



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

Fox Valley

McHenry

Chicago

Now Serving **4** Locations

FEBRUARY 2009

Congratulations to Nancy Gianni Chicagoan of the Year!

Founder of GiGi's Playhouse, Nancy Gianni, has been voted as a Chicagoan of the Year by **Chicago Magazine** for her work to raise awareness about Down syndrome. After giving birth to her daughter, GiGi, who has Down syndrome, Nancy opened GiGi's Playhouse Down syndrome awareness center in Hoffman Estates in 2003. Since then, Playhouses have opened in Fox Valley, McHenry,



Nancy's dedication to making the world a better place for all individuals with Down syndrome is obvious to all who know her. Her inspiration comes from her beautiful daughter GiGi and her passion has inspired many to spread positive awareness about Down syndrome in their communities. Nancy has channeled her passion into an unstoppable mission that has spread throughout the nation!



Chicago, and soon, Sioux City, Iowa. GiGi's Playhouse offers activities, resources, educational programs and support for individuals with Down syndrome, their families and the community.

Congratulations, Nancy, we are forever thankful to you for all you do to make the world a better place for individuals with Down syndrome.



Visit from Carrie

Carrie Bergeron visited the Hoffman Estates Playhouse in December. Carrie, who is married and lives in New York, has Down syndrome, and became an advocate for others with Down syndrome. She is a former board member

of the National Down Syndrome Congress Board of Directors and now serves

on the Self Advocacy Committee and the Youth and Adult Committee. She loves to share her experiences as a young adult with Down syndrome. She enjoyed time with her good friend Christine while visiting the Playhouse!



Brianna — A Gift

When Brianna was brought into the NICU, a doctor whom I had never spoken to before told me he believed she had Down syndrome. I was shell-shocked. There were some hard times recalibrating our hopes, dreams and expectations for Brianna.

The breakthrough for me came when one social worker shared with me the GiGi's calendar. It was filled with children with Down syndrome dreaming to be dancers, princesses, firemen, businessmen, and football players. There were inspirational quotes from parents as well. But it was the pictures that captured my heart. These



children in the calendar were having dreams met; they were leading a fulfilling childhood. There

was true joy in their smiles, joy that cannot be faked for a camera, but that came from their hearts.

At that moment, I realized I needed to take off the lenses I had been looking through, the lenses of disability, the lenses that saw a child

with Down syndrome as a normal child minus some set of abilities and capabilities. I needed to put on a different set of lenses and see Brianna as a child with abilities. She was a gift that was additive to our lives and the world.

Her life should be judged by

something more fundamentally important. Would she have a rich and meaningful life? Would her life bring joy and fulfillment to herself and those who love her? Our job as parents was not to create barriers and say what she could not do. We needed to knock down barriers for her and be her advocate, helping her achieve that fulfilling and meaningful life she deserves.

Today, now that the heart surgery is over, we focus much more on Brianna than on Down syndrome or her medical complications. We are really enjoying our daughter as a gift and trying to afford her all of the opportunities to grow and blossom to her potential. We recognize that there are plenty of difficult times and perhaps even some more heart break ahead, but I think that is what you sign up for, generally, when you decide to become a parent. The joys and successes of becoming a parent are not free, but they outweigh the trials and tribulations of parenthood.

As for my advice for new parents, I would recommend the following:

- Plug into a support network of positive people — they will be a key to helping you “get over the hump” and keeping you in the right frame of mind to make your tomorrows as valuable as possible. Look to friends, family,

coworkers, and support groups and organizations.

- For those people around you who are either not positive or are not “appropriate”, help them learn and reframe their thinking. You will be making your world, and the world at large, a better place.

- Take some time to mourn, but recognize you are mourning your dreams, not your child's.

- Take off the lens of disability and put on the lens of abilities. Then help others to do the same. Your child is a gift that will bring joy and fulfillment to your life. She is additive to the value of your life, not subtractive.

Mickey Loves the Literacy Program!

If you think your three year old is too young for our Literacy Program, you may want to think again! Mickey's mom said that because he is a visual

learner, Mickey understands the concepts and enjoys Literacy. He loves matching, and the program sparks his speech development!



Call your local Playhouse for information on how to enroll your child in Literacy!

Proud Tutor!!

Anna has been a part of our Literacy Program for about 6 months. She is 5 years old and completely awesome. I love being her tutor. She works so hard every session and we have such a good time! We have been working with various books and flashcards and last week I made some winter/Christ-

mas flashcards to work with. At the beginning of the program, she would find the correct word to match to the flashcard out of a field of two. Now, she picks out of a field of 4 or 5! Her mom, Jill, tells me that she spreads all her words out on the floor at home and plays the matching game by herself, picking out the words out of a big pile!

The thing I really love about the Literacy Program is how it is designed to really help kids suc-



ceed in every step. The kids aren't tested to find out what they don't know but rather shown what they do know which is, as you can imagine, really exciting (probably as much for me as it is the kids!). The matching games we play are so fun and there's no pressure to get it all right, all the time. Eventually I start to notice Anna picking up words with no pictures attached and reading them to me as we play our games... what a wonderful way to learn and discover! I have so enjoyed getting to know Anna as we've worked together and I look forward to every week. I feel really privileged to be a small part in her journey towards literacy. Each bit of progress is so thrilling... I can't tell who's having more fun here, me or her! Read more and see video about Anna on the new McHenry blog.

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 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

Gingerbread Workshop

On Sat., Dec. 20th, Karyn Hobfoll, a Chef Instructor from the Le Cordon Bleu Culinary School in Chicago conducted a Gingerbread House workshop at the Chicago Playhouse. This hands-on event was great success. Parents and children alike had a wonderful time decorating the two huge gingerbread houses.


















Chef Karyn built the houses and brought all the candy for decorating. It was so much fun and the gingerbread houses turned out beautifully. We plan to make this an annual event.

A special thanks to Chef Karyn for donating her time and talents!



3-Dimensional IEP Meeting

As parents of a child with Down syndrome, too often it may feel like the purpose of the IEP meeting is to reduce your child to a series of test scores. Come learn strategies for effectively talking about your child at the IEP meeting, building a partnership with your school, and creating an educational environment for your child where he or she can truly thrive. This meeting will be held at the Chicago Playhouse on **March 18th at 7pm.**

February		HOFFMAN ESTATES					
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	
1 Literacy 6-7:30pm Ground Hog Day 	2 Literacy 1:30-3pm 	3 Special Intentions Meeting 7-9pm	4 Open Play 12:30-2pm Literacy 11-11:45am Literacy 5:15-7:30pm	5 GiGi's Gala 7pm	6	7	
8 Nuestros Angeles Hispanic Playgroup 11am-1pm 	9 Literacy 10am-2:15pm 	10 Literacy 1:30-3pm 	11 Literacy 10am-2:15pm Literacy 3-5:15pm 	12 Open Play 12:30-2pm Literacy 5:15-7:30pm Wendy's Fundraiser 4-8pm  Golf & Roselle Rd.	13 NEW 	14 Crawlers 9-9:45am 2 & Under 10-11:30am Hop, Skip & Jumpers Noon-1:30pm Playhouse Pals 2-3:30pm Literacy 3:30-5:45pm	
15 Literacy 6-7:30pm Board Meeting 6:30pm President's Day 	16 Literacy 1:30-3pm 	17	18 Open Play 12:30-2pm Literacy 11-11:45am Literacy 5:15-7:30pm 	19	20	21	
22 Polish Group 11am-1pm 	23 Literacy 10am-2:15pm Hoffman Board Meeting 7pm 	24 Literacy 1:30-3pm 	25 Literacy 10am-2:15pm Literacy 3-5:15pm Literacy Bookmaking 6:30-8:30pm	26 Open Play 12:30-2pm Wendy's Fundraiser 4-8pm  Golf & Roselle Rd. Literacy 5:15-7:30pm	27 Friday Friends 7-9pm 	28 Kids Club 10-11:30am Literacy 3:30-5:45pm 	

DON'T FORGET!

Spread the Love Gala

7pm, Feb. 7, 2009

Register at:
www.gigisplayhouse.org

Bookmaking Party

What do you get when you combine 10 energetic people, some laminators and paper cutters with pizza? A very successful bookmaking venture! This is what happened on December 29 when volunteers showed up to help restock our Literacy materials for the upcoming semester. Thanks to the efforts of these wonderful volunteers, 95 complete, individual book units were made, all in a 5 hour window! No small feat! We are now ready to welcome our Winter Literacy participants. Thanks bunches!!
Susan Doody, Literacy Coordinator

There is a bookmaking evening on the **last Wednesday** of each month, from **6:30-8:30pm**. Please consider joining us on **January 28th** or **February 25th**.

New Group for 6-8 year olds!

Saturday, February 14th, from **2-3:30pm** for fun with the new Playhouse Pals group!

Open Play

We helped Ozzie celebrate his first birthday! Join us any **Thursday** from **12:30-2pm**.



Kids Club

We talked about our fun holiday vacations, played charades and games and had lots of fun. All kids 9-12 years old are invited to join us!





Friday Friends

Bowling was lots of fun! Mark your calendar for **February 27** (movie night) and **March 27** (laser tag)!

5,4,3,2,1 — Happy New Year!

Our New Year's Party was a blast! Many thanks to Boy Scouts Troop 399 who helped make the party a success!



SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
1 Ground Hog Day	2	3	4	5	6	7 GiGi's Gala 7pm
8 Literacy Program 4-5pm	9 Literacy Program 4-5pm 	10 Literacy Program 5:30-6pm 	11 Literacy 12:30-1:30pm Literacy 4:30-5:30pm 	12 Literacy Program 4-6pm Wendy's Fundraiser ?:?-?:?pm 	13	14 Walkers Group 9:30-11am RSVP 630.422.4035 Daddy & Me 3-4:30pm 
15 Literacy Program 4-5pm 	16 Literacy Program 5:30-6pm 	17 Literacy 12:30-1:30pm Literacy 4:30-5:30pm 	18 Literacy Program 4-6pm 	19	20	21 Hop Skip & Jumpers 10:30am-Noon RSVP 630.335.4824 Playhouse Pals 2-4pm 
22 Nuestros Angeles Hispanic Playgroup 11am-1pm 	23 Literacy Program 4-5pm 	24 Literacy Program 5:30-6pm 	25 Literacy 12:30-1:30pm Literacy 4:30-5:30pm 	26 Literacy Program 4-6pm 	27 Evening Open Play 6-8pm RSVP 630.778.7529 	28 Crawlers 9:30-11am 

Christmas Blessings

We celebrate many blessings at Christmastime, our health and family to name a couple, but one more very important one is our friends. The VW Club of Joliet held their annual



Christmas party this year and Joe, the president of the club,



and his wife Gina invited the volunteers at GiGi's Playhouse Plainfield as their guests of honor. When we walked in everyone was so friendly. We had not met very many people from the club, yet everyone was so excited to see us. Natalie, as usual, scoped out the party looking for someone she can play with. She found a few kids and adults who would allow her to pull them around

and dance with her. At first I was worried... would they understand Natalie?... would they be upset with her insistent attitude of not letting them sit for a moment?... but as I looked at everyone's face they had a smile from ear to ear. She worked the crowd! I don't know how many people she danced with that day but they all seemed to have a good time. I don't think they saw her as a little girl with Down syndrome. Everyone saw Natalie as a little girl who

likes to socialize, dance and run around :), just like her family sees her. Santa even appeared at the end of the night with gifts for all the kids! That was a huge highlight!

The VW Club has been touched by Down syndrome and has welcomed us as part of their family. We are so blessed to have them as support to our children.



GiGi's Plainfield is Moving!

GiGi's Playhouse Fox Valley will be open soon! Please call the Playhouse or email your leader to confirm any February groups or meetings. The phone message will be updated when the move is complete.

Our new address is:
4024 Fox Valley Center Drive
in **Aurora, IL**

Evening Open Play

The December group had lots of fun dancing to Christmas tunes, creating a snowman picture frame, and listening to how snowmen celebrate the holi-

days. Please join us at our next Evening Open Play group on **Friday, February 27th** from **6-8pm**. We will have pizza and create a craft. Please rsvp Genia at glatka@gigisplayhouse.org

Wendy's Fundraiser

Second Thursday of every month located at the corner of 59 and 134th street in Plainfield.



SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT
1 Nuestros Angeles <i>Hispanic Playgroup</i> 10am-Noon 	2 Literacy Program 4-6pm <i>Ground Hog Day</i> 	3 Open Play 10am-Noon Literacy Program 4-7pm 	4 Literacy Program 5-6:30pm 	5 Literacy 10am-1:45pm Literacy 5-7pm 	6 Sign 'til Dawn 5:30-6:30pm <i>RSVP</i>	7 Literacy Noon-1:45pm GiGi's Gala 7pm 
8 	9 Literacy Program 4-6pm 	10 Open Play 10am-Noon Literacy 4-7pm Wendy's Fundraiser 5-8pm  	11 Literacy Program 5-6:30pm 	12 Options & Advocacy Playgroup 10-11:30am Literacy 10am-1:45pm Literacy 5-7pm 	13 Sign 'til Dawn 5:30-6:30pm <i>RSVP</i> Teen-Tastic 7pm 	14 Literacy Noon-1:45pm Valentine's Day Open Play 1-3pm 
15 	16 Literacy Program 4-6pm 	17 Open Play 10am-Noon Literacy Program 4-7pm 	18 Literacy Program 5-6:30pm Charles Fox Seminar 	19 Literacy 10am-1:45pm Literacy 5-7pm 	20 Sign 'til Dawn 5:30-6:30pm <i>Please RSVP</i> Kid's Club 6:30pm 	21 Literacy Noon-1:45pm 
22 Daddy & Me 9-11am 	23 Literacy Program 4-6pm 	24 Open Play 10am-Noon Literacy Program 4-7pm 	25 Literacy Program 5-6:30pm 	26 Literacy 10am-1:45pm Literacy 5-7pm Bookmaking/ Make n' Take Night 6:30pm 	27 Sign 'til Dawn 5:30-6:30pm <i>Please RSVP</i> Friday Friends 7pm (18 & older) 	28 Hop, Skip & Jumpers 10-11:30am Literacy Noon-1:45pm 

McHenry to Launch New Program — Skill Builders

Join us for an afternoon of fun as we reinforce, or learn new, academic skills. The program will have Learning Centers, very similar to centers in a school setting. Each center will feature a particular learning activity for children to work on.

Phonics & Handwriting

We'll learn silly songs and actions to remember letter sounds and practice writing these letters.

Touch Math Center

We will be counting to 10 and adding single digits. And learning wouldn't be complete without an Art Center to work with primary colors and color blending. Please come and be a part of our newest program. Based on success, we will schedule this program regularly! Call the Playhouse for more information. Join us the Last Saturday of the month from 1-3pm.

McHenry Playhouse has a Blog

What is a blog you might ask? A website maintained by our programs director with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, and other material such as graphics or video. Our blog provides commentary and news about activities and programs at the Playhouse; it's our personal online diary for the Playhouse. It provides a forum for us to communicate quickly, combining text, images, and links to other blogs, and other media related to Down syndrome awareness. There is a google calendar posted on the blog that is updated regularly. You can click on an activity and see the full description and detail of the program. We are proud to join the more than 112 million existing blogs. You can find the McHenry blog through the link at gigisplayhouse.org or mcgigs.blogspot.com



Friday Friends

The spirit of the holidays are in our Friday Friends group all year round!

Eat at Wendy's & Help GiGi's

Tues., February 10th, 5-8pm

Feb. 10th
















McHenry Wendy's
2433 N. Richmond Rd.
(by the Home Depot)



Our Holiday Party

Though the holidays have passed, we could not help but share this moment that captured the spirit of our holiday party.



February		CHICAGO					
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	
Yoga 10-10:45am Nuestros Angeles <i>Hispanic Group</i> 11:15am-1:15pm 	Literacy Program 9-11am <i>Ground Hog Day</i> 	Literacy Program 4-6:15pm 		Open Play 11:30am-1pm 	Literacy Program 9-11am 	Open Play 10:15am-11:30am GiGi's Gala 7pm 	
Yoga 10-10:45am 	Literacy Program 9-11am 	Literacy Program 4-6:15pm 			Literacy Program 9-11am 	Playhouse Pals 11:15am-12:45pm 	
	Literacy Program 9-11am 	Literacy Program 4-6:15pm 		Open Play 11:30am-1pm Volunteer Night New Parent Packet Creation 6:30-8:30pm	Literacy Program 9-11am 	Open Play 10:15-11:30am Kids Club Noon-1:30pm  	
	Literacy Program 9-11am 	Literacy Program 4-6:15pm 			Literacy Program 9-11am 	Crawlers 10-10:45am 2 and Under 11am-12:15pm Hop Skip & Jumpers 12:30-2pm	

What GiGi's Playhouse Means to the Delaney Family

My introduction to GiGi's Playhouse seemed to be one of divine intervention. When my second son was born (Jack, Dec. 10th, 2007), my husband and I were completely unprepared for the revelation that he had Down syndrome. My lactation nurse recommended that I seek out support from GiGi's Playhouse. I asked her if she could arrange someone to come to my home to meet with me. 5 days after I gave birth, the day after I re-turned home with my precious baby, Heidi Aldama came to my home. I can still feel the emotion as she entered our home. I just wanted to hug and cry on the shoulder of another mother who has experienced all the emotions I was going through. Now, for my husband, this was a bit overwhelming... but for me, it was cathartic and necessary for me to be able to move forward. Ever



since that day I have never looked back. I have attended seminars provided by GiGi's that has given me great insight regarding Early Intervention and various therapies. My husband and son, Charlie (3), come to the crawlers and 2's and Under group. When Jack turned one this year a girlfriend called me to wish him a happy birthday. She asked me if the day

brought back any of those feelings I experience on the day of his birth. The answer is simple... my love for Jack is so strong that it has washed away all my initial feelings of fear, anger, doubt, and pain. I am a lifetime of a different person than the day he was born. GiGi's Playhouse was my refuge where I could find a common bond and connection with other parents. I am so excited about our future with the Playhouse and the great friendships we will make.

Thank you GiGi's Playhouse for being there for our family!

Thank You!!!!

A long overdue THANK YOU goes out to Lori and Brendan Burke. Lori and Brendan hosted a GiGi's Fund-raiser at their home and raised over \$500 for the Chicago Playhouse. Your generosity and commitment to the Playhouse are appreciated!

Show Your Support & Buy a Heart!

All during the month of February you can cut out the picture of the hearts from the Chicago website, sign it and send it to the Chicago Playhouse, 3660

W. Irving Park Road. They only cost \$5 each or 5 for \$20. We want to fill the entire entrance wall (and for those of you who have been to our Playhouse—

you know how big that wall is). Buy one for all members of your family or honor a friend or classmate who has Down syndrome!



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

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION
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save the date
Sat., Feb. 7, 2009
Spread the Love Gala
Register Online!

Get Ready, Get Set ...
RUN!

It's 5K planning time!! Are you interested in helping plan for the biggest event of the year?! All the Playhouses work together to spread the most positive awareness as possible! Call you local Playhouse to get involved!

Save the Date!
Sat., April 25, 2009
2nd Annual Game Night
Chicago Playhouse

McHenry —

Practical Advocacy and Special Ed Law Seminar

Do you have questions regarding your IEP, Special Education Law, and practical advocacy? Come join us for an evening with Charles Fox, a practicing attorney in Illinois since 1986, who has very successfully advocated for parents at due process hearings, mediations, IEP meetings, and on appeals in Federal Court. Charles is also the parent of a child with special needs.

Mr. Fox is a very dedicated advocate who is willing to share his expertise and experience with us. This is one speaker you won't want to miss!!

Mark your calendar for **7pm** on **Wednesday, February 18th.** This event will be held at the McHenry Playhouse. Please RSVP at **815.385.7529.**

Locations

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

Fox Valley
4024 Fox Valley Drive
Aurora, IL 60504
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

4 to serve you