

GiGi's
PLAYHOUSE™

Down Syndrome Achievement Centers

gigisplayhouse.org

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BUILDING A DREAM

Breaking news! Today we signed our new lease and begin breaking ground on our future! OK, this is breaking news to you but as I write this to you today I have the same feeling I had 10 years ago. The same pit in my stomach I had when I signed my first lease and opened the first GiGi's Playhouse. I remember praying that people, besides my Mom, would show up to our opening and understand what I was trying to do. I will never forget opening our doors and seeing hundreds of people lining up to see the first GiGi's Playhouse Down Syndrome Awareness Center!! Well now, 10 years later (and 15 Playhouses later), here I am again with the same fear and pit in my stomach as we embark upon a new adventure.

Expanding on ten years of service to thousands of families nationwide, GiGi's Playhouse will expand its free educational and therapeutic programs by opening a new GiGi's National Achievement Center on October 20, 2013. Located in Hoffman Estates, IL, the 10,000 square foot complex will house the National Playhouse (formerly the Hoffman Playhouse but bigger and better) and a training center for up and coming playhouses! It will also offer a comprehensive new program called "GiGi University": the very first progressive learning center for adults with Down syndrome. A unique component of GiGi University will be an active training business called "Hugs & Mugs". This creative endeavor will offer chocolate & bakery treats in mugs designed with artwork created by the adults themselves as well as kids participating in GiGi's Playhouse. The adults will run the business as an internship, and the retail store front will display additional artwork created by individuals with Down syndrome from around the world.

We have the attention of the country, no, the world! People are changing the way they see our children and adults with Down syndrome and now we need to start opening doors for them!

I believe in individuals with Down syndrome in a way that I can't even describe. I will never stop fighting for them but I need your help. Please contact me directly if you would like to be a part of building the dream. ngianni@gigisplayhouse.org or go to gigisplayhouse.org/buildingadream.

I promise we will make you proud.

Love, Nancy



Our target opening date is October 27, 2013! Many of the rooms are being named in honor of a business or family member. For naming opportunities contact mportugal@gigisplayhouse.org; there are only a few rooms left!



Surprise that special someone at the opening with a room in their honor!



GiGi's Playhouse National Achievement Centers.

educate. inspire. believe!

No that is not a typo!

Here is what the new National Achievement center will look like:



National Playhouse

— Same as the Hoffman Estates Playhouse but bigger and better! This facility will serve the families in the surrounding areas. It will also be an incubator for piloting new programs and be a model for the up and coming Playhouses.



National Training Center — Playhouses from around the country will receive the much needed support and training to run their playhouses efficiently so they can better serve their families.



GiGi University — GiGi U!
confident U healthy U whole U-
See page 3

GIGI U
confident u • healthy u • whole u



Hugs and Mugs — A retail store that will serve as a training ground and a source of income as the students build the business. Everything in the store will be created, packaged and designed by the kids from GiGi's and GiGi University.



Thank you Perkins & Will!

This project has been in development for 2 years and we are so excited it is coming to fruition! Perkins and Will Architectural Firm has been there with us every step of the way! Putting in countless hours and designs until we had it just right! They have done this PRO BONO! From design concepts and development plans to construction

documents and branding! We could never have done this without them. They have put their heart and souls into this project and we will never be able to thank them enough!

To learn more see www.gigisplayhouse.org/buildingadream

spreading awareness and achievement ~ WORLDWIDE!!



"When I realized Avery was going to need a little extra support and services in life, I started seeking out a place that could offer her those things. GiGi's Playhouse was the place. So we got in the car and drove a couple hours to the closest GiGi's. When we walked in the door, the energy that I felt was exactly what we needed. I was so inspired by my daughter and GiGi's Playhouse that I decided to open a GiGi's in our community! We now serve hundreds of families in the Bradley Bourbonnais area. Thanks Avery!"

Our 2013 New Playhouses ~

- Twin Cities, MN, Feb 9
- Querétaro Mexico!, Aug 15
- Oak Forest, IL, Sep 29
- Madison, WI, October
- Nashville, TN, October

12 months, we will be growing by more than 50% with 7 new locations opening in 4 new states — Tennessee, Texas,

Indiana, Wisconsin and our first international location in Mexico!

Every week, new families contact us to learn about how to open up a new location in their community. Here's a recent message from a group in Seattle.

"I went to GiGi's Playhouse grand opening in Minneapolis, Minnesota when I was in town visiting family and I fell in love! My son, Andrew, is 6 months old and we found out after he was born that he has Down syndrome. We have been welcomed and so inspired by the DS community. My husband and I currently live in the Seattle/ Bellevue area and would love to have a playhouse in our community! We truly feel blessed and we want everyone else to have that same feeling and impact throughout the community."

The broad network of GiGi's Playhouse locations supports new startups better than ever as we provide the tools to help move them along in the process. To learn about the progress and new location timelines, and how we're spreading our mission throughout the country and abroad, go to <http://gigisplayhouse.org/locations-in-the-works>.

A NEW PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE



With a little help from Mom and Dad, Lucas crossed the finish line at this years 5k!

Our family and friends helped us through the diagnosis but it was learning about this wonderful place called GiGi's Playhouse over the internet that really represented the true meaning of hope for us. We scoured every link of their website and before I could even comprehend what was happening my husband and I were signed up for our first GiGi's walk in the summer of 2011, when I was six months pregnant. There I was on this hot humid day, a pregnant woman expecting a child with Down syndrome at a Down syndrome event and terrified in my own skin. Even though we knew about Down syndrome, we didn't really know much and didn't know anyone with an extra chromosome; but being at this event made everything real.

I remember thinking as I was registering that there was still time to leave and maybe I made a big mistake by coming to the walk. For heavens sake, I was a big hormonal pregnant woman who was not thinking clearly half of the time. I remember feeling like everyone was staring at me even as I tried to hide the stinging, crying eyes behind my big sunglasses. What started out as a very tough day with lots of tears turned into a magical experience with tears of hope and happiness. For the first time I was relieved at what I saw that day. I saw love, I saw support, I saw family, I saw happiness, I saw a sense of belonging, I saw beautiful children and I saw what an amazing life my baby Lucas would have.

That day was a game changer for us. It was what we needed to be the best parents we could for Lucas and we haven't stopped yet. Lucas is now a year and a half and the GiGi's walk is an annual family event that everyone looks forward to.

My husband and I often talk about "our first walk;" we chat about how far we have come and it all started with just a little hope.



Before, during and after Kaylin's health problems GiGi's was there for us every step of the way. I don't know what we would have done without the continuous love and support from GiGi's. Positive energy flows through the doors and windows of the Playhouse like a happy addiction. We are so very thankful for GiGi's.

EDUCATION PROVIDES A VOICE



Steven is 22 years old and excelling in the GiGi's Literacy Program.

Steven began his involvement in the Literacy Tutoring Program at the Des Moines Playhouse this past winter and has quickly progressed. In

just 5 months, he increased his comprehension through weekly sessions with his tutor. He tackles challenges with sight words and sounds out complex words with accuracy and enthusiasm. Steven brings his sense of humor to his weekly tutoring sessions and has made learning to read so much fun! He's starting his first novel as we write this newsletter and might be done soon!!!

At Playhouses across the country, children, teens and adults like Steven are learning to read, increasing reading fluency and comprehension every day in one-on-one tutoring sessions, tailored to the individual learner. The Literacy Tutoring program is a supplement to a basal reading programs taught in school, using key concepts of matching, selecting and naming to teach the whole word, alphabet and phonics.

GiGi's Playhouse is so proud of each student, tutor and parent for their determination. Through that determination, our learners develop an invaluable sense of self-esteem that only comes with hard work and achievement.

GiGi's Playhouse Literacy Tutoring and Math Tutoring programs begin at age 3. For more information, to register or learn how to get involved, contact your local Playhouse.

save the date

GiGi's Playhouse National Gala!

Saturday March 1, 2014

The **Chicago Regional 5k** was a huge success! 3200 people came together to celebrate Down syndrome GiGi's **STYLE!!!** Check your local playhouse for details of the GiGi run/walk in your area.



Team Clover Technologies raised \$25,000! Making them the number one team again this year!

Our **travelling galleries** are at it again! See the Chicagoland gallery at the job site of the new GiGi's!! Located at 2350A West Higgins Road, Hoffman Estates! Below is the gallery hosted at Woodfield Mall!



giving back

At GiGi's Playhouse, achievements like Steven's are always a moment away. Every day we celebrate the joy, confidence, and amazing potential of our individuals, and we consider it a privilege to extend no-fee programming to all of our families. With that said, the programs are not actually free to the Playhouses.

To help us maintain no-fee programming, GiGi's Playhouse is excited to introduce the **Champion's Circle!** The Champion's Circle is a brand new monthly giving club that offers extended family members and friends a great opportunity to honor a loved one or someone special in their lives. **For the equivalent of just 30 cents per day-less than half a cup of coffee-extended family members and friends can support an individual with Down syndrome through a small monthly donation.** Will a member of your family be one of the first to join? We certainly hope so!

Calling all grandparents, aunts & uncles, cousins & adult siblings, and family friends and neighbors: we need your support! Gratefully, we ask you to consider joining the Champion's Circle, individually or as a family; to honor your grandchild, niece, nephew, sister or brother. Obviously, parents are also welcome to join the Champion's Circle too.

Individuals who are honored through donations to the Champion's Circle will also be highlighted in a monthly e-mail newsletter to over 15,000 people! To join the Champion's Circle, please visit gigisplayhouse.org/donate-monthly or e-mail mportugal@gigisplayhouse.org for more information. You can also join the Champion's Circle using the enclosed gift envelope. Thank you for your generosity, and for honoring the individuals and families of GiGi's Playhouse!

G

GIGI U

confident u • healthy u • whole u

BUILDING A DREAM PART II, continued

Today, a dream is becoming reality as we introduce GiGi University, a progressive learning program for adults with Down syndrome (22 and older).

GiGi U is a launching pad for achievement! GiGi University is an engaging 8 week instructional program focused in development of confidence, health and the "whole self", followed by an 11-17 week internship opportunity to learn and practice career skills, while gaining crucial work experience.

The 8 week instructional program meets three days per week for four hours. Participants will set goals to improve their self-esteem, self-advocacy and self-care, nutrition, fitness, and safety; as well as career skills, organization and hobbies through their involvement in GiGi University. GiGi U is intended for goal-directed adults who are ready to make a commitment to themselves to walk tall and achieve their greatest potential.

Like all GiGi's Playhouse programs, GiGi U is free to all families and supported through the tremendous contributions of volunteers. As our dream comes to reality, we will share the successes and work to expand this model to other Playhouses. GiGi U will be accepting its inaugural class this fall, at the National Playhouse in Hoffman Estates, Illinois.

quarterly national newsletter
summer 2013 edition



Read Lucas' Story
on page 2

Thanks to
our Volunteers !



What's the
IMPACT
of GiGi's Playhouse?

16,200+

Program
participants per
year nationwide

9,300+

Program sessions
per year nationwide

24,604+

Event attendees
per year nationwide

44,600+

Volunteer
hours per year
nationwide



Down Syndrome Achievement Centers

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nonprofit organization

u.s. postage

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EDUCATE. INSPIRE. BELIEVE.

hi everybody, we are
Building GiGi University
This Year! my mom
says you can see it on
October 20th for our
GRAND OPENING AND 10
Year BIRTHDAY PARTY!
see you there

Love
GiGi



did you know...

At GiGi's Playhouse, each program has a therapeutic or educational focus. Even if it appears the participants are just having fun, they are learning and experiencing therapy in disguise at the same time. Whether working on social skills, motor skills, speech and language, reading, math, computers or just simple peer interaction, it is all purposeful fun! Along with the development of new skills comes self-esteem – the most important element to Playhouse programs. Self-esteem is formed not only in the child with Down syndrome, but in the family members as well.

Please feel free to stop by anytime for a tour of your local Playhouse and see the "fun" for yourself!



GiGi's
Hoffman Estates



GiGi's
NYC



GiGi's
Atlanta



GiGi's
Quad Cities



GiGi's
Twin Cities