



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

educate. inspire. achieve

# Des Moines

# Newsletter



## 2012 Successes & Accomplishments

What a FANTASTIC year that will shortly be behind us, but looking back we can say, "GiGi's Playhouse Des Moines DID THAT!" We are very THANKFUL that each of you helped us obtain our goals and dreams for the year, without your support we would have difficulty doing so-THANK YOU!

- The Therapeutic Play Center is designed with our kids in mind to provide opportunities for Physical, Occupational, and Speech Therapies through fun & innovative activities!
- The Math Program held its first session this Fall! We had 10 Learners and Tutors that are having fun while learning math concepts!
- The 'i have a voice' Traveling Galleries made their debut on Sept 28 and will continue to travel around the state and area changing perspectives and raising awareness for Down syndrome!
- New Parent Packets were delivered to area hospitals and clinics that will give new families advice and information about Down syndrome.
- The newly redesigned Education/Conference Room has given us extra space to tutor older learners in a more conducive learning environment.



THANK YOU for making GiGi's Playhouse Des Moines the BEST!

## Our Superman

I was introduced to GiGi's Playhouse by chance almost 2 years ago when I heard Megan speak at a chamber lunch. I knew immediately that it was a place that I wanted to be a part of. I was greeted with open arms by all and felt like I was being welcomed into a family. Being able to spend time with the people at GiGi's, especially my new friend Shea, helped to nurture a part of my heart that was hurting from living 2 hours away from my uncle who had Down syndrome and was in failing health. I could take hours of your time in an attempt to explain how my uncle, Jim Hilsabeck, has made a difference in my life and the lives of his family members, friends, and even those who only briefly knew him.



Jim was born November 30, 1947. At age 2 my grandparents, Duane & Anne, were officially informed that Jim had Down syndrome. They were told by the doctors to put him in an institution and move on with their lives. Not only did my grandparents not take the doctor's advice but they took it upon themselves to get out in the community and improve the quality of life for those like Jim. They started a Cub Scout Troop for special needs children, served on countless boards, spoke at public events, and in 1959 helped establish a school for children with learning disabilities. With time, there were more school options, employment options and even housing options for people with special



needs in the Fort Dodge area. Jim was the inspiration for this all.

Growing up I never thought of my Uncle Jim as different. He went to work and earned a paycheck, he went bowling with friends on Saturday, and attended church every Sunday. He loved his family and especially loved being a big brother. My uncle Jim wasn't different, he was awesome! Jim taught me how to play bumper pool and Trouble, he taught me that Nestle Crunch bars taste better from the freezer, he taught me Superman is the best superhero of all, and he taught me the true meaning of genuine kindness, compassion, friendship, and unconditional love. Jim is who I aspire to be like in life! He had an unwavering faith in God and truly believed in the goodness of others. At the age of 63, Jim left to be with God on October 7th, 2011. The world has seemed a little grayer without him this last year but his family will always be thankful that God chose us for him to spend his time on earth with. We miss his huge smile and big laugh every single day. Everything we need to know about life we learned from Jim. He is our hero, our Superman. -Cynthia



## EDUCATION AT ITS BEST

### Math Update

We were very fortunate to begin our Math Program in 2012! The 10 students that completed the first session were complimented by all of the Tutors as being great learners and able to grasp all the materials quickly! The cost per learner for a 16-week session in the Math Program is approximately \$150, THANK YOU to those that have made donations and for grants we have received to help make this program possible! To become a part of the Spring Math Session register at [www.gigisplayhouse.org/desmoines](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org/desmoines) or email [mathDSM@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:mathDSM@gigisplayhouse.org)



## There is a Fundraiser For Everyone

GiGi's Playhouse Des Moines has a Fundraiser that everyone can participate in by either volunteering or attending! Looking to 2013 we have plans being made for the **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual International Gala** on **Sat, February 23<sup>rd</sup>** at the **Marriott Downtown!** The 2013 Gala will be even better; please make plans to attend by registering at: [www.gigisplayhouse.org/desmoines](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org/desmoines)! Our **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Friends of GiGi's Playhouse Golf Outing** will be held on **Sat, May 18** at **Copper Creek Golf Course!** You can register for the Friends of GiGi's Golf Outing at: [www.gigisplayhouse.org/desmoines](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org/desmoines)! The **16<sup>th</sup> Annual Central Iowa Buddy Walk** will be held on **Sat, August 24<sup>th</sup>** at **DMACC's Ankeny Campus.** You can register for the Walk or Sk at: [www.gigisplayhouse.org/desmoines](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org/desmoines)!



Funds raised at all of these events help to keep our doors open and the Playhouse operational, we have an awesome website that keeps you informed of all the latest happenings and events, also we use the funds to improve our programming for social events and to add more educational programs at GiGi's Playhouse Des Moines! Look at our goals from 2012 that we achieved, mainly due to these amazing fundraisers and participants like you! All funds generated go directly to GiGi's Playhouse Des Moines to help raise awareness and programming for our families! To learn more about how to register for an event or to volunteer contact us at: 515-252-PLAY!



## Literacy Update

We had over 35 learners in our Literacy Program this year! What great success each of these students has made from when they started the program to where they finished their session! You can now register your learner for the Spring Literacy Session at: [www.gigisplayhouse.org/desmoines](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org/desmoines) or email [literacyDSM@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:literacyDSM@gigisplayhouse.org)!



## Speaking Engagements Planned for 2013

We are very excited to begin our Speaking Engagements in 2013. Anne has been working very hard gathering input & getting speakers lined up! If you have a Speaker or Topic that you are interested in learning more about that would be beneficial to your family along with others please let us know!

We are excited to announce that Dr. Stacy Carmichael, Psychologist, will be on hand to discuss Behavior Management on January 15 at 6:30pm! Please plan on attending this session, RSVP to [programsDSM@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:programsDSM@gigisplayhouse.org) and ask any questions in advance.



## DECEMBER CALENDAR

Our office hours are Mon-Fri 9am-3pm

To read more articles about upcoming events check out our online Blog & Facebook!

- 1 Ready, Set Action, 11am  
Dance Squad, 1pm  
Teen Tastic, 6pm
- 7 Open Play, 10am  
Friday Friends, 7pm
- 8 New Parents Group, 9am  
Music Class, 10am
- 9 Holiday Party, 2:30pm
- 14 Friday Friends, 7pm
- 15 Open Play w/ Esther, 9:30am  
3-4 Yr Playgroup, 10am  
Story & Craft w/ Ms Jo, 11am
- 21 Friday Friends, 7pm
- 22 Nuestros Angeles, 9am





# Our World Turned Right-Side Up



I did not realize our lives were being lived upside down until shortly after my daughter McKenna arrived in 2004. Seven weeks premature, McKenna was a shock to our collective 'systems' the day she arrived; unexpected would be a HUGE understatement.

For the first couple of months our lives were chaos: a lengthy NNICU (Neo-Natal Intensive Care Unit) stay, a rare blood disorder, countless doctor appointments poking and prodding my little girl, and sleepless nights wondering what the future would hold for her and our family. A world of uncertainty and unknown becoming our new normal - funny how wrong we were.

I am not a man who easily accepts help from others; I would rather tough it out than show any type of weakness to the outside world. This position is very difficult to maintain when you and your family are thrown a life altering curveball. I was extremely uncomfortable at first with the outpouring of support and offers of help from not just close friends and family, but often times from people and families we had only casually (or in some cases never) met. From simple thoughts and prayers, to meals, clothing, research/resources, and most importantly time (taking our son to activities or just having him over to play). Over the course of McKenna's first year, I came to understand and accept this outpouring of help and support for what it truly was – genuine kindness and love for our daughter and our whole family. The tough-guy attitude was cracked by my newborn daughter; the first of her many duties in this world.

While our son has always been kind and thoughtful, the addition of McKenna to our family has only enhanced traits any parent would wish for their child - kindness, understanding, patience, and acceptance. Through his daily interaction with his little sister, our son has grown into a young man who has shown friends and classmates what it means to accept and befriend others who are not like us. His patience and understanding for those with special needs is truly a remarkable thing and will serve him well as he grows older. Our daughter McKenna has already succeeded in helping form our son into a much better person than I was at his age, and she is his biggest fan. Another success



story in our daughter's book!

My wife Michelle is an incredible mother. Her love for our kids cannot be overstated. With that said, Michelle probably has had the toughest time reconciling who our daughter is with what her expectations were prior to birth. I understand where my wife is coming from as McKenna is her only daughter and had such grand plans for the two of them. While it took longer for McKenna to work her magic on Michelle than it did me, I feel my wife now sees our daughter as the gift she really is – a typical little girl who loves dolls and playing house, who wants to learn how to use make-up, enjoys dancing and loves 'girly' things (shopping, clothes, cooking, and high school musical!). All the things any Mom would want for, and do with their daughter. Plus, there are the incredible benefits that go along with McKenna: a smile that could brighten any foul mood, an individual who says exactly what she thinks or feels, and a soul that does not care about the outside world's opinion, as long as she has her family. The end result - another person captured under the spell of my little girl.



The number of people who have been touched by our McKenna grows with each passing year. Family, friends, teachers, or new acquaintances all have more love in their hearts after meeting and knowing our little girl. It never ceases to amaze me the smiles she can generate and the looks of affection she gets from just the simplest of actions. A perfect example just happened on Halloween. Instead of simply going up to our neighbors doors, ringing the bell and asking for candy, McKenna made each stop a social event (average time at each stop approximately 5-10 minutes). They would talk about pets, her costume, swimming, dancing, and school. Any and all topics were open game for my little girl! The best part – after each and every stop, a big smile on the faces of those people she had just been with.

Over the last eight years I have come to believe God sent us McKenna for a very specific reason – to make us better people and open our eyes to the incredible world around us. Her duties to each member of our family are different, but equally important. Her job here on earth is far from finished, but she has a great start in making each and every one of us better people – which in my opinion is one of the greatest gifts anyone can ever give. –Steve, McKenna's Dad

## one million voices' and counting

Have you seen the 'i have a voice' traveling galleries? Have you become a part of our 'one million voices' in action? You can take part now!! Go to: [www.gigismillionvoices.org](http://www.gigismillionvoices.org) and let your voice be heard! The month of December you can see the **Des Moines 'i have a voice' Traveling Galleries in Fort Dodge, Iowa at Trinity Regional Medical Center** thanks to Holy Trinity Parish –Webster County! Are you interested in booking one or both galleries? Contact us at: [onemillionvoicesDSM@gigisplayhouse.org](mailto:onemillionvoicesDSM@gigisplayhouse.org) today! You can check Facebook or the website to find out where the galleries are and when they are available for booking! Without your voice we cannot reach one million voices and new advocates for Down syndrome!



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

nonprofit organization

u.s. postage

**paid**

rockford, il

permit no. 745

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

### Save the Date

Dec 9 -Holiday Party  
Jan 15 -Behavior Seminar w/ Dr Carmichael  
Feb 23, Gala @ Marriott dntn



### Yes, I will share my voice!

Enclosed is my/our gift of...(checks payable to GiGi's Playhouse Des Moines)

- \$1000.00 will sponsor an age specific program for 1 year
- \$ 500.00 will sponsor an age specific program for 6 months
- \$ 250.00 will sponsor an age specific program for 3 months
- \$ 150.00 will sponsor one learner in our Math or Literacy Program
- \$ 50.00 will sponsor a Family Fun Night providing Support & Friendship

GiGi's  
PLAYHOUSE  
Down Syndrome Awareness Centers



Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I/We pledge \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per month. Please send an invoice.

Donation of any amount is appreciated.

Please charge my:  MasterCard  Visa  American Express  Discover

Name on Card: \_\_\_\_\_

Card #: \_\_\_\_\_ Exp. Date: \_\_\_\_\_ CVC Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Send acknowledgement to the following address: \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like to specify which program your donation helps please do so here: \_\_\_\_\_

Please accept my gift in memory/honor of: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail Donation to GiGi's Playhouse at: 10430 New York Ave, Suite A, Urbandale, IA 50322 or  
Online at: [www.gigisplayhouse.org/desmoines](http://www.gigisplayhouse.org/desmoines) or Call 515-252-7529