



Down Syndrome Achievement Centers
educate. inspire. believe.

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GIGI'S PLAYHOUSE EXPERIENCES UNPRECEDENTED GROWTH, WHILE LAUNCHING A NATIONAL MOVEMENT TO SHIFT FROM DOWN SYNDROME AWARENESS TO ACCEPTANCE

HOFFMAN ESTATES, ILL: International Non-Profit [GiGi's Playhouse Down Syndrome Achievement Centers](http://WWW.GIGISPLAYHOUSE.ORG) are undergoing unprecedented growth in serving an ever-increasing number of families, while launching a national movement to change October's Down Syndrome Awareness Month to Down Syndrome Acceptance Month. The mayor of Hoffman Estates, Ill., where GiGi's Playhouse was started and is headquartered, is making the official proclamation of this change, and GiGi's Playhouses nationwide are engaging in campaigns to have the same declarations in their communities. The organization is also working with its 31 GiGi's locations in the U.S. and Mexico to plan and promote a series of meaningful events throughout October that will inspire people to embrace the GiGi's Playhouse mission to change the way the world sees Down syndrome and spread the message of acceptance for all.

GiGi's Playhouse provides free life-changing therapeutic and educational programs for 26,000 people throughout the country. Each month, 250 families are added, resulting in a consistent monthly growth of 16 percent across the network. In addition, 200 new communities have asked for a GiGi's Playhouse Down Syndrome Achievement Center to be established in their area. The significant growth and interest reflect a demand for programs that target the underserved population of more than 450,000 Americans living with Down syndrome.

"There are 6,000 babies born with Down syndrome every year," says GiGi's Playhouse founder Nancy Gianni. "They should not have to struggle for acceptance throughout their lives. Together, we can deliver opportunities that will help them excel and achieve, and we can educate our communities about their talents, personalities and character."

Gianni says she's inspired by the outpouring of support for Down Syndrome Acceptance Month and the organization plans to work with other Down syndrome groups to make the shift from an Awareness Month to an Acceptance Month as well. GiGi's Playhouses are engaging their communities across the country and in Mexico to celebrate children and adults with Down syndrome and promote acceptance of all who are different. Planned events include the 12th annual GiGiFest on Sunday, Oct. 16, in Hoffman Estates. The event will feature the annual Red Carpet Calendar Walk for those included in the 2017 #GenerationG Take Action Calendar, plus fun family activities and treats provided by Hugs & Mugs, the Hoffman Estates gift shop and café run by adults with Down syndrome.

Additional October events happening in Playhouses in other cities include fundraisers and awareness-building events at local farms and orchards, a balloon release in honor of loved ones with Down syndrome, guest speakers talking to schools about Down syndrome and sharing the story of GiGi's Playhouse, and the creation of "Best of All Walls," where families will honor children, volunteer tutors and other community members for their commitment to empowering individuals with Down syndrome.

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Gianni, who was recently named a [2016 CNN Hero](#), founded GiGi's Playhouse after her daughter, Gigi, was born with Down syndrome 13 years ago. With sheer courage and unwavering determination, Nancy started a revolution by building a network that is growing every day across the country and the world. GiGi's provides over 30 completely FREE purposeful therapeutic and educational programs specifically designed to work on important skills for each child, allowing them to reach their "Best of All." The organization works to change society's perceptions about those who are different and to foster acceptance for people of all abilities. This is the goal of the GiGi's Playhouse #GenerationG campaign, a movement to encourage being "accepting, generous and kind."

"Differences do not discriminate. We are all one birth, one diagnosis or one other life-defining moment away from being different, or from loving someone who is," Gianni says. "We will never stop fighting for those who struggle for lasting acceptance."

About GiGi's Playhouse

Founded in 2003, GiGi's Playhouse is the only international network of Down syndrome achievement centers, changing lives through free programs for individuals of all ages. The organization makes a lifetime commitment to support and empower families from diagnosis to adulthood. GiGi's Playhouse also works to break down barriers and change the way the world sees people who are different, by promoting acceptance for all through the #GenerationG campaign. The goal is to have a GiGi's Playhouse in every state by 2021. The organization's national recognition is growing, with founder Nancy Gianni being named a 2016 CNN Hero. In October, she was featured on the national "Steve Harvey Show" as a "Game Changing Woman." GiGi's Playhouse survives completely on donor funds and is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable organization. For more information about how you can help, visit www.GiGisplayhouse.org.

GiGi's Playhouses are located in the following cities: Atlanta; Chicago; Cleveland; Indianapolis; Milwaukee; New York; Phoenix; Bradley, Ill.; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Des Moines, Iowa; El Paso, Texas; Fargo, N.D.; Fort Wayne, Ind.; Fox Valley, Ill.; Gainesville, Fla.; Hillsborough, N.J.; Hoffman Estates, Ill.; Layton, Utah; Madison, Wis.; McHenry, Ill.; Nashville, Tenn.; Quad Cities, Ill.; Raleigh, N.C.; Rockford, Ill.; Sioux City, Iowa; Sugar Land, Texas; Syracuse, N.Y.; Tinley Park, Ill.; Twin Cities, Minn.; Westchester, N.Y.; and Queretaro, Mexico.

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