

Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities
University of Nevada, Reno

Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2024



**Nevada Center for
Excellence in Disabilities**

a member of



Association of University Centers on Disabilities

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Mission

The Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities' mission is to develop and provide exemplary services, programs, education, and research in order to promote a high quality of life for Nevadans with disabilities and their families.

Welcome

The 2024 fiscal year was a success for the Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities (NCED). Our operating budget was slightly over \$8 million in core funding, leveraged funds, and in-kind contributions, supporting more than 30 unique projects and nearly 80 staff and faculty. NCED positively contributed to people with disabilities and their family members by addressing issues at multiple levels, including direct-service provision, community training, capacity building, and systematic change. We are excited to continue serving Nevadans with products and programs related to disability through June 30, 2028. We are always looking for feedback and collaboration opportunities. If you have ideas for new programs, want to collaborate, or want to support any of our work, please reach out by emailing nced@unr.edu, or calling (775) 784-4921.



Randall Owen, Ph.D.
Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities
Director



Diane Thorkildson, MPH
Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities
Assistant Director

Financials

In FY24, NCED secured \$7,749,249.00 in funding, excluding core contributions, along with \$603,005 in core funding. This means that every \$1 of federal core funding leveraged an additional \$12.90 to support NCED activities.

About NCED



The Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities (NCED) is one of 68 University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) across the United States and its territories. There is at least one UCEDD in every state, and NCED is the only designated UCEDD in Nevada and serves the entire state. NCED is part of the University of Nevada, Reno. All UCEDDs work to accomplish a shared vision that foresees a nation where all Americans, including those with disabilities, participate fully in their communities.

NCED is one of 68 University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD)

Core Functions



Accessible Classroom

UCEDDs are part of the Association of University Centers on Disability, which provides technical assistance and support to this national network. These Centers are funded to provide four core functions to people with disabilities, their families, and communities: Interdisciplinary Training, Community Service, Research, and Information Dissemination.

Interdisciplinary Training

NCED contributes to instructional programs that help people gain academic or professional credentials, including academic degrees, professional certificates, and advanced training opportunities. These programs are available to students and community members interested in the disciplines that serve people with disabilities and their families.

Community Service

Community service includes direct services, technical assistance, and community education. Through technical assistance, NCED helps organizations and agencies support the quality of life for Nevadans with disabilities. NCED also educates the community on critical issues that affect people with disabilities and their families.

Research

NCED researches and evaluates various programs and public policies that impact people with disabilities, their families, and the systems in which we live. Our research contributes to the evidence bases that allow us, and others, to implement changes that ultimately improve conditions for the disability community.

Information Dissemination

NCED shares information on programs, critical issues and events that influence people with disabilities, their families, and decision-makers in our communities.

Interdisciplinary Training



Nevada Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental & Related Disabilities

The Nevada Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (NvLEND) improves the health of infants, children, and adolescents with autism and other disabilities by preparing practicing professionals, parents, and graduate trainees from diverse professional disciplines to assume leadership roles in their respective fields and by developing high levels of interdisciplinary clinical competence. Each **NvLEND class includes 14 trainees from across the state and across the disciplines.** LEND programs consider family and self-advocates a discipline. Consequently, parents/family members of children with disabilities and individuals with disabilities are encouraged to apply to participate in the training.

Developmental Disabilities Minor

The Developmental Disabilities undergraduate program at the University of Nevada, Reno, is offered as an interdisciplinary minor. A minimum of nine credits must be taken from a list of NCED-approved courses provided through Community Health Sciences, Special Education, Education, Human Development and Family Studies, Psychology, or Social Work majors. Typically, students who complete this minor are interested in working with people with disabilities in a way that relates to their major following graduation.

"The Developmental Disabilities minor gave me the knowledge and skills to connect my passion with real-world applications, preparing me to promote inclusion and empowerment in my career."
- Graduating Developmental Disabilities Minor student

Path to Independence

The Path to Independence is an inclusive, two-year, non-degree certificate program designed to provide a college experience for students with intellectual disabilities. This program is a collaborative effort involving the Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities (NCED), the University of Nevada, Reno Extended Studies Department (UNR EXS), Sierra Regional Center (SRC), the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR), and school districts such as Lyon County and Washoe County.



P21 Spring 2024 Graduation

**16 Total Students
enrolled in 2024**

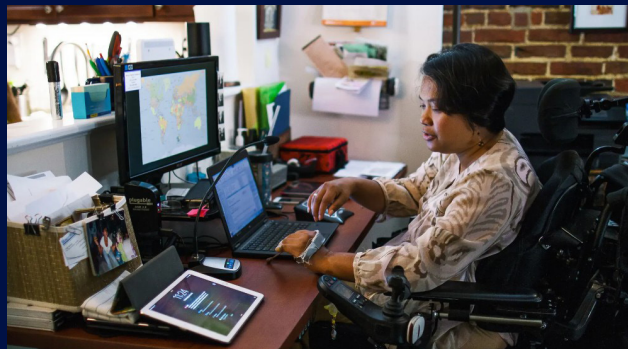
**8 Program
Graduates in 2024**

Community Services



Nevada Assistive Technology Resource Center

The NATRC is a statewide project of the Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities (NCED) at the University of Nevada, Reno. As part of the Nevada Assistive Technology Collaborative, the NATRC offers a variety of services and support to anyone interested in exploring the world of assistive technology. In 2024, the NATRC provided assistive technology loans to **181** people in Nevada and offered demonstration services for assistive technology to 518 individuals.



NATRC participant using assistive technology

Loan assistive technology to people in Nevada: 181

Demonstration services for assistive technology: 518

iCan Bike

Research shows that over 80% of people with Autism and 90% of people with Down syndrome never learn to ride a two-wheel bicycle. Through the iCan bike camps children and adults with developmental disabilities learn to ride a bicycle, empowering them with confidence, independence and the ability to self-transport. In partnership with The Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, NCED coordinated bike camps in Reno and Las Vegas in 2024.

45 riders were hosted across two events in Reno & Las Vegas



iCan Bike participant riding a two-wheeler

University Center for Autism and Neurodevelopment

UCAN is a interdisciplinary team of professionals operating out of the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology in the School of Medicine, focused on autism and neurodevelopmental disorders in children. The purpose of the UCAN Assessment Team is to provide diagnostic evaluations for children in need.

"UCAN gave us the answers we had been searching for and the support we didn't know we needed. Thanks to their compassionate team, we finally feel equipped to understand and help our child thrive."

- Parent who worked with UCAN

Completed 47 interdisciplinary Autism assessments (1,410 hours of service)

Community Services



Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

The MTSS framework serves as the infrastructure needed in Nevada to address the rising needs of the student populations in both our urban and rural districts as well as evaluate the student outcomes of Nevada's school climate initiatives. The integration aims to reduce time, effort and resources, and maximize student outcomes including improved school climate, reductions in discipline, and improved academic outcomes.



- **11** school districts received direct technical assistance from the MTSS team.
- **47** District Leadership Team meetings were facilitated and over **200** schools in Nevada recieved support.
- **64** MTSS training events were provided to (a total of) **975** participants implementing MTSS.
- **29** Coaching sessions were provided to district-level MTSS coaches, coordinators, and implementation teams.

The MTSS initiative has shown measurable success across Nevada schools. Some of the key improvements include a **3.3%** reduction in absenteeism, a **2.2%** increase in math proficiency, and a **1.1%** rise in English language arts proficiency. Student behavior has also improved significantly, with a **22.7%** decrease in bullying, a **6.6%** reduction in violence, and a **9.6%** drop in incidents involving controlled substances.

Positive Behavior Support - Nevada

Positive Behavior Support - Nevada (PBS-NV) is a statewide initiative dedicated to building a sustainable culture of quality behavior support for individuals with disabilities and challenging behaviors. By providing technical assistance, evidence-based interventions, and fostering partnerships with schools, agencies, and families, PBS-NV works to create inclusive, effective environments. Through initiatives like the NV APBS Conference, educators and professionals collaborate to drive meaningful, systemic change, ultimately improving the quality of life for Nevadans.

Served 148 parents and caregivers

Nevada Student Leadership Transition Summit

Every fall, high-school students from across the state come together for the Nevada Student Leadership Transition Summit (NSLTS). This two-day training is designed to empower transition age students with disabilities with leadership and self-determination skills toward fulfilling their postsecondary education, employment, and life dreams.



White Pine and Lund High School students

273 participants (Mountain Madness event: 72)

Research

Conducting research, evaluating programs and policies with the goal of better-serving people with disabilities.



Dr. Aylward, Dr. Owen, Dr. Greenwald, Dr. Batz

Using Early Intervening Services Funds to Reduce Racial Disproportionality in Special Education

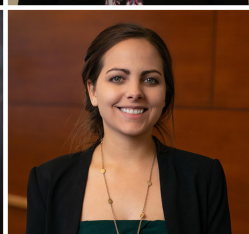
Researchers in the College of Education & Human Development examine how Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS) funds under IDEA Part B can address racial disproportionalities in special education. A case study of a diverse, Title 1 elementary school (Mountain View Elementary, pseudonym) highlights challenges and opportunities in using these funds to support students at risk of being misidentified for special education. The school used CEIS funds to hire an early learner paraprofessional and implement Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), but teacher attrition and limited flexibility in fund allocation hindered the program's impact. The principal stressed the need for greater flexibility to invest in professional development, particularly in behavior and special education.

The study underscores persistent racial disparities in special education, where students of color are disproportionately identified with disabilities and experience negative outcomes such as lower graduation rates and higher interactions with the juvenile justice system. Dr. Alexandra Aylward emphasizes the importance of understanding CEIS and CCEIS mechanisms to help school leaders dismantle inequitable practices and ensure equitable opportunities for all students. The findings highlight the need for adaptable funding and targeted strategies to address systemic inequities in student identification, placement, and discipline.

Interdisciplinary Team Treatment Approach to Youth with Dual Diagnoses

NCED faculty evaluated the Intensive Consultation Team (ICT) model, a collaborative approach designed to address the mental health needs of individuals with developmental disabilities. The model emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary teamwork among professionals, such as physicians and therapists, alongside active participation from the individual and their family in planning and goal setting.

In this paper, the ICT process is detailed, including the roles of team members, the frequency of meetings, data collection and review, the development of individualized support strategies, and the ongoing evaluation of plan effectiveness. A case study of Eric, a 15-year-old with a learning disability, ADHD, and anxiety, illustrates the model's application. Through the ICT, Eric's mother received guidance on positive parenting strategies, and Eric was taught emotional regulation and communication skills. These interventions led to significant improvements: Eric ceased aggressive behavior, transitioned to online education, and obtained employment. The study concludes by identifying key factors for ICT success, including family engagement, professional collaboration, and maintaining a person-centered focus throughout the planning process.



Dr. Greenwald, Dr. Ryst, Thorkildson, Dr. Brown

Information Dissemination



The Nevada Association for Positive Behavior Support Network

The Nevada Association for Positive Behavior Support Network, housed in NCED, recognizes people and organizations engaged in PBS-related activities in Nevada. NCED staff organized the 7th Nevada Association for Positive Behavior Support Conference in Feb. 2024. In total, 250 people attended. Topics included equity and disproportionality, trauma-informed approaches, integrated academic and behavior, positive behavior support with families, and opioid misuse.



Dr. Greenwald with NVAPBS conference attendees



Conference session on ACEs

Building awareness of programs, events, and critical issues that affect people with disabilities

NCED

Family Navigation Network

The Family Navigator Network (FNN) is a federally funded program, supported by the Nevada Department of Public and Behavioral Health, and consists of NCED faculty and family navigators who live and work in communities across Nevada. These Family Navigators serve as a vital resource for families of youth with special health care needs, connecting them to essential services and up-to-date information. By actively participating in events like health fairs and back-to-school gatherings statewide, they help bridge gaps between families and services while fostering community awareness and support. As part of this initiative, **Transitioning Together** is a monthly workshop series helping families navigate the shift to adulthood for youth with special health care needs. Each session features guest speakers, hands-on activities, and practical tools to empower families during this critical transition.



Ms. Alcala and Ms. Barnhart tabling for FNN



Ms. Larkins and Ms. Gonzalez collaborating



<https://www.unr.edu/nced>

To donate and learn more about how you can support our work, contact Quentin Smith, Director of Development & Advancement, at qowens@unr.edu.

Together, we can continue to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities.



Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities

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