



National Alliance on Mental Illness Help Line
1-800-950-6264 <https://www.nami.org/help>
Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800.273.TALK
Translifeline 877.565.8860
Veteran's Crisis Line 800.273.8255 *press 1*
Pastoral Care—Pastor Jim Alexander 623.792.5295
<https://thepalms.org/Tools2Thrive>



Down Syndrome Achievement Centers
educate. inspire. believe.

Phoenix, AZ

GiGi's Playhouse Phoenix, a Center for Down Syndrome Achievement

By Robin Lea-Amos

Executive Director of GiGi's Playhouse Phoenix/Scottsdale

October is when we celebrate Down Syndrome Acceptance Month. This is a call to action to *accept* and honor everyone around you. It is a month set aside to bring awareness to our community about the world of Down syndrome.

GiGi's Playhouse—a one-of-a-kind achievement center for individuals with Down syndrome, their families and the community—is located in Scottsdale, just off the 101 and Shea. GiGi's is a place where individuals with Down syndrome can join in activities with their peers, families are able to network, and basically, magic happens! With over 30 programs a month offered both in person and virtually, GiGi's provides multiple programs to encourage socialization, education, therapeutic progress, fitness, and independence. GiGi's serves all ages, from parents who are expecting a child born with Down syndrome, to our oldest participants who are now senior citizens. Everything at GiGi's is 100% FREE to families. Cost will never be a barrier to participation.

My journey in the disability community began by my becoming aware of several organizations that specifically served this community. As they say, "I was hooked." I was fortunate to be on the board of several non-profits who served the disability community. Then, in 2015, we were blessed when our own grandson was born with Down syndrome. His diagnosis was a complete surprise and has rocked our world. Jackson brings joy and energy everywhere he goes! Can you tell I am a grandmother??? My new calling is to educate and empower the greater community about Down syndrome and what those unique individuals can bring to our society.

A few facts about Down syndrome:

- Down syndrome occurs when there are three copies of the 21st chromosome

- Down syndrome is the largest chromosomal disability in our country and the least funded.
- The average age to have a child with DS is 28.
- Cause of DS is unknown. It does not discriminate across racial or socioeconomic lines.
- People with DS are significantly predisposed to congenital heart defects and a host of other medical conditions.
- 70-80% of people terminate pregnancy when Down syndrome is suspected.

Society has adopted an attitude of “perfect at all costs” which often results in parents choosing to terminate the pregnancy when Down syndrome is detected. Those are difficult and multi-faceted decisions, so at GiGi’s, we want to offer a “different view” of the Down syndrome community where an expectant parent can see the potential of their child’s life.

Over the last 50 years, changes in attitudes toward people with Down syndrome has resulted in better healthcare, more educational opportunities, access to jobs and independent living situations. An area where we as people of faith can do better is inclusion in worship. Many parents of children and adults with Down syndrome have stopped worshipping due to lack of inclusive programs or just a general misunderstanding toward their adult child with Down syndrome. I recall the large church I attended as a youth where an adult man with Down syndrome went with his mother. He was the only person I encountered with Down syndrome until I became an adult. I don’t recall his age, but he LOVED to worship. At times his “joyful noise” was out of synch with others and definitely out of tune! Our very proper Pastor took it all in stride and would occasionally say from the pulpit “OK, John that’s enough.” I might add, the same pastor said the same to me when I was talking too much to the other high school students. Can’t you just see the joy in the Lord’s face that John brought to our worship when he praised the Lord in his own unique way?

In an age of inclusion and acceptance, Down syndrome is still separated in many areas of our communities. While we work toward full understanding and embracing our differences, I hope our churches can lead the example in inclusion in worship.

As mentioned before, everything at GiGi’s is free to our families. We receive no tax dollars and are 100% funded through private donations and grants. We rely on our community both financially and through volunteering. Should you want more information about GiGi’s Playhouse Phoenix, I would be honored to answer any questions or give you a tour. Please visit our website at <https://gigisplayhouse.org/phoenix/> or reach out to me personally at reaamos@gigisplayhouse.org or 480.451.7529.

Care Team Members

Bobbie Chapman, Doris Gott, Eric Holmes, Jan Alexander, Carolyn Modeen, John Durbin, Pat Durbin, Kay Klinkenborg, Judy Jondahl, Lurene Ladd, Randolph Omahana, Scott Patrick, Suzanne Boisclair, Steve Meoli, Laurie Cathey, David Klingensmith, Vickie Ashenbrenner, Diana Shalzi, Pastor Paul, Pastor Jim.

*** People can also pick up a Care Team Trifold, which has Care Team member names and other helpful information about what the Care Team does, in the Narthex.

WISE Steering Committee

Andrea Stefanov, Anita Paulson, Judy Jondahl, Kay Klinkenborg, Nancy Nonini, Phil Ladd, Pastor Paul, Pastor Jim