

smiles



GiGi's Playhouse: A Home, a Haven and a Hangout

Welcome to *Smiles*, a newsletter from GiGi's Playhouse Rockford designed to bring you the latest news about what's going on and what's coming up!

Thanks to you, our community, we are making our dream a reality. We are creating a home, a haven and a hangout for those in our area with Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities, and their families and friends. New people show up weekly on our doorstep to check out this place called GiGi's.

Our doorstep has seen many emotions—tears of joy as people say, "I never thought our community would have anything like this," and happy faces of those dancing to *Just Dance 2* on our Wii system. Sometimes the mood at the Playhouse is quiet, as people enjoy the serenity of a place they call their own. Or it could be bubbling over with the laughter of those trying on costumes in our dress-up area. People are learning and enjoying as they make this place their own.

We can already tell so many stories of the babies, toddlers, teens and adults whose lives the Playhouse has touched.

A Home

Toddlers and elementary-age kids love to navigate the obstacle courses and all the

other play-based activities our volunteer therapists have created. These kids love taking over the Playhouse.

A Haven

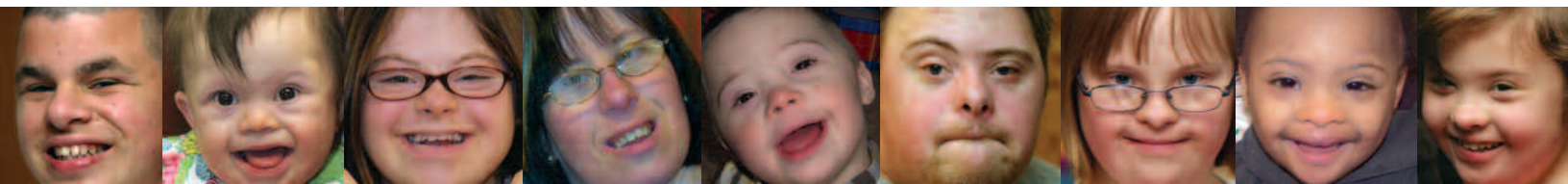
Babies who came as we opened our doors are starting to crawl and are growing right in front of our eyes. Parents are forming supportive friendships, always ready to welcome someone new who may need to share their story or benefit from the experiences of others.

A Hangout

Our hearts have been touched as teens and adults have begun building friendships—in some cases, for the first time. This age group is very confident, understanding that GiGi's Playhouse Rockford is their place to belong and hang out.

We are proud to offer Rockford and surrounding areas an organization that truly touches the lives of people of all ages. One thing is certain: we could not have brought GiGi's Playhouse Rockford to our Northern Illinois area without the support of our communities.

Thank you!





Taylor Watkins



In the Spotlight

Meet Taylor Watkins. She recently turned 12 years old and is a member of our Kids Club program at GiGi's Playhouse Rockford.

Taylor is a girl who definitely has a mind of her own. She is very social, independent and loves to play. With her easygoing nature, she finds it easy to make friends.

Taylor lives with her mom Michelle; dad Chris; two brothers—Logan, 9, and Joshua, 3; and their dog Marley. She loves babies and helps with her mom's daycare business. Some of Taylor's favorite activities are swimming, playing Four Square, Buddy Baseball and hockey.

A typical girl, she loves dresses and the color pink. But most of all, Taylor loves to be where the action is.

Thanks to Harris Bank's support of our Literacy Program, Taylor receives weekly literacy tutoring this summer at GiGi's Playhouse. We are always happy to see her when she comes through our doors!



At GiGi's Playhouse, it's Basic!

GiGi's Playhouse Rockford is the "lucky seventh" Playhouse to open. Using the basic model, our Playhouse is uniquely designed to meet our area's needs and currently offers the following programs. Check out the calendar on our website for times.

Parent Orientation – Any parent new to the Playhouse can be matched with another family raising a child with Down syndrome.

Open Play – At scheduled times, the Playhouse is open for all ages to enjoy organized activities or open play—dress-up, toys, computers, reading, puzzles, board games and more.

Two and Under – This networking group is designed for parents with children under the age of two. Parents sit together with their little ones on our rug and informally share their challenges and celebrations.

Crawlers, Walkers and Hop-Skip-and-Jumpers – Children six months to five years old participate with their parents in play-based activities designed by volunteer licensed therapists, using equipment funded by local grants.

Playhouse Pals and Kids Club – Children six to 12 years old participate with their parents in play-based activities designed by volunteer licensed therapists to emphasize interaction, focusing on social skills and large motor activities.

Teen Tastics – Teens age 13 to 19 enjoy special programs focused on appropriate socialization and friendship building. This group loves to be on the go and is planning summertime outings. We anticipate offering life skills programs in the future.

Friday Friends – Anyone age 18 to 99 is invited to participate in this "hangout" group. Many of our older Friday Friends have been limited in their social opportunities, so GiGi's has given them a place to really feel at home. Many even bring slippers to settle in for a comfortable evening at GiGi's!

Education – Our literacy program is one of two beneficial programs and is available to anyone age two-and-a-half and older. Depending on age and reading level, the program begins with a Playhouse-made book about the student, including pictures and names of family members. Attendance has already doubled during our second session. The other beneficial program we plan to bring to GiGi's Playhouse Rockford next year is a math program piloted by one of our sister Playhouses.





GiGi's Lemonade Stands

Remember those hot summer days when it was as simple as setting up a table, stirring up the lemonade and selling cups to thirsty passersby?

It was that simple when Grace Berlage, age 10, was inspired by the book, *The Lemonade War*, to jump-start fundraising last year for GiGi's Playhouse Rockford in honor of her sister Julia, age 14, who has Down syndrome.

It was a hit, and we're doing it again. Only this time, we're going bigger! We are holding our second annual GiGi's Playhouse Rockford lemonade-stand fundraiser all over town July 29 and 30, and we need your help!

Call the Playhouse at 815-654-7529 to find out how to set up a lemonade stand for GiGi's on one of these days, and we will help! Or stop by one of our lemonade stands to buy a glass and/or donate to GiGi's! It takes a great community like ours to raise a Playhouse!



Grace (top) and her lemonade stand.

Julia (bottom) relaxing at GiGi's Playhouse.

Coming up at your GiGi's Playhouse Rockford

- **Open Play**
Every Wednesday, 10 a.m.
- **Teen Tastics**
Summer tour!
June 27: Magic Waters
July 15: Friday Night Flix–Davis Park
Aug. 21: Riverhawks Baseball Game
Sept. 24: Cookout, hayride, bonfire–Lockwood Park
- **Friday Friends**
Third Friday each month
- **Program Day**
Third Saturday each month (ages 0-12)
- **Dance with Morgan**
June 28 (all ages)
- **Sign Language**
July 9 (parents only)
- **Moms' Craft Night**
July 25
- **Green Day**
July 9 – Metals and Electronics Drive
Recycling: portion benefits GiGi's
- **ProAm**
July 11: portion benefits GiGi's
- **Lemonade Days**
July 29, 30: all proceeds benefit GiGi's
- **Sign Language**
August 6 (parents only)
- **Moms' Night**
August 24
- **Golf Play Day**
September 12 – See back page!

For up-to-date programs and times, please see our website or call the Playhouse.

How to Help

At GiGi's Playhouse Rockford, we dream of a day without worries about daily operational expenses, when the only concern is to open the doors and greet our friends of all ages who play, learn and hang out at GiGi's.

However, one paid staff member currently operates the Playhouse on a day-to-day basis along with dozens of dedicated, loving volunteers. From our board of directors to office assistants and program helpers, volunteers do everything necessary to provide valuable activities for the children, teens and adults we serve.

So we encourage you to consider:

- Making an unrestricted donation to GiGi's Playhouse Rockford to be used for the area of greatest need.
- Paying our rent or utilities
- Purchasing something from our current wish list: cleaning supplies; lemonade mix; gift cards from Walmart, Target, OfficeMax or Office Depot. Call for more items!

We would love to visit with you about ways you can help. Or, for your convenience, please use the enclosed donation envelope.

To donate by credit card/Pay Pal, please go to gigisplayhouse.org/location-rockford.asp. Under 'Donate now to the Rockford location,' choose the button "Donate."

We appreciate your donation, which directly benefits those in the greater Rockford community whose faces you see in our newsletter.





GiGi's Playhouse Rockford

8801 N. Second St., Suite 2,
Machesney Park, IL 61115

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educate. inspire. achieve.

Playhouse open
Monday-Friday, 9 am - 4 pm
(Call for program times)

815-654-PLAY (7529)

Email: Rockford@gigisplayhouse.org

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Be sure to Like GiGi's Playhouse
Rockford on Facebook!

Curious about GiGi's Playhouse?

Take a look inside to see what's happening!

Save the Date!

GiGi's Playhouse Rockford's First Annual Golf Play Day

September 12, 2011
Rockford Country Club

Please call GiGi's Playhouse at
815-654-7529 for information about
sponsorship opportunities.

Your support helps to offset the
operational expenses of
GiGi's Playhouse Rockford.

Save the date and get your
foursome ready now!

