



Down Syndrome Awareness Centers

educate. inspire. achieve.

November 2011

# Newsletter

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**Coming soon:**  
New York, NY  
Mexico

## Celebrating Down Syndrome Awareness Month!

What a great way to celebrate Down syndrome awareness month last month – celebrating our 8 yr anniversary, opening 2 Playhouses, and having our 2012 Calendar models walk the red carpet!

Wow, it's only been 8 years! On one hand, it seems like it was just yesterday that GiGi was born and Nancy decided to start a place to change the way her local community views Down syndrome. And on the other hand, it seems like it's been way more than 8 years because of all the amazing things that have happened in this short time! 9 more Playhouses have opened, our 1st International Playhouse is on the horizon, and GiGi's has created a national voice for Down syndrome awareness through the award-winning calendar, Traveling gallery, our educational and therapeutic programs and so much more! None of this would have been possible without the tireless efforts of our staff and volunteers, the generous hearts of our donors, and our passionate board members! Thank you!



Order your  
2012 Awareness  
Calendar  
today at [www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org)!  
They make the best holiday gifts!



## Quad Cities Opens!



What a day! Hundreds of people gathered to for the UpSide of Down walk, raising funds for GiGi's Playhouse. After the walk, they gathered together again for the Grand Opening of the 8th official Playhouse! Kate, our self advocate board member, sang Reflections and thanked the crowd for coming to the Playhouse. President Gary Ghere, gave a beautiful tribute to the board, the national office, and all the volunteers that helped make a GiGi's Playhouse Quad Cities possible. The event was full with a ribbon cutting, cheerleading performance, and raffle drawing (where someone won and IPAD and donated it back to the Playhouse!). The Quad Cities community was spreading awareness about Down syndrome in a HUGE way!



## Atlanta Opens!

7 days after the Quad Cities opened, it was our turn. Thanks to the help of all of our wonderful volunteers our Grand Opening event could not have gone better!

Throughout the day we had over 300 people stop by and made many new friends. Jamal Anderson, former NFL running back for the Atlanta Falcons, was a big hit! While the parents anxiously awaited the ribbon cutting, the children enjoyed getting tattoos, balloons, and playing in the jumpy house. Once the ribbon was cut and everyone was inside, it was truly an amazing sight to see. After months of anticipation, it is wonderful to be open and ready to serve our Atlanta Down syndrome community!!



Both Playhouses are now providing programming for families touched by Down syndrome and the community! Be sure to go to [www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org) to see their calendar online, link to their facebook page, or to donate!

# GIGI's Playhouse News

## Hoffman

### An email from a Jane's mom to her tutor...

"Jane's teacher told me today that in testing she was one of the highest (in the top 5 or 6) for knowledge of letters (uppercase and lowercase) and letter sounds! How exciting.....here she is in a regular kindergarten class and not only is she "keeping up" but she's at the top of her class in this area!! Thanks again for all your help!"

Jane's teacher was so impressed by the program that she came to the Playhouse to observe a Literacy session and see exactly how the program works. She was able to see firsthand how, if you teach a child with Down syndrome the way that they learn best, success is within reach!



## Fox Valley

In October, GiGi's Playhouse Fox Valley welcomed a new dance program to our family! Preschoolers through 1st graders had an enjoyable opportunity to learn ballet in a fun and relaxed atmosphere with their peers. This pilot program will provide the participants the opportunity to perform for a large audience on November 5th at Oswego East High School at 6:00 p.m. at the performing arts show "The Youth Summit."

Led by Stephanie Clay, a professional dance performer and instructor, children will learn basic ballet movements and work on gross motor skills, following commands and working together as a team. One parent shares "My two girls have had the pleasure of working with Miss Stephanie and I'm so excited that GiGi's will get to work with her!"

The Youth Summit is an event that brings in many various talents from the Chicagoland suburbs and will feature awareness information about GiGi's Playhouse and Down syndrome. Partial proceeds from the event will benefit GiGi's Playhouse Fox Valley.

The next session for Basic Ballet begins November 13, 2011 at 4:00 p.m.



**Our Playhouses in Mexico and New York are working hard to find the perfect location and raise funds to open their doors! To help, go to [www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org) and click on their specific webpages!**

**Look for the GiGi's Mexico Awareness Calendar coming soon!**

## Des Moines

GiGi's Playhouse Des Moines and our future new families can all thank the Variety Club of Iowa for providing us with a grant that will fund 200 new parent packets and the purchase of 200 "Babies with Down Syndrome" A New Parents' Guide Books. We will distribute the packets and books to central Iowa hospitals. Thank you Variety Club for your support!



### Calling all volunteers!

We could use help at GiGi's with our upcoming gala committee, the assembly of the new parent packets, and we are still in need of an education coordinator. If you would like to help us by volunteering your time, please contact us at 515-252-7529.

We love our volunteers and we could not do what we do without them!

### Save the Dates -

December 3rd from 11:30 - 2:00 pm. We will have a potluck luncheon and cookie decorating. There also may be a visitor from up North!

February 25th, 2012 - «i have a voice» Gala at the Marriott Downtown.

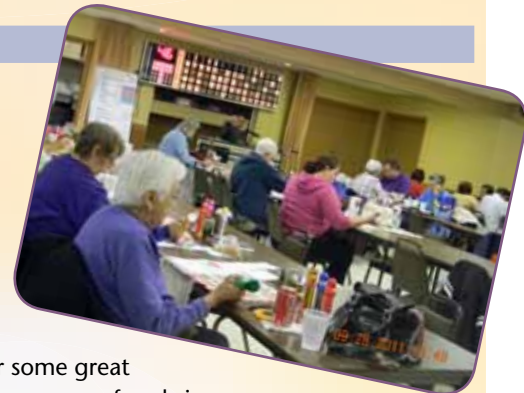
## McHenry

### BINGO!

GiGi's Playhouse McHenry has been hosting Bingo for over five months now and would love for you to join us at the McHenry VFW every Wednesday at noon for some great Bingo! Come out and have some fun, bring a friend or two and play to win! There are great people, great food and the opportunity to support GiGi's Playhouse McHenry all while having an afternoon of fun!

We have met so many wonderful people in the community that before coming to bingo had no idea what GiGi's Playhouse was. Through this crazy bingo adventure we have had the opportunity to share and educated hundreds of people about our mission to increase positive awareness of Down syndrome!

We are still in need of volunteers; if you are interested in helping one time per month please call the McHenry Playhouse at (815) 385-PLAY.



# GIGI's Playhouse News

## Chicago

Handwriting and fine motor skills can be difficult for any child, and even more so for kids with Down syndrome. In Chicago, we're into our first session of fine motor development classes, "Little Fingers" (for kids 3-6) and "Busy Hands" (for kids 6 and up). Developed by two occupational therapists, the program uses arts, crafts and the Handwriting Without Tears curriculum to strengthen and develop fine motor skills.

For each class, our kids work side-by-side with members of the St. Ben's Girl Scout troop (who have adopted the Playhouse as their service project this year) and students training to become occupational therapists. Even in this first phase of development, the skills and development have been amazing, and we can't wait to see them continue throughout the years.

Save the Dates:

Nov. 9

Wine Tasting and Fundraiser to Benefit the Teen Drama Class

6:30 p.m.

Michael Diversey's

670 W. Diversey

Chicago, IL 60657



Dec. 18

Teen Drama Class Holiday Pageant and Playhouse Holiday Party

10:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Stage 773

1225 W. Belmont,

Chicago, IL 60657

## Rockford

**Every once in a while you get the feeling you truly are doing something right.**

That was the feeling when some mom's from our Rockford Playhouse approached us to begin a Mom's Night Out at GiGi's. The mom's began to truly enjoy getting together with their kids at our Wednesday morning OPEN PLAY. It tends to be mom's with the



little ones who attend this open play. They not only discuss what is working for them with their baby but life in general and simply developing good girlfriend material. Who knits, who crochets, who scrapbooks, who just wants to talk.....that is what it is all about.

It began with a craft night, then

went to let's take it on the road and get a bite to eat, now their schedule for the next couple of months is as follows:

- Thursday, November 17th at 6:30p.m. at GiGi's Playhouse Rockford – bring a craft project if you have one otherwise, please come to talk. The newer mom's would love to have moms of all ages join them – the more the merrier.
- Sunday, December 11th at 1:00p.m. at GiGi's Playhouse Rockford – It is a Cookie Exchange! – Some will be making their cookies here or you can bring your own. Look for more details or call the playhouse at 815-654-7529.

Word has it on the street – that some free yoga classes may be coming down the road! Maybe just in time for our new year!

## Sioux City

### Celebrating Right From the Start...

Thank you to the Junior League of Siouxland! With the grant received from your organization this summer, we have been able to assemble wonderful tote bags for new families and for the Neo-Natal Intensive Care Units and maternity floors of area hospitals. These new packets contain newsletters and information about GiGi's Playhouse as well as a resource guide about Down syndrome for new parents. The bonus is that we have them available in English and Spanish, so we are able to reach out across language barriers!! We continue to get calls from the nurses to replenish their supply.... which is a great thing! The families are very appreciative of this and we feel good about offering resources and the reassurance that new families are not alone!

So, THANKS AGAIN to the Junior League of Siouxland! You took part in making a difference!



### Walking for a Great Cause...

Thanks to everyone who joined us for this year's Walk for Down Syndrome Awareness! We received great coverage from area television stations and had a wonderful crowd on a beautiful day! We heard many great comments and even had our biggest KID ZONE in 5 years! We can't wait to have an even bigger event next fall!

Congrats to the Top 3 Teams for raising funds! #1 Team Kohen, #2 Team Ray Ray and #3 Team Awesome Adam. **Thanks everyone for your continued support for GiGi's Playhouse!**

**Did you know that ALL  
GiGi's programs are  
FREE?**

Help us keep it that way! Purchase a calendar or make a donation – proceeds go towards our educational programs!



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



**one night. nine cities. 2 countries.  
your voice!**

February 25, 2012

This event has nearly doubled in size! You don't want to miss it! Your Playhouse needs committee members and sponsors – go to [www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org) to learn more!

## What awareness!

The Down Country group of Champaign, IL is bringing the i have a voice Traveling Gallery to the Quincy Mall! November 27 (private opening), November 28 thru December 28. Look at this gorgeous awareness billboard advertising the event!



Be sure to go to [www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org) to see your local Playhouse calendar!



Want to read more inspirational stories? Each Playhouse has a blog and a facebook page with current stories!