



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

educate. inspire. achieve

# Newsletter



## Farewell to a wonderful volunteer....

Claire Gillespie has been volunteering at GiGi's Playhouse McHenry since the spring of her sophomore year of high school (2010). She came to GiGi's initially because her cousin (who lived in Chicago - she is now seven and has since moved to the suburbs) has Down syndrome and was involved in GiGi's Playhouse Chicago. She wanted to do something to support GiGi's, and continued to become involved because she felt very comfortable and felt that she was able help to the children and families. Claire especially admire GiGi's mission to not only bring real support to local families, but to spread national (and local) awareness about Down syndrome and promote a positive image of people with Down syndrome.



Claire graduated from Marian Central Catholic High School this past June and will be attending the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. She plans on majoring in English and possibly minoring in music (or at least continuing piano lessons). She is also interested in psychology. Her future plans include getting her undergraduate degree in English and eventually masters in business and go into the field of publishing, where she hopes to one day open a company that will utilize new ways of bringing the written word to people across the world.

Claire received a number of local awards: from the Daughters of the American Revolution, a Good Citizen award and scholarship and was also awarded a scholarship for an essay she wrote, which won first place in McHenry County. She won the Sister Mardelle Scholarship at her high school and the Rotary Club of McHenry awarded me a scholarship. Finally, the Woodstock Fine Arts Association awarded her the Helen Wrights Fine Art Scholarship for playing piano and the Woodstock American Legion gave a scholarship. Claire was named salutatorian of her class at Marian and won the National Choral Award and the "Semper Fidelis" award from the Marines for musical excellence. Wow!!!

Claire said "I would love to say thank you to families at GiGi's for being so supportive of me and of each other and so positive. I am always amazed - when I go to GiGi's and see the many trials families go through - at how optimistic and encouraging you are. At GiGi's, I was motivated to work harder, because I saw the effects my actions had on others. Thank you for letting me work, play with, and get to know you. GiGi's Playhouse is a very special place to me as I know it is to everyone who walks through its doors." We will greatly miss you, but wish you well in your new chapter of life!



## 3rd Annual Vendor Fair

This past April we held our 3rd Annual Vendor Fair at the playhouse. This is a group of home-based vendors that come together to sell their products at one location. Each vendor pays \$50 for space rental but is then given \$50 in door prize tickets to sell if they want to recoup their investment. All of the space rental money is given to the playhouse. They are also responsible for donating one raffle prize package. In addition, many of the vendors donate an additional 10-35% of their sales back to the playhouse. Our responsibility as a playhouse was to be sure the place was clean and to assist with clearing all possible furniture and toys into our literacy rooms. Thankfully we had a young man who had a real talent for spatial relations and were able to get all items neatly, but snugly into our room. A few GiGi's families donated their time to answer any questions and thank the customers for coming in.

This year the weather cooperated and we had a steady stream of curious people. The vendors seemed pleased with the turnout. Even if they didn't have an excellent day financially, they got many new contacts for future business. By the end of the 3 hour

sale, we were handed a profit of \$1200 thus doubling the amount in just 2 years! We are very thankful for the vendors, for their desire to give back in such a "labor-friendly" way and for wanting to make this an annual event.



## Awareness

Each year one of our volunteers is asked to speak at the McHenry West High School Freshmen Health classes about Down syndrome and GiGi's Playhouse. This is the fourth year for this program and the first year that both semesters of students got to hear her share such good news and information about DS. Many of the families brought in their children with DS in order for the students to see that DS isn't such a scary thing. It always promotes a lot of discussion and sharing from the students and they are able to ask the parents more personal questions, too. By the end of the day, the later classes were excited to hear what she had to say and to meet some of the delightful children, so we know they are talking between classes about what they heard. In past years the students had to write one thing they learned from the talk before they left the classroom. Their comments ranged from "I will NEVER use the 'R' word again" to "They like to do the same things I do!" This past May, each class was asked if they had ever heard of GiGi's Playhouse. More than half of the students in each of the 8 classes raised their hands!

We are doing what we can to spread awareness. If anyone has any connections with their child's school and would like to have the students become more aware and knowledgeable about Down syndrome, please contact the playhouse for more information.



## July Calendar

- 19 Wendy's Night Crystal Lake  
Art Class, 4:30  
signing Class, 6pm
- 20 Open Play, 10:00-12:00
- 22 Fiesta Days Parade
- 25 Bingo, 12:00 at the VFW  
Volunteer Training, 6:30pm
- 27 Open Play, 10am  
Friday Friends, 7:00-9:00pm

## August Calendar

- 1 Bingo, 12:00 at the VFW
- 2 Art Class, 4:30  
Signing Class, 6pm
- 3 Open Play, 10:00-12:00 (every Friday)
- 4 2nd Annual Golf Outing, Fox Lake Country Club
- 7 Marketing meeting, 7pm
- 8 Bingo, 12:00 at the VFW  
Evening Open Play, 4:30-6:30pm
- 9 Options & Advocacy Play Group, 10:00
- 10 Open Play, 10:00-12:00  
Family Fun Night, 6:30pm
- 11 Crawlers & Walker, 10:15
- 13 Board Meeting, 7:00pm
- 14 Wendy's Night McHenry, 5:00-8:00pm
- 15 Bingo, 12:00 at the VFW  
Learn and Play, 5:00pm
- 16 Art Class, 4:30  
signing Class, 6pm
- 17 Open Play, 10:00-12:00
- 22 Bingo, 12:00 at the VFW  
Volunteer Training, 6:30pm
- 24 Open Play, 10am  
Friday Friends 7:00-9:00pm
- 29 Bingo, 12:00 at the VFW
- 30 Art Class, 4:30  
signing Class, 6pm
- 31 Open Play, 10:00-12:00





Dr. Mark Gerber, Pediatric Otolaryngology, NorthShore University Health System, visited with parents at the McHenry Playhouse on Thursday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>. He organized a detailed PowerPoint highlighting Ear, Nose and Throat conditions that may be present or develop in children who have Down syndrome. Dr. Gerber is a published author in peer review journals.

Some ideas from the presentation included:

- Every child should have a baseline sleep study performed by age 4 to determine if Sleep Apnea is an issue. Sleep apnea can be present even if no major signs are obvious (i.e. excessive snoring, gasping for air while sleeping, etc.).
- Allergy testing under the age of 5 is worthless if it's negative. However, if it's positive, it should be looked into.
- Chlorine and second-hand tobacco smoke can irritate our little ones' noses and cause increased nasal congestion.
- Little Noses Aerosol Saline Spray can be helpful when trying to clear up nasal congestion.

"I am so glad that I made the trip to the Playhouse for the discussion. It was extremely informative and so very helpful. Dr. Gerber is my son's doctor and I think he is a superb physician! I appreciate the time he took to volunteer his expertise and to share a detailed overview of Ear, Nose and Throat concerns that may affect children who have Down syndrome. It was a very relaxed evening and he answered every parent's question. It was a two hour informal consultation. We sat around the table, enjoyed cookies, and a shared conversation. Every parent left feeling grateful for Dr. Gerber's presentation, keenly aware of suggested tests and preventive strategies to insure optimum physical health. I personally gained new information from Dr. Gerber and I look forward to attending future parent information evenings."

Carey Personette, Will's Mom



### Friday Friends

Friday Friends Hawaiian Dance...what a fantastic night! Everyone arrived wearing their Hawaiian shirts, skirts and sunglasses. When you walked through the Playhouse doors you were greeted with a smile and beautiful flower lei, decorations hanging from the ceiling and walls, and a buffet full of tropical treats. Because this group is for our adults (18 and older), the parents do not have to stay, but so many did and enjoy watching and participating in the pure joy of the night!

Much thanks to our wonderful volunteer DJ, Larry Breidenbach, retired Special Education Principal. Larry knows just how to get the party started, not only did he play Hawaiian music and lead the Hula dance, he played everyone's favorites! There was also some outstanding karaoke duets and solos; never a dull moment under the disco ball! No one wanted to stop dancing or take a break to have a tropical drink or a snack, so they picked some up and brought them onto the dance floor. After much laughter, dancing and singing the night finally came to an end at about 10:00pm with the song..."That's what Friends are for".



This is such a great group of individuals that come together once a month and purely enjoy each other's company and friendship; it truly was a night to remember for all!

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

nonprofit organization

u.s. postage

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**Traveling Gallery on the Move!**

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

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Save the Date:

August 4<sup>th</sup> -

**GiGi's Playhouse McHenry  
2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Golf Outing!**

Go to [www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org)  
to register today!

