NEWS | POSTED MAY 28, 2020

May 2020 Spotlight on SRCD U.S. Federal Policy Fellow: Alayna Schreier, Ph.D.

Alayna Schreier is a SRCD Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow who is placed in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)

Alayna Schreier, Ph.D.

AUTHOR

As a clinical psychologist, I observed firsthand the impact of policy decisions on the lives of real people. I saw how some policies created barriers to service access and receipt for children and families, while others improved the quality and reach of those services. I knew I wanted to contribute to the policy process and help shape the decisions that impact young children and their families. The SRCD U.S. Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellowship was a perfect opportunity to learn effective ways to leverage science to improve human services for children and families.

I am currently a fellow in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). I work in the Division of Children and Youth Policy (CYP) within the Office of Human Services Policy (HSP). Our office serves as the Secretary's principal advisor on policy development, conducting policy research, analysis, and evaluation on issues related to children

and youth. I primarily focus on the early childhood portfolio, working on Head Start, child care, and trauma-informed approaches.

This has been an unusual fellowship year to say the least, as we enter our third month of full-time telework due to COVID-19. Although I had initially conceptualized this Spotlight as an opportunity to reflect on my work on our ongoing projects, it seems more fitting to talk about my experience during the past few months. I have been heartened by how quickly we responded in a crisis to meet the needs of children and families. Our office immediately mobilized a COVID-19 response and reprioritized our efforts to support our program partners in the Administration for Children and Families. I have seen the benefit of cross-sector collaboration, participating in both inter- and intra-agency COVID-19 response working groups, and I have witnessed the incredible role of public-private partnerships in responding to the immediate needs of families in crisis. This has been a lesson in "learning on the go", and figuring out how different policy levers work together to achieve the same goal.

We have continued to use the best available evidence to guide our decision making while recognizing the urgency of the situation. I have been able to work on numerous projects related to COVID-19 that have expanded my content and technical knowledge. I worked on technical assistance for those serving children on the ground, highlighting flexibilities in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. This project was a crash course in reading and analyzing legislative text and distilling the information for other audiences. Similarly, I provided technical assistance on proposed legislation, which helped me to think outside the box and consider the implications of legislation on the ground. I have also had the opportunity to deep dive into health and safety, conducting analyses of existing health and safety guidance as we move towards re-opening. In response to an immediate need identified by our partners, I developed a guide and checklist for transitioning in-person meetings and conferences to virtual events. We have also provided support and flexibility to our existing projects and contracts, in recognition of the challenges in human services research and data collection during this time. Finally, we are identifying both short- and long-term research questions to evaluate the impacts of COVID-19 and to think beyond the immediate crisis to build capacity and new service delivery systems for the future.

I initially pursued the SRCD Policy Fellowship because I wanted to learn ways to leverage science to inform policy and programs. COVID-19 has given us an opportunity to be creative and innovative in using evidence and data to redesign our system to improve human services for children and families. I feel incredibly

fortunate to be able to participate in the extraordinary work of responding to a crisis. As I look ahead to a second year of the fellowship, I am grateful to be able to continue working alongside such dedicated public servants.

READ ABOUT OTHER SRCD POLICY FELLOWS' EXPERIENCES