



Down Syndrome Awareness Centers

educate. inspire. achieve.

February 2011

Newsletter

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info@gigisplayhouse.org

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Fox Valley Location
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Aurora, IL 60504
630.778.PLAY (7529)

Sioux City Location
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Suite 7
Sioux City, Iowa 51104
712.226.PLAY (7529)

McHenry Location
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McHenry, IL 60050
815.385.PLAY (7529)

Des Moines Location
10430 New York Ave
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515.252.PLAY (7529)

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

Welcome to our newest Board Member!



When you first meet Kathryn Smith you notice her great smile, friendly disposition and her eloquence. Ms. Smith is passionate about her life, is an avid reader, a successful college student and is an exciting addition to the Fox Valley Board.

She also happens to have Down syndrome.

"Kathryn really provides our board with an incredible insight and point of view...we are blessed to have her skills to round out our team" says Fox Valley Board President John Barlow.

The following is our Q&A session with Kathryn, in her own words:

1) What excites you most about serving on the board at GiGi's?

I want to work with the younger kids at GiGi's because I like kids and I think it is good for them to see that a person with Down syndrome can help them learn. I also want the parents to see me and see how I got an education in school and with hard work their kids can do the same as me.

2) What are your passions in working with children with Down syndrome - what drives you to want to work with the younger children?

In my family we have grown up volun-

teering to help others and now that I am a young adult I would like to continue to help others. I know I can be a good role model for the kids at GiGi's.

3) Is there anything specific you wish people knew about you, or what your experience as a person with Down syndrome has been like thus far?

My family has always been open with me to talk about Down syndrome. I think that it helped me understand that I had to work really hard in school and always try to do my best work. I am the oldest of three kids in my family. I take responsibility at my house. I take care of my own stuff and I can cook, but I love to bake the best.

One thing I want people to know about me is I have a really good attitude about my life. I have dreams for my future. I want to get my education and work to make money and one day get married to my boyfriend, Justin, that I have been dating for over 3 years. Right now I am studying hard to get a certificate in data entry and I take academic classes in the afternoon. I also work once a week at an office job for our State Representative Darlene Senger.



I look forward to working hard as a board member of GiGi's Playhouse!

Thanks Kathryn!

Bringing home Mia!

There are so many inspirational stories taking place at each Playhouse daily. One of our favorite stories are those of adoption, of choosing to bless your family with a child with Down syndrome. We recently met a family in Des Moines who is waiting to adopt a baby girl from Hong Kong this month. Here is their story...

"There has always been a piece of me that thought it would be wonderful to adopt but we were blessed with 4 wonderful children so we never considered it too seriously. As time went on I couldn't shake the feeling that we were supposed to adopt. I realized that with my experience teaching early childhood special ed that we should consider opening our home to a child with special needs. We talked seriously about it in January 09 and we agreed to both pray about it, and see where it led us. Within a couple of weeks decided to go ahead with the process. We received an email with Mia's picture and a little bit of information on her in March, and immediately knew she was to become our daughter. From that moment, our intent was to get her home as fast as possible. This past year has been paperwork, prayer, and anticipation. A year later we are on our way to Hong Kong to bring Mia home!"

We know that Mia will be a huge blessing to the Evans family and can't wait to welcome her to our GiGi's family too! Interested in adoption? Email info@gigisplayhouse.org for more info.



GIGI's Playhouse News

HOFFMAN

December 9 – An Amazing Day!

Wow, the literacy program is changing lives all over the place! Below is the feedback from one of the parents of a child in the program...

"Wyatt read his first book today, December 9th, during his Literacy session with Carol. Then he picked up another one and read it, too! This is the result we wanted!!! Carol, our tutor, is wonderful! Wyatt loves verbal praise! His attending skills improved during this session, which made him more successful and therefore made reading more enjoyable and full of pride for him. Thanks and kudos to Carol! With more time and practice, he will do even better.



From the tutors perspective...

"I'm still on cloud 9 - I have wondered if I made a difference or not. Wyatt's reading to his family was not only a gift for the Nelsons, but a wonderful one for me as well. A very happy and healthy New Year to you and all the staff at GiGi's. I didn't know much about the organization, but I've fallen in love with the concept, the people I've met and absolutely all the darling smiling faces of the children I see there. I am so privileged to be a small part of it. Wyatt is very special in my life"



DES MOINES

We had a fabulous group of volunteers who took time off from work at The Principal Financial Group to make literacy books and materials for us! With their help and the help of all the other volunteers, our Literacy Coordinator, Gretchen Baldwin, we will begin our first ten-week literacy session on February 7th! We have learners signed up already with ages ranging from 4 to 44! We are always looking for volunteers to help make books and train as tutors. Let us know if you are interested!

We are also excited for the upcoming math program! If you have a background in this field and would like to be our math coordinator, become a tutor or volunteer to help make the many materials needed, please let us know. You can send an email to desmoines@gigisplayhouse.org

ATLANTA

We're are on our way! If you are interested in volunteering, donating, or attending the gala email Atlanta@gigisplayhouse.org



Remember to go to our website to see your favorite Playhouses monthly calendar of events!

If you would like the calendars emailed or mailed to you contact info@gigisplayhouse.org. You can get individual calendars or a condensed calendar of all locations!

High Tech Learning

There is perhaps nothing more gratifying than when your child learns something new and is able to show you what they have learned. In Adam Ripperda's case, some of what he had learned manifested itself in a simple electronic toy. Adam began his Literacy Sessions in June 2009 soon after the Sioux City Playhouse opened. Although he was rather non-verbal, his tutors & preschool teacher worked with him through sign & picture\word matching to teach him his colors, shapes, and alphabet. His mother, Megan, was seeing some progress with her 3yr old but was unsure how much he was truly grasping. One day in June 2010 while riding in the car with Adam and his two older sisters, Megan heard Adam playing with an electronic toy that identified letters of the alphabet, basic shapes, and numbers 1 through 10. Adam had switched to the "Question & Answer" option that he had played in the past with the assistance of his sisters. Megan was hearing the toy ask for a different letter, number, or shape to be identified-pressed and was surprised to hear how quickly this was being done. She turned to ask her daughter to slow down so Adam could watch her, only to see that Adam was identifying the letters, shapes, and numbers himself! Megan says she now knows that even though Adam may not be able to verbally convey it, there is no limit on what he can learn & understand!



GIGI's Playhouse News

CHICAGO

The kids of GiGi's Chicago must have been very good this year, because Santa showed up early with a huge bag of presents for kids young and old. With food catered by our neighbors at the Brownstone Tavern, kids made crafts, played and got into the holiday spirit. Thanks to our parents Susan Johnson, Sarah Koehn and Nicole Morales for putting the event together.

The New Year is greeting the Playhouse with a new beginning. A nine-member board is in place and ready to continue the Playhouse's mission of awareness (check our e-newsletter and Facebook page for introductions and roles). Our literacy program is expanding, and we're looking for ways to serve our families better with an e-mail survey hitting inboxes later this month.



ROCKFORD OPENING

We're open and ready to play, educate and inspire children, adolescents and adults with Down syndrome and their families in the Rockford and Northern Illinois area. It was a chilly day on our Grand Opening with snow flakes flying but that's ok because the warmth of heart and spirit was certainly flowing throughout the Playhouse. Local dignitaries as well as our own dignitaries from GiGi's Inc. and other Playhouses showed up to support as yet another GiGi's Playhouse was born!

Be sure to check our website for our calendar of events and programs in January and February. Our goal is to have our Literacy program up and running by March 1st. If you are interested in our Literacy program please call 815-654-PLAY - we are currently signing up children, adolescents and adults who are interested in being tutored.

Don't forget to like us on Facebook - GiGi's Playhouse Rockford. If you or a loved one have any questions about GiGi's Playhouse Rockford go to www.gigisplayhouse.org/location-rockford.asp or call 815-654-PLAY.



NEW YORK

Countdown to GiGi's Playhouse NYC!

The venue is selected. The architect is hired. And all we needed to do is let Gotham City know we're about six months away from our opening in Spring 2011! And we did it in style!

On December 6th GiGi's Playhouse NYC held Cocktails and Conversations at the home of Thomas and Mara Lehrman. Chaired by Tracy L. Nixon and Amy Brown, Cocktails and Conversations was a festive fund and friend-raiser. Attendees learned about the work the Playhouse will do, how they can help, and watched Matty B.'s heartwarming cover of Bruno Mars' hit song Just the Way You are about his sister who has Down Syndrome.

Board members, friends and advocates joined us for this event, which raised almost \$30,000 towards the launch of GiGi's Playhouse NYC! This is about a third of our projected annual operating budget for 2011. We were thrilled at how much enthusiasm we were greeted with when we discussed GiGi's Playhouse NYC. The passion and diversity of our community of supporters is inspiring. Cocktails and Conversations galvanized support and momentum as we propel towards our Grand Opening!



MC HENRY

We had our first FAMILY FUN NIGHT on December 3rd; the theme for the night was Holiday Cheer. We invited families and friends to come out and make ornaments, decorate cookies, the tree and the Playhouse.

We had no idea we would have such a great turnout! The Playhouse was glowing from the warmth of the holiday spirit, glitter galore and smiling faces! We had many first time visitors from the boys and girls scouts, they jumped right in helping to decorate cookies and ornaments. One Mom commented "This is just like home; everyone's laughing, eating and making a mess", we wouldn't have any other way! You could definitely feel the love throughout the Playhouse. Many thanks to everyone who participated, families, friends and volunteers! We look forward to our future Family Fun Nights!



Raffle tickets available!



1st Prize 7 Day All Expense Paid Caribbean Cruise

2nd Prize 7 Day Paradise Vacation Kauai, Hawaii

3rd Prize Diamond Tear Drop Necklace

4th Prize Judith Ripka Eclipse Earrings

Go to www.gigisplayhouse.org to purchase yours today!

\$100.00 (only 1000 tickets sold)



The Inaugural
have a voice
National Gala

You're Invited!

i have a voice

Inaugural National Gala

February 26, 2011

Join us for an exciting and inspirational evening celebrating the lives of individuals with Down syndrome and supporting GiGi's Playhouses.

Nine GiGi's Playhouses will celebrate together in five different locations.
Go to www.gigisplayhouse.org for event details and registration.
(register early as seats are limited!)

Atlanta Gala at the Ritz Carlton
Chicagoland Gala at the Belvidere Banquets
hosted by Rob Johnson
Des Moines Gala at the Marriott Downtown
New York Gala at the Core Club
Sioux City Gala at the Marina Inn

Sponsorship opportunities still available!