



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

educate. inspire. achieve

Newsletter



A Message from the National Office...

New Year, New Additions at National Office

As we enter a new year, the National Office of GiGi's Playhouse has so many exciting things that we want you to know about. This year, like every year, the core of our mission always begins when a new family walks in the door of a GiGi's Playhouse looking for support and answers to the many questions they may have. They are always greeted with a big smile and a "congratulations" – a word many have not heard before about their new child born with Down syndrome. Already this year we have had countless new babies visit our playhouse for the first time.

Some new faces you will see at the National Office or hear when you call are Kathy Noviskis, Office Manager and Dan Carpenter, Executive Director. Both Kathy and Dan are very excited to be at GiGi's Playhouse and look forward to getting to know all the wonderful people and volunteers that make GiGi's what it is today.



A face that has been around for a while at the National Office, Jenni Von Tobel, has recently added another member to her family with a baby girl. When she returns to the office, Jenni will be filling the role of Grant Writer.

Our dream of turning the playhouse that is connected to the National Office into a

National Training Center is slowly becoming a reality thanks in large part to the amazing efforts of Perkins and Will, an architecture and design firm helping lead the project. This project will transform the playhouse into a state-of-the-art training center where community member can come to from all over the globe to learn about how to bring the mission of GiGi's to their community.

Lastly, this year, we will be streamlining the operations of all the playhouses, including the National Office, as a result of our conversion to Donor Perfect database software. This conversion will allow each playhouse office to track all volunteers, programs, and financial data in one centralized place. This will allow us to better track and communicate the impact that our mission has on individuals and their communities.

All in all, this promises to be the most amazing year yet at GiGi's Playhouse. To all those people who have played a part in our success – thank you. We are glad you are along for the ride!!

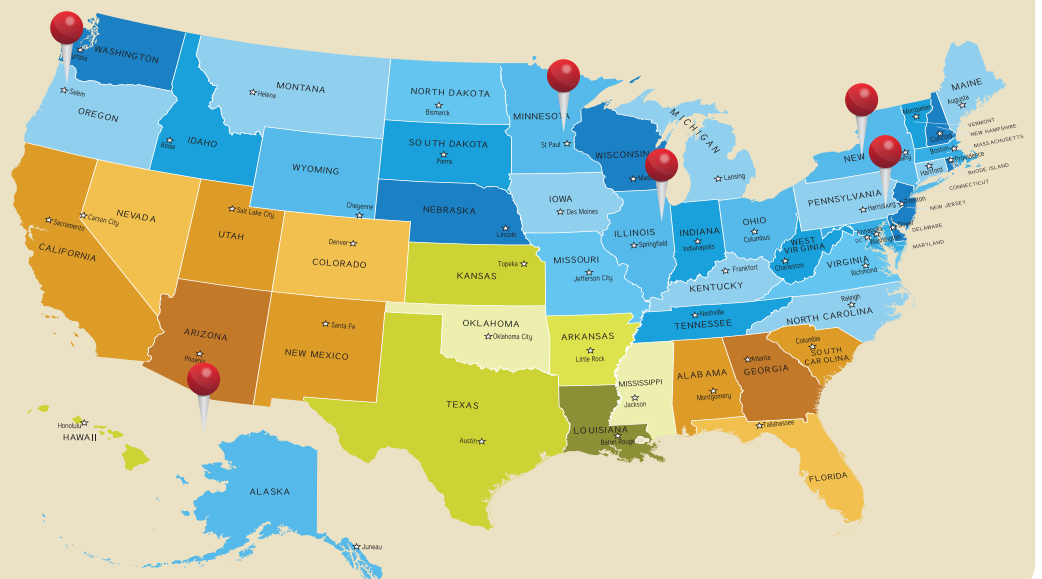
Save the Date! GiGi's 5K Run & Walk

June 10th, Arboretum Shopping Center of South Barrington
100 W. Higgins Road (Corner of Rt. 72 & 59)
South Barrington, IL

Communities Opening New Playhouses

At the National Office, we are constantly getting calls from community members who have heard about GiGi's Playhouse and are interested in learning how to bring a Playhouse to their community. Here are just a few of the communities that are at different stages of planning and organizing in order to try and open a Playhouse.

- Bradley, IL
- Twin Cities, MN
- Syracuse, NY
- Portland, OR
- Mexico
- Stratford, PA



Hoffman Estates
847.885.PLAY (7529)

Fox Valley
630.778.PLAY (7529)

McHenry
815.385.PLAY (7529)

Rockford
815.654.PLAY (7529)

Chicago
773.583.PLAY (7529)

Sioux City
712.226.PLAY (7529)

Des Moines
515.252.PLAY (7529)

Atlanta
866.946.PLAY (7529)

Quad Cities
309.762.PLAY (7529)

Coming soon:
New York, NY
Mexico

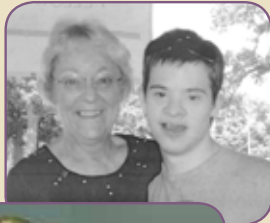
Sioux City



I Have A Voice International Gala ~Sioux City Location

The 2nd Annual International Gala will soon be upon us! Join us on Saturday, February 25, 2012, 6-11pm at the Marina Inn in So. Sioux City, NE. If you would like to make a donation and/or register for this event, go to: www.events.org/ihaveavoicesiouxcity. If you would like to donate towards the silent auction, please email us at siouxcity@gigisplayhouse.org or mail to GiGi's Playhouse, 1551 Indian Hills Dr, Suite 7, Sioux City, IA 51104. We greatly appreciate your love and support for GiGi's Playhouse!

Thanks to all of the wonderful volunteers this past year! We are always looking for volunteers for various programs! Check out the online calendar of events at www.gigisplayhouse.org. If you would like to get involved as a volunteer, email us at: siouxcity@gigisplayhouse.org (subject: VOLUNTEER). Thank you for your continued support!



New York

Don't Be Surprised If I Can Build a Playhouse!

We have a little sign on our kitchen door: "Grandma's House. Children Spoiled While You Wait." I love being a grandparent. When our grandchildren visit us in Connecticut, they enjoy a freedom that doesn't exist in their "Brooklyn" world. I don't think we spoil them. We're not caught up in the frenzy of being a parent; we can listen in a more easy-going way.

That's our grandson, Louis, in my arms. We're listening to his needs in a very special way. We are helping to bring GiGi's Playhouse to New York City. So what can two semi-retired grandparents do? We are putting our passion and talents to work for GiGi's Playhouse. I'm a designer and builder, Marilee is an artist with an education background. To date we've attended a Gigi's workshop and designed a playhouse concept. We are co-chairs of the site committee. I am also writing a series of motivational essays. Marilee created 175 hand-made Christmas cards, each containing an awareness message and an appeal for our new venue (naturally, Louis' picture appears). We hope to build up our database and generate between \$1,000-\$5,000 in donations. Imagine if we each did this!

We feel overjoyed to be making a positive contribution that will help families and children with Down syndrome. I have a question for all at GiGi's: Have you made the Grandparent Connection?

From the Grandparent Connection
Richard Reilly, GiGi's Playhouse, New York City.



Fox Valley

Fast friends together at the Fox Valley Playhouse Canine Connections

Jacob is 6 year old and loves dogs of all shapes and sizes. Since the family has never had their own pet before, they thought they'd attend the Canine Connections Dog Therapy group to give Jacob an outlet and introduction to the Canine world. His mother says, "Jacob loves his new furry friends. He has learned to brush them, walk them and to give simple commands, but most of all, he loves to just curl up and read to them!"

Hosted by Gigi's Playhouse Fox Valley in conjunction with the Fox Valley Therapy Dog Club, children are provided with a safe, nurturing environment to interact with trained therapy dogs who provide social stimulation and satisfy sensory needs for touch. Jan, a leader and trainer, shares "Dogs are great listeners. Children can learn about bite prevention and responsible dog care, but also they can just come and have a friend who will listen to them as they practice speech and reading skills."

Canine Connections meets on the 3rd Saturday of each month at 12:30 PM and is open to all ages. For more information, contact the Fox Valley Playhouse at 630-778-PLAY or foxvalley@gigisplayhouse.org



Hoffman Estates

Lots Happening at Hoffman!

The families and friends of the Playhouse in Hoffman Estates rang in the New Year with a wonderful party complete with sparkling grape juice and a balloon drop.

What a great way to kick off 2012! The Playhouse was packed wall to wall with people and with it being the holidays we had a few relatives in from out of town that had a chance to see a Playhouse for the first time.

The Park Ridge Community Woman will be hosting a Mardi Gras party to benefit the Hoffman Estates Playhouse. Information is provide at their website accessible by visiting the following website; <http://portal.prcw.org/portal/>. Many thanks to these ladies for all their support of our playhouse.

We have launched a campaign on Facebook to rename our Kids Club program. The program will be shifting its focus to incorporate activities that are not only social but therapeutic in nature. Kids will be learning and developing important skills while having a great time.

Most recently, we hosted a Volunteer Appreciation Party as a way of saying thank you to all the amazing volunteers who keep the playhouse running. Nancy Gianni was on hand to personally thank each volunteer and tell all the different ways their time has helped have such a positive impact on so many people. Thank you!!



Atlanta

Grace: Photographed and Photographer!

By Valerie Carter (Grace's mother)

Grace has been on top of the world lately. With the nickname "the Queen" it seems right where she should be. Grace met the famous fashion photographer-turned-philanthropist Rick Guidotti in Dahlonega, Georgia in March of 2011. He was visiting North Georgia College and State University promoting his organization "Positive Exposure" when he met and fell in love with Grace. Later after two hundred pictures, he asked if he could include Grace's photo in his new exhibit "Redefining Beauty." Positive Exposure aims to 'challenge the stigma associated with difference by celebrating the beauty of human diversity.' The new exhibit opened in Brisbane, Australia, went to Phoenix, Arizona and then on to the Cincinnati Museum where Grace and her family visited. (see photos). The exhibit has since gone on to Toronto and Denver, Colorado. It is scheduled to be in NYC for fashion week spring 2012.

Grace has not just been in front of the camera, she is also behind it as well. Grace loves to take pictures of her toys, her pets, her family, her room and most especially herself. With the IPAD 2, she took a series of photos of her own face, hands and feet. While on the device, she went into photo booth and manipulated the photos by experimenting with color and black and white. With Mom's help, the photos were put into a photomontage and entered in the National PTA's Reflection Contest. The theme for

2011 was Diversity Means... and Grace's entry was entitled "Diversity Means Me." (see photo) The entry won in the photography category for her school, Creek View Elementary in Alpharetta, Georgia. In the special artist category, it went on to win at the council level and then advanced to the state level, where it remains being judged. Grace continues to enjoy photography and looks forward to a future that will undoubtedly involve cameras.



For information on programs and updates from Des Moines and McHenry Playhouses, please see their webpage at www.GiGisPlayhouse.org

Rockford

Rockford Literacy Takes a Step Forward...

Thank you to the Loves Park Police, Riverside Community Church Super Solos and Try Beta Foundation for answering the call to the need for 3 IPAD2's for our Playhouse. We are grateful and very excited to be offering our Literacy Tutors, Students and GiGi's Families the use of the IPAD2's to enhance their tutoring, comprehension and learning at our Playhouse

The IPAD2 communication applications offer:

- Pictures that the student can push to show what they want or need. It will make tutoring our students easier especially when they are non-verbal and do not know their alphabet.
- A typing pad that allows you to type in a message and it will verbally present it to a listener. For our students who are non-verbal (11 out of 23 to date) would be allowed a freedom that they do not experience at this point.

The IPAD educational applications offer:

- Reading programs that include music and stand-alone music programs. Learning rhythm is an essential step in learning how to read. Individuals with Down Syndrome truly respond to music which is a successful adjunct to their learning. The IPad has many programs that allow the user to play the instrument on the tablet.

The IPAD interactive book applications offer:

- Highlighting of words and pictures across the page, reinforcing the left to right progression of reading and helping maintain interest. It also allows you to turn the page, another reading skill reinforced. Learning to stay on task is often a challenge for some of our students.

And last, but not least, we have teen agers and young adults in our Literacy program and finding materials and techniques that

are age appropriate is not always an easy task. It is not uncommon to have a 14 year old boy reading at second grade level. Finding books that are not "babyish" takes a lot of looking and luck. The IPAD helps with this issue as well – frustration gone, self-esteem intact.



Miku Hotani uses an IPAD during her tutoring session.

Chicago

Have you joined our Facebook group yet? Started as a way to notify families about what events are going on at the Playhouse, our 80-member group is evolving into a community chock full of advice, resources and information. As we move further into 2012, we're looking to develop this group into a full-fledged online community (think of it as a Playhouse in the Cloud) where we can help spread our message of positive awareness and potential of people with Down syndrome. (We're also planning on moving our message into more schools – particularly those immediately surrounding our physical Playhouse – and the community through more event participation and media awareness.) If you haven't yet joined, the easiest way to find us is to search for GiGi's Playhouse Chicago among Facebook groups. It's a great place to be.



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

nonprofit organization

u.s. postage

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schaumburg, il

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Traveling Gallery on the Move!
February – Chicago, IL
March – Wyoming

Email ihavevoiceproject@gigisplayhouse.org to schedule it in your city!

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

i have a voice 2012

Our international i have a voice Gala is kicking into high gear and we hope you can be a part of it! All of the Playhouses are working hard to make this our biggest and best event ever! Please call your local Playhouse or email gala@gigisplayhouse.org for event specific details and to see how you can help!!

The beauty of this event is that we are collectively celebrating the voices of all individuals with Down syndrome at venues across the country and even in Mexico! Together, we are sending an international message of acceptance and love, and showing the world what happens when you educate, inspire, achieve and BELIEVE!

Our new 2012 i have a voice video will debut at each Gala! This video will give you a glimpse into EVERY Playhouse and allow you to hear their individual Playhouse message. Talk about a creative group; this promises to be another award winning video!

The excitement that this event is building nationwide is incredible! Our goal is to share this excitement with as many people as possible – that's where you can help! Please reach out to your friends, family, neighbors and colleagues. Invite them to spend an amazing night celebrating some

pretty amazing people! We promise to make you proud that you did! The more people we can show the incredible potential our kids have, the better their future will be!

Register at www.gigisplayhouse.org.



Thank you to our sponsors for the 2012 i have a voice International Gala

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