

Janet Pearson comes to work motivated, friendly, and able to deal with all kinds of people. She is the first person people see when seeking FNA services for substance abuse. It's a job Pearson takes seriously.

"If you treat people with respect, you get respect," Pearson said. "I'm here to help them."

Pearson is with FNA's Behavioral Health Services, which helps people with substance use disorders, and mental health issues. She is a 18-year employee. Her office is in the reception area of the FNA Ralph Perdue Building on South Cushman Street. She was born in Fairbanks, and is the granddaughter of respected elder, the late Effie Kokrine.

Her area is filled with healthy plants, and bright sun catchers. She keeps a candy jar filled with goodies by the reception window. It is an inviting place.

Her kind demeanor has made her a favorite with everyone who knows her.

"She has this way with our consumers," said Siobhan Lynch, BHS clinical director. "It's so friendly, but keeps boundaries. She approaches people in a non confrontational way. She can work with someone who is inebriated, in a rage, or depression, and get them the help they need."

As the first point of contact for BHS, Pearson starts a case file for people seeking services. FNA BHS prides itself on the one-page, pre-service application, designed to make it easier for people to apply for treatment. Still, Pearson will help people fill it out if needed.

Once she's made the case file, she'll let the Intake/Assessment team know of the new file. The team then does an assessment to find the right place for the person. Usually that generates more paperwork, which Pearson tracks.

Her keyboard and phone get a daily workout. She easily handles 20 pieces of paperwork in a half hour. There is a well-worn path between her desk and the fax machine.

"Paperwork makes the office work," Pearson said.

A distinctive thing about her is that she is 2'6" tall, and she uses a royal blue motorized wheelchair to get around.

Pearson has osteogenesis imperfecta, also known as Brittle Bone Disease. About 25-50,000 Americans have the rare disease, according to the Osteogenesis Imperfecta Foundation.

The disease's main feature is a fragile skeleton and caused by a gene mutation that bone formation, bone strength and the structure of other tissues, among many other conditions, according to OIF.

Janet's parents, Jerry Pearson and Mary Kokrine Pearson, treated her like they would anyone else, Pearson said. Children with OI have to be handled gently, and regularly monitored by a doctor, according to OIF information.

Their upbringing is the reason Pearson is able to live independently. She doesn't need help at home and does her own errands. She takes the Van Tran to work and doesn't have a problem navigating the snowbanks in her wheelchair

She is an avid beader, and is known for her beaded ink pen covers.

Though she is not able to walk, she says she is not in any pain.

Pearson doesn't have a problem talking about her disease, and was a March of Dimes poster child when she was young. If anything, she encourages people to look it up.

"When my kids were little, they would ask her 'Why are you so small, Janet?'" said Lynch. "She'd say 'I just stopped growing when I was younger.' Then she'd show them cool things to do in a wheelchair."

Pearson's helpful nature is apparent in her work. People are her main concern.

"Somebody's got to be here for them," she said. "When someone asks for help, you don't put them on hold."