

URLEND Grant Receives Funding for Five Additional Years

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URLEND funding helps support advanced clinical training at the Sorenson Center.

The Utah Regional Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and related Disabilities ([URLEND](#)) grant, administered by the University of Utah in partnership with Utah State University, recently received funding for an additional five years. The Institute for Disability Research, Policy and Practice has received funding through this grant for the past 20 years, and much of it now supports advanced clinical training at the [Sorenson Legacy Foundation Center for Clinical Excellence \(SCCE\)](#).

LEND programs provide long-term, graduate-level training for students as well as interdisciplinary services and care for infants, children, and adolescents with disabilities. LEND programs operate within a university system, emphasizing vital interdisciplinary skills and preparing trainees from many professional disciplines to become leaders in their fields.

There are 60 LEND programs in the U.S., all of which share resources and information to maximize their impact. Students participating in the URLEND program come from Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, and North Dakota. Through the URLEND program, they receive training to function as family-centered, culturally responsive professionals who are able to work effectively in interdisciplinary settings. This renewed grant will support salaries and the cost of training programs for these students, allowing them to gain valuable experience that might not otherwise be available to them.

SCCE director and URLEND co-director Gretchen Peacock explained that although LEND training is optional, it has far-reaching effects for both students and families. “One of the overall goals is to build the capacity of professionals through specialized interdisciplinary training to better serve people with disabilities,” Peacock said. “Access to services is really limited outside of certain areas; all of these trainees will help meet the needs of their region and will reach more of those underserved communities.”

One aspect of the program that is especially impactful for trainees is the opportunity to interact with and learn from families with children with disabilities. Some families who are involved in LEND serve as mentors to trainees, taking them along to appointments or school activities to help them understand what the family experiences as they navigate life with a child who has a disability.

“That’s not something that most people inherently get out of a graduate program, learning what that’s like for families,” said Peacock. For USU students in particular, she said, interacting with professionals from traditional medical disciplines—such as pediatricians, genetic counselors, or pediatric dentists—is something they wouldn’t typically experience as part of their training, as USU does not have a medical school. These interactions help future clinicians understand the comprehensive nature of care for individuals with disabilities.

“In the end, URLEND trainees come out of the program with a greater appreciation for what different disciplines contribute to provide service to children and adolescents with disabilities,” said Peacock. “We’re excited to continue providing this integral training to support families throughout the nation.”

Peacock acknowledged the many individuals who make the URLEND program possible, including Judith Holt, who was instrumental in initially securing URLEND funding as a subcontract through the University of Utah in 2001, and Sarah Winter, the overall project director of the grant at the U.