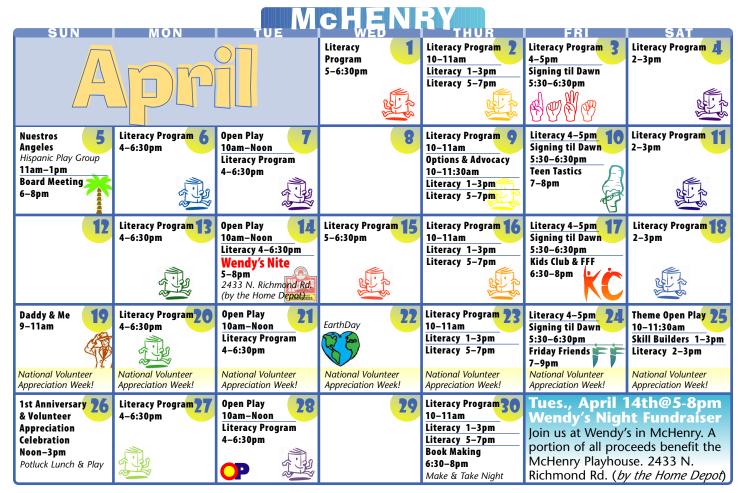
"Back in Action" Evening Open Play February

Our first evening open play group at our Fox Valley location was lots of fun! We ate lots of pizza, giggled and wig-

gled to the book "Clap your hands" and created some wiggley snakes. We had over 40 people in attendance! That was our biggest group yet. Thank you to all the families who are making this group such a big success. Our next Evening Open Play group will

be held **Fri.**, **April 24th** from **6-8pm**. "Come join the fun!" Please RSVP to **qlatka@qiqisplayhouse.org**.

5



April 19th-25th — National Volunteer Appreciation Week! PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by the community. From the warmth families, volunteers and board mem-

Thank you to our Volunteers!

By Susan DuBois

At the end of February we had the opportunity to participate in the McHenry Chamber Expo and once again this year, we were fully embraced

of a smile and a handshake, to a generous donation for our upcoming fundraiser, it was an amazing day that depicted the efforts of our labor over this past year in building the McHenry Playhouse. It was awesome to see our

families, volunteers and board members come together to share in the event reaching out and spread the goodwill of our organization with others in the community. We even caught the eye of our State Representative and the State's Attorney!

First Anniversary!

Our future has been shaped by the dedication and work of many volunteers! Our Board of Directors skillfully steers Playhouse activities. Incredible programs are developed by volunteer teachers, therapist and friends. We have many creative fundraisers, includ-

ing a Holiday Fashion Show, 5K, and Hawgs and Hot Rods Poker Run. We succeed in our vision to spread awareness about Down syndrome because of the support of each volunteer. As we celebrate our first anniversary on **April 26th**, we want to thank each and every volunteer at the McHenry Playhouse!

Hawgs & Hot Rods Krusin' 4 the Kids

Gear up for the Hawgs & Hot Rods Krusin' 4 the Kids. Ice Cream Poker Run fundraising event on **Sun., June 28th** in Woodstock. Check out the website for more details!

Themed Open Play is a Great Success!

We cut out bookmarks in shapes of things to match the theme for each month. February we made heart shaped ladybugs, March was St. Patty's Sham-rock celebration and April will feature, April showers, bring May Flowers. Please join us on





Saturday, April 25th!



2nd Annual Game Night

Are you ready for the 2nd Annual Game Night? Well, start warming up! Game night begins at **7pm** on **Saturday, April 25** at the Chicago location. Admission is free but you've got to "pay to play"! Food and drink will be provided while you try your hand at Jenga, Wii, Connect Four and more. Come on down and play! At the end of the evening we will crown the big winner

Game Night King/Queen.

Literacy Journey

The Literacy Program does more than help kids learn to read..... it also helps increase our children's spoken vocabulary. My 3 year old daughter, Kira, started GiGi's Playhouse literacy program this past fall. Since that time, I have seen a significant improvement in her vocabulary. For those of you

who are unfamiliar with the literacy program, it employs matching words to pictures and words. This process helps to reinforce

the visual learning of the word. Kira was 2 years old when she began her "literacy journey". At the time she had a spoken vocabulary of roughly 20 words. Within three months of beginning the program her vocabulary had doubled and it keeps growing. Thank you GiGi's!

Kira's mom, Rebecca Zook

Guest Speaker Series

In May, the Chicago Playhouse will begin a monthly Guest Speaker Series, Motivational Mondays, to provide the families of GiGi's and the community with information and inspiration! We are very excited about this program and about our amazing first speakers.

Motivational Mondays Guest Speaker Series presents:

My Sister, My Friend, Kiera Monday, May 4th at 7pm

Sisters Caitlin Pultz and Kiera Breault will speak about their special sibling friendship that has blossomed through the years. Kiera, a fun-loving, hard working twenty seven year old adult will speak to you on what it is like to grow up with Down syndrome. She will share with you her many talents which include swimming, working at a

hair salon and playing the piano. You won't want to miss this one of kind sister presentation!





Hoffman Estates

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Fox Valley Grand Opening Celebration Sun., May 3rd, 2009

Sun., May 3rd, 2009 from 1-4pm

Mark your calendars and join us for a Grand Opening Celebration with fun, food, games and much more!

Artists with Special Needs Raise Money for GiGi's Playhouse Hoffman Estates!

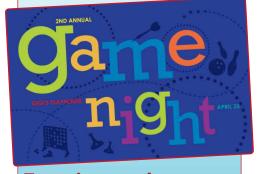
Three Little Pigs: "The Musical"

Sat., May 9th, at 7pm

at the Metropolis Performing Arts Centre in Arlington Heights.

Tickets will be \$30 (includes 2 drinks, hors d'oeuvres and dessert) and can be purchased online at **www.gigisplayhouse.org**

Save the Date 2nd Annual Game Night Sat., April 25th at 7-11pm



To register or donate to Game Nite go to www.gigisplayhouse.org

Come join GiGi at Open Play for lunch & learning!

At the Chicago Playhouse on April 2nd, 16th and the 30th from 11:30am-1pm. See you there!

Hoffman Estates

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

locations

Fox Valley

4024 Fox Valley Drive Aurora, IL 60504 **630.778.PLAY**

McHenry

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