

## Gigi's Playhouse Weston Summary Report

### **Information about the Applicant**

GiGi's Playhouse was created to change the way the world views a Down syndrome diagnosis and send a global message of acceptance for all. We change lives through consistent delivery of free educational, therapeutic-based and career development programs for individuals with Down syndrome, their families, and the community, through a replicable Playhouse model. The very first Playhouse was created in 2002, to be an inspirational and dedicated place for families to celebrate their child and benefit from free, purposeful programs that unleash joy, confidence, and continuous improvement. As a network, there are 55 Playhouse locations currently operating using over 20 years of experience in fundraising, non-profit management, program development, and more. Locally, GiGi's Playhouse Wausau opened its doors on December 12, 2020. Our Playhouse is considered one of the smaller locations because of the rural community in which we are located but this has not stopped us from standing out in the network of Playhouses regarding event planning and fundraising. Last year GiGi's network created the GIGIFIT Acceptance Challenge in which all Playhouse locations participated, and Wausau's Playhouse not only created a brand-new GLOW Fun Run/Walk event (the first ever in GiGi's history) but we also fundraised to be in the top 10 of Playhouse's overall. For 2022, we were in the top 5! Our team worked hard to build out our location and we learned a lot in the process. This has prompted GiGi's national to use our location as a mentor for new Playhouse startups. Additional accomplishments within our first year of operation include being 100% volunteer run, providing over 1,800 hours of programming, establishing a relationship/internship with the Medical College of WI, and having an individual with Down syndrome join our Board of Managers!

GiGi's Playhouse Wausau is seeking funds to create Seed to Sale; a pilot program explained in greater detail below that we plan to launch in 2023. We will be working closely with the national program coordinator to roll out the Seed to Sale program, lesson plans, and community engagement which includes the career portion of the project.

GiGi's Playhouse Wausau will serve individuals with Down syndrome (any diagnosis as we are inclusive) and their families through potential support from the Wispack Foundation for our new Seed to Sale project program.

### **Statement of Need**

According to the Center for Disease Control, one in 700 babies are born with Down syndrome, making it the most common chromosomal condition. Individuals with Down syndrome face challenges in the form of cognitive and physical disabilities and have long faced discrimination, bullying, and low expectations. However, the median life expectancy today for individuals with Down syndrome is 65-more than double the 25-year life expectancy as recent as 1983. Advancements in medical care and life expectancy have created more opportunity in school, jobs, meaningful relationships, and community life, but these opportunities require high-quality educational resources, a stimulating home environment, good health care, and support from family and friends. GiGi's Playhouse provides programming designed for these individuals and families, builds community, and creates a space where they can thrive. The Seed to Sale project will be included as a specialty program for Playhouses throughout the network to provide to participants.

We have already secured 50% of needed funding for the first-year costs. We will be working with local businesses to receive in-kind services and items such as the building of a garden shed and obtaining soil and mulch. Potential support received from the Wispack Foundation will be used for remaining tangibles needed to start the Seed to Sale program and assist with printing costs of program materials. GiGi's

Playhouse Wausau has also had 4 small, raised garden beds that our adults have maintained for 2 summers.

### **Project Goals and Expected Benefits**

Seed to Sale provides participants of all ages the opportunity to play, learn, and grow through gardening while purposefully progressing skills in communication, cognitive abilities, social skills, health, and wellness and even math. Participants will learn how to grow and harvest produce. The produce grown will be used in GiGi's Kitchen programming and will be sold at a local farmers market. This program empowers individuals with Down syndrome to become motivated to eat and love fruit and vegetables, promotes physical activity, and instills a respect for nature. Teen and adult participants will be empowered to explore the career-based opportunities that exist when harvesting items produced in the garden, all while increasing self-confidence, accountability, and quality of life. The Seed to Sale project is directly related to Wispect Foundation's focus area of education and addressing individuals with Down syndrome quality of life.

There are several goals for the Seed to Sale program that include but are not limited to: Increased healthy eating habits by developing a positive relationship with food. Studies show that students involved in garden programs are more likely to develop a snack preference for fruit and vegetables as well as there being a link between growing food and food preparation at home.

*Measurable objective: participants will try 3 to 5 new fruits or vegetables. This is a huge goal as many individuals with Down syndrome have food sensory issues and are particular with what they are willing to eat.* Increase knowledge of the community we live in through participation in activities, community outings and events. Build team-work skills through interaction with others in a small group and large group peer interactions. *Measurable objective: participants will attend 3 out of 4 scheduled field trips to destinations such as locally owned farms, farm-to-table restaurants and school forests.*

Increase self-confidence through the process of tending a plant and seeing it bloom and produce food.

It takes time and patience, but the payoff in satisfaction is equal to the investment. Per Dr. Wendy Matthews, a consultant of Mindprint Learning, "It is wonderful for building a child's sense of competence, as they engage in a real-life activity that they might have previously seen as only for adults." *Measurable objective: parent testimonials and observed behavior.* Increase in STEM abilities by providing real world opportunities for planning, organization, observation, and experiments.

*Measurable objective: At least 75% participant attendance in scheduled programming days including completed learning projects and garden journal entries.* Increased quality of life by providing a hands-on, multi-sensory learning environment to help participants live a well-rounded, healthy, confident, and fully enriching life. Depending less on those around them and helping participants make a habit of calming themselves ultimately learning to relax. In addition, according to Garden Organic, involvement in gardening can contribute to improved alertness, cognitive abilities, and social skills. *Measurable objective: At least 75% participant attendance in scheduled programming days including completed learning projects and garden journal entries.* Increase career skill knowledge: aspects from GiGiU in applying best practices in areas of customer service, team building and money management.

Students participate in community farmers market to apply their skills by selling produce/garden items to the community. *Measurable objective: career progress evaluation that looks at attitude and cooperation, reliability, productivity, quality of work, and teamwork and communication.*

### Project Implementation Plan

The Seed to Sale pilot project will begin March 2023 and go through October 2023. As the program grows Playhouse's can-do year around programming with smaller indoor tabletop gardening (herbs for example). Participants will meet 1 1/2 to 2 hours, twice per month (additional time would be required once harvesting garden items and attendance at farmers market starts, this would be for teens/adults). Our Program Coordinator, Cory, and Playhouse Manager, Erica, will oversee program leads (2 to 3 volunteers) and assistants (1 to 3 volunteers) and ensure program lessons/activities are completed and any obstacles are worked through.

### Evaluation Plan

Because Seed to Sale is a pilot program there will be required check ins with the national Program Coordinator throughout the program that evaluates participant attendance and progress based on identified program goals. At a local level post-program reports will be completed for every scheduled session date which will look at what went well, program challenges, and adaptations made or needed. Each participant will also have a progress tracker that measures each goal/objective. The National Program Coordinator, local Program Coordinator, programming committee, Playhouse Manager, and program leads and assistants will all have an active role and be responsible for documentation.

### Budget

#### Budget:

Program Expense	Description	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Garden Materials	Garden beds, garden shed, fencing, trellis, soil, mulch, composter, wheelbarrow, shovels, etc.	\$6,576.29	\$1,225.96	\$1,625.96
Lesson Materials	Tabletop composters, Wigglers learning materials, individual garden tools, Lesson to Grow By learning material, etc.	\$1,285.87	\$278.45	\$278.45
Career Materials	GiGiU materials, tent, tables, display baskets, cash box, etc.	\$1,155.17	\$500.00	\$500.00
Printing Costs	Printing for lesson plans, marketing signs for sale of items, misc. printing	\$250.00	\$150.00	\$150.00
Field Trips	Stoney Acres, Red Eye, School Forest, TBD	\$150.00	\$150.00	\$150.00
Facility Costs	Increased electrical and water	\$150.00	\$150.00	\$150.00
	Total	\$9,567.33	\$2,454.41	\$2,854.41

### Staff Recommendation

The grant can be recommended for approval. The facility costs cannot be included; however, the total overall costs are \$14,876.15 for the full three year plan. A grant for \$10,000.00 can be provided and the proceeds can be excluded from the facility costs.