



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

educate. inspire. achieve

# Newsletter



**On February 25th, GiGi's Playhouse NYC opened its doors for the first time, thanks to the unfailing support of families and a concerned community of individuals making the dream of GiGi's Playhouse NYC a reality.** In just 3 short months, we have welcomed over one hundred families, engaged dozens of volunteers and given New Yorkers touched by Down syndrome a reason to brag about their families. "I am so happy!" reports a mother on her second visit to the Playhouse.

GiGi's Playhouse gives the Down syndrome community hope, inspiration and an extended family of resources. Passers-by linger, awed by the faces of children pictured in our beautiful store front windows. Organizations call, impressed by our weekly programs and refer their clients to our community setting. GiGi's Playhouse is the only community center designed to meet the social, emotional and developmental needs of individuals with Down syndrome and their families.

Thank you for being a part of something big - GiGi's Playhouse NYC!



## Math and Literacy tutoring launch with Nancy Gianni - GiGi's Mom. Wednesday, June 20th, doors open at 5:30pm

What Bill Gates is to computers, Nancy Gianni is to Down syndrome. Making the world 'think different' about her daughter and all children born with an extra chromosome requires reinventing the way we support individuals with Down syndrome. One-on-one weekly Literacy and Math tutoring, run by highly skilled educators (most of whom teach at the visionary Ideal School) is key to Nancy's mission. She's flying in from her Chicago home to introduce the program to our community and to speak about the power of the Playhouse. Don't miss this chance to meet the mastermind behind GiGi's Playhouse and become a part of the Math and Literacy tutoring program. Wednesday, June 20th, 5:30-8:30pm



## New Parent Support

- GiGi's has created a Celebration Packet for hospital staff to give to new parents - gone are the days of consoling parents upon the birth of babies with Down syndrome.
- Our New Parent Group gives families a community of friends and mentors - gone are the days of feeling isolated.
- Our Physical Therapy Pilot with Lisa Yoon, PT, MS, PCS, gives therapeutic input to infants, right when they are primed for gross motor development.
- And we're launching a Weekly Parent-Baby Group, hosted by expert Occupational Therapist Kirsten DeBear, MEd, OTR, to help parents understand the incredible impact they can have on the overall development of their children with Down syndrome.



## Lectures, Events, Book Discussions

GiGi's Playhouse is more than a place for kids to develop important skills. It's a place for parents to get inspired and stay abreast of things that will affect their lives and the lives of their children. Below is a list of some upcoming lectures and events:

**Wednesday, June 13th at 6:30pm** - Amy Julia Becker, author of *A Good And Perfect Gift: Faith, Expectations and a Little Girl Named Penny*, will discuss her book (Named one of Publisher's Weekly's Top Books of 2011) - "Becker . . . knows how to grab a reader's heartstrings and never let go . . ." (Publisher's Weekly)

**Wednesday, June 20th at 5:30-8:30pm** - Nancy Gianni, Founder, CEO and GiGi's mom will discuss the literacy and math programs and her 10 years of experience inspiring 14 playhouses in the US and abroad.

**Wednesday, June 27th at 6:30pm** - Kirsten DeBear MSEd, OTR, one of the most experienced and sought-after Occupational Therapists in the city and celebrated author of numerous children's books, will offer the second of a 10-part parenting seminar entitled: *Brain Development in Children with Down Syndrome - The Importance of Relationships*.

## Volunteer Profile



Lisa Yoon PT, MS, PCS, has been a licensed physical therapist for 17 years. She is a board certified clinical specialist in pediatric physical therapy. She is an Early Intervention service provider, works with the NY Department of Education and as an Adjunct Professor and Lab Instructor

for post graduate studies.

"I have seen dramatic changes in the functional abilities and outcomes for children with Down syndrome and their families. Each year I see children in school able to do so much more! I want to be a part of an organization that is providing the combination of support that I feel makes that difference. GiGi's Playhouse gives kids and families the community and the therapeutic support they need."

Lisa has been piloting a group infant and preschool physical therapy program at the Playhouse since March and hopes to expand it to a weekly program in the Fall.

For more information: [infonyc@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:infonyc@gigisplayhouse.org)

## Emily Perl Kingsley

Emily Perl Kingsley is an international celebrity - her credits include 42 years as a writer for Sesame Street and author of "Welcome to Holland"- the most widely read and translated essay on Down syndrome, and the mother of Jason Kingsley, co-author of *Count Us In, Growing Up With Down Syndrome* and star of numerous media and television programs. Did we mention her advocacy work for the Down syndrome community? Ms. Kingsley joined us at the Playhouse on April 29th to share her experience in how to create a stimulating environment for our children.



## Programs and Lectures

**Saturday Art, Music and Dance Classes** - Stop by on a Saturday and feel the joy of parents and children exploring art and expressive movement together.

**Family Pizza Nights** - on a Wednesday evening, the community gathers at a community table - We all pitch in, most of the kids leave in PJ's, and there are no dishes for you to wash!

**Weekly Sunday Brunch** has become a ritual at the Playhouse and a place for families to connect while children explore the Playhouse stage, costumes, toys, games - and make life-long friends!

Summer will bring the launch of private tutoring in the Playhouse literacy room - gone are the days when children with Down syndrome were considered "trainable" but not "teachable." GiGi's National Literacy Program has taught thousands of children to read.

Other Classes to look for:

- Hip Hop Dance
- Spanish Language Group
- Technology - Building Robots
- Adaptive Ballet
- Teen Club Night
- Digital Photography Exploration



If you'd like your child involved in any of these, let us know:

[rsvpnyc@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:rsvpnyc@gigisplayhouse.org)

## CALENDAR

### June:

- 20 Literacy & Math Launch with Nancy Gianni, 5:30pm
- 21 Full day Literacy Tutor Training
- 23 Open Play, 11am-2pm  
Volunteer Orientation/Brainstorm Session, 3-5pm
- 24 PT group session, 4 year olds 9am  
Sunday Brunch, 11am
- 27 Lecture by Kirsten DeBear, MSEd, OTR, *Brain Development, The Power of Relationships*, 6:30 pm

### July:

- 1 New Parent Group, 10 am
- 7 Art, 10am  
Dance, 11am
- 14 Music, 10am  
Dance, 11am  
Playhouse Tag Sale, 1-3pm
- 18 Lecture by Kirsten DeBear, MSEd, OTR, *Brain Development, The Challenge of Low Tone*, 6:30 pm
- 21 Art, 10am  
Dance, 11am
- 26 Book Talk w. George Estreich, *The Shape of The Eye*, 6:30 pm
- 28 Music, 10am  
Dance, 11am  
Volunteer Orientation/Brainstorm Session, 3-5
- 29 Picnic at the Harlem Meer in Central Park, 11 am-2 pm

