



Down Syndrome Awareness Centers

educate. inspire. achieve.

August 2011

# Newsletter

[www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org)  
[info@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:info@gigisplayhouse.org)

## Hoffman Estates Location

1069 W. Golf Rd.  
Hoffman Estates, IL 60169  
847.885.PLAY (7529)

## Fox Valley Location

4024 Fox Valley Center Dr.  
Aurora, IL 60504  
630.778.PLAY (7529)

## McHenry Location

5404 W. Elm St. Suite A.  
McHenry, IL 60050  
815.385.PLAY (7529)

## Rockford Location

8801 N 2nd  
Machesney Park, IL 61115  
815-654-7529

## Chicago Location

3948 N Lincoln Ave  
Chicago, IL 60613  
773.583.PLAY (7529)

## Sioux City Location

1551 Indian Hills Drive, Suite 7  
Sioux City, Iowa 51104  
712.226.PLAY (7529)

## Des Moines Location

10430 New York Ave Suite A  
Urbandale, IA 50322  
515.252.PLAY (7529)

## Coming soon:

Quad Cities IA/IL  
New York, NY  
Atlanta, GA

## A Full Day at the Playhouse



**9:00 am** When Marnie first found out she was pregnant with a child with Down syndrome, she came to the Hoffman Playhouse to visit. She came to learn about the different programs and support that GiGi's had to offer her. She had no idea that 2 years later she would back at the Playhouse with Ruby for a completely different reason – this time to be trained on the Literacy program and to learn more about bringing the Playhouse to Atlanta!

Though she came for training, she also got to see a snapshot of the Playhouse in action and experienced the very heartbeat and purpose of the Playhouse...

**10:00 am** "When I brought Marlee to her 1st literacy session this month, I expected her to match pictures to pictures and that's what we practiced at home. I can't even begin to tell you how amazed I was seeing the program in action! It exceeded all my expectations. We began with the *I See* book which uses a custom made book just for Marlee with pictures of her family members. We went through each one; I see Mama, I see Daddy etc. She did great – I had never heard her put 3 words together before!



The best part was that AFTER the lesson was over, she saw a picture of Papa in the corner of the room and went over to it and clearly said, "I see Papa." I was amazed! The fact that she initiated and transferred her newly learned knowledge outside of the lesson is amazing!"

That, is the whole purpose of the Literacy Program at GiGi's Playhouse. In fact, that's the goal of all our programs – to teach skills that can be transferred out into the community, into school settings, and daily life in general.

Marlee's mom sums it up... "The hands on training I have received was so beneficial – this program and will empower and equip so many families - thank you GiGi's!"

**11:00 am** Marnie saw the 1st literacy session of the summer in action- here is a story from the mom in that session...

After this session was over, a new family walked into the Playhouse – the parents of a 2 year old boy named Arthur. He had never been to the Playhouse and his parents were so excited to see all the programs available to him (2 and Under, Crawlers and Walkers, and Literacy) for free!

**12:30 pm** Then, Open Play started! A volunteer group from a local church helped out with serving pizza and juice boxes and playing with all the kids while the parents had a chance to network together.



By the time Marnie left, her daughter Ruby was ready for a nap after playing with her friends at the playhouse. Marnie left feeling very empowered with regard to the

Literacy program, the purpose of the Playhouse, and is excited to bring all of it to Atlanta!

**6:00 pm** If Marnie had been able to stay longer, she would have seen 30 students from Elmhurst College come to learn from parents of children with Down syndrome. The students are future educators, therapists, and Early Interventionists and every year, the program sends them to GiGi's Playhouse to hear, first hand, what it is like to have a child with Down syndrome. They get to learn beyond the textbooks and find out from parents what they would like to see in their therapists and educators. What a great opportunity to shape our future generation!



Students from Elmhurst College

A day at any Playhouse is full of education, awareness and of course...inspiration!

# GIGI's Playhouse News

## Atlanta

GiGi's Playhouse is about to open: Thanks to your support we will open our doors at the end of July. FREE Therapy and FREE education for kids in the Atlanta area will begin in the Fall. Our premises in the heart of midtown Atlanta is taking shape. Our specialized building is located in the heart of our community in a small shopping center called Amsterdam Walk. We have started to interview volunteers and are working on expanding our volunteer community.

To help raise monthly support for the Playhouse, we have launched our Bricks and Smiles appeal. We will honor anyone who commits to give a monthly amount to the Playhouse with a smiley face on our tree or an engraved brick on our wall. If many people give a little, the Playhouse's future will be assured. To put your brick in the wall or smiley face on our tree please visit: <http://www.gigis-playhouse.org/location-Atlanta.asp>.



## Chicago

### 2 New Programs

First, we're gearing up to launch the one-on-one

**Math** tutoring program for ages 4+ that has been working so successfully. We're also launching a pilot **Fine Motor Skills and Handwriting program**. Offered in two age groups (3-6 and 7-12), these group classes will work on fine motor skills, art and writing.

Special thanks to our Occupational Therapy experts – Rhonda Schleis and Katie Frank as well as the 6th, 7th and 8th grade Girl Scout Troop from St. Benedict's school, who adopted GiGi's Chicago as their community service project for the upcoming school year.

As with all of our programming, Math and Fine Motor Skills will be offered free of charge. Space is limited, however, so reserve your space now! For an application (or if you have further questions), e-mail us at [chicago@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:chicago@gigisplayhouse.org).



## Rockford

### A Home, A Hangout and An Education Center

Being the newest Playhouse to open, it is very humbling and very exciting at the same time. Humbling, for the basic GiGi's concept and all the many facets. Exciting for what it brings to an area where people are looking for help and answers.

We offer a Home – that "homey" atmosphere of the living room and playroom beckoning each child, teen and adult along with their families to come in and be themselves. Our happy volunteers have said this too, "I love coming to GiGi's, it is like a home."

We offer a Hangout – for people to have a place to come and know this is "their place" where they can invite friends to have a great time, watch a movie, play a game or dress up – and learn at the same time!

We offer an Education Center – for the place where people come to feel solace, acceptance, relationship building and experience educational resources for individuals with Down syndrome and for their families.

Thanks to all of our GiGi's Playhouse Family who helped us along the way – as you all stated, "When you build it, they will come!"



## Hoffman

**Join Us!** Open Play every Thursday from 12:30-2pm!

The 2nd Saturday of every month is full of amazing programs!

Crawlers 9am

2 and Under 10am

Hop, Skip & Jumpers (3-5 yr olds) 11:30am

### More than Numbers!

When Sabrina started in the math program, we focused on counting. We began with counting coins. I found out that whenever Sabrina would go to the store, she would keep the change from the auto change dispensers. I told Sabrina that in order to keep the change, she had to count it correctly! This was very motivating for her! Now, during our sessions, when mom puts out real coins on the table, in seconds she counts them correctly - and puts them in her pocket! Not only did Sabrina get her coin values down and adding them she raised her math grade a whole letter!!

That's what our math program is all about – it's about so much more than numbers. It's about money management, reading clocks, fractions and more!

## Des Moines

"Spread the Word Roadtrip" comes to Des Moines:

On June 21st, Waynesburg University students **K Scarry, Sarah Blais, and Sam Civitate** visited Des Moines and met our families at a Pizza Party here at GiGi's. The girls began a 75-day summer roadtrip, crisscrossing 35 states to promote the *Spread the Word to End the Word* campaign and advocate for full inclusion.

During their journey, they hope to educate their audiences about the innumerable talents and abilities people with disabilities possess, and teach them to see their peers with disabilities the same way they do - *as classmates, as colleagues, as friends, and most importantly, as equals.*



K and Sarah will also promote the Spread the Word to End the Word campaign, which is an ongoing effort by **Best Buddies International** and **Special Olympics** to raise the consciousness of society about the dehumanizing and hurtful effects of

the r-word, and encourage people around the world to pledge to stop using it.

Save the Date:

August 27, Buddy Walk at DMACC Ankeny Campus

### Friends of GiGi's Playhouse Golf Outing

1:30 PM following the «Up with Down» Buddywalk.

Where: Copper Creek Golf Course - Pleasant Hill, IA

Who: Anyone & Everyone - non competitive best ball format - the only requirement is to have fun

Cost: \$100 per player, includes golf and cart

Hole-in-one prizes to be supplied by Toyota of DSM. We are taking

teams now - Please email [troyhugen@gmail.com](mailto:troyhugen@gmail.com) to hold your spot.

Reserve entire team spots - 4 golfers.



# GIGI's Playhouse News

## New York

### Here is an excerpt from a story published in New York!

A Playhouse Of Their Own - Now In Seven Cities, The Next Stop For GiGi's Playhouse Is New York. By Darcy Newell

For many parents of a child with Down syndrome, the diagnosis can be an isolating and overwhelming experience. "My first reaction was, 'How am I going to take care of my child? How am I going to protect her?'" says Tracy Nixon, whose daughter Laura, now 7, was diagnosed with Down syndrome at birth in 2003. "I probably didn't sleep at all the first six months—I spent the entire time scouring the internet," says Nixon. In September of 2004, Nixon met Debbie Morris, a fellow New Yorker whose daughter Sophia, only a year younger than Laura, also had Down syndrome. "When Sophia was born, it was definitely a shock to my husband and me," says Morris. "But luckily I was connected with Tracy the third day after Sophia was born, and she was a tremendous help."

Beyond their supportive friendship, Nixon and Morris became very interested in fostering a more cohesive community for all local families with children with Down syndrome. In their experience, the informal network of social service agencies, schools, and websites for families with children with Down syndrome—or any other special need for that matter—can be helpful but patchy and porous.

That's why Nixon and Morris are spearheading the effort to bring a remarkable organization called GiGi's Playhouse to New York City!



## Fox Valley

"My favorite part of tutoring is watching those 'AHA' moments for the children. When they make those connections and master a skill, there is nothing else like it!" says Patty, a veteran tutor at GiGi's Playhouse Fox Valley. With both the Literacy and Math programs in full swing, students are showing great strides in their 1:1 tutoring sessions. One parent, Alice, shares "My son was hitting the stage where we needed to reevaluate his academic modifications. The school team was very interested in learning what works for us in the GiGi's program and attended one of the Math training sessions. His teacher expressed that she appreciated the creativity and some of the fresh ideas we could use in the classroom with my son. By the end of the semester, he was showing progress and meeting some of his IEP goals in Math!" A new tutor, Gina, shared her excitement to begin working with students, "I was a bit apprehensive about tutoring Math at first, but the way the training is laid out step by step combined with the user-friendly materials, it really is something anyone with a gift for teaching can do!"

If you are interested in learning more about becoming a tutor in our Literacy or Math programs, contact the Fox Valley Playhouse at [foxvalley@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:foxvalley@gigisplayhouse.org)

## McHenry

The Board of GiGi's Playhouse McHenry bid farewell last meeting to a founding board member, Scott Bradfield. Scott and his family moved from McHenry to their new home in St. Joseph, Michigan. Scott has been a member of the McHenry Board since day one.



"The amount of work that went into getting the Playhouse constructed and ready for the opening was monumental. I remember looking out at the crowd of people when we opened, the kids who will be using the Playhouse, the people who donated so much time, energy and money to get it going, and could not feel more proud of what we had done and felt so much hope for the future."



Moving to a new house is a big transition and Scott wanted to ensure that his son Tyler, with Down syndrome, was prepared. Once the house was clean and empty, Scott and Tyler walked room to room showing him the house was not their home anymore. The next day he showed Tyler the truck arriving at their new home watched as all of Tyler's "stuff" was unloaded and put into his new room.

Scott's thoughtful approach worked and Tyler was running around and playing.

He will be greatly missed, although we look forward to his visits!

### Save the Date!!

4th Annual Getting Down with Fashion Show  
Sunday September 18, 2011

## Sioux City

### Join Us on Saturday, August 27, 2011 for the...

GiGi's Playhouse Down Syndrome Awareness Walk!

The cost to register is \$15 per walker and includes t-shirt, activities and refreshments. Pre-registration by Aug. 10th guarantees your t-shirt size availability. It's not too late to join in on the fun! All funds raised support GiGi's Playhouse Down syndrome Awareness Center! Email: [events@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:events@gigisplayhouse.org)



### Register Now for Fall Literacy Tutoring!

The Summer session was a huge success and will be wrapping up soon. So, it is that time again to begin registrations for the Fall session which will begin September 5 and run through November 18, 2011!! Our tutoring sessions are filling up fast, so register today for your child to be involved in this wonderful program or to be added to the waiting list. Email: [literacy@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:literacy@gigisplayhouse.org)





## GiGi's on Facebook!

Be sure to check out your local GiGi's Facebook page as well as join the GiGi's Inc. page to keep up to date with activities, programs and awareness events!

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

## Billboards around Chicago!

*Here is what someone posted on our facebook page...*

*"Got off the expressway, heading east on Foster Ave, and all of a sudden I see GIGI on a billboard!!!! Great awareness!"*



## 2012 Calendars coming soon!

Watch the website and next months newsletter for your info on ordering yours! This calendar is inspirational, educational and beautiful all at once!



## Another Playhouse Opening Soon!

GiGi's Playhouse Quad Cities is receiving a warm welcome in the Quad Cities IL/IA community and we are hard at work bringing our Playhouse to life! Our buildout will soon be underway and plans for an early fall Grand Opening are in the works! We are in need of furnishings, toys, and supplies and there are still many volunteer opportunities at Gigi's QC. For more information please contact us at [quadcities@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:quadcities@gigisplayhouse.org)!

Look for information on the October 1, 2011 Quad Cities Down Syndrome Awareness Walk benefitting Gigi's Playhouse QC in next month's newsletter



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!*