



# 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

educate. inspire. believe.



# WELCOME



A year of  
**extraordinary  
achievements**  
made possible by you.

# CONTENTS



Letter from the Board President

GiGi's Playhouse Vision & Mission

Overview of the National Network

Our Programs

Our Lectures & Events

Resources & Local Support

Core Volunteer Team

Testimonials

Board, Committees & Staff

Letter from the Staff

Financials

Donors

Contact Information

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

## Debbie Morris | *Board President*



As I sit and watch Hop, Skip and Jump on a Saturday in Brooklyn, I am inspired by our volunteers, proud of our little ones taking part in the program and thrilled to be sharing information, stories, and laughter with our parents. What the Playhouse has created in six years is nothing less than miraculous – a home for families touched by Down syndrome in the NYC community where inclusion and acceptance is assumed, smiles and laughter abound, and love is everywhere.

Our 2015 achievements are numerous. We are so proud of opening our satellite GiGi's location in Brooklyn with Extreme Kids and Crew. Getting the Playhouse into the other boroughs has been a priority for us, and our Brooklyn satellite is a major success. Stay tuned for more to come!

We increased participation, including the number of Spanish speakers we serve. We had more community events and held more caregiver lectures than ever before, discussing important topics such as health and safety and working with the NYC education systems. We launched an adult monthly social night in addition to welcoming our adult participants to the Playhouse weekly, saw an increase in our Tweens Saturday program, and ramped up our New Parent mentor program, all while continuing to provide quality instructive programming to our under 10's.

As we look forward, we are excited by the opportunities that exist to continue and to expand serving the Down syndrome population of New York City. From our home in Harlem and our "rental" in Brooklyn, we are fulfilling our mission to provide free quality programming and skill-building to people with Down syndrome, from birth through adulthood!

I am excited by our future, and so humbled and grateful to all of our supporters, staff, volunteers, friends, and the Harlem community for their continued belief in and embrace of, GiGi's Playhouse NYC. From the bottom of my heart, thank you!

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Debbie Morris'.

Debbie Morris



# VISION & MISSION

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

2

**OUR VISION:** is to see a world where individuals with Down syndrome are **accepted and embraced** in their families, schools and communities.

.....

**OUR MISSION:** is to **increase positive awareness** of Down syndrome through **national campaigns**, educational programs and by **empowering individuals with Down syndrome, their families and the community.**



## gigi's locations



Queretaro, Mexico 🏠

Changing the way the world sees Down syndrome.  
one child. one diagnosis. one community at a time.

The President and Founder of **GiGi's Playhouse** is Nancy Gianni. When Nancy gave birth to her daughter, Gigi, fourteen years ago, she was inspired to create a place where children with Down syndrome and their families could come together free of charge for education, awareness and fun. Through Nancy's passion and commitment, there are now more than thirty GiGi's Playhouses across the country, with plans for many more. **GiGi's Playhouse** empowers individuals with Down syndrome to reach their greatest potential. From Nancy's inspiring vision, **GiGi's Playhouse NYC** opened its doors in 2012, thanks to the resources and hard work of our intrepid founders, Tracy Nixon and Debbie Morris and our former Executive Director, Britt Sady. As the only **GiGi's Playhouse** in New York City, we have an important mission and a large community to serve.

**GiGi's Playhouse, Inc.** and its subsidiaries, including **GiGi's Playhouse NYC**, carry a 501(c)(3) exemption.

## PROGRAMS FOR EARLY LEARNERS

### Busy Bodies (Under 2s) | Ages 0-2

A Playgroup for children two and under to meet new friends, learn and grow, while parents have the opportunity to socialize and network with one another.

### LMNOP | Ages 0-5

Language Music N' Our Peeps. This program uses music as a tool for early language acquisition. Sign language and games support all types of communication!

### Hop, Skip & Jump | Ages 2-7

This program helps promote social, emotional and gross motor development through a variety of activities, including dance, interactive play, sharing, cooperative games and physical activity. We incorporate creativity and movement throughout the program.

## PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG ADULTS & ADULTS

### Gratitude Committee | Ages 20 and up

This core group of adult volunteers with Down syndrome meets weekly to hand-craft thank you cards and other works that we use to thank our supporters and volunteer staff.

### Bowling Buds | Ages 18 and up

This social club for adults with Down syndrome meets once a month at Lucky Strike Bowling for a fun night out with friends! While bowling, volunteers facilitate social interactions between participants.

Our programs not only educate individuals with Down syndrome and their families, but also provide support through a nurturing community.

## PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN & TEENS

### Literacy Pods | All Ages

Each individual learns to read and develop literacy skills at a different pace. The GiGi's Literacy Program builds a foundation in sight word recognition, vocabulary, comprehension and articulation through group tutoring adapted to fit the learning style of individuals with Down syndrome. Students also learn classroom skills and expand attention.

### Adaptive Ballet | Ages 6 and up

Develop dance fundamentals: balance, coordination, and flexibility. Dance improves posture, body awareness, and builds confidence and grace. These skills can be learned in a fun environment while encouraging the carry over of these abilities into their everyday lives. Children experience dance in a creative way while working on important motor skills.

### Playhouse Pals | Ages 9-15

This social club uses theater games to teach social skills and builds intimate friendships between tweens & teens.

## PROGRAMS FOR ALL AGES

### Soccer Clinics

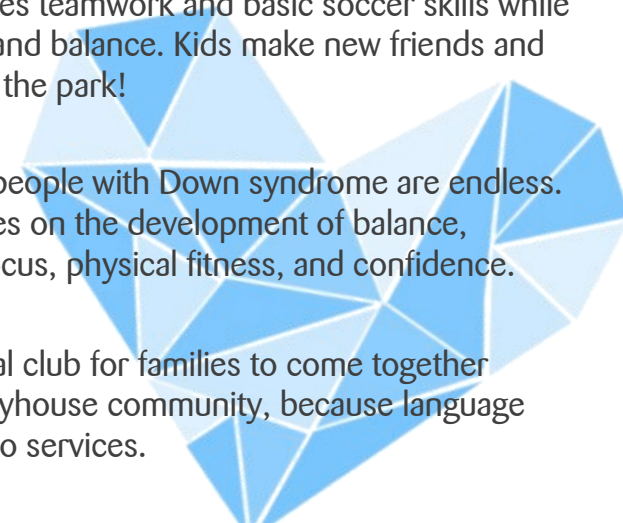
Our soccer program teaches teamwork and basic soccer skills while building up core strength and balance. Kids make new friends and have fun playing soccer in the park!

### Karate

The benefits of karate for people with Down syndrome are endless. Our karate program focuses on the development of balance, coordination, discipline, focus, physical fitness, and confidence.

### Fiesta Hispana

Our monthly Spanish social club for families to come together and share in the GiGi's Playhouse community, because language should never be a barrier to services.



## National “I Have a Voice” Gala | Annually

Every chapter of GiGi’s Playhouse International holds their biggest fundraiser – the annual ‘I have a voice’ gala. Guests enjoy dinner, dancing, silent and live auctions, and knowing that their generosity supports free programs for individuals with Down syndrome and their loved ones! Generous friends new and old help us raise the funds we need to support our growing community center, and corporate friends gain a better understanding of the challenges we live with and the profound joy our children bring.

## Winter Celebration | January

Games, crafts, snacks, music, dancing, mascots, photo booth, and special guests make this yearly holiday party a fun event for the whole family.

## World Down Syndrome Day Party | March

We celebrate World Down Syndrome Day (March 21st) with community parties, lectures, and awareness events. This past year featured a Karaoke and Dance Party, a Down syndrome film festival, an Open House, and lectures on how children with Down syndrome learn. This is an opportunity for us to celebrate our differences!

## Dancing for Down Syndrome | June

Launched in 2014, our grass-roots awareness and fundraising initiative, Dancing for Down Syndrome (DFDS), asks families to tell their story of loving someone with Down syndrome and being a part of the Playhouse, and to share that story with the wider community. This event is by and for the families that come to the Playhouse and benefit from our free classes, workshops, lectures, parties and events. The campaign ends with a dance party celebration of everyone’s efforts!

## Disability Pride Parade | July

GiGi’s Playhouse NYC was proud to march in the first ever Disability Pride Parade in NYC in 2015. We joined thousands of individuals with disabilities, families, friends, and advocates to bring awareness to the challenges people face every day.

## Inclusion in Education and Life | September

A lecture with Dr. Kathleen Feeley, a Board Certified Behavior Analyst, Associate Professor at Long Island University Post Campus, the founding director of the Center for Community Inclusion, and the Executive Director of the New York State Department of Education Funded Long Island Parent and Early Childhood Direction Centers, discussing the rationale for inclusive programming for children with Down syndrome and key factors that lead to success.

## Kirsten DeBear—On Teaching Kids With Down Syndrome

Kirsten DeBear, MEd, OTR gives an annual three-part lecture series on working with individuals with Down syndrome, popular with volunteers, families, and other professionals serving the Down syndrome community. Over the three session, Kirsten discusses the principles of relationship-based interventions, stages of literacy, and behavior management. Kirsten DeBear is an occupational therapist in private practice, with a masters degree in Parent Infant Development from Bank Street College. She has been working with young disabled children for over 40 years.

## Under 2’s Lecture Series

Our new parent groups in Manhattan and in Brooklyn met with various experts this year. Topics included: Navigating Early Intervention, Toilet Training, Feeding and Speech, Finding the Right Preschool, and Q&A on Development.

## Pre-natal Diagnosis Support

GiGi’s offers accurate and positive information about Down syndrome to families who have received a pre-natal diagnosis.

**GiGi’s Playhouse NYC hosts parties, lectures and events throughout the year that support our mission and the community we serve.**



# RESOURCES & SUPPORT

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

6



HUFFPOST EDUCATION



TALBOTS

Brooklyn Museum



GLAMOUR

NEW YORK POST

LUCKY STRIKE®

NYMetroParents



**GiGi's Playhouse NYC** partners with many organizations that support the Down syndrome community and help us spread our message of awareness.

# CORE VOLUNTEER TEAM

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

7

**Volunteers** are the backbone of the Playhouse. We rely on the dedication, talent, and expertise of a core group of volunteers who deliver our programs. We ask for a three-month commitment; the majority of our core program volunteers have served for over 2 years.





# TESTIMONIALS



GiGi's Playhouse is a wonderful community of kids, parents and volunteers of all ages. Every volunteer is dedicated to helping the children grow into independent adults. I am motivated by following the progress of the children, and deeply inspired by the hard work of other volunteers and staff. -Ryoma



Working with the children, staff and families at GiGi's has provided me with an unexpected but welcome education. I set out to help kids learn to read, and in the process ended up learning my own valuable lessons about self-worth, volunteerism, and happiness. GiGi's Playhouse is undoubtedly one of the most fulfilling activities I've ever participated in. -Brandt



When I first volunteered at GiGi's my adult children asked me if it made me sad to be there. Their oldest brother John was born with Down syndrome and congenital heart disease. Unfortunately, he passed away twenty years ago at fourteen years old. John added so much to our family - his unending love and happiness. So when I volunteer at GiGi's, I don't get sad for what I lost, rather I find joy in what I had - my son, John. -Anita

## NYC BOARD MEMBERS

Deborah Morris, President  
Jane Providenti, Vice President  
Sharon Hart-Fanelli, Secretary  
Jon Connolly, Treasurer & Finance Chair  
Frank Sawyer, Development Chair  
Saudia Ally, Gala Chair  
Laura Blau  
Ryan Brown  
Eric Fogarty  
Liza Galler  
Adam Hait  
Gretchen Hayes  
Rebecca Purnick

## NYC STAFF

Nina Gonzalez Sisson, Site Coordinator  
Benjamin Kaufman, Programs Director

## GALA COMMITTEE

Saudia Ally, Gala Chair  
Nina Gonzalez  
Benjamin Kaufman  
Adam Hait

## DANCING FOR DOWN SYNDROME (DFDS) COMMITTEE

Sharon Hart-Fanelli, Co-Chair  
Frank Sawyer, Co-Chair  
Nina Gonzalez  
Benjamin Kaufman

## PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Hilda Chusid  
Kathleen Feeley  
Tobie Franklin  
Liza Galler  
Julia Harquil  
Bonnie Keilty  
Jordana Mendelson  
Tracy Nixon  
Kristen O'Brien  
Emily Perl Kingsley  
Jane Providenti  
Cary Williams

## PROGRAM LEADERS

David Chung  
Veronica Glen  
Brandt Hersh  
Andy Kleiman  
Martyna Okuniewska  
Emma Schaeffer  
David Sheeger  
Madeline Day Smith  
Emily Thomas  
Hayden Wilson

## INTERNS

Graciela Lema  
Tatiana Rendon  
Ana Skrypczuk

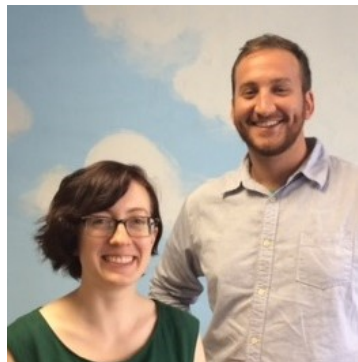
## VOLUNTEERS

Kerri Aidikoff  
Safia Al-Rawi  
Camille Amezcua  
Elizabeth Atlas  
Kenan Bardt  
David Beal  
Kirsten Bowen  
D'Andra Brown  
Olga Bykanova  
Katherine Cardy  
Sarah Carter  
Lauren Costabile  
Emily Darby  
Eunice Daudu  
Renata Demichelis  
Cindy Gaynor  
Jernora Gross  
Kimberly Hall  
Noa Hankin  
Bridget Heddens  
Jeremy Hersh  
Victoria Hinojosa  
Ethan Jones  
Julia Klele  
Verónica Labarca  
Srinivas Lakhanigam  
Darius Mayfield  
Shamiah Mayfield

Tatiana Rendon  
Emma Schaeffer  
Elizabeth Scheel  
Jenniffalisa Scigliano  
Mona Tauseef  
Renee Tidaback  
Marilena Vasilatos  
Beth Wrubleski



## Mary “Nina” Gonzalez Sisson | *Site Coordinator* & Benjamin Kaufman | *Programs Director*



As the on-site stewards of GiGi’s Playhouse NYC, we are so proud to be an integral part of the GiGi’s Playhouse community! From programs to parties, from lectures to providing information to caregivers, we embrace the opportunity we have in working with the Down syndrome community of New York City and providing what no other New York City organization is able to offer.

2015 was a year of significant growth for the Playhouse. Our expansion of the number of programs, and into the borough of Brooklyn, allowed us to serve so many more in the community. We accomplished so much:

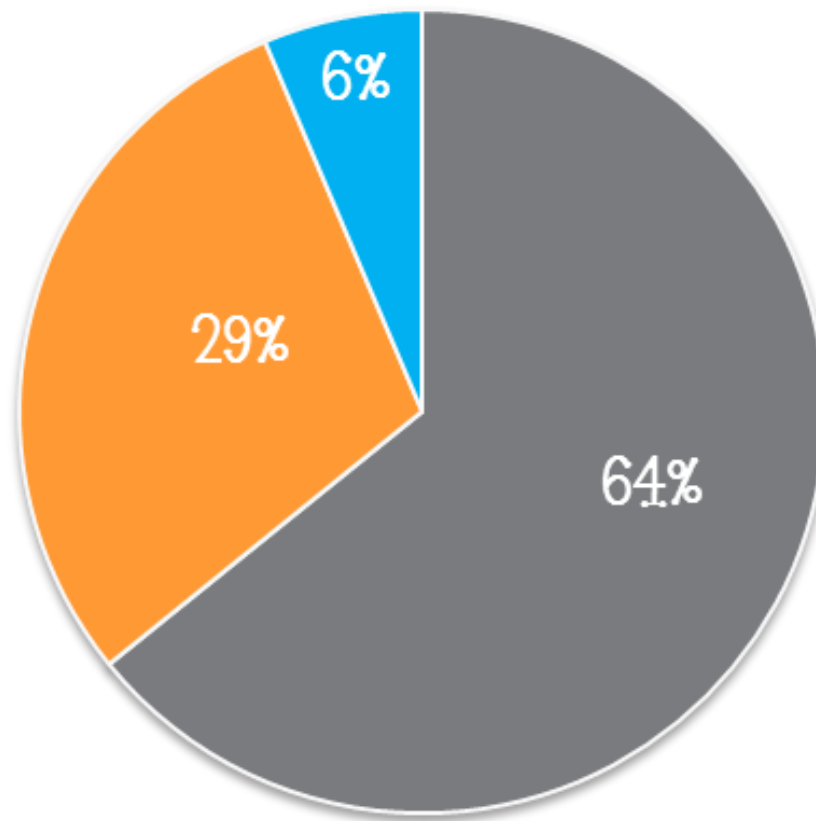
- Our network of families grew 32% to over 450 families, with 140 of those families attending Playhouse programs and events throughout the year
- Our volunteers tirelessly gave 1,500+ hours of their time
- More than 100 new families became part of the Playhouse community
- The size of our network (donors, volunteers, newsletter subscribers, volunteers, professionals, and families) increased 49% to over 2,400 people.
- Our resources for new and expectant parents have expanded, with parent mentoring and expert lectures
- Thanks to the monthly Fiesta Hispana program and making translation available during most other programs and events, we were able to actively serve our Spanish constituents
- Fantastic Friends, a monthly program for adults with Down syndrome, has become a regular part of our programming—giving our adult population an opportunity to make new friends and practice social skills
- In September, we launched our first ever satellite program in partnership with Extreme Kids & Crew, to offer Hop, Skip & Jump in Brooklyn
- We celebrated World Down Syndrome Day at the Brooklyn Museum, were interviewed by The Best Medicine radio show, marched in NYC’s inaugural Disability Pride Parade (promoting inclusion, awareness and visibility), and we hosted Playhouse visitors from across the USA and the globe!

Come visit us and you will see that your support of GiGi’s Playhouse NYC truly does change the world—one child, one diagnosis, one community at a time.

Thank you for making our growth possible!

Mary “Nina” Gonzalez Sisson

Benjamin Kaufman



2015 Total Expenses  
\$366, 834

- Programs
- Fundraising
- General & Administration



90% of our annual expenditures go directly to programming and events that benefit our community and related fundraising.



# OUR DONORS

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

12

## FOUNDER'S CIRCLE

Tracy Nixon

Gretchen Hayes

Tom & JoAnn Fogarty

Matthew & Lauren Fogarty

Andrew & Debbie Morris

Jean Sullivan & Richard Cane

Benno & Evelyn Ansbacher

Jonathan & Rosemary Ansbacher

Gaurang & Heather Trivedi

Mitch Rubin & Audra Zuckerman

Eric & Becky Fogarty

Invest for children

### \$20,000+

Benno & Evelyn Ansbacher  
Jack & Aggie Green

### \$15,000+

Tom & JoAnn Fogarty

### \$10,000+

AIG  
Eric & Becky Fogarty  
Goldman Sachs & Co.  
Tracy Nixon  
Drs. Gaurang & Heather Trivedi

### \$5,000+

Invest For children  
Matthew & Lauren Fogarty  
David & Lauren Mazzullo  
Mary McMahon  
Andrew & Debbie Morris  
Platinum Maintenance Services Corp.  
Richards Kibbe & Orbe, LLP

### \$5,000+ continued...

Jane Providenti  
Jacqueline Sacks  
Otto Herrmann, Inc.  
The Taft Foundation  
Wilmer Hale

### \$2,500+

Aon Risk Solutions  
Kevin & Sarah Brakstad  
Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation  
Environmental Building Solutions, LLC  
Michael & Jessy Nahmias  
Marya Propis  
Wendy White Baxter

### \$1,000+

Mark & Shervon Anderson  
Ask Contracting Corp.  
Bob & Pat Becker  
Lisa Butera  
Marc & Stacey Calcano  
Jo Chasen  
Lauren Costabile  
Credit Suisse Americas Foundation  
Ruth Erickson

### \$1,000+ continued...

Thor Eusner  
Emily Fanelli  
Carol Falcinelli  
Linda Gallagher  
GG Painting  
Guardian Service Industries  
Henegan Construction Co. Inc.  
The Jamner Family Foundation  
The Loews Foundation  
Peter Loftis  
Robert & Lori Maccarrone  
Marsh & McLennan Companies  
Barbara Michels  
Morgan Stanley Foundation  
Kate Morrone  
Joseph Neto & Associates  
Dan & Rebecca Purnick  
R.Evolución Latina  
Dorthea Richter  
Dana Roberts  
Lilian Rusing  
Oliver & Elissia Sigalow  
Tucker & Julie Siler  
Jean Sullivan & Richard Cane  
Matthew Thompson  
Theresa Unanue  
Karolina Zienkiewicz

### \$500+

Jake Abraham & Katie Sammis  
Attila Balla  
Kenan Bardt  
Nate Berkopec  
Josh & Laura Blau  
Jon Connolly & Rachel Adams  
Chad & Emily Dreas  
Hakan Ergulec

### \$500+ continued...

Laura Fahsbender  
Jodie Fischer  
Shieva Ghofrany  
Google Inc.  
Adam Hait  
John & Lisa Hegeman  
Brandt Hersh  
Phil & Veronique Imperial  
Wallace jabbaar & Yamira Siu  
Kids for Kids Foundation  
Benjamin Kaufman  
Jonathan Lewis  
Alexandra Littlejohn  
Sarah Lockyer  
Eileen McGuire  
Connie Miller  
Anita Murtha  
Michele Natal  
National Down Syndrome Society  
Louis Craco II & Jennifer Patterson  
Perry Patterson  
Anthony Ptak & Jordana Mendelson  
Darren & Jenni Reynolds  
Darin Rupinski  
Robert & Anne Russo  
Safety Building Cleaning Corp.  
Linda Saraceni  
Barry & Peg Wentworth  
Stephanie Witowski  
Ada Zhou & Noa Hankin



**GiGi's Playhouse NYC** is  
entirely locally funded by  
individual and corporate dona-  
tions and foundation support.

# CONTACT INFORMATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2015

13

## Location:

106 W. 117th Street  
New York, NY 10026

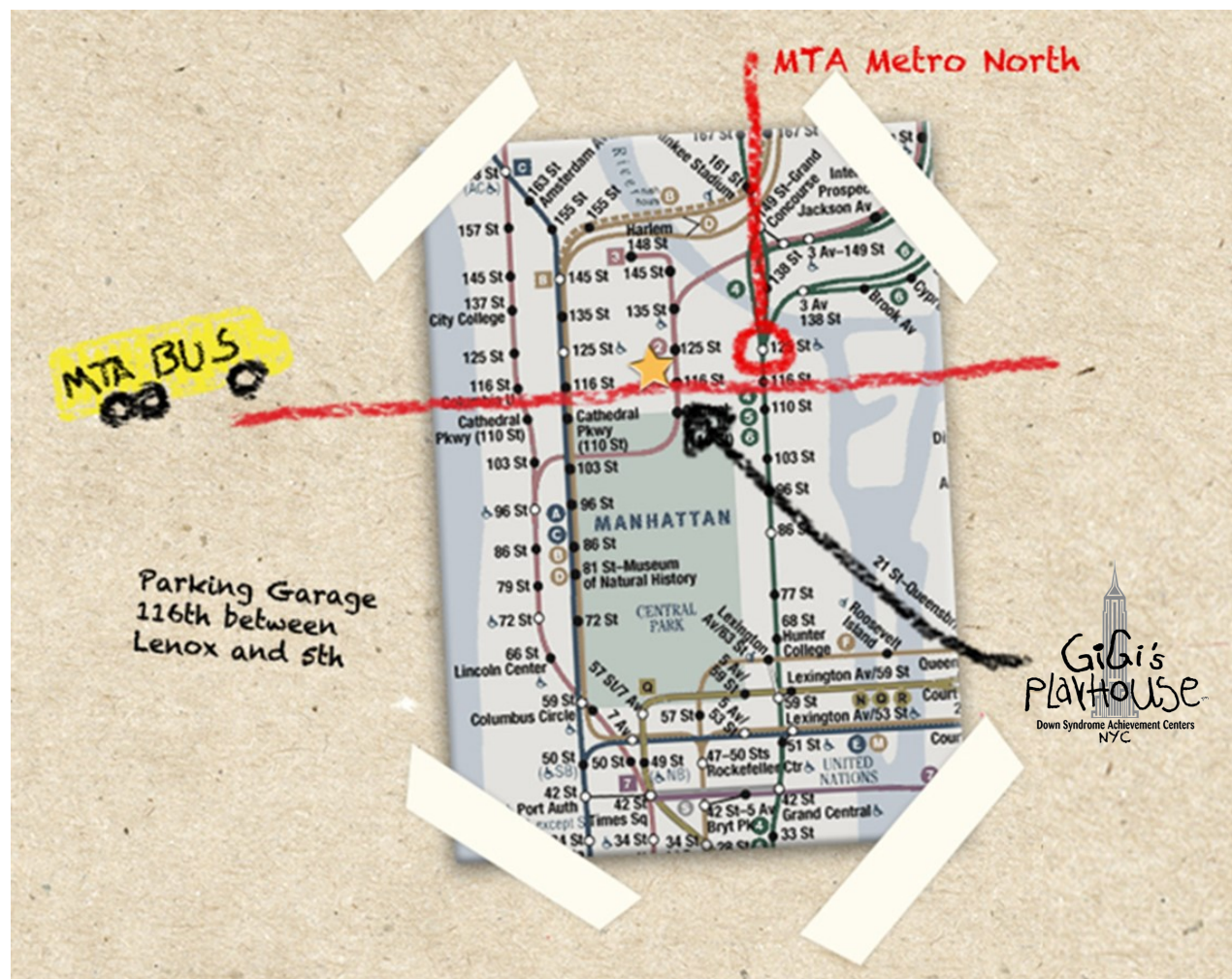
## Mailing Address:

PO Box 925, New York, NY 10026

646-801-7529

nyc@gigisplayhouse.org

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



/GiGiPHNYC

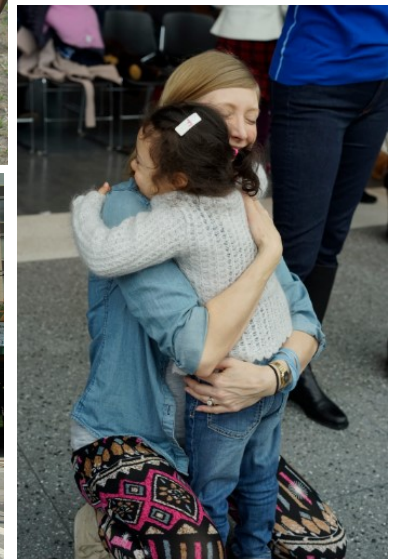
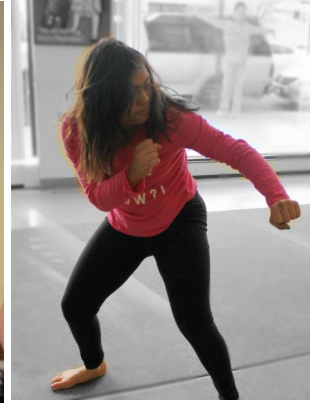


/gigisplayhouseNYC



/nycgigisplayhouse









educate. inspire. believe.

THANK YOU

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