

## educate. inspire. *Believe!*

**Greetings all!** I am so thankful for each and every one of you who believe in us every day! Our donors who allow us to continue to provide free programming, our new parents who courageously walk into the Playhouse to face their diagnosis head on, our moms and dads who continue to work hard every day to raise the bar for their kids, our adults with Down syndrome who are showing the world that it is never too late to learn, and our beloved volunteers, without whom we could not do what we do every day. All of you are helping us to change the world and make this world a more accepting place for us all! Thank you!!



As I walk around the playhouse I am always so blown away by our young new moms. I see them fearful to walk in the door that first time with that deer in the headlights look on their face. Now, when I see them they are taking the hand of the next fearful new mom and letting her know she will never be alone. Changing that babies life forever. They are now part of a family that will never stop fighting for them. The part that is so amazing about all of this is that it is happening at Playhouses all around the

country and in Mexico too! It only takes one person to believe in you to give you the strength you need to move forward with your diagnosis!



Last week **30** GiGi's Playhouses from around the country and in Mexico participated in our 6th Annual GiGi's Bigger, Better, Stronger Together Board Conference at the Schaumburg Convention Center. It was 3 days of

inspiration, education, networking and fun! The conference ended with a banquet where our adult interns with Down syndrome, who run our Hugs and Mugs store, inspired the crowd. At one point they could not articulate how happy they were to have the entire country (and beyond) fighting for them so they just started singing "God Bless America" and the whole room stood up and sang with them!! It was the most amazing moment, there was not a dry eye in the house.

I am so blessed to have so many amazing people helping to make my dream come true! We truly are changing the way the world sees Down syndrome, one child-one diagnosis-one community at a time!

Thank you for Believing!  
Love Nancy and GiGi

"Going to GiGi U has taught me so many life lessons my parents have tried to teach me. Sometimes I would get upset and run into the bathroom at school and not understand anything they said. At GiGi U I have learned healthy living and eating, self control, self advocacy, and my career skills. When I don't understand something I can use my voice. Life is fun when you enjoy every second of the day!"



~Aubrey, GiGi U graduate and Hugs + Mugs intern



At GiGi's Playhouse we make a lifetime commitment to our families. Please help us continue our FREE programming and change the way the world sees Down syndrome.



## Volunteers *Believe!* (and change!)



*Two years ago, I did not have a personal connection to Down syndrome. Two years ago I sent in an email to see if I could help. I picked up my camera and went to visit GiGi's Playhouse to take pictures at Open Play. I watched, I soaked in this amazing community and I asked questions. Stereotypes were shattered.*

*As I left the playhouse I got in my car and wept. I was changed. I know that phrase is used a lot, but I mean it from the most sincere place. I am changed. I have been taught what it means to not give up, to fight and work hard for my goals, I am inspired and challenged weekly by my friends who are leading the way for us all. I have gained more than I could ever give back.*

*Two years ago I had no personal connection to GiGi's, today I thank God everyday that my world is bigger and filled with friends who I will spend the rest of my life advocating for and learning from. ~Heather, a grateful volunteer*

## Parents *Believe!*

### As seen on facebook...

*I have talked about GiGi's Playhouse National Achievement Center before and how much it means to our family. In the summer we are there just about every week for LMNOP class and Open Play. LMNOP stands for Language, Music, N' Our Peeps. We started going to LMNOP when Mady was only a few months old and we loved it! We learned songs, finger plays, sign language, danced, and read stories. Madylin has always loved music and she loves that class. We try to go anytime I don't have school and definitely over the summer. This is just one of the many FREE programs that GiGi's provides for Madylin and her friends. So grateful for that place!*

~Mady's Mom



## Friends *Believe!*

*Faith is a fun loving, sassy, energetic 9-year old who happens to have Down syndrome. Her best friend is Courtney, who is caring, loving, serious, dramatic, enthusiastic, and truly a one of a kind friend that happens NOT to have Down syndrome.*



*Although Courtney is 12, they are more alike than different. They are both cheerleaders, they both like hanging out together, they both like movies, swimming and the trampoline. They both attend the same elementary school, Faith in 3rd grade and Courtney in 6th grade.*

*Courtney is an amazing friend, supporter, and advocate for Faith. She recently had her 12th birthday party and asked for donations to GiGi's Playhouse in lieu of personal gifts!! She is such a cool kid, who is spreading the word and truly educating her community about Down syndrome. What a special friend Faith has!*

~Terri, Faith's Mom

## GiGi's *Believes!*



**With free programming, one on one tutoring, and a commitment to excellence we ARE changing the way the world see Down syndrome! One child. One diagnosis. One community at a time!**

## #GIVINGTUESDAY™

We give thanks on Thanksgiving, shop on Black Friday, browse the web on Cyber Monday. Now, a day dedicated to giving back #GivingTuesday.

Save the Date : Dec 2nd - Donate online at [gigisplayhouse.org](http://gigisplayhouse.org) or text "TUESDAY" to 52182 to give via your cell phone.

**Please Note The Coleman Foundation Matching Grant: Every dollar from donors who have not previously contributed to GiGi's Playhouse online will be matched by The Coleman Foundation, up to \$15,000.**



This is a very special opportunity and we hope that you will help us spread the word to your Family & Friends. Thank you!



We are proud to announce that we are expanding our retail store, Hugs + Mugs (aka our career training center) to include food service! The interns (all GiGi University graduates) have proven to us that they are ready to take on this responsibility and extra work! The store is currently running 5 days a week but will move to 7 day a week when the new café style build out is complete! Our biggest revenue currently comes from our parties! What a gift! These parties really allow our interns to shine and allow the community to see all that they are capable of! Not to mention generating much needed revenue!

**Can't make it to the store??** Look for our V-21 and G-21 cookies in local convenience stores! OR stop by the gift shop at St. Alexis or Alexian Brothers to purchase cookies and exclusive gifts made by the Hugs + Mugs interns! We are growing and ready to serve!

**"When you learn, TEACH,  
when you get, GIVE"**

~Maya Angelou



twenty-four cities  
two countries  
one voice

**GiGi's Playhouse**  
**2015 International**  
*gala*  
*i have a voice*

**Save the date: Saturday, March 14, 2015**

Drury Lane | Oakbrook Terrace, IL

More details and formal invitations to follow!  
For Sponsorship Opportunities: Contact Jayne Drew at [jdrew@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:jdrew@gigisplayhouse.org)

**Thank you** for believing in individuals with Down syndrome and their families. We appreciate your generous support!

# You should see what we've been up to - Have You Been to the Playhouse recently?

We invite you to come see first-hand the miracles that happen every day at our GiGi's National Achievement Center in Hoffman Estates. Our distinct locations, FREE educational and therapeutic programming, and positive energy support tens of thousands of families every year. Contact Jayne Drew at [jdrew@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:jdrew@gigisplayhouse.org) to schedule your tour.



## We want to thank our Platinum Level donors this year for their generous support - we cannot do it without you:

- The Foglia Family Foundation
- The Coleman Foundation
- The Rice Foundation
- John & Mary Manley
- Levitetz Family Foundation
- Alan Barsumian
- Michael Healy
- Gregory and Jennifer Janson
- The Chicagoland Buddy Walk
- Chicago Cubs Charities
- Jim & Sheryl Cerkleski
- Anonymous Donor



Michael Hennessy, Patrick, Rosa Berardi, Brian & Antonella.

In celebration of that extra special 21st chromosome, GiGi's Playhouse is asking you to consider becoming a sustaining donor by giving \$21 a month to support the FREE programs offered to individuals with Down syndrome. Monthly donations are vital to the operation of the Playhouse and can help to ensure our programs are beneficial and growing and all of our kids and adults strive to better their "Best of All" everyday

- **\$21 a month can sponsor** a child to receive one on one tutoring in literacy, math, or handwriting.
- **\$21 a month can allow** us to purchase the materials and equipment needed to run successful programming.
- **\$21 a month can make** a tremendous impact in the lives of the individuals we serve.

GiGi's Playhouse celebrates the many achievements of individuals and their families, develops new programs to benefit our participants, and works tirelessly to change society's outdated perceptions about the amazing potential of individuals with Down syndrome.

**From our learning labs-** "During literacy tutoring Paul sits with Ryan and listens to Ryan in a way that I haven't seen before. You can tell when Paul isn't comfortable around someone, but Ryan is able to pull Paul out of his shell. They just have such a wonderful connection. It is beyond words." ~ Lisa, Paulie's Mom



Miracles really do happen at GiGi's Playhouse, where we turn belief into achievement with your help. Donate online today at [www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org) or via the form below.

## Help us continue to support individuals with Down syndrome

I want to give:

- \$25
- \$50
- \$75
- \$100
- \$250
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

I want my gift to support:

- Literacy and Math Tutoring
- Therapeutic Programs
- GiGi University and Hugs + Mugs
- New Program Development
- Greatest Area of Need

My donation is made:

- As a General Donation
- In Honor of \_\_\_\_\_
- In Memory of \_\_\_\_\_

I want to join the **\$21** club (monthly \$21 giving):

- Yes
- No

I am donating by:  Check  Credit Card

Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Save money on printing and postage:  
donate ONLINE at [gigisplayhouse.org](http://gigisplayhouse.org)  
donate monthly at: [gigisplayhouse.org](http://gigisplayhouse.org)



GiGi's Playhouse started strong in the Midwest, but our message has been expanding broadly across the US, with every region of the country growing! By the end of 2015, we'll see the Midwest adding Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio and North Dakota. In the East, we're coming to New Jersey and New York, then to Florida and Texas in the South. In the West, we'll be in Utah, Arizona and California. We expect to have over 30 locations by the end of 2015!



Changing the way the world sees Down syndrome. one child. one diagnosis. one community at a time.

# Hugs + Mugs

HANDMADE • HEARTFELT • HOPE FILLED



Hugs + Mugs launched their new G-21 Gluten Free chocolate chip cookie, even our gluten lovers are eating it up!

Our products feel good and taste good! When you buy them you are not only satisfying your own needs but the needs of our interns. Send a message of kindness & wellness this holiday season!



Save 20%  
in store  
exp 11-28-14

**Need a holiday gift for your corporate event?** We recently filled a 250+ mug order for Purity Wholesale Group - Thank you! No order too small or too large. Email us at [hugsandmugs@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:hugsandmugs@gigisplayhouse.org) for details and pricing.

Look for us on line, or email at [hugsandmugs@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:hugsandmugs@gigisplayhouse.org) or call 847-278-8531



Visit Hugs + Mugs for all of your holiday shopping!

## GiGi's Playhouse Nashville

All of this started as a dream – a dream between one dedicated teacher to an amazing boy with Down syndrome and his mother to bring a GiGi's Playhouse to the greater Nashville area. In a few short years, that dream transferred into a reality that was only possible through countless hours of hard volunteer work. What started as meetings in a cafe with a small group of less than 15 parents and other people who have a heart for Down syndrome has snowballed into a fully functioning Playhouse that includes a board, fundraisers, tutors, and other individuals dedicated to showing Middle Tennessee how much we need a place like GiGi's. This place is a blessing that not every community has, and the services that it provides are priceless. Just imagine the look on a mother's face as she hears her son read for the first time after being told shortly after his birth that that moment might not ever happen. It shows the world that people are so much more than a diagnosis. These are amazing individuals that have so much to offer in their communities. We are helping to change the whole concept of one child, one diagnosis, one community at a time.



## From our interns....

### Matthew Kaman

*"I love the environment and being a deep-thinking creator. I love working with Hugs + Mugs friends and staff that make me feel right at home. I graduated from GiGi U and I've been working here since May. I am a percussionist. This is who I am. Having Down syndrome means that I can do lots of things that no one else can do and being loved by everyone, especially the ladies."*



### Patrick Chanthalusy

*Patrick is a mentor in Hugs + Mugs. He enjoys working with his other Hugs + Mugs interns and mentors. "I feel proud when I can help them. I also like writing about my day."*





Down Syndrome Achievement Centers  
2350 West Higgins Road  
Hoffman Estates, IL 60169

national newsletter • winter 2014 edition

nonprofit organization  
u.s. postage  
**paid**  
palatine, il  
permit no. 1312

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



I do my happy dance when I get to GiGi's!



**It is here!**  
The GiGi's Social Change in Action 2015 calendar! This amazing work of art sends a message of acceptance and love to anyone who sees it! Help us #BETHECHANGE!

#gigisbelieves

2015 Calendar  
Order yours today!

[www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org)

Save 20% online with promo code **CALENDAR20** exp 12-31-14

New families walk through the doors of our Playhouses every day. For some families, the choice is easier to face than for others, but all families who walk through our doors see the celebration and potential in individuals with Down syndrome. We recently posted the question:

*If you could describe that experience in five words or less, what would you say?*

These were five of our favorite comments from our families:

-  You are never walking alone
-  Love does not count chromosomes
-  Feeling sorry for myself ended
-  Contagious level of POSITIVE energy
-  Someone who spoke my language

