



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

educate. inspire. achieve

Chicago Newsletter



Behind The Scenes At The Chicago Playhouse



When you pop in and out of GiGi's Playhouse Chicago for a tutoring session, class or event, do you ever wonder what makes our playhouse run behind the scenes? Last year, we trained over 100 volunteers in the Chicago location alone! Some dedicate 10 or more hours

per week coordinating one of our programs. Many others devote 1-2 hours per week, while others have come just once to help with a specific need or event. Together, they make up a crucial web that enables us to conduct 130 tutoring sessions, 12 classes and 7 Open Plays every month, along with smattering of sibling and parent workshops, birthday parties, outreach activities, special events and fundraisers. Whew!

The massive effort of coordinating these volunteers falls on Jennifer Casey, our Site Coordinator extraordinaire. Jennifer is our sole employee and the ever-present smiling face who also greets visitors, manages the office and is our front line for anyone interacting with the Playhouse. Supporting Jennifer is a 10-member Board, made up of a talented mix of parents and community members who run committees and take on significant volunteer roles. As a team, we are responsible for ensuring the long-term vi-

ability of the playhouse, in terms of outreach, programs, fundraising, events and financial discipline.

Last, and certainly not least, are all our donors and sponsors who help ensure we can afford our rent, materials and supplies. Some have donated a ream of paper or an auction item, and others have donated thousands of dollars. Every bit counts in our goal to raise \$150,000 for 2012! There is no fluff in this organization, and these generous donors have helped us to continually add programming and events in response to needs expressed by our families.

There are simply not sufficient words to thank the hundreds of people who support all of us who benefit from GiGi's Playhouse Chicago. I am eternally grateful for and humbled by each and every person who contributes their time, talents and money to make it happen!

I hope to see you in South Barrington on Sunday, June 10th for the GiGi's Playhouse Annual Chicagoland 5K Run and Walk to show your support for all these individuals and participate in our biggest event of the year!

Kim Hanna
GiGi's Playhouse Chicago
2012 Board President



Volunteer Corner

Hilde Akra, a 26-year-old from Norway, was a near permanent fixture around the Chicago Playhouse for most of the spring. In the United States accompanying her boyfriend (who was in Chicago as an exchange student), Hilde heard about GiGi's Playhouse through the Internet, looking for an opportunity to continue the work with children with special needs she had been doing in her homeland.

"In the near future, I want to work with parents who are expecting a baby with Down syndrome or who just had a child with the Down syndrome," Hilde says. "So I wanted to develop my knowledge about Down syndrome, and I had to try and find a place like GiGi's Playhouse."

A health and social worker in Norway, Hilde had "some knowledge" of Down syndrome before coming to GiGi's, but that was mostly concerning adults. Since working at GiGi's during Open Plays, as a literacy tutor and as an occasional babysitter for our families, Hilde says she's learned a lot more about young children with Down syndrome.

"One of the most important things I have learned after my time at GiGi's is that every child is unique! We must never forget that. I was lucky to be a Literacy Tutor. I got introduced to a learning method, which was new for me. That is a method I will for sure take home with me."

Departmental Updates

Communications and Outreach: We're continuing our efforts to reach even more people than we already do. This summer, we're going to begin collecting names and reaching out to the schools in the area, and we could use your help. If you have contact information for the case manager or social worker at your school, please send us a quick e-mail with it. The more information we have, the more outreach we can do.

Fundraising: We're still looking to reach our goal of \$150,000 for the year, and every little bit helps. In addition to the 5K this month, we're gearing up for a big push in October (aka Down Syndrome Awareness Month). Contact Brent at 773-217-9407 to learn how to get your company involved in the month long initiative to increase awareness and raise some money for the Playhouse.

Events: It's not too late to register for the 5K on June 10! You can do it online (check our website for the link), or you can register on the event day. Also, if you're heading to Northcenter's Ribfest, look for our table in the kids' area. Stop by and we'll give you a balloon.

Programming: In an effort to provide more targeted programming for our families, we're offering a special "Pre-Crawlers" session on Sunday, June 24th at 10 a.m. A physical therapist from Children's Memorial will be stopping by to offer tips and tricks. It's open to all infants who are not yet crawling.



We love hearing success stories from our parents. This one comes from Christi Harrison, mom of 3 ½-year-old Jimmy, a student in our literacy program since September 2011. In his seven months of learning, Jimmy has learned to identify all his letters (upper- and lower-case) and their corresponding sounds, word matching, and has learned 85 sight words. And he's already beginning to sound out words. "He really looks forward to learning," Christi tells us. "As soon as I say, 'Let's go read some books,' he makes his way to the literacy room."

Way to go, Jimmy! And way to go Christy for working so hard with him!

CALENDAR

- 3 Arts & Crafts, 10 a.m.
Open Play, 1 p.m.
- 6 Open Play, 9:30 a.m.
- 9 Northcenter Ribfest, Noon – 7 p.m.
- 10 Northcenter Ribfest, Noon – 7 p.m.
Chicagoland 5K, 8 a.m.
- 13 Open Play, 9:30 a.m.
- 20 Open Play, 9:30 a.m.
- 24 Open Play, 1 p.m.
Pre-crawlers, 10 a.m.
- 27 Open Play, 9:30 a.m.
- 30 Spring Literacy Session ends



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

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Save the Date

Come visit our table in the kids' area at Northcenter's Ribfest on June 9-10.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED