



**DARBY HILLS, NANCY GIANNI, RUBINA NGUYEN, AND JOY WAGNER**



# Charity Gamechangers

FOUR BARRINGTON AREA WOMEN HAVE CHANGED OUR WORLD

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## Darby Hills – Barrington Children's Charities

"When Tom and I founded Barrington Children's Charities in 2010, the mission was two-fold: First, we aimed to heighten public awareness of children's issues and foster solutions to their problems. Second, we raised monies to fund a wide variety of programs to support the social, emotional, physical, and educational needs of local children. Over the last 10 years, BCC's vision has evolved into an essential-needs charity. BCC enables our volunteers, board members, and donors to turn compassion into action and provide essential items that children in struggling families need to thrive in school, participate more fully in life, and to just be a kid. Some of those essential needs we provide are food, eyeglasses, dental care, and mental health."

## Nancy Gianni – Gigi's Playhouse Down Syndrome Achievement Centers

"GiGi's Playhouse was created to change the way the world sees Down syndrome and send a global message of acceptance for all! We celebrate our diagnosis and provide hope to thousands of families. We change lives everyday through the consistent delivery of free educational, and therapeutic-based programs for individuals with DS, their families, and the community. I love that we have turned into a place where everybody learns and grows. Though we directly serve individuals with DS and their families with free programming, we also give the community a place to serve. The individual with DS and their families receive free life-changing therapeutic, educational, and career training programs. Down syndrome is the largest chromosomal disability in our country and yet, it is the least funded. The average age to have a child with DS is 28. Our families and extended families need us, and they need acceptance from day one. From a prenatal diagnosis to career skills, we make a lifetime commitment to remain by their side."

## Rubina Nguyen, DDS – Sudden Cardiac-death Awareness Research Foundation

"The Sudden Cardiac-death Awareness Research Foundation (S.C.A.R.F.) offers an AED donation program reaching into the community at large. Our goal is to reduce the number of deaths that occur from sudden cardiac arrest. Research shows that despite having an AED nearby, most people are reluctant to use it. Our goal is to remove these barriers."


Through our Mentorship & Career Guidance Program (for high school and college students, ages 16+), we guide our interns towards success by focusing on critical thinking, teamwork, and higher education. By teaching our interns how to navigate the real world with confidence and professionalism, we give them a strategic advantage towards lifelong success. Applications for summer 2020 program are currently open. The deadline for applications is December 13, 2019. Our S.C.A.R.F. Teen (ages 13–15) camps and S.C.A.R.F. Junior camp (ages 9–12) are STEM-based week-long camps that are held in summer for younger students.

Our free Healthy Heart Clinics are open to all community members who do not have health insurance but have cardiac concerns. We provide free cardiology consultations, as well as basic cardiology testing including EKG, echocardiograms, and treadmill stress testing. If more advanced testing or procedures are required, we will refer the patient to facilities where this care can be provided moving forward."

## Joy Wagner, RN, BSN – NeuroBalance Center

Joy Wagner is a pediatric nurse who was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) in 2001. She was also a single mom with 5- and 8-year-old daughters. MS literally knocked her off her feet. For four months, she couldn't walk, drive, or read. She had to give up her nursing job. MS, like almost 100 other autoimmune related diseases, attacks mobility and therefore independence and quality of life. A person with an incurable disease like this often loses their job and becomes home bound, tied to a walker, or a wheelchair. Often, they give in and give up.

Joy turned to her nursing training and began to research how exercise, diet, and attitude might allow her to reclaim mobility and maintain her independence. She began educating and training others. Joy received the National MS Society's "Leader of Hope Award" in 2004 in recognition of her "fitMS", and her dedication to helping MS patients improve mobility. fitMS outgrew its space.

In 2011, Joy and Dr. LeeAnn Steinfeldt opened fitMS NeuroBalance Center and the programs grew to benefit not only MS, but people with Parkinson's Disease, psoriasis, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, Sjogrens, myocarditis, Crohns, celiac, vasculitis, type 1 diabetes, fibromyalgia, and stroke. fitMS outgrew its name. Services were offered on a sliding scale. Bus services were added to pick up clients unable to drive. fitMS NeuroBalance Center became not just a place to exercise, but also a place to come for community. 

*Joy Wagner*

INVERNESS

NEUROBALANCE CENTER, NFP

“What inspires me is that I have MS, and what I have learned has improved my life and I want to help others do the same thing. I’m inspired every day because I can see the changes physically and emotionally in everyone who comes through our door. You can see hope restored, smiles come more quickly, and that participants care about each other and lift each other up.”







## NEUROBALANCE CENTER, NFP

STARTED IN 2003. BECAME A 501C3 IN 2010.

CONTACT INFORMATION:  
[INFO@NEUROBALANCECENTER.ORG](mailto:INFO@NEUROBALANCECENTER.ORG)  
 847-800-6162

- In 2016, fitMS NeuroBalance Center served over 5,400 client contacts. fitMS not only outgrew its name, but also outgrew its facility. To make continued growth possible with these ground-breaking services, we built and moved into our new building in September 2017. The new NeuroBalance Center is a 10,000 square foot state-of-the-art facility. It was designed and built from the ground up to go beyond ADA compliant and set new standards for what a truly accessible building can be.

- We have many volunteer opportunities at the NeuroBalance Center for all ages and availability. All the drivers of our lift equipped van are volunteers and we are always expanding the program. We use volunteer assistants at our front desk and in all our fitness programs, and for maintaining our garden and landscaping.

- Our annual fundraiser is our Gala each year on the last Saturday of September. Next year is our 10-year anniversary in Barrington. We will celebrate beginning on June 13, 2020 with an anniversary Barbecue at NeuroBalance Center and cap off with our 10th anniversary Gala on September 26th at Wynstone Country Club.

- Our reach includes all the Northwest Suburbs because we are the only program of this kind people with travel up to 45 minutes. Our transportation program provides rides for those within a 20-minute ride from the center.

- We currently serve about 700 individuals. We have grown in the last three years from 357 services provided in 2016 to over 10,000 services in 2018. This growth comes from our new building which enables us to serve more people in more ways.

- Clear evidence of our success is the fact that people who started with us 16 years ago still come to the center. They come back because our programs help them live better. Their success is our success. People often come at first through the urging of a loved one, physical therapist, or physician. Over time they increase the visits per week and try many different services.

- “Bob” had a massive stroke three years ago. He came to us about a year later when the rehab program he was in told him he had



reached his potential and insurance would no longer cover services for him. He couldn't roll over in bed, walk more than a few steps, button his shirt. Two years later he has made huge strides...rolls over in bed, walks up the stairs, walks for 27 minutes straight, uses no braces on his legs, bounces a ball while walking. We know he has not even yet reached his potential.

- A young man with MS, 28 years old, came in being pushed in a wheelchair by his 8-month pregnant wife. He has been a loyal participant for 10 years. Within about six months he no longer used a wheelchair and hasn't since that time. He is back to driving a car!



A woman with dark hair, smiling, wearing a long, flowing red gown with a V-neckline. She is also wearing a necklace and a bracelet. She is holding a black clutch bag. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

*Rubina Nguyen*

SOUTH BARRINGTON

SUDDEN  
CARDIAC-  
DEATH-  
AWARENESS  
FOUNDATION  
(S.C.A.R.F.)

“When S.C.A.R.F. was founded in 2012, our initial goal was to raise awareness about sudden cardiac death/arrest, a condition that kills more people than most cancers combined. We wanted to educate the general population about this deadly epidemic. However, there was always a strong underlying feeling that we could do more. Hence, the S.C.A.R.F. Mentorship and Career Guidance Program for high school and college students was formally established in 2014. Each year as we expand, our vision remains the same—we want to build lives while saving lives.”





## SUDDEN CARDIAC-DEATH AWARENESS RESEARCH FOUNDATION (S.C.A.R.F.)

FOUNDED IN 2012.

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

DR. SARAH ALFANO [SALFANO@SCARFNOW.ORG](mailto:SALFANO@SCARFNOW.ORG); 815-595-3050 (EXT 703)

VOLUNTEER APPLICATIONS: [HTTPS://WWW.SCARFNOW.ORG/VOLUNTEER](https://www.scarfnow.org/volunteer)

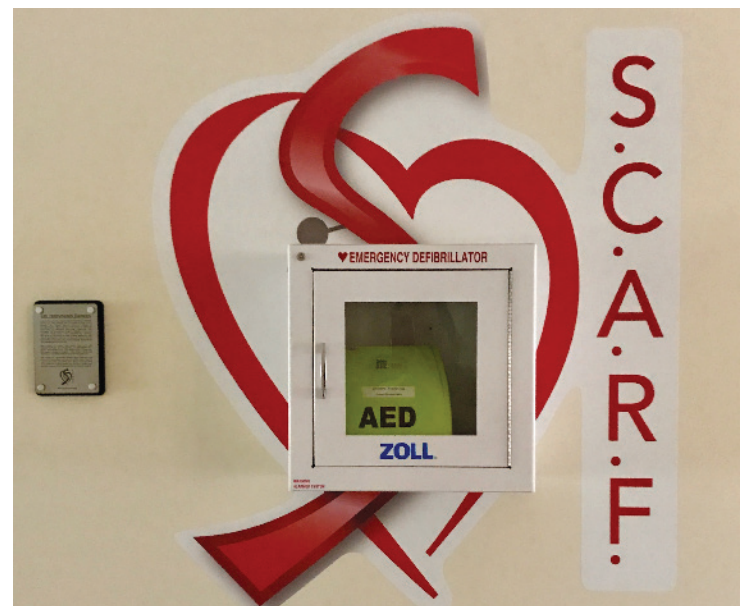
- Our reach expands across Northern Illinois and has even extended into Michigan in 2019. We have donated (or will be donating) AEDs from Chicago to Rockford, from Elgin to Detroit. For our Mentorship program, students come from across all the Chicago suburbs and Rockford. We are open to expanding our reach and impacting communities even further. Sudden cardiac arrest is happening across the nation and we want to do our part to reduce the devastating fatalities.

- Upcoming events that could use volunteers:

- November 15, 2019: SCARF Blood Drive
- June 28, 2020: Dance for Life
- SCARF Junior Camps: tentatively scheduled June 8–12 and June 22–26
- SCARF Teen Camps: tentatively scheduled June 15–19 and July 6–10
- Rhythm of Life Gala: August 1, 2020. Volunteers will also be needed the 1-2 weeks prior to the gala to help with preparations

- Signature Fundraiser Details—The Rhythm of Life Gala is our main fundraising event. Traditionally held the last weekend of July or first weekend of August. For 2020, this event is scheduled for August 1 and will be held at the Westin in Itasca. Dance for Life is scheduled for June 28 at 10 a.m. and will be held in Hoffman Estates. Walk for Life is scheduled for July 12 and the exact location and details is TBD.

- Sudden cardiac arrest: 550,000 deaths annually with almost 350,000 taking place outside of a hospital. Every 1 minute without CPR or AED = 10% risk of death or serious complication. Average EMS response time in the U.S. = 6–10 minutes. 98% of people with a sudden cardiac arrest do not survive. However, use of CPR/AED prior to EMS arrival triples survival rates.







*Darby Hills*

BARRINGTON HILLS

BARRINGTON CHILDREN'S  
CHARITIES

“When I found out that some Barrington 220 children were getting breakfast and lunch through the government during the week, but were going hungry on the weekends, I knew I had to take action. I am personally inspired by all our volunteers, board members, and donors who donate their time, treasure, and talent to help so many local children in need. That's what inspires me to do what I do.”



## BARRINGTON CHILDREN'S CHARITIES

FOUNDED 2010

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

BARRINGTONCHILDRENSCHARITIES@GMAIL.COM  
BARRINGTONCHILDRENSCHARITIES.COM.



- Barrington Children's Charities benefits children in need in Barrington220. This encompasses all eight elementary schools, the Early Learning Center, both middle schools, and BHS. We feed over 750 children every week in Barrington 220. In one year, we pack over 27,750 bags and in 10 years that's 277,500 bags of food for hungry children. In the first year of our program we fed 400 kids at one elementary school. The program has grown substantially.

- Our signature event is the annual "Holly Ball" this year on December 14, 2019.

- We measure our success by the number of children who receive the food and nutrition, the vision and dental care, and the mental health services they need. Although this is not easy or straightforward, we work every day to make it happen.

- Every time I hand a bag of food to a child and they look up at me and smile and they say thank you for the food, I know I'm making a difference and it melts my heart.

- Over the last 10 years, BCC's vision has evolved into an essential-needs charity. BCC enables our volunteers, board members, and donors to turn compassion into action and provide essential items that children in struggling families need to thrive in school, participate more fully in life, and to just be a kid. Some of those essential needs we provide are food, eyeglasses, dental care, and mental health services.



*Nancy Gianni*

SOUTH BARRINGTON

GIGI'S PLAYHOUSE  
DOWN SYNDROME  
ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS

“ We change lives everyday through the consistent delivery of free educational and therapeutic-based programs for individuals with Down syndrome, their families, and the larger community through a replicable playhouse business model. I am driven by intolerance, ignorance, and a quest for all people to be treated equally. It is hard for me to understand how a population of people who love so deeply, with no conditions, can be valued so poorly. They have so many strikes against them, yet they continue to try to make the world a better place. ”







## GIGI'S PLAYHOUSE DOWN SYNDROME ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS

FOUNDED IN 2003

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

**JAMI BALGRO AT [JBALGRO@GIGISPLAYHOUSE.ORG](mailto:JBALGRO@GIGISPLAYHOUSE.ORG), OR  
CALL 847-885-PLAY**

**TO VOLUNTEER: [VOLUNTEER@GIGISPLAYHOUSE.ORG](mailto:VOLUNTEER@GIGISPLAYHOUSE.ORG)**

- We have many fundraisers every year! Our largest annual initiatives include GiGi's Playhouse Chicago-land Gala (February 29, 2020), 5K and Fun Run and Dash for Down syndrome (June 14), GiGi's Golf Outing (September), GiGiFest (October), and GiGi's Playhouse National Leadership Conference (November).

- There are currently 46 GiGi's Playhouse locations across the country and in Mexico with 10 more in the works and 200 inquiries worldwide to open more. 240 new families join GiGi's Playhouse every month!

- Recognition from corporate America is a big measurement. When Microsoft came to us to ask us how Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning can help individuals with Down syndrome, I knew we were being recognized! Then when MIT joined us, I knew we were going in the right direction! We are currently working with them on a Physical Therapy based gaming app that will be life-changing for our individuals with Down syndrome and other disabilities! Stay tuned!

- My aha moment came this year when Tom Ricketts asked GiGi to sing the National Anthem at the Cubs game! Seeing her stand there, so confident, in front of 40,000 people was truly a dream come true for both of us. I realized in that moment that I didn't fail her as a mother, which has been a constant struggle for me. How do I continue to be this voice for Down syndrome and run a \$14 million dollar international not-for-profit that gives everything away for free and still take care of my four kids? Well, I saw that day she was taking care of herself and GiGi's was helping her.

- GiGi travels to all our locations and Grand Openings with me. She inspires people around the world and encourages them to go for their dreams. Yet when we leave, people still stare at her as we walk through the airport, seeing her only as a diagnosis and not as the strong, inspirational leader she really is. But we do not let that stop us!