



educate. inspire. achieve



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

# 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That's what GiGi's is all about – using the continued prevalence of outdated stereotypes as fuel to continue working hard to educate our communities.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!

## Getting To Know Your GiGi's Playhouse Board Of Managers

GiGi's Playhouse Quad Cities would like to introduce you to our President, Gary Ghere and his family.

Gary has lived in the Quad Cities since 1982. He moved here from West Lafayette, Indiana, home of Purdue University where he graduated with a MS in Management and a BS in Industrial Engineering. He now works for John Deere and just recently celebrated his 30th year with the company. He enjoys spending time with his family and working to promote and sustain our new GiGi's Playhouse QC. In his spare time, Gary likes to golf (or at least attempt to play golf), watching movies, rooting for the Green Bay Packers, swimming, and reading.

Gary is married to Juanita, a GiGi's Playhouse volunteer who has put in countless hours and is looking forward to being a tutor in the Literacy program. Juanita and Gary have (3) children. Their two oldest, Ashley, a senior and Alex, a sophomore, both attend the University of Iowa. (Gary will root for the University of Iowa, but only if they are not playing Purdue!) And, then there

is Caitlin, his 16 year old with Down syndrome. She is a member of the nationally renowned Pleasant Valley Sparkles cheerleading squad (featured in People magazine and on Oprah Winfrey's show) and loves being with her friends, especially at GiGi's.

Finally, Gary feels it is blessing to be a part of the team that has brought GiGi's Playhouse to the Quad Cities. The local Board of Managers has been outstanding. The support from GiGi's Playhouse home office in Hoffman Estates, the Quad City community, and our volunteers has been tremendous. With these great resources, as Gary has stated, "The local board is committed to serving the local needs of our Down syndrome community through the awareness and educational services provided by our GiGi's Playhouse".



## Volunteer Spotlight

At GiGi's Playhouse, we always say that volunteers are at the heart of what we do. This month we would like to introduce you



to Kim Hudson, our program host and volunteer at Friday Friends. Kim's "day job" is at Family Care Solutions where she is a caregiver for individuals with special needs. Her passion for this line of work lead her to GiGi's Playhouse Quad Cities where she lends her boundless energy, sense of humor, and karaoke and dancing skills to our Friday Friends program where she is loved and admired by the program participants as well as their parents. Kim summed up her joy for volunteering at Friday Friends when she said, "I can't think of anything I would rather do on a Friday night." Thank you, Kim, for your generosity and dedication to making GiGi's Playhouse Quad Cities THE place to be on a Friday night!

Interested in volunteering at the Playhouse? Contact us at [quadcities@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:quadcities@gigisplayhouse.org) or 309-762-7529.



## "Taco Tuesday" Success at Mulligan's Valley Pub!

Many thanks to all who joined us at Mulligan's Valley Pub in Coal Valley, IL for our "Taco Tuesday" event. Friends and families of GiGi's Playhouse Quad Cities packed the house, enjoyed some great tacos, spread awareness, and raised \$1,800 for our Playhouse. A special thank you to our friends at Mulligan's for their generosity and hospitality at this event. It is community partnerships such as these that keep our Playhouse alive.



## THE 2 & UNDER GROUP

To start the year off, we would like to introduce you to the youngest group at our Playhouse, the 2 & Under Group! Accompanied by their parents, this group of cuties meets twice a month for stories, finger play, music, socialization, and plenty of smiles! In addition, the parents have the opportunity to meet other parents who are also beginning the journey of raising a child with Down syndrome. They share stories, ask many questions, and find comfort in knowing that they are a part of a wonderful community and support system.

This group recently participated in a photo shoot and upon seeing the group photo, Bristol, age 2 (standing) signed, "friends". Yes, Bristol, these are your friends! We at GiGi's Playhouse can't wait to see what the future holds for this remarkable group of little ones!

## GIGI'S PLAYHOUSE NATIONAL BOARD RETREAT

The Board of Managers and key volunteers from GiGi's Playhouse Quad Cities attended the GiGi's Playhouse National Board Retreat at the San Filippo Estate Barrington, IL November 12-13, 2011. Nancy Gianni and the GiGi's Playhouse, Inc. staff shared plans for growth and expansion over the coming months and years. Each Playhouse was asked to prepare a presentation, and Gary Ghere and Michelle Hornbuckle shared the history of our Quad Cities Down syndrome community-including the Up Side of Down Syndrome Family Group, the Buddy Walks, and the many efforts by all who played a role in bringing GiGi's Playhouse to the Quad Cities. We also shared plans for our own growth beginning with the launch of our literacy program in January! Exciting things are on the horizon for all involved with GiGi's Playhouse locally and nationally, so stay tuned!







## A Visit from Nancy

GiGi's Playhouse QC welcomed a special guest in December – Nancy Gianni, CEO and founder of GiGi's Playhouse, Inc. (and most importantly, GiGi's Mom)! Nancy traveled to the Quad Cities on December 8, accompanied by Jenni VonTobel and Dan Carpenter, the new Executive Director of GiGi's Playhouse, Inc. to conduct a literacy tutor training session. Following the training, Nancy and Co. stayed for an Open Play pizza party and had the opportunity to get to meet some of our families and for all of us to express our gratitude to Nancy for all she has done for the world of Down syndrome. It also helped our Quad Cities community make the connection to GiGi's Playhouse, Inc., and see that our Playhouse is a part of something much bigger. While our Playhouse makes a direct impact on our community, we are also part of an organization that is reaching people on an international level. Together with the rest of the GiGi's Playhouse family, we continue the mission "to increase positive awareness of Down syndrome through national campaigns, educational programs, and by empowering individuals with Down syndrome, their families and the community." Thank you Nancy, Jenni, and Dan, for an amazing day. We look forward to welcoming you back to our Playhouse again soon!



## CALENDAR

- 6 7-9pm, *Friday Friends (18+y/o)*
- 7 9:30am, *2 & Under*  
10:30am, *Hop, Skip & Jumpers (3-5 y/o)*
- 8 1-3pm, *Open Play (all ages)*
- 10 (Time TBD), *Literacy Tutor Meet & Greet*
- 14 10:00am, *Playhouse Pals/Kids Club (6-12 y/o)*
- 16 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY
- 20 7-9pm, *Friday Friends (18+y/o)*
- 21 9:30am, *2 & Under*  
10:30am, *Hop, Skip & Jumpers (3-5 y/o)*
- 22 1-3pm, *Open Play (all ages)*



GiGi's Playhouse  
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**Traveling Gallery on the Move!**

January – Quincy, IL

February – Chicago, IL

March – Wyoming

Email [ihavevoiceproject@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:ihavevoiceproject@gigisplayhouse.org) to schedule it in your city!

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

The 2nd Annual  
**have a voice**  
International Gala  
Saturday, February 25, 2012

**Gearing up for Gala!**

Put on your party dress and get out your dancing shoes and join us February 25, 2012 for the 2nd Annual "i have a voice" international gala! The Quad Cities gala will be held at the Outing Club in Davenport, IA. Tickets are \$75/person or \$700/table of 10 and can be purchased online at [www.events.org/ihavevoicequadcities](http://www.events.org/ihavevoicequadcities) or by contacting the Playhouse at 309-762-7529. Seating is limited, so purchase your tickets now!

Interested in being a gala sponsor or donating an item for the silent auction? Contact Michelle at the Playhouse at [quadcities@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:quadcities@gigisplayhouse.org) or 309-762-7529 for more information. Sponsors will be recognized nationally in programs at all 9 "i have a voice" gala locations!

