

## Violet & Zola

### 2021 Youth Honorees

These sisters are the epitome of acceptance. Eight-year-old Zola was adopted from Ethiopia and her seven-year-old sister Violet was adopted from China.

“We live in a box of advocacy and I love that role,” says their mom Megan Chaffee. “We are advocating acceptance for a black daughter. We are advocating acceptance for a child with Down syndrome. Both of them belong and both of them are worthy of being accepted.”

So, it is fitting that this year’s virtual 3.21 Run is part of a larger #AcceptanceChallenge among GiGi’s Playhouses nationwide – part of a mission to change the way the world views Down syndrome.

“We chose our girls,” Megan adds. “We knew Violet had Down syndrome before we ever brought her home. In fact, we chose her from a list of children less likely to be adopted because they had physical and intellectual disabilities. We just fell in love with her face and knew we had room in our hearts and our home for her.”



Megan and her husband Kyle connected with GiGi’s Playhouse before they even brought Violet home; having honest conversations with other parents about what it takes to raise a child with Down syndrome.

“GiGi’s was such a great place for us to get to know other families and find the support we needed,” Megan says. “And now to see the excitement on Violet’s face when we pull up to the Playhouse and to watch her explore in a safe place where she can be herself; it’s freeing. It’s just a unique and beautiful place.”

Megan says GiGi’s has also been a safe haven for Zola; a place where she can connect with the siblings of other kids with Down syndrome.

Violet is in remarkably good health. Despite intermittent aspiration and a delay in speech; her hearing, eyesight, and heart all seem to be unaffected. Now finishing kindergarten, Violet is fiercely independent and constantly on the move – running,

riding her bike, and climbing anything in her path. She loves to watch movies and of course, play with her big sister.

Megan offers this advice to new parents of children with Down syndrome, "It's okay to be scared and it's okay to grieve. It is all part of the process. But there will be a time when you come to accept that these kids are kids. They're not a diagnosis, and they have the power to bring as much, if not more, joy to your family as your other children."

The Chaffee family plans to host a neighborhood walk to raise money for the virtual 3.21 Run on Saturday, June 5<sup>th</sup> to raise money for the programs they have personally benefited from including LMNOP, GiGiFit Kids, and Kindergarten Prep.

"There's still more work to be done when it comes to acceptance of people with Down syndrome, but I have great hope for my girls," Megan beams. "The more that we can share their capabilities, the more doors we can open for them."