

GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh  
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CLIENT PROFILE

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GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh is currently led by President Michelle Pfeiffer who lives near the location in Cary, North Carolina, with her husband and three children, Andrew, Anna, and Ashley. Her daughter Anna has Down syndrome, and inspired Pfeiffer to take a leading role in her local GiGi's Playhouse.

As president, Pfeiffer organizes the nonprofit, coordinates events and schedules, and initiates plans and ideas for the company. In addition to her work at GiGi's Playhouse, Pfeiffer is also the founder and director of Anna's Angels Foundation, "A nonprofit foundation focused on funding Down syndrome research at Duke Children's Hospital and Health Center" (GiGi's Playhouse).

When asked what inspired her to become involved with GiGi's Playhouse, and how the role as president shaped her vision for the Raleigh location, Pfeiffer states that when the current



executive presented her with the idea to open a GiGi's location in the area, she was "all in." When her daughter Anna was born, Pfeiffer said, "There was nowhere for us to go," she said. "There wasn't a natural setting where I could meet several other moms, dads, and families that had children with Down syndrome." Getting involved with GiGi's Playhouse gave Pfeiffer and her family a space to grow,

but also an opportunity to help other families in the area. Pfeiffer credits her daughter Anna and

the results she has seen through the successful programs provided at GiGi's Playhouse for her inspiration. "I've seen the life changing programs we are providing. With everything being at no cost to participants, it's very accessible to local families and they're getting a variety of high-quality programs and services," said Pfeiffer.

GiGi's Playhouse Inc. was founded in 2003 by Nancy Gianni in South Barrington, Illinois, after the birth of her daughter, GiGi Gianni. After her daughter GiGi was born with Down syndrome, Gianni wanted to create a welcoming community and place for her daughter and other individuals with Down syndrome to learn and grow. This hope for a community and acceptance around Down syndrome led to the creation of GiGi's Playhouse. The playhouse is a learning center that "offers direct educational, therapeutic and career building programs to individuals with Down syndrome, their families, and the community". Since establishing, GiGi's Playhouse has expanded across the United States with over 60 locations and over 220,000 volunteer hours put towards the nonprofit.

Despite loving her role, Pfeiffer says that challenges remain. One of the main challenges of GiGi's Playhouse, and most nonprofit organizations, is funding and sustainability. Pfeiffer states that she wants to keep GiGi's running for as long as possible, and the way the organization is focused on doing that is creating an endowment. "I want to see GiGi's here in 10 and 20 years, and to do that, we are currently focused on creating an endowment. We are so excited as we are currently moving forward with an endowment, so that in years from now when a family has a baby with Down syndrome, families will have a place to go," said Pfeiffer. With these practices, GiGi's Playhouse will continue to be a thriving nonprofit that helps hundreds of individuals and families each year.

GiGi's is a growing nonprofit that only hopes to reach more families and spread its vision of worldwide acceptance for individuals with Down syndrome. In its effort to expand, Pfeiffer started a partnership with Dairy Queen locations in the Triangle through its Round Up program to fundraise money for Down syndrome Awareness month during the month of October. With every purchase at Dairy Queen at all five locations throughout the Triangle, Dairy Queen will donate a percentage of the total to GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh.

Pfeiffer has also organized a partnership with North Carolina Central's speech pathology program that allows graduate students to come in to help and teach speech, language and literacy programs at GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh. Additionally, GiGi's has partnered with North Carolina State University for a program called "Victory Days" in which participants at GiGi's pair up with NCSU football players during their training camp. During this event, they run out of the tunnel at Carter-Finley Stadium and get announced as they run out, participate in skill stations together, and run a touchdown in with the entire team. Throughout the year, GiGi's attends NCSU's football practices every Friday for an event titled "Snack with the Pack" where they walk through their practice and eat together. GiGi's close bonds with local businesses and universities in the area has been beneficial for both GiGi's and the surrounding community. Pfeiffer states that "One of the things we see here is that we are doing so many things inside the walls of GiGi's. But we have to get our community ready for our participants outside. We give them these inclusive opportunities for them to interact with our participants and help make our community more welcoming," which is why these partnerships are so important.

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Pfeiffer's role as president has given her tremendous responsibility, and a chance to provide resources and growth for herself, her family including her daughter Anna, as well as impacting the lives of hundreds of other individuals and families. She hopes to continue in her role as president and continue to build the GiGi's Playhouse community for many years into the future. Her past and current partnerships have been impactful and inspiring, and she hopes to continue this growth and expand GiGi's Playhouse Raleigh. "I have been inspired by GiGi's every day, and I can't wait to see its growth," says Pfeiffer.

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