Spreading The Word About Research | CPD

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Shane Johnson, CPD associate director of development, describes research posters to a tour group.

Did you know that Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities is a leader in research, training and direct services for people with disabilities? If the answer is yes, you’re among the 2.1 million people reached last year by the CPD’s information dissemination efforts, which include website visits, print materials, presentations and media mentions. The CPD website is the main portal for people to access programs and staff listings, but many programs have their own websites, including Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education (TAESE), Autism Support Services: Education, Research and Training (ASSERT), Web Accessibility in Mind (WebAIM), Utah Assistive Technology Program (UATP), Interdisciplinary Disability Awareness and Service Learning (IDASL), Utah Regional Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (URLEND), the Child Care Nutrition Program and Up to 3 Early Intervention. The CPD blog and social media sites are accessed from the home page of the main CPD website. A new blog is posted every Monday, Wednesday and Friday and spotlights a new research activity, publications, a news event or an interesting person. “I love reading the feature stories and blogs,” said a commenter on the CPD website. “I have been at the CPD for more than 20 years. Even though I think I know what's going on, I learn so much more about the programs that are highlighted.” UATP and WebAIM also have blogs and post updates on social media. “We use social media quite a bit,” said Jared Smith, associate director of WebAIM. “Twitter is an incredible resource for us because so many people in this field on active on Twitter. Discussion and communication go both ways.” WebAIM also utilizes an interactive e-mail discussion list to announce trainings and other events. “We’re kind of in a place where we don’t have to worry too much about getting our stuff out,” Smith said. “It tends to happen organically on its own. It’s interesting to see the channels it goes through when it gets re-tweeted and re-blogged, because we’ve been able to establish that community.” Smith said the WebAIM website is one of the top Google search results for the terms that are used in this field, and for good reason. “We have a lot of really good content. We have good content, so people link to it, which moves it up,” he said. “And we’ve been at this a long time. It just comes naturally.”

Storee Powell, marketing/public relations specialist for UATP, said she tries to strike a balance between providing online and paper resources about not only UATP, but useful handouts such as a list of iPad apps that are helpful for people with disabilities.

Much of UATP’s information dissemination happens the good old-fashioned way—by handing out fliers and brochures at health fairs and conferences throughout the year.

Monica Urrutia hands out thousands of brochures for UATP, Utah Assistive Technology Foundation (UATF), Citizens Reutilizing Assistive Technology Equipment (CReATE), Up to 3, Clinical Services and the CPD.

“I've gone to just about every senior citizen center in Utah,” Urrutia said, as well as county fairs and health fairs from border to border. In addition to distributing brochures, she demonstrates assistive technology equipment. Because Urrutia is a native Spanish-speaker, she has helped to translate many of the printed materials into Spanish as well.

By handing out paper resources, staff members are able to build rapport with professionals, teachers, occupational therapists and even commercial vendors, who will, in turn, pass the information on to consumers who request it. The established rapport also allows UATP staff to direct professionals and vendors to online resources.

The CPD’s information dissemination efforts are not limited only to its internal resources. Recent media mentions
in local and national publications include the Logan Herald-Journal, the Ogden (Utah) Standard-Examiner and The Wall Street Journal.

CPD researchers also have a hand in getting the word out. Last year, researchers published three books and 23 studies in peer-reviewed journals such as Early Childhood Research Quarterly, Brain Behavior and Immunity, The Volta Review, Pediatric Neurology, Autism Research and Treatment and Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders.

Researchers also shared their findings during presentations at conferences such as C-SUN (California State University, Northridge International Technology and Persons with Disabilities Conference), AUCD (Association of University Centers on Disability) and International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disabilities, which reached thousands of other professionals from around the world.

Through these efforts, the CPD shares information on research, technical assistance, programs and services with professionals, students and people with disabilities in Utah and around the world.