



Down Syndrome Awareness Centers

educate. inspire. achieve.

December 2010

Newsletter

www.gigisplayhouse.org
info@gigisplayhouse.org

National Office
1071 W. Golf Rd.
Hoffman Estates, IL 60169
847.885.6149

Rockford Location
8801 N 2nd
Machesney Park, IL 61115
815.654.PLAY (7529)

Hoffman Estates Location
1069 W. Golf Rd.
Hoffman Estates, IL 60169
847.885.PLAY (7529)

Chicago Location
3948 N Lincoln Ave
Chicago, IL 60613
773.583.PLAY (7529)

Fox Valley Location
4024 Fox Valley Center Dr.
Aurora, IL 60504
630.778.PLAY (7529)

Sioux City Location
1551 Indian Hills Drive, Ste 7
Sioux City, Iowa 51104
712.226.PLAY (7529)

McHenry Location
5404 W. Elm St. Suite A.
McHenry, IL 60050
815.385.PLAY (7529)

Des Moines Location
10430 New York Ave Ste A
Urbandale, IA 50322
515.252.PLAY (7529)



Hi!!!

Wow! What a year! 4 new locations! Des Moines, Iowa opened, Rockford, IL opens January 8th and New York and Atlanta are set up and on their way! Not to mention all that has been going on at our existing Playhouses! We launched our long awaited math program, condensed our literacy and phonics program into one amazing program, enhanced our hospital outreach to reach the Spanish population, added Club GiGi's for our adult population, started a theatre groups for teens, dance class for tots and many other programs to raise self esteem and get some therapy to boot!

In order to manage all of these locations we needed a server based model and standardized policies, procedures and materials – all of which are paramount in our growth. That was a bigger job than I ever thought but will be worth it to support all the efforts of each Playhouse! Here is a letter I recently wrote to all of the GiGi's Playhouse board members;



Des Moines GiGi's

Yesterday was one of those days when I woke up in a panic. Are we doing enough for Down syndrome? How can we help the Playhouses more? How are we going to get more money? It was the kind of panic that made your heart pound and you knew you were not going back to sleep.

I started shooting out emails and I realized that I needed to take a step back and look at all that HAS been accomplished. WOW! Because of all of YOU, we truly are changing the way people see Down syndrome! I am not just talking here in our own communities but all around the world! When I got to the Playhouse I received an email from our new board in Mexico! Yes, Mexico! We just got our national model down and now we are talking with our lawyers for creating an international model! Then GiGi's Mexico will be born!

After I read the email, I went to the front of the Hoffman Playhouse and there was a Hispanic child being tutored. Excited, I told the mother that we are opening a Playhouse in Mexico! She was thrilled and said "I know you don't remember me, but 3 years ago when I first came here, you told me my daughter can do anything! No one believed that in my family. You told me to potty train and not to give up! My family said 'No, leave her alone'. But I listened to you and I went home and in 8 days (very hard days) she was potty trained! Thank you! Thank you for GiGi's Playhouse!" She was right, I did not remember. But because there was a place for her to come, to learn to believe in her child, to see the potential in her child, she raised the bar. Watching that little kindergarten girl walk out of the Playhouse, with 4 new literacy books in hand, was what I needed to motivate me and keep us on our mission.

I know that talking to that mother was my sign from God to keep moving forward. A day that started with so much question and uncertainty ended with love, pride, hope and the certainty that yes, we are doing the right thing.

This applies to all of you, too! We could not do this without all of you! Keep reading, then we will meet again on page 4!



How YOU Have Made a Difference!

More than Down syndrome

From your support, we have been able to ensure that the educational programs go beyond the learner with Down syndrome. Family members change the way they view their child, sibling or grandchild. Educators raise the expectation of their student with Down syndrome. The medical community shares accurate and up-to-date information with new parents. As a result, the community embraces individuals with Down syndrome – all from your support!



More than a Fundraiser

The Fashion Show, hosted by the McHenry location, was about more than just showing of the latest style. It was about more than raising money. It's about bringing out that self esteem and raising the confidence in all individuals with Down syndrome and their family members! By supporting the various events and fundraisers that GiGi's puts on, not only are you helping us be able to continue to offer free educational programs and develop new ones, you are directly influencing people with Down syndrome!



More Than a Playhouse, More Than a Place to Learn

At GiGi's, the programs that we provide are based on the needs of all individuals with Down syndrome and their families. However, the impact goes much farther than those receiving direct services. It's about so much more than the learner with Down syndrome...take Hanna for example...



The GiGi's LifeCycle

- It's about Hanna's parents going to *GiGi's Open Play* when she was first born and hearing CONGRATULATIONS! You just had a baby! And them realizing that Hanna is just that - their baby daughter!
- It's about taking that realization, and working hard with Hannah in the *GiGi's Crawlers and Walkers* programs to combat the low muscle tone that is so common to children with Down syndrome.
- It's about Hanna going to Kindergarten with the ability to read from *GiGi's Literacy Program* and changing the way her teacher views Down syndrome.
- It's about Hanna going to Junior High with the self confidence she gained at the *GiGi's Open Mic and Teen Nights*. Being confident in who she is helps her develop friendships.
- It's about Hannah graduating High school and showing the world that they can't put limitations on her.
- It's about Hannah using the skills she learned in the *Literacy, Phonics and Math Programs* to find a job that she enjoys and can excel at.
- It's about Hannah using the *Life Skills* classes at GiGi's to live independently in her own apartment because she has budgeting, reading and social skills.

Making a Difference

Pam, a student at Elmhurst college, volunteers every week at GiGi's Playhouse. Here, she describes why, "When I heard Nancy speak at my school, I knew that was a good place for me to volunteer. I started volunteering every other week administratively. I helped with thank you notes, *i have a voice* projects, and more! One day, I was creating literacy books and wanted to learn more about the program. When I found out that the books I was creating were going to a child to help them learn to read, I knew I wanted to do more. So I took the Literacy training and became a tutor! I love the kids I work with and it feels good to know I helping them with such a vital life skill! I continue to volunteer administratively too because I know that every project I work on has a direct impact on the life of someone with Down syndrome! Where else can you say that?!"

It's because of the hundreds of volunteers like Pam who give of their time, that we are able to make a direct impact in our communities as well as continue the mission of spreading awareness and education across the nation!



Most of all, it's about Hannah and the thousands of kids like her, reaching their potential and living life – full of friends, family, responsibility, even bills! It's a full life – the kind we all want. By helping Hannah live the kind of life she dreams of and deserves, the world around her is slowly changing. The kindergarten teacher won't judge future kids in her class. The generation that Hannah grew up being friends with are learning the truth about Down syndrome. The community around Hannah sees her independent lifestyle and changes the way they view Down syndrome. A new appreciation for the reality of what Down syndrome is and what it is not, is born. Everyone has raised expectations for individuals with Down syndrome!

How YOU Can Continue to Change the World!

A Picture is Worth a Million Words

GiGi's is spreading awareness without even using words through our National awareness campaigns!



The *i have a voice* Traveling Gallery. From Hospitals, to shopping malls (pictured here in front of Macy's) to Galas's, our Traveling Gallery is circling the country and sending a powerful message. It's title, *i have a voice* is clearly portrayed; each voice is heard through the eyes of the larger than life photos. We are working hard to make this inspirational gallery into a beautiful coffee table book for all to enjoy!

The Yearly Believe Calendar. On each page of this BEAUTIFUL calendar you will see quotes from parents of children in the calendar who BELIEVE! It is designed with the belief that you will read these quotes, share them with your family and teach them the importance of love and acceptance.



HOW YOU CAN HELP– Buy some calendars for family, friends and colleagues. Great for corporate gifts and a write off to boot! Help us find a high traffic area to host the gallery! (corporate lobbies, airport, malls, get creative!) Or donate dollars to help offset shipping costs and underwrite the book! Contact ihaveavoic@gigisplayhouse.org for more information.

1st Phonics Graduate!

Lydia is making history as the very first graduate of the Phun with Phonics Level One Reading Program and she has no intention of stopping! Lydia plans to continue her Literacy tutoring, and tackling more and more words. To celebrate her monumental achievement, Lydia's parents planned a mini-graduation ceremony. There, before a captivated audience, Lydia read a series of books ending with *The life Cycle of an Insect*. She then took the comprehension test and aced it! "We hoped, we dreamed of her reading someday like her brother James," said mom, Laura. "Our dream came true through the GiGi's reading program. 'Wow,' she would say, 'look at all the word families that I know!' And you could see how proud she was of her academic achievement! She was energized to do more!" Lydia is a testament to power of determination, hard-work and a belief in the great potential of our children. Congratulations, Lydia, and keep-on reading!



The literacy program is for all ages!! All of our books are custom made and are relevant to the individual student. A pre-schooler will start with a custom made family unit, whereas an adult may need a book that is geared toward their place of employment.

HOW YOU CAN HELP – The Literacy program is our biggest program at each of the Playhouses. It is also one of our biggest expenses. Donations of paper, laminate, toner cartridges, and office supply gift cards are simple ways to help us keep our costs down and ensure that kids have the books they need!

How YOU can continue helping!

- **\$25,000** to sponsor a new Playhouse site launch
- **\$15,000** to sponsor the annual operating subsidy from INC for a typical Playhouse
- **\$5,000** to sponsor a new Playhouse sign
- **\$3,500** to sponsor rent costs for a typical Playhouse for a Quarter
- **\$1,000** to subsidize the printing costs
- **\$2,000** to launch a new program at a typical Playhouse
- **\$500** to fund activities for a month
- **\$400** to sponsor monthly newsletter
- **\$100** to fund a Club GiGi's event
- **\$50** to fund literacy books
- **\$25** to pay for paper

4 States, 2 countries and Counting!

With your help, GiGi's is going international! We have had visitors from Ireland, Australia, Nigeria and Canada within the last 2 years! And our 1st international Playhouse will be opening in Mexico! We continue to get inquiries about opening around the country and have potential Playhouses in Indiana, California and Tennessee in the works!

We often get asked how we choose locations to open a Playhouse. The answer is, we don't! People call the National Office asking how to get a Playhouse in their area. Together, with guidance from the Executive Board, we lead the various locations through the in depth process of opening a Playhouse... everything from gathering potential board members to the legal implications of becoming an LLC, training for Literacy and other programs to helping shape the look of their Playhouse! GiGi's Playhouse, Inc. knows that, **with your help**, we can continue opening Playhouses in states around the nation and countries around the world. By helping individuals with Down syndrome reach their potential in their communities, we can increase awareness on an international level and 1 community, 1 state, 1 country at a time, we can change the way the world views Down syndrome!



At our 2nd Annual Board Retreat, we had 70 people representing 10 Playhouses!



I'm back!!!

Can you believe you helped to make all that happen??

When we opened the first Playhouse I had no idea just 7 years later we would have 9 locations! Did you ever hear of the saying "be careful what you wish for?" I am living it! I realize a higher power is driving this mission, I am just lucky enough to be sitting in the drivers seat, but someone has to help put the gas in and keep it serviced! That is where all of you come in! The economy has slowed down but our growth sure has not! In order to provide what our locations need and continue with this national movement we need your help!

I know the economy is tight, but you have more resources than you know! You do not have to donate yourself but you can help by asking others who can. Have your company sponsor us, put us on your matching program, (or ask your neighbor too!) help us find free printing or other free services, donate paper products, give us leads on grants, juice boxes, water, no gift is too small! (or too BIG!!)

When GiGi was a baby, I made a promise to her that I would change the way people see Down syndrome and I want to thank you all for helping me make it come true. This could not be happening without all of you!

Thank you for supporting GiGi's around the world!

Nancy + GiGi

All invitations electronic this year! Be sure to send in the reply card with your updated email address!

one night. five cities. your voice.
Save the date!

The Inaugural
have i voice

National Gala
Saturday, February 26, 2011

GiGi's PLAYHOUSE
Down Syndrome Awareness Centers

Venues in:
Chicago
Sioux City
New York
Des Moines
Atlanta

educate. inspire. achieve.
www.gigisplayhouse.org

Sponsorships Available



How YOU can continue helping!

- **Literacy Program:** paper, laminate, office supplies
- **Services:** videography, cleaning, painting, grant writing
- **Corporate Sponsor** – have your logo displayed nationally at our Inaugural National Gala! Go to www.gigisplayhouse.org for details!
- **Attend** the *i have a voice* Gala in one of 5 Cities on February 26th, 2011. Go to www.gigisplayhouse.org to register!
- **Matching Gifts!** If your company has a matching gift program (most do), consider GiGi's as your partner! Your donation has a double impact!
- **Volunteer!** All Playhouses can use volunteers – group volunteer projects are very helpful too!
- **Email** info@gigisplayhouse.org to see how you can get involved at your local Playhouse.
- **Donations!** Please consider making a donation by enclosing the return slip and mailing it to GiGi's Playhouse – everything we do is free for our families, we operate based on your donations!

Would you consider a gift to GiGi's Playhouse today?

You are making an impact that can be felt world-wide! Thank you!

December Newsletter – new format! Looking for your Playhouse calendar?
Go to www.gigisplayhouse.org to see your local Playhouse events calendar and blog

Buy your 2011 Calendars and get a FREE set of Notecards (a \$10 value!)

They make great holiday gifts and help support GiGi's!

Go to www.gigisplayhouse.org to order today!

Enter in Code: FREECARD

