



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

# Newsletter



## A Message from the National Office...

*"I remember when I first came to the Playhouse 4 years ago with Somer and she learned to communicate for the first time in the GiGi's literacy program. It was like her whole world opened up! She was able to connect her ability to sign with the responses of others! It was amazing – we were all in tears. Today, she excels in the literacy program – we can't make books fast enough to keep up with her!"*



This is just one of many testimonials we hear about the GiGi's literacy program, which was created by Shari Andress, Developmental Therapist and mother of a child with Down syndrome. Like all of our programs, the Literacy program is success-based and incorporates proven methodologies from professionals in the field including Patricia Oelwein, Sue Buckley and more. Together with Nancy Gianni, founder and GiGi's mom, Shari will be visiting each

of our Playhouses, presenting on various topics including:

- Down Syndrome Basics – what DS is and what it is not, how it affects siblings and other family members
- The Learner with Down syndrome – why teaching the way we learn best ensures success
- Literacy and Math tutoring



These on-site trainings will ensure that each Playhouse is delivering the GiGi's programs with the highest integrity possible and will include video instruction, educational iPad apps, and hands-on demonstration. GiGi's is committed to these educational programs and sees them as a catalyst for change in our communities!

## Welcome to our new Chicago-only monthly newsletter!

This will be a place for you to receive more information about the Chicago Playhouse, the important events and the stories of the families and volunteers who create our community. Every month, we'll be presenting you with inspirational stories and photos from the families who come in, spotlighting a volunteer (or two) and keeping you updated on Playhouse happenings and upcoming events (including a full monthly calendar as an easy reference guide). If you'd like to receive this newsletter by mail every month, please send your name and mailing address to [Chicago@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:Chicago@gigisplayhouse.org).

Happy reading!



## Teen Drama Troupe

Having taken on one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies last year with "Romeo and Juliet," the Teen Drama Class from GiGi's Chicago is now focused on the Bard's most noted comedies, "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Our teen thespians (and their program leaders and volunteers) have been hard at work since January, working through the text, learning about the characters, and auditioning for their favorite roles in preparation of a spring performance on May 19.



During their months of preparation, the teens took a field trip to the Chicago Shakespeare Theater to see a performance of "Short Shakespeare Taming of the Shrew," in their theatre at Navy Pier. Far from just giving our teens exposure to the arts, our Drama Class is an important outlet for teens' natural creativity, while giving them more confidence and building their articulation skills. As Anna Kwidzinski, sister of Teen Class member Emily, says: "Because of the Class's free play, dramatic interpretation, and improvisational exercises, Emily is blooming into a precocious and optimistic young lady. Her involvement in GiGi's Playhouse is honing her critical thinking skills, and she is grasping concepts through dramatic exercises and applying them to similar situations she faces every day."

**The Teen Drama Class will perform "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Neo-Futurarium, 5153 N. Ashland in Chicago, on May 19. Doors open at 4:30, with the performance starting promptly at 5 p.m. Get your tickets at [www.events.org/gigisdrama](http://www.events.org/gigisdrama).**

## Departmental Updates.

### Facilities:

We hope you've noticed the number of improvements we've made over the past few months inside the playhouse. Most notably, we've installed our television and Blu-Ray Player, giving us a chance to perhaps have a movie night every now and then, and some bigger dance parties. And thanks to a generous donation from Oscar Escalante and his employer Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, we've added five new desktop computers and are in the process of networking them for use in our programs. Further technological upgrades include getting our own copier and installing a keyless entry system on our Lincoln Ave. door.



### Programs:

It's going to be a great summer at GiGi's Chicago. Sunday, May 6, will be the first of several monthly Arts & Crafts Classes continuing through the summer. The class will be a place to ward off summer boredom while giving kids a chance to socialize with friends. The classes will take place the first Sunday of every month from 10-11 a.m. And don't miss our Sign Language Workshop on Sunday, May 20, from 10-11 a.m. This is a great opportunity for parents to learn some basic signs to teach to their children.

### Fundraising:

Thanks to a few grants and many generous private donations, we're well on way toward reaching our goal of raising \$150,000 for the year. However, we still have some big events coming up. First, if you haven't registered for the Chicagoland 5K, do so now. This is the biggest fundraiser of the year for us, and it's a great way to get all of our voices together in one place. We need your help securing corporate sponsorships, please contact us (Chicago@gigisplayhouse.org) to learn how your company can get involved.

### CALENDAR

- 2 Open Play, 9:30 – 11 a.m.
- 4 Teen Drama Class, 5:30 – 7 p.m.
- 6 Art & Crafts Workshop, 10-11 a.m.  
Open Play/Cabin Fever Buster, 1-3 p.m.  
Volunteer Appreciation, 7:30 p.m. at Big Bricks (3832 N. Lincoln Ave.)
- 9 Open Play, 9:30 – 11 a.m.
- 11 Teen Drama Class, 5:30p
- 12 Teen Drama Class Dress Rehearsal, 4:30p
- 16 Open Play, 9:30 – 11 a.m.
- 17 Volunteer Orientation, 7-8 p.m.
- 18 Teen Drama Class, 5:30p
- 19 A Midsummer Night's Dream (teen drama performance), 4:30 p.m.
- 20 Sign Language Workshop, 10-11  
Open play, 1p.m.
- 21 Spectacular Sibs, 4:30-6 p.m.
- 23 Open Play, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.
- 30 Open Play, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.



GiGi's Playhouse  
1069 W. Golf Rd.  
Hoffman Estates, IL 60169

### Save the Date

June 8-10 Northcenter's Ribfest. Interested in having fun while earning money for the Playhouse? Join our army of volunteers (we get \$50/shift for each volunteer we recruit). Contact us at Chicago@gigisplayhouse.org for a registration form.

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