

<http://www.nudm.org/gigis-playhouse-nudms-2017-primary-beneficiary/>



EVANSTON, Ill. — May 25, 2016: GiGi’s Playhouse, a nonprofit organization that provides free therapeutic programming and support to individuals with Down syndrome, has been selected as the primary beneficiary for Northwestern University Dance Marathon (NUDM) 2017. NUDM is one of the largest entirely student-run philanthropies in the country, raising more than \$1 million for its beneficiaries in each of the past six years.

“More than 400,000 people in the U.S. have Down syndrome, and we are beyond excited that NUDM has the opportunity to help improve the lives of these incredibly inspiring people,” said Ian Pappas, one of the NUDM 2017 Executive Co-Chairs.

Now serving 30 different communities throughout the U.S. and Mexico, GiGi’s benefited over 25,000 individuals with Down syndrome last year through programming and support.

Without GiGi's, these individuals would not have access to free, life-changing therapeutic and educational programs, and they might not have found such a strong, personalized support system.

“When you realize the challenges people with Down syndrome face every day, like dealing with so much discrimination,” said Jenny Halpern, one of the NUDM 2017 Executive Co-Chairs, “you realize NUDM has the power to not only improve the futures of these people, but also to change the way the rest of the world sees their differences by spreading awareness and acceptance.”

NUDM's financial donations will help fund what makes GiGi's so unique: their purposeful programming. A majority of the donations will go toward expanding the speech and language program, improving educational literacy and math tutoring, as well as further developing exercise programming and therapy. Finally as GiGi's continues to rapidly grow, NUDM's gift will also help the organization develop a pilot Mobile Playhouse program that will allow GiGi's to be even more accessible to underserved neighborhoods.

Besides funding various types of GiGi's programming and the Mobile Playhouse, NUDM is excited for the service opportunities presented by partnering with GiGi's. Students will be able to continuously engage in service by becoming literacy and math tutors for individuals with Down syndrome and by participating in events like GiGi's annual 5k and GiGiFest. Students will also have the opportunity to participate in ECF service events alongside individuals from GiGi's.

Additionally, GiGi's will provide NUDM with a chance to expand the current Hero Program. Because GiGi's serves people of all ages, this year's Hero Program will bring dancers together with both children and adults involved with GiGi's. Together, students and heroes alike will be able to not only spend time learning from one another, but also to spread the message of global acceptance for people of all abilities.

Many deserving charities submit extraordinary applications each year for consideration as NUDM's primary beneficiary. The NUDM Executive Co-Chairs then narrow this list down to a number of charities and present those to the executive board. In order to ensure that the best decision is made for both Northwestern and the beneficiary, the board then conducts several rounds of interviews to eventually choose the primary beneficiary. After a significant amount of time, further interviews and deliberation, GiGi's Playhouse was selected unanimously by the entire Executive Board. For the 20th year in a row, the Evanston Community Foundation will serve as NUDM's secondary beneficiary, funding a variety of local grants.

NUDM is also happy to announce the creation of the NUDM Grant Program. In order to increase financial accessibility and to assist dancers and small teams with their fundraising efforts, NUDM is devoting spring and summer fundraising to the Grant Program Fund. This will be used to allocate funds to the personal NUDM fundraising efforts of lower income dancers, individual dancers and smaller teams through a streamlined application process.

NUDM 2017 will be held March 3-5 on the Norris University

Center East Lawn at 1999 Campus Drive at Northwestern's Evanston campus.

About GiGi's Playhouse:

GiGi's Playhouse is a nationwide network of Down syndrome achievement centers that impacts the lives of children and adults with Down syndrome through free educational and therapeutic programs that unleash confidence and promote continuous improvement. Through these programs, campaigns and community engagements, GiGi's aims to change the world's outdated perception of individuals with Down syndrome in a movement toward global acceptance for people of all abilities. To learn more, visit gigisplayhouse.org.

About Northwestern University Dance Marathon:

Now in its 43rd year, NUDM is one of the largest entirely student-run philanthropies in the nation. Since 1975, NUDM has raised more than \$17 million for more than 30 different charities. Last year, NUDM raised over \$1 million dollars for its sixth consecutive year in support of Blessings in a Backpack — an organization that, through an all-volunteer network, mobilizes communities, individuals and resources to provide food on the weekends for elementary school children across America who might otherwise go hungry — and the Evanston Community Foundation. To learn more, visit www.nudm.org.

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May 25th, 2016