



South Dakota Achieve

BY COLETTA BLY

Marker Location: 4100 S. Western Avenue, Sioux Falls



South Dakota Achieve

Beginning in 1945, several proactive Sioux Falls women sought to dispel a widely held opinion: if a child were mentally impaired and unable to attend a public school, it was a hopeless task to try to train the child to live a useful life. Dorothy Hollister believed otherwise. In 1945, she launched Hollister School, a private school and the first in Sioux Falls for children who were mentally retarded. It began with one room in her home and one child, her daughter. With the help of the Sioux Falls business community, she eventually enlarged her home to accommodate 42 children. Four years later, Mary Sweeney opened a second private school, again in her home and again for a daughter. Her Hope School included a unique Life Skills curriculum with arts and crafts, music, physical education, and language development.

In January 1955, Hope School parents organized a chapter of the National Association for Retarded Children (ARC) which is now the Sioux Chapter. An ARC Workshop for the mentally retarded began in 1958. It soon became apparent that children's lives were being enriched and that basic skills were being learned. In 1963, Lue Blegen, Nita Hatlestad, and Carmeta Ludeman organized Faith Preschool, the city's first licensed day care center for mentally challenged children.

Local surgeon Dr. Robert Giebink donated land in 1965 for the construction of Sioux Vocational Hospital and School for the Handicapped. Onsite housing was provided by purchase of four barracks from the closed Sioux Falls Army Air Force base. Renamed Sioux Vocational School, in 1979 it became the first agency of its kind in South Dakota to be accredited nationally.

A capital fund drive raised more than \$900,000. These funds allowed expansion of the facility, including food services, a work activity center, a new medical and therapeutic wing, and a remodeled administrative area. A Foundation also was incorporated to raise, manage, and distribute funds. Soon every person supported by the services was paid a wage. In 1998, when a new Conference Center was constructed on Western Avenue, a revised and novel mission statement was chosen for the agency: "We find innovative ways for people with disabilities to achieve their dreams." Renamed South Dakota Achieve in 2006, the organization celebrated 27 years of national accreditation, the longest of any similar agency in the nation.

Today South Dakota Achieve stands in testimony to the conviction and determination that people with disabilities can learn and can lead productive and satisfying lives.

DEDICATED IN 2008 BY THE MINNEHAHA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



The Birthplace of a Movement

In 1945 Dorothy Hollister founded the first school in South Dakota for retarded children. Hollister School was located in Dorothy's home at 1020 East 26th Street.



Pledge of Allegiance

Each day at Hollister School began with the class reciting the pledge of allegiance.