

From the Director: IDRPP in a Post-COVID World

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Executive Director Matthew Wappett

Note: The Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice has recently released its annual report, with this introduction by Executive Director Matthew Wappett. You can [read the report](#) on our website.

The world around us is going through an era of change and upheaval that is unparalleled in its scope and magnitude. The traditional rules of work, school, and daily life have all been called into question and we are all trying to figure out what it means to live and work in a post-COVID world. Some organizations are struggling to adapt and evolve, but the Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice (formerly the Center for Persons with Disabilities) has continued to grow and thrive despite the many challenges. Although COVID certainly impacted our operations, it did not slow us down, and Institute for Disability staff have continued to demonstrate their grit, creativity, and resilience in the face of these many challenges.

Last year was a record-breaking year for us in many areas. We surpassed our prior benchmarks for the total number of people served by our programs, the number of projects we managed, the number of research and evaluation studies completed, the number of peer-reviewed publications accepted, and the number of products we developed and disseminated. We have focused our efforts on cultivating new collaborative relationships and pivoting to address the emerging needs in a post-pandemic world, and we are excited about the many new projects we have brought in this year. These new projects will continue our legacy of excellence in serving children and adults with disabilities and will help us

continue to create evidence-based programs that improve the capacity of educators and other professionals in the human services.

The biggest update over the past year is a name change and rebranding. We began the process of renaming prior to the pandemic, and we received approval from the Utah State University Board of Trustees in January 2021 to rename the USU Center for Persons with Disabilities to the USU Institute for Disability Research, Policy & Practice. This name change and rebranding coincides with the post-COVID return to the office and provides us with an opportunity to celebrate our past success and to recommit to our mission for the future.

Over the last couple of years, we worked closely with administrators and marketing professionals at USU to develop a new name and brand identity that would accurately capture the breadth, depth, and capacity of our programs. Our prior name, the "Center for Persons with Disabilities," was a reasonably descriptive name in 1991 (when the name was adopted), but linguistic trends have changed and the CPD grew in size and in the scope of our programs. Over the years, many other "centers" emerged from our various projects, and it became awkward to describe the multiple centers within the Center in our marketing and outreach materials. Therefore, with university approval, we elevated our status from a "Center" to an "Institute." Becoming an "Institute" that houses multiple "centers" helps clarify our organizational structure and increases our visibility on campus, in the state, and among our peer institutions.

Along with all the growth and change, we have also said goodbye to many long-time staff who decided to retire this past year. Several of these staff have been at the IDRPP for 30+ years and we have been sad to lose their institutional knowledge and experience. One of the hallmarks of a healthy organization is staff retention, and the fact that we have so many staff who have chosen to spend their entire career at the IDRPP is a testament to the teamwork and supportive culture at the Institute. Although it is difficult to say goodbye, we are grateful for the contributions of these staff members and for their commitment to the mission of the IDRPP.

As staff have retired, and as the human services evolve to accommodate a post-pandemic society, we have brought in new staff with new energy, ideas, and areas of expertise. Over the past year, we have launched new programs in mental health, tele-health, family support, equity & diversity, public health, and disability studies. We have launched new collaborative projects with university and state partners to build capacity and improve supports

within education, health, and social service systems. We are excited for the opportunities that lie ahead, and our team of skilled professionals and staff will continue to deliver the high-quality research, services, and training that have been the foundation of our growth and success.

2021 is also our 49th year of operations! We opened our doors in 1972 as a local specialized education program, and since then we have grown to be a national and international leader in research, training, and services for people with disabilities, families, and the professionals who serve them. We will be spending some time this next year reflecting upon our past and planning for the future. Please watch for several events this next year that will highlight our history and accomplishments for our 50th anniversary.

This opportunity to celebrate our 50th anniversary is an opportunity to recommit to our core values of innovation, inclusion, collaboration, and care that have been the foundation of our success.

None of our accomplishments would be possible without the support we receive from USU and our community. We are grateful for the trust of our loyal clients, colleagues, and collaborators and we are excited to continue to work with you to create a more equitable and inclusive world. We are always striving to be better than we were yesterday, and we would love to hear from you if you have any thoughts on how we can improve our image and our impact. If you are on social media, please connect with us there. You can also contact us and stay up to date through our [website](#) and our [blog](#). As always, please do not hesitate to contact us anytime.

Thank you again for your trust and support. We appreciate you!