



**GiGi's  
PLAYHOUSE**  
Down Syndrome Awareness Centers  
**McHenry**

educate. inspire. achieve

# Newsletter



## A Message from the National Office...

### The Making of a Playhouse

Ever wonder how a Playhouse actually gets started? In New York, they are days away from opening their own Playhouse. It doesn't happen overnight, and in New York they are closing in on this milestone only after months and months of hard work, community organizing, raising of funds – and most importantly – finding the right location.

In New York they are on the brink of realizing their goal thanks to a lot of hard work on behalf of their Board of Directors and their Site Coordinator, Britt. The Board and Britt have been busy raising the necessary funds and getting the word out in their community, but faced the challenge of finding a location for their Playhouse that was in a New York City location with good visibility, relatively easy to get to, and affordable. If you know anything about New York, the visibility and accessibility of a location can be pretty easy

to find – it's the affordable part that can be the challenge.

However, we are so happy to announce that GiGi's New York is about to become a reality. New York has the distinction of becoming our 10th Playhouse to open and the first of 2012. Thank you to the Board of Directors of GiGi's Playhouse New York for their dedication and unwavering commitment to bringing the mission of GiGi's to their community.



### Educate, Educate, Educate....

We recently received an email from a 3rd grade teacher in town asking if someone could come into her classroom to talk about DS and GiGi's Playhouse. Her class had won some money from a PTO contest and instead of spending it on a pizza party as is the usual practice, her students wanted to donate it to a group in need. They researched 3 non-profits online and voted to give the money to GiGi's Playhouse.

Jean, our site coordinator, along with Chris, a volunteer, arrived on a Monday afternoon with a calendar for the classroom and bookmarks and pamphlets for the students. They were so excited as they had been talking about this for a few weeks. One of the students, Jordyn, knew all about GiGi's since her older brother had participated in the Field Day and Christmas party as a member of the McHenry football team. Chris and Jean gave an overview of DS, the variety of activities that happen at the playhouse, and read the book *It's OK to be Different* by Todd Parr. They asked insightful questions and shared their own personal challenges, as well. They identified areas in which they are different from each other but found a greater number of similarities. When finished, one of the boys presented Chris and Jean with a check and a moving, straight-from-the-heart speech, thanking GiGi's for all we do to educate others about DS and helping those with DS to become the best they can be. Young children, young minds, learning to see others as more alike than different.



## Returning Family



Two and a half years ago a family came to the playhouse with their newborn, Rory, in tow. He was their 7th child and didn't have any interest in nursing. Sarah was determined to nurse him but needed support and information from someone who not only had a child with DS but someone who had also nursed that child. One of our volunteers had gone through the nursing challenges Sarah was now facing and offered to meet with her at

the playhouse when no groups were going on in order to keep noises and distractions to a minimum. After one session and a few supportive phone calls, Rory had figured it all out and was well on his way. Sarah and her family have continued to attend playhouse activities but usually in spurts. As Sarah puts it, "With 7 kids each one gets to be the focus of our attention at different times." She recently popped in with Rory, who is now a busy 2 ½ yr old charmer. Sarah stated that even though they aren't able to come in as often as they want, she and her husband look forward to the monthly newsletter to read about all the families and opportunities that are available for their son. It's like a refreshing dose of support in my mailbox every month.

## Blessed Adoption

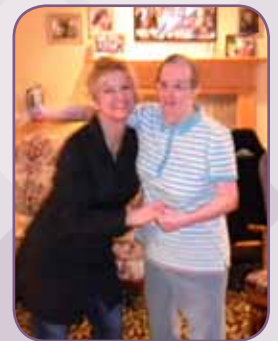
Frequently when you hear of a child being adopted by a loving family you don't think past the initial announcement. You don't hear about the legal issues, the twice monthly home visits, multiple consents, or the medical complications that are so often a part of adopting a child with Down syndrome. But those of us that have met Erin and Josh Horton and their sons, Malachi and Elijah, we have been informed of many of these details along the way. Malachi was a charmer from the start when Erin brought him in 3 years ago. All he had to do was bat his eyes at the moms in the group and he could get anything he wanted. He stole our hearts. His parents were there for him when he struggled with health complications, including many heart issues, a stroke and then subsequent brain surgery. Erin managed his multiple therapies, play time and family outings. However, throughout this time, Erin and Josh have not been able to legally sign their names as Mom and Dad. This all changed on February 3, 2012. Erin and Josh had to appear in court for the final legal judgement. They can FINALLY legally call him Malachi Horton, they can sign school forms as "Mom" and "Dad" and they can make every decision regarding him. This is Erin and Josh's answer to their prayers. So congratulations Erin and Josh, or should we say "Mom and Dad."



## Making New Friends.

The Friday Friends group came out to GiGi's Playhouse McHenry to have a party! The night started out as a "girl's night" with Brenna, Whitney, Jessica, Destiny and Robin all hanging out. The ladies were jamming the music and making some Valentine's decorations for the Playhouse and commenting on how they need some guys to come and make it a party, when in walks Timmy, ready to get the party started! The crafts quickly ended and the dancing began, disco ball turning and Shania Twain blasting, they hardly noticed that the door had opened and a new friend was standing off to the side watching. We turned down the music and got to know our new friend David.

David attends Johnsbury High School and his class comes to the McHenry Playhouse once a month to work on cooking skills. David came home from school the other day and started talking to his Mom about making a taco salad; he listed all the ingredients one by one. David's Mom was so happy because it is often hard to get David to talk about what he does at school. She asked him if he had made the taco salad at school, he said "no...GiGi's". He had a calendar in his hands and told his Mom that he wanted to go to GiGi's! Mom was happy to see that the Friday Friends happened to be that night.



David is often shy around others, but he jumped right in and started dancing with the whole bunch! Mom and Dad were elated to see him socially interacting with peers his age and genuinely having a great time! Welcome David!!!



## Finding the right doc

When parents first get the news that their child has Down syndrome, their heads fill with questions. One that weighs on many is how to find the right physician for their child. Who knows about DS? Which one will treat my child and my excessive questions with respect? What have other parents thought? At the playhouse we have many parents who freely share the good and the bad about many of our specialists. We rely on their feedback and insights to help others choose the right physician. One of our favorites that many parents have chosen is Dr. Mark Gerber, ENT specialist. My first encounter with him was when I brought my older daughter to him for a tonsil evaluation. He looked at my other child (with DS) and asked me tons of questions about her ear care, progress, etc. He mentioned a needed sleep study at age 4-5 and other things her current ENT had not even addressed. I switched that day because he spent more time discussing her care than her two previous ENT's had combined. Best of all, my daughter is very comfortable with him which leads to better cooperation from her. He is checking his schedule and is planning to come to the playhouse to discuss issues specific to DS and to answer all of your ENT related questions. Keep checking our website for the exact date of his session and we will be sending email notices, too. If you have a physician that you like or you think would like to come out and answer questions from parents, let us know.

## Literacy Story:

Show Me A Sign...Signing Class meets every other Thursday at 6:00pm at the Playhouse.

Taught by our wonderful volunteer (and Board Member) Rusty! Rusty has been teaching basic sign at GiGi's for over two years to the parents, tutors and the community. If you are interested in helping with this class, we are in need of Signing Times DVD's to be donated for the class.



## CALENDAR



- 1 4:30 Art Class, 6pm Signing Class
- 2 10:00 – 12:00, Open Play (every Friday)
- 3 10:00-4:00, Cary Grove Expo
- 4 10:00-12:00, Spanish Open Play
- 6 McHenry Chamber Mixer
- 7 12:00, Bingo at the VFW (every Wed.)
- 8 10:00-12:00, Options & Advocacy Play Group
- 9 10:00-12:00, Open Play  
6:30pm, Family Fun Night
- 10 10:15-11:00, Crawlers & Walkers  
5:00-7:00pm, Sat. Open Play
- 11 1:00-2:30pm, Learn and Play & St. Patrick's Day Parade
- 12 7:00pm, Board Meeting
- 13 5:00-8:00pm, Wendy's Night in McHenry
- 14 12:00, Bingo at the VFW  
4:30-6:30pm, Evening Open Play
- 15 4:30 Art Class, Wendy's Night Crystal Lake  
6pm, Signing Class
- 16 10:00-12:00, Open Play
- 17 7:30pm, Hockey & Awareness Night, Sear Center
- 21 12:00, Bingo at the VFW  
6:30pm, Volunteer Training
- 23 10:00-12:00, Open Play  
7:00-9:00pm, Friday Friends
- 26 6:30pm, Coupon Club
- 28 12:00, Bingo at the VFW  
6:30pm, Volunteer Training
- 29 4:30, Art Class  
6pm, Signing Class
- 30 10:00-12:00, Open Play

GiGi's Playhouse  
1069 W. Golf Rd.  
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**Traveling Gallery on the Move!**  
**March – Wyoming**

Email [ihavevoiceproject@  
gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:ihavevoiceproject@gigisplayhouse.org) to schedule it  
in your city!

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

## Save the Dates

**Cary Grove Expo-March 3rd**

**McHenry Chamber Mixer March 6th**

**Sat. March 17th Hockey Fundraising/Awareness  
Night at the Sears Center-Tickets on sale now,  
please call the playhouse (815) 385-PLAY!**

