



Down Syndrome Awareness Centers

educate. inspire. achieve.

December 2011

# Newsletter

www.gigisplayhouse.org  
info@gigisplayhouse.org

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

**Rockford**  
8801 N 2nd  
Machesney Park, IL 61115  
815.654.PLAY (7529)

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

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

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

**Atlanta**  
549-4 Amsterdam Ave.  
Atlanta, GA 30306  
866.946.PLAY (7529)

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

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

**Quad Cities**  
3906 38th Ave  
Moline, IL 61265  
309.762.PLAY (7529)

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

## A Message from GiGi and the National Office...

DEAR FRIENDS,  
THANK YOU FOR GIGI'S PLAYHOUSE.  
I LEARN TO READ, DO MATH, CHEERLEADING,  
MEET NEW FRIENDS AND PLAY.  
Jessica is my BFF!  
Love  
GiGi



What she didn't write here (but would have if I let her!) are the things that she tells me everyday, "I want to be a teenager, I want my license, I want to go to college, I want a job". She watches all of her favorite Disney stars

progress in life and she wants to be on that same path. She gives 100% to everything she does, but no matter how hard she tries she will still be judged by people because she wears her diagnosis on her face. Did you know that 3 out of 4 kids with special needs will be bullied? The worst part is 80% of people will stand by and let it happen. Yes, 80% (www.cnn.com). What is GiGi's doing to change this? Our national awareness campaigns and our educational programming are a catalyst for change by giving a voice to our kids, our siblings, our families, and or communities, which in turn will give a voice to anyone with a disability.

We are able to do all of these things because of people like you who support the Playhouse. Building the infrastructure to support such growth has been a challenge but our 2012 plan is full of initiatives, projects and deliverables that will ensure our success and the success of our many Playhouses to come! With that comes the

success of the children and families served by the Playhouses.

Down syndrome is the largest chromosomal disorder, yet we are the least funded. By helping individuals with Down syndrome reach their potential, we are laying the ground work for acceptance – not only for our kids but for everyone. One Playhouse, one community, one child at a time. Thank you for helping us make this happen!

**Over a million** people across the country have viewed the i have a voice Traveling Gallery.

- + **Thousands of kids** with Down syndrome are participating in our educational programs.
- + **Hundreds** of siblings are joining forces to show the world the potential in their sibling.
- + **Multiple** GiGi's billboards are up around the country eradicating stereotypes.
- + **THREE** new Playhouses opened around the country this year.
- + **The FIRST** International Playhouse is getting ready to open in Mexico.

### Equals=

An **INFINITE** number of perceptions changed, kids being educated, communities and countries opening their hearts and minds, kids with Down syndrome being included and a better world for us all!

*Read on to learn how your local GiGi's Playhouse is changing lives daily in your community!*

## Meet Our Local President and Vice-President...

What a great year 2011 was for GiGi's Playhouse Sioux City! Sara Freiberg took the role as President and Jennifer Koch as Vice-President. Sara is the mom of 6 year old Devon and Jennifer is the mom of Kohen who is 5 years old. We also welcomed Marlene Pietz as our new Site Coordinator and restructured our Board. We have lots of new roles but we have a wonderful Board in place who have rolled up their sleeves and continue to give it their all for our local playhouse! Our goals this past year have included building upon the Literacy program, adding and training new tutors, fundraising, grant writing, and organization of the Playhouse! We are working hard at the expansion of our programs including the addition of Math Tutoring, a Teen group, 2 and Under group as well as more family involvement. We also raised funds towards the creation of new parent packets to assist new families in area hospitals and want to continue reaching out to the community! We have had a lot of interest in volunteer opportunities over the past year and are excited for more in 2012. Because all of our programming is free to participants, we couldn't have done this without

help from our surrounding community, from the neighbors who walk by, to the business community who've stepped up with donations and support at every turn, as well as students from area schools who've helped us accomplish so much! We couldn't have accomplished all that we have without their help and support! Thank you everyone!

A huge highlight to our year came when an illuminated sign was purchased and put up, as well as full window decals adorned with our beautiful local kiddos with Down syndrome! We have received many compliments and lots of "second glances and smiles," as people walk by the playhouse! So stop by and take a look!! We look forward to another great year in 2012!

Sincerely,  
Sara Freiberg, President, GiGi's Playhouse Sioux City & Jennifer Koch, Vice-President GiGi's Playhouse Sioux City



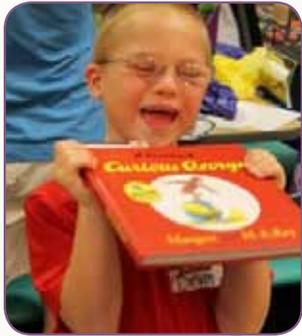
# GIGI's Playhouse News

## The important Things in Life

By Sara Freiberg

Imagine a breezy, March afternoon going to the doctor office and hearing your child has a 1/30 chance of having Down syndrome. How do you react, right? That's what I thought when I heard the news our third child, Devon would have Down syndrome. I cried for about 5 minutes and then thought, ok, God has a plan, but I wasn't sure what it was! After leaving the appointment, we attempted to educate ourselves, our children, family members, and friends. I hopped on the internet right away to educate myself and passed along any information that I had read. I had learned of the early childhood interventions that our Area Education Agency had for families. I accessed them as soon as Devon was born. I called Marlene, July 29th, 3 days after Devon was born and said it's time to get started. I was very much a person who was going to advocate for my son and really didn't want to wait. My husband was very supportive of this new role and was

ready for whatever needed to be done. A small group of families came together and began a local parent group known as, "Buddies for Life." This was our local Down syndrome support group that was started to advocate for children and adults in the tri-state area (Iowa, South Dakota, and Nebraska). I had heard of GiGi's Playhouse from a friend and began to bring this idea to the group and said, "We really need one here! It is a great place to begin supporting the educational needs of our families and a place where all our kids can play and engage with other siblings." Today, I am proud to say GiGi's has helped Devon in reading, following directions, and listening. His kindergarten teacher and Resource teacher were very surprised at what Devon knew in coming to Kindergarten. He is reading at a level A in guided reading, knows his numbers and all of the letters of the alphabet! Thank you to his tutors at GiGi's for the extra support! In Devon's spare time, he has played t-ball with his classmates, participates in TaeKwonDo (and is a green stripe) and cheers for the Nebraska Cornhuskers. Devon is a true joy to our lives and we have learned more from him than what he will ever learn from us!



# GIGI's Playhouse News



## GOALS for 2012:

We want to continue to reach out to new families in the new year! We are working hard at the Sioux City Playhouse towards the expansion of our programs including the addition of Math Tutoring, a Teen group, 2 and Under group as well as more family involvement activities. We are excited about the progress our kiddos have made and want to continue to make a difference! If you would like to make a donation or want to volunteer, contact us at [siouxcity@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:siouxcity@gigisplayhouse.org). We want you to be a part of making a difference

and continue our mission to EDUCATE – INSPIRE – and ACHIEVE!



## Spotlight on Literacy:

The Sioux City playhouse has been busy with Literacy tutoring! This summer, a young man named Keagan Funke began coming to the playhouse for literacy tutoring. Keagan is 14 years old. His interests include baseball, playing the guitar, music, dancing, drawing, working out and his favorite holiday is Halloween!

Up to this point, he hadn't enjoyed reading at home or school and decided he wanted to be a better reader, so his parents decided to sign him up for the GiGi's Playhouse Literacy Program! Through various assessment tools, his tutor, Sharon was able to figure out the level he was on and choose books that were appropriate for him. He has a new found attitude towards reading and has gained great confidence. He now enjoys reading with his family and going to literacy tutoring each week. He loves to learn new words in all types of reading material! He is especially fond of books about space and sharks! "Just seeing him READING on his own is the best part!" says his mom, Jenee.

His parents are so proud of him and are so pleased with the progress he has made from the Literacy program. "We thought it was only for the little kids," says his dad, Neil. They quickly found that it worked for him and they look forward to his future success in the program.

Obviously, you can see that the literacy program is for all ages! Children at any age can start at their own individual level and become successful readers! If you would like to be a part of this wonderful program as a tutor or if you have a child with Down syndrome and want to get them involved in the tutoring program, email Jenni at [literacysc@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:literacysc@gigisplayhouse.org) (subject: TUTOR or CHILD to be TUTORED).

GiGi's Playhouse  
1551 Indian Hills Drive, Suite 7  
Sioux City, Iowa 51104

nonprofit organization

u.s. postage

**paid**

schaumburg, il

permit no. 93

## WOW!

Check out our NEW local newsletters!  
Look inside to see how far your local  
Playhouse has come and how you can  
help continue changing lives!



**2012 calendars  
are here!** Give  
a gift of love and  
acceptance and  
help us change  
the way people see our kids!

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

*You are invited!*

one night. nine cities. two countries. your voice.  
save the date!

The 2nd Annual

have **i** voice

International Gala  
Saturday, February 25, 2012

GiGi's  
PLAYHOUSE  
Down Syndrome Awareness Centers



Venues in:

Chicago

Sioux City

New York

Quad Cities

Des Moines

Twin Cities

Rockford

Atlanta

Querétaro, Mexico

educate. inspire. achieve.

[www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org)

*The honor of  
your presence is  
requested*

February 25, 2012

Marina Inn - 4th and B St. S.  
Sioux City, NE

Register Today!  
[www.events.org/](http://www.events.org/)  
[ihaveavoicesiouxcity](http://ihaveavoicesiouxcity)

Black tie with a rockin' edge!  
*Celebrate Down syndrome,  
GiGi's style!*

**Go to [www.gigisplayhouse.org](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org) to register!**