

GiGi's news

educate. inspire. achieve.

from the
playhouse



january

2010

“congratulations” on your new baby!



I just made a realization as to why God has blessed us with such a wonderful baby. When I came in to work today, I had an urgent message on my desk to call one of the OB nurses. When I did, she told me that there was a mom who wanted so desperately to meet me since my son, Jake, has Down syndrome.

You see, this mom just found out that her newborn son, their 7th child, has Down syndrome. After I got my thoughts together of what I'd say to her, I remember a very special word that

GiGi's shared with me when I called for the very first time after having Jake. That word was CONGRATULATIONS. So, I went into her room and said, “CONGRATULATIONS on your beautiful new baby boy!”

I am getting information to share at the hospital. I told these parents not to look at any books or information related to Down syndrome that is older than 5 years. While my heart just breaks for the sadness that she is facing, my heart rejoices because I know that GiGi's can help her and her family and that I just made a new friend. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to share the Playhouse with her. Their family will make a great addition to the GiGi's family. Thanks again for what you have done to make it easier to spread the joy of Down syndrome to others. Joe and I both agree we wouldn't have it any other way! — **Naomi Scianna**

full circle

Did I know that she was going to change my life?
Did I know that her smile can change lives?
Did I know that different was actually awesome?
Did I know how loved I was?
Did I know what a gift I had just received?



No, I did not know any of this four glorious years ago. Annabelle is part of the “i have a voice” traveling exhibit that shows the world that our children are a part of society, that an extra chromosome is a gift for the world to marvel at. The exhibit has given me many opportunities as a parent to brag about my daughter, it has also allowed me to meet many wonderful people who are just in awe of our children.

The exhibit came full circle for our family in the month of October when the exhibit was at St. Alexius Medical Center. That is the very place that I received the news that Annabelle had Down syndrome. My reply? “Who cares?”

I know that is a strange reaction, but that was just it — WHO CARES — she is my baby girl and that is all that mattered to me!

That very place where she spent the first three weeks of her life is the same place that her life was being celebrated. I just think if the doctors and nurses could have seen that exhibit before my daughter was born, they would they have looked at her differently, and they would they have spoken to me differently. Now when they speak to a mother of child with Down syndrome the mom might just have caught a smile. Remember loving a child with Down syndrome is contagious, help us spread the love!

— **Mary Jo Shepherd**

GiGi's education center

literacy in the new year in sioux city!

january 11, 2010!

We are purchasing many new items that will work well with the literacy program with the grant money received from the Ronald McDonald House Charities. We have several new students this year and are excited about the progress they are making! We couldn't do it without all of our wonderful volunteers... so a big Thank You!

thank you!

Educational and Development Toys were provided to the Chicago Playhouse! Thank you to the



Stevanovich family. GiGi helped check out the great selection provided during the holiday party. What an amazing gift for our educational efforts!



read in the new year

The winter semester begins this month. If you have not signed your child up for tutoring, check with your Playhouse to get more information and check for availability.

Is your child too young to start the literacy program? It's never too early to start preparing them for reading! Here are some tips to encourage literacy and make reading fun!

read together every day

Make this a time when the two of you can cuddle close.

give everything a name

Build your child's vocabulary by talking about interesting words and objects. For example, "Look at that airplane! Those are the wings of the plane. Why do you think they are called wings?"

read with fun in your voice

Read to your child with humor and expression. Use different voices. Ham it up!

know when to stop

Put the book away for awhile if your child loses interest or is having trouble paying attention. Look for text that is short and simple. Read a little bit, several times a day.

be interactive

Discuss what's happening in the book, point out things on the page, and ask questions.

read it again and again

Go ahead and read your child's favorite book for the 100th time! There are many skills they can gain from repetition.

point out print everywhere

Talk about the written words you see in the world around you. Ask your child to find a new word on each outing.

recite rhymes, sing songs, make mistakes

Pause to let your child finish a phrase or chant a refrain. Once your child is familiar with the rhyme or pattern, make mistakes on purpose and get caught.

choose engaging books

Books featuring animals or machines invite movement and making sounds. Books with flaps or different textures to touch keep hands busy.

naming, describing, communicating

Set up a zoo with all the stuffed animals. Stage a race with the toy cars. Put your child in charge and ask lots of questions.

an adventure every day when you're a child

Choose books about everyday experiences and feelings. Your child will identify with the characters as they dress, eat, visit, nap, and play.

ask questions

Take time to listen to your child's answers. Encourage your child to tell you what he or she thinks. You'll build language skills and learn what makes your child tick at the same time.

not having fun?

Try a different story or a different time during the day. Reading with a young child is primarily about building positive experiences with books, not finishing every book you start.

feedback from a first-time tutor

Since I am going into the field of special education, I wanted to be a literacy tutor and get a first-hand view of how children with Down syndrome learn how to read. It has been an amazing experience and I am so impressed in my student's progress! I have truly enjoyed tutoring and am happy to work with both the literacy and phonics programs. The children are excited to learn and it is great to see your efforts pay off! For example, with Brett, we go through a word family until he is comfortable with the words. At the end, when he reads the story, I feel so proud of him and he is so excited about his accomplishment! The phonics program is supporting what he is learning in school and ultimately will only increase his overall reading

success.

I truly believe in the benefits the programs offer. I foresee always being a part of GiGi's and



helping such a great community of children and parents. I personally do not feel it is a big time commitment and would encourage others to consider offering their time and service. I believe we should all give back to our community and what better way than through the gift of reading.

— Rachel is a Hoffman Estates tutor

1 hour makes a difference

Can you spare one hour a week? Tutors are still needed for our Literacy program — you can make a huge difference in the life of a child by helping their reading and comprehension skills through our Literacy program. We have many kids on a waiting list! Training provided — to find out more, email literacydirector@gigisplayhouse.org.



volunteering helped me discover genuine love

While going to college I worked with individuals with developmental disabilities. It was there I discovered my passion in life!! Daniell told me about the Sioux City Playhouse, and I was eager to volunteer in any way that I could! I attended the Literacy Tutor training and learned about how the program works. I began tutoring Olivia at the beginning of the school year. She is one of the most amazing little girls!! Volunteering at the Playhouse has been an AMAZING experience. When I tell people about where I have worked and volunteering at GiGi's Playhouse, people often say, "Wow, it takes a special person." I don't feel like I am a special person, I feel like I am a lucky person!! We often question why God has made these individuals different. I believe God put us all here for a purpose, and individuals with Down syndrome and other disabilities are no different! I signed up to be a literacy tutor to teach kids



like Olivia to learn to read; well, Olivia ended up teaching me!! Olivia never judged me! Olivia never cared if my hair was done, or if I was wearing the cute new name brand shoes! Olivia looked at me and saw me! To be a part of a place like GiGi's Playhouse where you can walk in and be completely yourself and experience the most genuine love is something that I will take with me forever! I just want to thank the Playhouse and Olivia for such a great experience and for bringing such joy to my life!!

— Jessica Heeney

winter fun open play

january 9, 10-11am

Join us January 9 for some indoor winter fun! We will have winter theme crafts, a snack and lots of indoor fun! All ages and siblings are welcome!



family fun

Hoping your holiday break was wonderful and filled with family & friends! During our Holiday Party at the Playhouse, families enjoyed time together making gifts, watching movies and visiting with a special guest, Santa!



1st anniversary celebration

Sunday, March 21, 2010

We can't believe that our first anniversary is nearly here! Mark your calendar for this celebration.

motivational monday

Join us on Monday, **January 25th** at 6pm as reps from the Northwest IA AEA will be sharing information with us on what they have to offer all of us (support, education and inspiration).

programs & activities at the playhouses

to view a full description of our programs, go to www.gigisplayhouse.org

2&under playgroup

Children play while their parents network with each other.

crawlers

Focuses on crawling, fine motor skills and social interaction with peers.

walkers

Focuses on post walking skills with peers to prepare children for school activities.

hop, skip & jumpers

Promote friendships, social skills, and interactive play through fun creative activities! (3-5 year olds)

teen-tastic

Pizza party, watching movies and playing games. (13-17 year olds)

friday friends

Karaoke, dancing, softball games – the fun never ends! (Adults 18 + over)

nuestros angeles hispanic playgroup

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

polish group

Polish speaking families gather for food, fun, friendship and education!

playhouse pals

Structured playgroup focuses on developing friendships and confidence all while having a great time! (6-8 year olds)

open play

Everyone welcome to this weekly gathering of networking and friendship building.

kids club

Fast paced group incorporates social, communication and confidence-building skills and activities! (9-12 year olds)

literacy

Free program teaches kids how to read. By appointment only – Call ahead!

daddy&me

Dads, bring your kids and meet other fathers in your area!

reserve it!

Playhouses can be reserved for any function or other special needs group.

january calendar

sun

mon

tue

wed

4:15pm gigi's cheer
at layton athletics
10am-noon nuestros angeles
hispanic playgroup

3

5:15-6pm literacy program
9:30-11am tot class
rsvp 630.778.PLAY
12:30-1:30pm literacy program
4-5:15pm literacy program
5:30-6:45pm literacy program

4

5-6pm open play
9-10:15am literacy program
1-2:30pm literacy program
4:30-6pm literacy program
5-5:30pm literacy program
10am-noon open play
pizza & friendship
volunteer orientation
literacy program
7pm
5:45-6:30pm

5

9:30am-2:30pm liter
3-4:30pm liter
6:30-7:15pm liter
4:30-6pm liter

11am-1pm nuestros angeles
hispanic playgroup
speech therapist will speak
4:15pm gigi's cheer
at layton athletics
4-4:45pm literacy program

10

5:15-6pm literacy program
9:30-11am tot class
rsvp 630.778.PLAY
12:30-1:30pm literacy program
4-5:15pm literacy program
5:30-6:45pm literacy program

11

4:30-6pm literacy program
1:30-2:15pm literacy program
5-5:30pm literacy program
5:45-6:30pm special olympics young
athletes
6:30-7:15pm special olympics young
athletes
10am-noon open play
pizza & friendship
5-8pm wendy's night

12

4-5:30pm liter
8:30-9:15am liter
11am-5:30pm liter
6:30-7:15pm liter
4:30-6pm liter

4:15pm gigi's cheer
at layton athletics

17

5-6pm open play
9:30-11am tot class
rsvp 630.778.PLAY
12:30-1:30pm literacy program
4-5:15pm literacy program
5:30-6:45pm literacy program

18

4:30-6pm literacy program
5-5:30pm literacy program
10am-noon open play
pizza & friendship
literacy program
5:45-6:30pm

19

4-5:30pm liter
4:30-6pm liter
5:15-5:45pm kara
6-6:30pm kara
rsvp

11am-1pm group
rsvp to Krystyna at 847.962.4820
4:15pm gigi's cheer
at layton athletics
10:30am daddy&me
bowling at raymond's bowl in johnsburg

24

11am-1pm nuestros angeles
hispanic playgroup
4:15pm gigi's cheer
at layton athletics
4-4:45pm literacy program

31

9-10am open play
6pm motivational monday
9:30-11am tot class
rsvp 630.778.PLAY
12:30-1:30pm literacy program
4-5:15pm literacy program
5:30-6:45pm literacy program
7pm motivational monday
literacy program

25

4:30-6pm literacy program
5-5:30pm literacy program
10am-noon open play
pizza & friendship

26

4-5:30pm liter
4:30-6pm liter
6:30pm boo

5

recipients of KidsMatter award

Since 1993, the KidsMatter/Youth Service Award has honored Naperville youth residents for performing outstanding volunteer efforts within the surrounding communities. In November, Corbin Mendoza and Eric Sciortino, who have volunteered weekly at GiGi's as part of a work-study program, were proud recipients of this award!

Congratulations Corbin & Eric and thank you for choosing to contribute your valued time to GiGi's Playhouse!

oswego east poms volunteer group

Thank you to the Oswego East Poms group who came out to the Playhouse to volunteer their time with the Halloween "Family Night" Party on October 30th! We had a huge party and their assistance was greatly appreciated! We hope to see them back soon!



playset winner

Congratulations to the Burleigh Family on winning the GiGi's Fox Valley Playset Raffle donated by Costco of Naperville! The raffle raised over \$1,000 and will benefit the Fox Valley location. Thanks to Costco and all who participated!



For more information about any event please contact Annie at **630.778.PLAY** or email at **foxvalley@gigis-playhouse.org**



super sibs workshop

"It was great talking to other kids who know just how I feel!", said one of our sibling participants during our Super Sib workshop for children ages 5-10.

We were thankful to have the workshop facilitated by Dr. Jennifer Manfre, of Naperville Pediatric Psychology and Development. Dr. Manfre also has extensive experience conducting pediatric neuropsychological evaluations and has worked with children, adolescents and families for the past 10 years.

She is also the proud mom of four children, two who also happen to have Down syndrome.

The participants were able to spend some time sharing the highs and lows of having a sibling with Down syndrome, share in discussions about what it means to be a brother/sister of someone with special needs and connect with activities, games, crafts and a delicious snack of cookies and hot cocoa.

Stay tuned for future Super Sib Workshop information!

teaching modifications for students with down syndrome a workshop

Thursday, January 14th at 7pm.

Moderator: Sharon Tate, Assistant

Superintendent Student Services, D204

CDPUs available. RSVP by January 8th to 630.778.7529 or

foxvalley@gigisplayhouse.org

hoffman estates

Playhouse

polish group

Our Polish group meets on the fourth Sunday of each month from 11am-1pm. Join us on **January 24th!** RSVP to Krystyna at **847.962.4820**.



pajama jam

On Saturday, **January 9th**, we are having a PAJAMA JAM! Yes! In the middle of the afternoon! Wear your favorite pajamas and slippers and bring your night-time pal and favorite bedtime story to cozy up for some classic night-time activities! Bring a friend!



hispanic playgroup

A speech therapist will be joining Nuestros Angeles in January! Join us on **January 10th** from 11am-1pm.

thank you, roosevelt university students

Roosevelt University Community Involvement Coordinator, Vinny Cascio, is heading up efforts for students to raise money for GiGi's Playhouse — and they have raised \$1500 so far! We appreciate their support for our kids!

family fun night

Coming to the Playhouse on Friday, **March 5th** Family Fun Night! 6:30-8:30pm, all Playhouse families are invited!

kids club talent variety show january 23

All the kids are encouraged to bring acts — this could be magic tricks, jokes, songs, dances, instruments, or puppet shows.



inspired

Inspired by new templates presented at the Board Retreat, Chris Newlon made a personal poster for her daughter, Rebecca. The poster is in the teacher's lounge at her daughter's school right next to GiGi's calendars! "I felt it was important to share with the entire staff a little insight into Rebecca since she is the only one with Down syndrome in her grade." Rebecca was so excited to share the poster with her teacher, classmates and therapists.



awareness at chamber of commerce event

More than 200 businesses attended the McHenry area Chamber of Commerce Scramble, and we were able to talk about GiGi's and reach out to our community and spread awareness! Many people had no idea what GiGi's was or that we offer free educational and therapeutic programs in our community. This was the perfect platform to let our neighbors

know how GiGi's can make a difference in the lives of those they know and love! During the event, many were truly interested in how they could help us; many have contacted us since the scramble!



kids club

Kids Club made Thanksgiving turkey baskets and picture frames made a snack and played a game. Our next event will be a Pajama Party, wear your P.J.s & slippers and join us for some fun. Bring a friend and be entered into a drawing for a prize!



guest speaker during open play

Patrick Flanagan, CO, LO Lead Orthotist of Mercy Health System will be speak about the importance of orthotics on Tuesday, **January 26th** at 10:30am.

wendy's night

Please join us at Wendy's on Tuesday, **January 12th** from 5-8pm. A portion of all proceeds go back to the Playhouse.

bingo night

Monday, February 15th!
McHenry Moose Lodge with details to come!

kids club

The Playhouse hosts a pre-teen (age 9-12) get-together on the third Saturday of each month at 4pm. Kids and their families join us for lots of fun, including open play with dance music for those in the mood to show off their latest



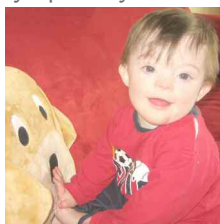
Sam, Quincy and Julian

moves! We play games as a group. Quincy's favorite is "Three Things About Me", where each child has a chance to leave the room and change three things about their appearance, and return so the group can guess what now is different. We also enjoy craft and snack time. Last month we decorated door hangers with stickers and markers. For December the plan is to make decorations for Christmas and Hanukkah.

Interested in joining in the fun?
Contact Cheryl at cheryl444@gmail.com

check our calendar!

Please check your January calendar for new program times! We have adjusted program schedules to let more families join in the fun! Changes to note: Saturday Open Plays are now from 9 to 11am the first and third Saturdays of the month, and the Hispanic Play Group is now the first Saturday of the month at 9am. Please let us know if you have any questions or program suggestions, email chicago@gigisplayhouse.org.



motivational monday

Motivational Mondays are back in the new year after their holiday break. The first Motivation Monday of 2010 will be an informational session on the Literacy Program for all Chicago families! **January 25th** at 7pm.



thank you!

A huge thank you to the Stevanovich family for providing all the gifts for the kids!! Every year the Stevanovich family has a holiday party. This year instead of hostess gifts they asked for developmental toys for the kids!! Boy did their friends come through!!
THANK YOU!!!





impact in high school across the country

Charlene Lee had an amazing story about the impact of our calendar when she came to the Playhouse for Literacy with her daughter, Teagan.

Her sister, a high school teacher in St. Louis, put the calendar up in her classroom. She wanted to show her students that the derogatory words they use, such as the r-word, are truly hurtful to many people and discussed that with her students.

She made a word wall and then asked the students to write words on it to describe the

faces in the calendar. The words the students came up with were anything but derogative or hurtful..... cute, adorable, smart, playful, full of life and charismatic.



Something as simple as our calendar pictures is making a difference in the hallways in high schools across America.

spread the love gala

Saturday, February 6th
Join host **Rob Johnson**
for an evening celebrating individuals with Down syndrome.

A spectacular night of delectable dining, silent auctions, and live entertainment!



fruit of the spirit

Saturday, April 24, 2010 at 11am,
a luncheon benefiting GiGi's Playhouse,
www.fruitofthespiritluncheon.com

1st anniversary celebration

Sioux City Playhouse
Sunday, March 21, 2010

club gigi's grand opening

Friday, January 22, 7pm at the Hoffman Estates Playhouse.

our playhouses

hoffman estates

1069 w. golf rd., hoffman estates, il 60169
847.885.PLAY (7529)

fox valley

4024 fox valley dr., aurora, il 60504
630.778.PLAY (7529)

mchenry

1720 n. richmond rd., mchenry, il 60050
815.385.PLAY (7529)

chicago

3660 w. irving park rd., chicago, il 60618
773.583.PLAY (7529)

sioux city

1551 indian hills dr., suite 7, sioux city, ia 51104
712.226.PLAY (7529)

www.gigisplayhouse.org