

Down Syndrome Awareness Centers
www.gigisplayhouse.org

GIGI'S NEWS

Serving two locations

Loving a child with Down syndrome is contagious... Help us spread the love!!

Hoffman Estates
 1069 W Golf Rd • Hoffman Estates, IL 60169
 847-885-PLAY • www.gigisplayhouse.com

Plainfield
 10052 S. Bode Rd, Unit D • Plainfield, IL 60585
 630-778-PLAY • www.gigisplayhousetoo.com

February 2007

Making a difference

We recently had the pleasure of opening a very inspiring piece of mail containing a letter and a donation. The letter explained that a group of high school athletes were so moved by their coach's positive experience with GiGi's Playhouse that they came together and accumulated a sizable donation. Of course the donation is wonderful and will help a great deal, but it is their words that have rejuvenated us and made us realize the potential that GiGi's Playhouse has to affect so many lives. We would like to thank them for their generosity and their efforts to raise awareness. Printed below is their letter in its entirety.



Enclosed is a donation totaling \$1,082 from the Neuqua Valley Cross Country team. This was a joint effort meant as a gift to our coach, Jim Dickerson, in whose name we would like the donation to be made.

Though none of the donations came from families directly affected by GiGi's, we have all seen the effect your organization has had on the Dickerson family and our beloved coach in particular. Our coach shows none of the anxiety usually associated with having a child with Down syndrome and all of the joy and affection of parenthood. We recognize that this is, in no small part, due to the helping hand he receives at GiGi's Playhouse and we would like to thank you for that. Moreover, without the help of GiGi's, it would be an incredible strain on the Dickerson family to have Coach Dickerson working with us and we also thank you for giving him that time. Coach Dickerson has been a father figure and a source of joy for all lucky enough to come in contact with him and we feel it is only a proper repayment to do all we can for any organization that assists this integral member of our Cross Country family. Thank you for all you do for our local families and please continue to allow men and women like Coach Dickerson to enrich the lives of others.

Coach Dickerson, you should be so proud that your family has evoked such compassion from young people, and that your life's work is so appreciated. We are very thankful that your experience with GiGi's has been so profound that people who have had no direct contact with our center are inspired enough to act. We're pleased to see that GiGi's Playhouse has had a full-circle effect in your family's life.

OUR MISSION: to increase awareness of Down syndrome by providing programming, support, and education.

It takes a village

...(or a Playhouse!)

We always feel lucky when we can notice the progress being made by our friends. So, we felt especially blessed to actually witness the advancements being made by 18-month-old Ryan Lach. When Ryan first started coming to the Playhouse, he would cover his ears and stay buried in his dad's arms. Amazingly, after just a few visits, Ryan has blossomed into one of the friendliest kids around! He even crawled to me and gave my hand a kiss (of sorts)! The Open Play group is excited to have such a gentleman in our company! Ryan's grandparents tell me that on Thanksgiving, he even worked his way into the middle of a group of kids he had never seen before and was the



center of attention!! They knew he wouldn't have done that before. Ryan got his confidence from the Playhouse and his family learned how to help him work through his fears by networking with other parents at GiGi's Playhouse. We're so proud of you, Ryan!!



This story reminds me of a Dad who brought his three children to see Santa at the tree trimming party. His one-year-old daughter has DS and he has 2 young boys. They had such a great time and when they were leaving I told him he was really brave to venture out with all three kids to such an event. His response was "I wasn't alone, it's like that saying...It takes a Village" the Playhouse families were the Village!



HOFFMAN ESTATES LOCATION

Open Play every Thursday 12:30-2:00

Pizza lunch, volunteers, new friendships and fun for both the kids and the parents!! Check out this trio!! They met at open play almost a year ago! And look at them at open play NOW!!!



Friday Friends (ages 18 and up) had their Holiday party at Hoffman Estates Bowling Alley, and, as you can see, we all had a great time! Check out our new Friday Friends Fleece Jackets.

Thanks M&M sports!!!!
We love them!!!

Hop, Skip and Jumpers

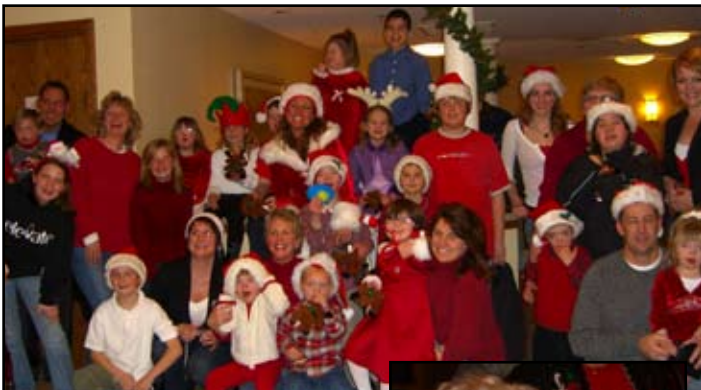
had a great time in December!! We made ornaments, sang songs, and played freeze dance!! HSJ is every 2nd Saturday from noon to 1:30 p.m. for children ages 3-5. Hop Skip and Jumpers helps to facilitate interaction with other children through creative play. It encourages the kids to take turns and use their listening skills as they make crafts, participate in games, sing songs and use good manners at snack time.



Leaps and Bounds. Talk about improvement!! We thought the kids did some great dancing the first time, but you should see them now!! We even have an official balance beam to practice on now! (Instead of our taped line on the floor!) Leaps and Bounds' focus is on fun while learning the fundamentals of dance.



They recently performed for Friendship Village Senior Center, and they will be performing at the 2007 "Spread the Love" Gala and numerous other functions this year! Come join us the third Saturday of the month at 10 a.m.!! Boys and girls welcome! Please RSVP 847-885-7529



Once again the Seniors at Friendship Village loved our Holiday songs!! We sang loud and proud!!



New T-shirts and other items will be arriving soon at our Hoffman Estates location. Go to our Web Store to preview the new items coming in March. Fleece, Windshirts, Golf Shirts, Hoodies, and sweatshirts!!



The 2-and-under group is rockin'! Come join us the 2nd Saturday of the month at 10 a.m.!! We got some of them to slow down (or wake up!) long enough to pose for a picture!

EVERYONE WELCOME!!

The Special Intention support group meets the first Wednesday of the month from 7-9 at GiGi's Playhouse. This group is run by a group of parents who have children with special needs. Babysitting is not provided, but kids are welcome. Any questions call 847-776-0821 or email premiemom99@yahoo.com

HOFFMAN ESTATES LOCATION

February 2007



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 Open Play 12:30 - 2:00 Everyone welcome!	2 Reserved 2-4	3 Literacy Program 8:00 - 10:00
4	5 Literacy Program 10:30 - 5:30 	6 Literacy Program 9:00 - 12:00 3:30 - 6:30 	7 Literacy Program 10:00 - 2:00 	8 Open Play 12:30 - 2:00 Everyone welcome!	9 Reserved 2-4 Open Mike Night 7-9pm High School Ages	10 Literacy Program 8:00 - 10:00 2 & Under Group 10:00 - 11:30 HOP, SKIP & JUMPERS 12:00 - 1:30 Spread the Love Gala
11 Hispanic Play Group 11am-1pm	12 Literacy Program 10:30 - 5:30 	13 Literacy Program 9:00 - 12:00 3:30 - 6:30 	14 Literacy Program 10:00 - 2:00 	15 Open Play 12:30 - 2:00 Everyone welcome!	16 Reserved 2-4	17 Literacy Program 8:00 - 10:00 Walkers Group 9am-9:45am RSVP required Leaps & Bounds 10:00 - 11:00
18	19 Literacy Program 10:30 - 5:30 	20 Literacy Program 9:00 - 12:00 3:30 - 6:30 	21 Literacy Program 10:00 - 2:00 	22 Open Play 12:30 - 2:00 Everyone welcome!	23 Reserved 2-4 Friday Friends 7pm 18 and up	24 Literacy Program 8:00 - 10:00 UPS for Downs Playgroup 11am-1pm
25 Polish Play Group 11am-1pm	26	27 Literacy Program 9:00 - 12:00 3:30 - 6:30	28 Literacy Program 10:00 - 2:00			

Open Play-Every Thursday! Everyone is welcome! Stop by for pizza, pop and fun! We have volunteers to assist with the kids so the parents can hang out! It is awesome!!!!

The literacy program- GiGi's Playhouse provides FREE private tutoring to children with Down syndrome. Customized materials are provided for each individual student. The program also assists teachers and parents on how to tutor their children.

"Future" Friday Friends- Ages 6-8 only. Kids create lasting friendships through facilitated interactive play, while promoting good social skills. Each session ends with a pizza dinner in which social skills and table manners will be encouraged.

Friday Friends- Ages 18 and up only. Party with the gang! Equal numbers of peers with Down syndrome as without. Karaoke, dances, laser tag, bowling, prom, movie nights, friends and fun!

2 and under group- Families with kids 2 and under get together to play, and have fun while the parents network with each other!

Hop, Skip and Jumpers- For 3-5 year olds, this program will help promote friendships, good social

skills and interactive play through fun creative activities!

Hispanic Group- Spanish speaking families gather for food, fun, friendship and education.

Polish Play Group- Polish speaking families gather for an afternoon of fun and friendship.

Reserved- Playhouse may be reserved for private play groups, parties or support groups

GiGi's Crawlers: This group focus' on crawling skills as well as fine motor skills, social interaction with peers in a semi-structured environment. Children need to be crawling and are accompanied by a parent/adult.

GiGi's Walkers: This group's focus is on post walking skills with peers to prepare children for school activities (balance beam, kicking, throwing, jumping, etc.) Children need to be walking and must be accompanied by a parent/adult.

The Playhouse can be reserved for any Down syndrome related event.

When it is available it may also be used by other groups with special needs.

Everyone is welcome at GiGi's Playhouse!

Due to the need for scheduling volunteers and acquiring supplies, reservations are greatly appreciated. (847) 885-PLAY, or you can e-mail nancy@gigisplayhouse.org. Feel free to leave a message!

Check the website for constant updates and to see pictures of the activities www.gigisplayhouse.org!

GiGi's Playhouse is located 3 miles West of Woodfield Shopping Mall next to Schaumburg Toyota in the Brandess Center at
1069 W. Golf Road
Hoffman Estates IL, 60169
847-885-PLAY!

PLAINFIELD LOCATION

Thank You Thank You Thank You

Thank You to Ms. Carol Davidson and the Student Council from Central H.S. in Clifton, IL for raising money for GiGi's Too at their Pack-the-track walk-a-thon.

Thank You to the Hydrite Chemical Co. (Brookfield, WI) is Brian Strong's employer (Father of Nathan Strong one of our calendar kids) they matched the amount of calendars employees purchased and made a \$250 donation to the Playhouse. We are proud of Hydrite for helping out.



Thank You to Rose & Steve Bagby (Teagan Schuh's grandparents) for all the Pottery Barn play furniture and Accessories they donated to the TOO!



OPEN BIRTHDAY PARTY!

Saturday, February 17, 10-12

Is your birthday in the winter?? Come celebrate with us! Cake, goody bags, presents, bring the whole family! Friends too!! Please RSVP so we have enough for everyone!

THANK YOU to the Siannas family for getting the reading program a large donation. Wendy is a tutor in Plainfield and her husband Steve works for Morgan Stanley. We appreciate your dedication.



We are so excited!!

We are getting new equipment

for our classes! Including a new balance beam for our walkers group. This group works on post walking skills, peer activities, and prepares children for school activities (while having fun!).



Don't forget

The first Saturday of the month is the 2 & Under group and the 3-4 playgroup.



Signing Time

Join us February 16 to sign along to fun songs. Open to all ages.

Hispanic Group

Calling all Spanish speaking families. Come join us on the fourth Sunday of the month for food, fun, and friendship.

Scrip Is Coming To Plainfield in March 2007

You might ask, what is scrip? Scrip is purchasing negotiable gift certificates that can be used just like cash. Scrip is issued by national and local retailers where many of you already shop. GiGi's Plainfield is able to purchase the gift certificates at a discount off the face value and then sell them at full face value. The difference goes directly to GiGi's in Plainfield. Because Gigi's will pay for the gift certificates up-front, retailers are glad to discount anywhere from 2%-15%. Scrip can be used to purchase anything from groceries, fuel, clothing, toys, and cosmetics to entertainment, electronics, home improvement, or household services. By converting your buying dollars to scrip and shopping like you always do, you can help GiGi's maintain the building, run and fund the programs, and continue to grow! Detail coming to you in the mail in early March.

Board Positions

We are growing and are in need of new boards and committees members for 2007. If you are interested please call the Playhouse ASAP and get involved! No job is too small and the rewards are HUGE!

PLAINFIELD LOCATION

February 2007



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p>All Events are Free unless noted. *RSVP to 630-778-PLAY Bring a friend who doesn't have Down syndrome</p>				1	2 Private Play Group 12-2 pm Teen-Tastic 7-9 pm	3 2 & Under 9:30-11:00 am 3-4 Playgroup 11:00 am-12:30 pm
4	5 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i>	6 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i>	7	8 Come Sign with Us 6-7 pm	9 Private Play Group 12-2 pm	10 Daddy & Me 3-4:30pm Pre-walkers 9-10 am Walkers 10-11am Spread the Love Gala
11	12 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i>	13 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i>	14	15	16 Private Play Group 12-2 pm Signing Time 4:30-5:30 pm	17 Birthday Party 10am-12pm Please RSVP <i>Private Party 4-9p</i>
18 <i>Private Party 5-9pm</i>	19 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i>	20 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i>	21	22 Come Sign with Us 6-7 pm	23 Private Play Group 12-2 pm	24 Pre-crawlers 9-10 am Crawlers 10-11 am <i>RSVP to 630-423-4035</i>
25 Hispanic Group 11 am-1 pm	26 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i>	27 Literacy Program 3-6 pm <i>By appointment</i>	28 **Literacy Program is a FREE Literacy Program for all ages (by appointment only, please call Melisa at 630-904-6960 or email cleary@wowway.com) <i>We are looking for tutors and students.</i>			

2 & under playgroup: Families with children 2 and under get together and play while the parents network with each other. Siblings always welcome.

3-4 year old playgroup: Families with children ages 3-4 get together and play while the parents network with each other. Siblings always welcome.

GiGi's Crawlers: This group focus' on crawling skills as well as fine motor skills, social interaction with peers in a semi-structured environment. Children need to be crawling and are accompanied by a parent/adult.

GiGi's Walkers: This group's focus is on post walking skills with peers to prepare children for school activities (balance beam, kicking, throwing, jumping, etc.) Children need to be walking and must be accompanied by a parent/adult.

Teen Tastic: This group usually meets the 4th Fri. of the month from 7-9pm. We order pizza for dinner and have lots of fun watching movies and playing games with each other. 6th-12th grades.

Hispanic Group: Spanish speaking families gather for food, fun, friendship and education.

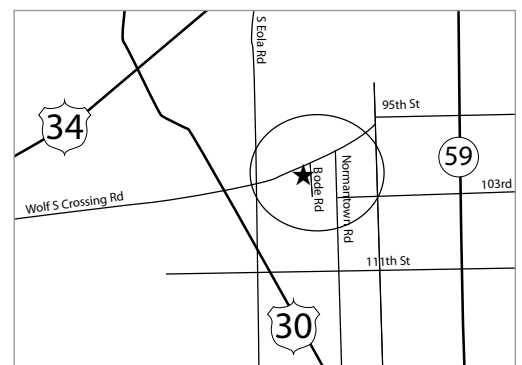
Intro to Sign Language: Come with your child to learn Sign Language. All ages are welcome.

Signing Time Group: Learn sign language by signing along to the songs from the TV series. All ages are welcome.

Daddy and Me: Dads get out with the kids and get together with other dads. All ages.

Birthday Party: All ages

10052 S. Bode Rd, Unit D
 Plainfield, IL 60585
 630-778-PLAY (7529) • fax (630) 778-7519
www.gigisplayhousetoo.com



What an Incredible Gift Giving Season!!

A special thank you from GiGi:

I am lucky to be surrounded by friends and family who love me and all my friends with Down syndrome so much!! My Mom and Dad get so overwhelmed by their generosity. They accept me for who I am, and they help us spread the word about all of the potential that my friends and I have!! Without the support of all of our friends and family I do not know if my Mom and Dad could continue to work so hard. But with me as their inspiration, how could they not??



GiGi saying thank you to (from left) Mike and John Dimucci from JM Realty in Palatine Illinois for their very generous donation!

Thank you to my awesome neighbors, the DiMucci Family, the Cirrincione family and the Teik Family for spreading awareness and acceptance of Down syndrome and for their VERY generous donations.

XOXOXO
GiGi

A heartfelt thank you goes out to John and Mike DiMucci and the entire DiMucci family. Giving to help others is a choice people make. The DiMucci family not only makes that choice financially but emotionally as well. They participate in our awareness events and lead others in not seeing a difference in our children. Thank you John for your \$10,000 donation and Mike for your \$5,000 donation. We promise to make you proud.



Once again the Cirrincione Family had their annual fundraiser to raise awareness and funds for GiGi's Playhouse. This year they started a scholarship in honor of their friend Colleen Mullen who passed away. The event raised over \$5,000!! The funds will go towards continuing education for our adults with Down syndrome.



Christina Teik turned 5 this year and in lieu of gifts she asked her friends and family to donate to either St. Judes or GiGi's Playhouse!! It was a truly amazing party. Just ask Santa and his reindeer...they were there too!!

Thanks to all of these amazing donations we are able to buy the equipment we need for our programs!! Check out our new balance beam for our walkers program! A licensed physical therapist facilitates this structured gross motor group, focusing on post-walking skills, peer activities, music and of course a whole bunch of fun! The Plainfield location is expanding this program to include pre-walkers and pre-crawlers! The equipment will be used in some of our other classes as well! Thank you!!!!



Now check out the real thing baby!!



Check out our old balance beam (taped line on the floor!)

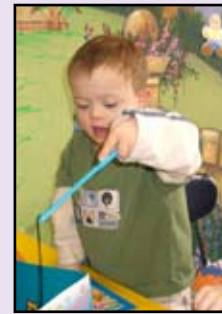
GiGi's Playhouse FREE "Learn to Read" Literacy Program

We are currently working with over 120 kids and the list is growing! If you are interested in volunteering for this amazing program please call the Playhouse. We need teachers, assistants, bookmakers, and organizers.

With the incredible success and growth of this program, we have seen the need to re-structure. This will not affect your tutoring or your child's program but it will help the future of the program! Suggestions are welcome and encouraged!!!

Recently, we started using a magnetic fishing game with some of our literacy students. The kids really enjoy fishing for various letters. Some kids have really taken to fishing for their own sight words. We simply attach a paper clip

to their words and play with the magnetic poles.



We're happy to coordinate our reading strategies with your child's school program. Kindergarten

students have been bringing in their "word wall" words, and we create lotto boards for them to practice. Once a group of words is fairly well mastered, we can create a book for them to practice those sight words in a meaningful context.



Future Readers

DUAL DIAGNOSIS??

Anyone out there dealing with a diagnosis of both Down syndrome and Autism? If so, please email Beth at dbschafer@yahoo.com. She is looking to network with other parents and possibly get a group together to help parents dealing with a dual diagnosis.

Thank you, Zurich America for the \$10,000 donation and for spreading Down syndrome awareness throughout your company!! A huge thank you to the Smith family for making it all happen!! Here is their story from 21-year-old Nicole Smith about her sister 23-year-old, Concetta, and her 6-month-old niece, Samantha.

A new link in the chain *By Nicole Smith*

Like many little girls, my sister and I played with Barbies. Every time it was the same, our Barbie would meet their Ken, fall in love, get married, have lots of babies and live happily ever after. When my sister was married in 2004, all I could think of was how everything we had wanted to happen when we were little was now coming true. Even more exciting I remember the day my sister called to tell me she was pregnant. I was sitting in my dorm room at college when my cell phone rang and the voice on the other end said, "Hello, Auntie Nicole!" I was so ecstatic. The nine months passed and brought with them growing anticipation. Bright and early on May 7th my family was woken up

by a phone call. I was still half asleep when my father walked in, phone in hand, and said, "Congratulate your sister, she's in labor." Seventeen hours later, little Samantha was born, but she was having problems breathing, so they took her to the NICU.

After a short time, we were allowed to go see my sister. She looked white as a ghost, and I could see the fear in her eyes. We waited... and waited... and waited for close to three hours before the doctor from the NICU came in to see us. I remember he walked in and asked Concetta if she had picked out a name for the baby. She told him Samantha Laura. He then told her that they got her stabilized, but that he saw signs of Down syndrome. I hate myself for my reaction. I got up from my seat, went into the bathroom that was right there, and burst into tears. I hate it, and yet I believe so many people would have the same reaction in that same situation. You can't help but feel hopeless. That's why I love Gigi's Playhouse. My family and I were trying to come to terms with what having Down syndrome meant, and we found a place that was like stepping into a relative's home. You feel welcome, and every concern you have melts away when you walk through that door and see the faces of all the children at Gigi's. They are not just surviving... they are thriving, and I truly believe these kids can do anything. And I think that's why so many people at Zurich fought to get so much money



for the Playhouse. My parents and sister work at Zurich and because

they showed them the love we were receiving from Gigi's, I think they turned around and decided to give what they could. I think Zurich saw the same thing I saw when I walked through the door... potential. Potential to achieve anything and everything. I truly believe that all this happened for a reason. I think that Gigi's is forming a chain of support and by my sister having Samantha and having her have Down syndrome we have now joined our chain to Zurich who in turn will join it with their families and friends. I believe that someday someone like me will be sitting there and be told what we were told and their reaction will be one of joy because they will know that having a person with Down syndrome in your life gives you love and connects you with people who understand and appreciate this love.

To read Nicole's full story please go to our website www.gigiplayhouse.org.

Aside from therapy equipment, one of our dreams is to have a Speech Therapist at the Playhouse to assist the kids in the literacy program and to help low income families with this crucial therapy. Thank you Zurich America for bringing us closer to our dreams!

Words from some "Village People"

Here are a couple of quotes from some of our committee members and about some of our committee members:

"I am reminded of the movie "It's a Wonderful Life." "Every time a bell rings an angel gets its wings." We should have a bell on the Playhouse entrance door-It has turned so many people into angels! Thanks Nancy for giving us wings!"

"What a gift the Playhouse is!! It brings tears to my eyes knowing our children are going to turn out so great because the parents here know no boundaries. You are all awesome role models. You all show us that love has no bounds and that is why we put no boundaries on our children. The sky is the limit."

"Having all of my children grow up around such great teachers is a dream come true. Thank you all for being such great leaders in my world, you all lead with such great examples, there is no greater gift you could give my family. Thank you"

We are forming new boards and new committees for 2007. If you are interested please call the Playhouse ASAP and get involved! No job is too small and the rewards are HUGE!

Our "SPREAD THE LOVE" holiday raffle is off to a great start! Grand

prize is \$10,000, second prize is a paradise vacation to Kauai and third prize is diamonds baby!! Paul Gianni brought his gang of elves to the Chicago Board of Options to raise some awareness and sell some raffle tickets!

Tickets are still available!! Please help us sell them! Next month we are off to the Chicago Mercantile Exchange for another day of DS awareness and more ticket selling! Picture Raffle at board

Raffle drawing to be held at the "Spread the Love" Fundraising Gala on February 10th, 2007. Channel 2 Chicago News Anchor Rob Johnson will be hosting the event. Seating is limited so get your tickets before we are sold out!!





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Hoffman Estates, IL 60169

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**Don't Forget
Spread the Love Gala
Feb 10**

Here is a story from newcomer Bridget, who is our on-site coordinator two days a week.

"It was only my second day working at GiGi's Playhouse when I got the privilege to see the amazing transformation that takes place when a new mother walks through the doors. An understandably worn out young mom came in and wearily asked about getting help. I invited her to have a seat and introduced her to Nancy. What happened over the course of the next two hours was amazing, at the very least. Nancy embraced the mom and showered her and her beautiful little boy with a love that I typically reserve for family and close friends. The mom was instantly put at ease and her entire posture changed. She knew she was in a place of understanding and that there were people here who could actually say with authority "I know how it feels." More than a shoulder to lean on, though, Nancy was a cheerleader with whom to celebrate the life of this beautiful little boy. She pulled out her ever-present camera and made him the star of what I would have to imagine was his first-ever photo shoot. Judging by his charm, I don't think it will be too long before he's gracing a page in the GiGi's Playhouse calendar!

It turns out that the system and even their doctors had been failing this family. A few phone calls were made, recommendations were given, and a plan of action was put into place. It was clear to me, and certainly to the mom, that there were no cracks for her son to fall through at GiGi's Playhouse. He would be receiving the services that he needed and deserved, and I cannot imagine the peace of mind that that must have inspired. The very next day, the mom and future calendar boy came back for open play. He met his new friends, posed for more pictures, and watched his mom smile and laugh.

To say I enjoyed my first week on the job is a complete understatement. I will have to work harder than ever before in order to give back even a small portion of what I am receiving from all of the GiGi's Playhouse families."



SAVE THE DATE!!!!

**SUNDAY, JUNE 10, 2007, 9:00 A.M.
GIGI'S PLAYHOUSE 4TH ANNUAL DOWN
SYNDROME AWARENESS 5K FUN RUN 1
MILE WALK!!!**

GET YOUR TEAM TOGETHER!

This year more than ever we need to show people the potential in our kids!! Last year we had over 1000 participants, this year lets make it over 2,000! Please VOLUNTEER by contacting the Playhouse ASAP!

**TOGETHER WE
REALLY CAN MAKE
A DIFFERENCE!**



**Sponsors are needed for this
awesome event.**

For 2007 we are starting a bigger and better Down syndrome awareness campaign and are looking for people to help create and/or distribute materials to doctors offices, colleges, hospitals etc.