



# GiGi's PLAYHOUSE

Down Syndrome Awareness Centers

GiGi's Playhouse National Office  
1071 W Golf Road  
Hoffman Est, IL 60169  
847-885-6149  
[www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org)

Happy Holidays!!

When you believe in someone you can truly change who they will be. We see it happen every day at Playhouses nationwide! This year has been an incredible year of growth. I didn't realize just how incredible it was until I saw 18 Playhouse Presidents standing up at the International Board workshop and share why they have a Playhouse in their community. It was amazing! This is so much bigger than me or GiGi. This is about changing the way the world sees Down syndrome. And it's happening because of people like you who believe in our mission, our Playhouses, and our kids. Thank you!

Enclosed in this newsletter, you will hear some of the voices of our presidents, you will read about how the literacy program is teaching thousands of kids to read, how our national awareness campaigns are changing perceptions, and how you can continue to be a part of it all! Thank you so much for your continued support which helps us keep all of our programs FREE to families across the nation!

Happy holidays to you and your family!  
Love Nancy

THANK YOU FOR BELIEVING  
IN ME AND MY FRIENDS



Love,  
GiGi



"Ten years ago,  
Nancy cradled a newborn in her  
arms and made a promise. She would make the world  
a better place for her daughter - for all children and  
families touched by Down syndrome. At that moment  
she didn't know the details of how, but she knew she  
couldn't do it alone. Now, we are part of her promise"  
-GGP NYC Board Member and proud grandpa

**We cannot make the voices of our children heard  
without your help. Please consider making a gift to  
GiGi's and being part of changing lives!**

educate. inspire. achieve. **believe!!**

**believe** in Strength People with Down syndrome have low muscle tone making every day things like walking and talking more difficult. At GiGi's we provide the tools, needed to help them succeed.

**believe** in Change People with Down syndrome wear their diagnosis on their face. Our national awareness campaigns are designed to change those outdated perceptions of what Down syndrome is and what it is not. Those beautiful faces are the catalyst for change and spread an international message of acceptance for all.

**believe** in Community Without the help of communities opening their minds and their hearts, GiGi's Playhouse would not

exist. Each Playhouse is run on the hearts of thousands of volunteers. This ensures that funding goes directly into programming.

**believe** in YOU Your support enables GiGi's to helping thousands of kids in our educational programs, open Playhouses across the nation, and spread awareness about Down syndrome. Without you we would not be growing at phenomenal speed we are now and our kids would not be succeeding at the level they are now. The foundation is built and we can't turn back now - they are counting on us!

**Whether or not your child has a diagnosis, we all deserve  
a world where EVERYONE is accepted and valued.**

Hoffman  
Est, IL  
847.885.PLAY (7529)

Fox Valley, IL  
630.778.PLAY (7529)

McHenry, IL  
815.385.PLAY (7529)

Rockford, IL  
815.654.PLAY (7529)

Chicago, IL  
773.583.PLAY (7529)

Sioux City, IA  
712.226.PLAY (7529)

Des Moines, IA  
515.252.PLAY (7529)

Atlanta, GA  
866.946.PLAY (7529)

Quad Cities, IA  
309.762.PLAY (7529)

New York, NY  
646.801.PLAY (7529)

Bradley, IL  
815-939-PLAY (7529)

Syracuse, NY  
315-288-PLAY (7529)

coming soon: Queretaro, Mexico • Twin Cites, MN • Oak Forest, IL • Nashville, TN

## A New Parent's Perspective

*"My doctor told me that my baby would never walk, or talk, or even smile." When Adriana came to the Playhouse, she was 7 months pregnant. Being from Costa Rica and living in Bosnia, she had many cultural barriers to overcome with regard to disability. Imagine her surprise when she came to Open Play, our program for new parents, and saw so many children at the Playhouse living life as typical kids! She was given calendars and information to send to her family back home in Costa Rica – many items in Spanish – to help them understand what Down syndrome is and what it is not. Most of all Adriana was given hope – hope that her daughter will grow up living life to the fullest, hope that her family can learn a new way of acceptance. "Now that I have Sophia in my arms, I wonder what the doctor was so afraid of. She's beautiful. She's my baby."*



Cultural differences can be major barriers to acceptance- but they don't have to be! That's why our Playhouses have a Spanish-speaking group called Nuestros Angeles which brings the Hispanic community together to share accurate information about Down syndrome! We are also opening a Playhouse in Querétaro, Mexico!

*"I want Cody to have a place to help him build confidence. Because of the future GiGi's Playhouse Twin Cities, Cody can stand tall."*

-GGP Twin Cities President

## Raising up a generation of Self advocates

*GiGi's Playhouse is in many ways about inspiration. When my daughter Sophia saw GiGi give her speech at the International Board Workshop, she was inspired. I couldn't quite believe it as Sophia grabbed the microphone and captivated the entire room! She has an anxiety disorder called Selective Mutism – performance related stress - and hasn't spoken in school for 2 years. And yet, she captivated the audience and even offered a 3rd song in response to an encore request! When she got back to the table her first comment to Mom – was "I did it!" That's inspiration indeed! – NYC Board Member and Sophia's proud father*

The Playhouse voice is truly that of those we serve – individuals with Down syndrome. The newest GiGi's program, Young Advocates, is designed to help children with Down syndrome ages 10+ to learn how to speak publicly and focuses on self confidence, speech clarity and projection, and social skill training.



## Adult Mentors!

Meet some of our adult mentors! Kayla is the newest assistant site coordinator at GiGi's Playhouse Syracuse! Here, she stands with self advocate and GiGi's Fox Valley board member Kathryn Smith. By living lives to their highest potential, they are eradicating outdated stereotypes everywhere they go – and mentoring our younger children with Down syndrome! Offering jobs at the Playhouse is a great way to train for work in the outside world! Many of our Playhouses piloted adult programs successfully this past year!



## EDUCATION provides a VOICE!

Did you know...

- 92% of our students show gains in literacy!
- 78% move up a level after 1 session!
- 98% of our students show noticeable gains math!

Children with Down syndrome learn differently than typically developing children. Our tutors work 1:1 with each child or through group tutoring, teaching them in the way that they learn best. As with all of our 28 programs, the purpose goes beyond the learner with Down syndrome as not only is a child learning to read, but he/she will be changing the perceptions of the community around him! GiGi's individualizes each program to meet the specific needs of the child including those with dual diagnosis, medical issues etc. GiGi's continues to pilot new programs and is committed to keeping all of them free of charge!



*"My hope was for Kohen to be fully integrated in school. When he was diagnosed with Leukemia, much of his preschool time was spent dealing with medical issues. Because of the literacy program at GiGi's Playhouse Sioux City, he is already ahead of many "typical peers" in kindergarten!" GGP Sioux City President*

## Spreading Awareness Internationally!

Hilde heard about GiGi's Playhouse while looking for an opportunity to continue working with children with special needs. A health and social worker in Norway, Hilde had basic knowledge of Down syndrome, but since working at GiGi's Hilde says she's learned so much about their abilities! "One of the most important things I have learned after my time at GiGi's is that every child is unique! I was introduced to a new learning method which I will for sure take home to Norway with me."

GiGi's had visitors from over 5 countries this year and is opening our 1st International location in Mexico!







## One Million Voices!

Jaden's diagnosis came as a shock to his parents who are both 17. Just three

days following Jaden's birth, his great-grandparents noticed the GiGi's Playhouse sign and decided to stop in. Within two months, the young parents came to the Playhouse and have been involved ever since. Jaden is now a happy, healthy 1 year old who has made his parents so very proud! Jaden is the face of the Quad Cities "one million voices" gallery pictured above!

Imagine the sound of One Million voices sharing stories of community acceptance and lives meant to be lived! The sound of people across the nation choosing to stand up, defend and befriend people with Down syndrome. That's exactly what the One Million Voices Project is all about. It's a gallery. It's a movement. It's a campaign designed to increase cultural awareness and build advocacy for our kids. As an extension to our i have a voice Traveling Gallery (which continues to travel across the nation), these smaller exhibits offer the flexibility of being located in any location big or small! Email [gigisonemillionvoices@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:gigisonemillionvoices@gigisplayhouse.org) for more info!

## Share your voice!

- Sponsor a Gallery in your area!
- Provide a location to host a Gallery!
- Serve as a Gala Sponsor
- Provide auction prizes (tickets, vacations etc)
- Donate airline miles
- Donate printing services



## Changing Lives. One Diagnosis. One Playhouse. One Community at a time.

Your gift changes lives. It changes the life of the mother as she begins to accept the diagnosis for her child. It changes the life of a young advocate as she learns to speak publicly about what makes her unique. It can even change your life as you see the dramatic impact your gift has in your community! Thank you!

*Will you help change lives?  
make your donation today at [www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org)*

*"My hope is to open doors that will never again be closed to people with Down syndrome. Because of GiGi's Rockford, my grandson Landon will have open doors."*

*-GGP Rockford President*

## 12 Playhouses Open, 6 more in the works

As our 10 year anniversary approaches so does our 16th Playhouse. Over 120 people gathered from Playhouses around the country for a 2-day Board Workshop Training in downtown Chicago last month. The sharing of ideas, problem solving, and collaboration was inspirational to say the least! When a Playhouse opens in a community, the entire town changes. Schools begin to write the GiGi's literacy program into IEP's, hospitals pass out GiGi's Celebration packets, teens learn acceptance of differences. Families are supported and people with Down syndrome have a world of opportunities opened up for them. Pictured below, are the leaders of the Playhouses nationwide. *Thank you for helping us serve our families!*



*You're Invited!* one night. thirteen cities. two countries. your voice.

3rd annual • february 23, 2013

have a voice

*gala*



Atlanta • Chicago • Des Moines • Fox Valley • Hoffman Estates  
McHenry • Mexico • Nashville • New York • Quad Cities  
Rockford • Sioux City • Syracuse • Twin Cities

GiGi's  
Playhouse  
Down Syndrome Awareness Centers

Celebrate Down syndrome, GiGi's style!  
Black tie with a rockin' edge and streaming live to 13 cities as we collectively celebrate with all of our locations!!

Chicago event hosted by Rob Johnson, CBS Channel 2  
Entertainment by 7th Heaven

Belvedere Banquets  
1770 West Devon, Elk Grove, IL

Register today at [www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org)!  
Sponsor the event and receive international exposure for your company!

Questions? Contact [gala@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:gala@gigisplayhouse.org)

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Hoffman Estates, IL 60169

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## You're Invited!

Register today for the  
3rd Annual I have a  
voice Gala!  
2-23-13  
Go to [www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org)!  
Invitation inside!



THANK YOU FOR HELPING US!  
Love Gigi



"My dream is a  
society where  
acceptance is not  
a concern but a  
reality. Because  
of your support of  
GiGi's Playhouse,  
we are getting  
closer to that  
reality."

-McHenry  
Playhouse president

## GiGi's Goes International!

Support GiGi's  
Playhouse Mexico by  
purchasing the Spanish  
calendar!

Have connections  
in Queretaro?  
Email [Mexicoqro@  
gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:Mexicoqro@gigisplayhouse.org)



## PASS ON the virtues of our children!

Who knew that something as simple as a calendar can have life changing effects? That's exactly what the GiGi's Down syndrome awareness calendar is all about. Each page captures the values and heart of people with Down syndrome and asks you to...PASS THEM ON!

These calendars are created to be in schools, medical buildings, offices and of course on your wall! They make excellent holiday gifts!

Buy yours for \$12 today!  
Go to [www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org) to purchase!

