

THE HEART OF STARK

GiGi's Playhouse Canton nets national recognition

Canton Repository
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In partnership with The Repository, every Monday, Stark Community Foundation is highlighting positive happenings in our community. Here's to Good News Mondays!

GiGi's Playhouse Canton, a nonprofit serving individuals with Down syndrome in our community, was recently awarded the Core Value Champion award from its national office during the 2023 GiGi's Annual Leadership Conference. Out of all 58 open branches of GiGi's Playhouse around the country, the Canton Playhouse was chosen for its hard work and attention to purposeful interactions over the past year.

"It has been an exciting couple months," said Megan Vance, site manager at GiGi's Playhouse Canton. "It

was quite the pleasant surprise to receive this award!"

GiGi's Playhouse Canton was established in 2019 by a group of passionate parents and individuals in the Akron-Canton area to provide individuals of all ages with Down syndrome a safe place to call their own in our community. Participants of all ages are encouraged to explore their abilities through proven programming and offerings in an environment of support and celebration. All programs are delivered by a team of trained volunteers and offered at no cost to families, so cost is never a barrier to receiving resources, support and services.

One program that earned the Canton Playhouse national recognition is GiGiFIT - a free program that combines physical therapy with fitness activities and promotes wellness through nutrition, pushing through barriers and

building self-confidence. Created in collaboration with skilled physical therapists who work specifically with individuals with Down syndrome, the GiGiFIT program is designed to address common issues for individuals with Down syndrome, including hypotonia, excessive joint laxity and decreased balance. Participants build strength, endurance, power, joint stability, balance and movement control as they are empowered to be more independent and secure in their abilities.

This year, through support from the Wish, Cope and Life Foundation at Stark Community Foundation and other community funding, GiGi's Playhouse Canton expanded its GiGiFIT program to create different classes for infants, toddlers and kids. It was also able to split its teen and adult programming into two separate classes, providing a more personalized experience for

participants.

"GiGi's Playhouse Canton has grown to the point where we just hired our second employee," said Vance. "It is amazing to have received so much support from our community, and I can't wait to continue to share about the growth that is to come."

Learn more at www.gigisplayhouse.org/canton

As the community's trusted partner in giving, Stark Community Foundation helps individuals, families, businesses and nonprofits achieve their philanthropic goals through a variety of charitable funds and strategic initiatives. Ranked in the top 10 percent of community foundations in the country, the Foundation and its family of donors have granted \$230 million to nonprofits since 1963. Learn how you can simplify your giving and amplify your impact at www.starkcf.org.