

2016 CNN Hero: Nancy Gianni!

What defines a hero? Courageous Action? Selflessness? Boldness? Nancy Gianni personifies all of these qualities, and was one of 25 people chosen as a 2016 CNN Hero! CNN Heros are vetted from 40,000+ nominations across 80 countries, representing a year-long initiative that honors everyday people for their selfless, creative efforts to help others. 2016 marks the tenth year of the Peabody Award-winning, Emmy-nominated campaign. Voting for the top 10 CNN Heroes begins on October 26.

For Nancy and GiGi's Playhouse, this award signifies 12 years of blood, sweat and tears to methodically prove to the world that individuals with Down syndrome are much more than a diagnosis. This effort began with one child, one diagnosis, and one community at a time. Today confidence is built and barriers are broken at 31+ Playhouses around the country and in Mexico. The world has taken notice, and GiGi's Playhouse is no longer the organization it was just one year ago. Playhouse participation in 2016 alone exceeds 95,000 hours of FREE educational, therapeutic and career programs. National media and entertainment platforms such as A&E and NBC are approaching GiGi's Playhouse with new partnership opportunities. An average of 240 new families and volunteers per month are approaching a GiGi's Playhouse for the first time. The list of inquiries for new Playhouses continues to surpass 150 communities.

We thank CNN for recognizing Nancy's belief, vision, and courage to take risks and challenge the status quo. Hundreds of thousands of lives are better for it. From Richard Riley, a long-time Playhouse family member and supporter from New York, who nominated Nancy for CNN Heroes: *"Acknowledgment on the world stage should be but a beginning in recognizing the mission and the expectation of its success that Nancy Gianni has set. It could have easily been about her child, her struggle. Instead Nancy chose the word our...our children, our struggle. Nancy dynamically proclaims, 'Each of you have the power to change the world; it's not about the obstacles that life throws at you, it's how you overcome them.' She lives these words. Millions are in need of the touch of Love that is GiGi's Playhouse!"*



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Best Friends give their Best of All

The young man on the left, Jacob Potter, prefers to be called "Potter" because he is just that cool. Potter joined Karate Kickers at the Syracuse Playhouse a few months ago. On his first visit Jacob was a little shy and wanted his mentor to stay close during the class. Now Potter is a pro! He has unbounded confidence, learns the routines, and has become a really good friend to Kyle, also pictured. Kyle had a very hard year last year due to horrible bullying from a school aid. Kyle struggled to feel safe but each week he showed up and watched Potter. Each week the first person he looked for was Potter. Now Potter & Kyle are participating and growing, TOGETHER! Their friendship has been amazing to watch. Each friend gives his #bestofall while encouraging and supporting the other. #GenerationG



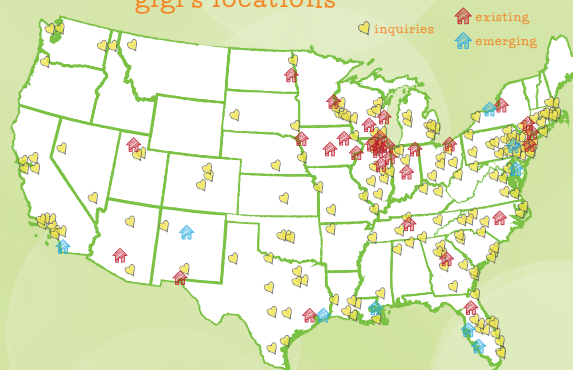
Always stronger together, GiGi's Playhouse is elated to welcome the following communities to the Playhouse family. We congratulate you on your 2016 openings and we thank you for your service to our heroic families!

Cleveland | Ft. Wayne | Raleigh | Madison

GiGi's Playhouse looks forward to welcoming the following communities to our family in the coming months:

San Diego | Albuquerque | Rochester | Annapolis | New Orleans

gigi's locations



Queretaro, Mexico 🏠

Partners: A&E TV, Born this way and GiGi's Playhouse

GiGi's Playhouse is honored to partner with A&E Network for the second season of the Emmy Award Winning "Born This Way", a multi-episode program providing an intimate look at a diverse group of young men and women with Down syndrome as they pursue their passions and lifelong dreams, explore friendships, romantic relationships and work, all while defying society's expectations. The series also gives voice to the parents, allowing them to talk about the joy their daughter or son brings to their family, and the challenges they face in helping them live as independently as possible.



GiGi's Playhouse role included pre-launch marketing and promotion for Season 2 at Playhouses throughout the network. Additionally, cast members of "Born This Way" joined GiGi's Playhouse at the 2016 National Down Syndrome Congress for appearances, speaking engagements, and participation in the Hugs & Mugs on-site pop-up store.

Born This Way won a 2016 Emmy for Outstanding Unstructured Reality Program. Recently, the series was chosen as one of six honorees for the 2016 Television Academy Honors, an award that recognizes television programming that inspires, informs and motivates. GiGi's Playhouse leadership, families and supporters congratulate A&E Network and the "Born This Way" team and looks forward to continued collaboration for future seasons.

Together we show the world that individuals with Down syndrome have compelling and inspirational stories to share, and valuable contributions to offer.



Community Spotlight

From Tinley Park - Laurie, her husband Marcus and their son Tyler came to us back in December after receiving a prenatal Down syndrome diagnosis. Laurie reached out to us on the GiGi's Tinley Park Facebook page, and when I asked her how she had found out about GiGi's she said "I was just reaching out to anyone who would listen". Laurie was scared, anxious, and emotional-but it was beautiful seeing her connect with other parents who had once walked in her shoes. Laurie connected with Gina that day, another parent who recently also had a prenatal diagnosis. After the birth of Gina's daughter, they talked through text messages every day, supporting each other and offering strength and love-which they still do to this day. Laurie had her daughter Emily and she told me when she saw her daughter [it was the] "exact moment that the broken pieces of my heart were put back together". She recently told me she wants to become an advocate for women who have received a prenatal diagnosis, and that the experience of connecting with GiGi's and the Down syndrome Community has changed both her and her family's lives.



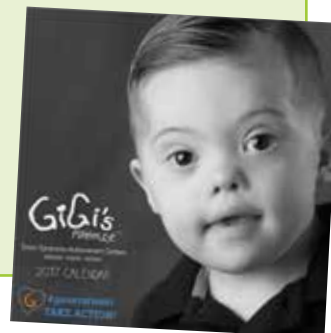
#kindnessmatters
#GenerationG

Coming Soon! The 2017 GiGi's Playhouse Calendar!

Photographs by Thomas Balsamo

It's never too early to start planning ahead. Calendars will be on sale for \$12 during Down Syndrome Awareness Month and then available after November 1 at the normal \$15 price. Models will be autographing calendars at GiGiFest on October 16th don't miss out on this opportunity!

To order yours go to
gigisplayhouse.org





The Amina Grace Speech & Language Program



The Amina Grace Speech and Language Program at GiGi's Playhouse Hoffman Estates began though the generous support of Munawar Ali and Maura Cullen in loving memory of their daughter, Amina. GiGi's Playhouse envisions a world in which clinical speech and language therapy programming is available to all Playhouse

families for free; also as a replicable model for both brick & mortar Playhouses and mobile delivery nationwide.

The program was piloted in Fall of 2015 to help expand speech and language communication skills for children and adults with Down syndrome. Due to increased demand for the program, it was determined that there was a need to expand the program further. Since then, 64 participants ranging in ages 2 to 34 joined the program at no charge, **representing more than 115 hours of free speech therapy for Playhouse families.**

The Amina Grace Speech and Language Program is open to participants of all ages and runs 4, 10-week sessions throughout the year at the National Achievement Center. Efforts are underway to seek funding in support of program expansion to other Playhouses. Like all GiGi's Playhouse programs, **this program is provided to families completely free of charge.**

From Playhouse families and program volunteers:

"I've known Anne for years and today was the first conversation I've had with her in which I understood every single word she spoke. I can't believe it."

"The playhouse speech therapist and my daughter have a routine they follow, and my daughter flourishes with the therapist. She sets clear goals and expectations, and my daughter rises to the challenge to reach those goals and shine. Her speech is clearer, and she is speaking in longer sentences since starting speech therapy at the playhouse."

"My eyes are filled with tears and joy is bursting through my heart. I am so delighted that people see our son for who we know him to be. This is the first time in his life that is getting to be heard. Thank you for this gift."

"My daughter's speech has improved so much. She is using her speech skills Sarah taught her on her own. She is slowing down, opening her mouth more and showing confidence. I can't describe how much these sessions are doing for her."



Generation G Autumn of Acceptance

Generation G is a conscious decision to be better every day. Be Accepting. Be Generous. Be Kind.

ACCEPTANCE is the fall focus for the Generation G campaign and October is Down syndrome Acceptance month! How will you TAKE ACTION and demonstrate acceptance?

- Host a hot chocolate stand or other fundraiser at your business.
- Change your Facebook profile to a Generation G branded image.
- Tweet about GiGi's Playhouse and the Generation G campaign.
- Host a Pep Rally at your local school to introduce Generation G to students in a fun and exciting way.
- Invite a representative from your local GiGi's Playhouse to speak briefly about Generation G.
- Create an art project (drawing, painting, etc.) about what Generation G means to students
- Attend GiGi Fest or a local playhouse event in your community.



#generationG



National Conference

On November 2-5 GiGi's Playhouse entire national network will converge in the Chicagoland area for a 4-day training conference on all aspects of Playhouse programs, operations, fundraising, marketing, IT, finance, board development and other topics.

Like Playhouse programs, the national conference is not free to GiGi's Playhouse to deliver. Venue costs, curriculum development and delivery costs, and more are needed to ensure effective training, networking and inspiration. Conference sponsors benefit from speaking opportunities during general and breakout sessions, branding on the conference smartphone app, marketing materials in guest bags, logo branding in curriculum materials, and more. If you are interested in supporting Playhouse families through the training and growth of our network, **please contact Marc Portugal, National Director of Marketing, for more information: mportugal@gigisplayhouse.org.**



Playhouses network wide are strongly encouraged to connect with Northwestern University alumni in their communities. Invite them to tour your Playhouse and observe programs that will be supported by NUDM. Thank you to all hero families for your participation and support.

Northwestern University Dance Marathon

Returning to school this fall, students, faculty, administration and partners of Northwestern University welcome GiGi's Playhouse to campus as the 2017 beneficiary of the Northwestern University Dance Marathon (NUDM). NUDM is the longest-running university dance marathon in the nation and is entirely student-led. Through various "hero events" and campaigns, NUDM participants and leadership will engage Playhouse families to learn more about individuals with Down syndrome and form lasting bonds of friendship. In doing so, the greater Northwestern community and alumni networks will learn more about GiGi's Playhouse mission and programs, and how they can support our heroic families as volunteers, ambassadors, and supporters.

From the executive co-chairs of NUDM 2017: *"More than 400,000 people in the U.S. have Down syndrome, and we are beyond excited that NUDM has the opportunity to help improve the lives of these incredibly inspiring people. When you realize the challenges people with Down syndrome face every day, including dealing with so much discrimination, you realize NUDM has the power to not only improve the futures of these people, but also to change the way the rest of the world sees their differences by spreading awareness and acceptance."*



#playforchange



Acceptance is More Than Awareness



Donor Spotlight: Nationwide Rail Services

GiGi's Playhouse is humbled and honored to acknowledge Joe and Deanna Barton and Nationwide Rail Services as one of our biggest supporters. One year ago, Joe arrived at GiGi's Playhouse Chicagoland golf outing with a tractor truck whose custom design specifically honors individuals with Down syndrome. Since then, Joe and Deanna donated a 55' trailer with pictures of GiGi's Playhouse families branded on every side! Through their generosity, Joe and Deanna arranged for the truck & trailer to be used as a mobile billboard and proclamation of acceptance for individuals with Down syndrome at various Playhouse openings and events this past year.

Joe and Deanna represent the best of humanity and serve as ambassadors for our vision of global acceptance for all. On behalf of all Playhouse families and friends, we thank you once again for your continued generosity and belief!



"Two Words..."

From a loving playhouse family:

"You're pregnant." Two words that changed our lives forever. After more than 2 years of trying to get pregnant, my wife, Denise and I were absolutely ecstatic that we were finally going to have a baby. "It's twins." Two more words that, while unexpected and initially terrifying, increased our excitement and feelings of wonder. "Down Syndrome." Another two words. These took our breath away and reshaped our reality and future.

As therapists, Denise and I have worked with countless patients and their families to support the highest quality of life possible for them. We have also volunteered with various organizations that offer services to those with special needs. Nonetheless, our son, Oliver's prenatal diagnosis came as a shock and filled us with fear. Combined with that, it became evident that he would need to be born 10 weeks early in order to have a chance to survive, and that his typical twin, Nathan would be along for the ride. What was already a challenging experience was made more difficult because we felt so alone.

We would ask to be connected to parents in the area in order to get more information on what to expect. Unfortunately, those connections weren't made and we found ourselves searching the internet for answers and hope.

After the boys were born and life settled down a bit, we were put in touch through absolute chance with some amazing moms of children with Down Syndrome. Those moms led us to GiGi's; our first visit was

to meet other moms and when we left at the end of the night, a feeling of belonging overwhelmed us. To travel this journey with people who are walking the same path and root for your child the way they root for their own is something that can't be described. Beyond the sense of community and support that GiGi's has given us, we have also seen our boys thrive in the various therapies and play groups. They have met friends there and even brought family along to see firsthand everything the playhouse has to offer. We envision both boys continuing to benefit from GiGi's in so many ways throughout their lives.

Ultimately, Denise and I have found that we had nothing to fear to begin with. That there is an unexpected beauty to this life and we are so privileged to live it. That our sons have been such a blessing and changed us in ways we couldn't have imagined and shown us how to achieve right alongside them. Our sons. Two words.





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national newsletter • fall 2016 edition

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Hugs + mugs

CAFÉ • GELATO • designABILITY

coupon

2 for 1 Gelato
with this coupon

valid through Nov 30, 2016



October is Down syndrome Acceptance Month, celebrate with us!

GiGiFest

Sunday October 16th 2016

Food | Games | Inflatables | Petting Zoo | Raffles | Prizes
Pumpkin Painting | Music | Red Carpet Calendar Walk

