



GiGi's
PLAYHOUSE™

Down Syndrome Awareness Centers

educate. inspire. achieve.

December 2011

Newsletter

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info@gigisplayhouse.org

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Atlanta
549-4 Amsterdam Ave.
Atlanta, GA 30306
866.946.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!

Scott Perlman – New GiGi's Playhouse McHenry Board President

I am extremely honored, excited and a bit terrified at having been elected Board President of GiGi's Playhouse McHenry. I have not met many of our families yet but I hope to in the coming year. Until then, I will tell you a bit about myself. I am married to Susan, whom I met in the first grade but did not start to date until sophomore year in high school. We have lived in Libertyville for the last 25 years and have three children. Ben is 30 and is an administrator for Emory University in Atlanta. He lives there with his wife, Meredith, who is an attorney. Becky is 28 and lives in Chicago having just returned from studying in Israel for two years for her Master's degree. She teaches at a school in Hyde Park. Laura, 26, lives in Milwaukee and is a bilingual (Spanish) speech pathologist.

I have been on the board for a little more than a year, having been "recruited" by Chris Newlon. Shaun and Chris have been our friends since Shaun and I attended Northwestern together and joined the same fraternity.

I hope to use my skills and experiences from running a small but global manufacturing company (The Intec Group) to continue our Playhouse's growth and development. I am utterly amazed at what has been accom-

plished to date. I hope to build on the foundation that has been established by thousands of hours of hard work by a core group of people.

Programs, Volunteers, and Funding are the three foundation blocks of our organization. Programs are what we bring to our clients and families from education to social events to networking to community education and awareness. We are a "volunteer-centric" organization that relies virtually 100% on the skills, dedication, and commitment of volunteers. And without funding, we cannot grow and develop programs or, at its most severe, even keep the doors open. Without any of those three, we will fail to survive and the more we have of each, the more we can do for our clients, families, and community.

The first step I have taken is to establish a vision, mission and list of objectives for our organization. This will provide a basis from which we can develop a plan to grow and prosper. In future newsletters I will be reporting on the board activities and the development of our plan for 2012. Until then, I present for your review our vision, mission, and objectives.



GIGI's Playhouse News

A Literal Literacy Success!

Rebecca N. has been in the Literacy Program at GiGi's Playhouse McHenry intermittently for the past 3 years. While we followed the instructions and practiced each day with her, the 3 tutors Rebecca had were instrumental in her enthusiasm for reading. Her first tutor, Hope, was a special education teacher who tapped into Rebecca's awareness of family and places she frequented, such as her doctor and favorite lunch spot- "soup and bread, please." Next was Sue, who took a real and intense interest in Rebecca's successes each session. Last summer she was paired with Tierney, a young college student and younger sister to an adult with DS. All three tutors had a few things in common that lit up Rebecca's world; they were creative, adaptive and knew how to provide structure and limits all at the same time. On days when Rebecca wanted to get in the pop-up tent, under the desk, or on her belly, her tutors were right there with her. If she was feeling silly and wanted to throw the word cards across the room when she matched them correctly, Sue had her aim for a bucket instead -creative and yet limits were still in place. And the results speak for themselves! This past month she was evaluated and is reading ON GRADE LEVEL for the first time. We are true believers in the literacy program at GiGi's Playhouse and hope for ongoing successes.



GiGi's Playhouse's Kitchen is Cookin' Up Some Learnin'

GiGi's Playhouse McHenry is incredibly fortunate to have a completely equipped and fully functional kitchen and we're cooking up more than the occasional snack. One of our visitors at an Educator's Open House came up with the idea that it could be a great facility to teach kids about cooking. Site Coordinator Jean Boyle ran with the idea and there are currently three schools making use of it and a fourth will be coming on board very soon.

One of the originating schools, Richmond Burton, makes an entire day out of the event. The class decides what they will cook and then makes a list of the necessary ingredients. The outing begins with their bus taking them to the local bank to "withdraw" the needed money for the supplies. Of course, a significant part of this visit is to learn about savings and checking accounts and basic things like counting money. They proceed to the grocery store to purchase the supplies. Again, woven into the experience is learning about making selections, understanding the cost of a product, and paying for it. Then, it is on to GiGi's Playhouse to put it all together.



The Playhouse's kitchen presents an outstanding "laboratory" in which to learn about the important daily living skill of food

preparation, kitchen safety, and proper hygiene while cooking. The ages of the participants range from 5 to 15, which affects what is taught and how deeply they dive into a subject. But one thing is common among all of them regardless of age, they have a great time and walk away with a smile on their face, some goodies they made, and new knowledge of how things are cooked for their meals and treats.

Cooking together is a great way to have a good time as a family. We hope that the kitchen at GiGi's helps to give our families another opportunity to work, learn, and play together.

GiGi's Playhouse Founding Board Member Spreads the Love

Sue DuBois, one of the founding board members of GiGi's Playhouse McHenry, will be bringing the GiGi's overall vision of acceptance to the Dominican

Republic at Dominica's Orphanage. Many orphans here have special needs and some are quite ill. They have one thing in common and that is a need for a loving environment and to be nourished physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

Less than a year ago Sue went to vacation in the Dominican Republic and was struck with the extremes of the country. She saw many "street children" who had no parents, or whose parents did not have enough to feed them, and many children with special needs whose family could not take care of them.

That same internal spark that was ignited when her niece, Riley, was born with Down syndrome and lead her to be one of the founders of GiGi's Playhouse McHenry, fired again. Sue saw a dramatic need to help these children which resulted in her meeting the people at Dominica's Orphanage. Sue has already amassed a couple hundred pounds of supplies for the kids and for a local school that was lost in a fire and is being rebuilt. She will be bringing the GiGi's tutoring materials and many techniques and skills she has acquired at the Playhouse to these children over 1,800 miles away. The old saying that our loss is their gain was never more true. Dominica's is incredibly lucky to have Sue dedicate herself to



them for the next several months. We know that when she leaves there, she will leave them so much for the better than when she found them, and the children will know that they have been touched by a someone who loved cared about them.

They will know and remember that and it will make a significant difference in their lives, just like it has with our kids at GiGi's Playhouse McHenry.

GIGI's Playhouse News

Congressional Office Reaches out To GiGi's Playhouse

At the request and invitation of Congressman Joe Walsh's office, GiGi's Playhouse McHenry participated in a Job Fair at the Woodstock North High School.

Congressman Walsh represents the 8th district of Illinois which covers the northern suburbs of Chicago, including portions of Lake, McHenry and Cook counties. The district includes most of Chicago's northwestern suburbs, such as Hoffman Estates, Arlington Heights, Schaumburg, Gurnee, Palatine, Mundelein, Zion, Barrington, the Cook County portion of Elgin, McHenry, and Woodstock.

The job fair brought employers and job seekers together. Over six hundred job seekers attended the fair to gain more information from the fifty featured Illinois employers. Job seekers also had the opportunity to attend a seminar on how to approach job interviews and resume building tips. Walsh stated: "I wanted to create a forum to help place qualified workers with Illinois employers to get the people of Illinois back to work. We need to start being proactive in both creating jobs and



placing unemployed workers in open jobs positions."

Scott Perlman and Jean Boyle represented GiGi's Playhouse and throughout the afternoon met with people interested in volunteering, representatives from companies interested in educating their employees about the services GiGi's Playhouse provides, and with people that were just interested in learning more about Down syndrome.



Staff members from Walsh's office will be attending the McHenry facility's Halloween Party. Additional meetings with the Walsh staff to examine ways to work together to promote the Playhouse's mission and objectives are planned.



At&T and GiGi's Playhouse Team Up

GiGi's Playhouse McHenry received a \$10,000 donation from AT&T in October. An AT&T employee informed the company about GiGi's Playhouse and what they make available to children with Down syndrome and their families including pre-natal diagnosis support, programs to develop physical capabilities in babies and toddlers, social programs for all ages, literacy and math tutoring, in addition to community education and awareness activities. AT&T was incredibly moved by this and that these programs are all free to the children and their families.

AT&T selected the annual "GiGi's Getting Down with Fashion" Show and Luncheon to make the presentation. This is the annual event where the children, their families and the community come together to celebrate the love they have for individuals with Down syndrome. Right before the models, who are all children and adults with Down syndrome, took to the stage, Dave Barber, Director of The United Way for McHenry County presented Chris Newlon, President of the McHenry organization, with the check.

"What an absolutely wonderful event," said Mr. Barber. "I was truly moved by the all the models, their families, and the community that came together to put on a really remarkable fashion show. This one event really highlights the love they have for their



children and celebrates the talents and potential of individuals with Down syndrome."

Vision

To see our community be a place where individuals with Down Syndrome are accepted and embraced in their families, schools, and communities and to have every child with Down Syndrome in our community reach their fullest potential.

Mission

Increase positive awareness of Down syndrome where we live through local campaigns, educational programs, and empowering individuals with Down syndrome, their families and their communities.

Objectives

- Maximize the number of families we serve.
- Constantly increase the quality and amount of educational and developmental programs offered and the level of participation.
- Constantly increase the number of people in the community we educate about Down syndrome.
- Maximize the number of effective and active volunteers.



GiGi's Playhouse
5404 W. Elm St. Suite A.
McHenry, IL 60050

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



educate. inspire. achieve.

www.gigisplayhouse.org

Venues in:

Chicago

Sioux City

New York

Quad Cities

Des Moines

Twin Cities

Rockford

Atlanta

Querétaro, Mexico

*The honor of
your presence is
requested*

Saturday February 25, 2011

Belvedere Banquets

1770 West Devon

Elk Grove, IL

rsvp_gala@gigisplayhouse.org

Hosted by Rob Johnson

Entertainment by 7th Heaven

Black tie with a rockin' edge!

*Celebrate Down syndrome,
GiGi's style!*

Go to www.gigisplayhouse.org to register!