**50 Years at Foothills Gateway: Day Program and Work Crews of the 90s**

*Diane Bocanegra has been an essential part of Foothills Gateway’s Day programs and work crews since 1990, and now serves as Janitorial Supervisor for the organization. Today she takes us back to the 1990s and the unique partnerships and work experiences that Foothills Gateway offered through our many crews and day program opportunities.*

Giving people with disabilities the opportunity to learn skills and do meaningful work has always been something that happens at Foothills Gateway. In the 1990s, the IDD system in Colorado allowed us to offer a number of work opportunities in a group format that may surprise you. The ‘crew’ model, made up of several adults with disabilities and a supervisor or two, was used in a number of different ways. Often, we formed relationships with local businesses and were able to offer work experiences where people could learn skills, earn a paycheck, and provide a valuable service to the customer. Here are a few of the more unique crews we operated back then.

Foothills Gateway ran a cleaning crew for many years. Much like any other house cleaning company, customers paid us to clean their homes on a regular schedule. The cleaning crew was responsible for mopping, vacuuming, cleaning kitchens, tubs, and showers – you name it! In the 90s, we cleaned over 200 houses each month, which is pretty amazing. We also provided cleaning services to businesses, often cleaning after business hours when buildings were not occupied. There was an afternoon shift cleaning crew that cleaned the US Fish and Wildlife Building in Fort Collins from 4-9pm each business day, and also a night shift crew that worked overnight hours cleaning businesses such as the Monte Carlo Lanes (now Chipper’s), the Honda dealership, and a dive/rescue shop.

When many of these crews started, most staff only worked on a part time basis. As business increased from outside customers and more opportunities became available, many staff switched over to full time status. To ensure staff had enough full-time hours, we looked for other contracts we could get that would allow us to use our crews. For a period of time, we cleaned the Orchards/King Soopers shopping center (parking lots, sidewalks, etc.) in Loveland. We also cleaned many parks for the city of Fort Collins.

It was also in the early 1990s that we entered into a contract to clean the Federal Building and US Post Office in downtown Fort Collins. With a dedicated crew and supervisors, we ran two shifts there for many years – early morning from 5am through 1pm and into the evening from 1pm to 9pm, along with hours on Saturdays. There were several people who worked on this particular crew for many years and made many great friends at the Fed Building and with customers who frequented the Post Office on a regular basis.

Another long-time crew that was offered at Foothills Gateway was the Lawn Crew. This group did basic lawn mowing and trimming for our main building and the staffed homes that Foothills Gateway operated at the time. The Lawn Crew also had many customers in the community, both businesses and local residents, who paid for their regular services. At their peak, the Lawn Crew would mow and care for over 90 customers each week!

Probably our most unique ‘crew’ offering was the Yo! Coffee cart that Foothills Gateway created and staffed. The coffee cart was first located at Foothills Gateway so staff and those working the cart could learn the equipment and how to make various drinks. Later, the cart was open regularly at Rocky Mountain High School, where students with disabilities sold beverages and small treats to students and teachers each school day. I remember watching high school students order shots of espresso (sometimes three or four!), drink them in one gulp, and slam the glass on the table like they were in a saloon! It was pretty funny!

Back at the main building, day program options were also offered ‘in house’ as they are today, though things did look just a little different. One of our largest contracts in the 1990s was with Saratoga Cycles, who produced a mounted set of pedals that could be ‘cycled’ with your hands in order to build upper body strength in someone who used a wheelchair. Saratoga Cycles program participants assembled many of these unique cycles over the years and to this day, the day program room near the loading dock is referred to as Saratoga or “the cycle room”.

A few other key differences in what you might see in the 1990s day program would be the look and feel of our hallways and gym area. Foothills Gateway was a much more colorful place, with hallways painted a variety of different colors, usually determined by whatever paint had been donated to the agency. Lunchtime also had some big differences. The gym served as the cafeteria, and even had lunch tables mounted to the walls that would pull out and provide school cafeteria-like seating. You can still see the ‘cubbies’ where the tables were folded along the south wall of the gym. And true to the cafeteria style, hot meals were delivered each day that were kept warm in steam tables in the kitchen area (which now houses the ice machine and laundry) and were available to staff and people in day program to purchase

While a lot has changed over the years, one thing remains the same. Foothills Gateway has always done its best to provide opportunities for people with disabilities to grow and learn. I have been able to work with a lot of people we served on different crews over the years, and many have moved on to jobs in the community and others have continued to build skills in day programs. It has always been a joy to work with each of them and watch them grow in their own ways.





