**50 Years at Foothills Gateway: A Look Back at the Beginning**

*When Foothills Gateway first opened its doors in 1972, Phyllis Freeman was one of the employees who was there. Phyllis spent her career at FGI - almost 40 years - and retired as the Placement Coordinator in 2011. Today she reminds us how the organization got its start and takes a look back at what it was like at the very beginning.*

Have you ever wondered what Foothills Gateway was like when the doors first opened? I’d like to take a look back on how it all got started.

In the 1960's, Larimer County had two separate programs which provided services to children and adults with developmental disabilities - Gateway Easter Seal Center in Fort Collins which operated out of an old elementary school, and Foothills Activities Center which was headquartered in a large house in Loveland.  Both centers offered educational programs for children and limited contract work for adults.

While these options were both providing good opportunities, parents and other supporters within the two communities had a dream to combine the existing programs and serve individuals in a new setting located between Fort Collins and Loveland.  Fulfilling this ambitious dream and using a little bit of each organizations’ name to signify the partnership, the Foothills Gateway Rehabilitation Center (later shortened and renamed to Foothills Gateway, Inc.) opened its doors in January 1972.

If you had toured the building in 1972, here is a description of what you would have seen. There were four classrooms for children, one of them specifically for preschool-aged kids.  A large, open area, which now houses the cubicles across from the accounting offices, provided a common space for a wide variety of activities.   Next to the main kitchen, what is now the File Room was then available to learn or practice homemaking skills. Behind the restrooms located next to the Bennett Conference Room, outdoor toys and play vehicles were stored.

The therapy department was located in what is now the Everitt Conference Room.  To this day the large hooks used for hanging therapy swings and other equipment can be seen mounted to the large, wooden beams on the ceiling. The small, enclosed rooms near the main entrance were used for individual speech therapy.  An audiology booth was also available for hearing evaluations, provided to both staff, as well as the adults and children who attended the program. Also in the main entry area, there was a desk for the one Case Manager on staff, as well as a few chairs for guests.  The area in front of the windows, which now provide a view from our lobby, provided space for Care A Van staff, a contracted transportation provider at the time.

The Executive Director, his secretary, and an accountant used the area next to the west windows, which now look into our courtyard.  One conference room, located just south of the Director's office, completed the area.

The workshop area for adults (rooms we know as Production, VSTA, and Saratoga) provided work activities with contracted work procured from community businesses, janitorial work, assembly work, and a wood shop.

Upon the opening of the new building, emphasis was placed on providing services to more people in an effort to continue meeting their individual needs.  To give you an idea of the size of the organization in the beginning, the client files from both the Loveland and Fort Collins programs were locked into one, four-drawer file cabinet.

While all of this may not sound like much, one thing was certain. Foothills Gateway had laid a great foundation for supporting people with disabilities in Larimer County, and there was plenty of room to grow.