Working Professionals Benefit From Training

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Too often, children and adults with disabilities, and their families, see a number of different service providers who may not be aware of all of their needs. Interdisciplinary training for health care professionals recognizes that no single discipline has all the answers, said Judith Holt, Director of Interdisciplinary Training at Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities.

“Interdisciplinary is integrated. The closer you work together, the better it is for families,” she said. “It is really helpful to provide a better level of service and supports for children with disabilities as well as adults.”

To provide that interdisciplinary training for service providers and healthcare professionals, the Utah Regional Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities program (URLEND) offers interdisciplinary leadership experiences each year to trainees from Utah, Idaho, North Dakota, Montana and Wyoming.

URLEND is a joint effort of Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities, the University of Utah School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics and the Utah Department of Health’s Bureau for Children with Special Health Care Needs.

The LEND program itself was started about 40 years ago with the big research hospitals, Holt said. She began the URLEND program at the CPD in 2000.

Trainees complete 300 clock hours in didactic, clinical and leadership training. Participants in the Autism Enhancement strand complete an additional 150 hours, while participants in clinical audiology and infant pediatric audiology have additional requirements.

Disciplines represented by the URLEND trainees include audiology, dentistry, education, general medicine, genetics, health administration, nursing, nutrition, occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychology, social work and speech-language pathology.

“They can come here to observe the process, and to get a feel for what an interdisciplinary team is like, even if they’re not providing services here,” said Vicki Simonsmeier, co-director of the CPD’s autism evaluation clinic and a URLEND faculty member. “It’s a pretty incredible program. The trainees are always amazed at the end of the year by what they’ve learned.”

Because of the emphasis on leadership across the program and across the states, part of the training includes the use of technology like Skype to facilitate interdisciplinary discussion.

Simonsmeier said leadership projects being done this year by trainees include a research survey of regular education teachers to discover how much they understand about the behavior of children with autism and if that knowledge is implemented in the classroom, and a survey of parents of children with special health care needs, to discover the characteristics of a ‘good parent,’ and if those characteristics are different than those of parents who don’t have a special needs child.

Simonsmeier said there are parents of children and adults with disabilities at each LEND site and on all leadership projects.

“Having family members as faculty help the professionals understand that they can’t have a discussion of disability if people with disabilities are not at the table,” Holt said.

Simonsmeier agreed. “If we don’t have the parents’ voice, we head off in the wrong directions,” she said.
Vanessa Webb has been a URLEND trainee for two years, in both the general and Autism Enhancement strands. She completed her master’s degree in Health and Human Movement with an emphasis in Health Promotion at USU this spring and hosts a Spanish-language radio show that discusses healthcare related topics. She plans on applying to medical school this summer.

“The aim of URLEND is to shape future leaders in healthcare policy. That meant to me not just growth as a professional, but as a person,” Webb said. “The program shaped me and gave me the tools to believe that I can be a leader and to advocate for others.”

Because of her experience, Webb said, she recently presented at an autism conference in her native Peru, something she would not have considered without the help and support of her URLEND mentors.

“As a minority, to be exposed to the caliber of people in URLEND—it’s great,” she said. “A lot of time we put limitations on ourselves. For myself, URLEND was an end, and a beginning, of a new perspective how to see life, in my professional career and as a person.”

The opportunity to work with leaders who set a good example has made her more respectful, more aware and more willing to help other people, she said.

“You can help, no matter what, no matter where, you can make a difference,” she said. “We can all become better than what we were yesterday.”

Cherissa Aldredge completed her LEND training in 2012 and is currently a student in USU’s Disability Disciplines doctoral program. She is also the Region 1 Coordinator for Grassroots Advocacy Partnership (GAP), a disability advocacy organization, which serves Box Elder, Cache and Rich counties in Utah.

Her interest in disability advocacy grew out of her own experience with an acquired brain injury and subsequent vision loss. Before her injury, she worked in human resources, and has a particular interest in employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

“The LEND program will help bridge the gap between my experience in the world of business and where my career is going to go,” she said. “I learned how disability looks from a variety of perspectives, not just my own. I was able to expand on my own experience with disability to gain a broader perspective.”

While participating in the LEND program, Aldredge connected with Claire Nantoya of the Utah Developmental Disability Council, which funds GAP of Utah. That connection with Nantoya led to her current position.

Janel Preston was a URLEND trainee in 2011-2012 and is the autism specialist with the CPD’s Up to 3 early intervention program. She works with families of children who are suspected of being on the autism spectrum or who have already been diagnosed. She also works with Clinical Services in the Autism Spectrum Disorder Evaluation Clinic.

Preston completed the autism enhancement strand.

“I found the information really useful—things doctors had more experience in dealing with,” she said. “It helped me to understand the subtle nuances that go along with autism spectrum disorder.”

Preston made contacts with other professionals in her field, who can now be resources for her. She also had the opportunity to gain first-hand experience at other clinics in the area and is able to refer services to the families she works with.

“Being a URLEND trainee gave me a renewed sense of excitement about what I’m doing, to be reinvigorated about the things I was already using,” she said.

One of the training sites for the Autism Enhancement strand is the Autism Support Services: Education, Research and Training (ASSERT) preschool at the CPD. According to program coordinator Lyndsay Nix, URLEND trainees attend a week-long training at the clinic and receive the same training as staff members. They work with the children in the morning and have didactic sessions in the afternoon.
“They learn the policies, techniques and strategies we use so that when they leave, they have the full experience and have been trained as ASSERT staff,” Nix said. “Those who aren’t on the AE track are still welcome to set up observations as often as they like to get as much of an experience as they want.”

ASSERT uses applied behavioral analysis to change the negative behaviors of children with autism, Nix said, and many trainees claim to have been converted to ABA when they leave.

“Last week a couple of people said they wanted to change their career plan,” Nix said.

In addition to being a URLEND training site, ASSERT provides consultations for school districts throughout Utah and provides training to school district personnel on effective educational and behavioral strategies for children with autism.

**Statewide programs meet professionals’ needs**

**TBI**

Training provided by the CPD in conjunction with the Utah Brain Injury Council has provided information about traumatic brain injury (TBI) to mental health providers, job service professional, migrant head start teachers and staff and for law enforcement officers around the state.

According to Sue DuBois, who is the state TBI coordinator and a CPD research assistant, the focus in all TBI training is to help professionals and consumers understand TBI —what causes it, how it affects a person, strategies for coping with TBI and resources.

DuBois is currently involved in a training project being developed by the Veterans' Administration in collaboration with the CPD, USU Counseling Services and USU Veterans’ Outreach. The training is being designed specifically for higher education, and is focused on student support staff who have first contact with veterans. The training will include a manual, a DVD and a three-hour workshop.

**IOTI**

The Interagency Outreach Training Initiative (IOTI) is an ongoing legislative appropriation that has been administered by the CPD since 1995.

“IOTI is a wonderful system to provide needed disability training and awareness that there often isn’t other funding sources for,” said Marilyn Hammond, Associate Director of Interdisciplinary Training. “It’s a way to educate professionals.”

Current training programs include American with Disabilities Act (ADA) training for court officials including judges and attorneys, and training to help police officers work with people with disabilities.

According to Martin Blair, chair of the IOTI steering council, the program was an initiative of the directors of state agencies that dealt with disability issues, including rehabilitation, education, aging, direct services for people with disabilities and Medicaid funding.

“There were many services being provided to people with disabilities by people who didn’t have college degrees, what we would call paraprofessionals,” Blair said.

Often, trainers in IOTI programs are people with disabilities or their family members, Hammond said.

“It helps break down barriers,” she said. “People ask questions, they view the trainers as professionals.”

**Child Care Nutrition Program**

The Child Care Nutrition Program, headed by Jeanie Peck, allows qualified child care providers to receive monthly reimbursements to help offset the cost of providing meals to children in their care. It is a part of the United States Department of Agriculture’s Child and Adult Care Food Program.

The Child Care Nutrition Program provides one 2-hour class per year at no charge to providers on a variety of topics related to nutrition and new regulations. The program also publishes a bi-monthly newsletter that provides new ideas, recipes, menus, current information, events, tips, and more for families free of charge.

The website offers information for providers on how to get started in the program, meal requirements, reimbursement rates and online forms, as well as an extensive resource section.

**Feeding Conference**

For the last eight years, USU has sponsored a Feeding Conference for speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists and early interventionists—people who work with children who won’t eat. According to Cathy Mace of the Up to 3 early intervention program, attendance has ranged from 50 to 120 a year.
This year’s conference will be Aug. 1 and 2, and will feature a gastroenterologist who will talk about pediatric feeding problems from an organic perspective, and a speaker who will present a behavioral perspective.

**Nationwide assistance for state agencies, school districts**

Training offered by the CPD is not limited to healthcare professionals. Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education, or TAESE, provides training to state agency or school district personnel on a wide variety of special education issues.

“We contract with eight states on larger conferences on fiscal accountability in special education,” said TAESE director John Copenhaver. “We try to build their capacity so they will have a better understanding of the issues in special ed.”

As with everything else, Copenhaver said, there are hot topics.

“Right now, it’s fiscal issues and data—how to collect it and how to make decisions based on the data,” he said. “People are swimming in data, but are having a hard time making decisions based on it.”

When there are complaints by parents about the special education needs of their child, TAESE assists with dispute resolution and mediation between the parent and the state or school district by training the contractors who become the mediators, complaint investigators, resolution specialist and due process hearing officers.

TASK12 is a program to assess sign language interpretation skills and provide the results of the assessment to the interpreters, Copenhaver said. If they need to enhance their skills, training is available online, he said.

TAESE also organizes and manages conferences and meetings by contacting speakers, assisting with agenda development, preparing materials, organizing events and preparing final evaluation reports.

**CPD training touches lives around the world**

Web Accessibility In Mind (WebAIM) works primarily with web designers, developers and webmasters and provides training and technical assistance to help them evaluate their own websites and make them accessible to people with disabilities. WebAIM has offered training around the world.

“Training is the biggest part of what we do,” said Jared Smith, associate director. WebAIM staff offers a two-day training on campus about three times a year, or will go to a client’s location for a more customized, more intensive training.

“Just training empowers them, and gives them information so they can evaluate their own site,” Smith said.

WebAIM staff can also perform in-depth evaluations for clients, and give them a report that outlines any accessibility issues and what they need to do to fix those issues.

Smith said they are currently working on a training for an online e-learning corporation that has lots of websites.

“They want evaluations of all the sites, then targeted training for different audiences and groups,” Smith said. “These trainings are a little more intense.”

Training programs developed by CPD researchers are being used worldwide after being translated into several different languages.
Bess Dennison, SKI-HI program coordinator, presented the Visually Impaired In-Service in America (VIISA) program in Poland, and the materials have been translated into Polish for continued training. The program provides early intervention resources for teachers of young children who are visually impaired.

The VIISA curriculum, including Powerpoint slides, was translated into Arabic by Suha Tabbal, who attended one of Dennison’s trainings in Knoxville a few years ago. Tabbal is the Director of Childhood Development at the National Council for Family Affairs in Amman, Jordan and provides training in Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Syria, Dennison said.

According to Dennison, Tabbal works with non-governmental agencies or other agencies in the Middle East that provide training to early interventionists who work with visually impaired preschoolers.

“She is very committed to providing services, but they had to translate it first,” Dennison said. “They needed a curriculum to follow, and had to make adaptations for cultural differences.”

Tabbal brought a DVD of the preschoolers she worked with to the training she attended in Knoxville.

“They adjust just like blind preschoolers in this country,” Dennison said. “I don’t know what we were expecting. It was enlightening for the people there.”