



Did you know...

- that Founder, Nancy Gianni, won Chicagoan of the Year?
- that GiGi's won an Emmy this year?
- we have updated our tagline to *educate. inspire. achieve.?*

Read the stories inside to learn more about how GiGi's is changing lives thanks to YOUR support!

Guess who's turning 6?! GiGi's Playhouse

Where We Were

Just 6 years ago, Nancy Gianni gave birth to her 3rd child and was thrust into the world of Down syndrome. She thought her life, as she knew it, was over. But she soon came to realize that GiGi was more like her other kids than she was different! With the help of the community, GiGi's Playhouse opened as a Down syndrome awareness center. Since then, it has turned into so much more! What started as a local Playhouse in a suburb of Chicago has turned into an international phenomenon, spreading awareness and inspiration to everyone it touches.

Where We Are

Aside from empowering families across the country, GiGi's Playhouse centers evolved into educational centers with a focus on national awareness for Down syndrome. We have designed a corporate structure and have successfully replicated nationally! Did you know...

- Currently there are 5 Playhouses and a Literacy Satellite.
- All of our programs are free to our families and are therapeutic in nature.
- Each of them are designed to work on specific skill development in several areas, including: speech and language, social development, and fine and gross motor skills.
- Our literacy and phonics program alone teaches thousands of kids with Down syndrome to read around the nation!
- Our National Awareness Campaign, the *i have a voice* Traveling Gallery, has already traveled to states around the nation and has requests coming in every week.

Where We are Headed

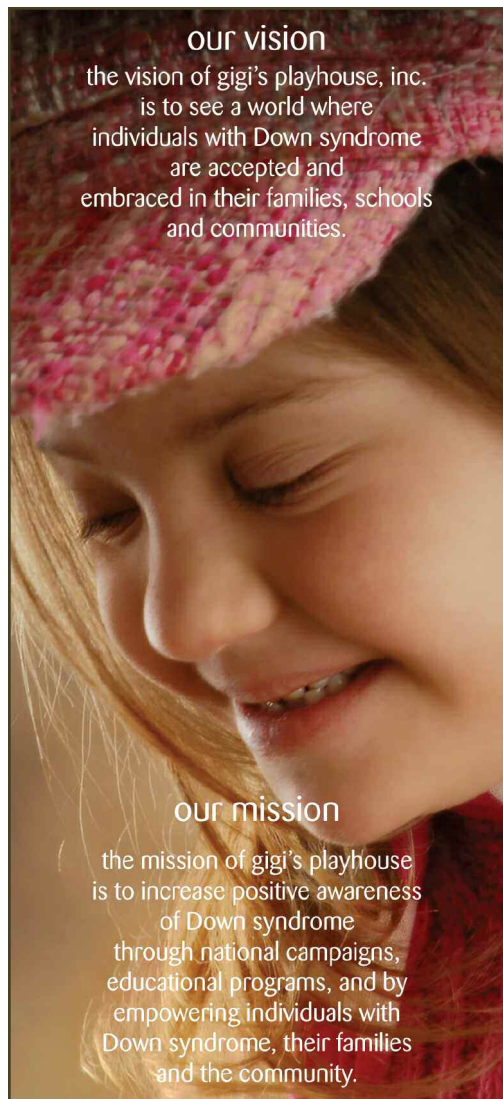
We get calls daily about opening a Playhouse in other areas. Currently there are three Playhouses in the works – on the Eastcoast, Westcoast, and another in the Midwest! We are so excited about the growth of the Playhouse because we know that all GiGi's are committed to the important mission of spreading positive and accurate information about Down syndrome through education and by supporting and empowering families and the community. By helping individuals with Down syndrome reach their highest potential, we can change outdated perceptions that people may have. The end result is a world that is empowered with knowledge, compassion, and inspiration – what a better place for all of us! This is made possible with your support!

our vision

the vision of gigi's playhouse, inc. is to see a world where individuals with Down syndrome are accepted and embraced in their families, schools and communities.

our mission

the mission of gigi's playhouse is to increase positive awareness of Down syndrome through national campaigns, educational programs, and by empowering individuals with Down syndrome, their families and the community.

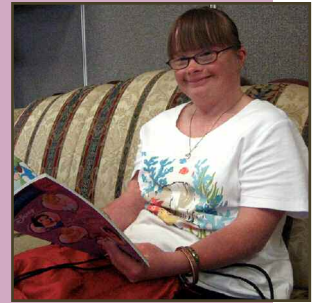


Changing Lives

When Lisa came to GiGi's Playhouse, she was hoping to meet some friends, and got so much more! Lisa, a 35 year old woman with Down syndrome, had never been taught how to read. When she came to GiGi's, she joined the Literacy program. A few short months into the program, Lisa was not only reading but was comprehending the stories as well! An entire world opened up for her. Now she can go out with her friends and order from a menu. She has gained independence because she can read a map, street signs and can now take the bus. So many of the daily activities that we take for granted are based on literacy skills — and Lisa now has them!!

Just a few months prior to Lisa coming to the Playhouse, we were approached by Hayden's mother, who wanted to enroll her child in the program. We usually start at 2 1/2 or 3 yrs. and Hayden was only 2 but we decided to give it a chance. We made custom books just for her and Hayden was so excited about being in the program that the tutor had to work fast to keep up with her! She already knows many vocabulary words and is able to match almost anything — the first step in gaining literacy skills. That is quite feat for a 2 year old!

While the lives of both of these individuals will be forever enhanced by their literacy skills, the lives of those around them are also impacted. The family and friends of Lisa will have to replace their misconceptions that it's too late to teach an adult literacy skills. The future Kindergarten teacher of Hayden may have to re-think some of his/her preconceived notions when Hayden shows off her reading ability!



Changing Families

When GiGi's hosted its annual Volunteer Appreciation Night, we had no idea of the long term impact to come. As we thanked the leaders of Nuestros Angeles, the Spanish speaking Playgroup, they told us about a new 16 year old mom who just gave birth to a baby with Down syndrome. This family had no clothes, diapers, or basic items for this new addition to their family. They also lacked in support and knowledge about the Early Intervention system or Down syndrome in general. Some amazing supporters of the Playhouse, the Cirrincione Family, put together an impromptu baby shower for this family! We put out a call to our members letting them know of this opportunity to help and the response was immense! 2 weeks later, 50 people showed up with their donations and we had to get a storage unit to hold all of the supplies! The goal was to help one family but we were able to help many more due to the plethora of donations we received! This was possible only with the help of so many volunteers, supporters of the Playhouse, and most of all the GiGi's Family. That's what we are here to do — support our fellow families in need whether it be with baby items, resources, information, or other parents to connect with!



Changing Communities

When the Traveling Gallery, pictured here, came to Denver, the kids were so proud to show it off that it went back a second time last year! GiGi's Playhouse focuses on the individual while keeping a mission of national awareness in mind. That is why the Playhouse model is so successful. Each Playhouse is able to reach individuals with Down syndrome and their families, and together the Playhouses are changing communities around the nation!

Karen Meyer from ABC Channel 7 summed it up best when she said, "GiGi's is the fastest growing non-profit I've ever seen!" It's because of the important mission we have and the dedication of all the people involved! Our National Awareness Campaign, *i have a voice*, has been traveling across the country spreading awareness everywhere it goes! This campaign seeks to replace stereotypes with up to date images and information. If we can change outdated perceptions, what a better world for all!



Educate!

Turning Negatives Into Positives – and Winning an EMMY!

When Veronica's Grandma went to pick her up from school, a little girl ran up and pulled on Grandma's coat saying, "I know what's wrong with her, I know what's wrong with her!" Before Grandma could respond, the little girl went on to say, "My mommy told me what's wrong with her – Veronica doesn't have a brain!" Grandma could barely compose her shock at those hurtful and certainly ignorant words. Coming from a 4 year old peer of Veronica's was not the issue – the fact that her mom had told her this was the problem. We soon came to find out that this little girl's mom was a clinical psychologist at a local hospital and those are the words she was using to explain special needs to her daughter! Perhaps the most impactful part of the story is that Veronica's 6 year old brother was with Grandma and heard these hurtful words said about his little sister.

When Veronica's mom brought this information to GiGi's Playhouse, we knew we had to do something about it. We decided to create a video from the perspective of siblings. With Rob Johnson from CBS Channel 2 as our host and the Barrington Film Class as our videographers, this powerful video featured siblings ages 5-adult who shared their perspective of what life was like growing up with a brother or sister with Down syndrome. Veronica's brother was featured and was given the chance to share the blessing of having a sibling like Veronica and how hurtful words can be — not just to Veronica but to everyone that loves her. Though the stories were different, the theme was the same, that their lives were blessed beyond what they could ever have imagined! *This video brings hope to parents and inspires everyone who watches it – it must have impressed the folks from the National Academy of Television and Sciences who awarded it an Emmy!*



Inspire!

When Katelynn was born, the medical staff unfortunately did not see the blessing that had been given to Katelynn's parents and the atmosphere in her hospital room was one of mourning and sadness. Luckily, her grandmother turned up the lights, put the shades up, and bought out the entire gift store with balloons, flowers and 'congratulations' cards. After all, they were celebrating a birth! Mom explains it best in her own words...

"On 2/28/09 we were blessed with our daughter Katelynn Eleanore, she is our first baby and was diagnosed with Down syndrome at birth. Our first time learning of GiGi's was when we received a Celebration package in the mail and then a call just a few days later congratulating us on our new baby girl & inviting us to Open Play that week! Chris, my mom, Katelynn & I all went not knowing what to expect; the car ride there was quiet. When we walked in, WOW, it was so warm, so caring, so genuine and all the parents there listened with open hearts and all asked "what can we do for you?" The moms of GiGi's helped us build an incredible team of doctors for Katelynn and guided us through the Early Intervention Process. With support and help from GiGi's Playhouse we will have the opportunity to help Katelynn reach her full potential and become even more amazing everyday."

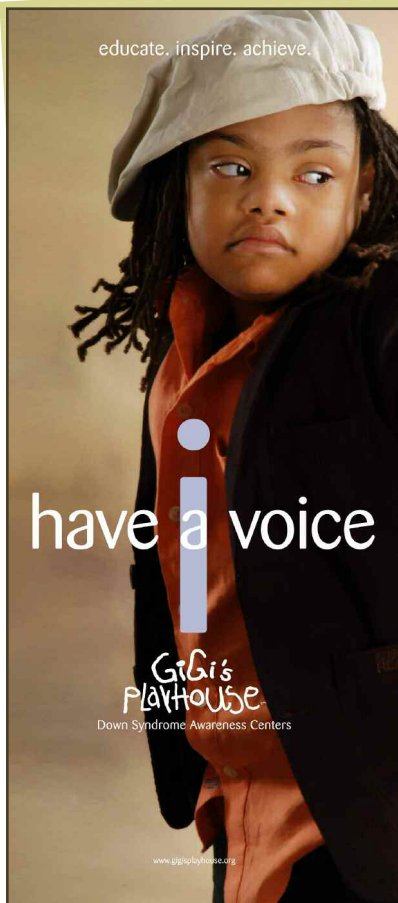


Achieve!

Not only have we grown in number with 3 new Playhouses in just 2 years, but we are also growing in our educational programs! Each program we have is designed to work on specific skill development in the areas of speech and language, social skills and fine and gross motor skills. There is education and therapy in everything we do! Besides our 9 designated age-group programs geared at reinforcing skills by age level (crawling, walking, speech, self esteem, friendships, etc), we also have school-aged programs that work with the schools to ensure the most success for each child. These programs include our Literacy program, Phun with Phonics, Skill Builders, Sign classes and more! Check out our website to see all the educational programs we offer and how they are making a difference in the lives of individuals with Down syndrome all over the country!



Do You Want to be a Part of Changing Lives?



As we move into 2010 with the mission of spreading Down syndrome awareness and celebrating the lives of individuals with Down syndrome, we have some exciting goals. We are working towards opening 3 new Playhouses, creating a book to accompany the *i have a voice* Traveling Gallery, and expanding our activities and programs to include Handwriting, Math tutoring, LifeSkills training and more! These are achievable goals and you are personally invited to join us.

Our year-end goal is to raise \$50,000 and we invite you to help us continue to change our world – one life, one family, one community at a time.

None of the above stories would have been possible without YOU! You are not only what sustains us financially but you and your family are what motivates and inspires us!

Whatever gift you choose to give, whether it is a financial gift toward our year-end goal, the gift of your time, or an in-kind donation, we thank you on behalf of all individuals with Down syndrome.

Enclosed is a gift from GiGi's. This magnet can be used in your own home or as a way to spread awareness - put it in your doctor's office, school, or place of work!

XOXOXO
GiGi and all my Friends

2010 Awareness Calendar!

Our 2010 Down syndrome awareness calendar was inspired first by our children with Down syndrome and second by the wisdom of Mother Teresa. Her messages are universal, non-denominational and filled with love, just like ours! The pictures portray the kids of GiGi's like you've never seen them before! You can order this calendar at www.gigisplayhouse.org. This is an excellent tool to share the potential and depth of individuals with Down syndrome – it makes a great holiday gift for teachers, therapists, family and friends!



You Don't Want to Miss This!

With so many locations, there are too many events to list!

Be sure to go to www.gigisplayhouse.org to check out all the great events and to register.

Enclosed is a form for us to update your info and a way for you to tell us what GiGi's means to you! Please fill it out and return!

GiGiFest 2009!

Our 6th Anniversary Party & YOU'RE invited!

October 4th, 2009, Noon-3pm

at the Hoffman Playhouse.

This family event will have pony rides, face-painting, and of course will feature our 2010 calendar models on the red carpet! See you there!

