Barbara Fiechtl, clinical instructor in the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation and a faculty member for the Center for Persons with Disabilities’ (CPD) Utah Regional Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (URLEND) project, presented a poster at the recent Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) conference. The poster, titled “Parent-Directed Consultations via Videoconference: Participant Feedback,” examined a URLEND project designed to provide trainees with interdisciplinary experience, as well as the opportunity for direct experience with families. “Not many of the other LENDs are doing something like this,” Fiechtl said. “With the poster, we tried to explain how we set it up so other places could do it.”

The project allowed LEND trainees in far-flung locations to work together with parents to offer treatment and intervention suggestions for their children with disabilities. Utah and Idaho each had trainees in two locations, while North Dakota, Montana and Wyoming each had one location. The sites were linked via remote connection, including computer, web cam, microphone and speakers, set up by Utah TeleHealth. The consultations ranged in length from 75 minutes to two hours. “The trainees get a list of concerns from the parents about two weeks before the videoconference,” Fiechtl said. “The trainees then volunteer to find out the information.”

Trainees are learning communication skills, as well as learning how to interact with other professionals on a team. One trainee commented, “I really liked the ‘interdisciplinary’ feel of the whole process and that the comments and suggestions had relevance across the disciplines. I liked hearing what others had to say and what suggestions were being made and felt like it ended up being a session that had a ‘well-rounded’ feel with suggestions from a lot of perspectives.”

A parent said, “It was great to have so many people available with so many different specialties … Everyone involved seemed like they were prepared with information on our son and ready to give feedback and suggestions. Everyone seemed to genuinely care about us as a family even though they didn’t know us. Everyone was kind and empathetic.” Fiechtl said when the project began six years ago, there was one videoconference scheduled each semester. Now, there are 10-12 each semester.