Adrienne Akers moved to Logan in the early 70s, bringing with her a degree in physical therapy and no interest in working with children.

That changed when she got a job with the new Exceptional Child Center in 1973 (now the Center for Persons with Disabilities). She began a career that lasted through shifts in disability policy and two name changes at her workplace. Now the Center for Persons with Disabilities has given her the 2009 CPD Alumni of the Year award.

When Akers started at the CPD, Utah was experiencing a trend away from institutionalizing young children with disabilities. Parents came to the center asking for options other than sending their children to group homes. The Exceptional Child Center began providing direct services to very young children, and Akers was brought on board because of her background in motor development. She began working in the center's classrooms and doing clinical evaluations.

The disability field evolved over the years. As the movement to include children with disabilities into mainstream classrooms began, the CPD's focus expanded to include research and demonstration projects that developed curricula for educating children with disabilities. Akers eventually got a Masters in Family and Human Development and began working as a researcher. She started with the center's Early Intervention and Research Institute and began working to support families in working with their own children. Her focus shifted from trying to change what a child could not do to building on the strengths of the child and family.

Then, in 2001, she started work on the "Opening Utah's Doors" project, funded by a grant from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau. The focus was to make it easier for families to apply for government programs. Then, while attending an interagency meeting, Akers and EIRI Director Richard Roberts learned about a computer program prototype conceived by Nathan Garn and Darren Labrum, two programmers from Utah County. They had begun work on an online program that interviewed clients, collected information and plugged it into applications for different services, consolidating several applications into one.

EIRI purchased the programmers' prototype and took the concept on as a research project. Eventually Utah Clicks allowed people to go through one process to apply for several programs, like Medicaid, Head Start and Baby Watch. The project won the 2006 Innovation Award from the Council of State Governments and wound up launching a private spin-off company, Dynamic Screening Solutions. Akers is its President and CEO.

Akers' career has changed directions again, as the scope of Dynamic Screening Solutions has expanded into the business world. Still, her time at the CPD helped shape her career. She credits Roberts with serving as a mentor, teaching her to work effectively with families.

Another mentor was the late Dr. Glen Casto, former associate director of CPD, who encouraged her to set goals and work toward them with confidence. He helped her accomplish things she didn't know she could do. "My original training as a physical therapist never prepared me for the career I was supposed to have."