



educate. inspire. achieve



**GiGi's
PLAYHOUSE™**
Down Syndrome Awareness Centers

Newsletter



A Message from the National Office...



Catalyst for Change!

After stumbling upon the definition of Down syndrome in a children's dictionary, 10yr old Bella Gianni, GiGi's sister, recently wrote a 12 page letter in response...here is an excerpt...

"At my brothers basketball game, I got bored so I looked in my bag and took out a dictionary and just read the top of the pages with the first and the last words of the page. Then I came to "Down syndrome", so I read the definition. It said "a genetic condition in which a person is born with eyes that appear to slant, a broad skull and shorter fingers than normal." At first I thought I was reading the wrong definition, so I went to GiGi and her eyes weren't slanted, they looked perfect to me. After I looked at her beautiful eyes I measured her hand to mine, I am two years older than her and my hands are only an index fingernail bigger. When we were on our way home, me and GiGi were playing and I saw no difference in her from me. We both laugh, cry, teach and more."

Bella asked her mom why the definition didn't mention that Down syndrome is defined by an extra chromosome and instead it described Down syndrome by what a person might look like? That is a good question and shows the deep-rooted societal issue of defining people based on what they look like. GiGi's is working to change that – to let potential and ability be what defines people with Down syndrome and anyone else that is different from ourselves. Not by what they look like, not by what old stereotypes say. Bella wants to be part of that 20% that stands up for those that are bullied and has already drafted a letter to the maker of the dictionary.

That's what GiGi's is all about – using the continued prevalence of outdated stereotypes as fuel to continue working hard to educate our communities. Each of our 10 Playhouses around the nation are focused on being a catalyst for change through the use of educational and therapeutic programming, national and local awareness campaigns, and community outreach. If you hear of any stories that show a need for training or education, please let your local Playhouse know! Together, we can make a difference!

2 babies, 1 Santa, lives changed!

At the annual Holiday party, Santa had the privilege of meeting Olivia, a 1 week old baby with Down syndrome. Olivia and her family (including Grandma!) came to the Playhouse to network with other parents and see what GiGi's Playhouse is all about. What they also learned was that Olivia is a bundle of potential. That she will walk and talk and read. That they have instantly become part of a family that advocates for all the abilities that Olivia has! Mom's first impression of the Playhouse was that it was very warm and friendly and had something for her whole family– her other daughter who is 2, immediately played with



other siblings and kids at the Playhouse (and stayed far away from Santa!).

Just a week before Olivia was born, another baby girl with Down syndrome was born at the same hospital. We can't wait to meet her as well! The Playhouse family continues to grow each week at every one of our 11 locations. Each family is welcomed with a Celebration packet and told "Congratulations!" This is often the first time a family hears congratulations and GiGi's is proud to help each parent see their child as just that – their beautiful son or daughter.

Happy New Year to all our Playhouse Families, Volunteers and Donors!

Fox Valley



When Susan's youngest child headed off to college, she found herself in 'empty nest' mode and decided to look for volunteer opportunities. An article in the newspaper about GiGi's Playhouses led her to contact the National Office in Hoffman Estates and she began her journey volunteering with GiGi's.

Four years later, Susan continues to serve our organization at the Fox Valley location as a key volunteer position as our Literacy Materials Manager. Susan explains, "I get more satisfaction out of volunteering than I ever did as a paid employee. This is a flexible opportunity that is structured to my skills and meets a need for GiGi's".

For more information on how you can become involved as a volunteer, please contact us at 630-778-PLAY or Foxvalley@gigisplayhouse.org

Atlanta

Time seems to really be flying down here in Atlanta. We have been keeping the Playhouse busy with classes being offered almost every day! No matter what program the kiddos are attending, as soon as they walk through the door their faces light up with a smile and they immediately make themselves right at home. It has truly been amazing seeing the progress the kids are making in our programs whether it be singing songs in music or grasping crayons in Art and OT. The hard work and determination of one student in particular has really paid off! Johnathan came to his first Crawlers class in on October the 13th. Although he was not moving around much at his first session, he pushed himself right up and smiled at one of our physical therapists! It was like he was letting her know he was eager and ready to learn to crawl. After a month and a half of the Crawlers program, practice at home, and determination Jonathan is now crawling! WAY TO GO JONATHAN!

Another exciting milestone we reached was the beginning of Nuestros Angeles, our Spanish speaking Playgroup. Families attended the orientation last week and together we have since assembled a calendar for our little Latino Angels. We are thrilled that the group is having their Holiday party on December 21st at the Playhouse and look forward to a growing schedule starting in January.

Stay tuned for more fun in Atlanta, it gets more exciting every day...



NYC

New York, New Year, New GiGi's!

New York is a city famous for its big heart and cultural offerings. It's also known for the way it can isolate people, especially when they're 'different'. Over 8 million people live in New York City. Statistics tell us that more than 8,000 of those people have Down syndrome.

Stacy is 9 months pregnant with a baby she calls her "little prince". She has already felt the warm embrace of a community also touched by Down syndrome. These families share friendships, mutual support, and a fire in their bellies to make sure their children not only achieve their potential but that the world is ready to recognize, welcome and celebrate along with them!

It's this type of beautiful, grassroots energy, dedication and love that is the driving force to open a GiGi's Playhouse in New York City. This group of 15-20 families meets monthly in a donated nursery school classroom. Having a GiGi's Playhouse in New York City will make it possible to reach out to the other 7,895."



McHenry

BUILDING FAMILY, FUN AND FRIENDSHIP

Each month the Playhouse hosts Family Fun Night. During the busy month of November it was held the week before Thanksgiving and many families gathered together to kick off the holiday season at GiGi's Playhouse McHenry! There were delicious snacks and desserts, holiday crafts and ornaments made for the tree, but most of all there were wonderful conversations shared by all. Jessica, one of our regulars at our Friday Friends group, invited her friend Destany to come to Family Fun Night. Destany, her mom, and sister came to GiGi's for the first time. Destany's mom was quickly engrossed in conversation with Jessica's mom about the Playhouse, her sister jumped right into the crafts and Destany and Jessica sat down at the craft table and started talking to each other, this wonderful conversation between the two of them continued on for the next two hours! They laughed, joked and chatted without a care in the world, as



teenagers do. When the evening came to an end, we asked Destany if she would be coming back soon, she replied absolutely, I had a great time! Family, fun and friendship...it's a beautiful thing!

GiGi's Playhouse Rockford

A New Year brings a new beginning....

At GiGi's Playhouse Rockford we are not only celebrating a New Year with the rest of the world but we are celebrating our 1st Anniversary on January 8, 2012. Year One brought wonderful yet challenging times. Challenging as we brought a new business to our community, challenging as we determined who needed us, who supported us, we needed to organize ourselves as the new business we were becoming, and what programs were effective to those who looked to us for help. Wonderful, well because of the babies, the toddlers, the elementary school aged kids, the teenagers, the adults and all of the families.

First and foremost thank you to the families and kids, you are stunning as you all fight for your children, for their rights and needs as each individual blossoms into who they will become. The people we are serving help us to know we will go through whatever challenge we face to bring them the beautiful concept of being a GiGi's Playhouse.

We look to our New Year of business with hope as we plan to offer the families, guest speakers on hot important topics and more programming, like a new Dad and Me program or more educational programs like the much awaited Math program.

Please join us as we celebrate our 1st Anniversary with a Community Open Play on Sunday, January 8, 2012 from 1:00p.m. to 3:00p.m. Refreshments will be served and enjoyment will be had as our kids show you what takes place at GiGi's Playhouse Rockford.



Chicago

Rudolph wasn't in attendance, but he was there in spirit (and song). On Dec. 18, the Chicago Playhouse held its annual holiday party at Stage 773. The program began with the Teen Drama Troupe performing some beloved holiday-themed scenes, songs and dance numbers (including versions of Santa Claus is Coming to Town; How the Grinch Stole Christmas, the Nutcracker and Linus' monologue from It's a Charlie Brown Christmas).

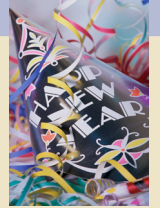


After the performance, audience members and families gathered for a party full of food, fun and holiday cheer (including a visit from a special guest, who had made a list, and checked it twice; everyone was found to be "good"). It was a great

way to celebrate the season, and we'd like to especially thank Stage 773 for generously providing the space (and, as always, our great drama program heads Mallory Schuh and Kathryn Yohe for helping put together a wonderful performance). See you in the New Year!

HOFFMAN eSTATES

Join us on December 31st at 12pm to ring in the New Year! Be sure to check out details on the website! Everyone welcome!



Programs Galore!

The Programming at the Hoffman Estates Playhouse continues to grow! We have new families coming every week (check out the cover page story about Santa meeting new babies!). Be sure to join us every Thursday for Open Play from 12:30-2pm.

January 14

9am Crawlers
10am 2 and Under
11:30am Hop, Skip and Jumpers (3-6 yrs)

January 20

10:30am Kids Club (9-12yrs)

January 27

7-9pm
Friday Friends (18+)

These are just a few of the many programs happening every day – be sure to go to www.gigisplayhouse.org and click on Hoffman Estates to see the calendar of events!



Sioux City

A Special Tribute to our Volunteers...

Valuable is the work you do,
Outstanding in how you always come through.
Loyal, sincere and full of good cheer,
Untiring in your efforts throughout the year.
Notable are the contributions you make,
Trustworthy in every project you take.
Eager to reach your every goal,
Effective in the way you fulfill your role.
Ready with a smile like a shining star,
Special and wonderful - that's what you are!



Thank you to everyone who volunteered their time and talents in the past year! Whether it involved tutoring a child, helping out at our local Walk for Awareness, setting up computers, or even cleaning at the Playhouse, we appreciate everything you have done and continue to do for our kids! If you or your group would like to volunteer at GiGi's Playhouse in Sioux City, IA, email us at siouxcity@gigisplayhouse.org subject: VOLUNTEER

2 And Under!

Our 2 and Under group is growing! Many of our "little ones" are around the same age which has allowed this group to grow into a wonderful support system! These little ones have had opportunities to interact and explore in a nice, small group setting, while their parents have had time to talk with one another and develop lasting friendships! We welcome new families to join us throughout the year. The 2 and Under group will be meeting the 2nd Saturday of each month from 10:00-11:30am. The next play date is January 14, 2012 at 10am....so mark your calendars!



Looking for Quad Cities or Des Moines news?

Go to www.gigisplayhouse.org to see their local newsletter and calendar!

GiGi's Playhouse
1069 W. Golf Rd.
Hoffman Estates, IL 60169

nonprofit organization

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Traveling Gallery on the Move!

January - Quincy, IL

February - Chicago, IL

March - Wyoming

Email ihavevoiceproject@gigisplayhouse.org to schedule it in your city!

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

You are invited!

one night. nine cities. two countries. your voice.
save the date!

The 2nd Annual

have **i** voice

International Gala
Saturday, February 25, 2012

**GiGi's
PLAYHOUSE**
Down Syndrome Awareness Centers



Venues in:

Chicago

Sioux City

New York

Quad Cities

Des Moines

Twin Cities

Rockford

Atlanta

Querétaro, Mexico

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www.gigisplayhouse.org

GiGi's is going GREEN!!

All invitations and registrations are electronic!

Go to
www.gigisplayhouse.org
to register today!

rsvp_gala@gigisplayhouse.org

Black tie with a rockin' edge!
*Celebrate Down syndrome,
GiGi's style!*

Chicagoland Gala Info
Hosted by Rob Johnson
Entertainment by 7th Heaven

Go to www.gigisplayhouse.org to register!

**Rockford's Gala is 2.18.2012 and Atlanta's Gala is 3.3.2012*