

History of Skyline Center

Skyline Center, Inc. was officially incorporated on November 18, 1963 as the Clinton Association for Day Care of Handicapped Children. The organizational meeting was held on November 13th. The energy and motivation behind the founding of the organization came from various interested members of the Clinton County Association for Retarded children. They wanted to ensure that day care services would be available, in the community, so that children with disabilities would be able to enjoy a higher quality of life and continue to live in their home community and have the same opportunities that were afforded to other children.

The new organization was awarded a grant for \$11,200 from the Iowa Department of Social Services to help to get started, and they arranged to lease a building on Skyline Drive in Clinton to house their new program. Currently that building is owned by the Meadowview Pool Association. The original cost for services in the new facility was \$2.00 per day, and their first annual budget was \$14,000. The association became a United Way organization on September 9, 1964. The first director was Mrs. Eugene Sheldon.

The day care program opened on February 2, 1964 with 10 children. In 1965 the decision was made to leave the Skyline Drive Building and move to 3 buildings in the old Schick Army Hospital complex, owned and operated by the Job Corp. The new buildings provided 4 times the space, and by 1967 the association was serving 25 children with disabilities. The expansion continued. In January of 1967 the association began a relationship with the Area Education Agency, which continued for many years and provided educational services for the children served by the association. And in 1968

they received an \$18,000 grant to start a workshop program. That grant marked the beginning of Work Services at what is now Skyline Center.

It was also in 1968, May 14th to be exact, that the Clinton Association for Day Care of Handicapped Children ceased to exist and Skyline Center, Inc. was created. The change in name accompanied a corresponding change in the Articles of Incorporation. The word children was replaced by the word persons and the evolution of Skyline Center's services was begun. Skyline Center began to show its ability to adapt to changes in the population of people that it served, and that ability continued to be present and active as recent history indicated.

In 1970 persistent rumors that the Job Corp was leaving Clinton proved to be true. To secure its position, Skyline Center decided to acquire the land and buildings that it occupied. Under the provisions of the Federal Surplus Property Act, Skyline Center was given a quit claim deed for its property at 2600 N. 4th Street in Clinton, Iowa. The stipulation was that the property had to be used for the public good for a period of 30 years, after which time the property would be transferred, free and clear, to Skyline Center. The quit claim deed was duly recorded on April 27, 1971.

During those early years the organization was plagued by financial problems, 1972 was an especially bad year. The organization enlisted the aid of the Clinton County Board of Supervisors to help with reorganization, and services were separated into two departments, Children's Services and Adult Services. By December of 1972 Skyline was \$38,000 in debt. Things were so bad that year that the County Board of Supervisors had to pay the staff's salaries in June.

But if 1972 was bad, 1973 was wonderful. By February of 1973 all the debt was retired, and with a new “purchase of service” agreement with the State of Iowa, things began to look up. In 1974 the organization received final authorization on a grant to add a 3200 square foot addition to the workshop. And, in 1975, when the Area Education Agency took over the total operation of the day activity and early learning programs, Skyline had made the transition from children’s to adult services. Other milestones reached in 1975 included the ratification of a union contract with the people we served that made Skyline Center the only sheltered workshop in the country with a nationally affiliated union, and the formation of a Residential Alternatives Committee which led to Skyline’s first Community Living Program, one year later.

Following the dynamic first decade of the organization, and the roller coaster ride that marked the seventies, Skyline Center slowed down a bit. There were the usual budget crunches and growing pains, but there were no new building initiatives or program changes. Skyline Center had grown to include over 100 people with disabilities and 40 staff persons. But as the organization moved into the 1980’s, the next growth spurt was on the way.

In 1984 Skyline Center became the parent company of a new corporation, Skyline Residential Services (SRS). That corporation was started to build and own an 8 person group home and a 12-unit apartment building for people with disabilities, through the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Skyline Center was getting into Community living for people with disabilities in a big way. The new residences were finally completed and occupied in 1987. People were anxious to get into the program and were waiting in line. Over the next two years Skyline’s Community

Living Program continued to grow. In 1990 a house was acquired at 313 13th Street in DeWitt. Five people with disabilities lived there. Shortly thereafter, in May of 1991 a similar home was purchased in Clinton at 701 N. 13th Street. Skyline Center was now serving over 30 people in Community Living.

While this was going on Skyline's Work Service Department was expanding as well. With a Community Development Block Grant award in 1989 Skyline added nearly 5000 square feet of work space, and remodeled its east wing to serve people with severe disabilities. But even with the new work space, Skyline's employees were recycling and selling paper, plastic, tin, and aluminum in great volume, and space was at a premium.

Eventually it was decided that a special recycling center was needed and Skyline again applied for a Community Development Block Grant. In a name the facility contest, the Clinton Area Recycling Environment (CARE) was born. The Clinton County Area Solid Waste Agency provided land and financial support for the new facility. Things seemed to be going well, but in 1995 after two years of operations the Solid Waste Agency exercised its option and purchased CARE, sighting financial problems as the reason. It felt it could no longer support the operation as a third party subsidizer. In reaction to this set-back Skyline Center decided to provide jobs in another way, and in September of 1995 it opened DeWitt Specialty Packaging, a new work center in DeWitt that could employ up to 40 people from the rural areas of the county. The goal was to shorten their daily commute while providing them with paid work, and improving their quality of life. Finally it seemed that Skyline's work program would have enough space, but one more expansion was in the works.

The old work center at 2600 N. 4th Street was still not big enough, with just over 14,000 square feet of production area. With work coming from many different industries Skyline needed additional storage for their products. So, even though restricted by a tight budget, Skyline Center made an offer on 40,000 square feet of manufacturing space formerly called the Illinois Range Building. The owner accepted. The new work center, known simply as SCI, opened in April of 1997. An addition 20,000 square feet of warehouse space was added through a Community Development Block Grant Project in 2005. Today the administrative, Community Living, Oce' Recycling Project, and Day Habilitation programs are located at the old 2600 N. 4th Street facility.

The DeWitt Specialty Packaging building was closed in 2004, and the program was consolidated with the SCI program. Quality of life for people living out in the far reaches of the county became less of an issue since the SCI building was much closer to DeWitt and the commute time was significantly shorter than it had been when they were being bussed to the north end of Clinton. Maintaining two separate facilities in the age of higher energy costs became too much of a burden.

Also in 2004, recognizing the need for continuity of health care, Skyline Center opened Home Health to provide care for individuals currently receiving other services. Over the years Home Health expanded to serving the needs of all individuals, not just those receiving other services, in Clinton and southern Jackson counties.

In the last 50 years, Skyline Center has grown from a day care center serving 10 children with disabilities to an adult work and community living agency serving over 200 individuals and employing a staff of 100 people. Skyline Center has changed over the years to meet the needs of those we serve, and the organization will continue to change as

it goes on into another 50 years. Some of the challenges that await are services for seniors with disabilities. Yes the group of 10 that was originally served has moved closer to their golden years, and their future needs must be met. Also, Skyline Center has come full circle, as the organization is again serving children with disabilities, this time in their parent's homes. In the next fifty years Skyline Center will have programs to meet the needs of people with disabilities of all ages and with all types of disability.

What started as the hopes and dreams of a group of concerned parents and citizens in a small building on Skyline Drive in Clinton, Iowa more than 50 years ago has grown into a comprehensive agency serving the needs of people with disabilities regardless of age. And many people hope that it will continue to do so for at least 50 years more.