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July 2020 Spotlight on SRCD U.S. State Policy Fellow: Callie Silver, M.A.

Callie Silver is a SRCD State Policy Pre-doctoral Fellow who is placed in the Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD)

AUTHOR

Callie Silver, M.A.

As a rising fifth year studying Community and Prevention Research within a Psychology PhD program at the University of Illinois at Chicago, I am passionate about high-quality and equitable systems of early childhood care and education. My professional interests lie in the intersection between research, policy, and practice that ultimately improve the lives of young children, families, and educators. More specifically, I have been and continue to be involved in research projects regarding social-emotional development, exclusionary discipline (e.g. suspension and expulsion), and mental health consultation within early childhood care and education. A deep commitment to policy-informed research (and research-informed policy) led me to the SRCD State Policy Predoctoral Fellowship and I could not be more grateful to have had this opportunity!

The Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (GOECD) is a unique government agency that leads many of the state's early childhood initiatives with a major goal of collaborating with and uniting the

mixed-delivery systems for early childhood care and education (ECCE) that exist in our state. Being placed in an interdisciplinary, collaborative agency allowed me to better understand the complexity of the ECCE landscape within Illinois and the necessity of GOECD as a governing body.

While I have had the pleasure of working on several meaningful projects over the past year, I am going to highlight two that have been the most central to my Fellowship experience: responding to COVID-19 and my Pyramid Model work.

When I applied for this Fellowship last year, it is safe to say that helping Illinois respond to a global pandemic was probably the last thing I thought I would be doing. Fast forward to March 2020 and it was “all hands on deck” at GOECD. I worked closely with members of the Communication Team to respond to incoming questions about Illinois’ rapid-response, emergency child care system through the creation and continual updating of an FAQ document. I also assisted with the curating of resources and writing of an Emotional Well-Being Toolkit for families and caregivers to help our adults with young children cope with all of the changes and stress associated with COVID-19. My exposure to various issues, stories from the field, and connections with other state agencies related to the pandemic also led to my dissertation topic, a qualitative study that will be exploring novel family engagement and social-emotional learning practices that were developed during COVID-19 within Head Start centers.

This Fellowship year has also been defined by my work on the Pyramid Model, an early childhood Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) framework. Over the course of this year, my primary focus has been the creation of an Implementation Guide for Illinois’ work as a Pyramid Model state. In 2017, Illinois officially began implementing an early childhood PBIS professional development system, known as the Pyramid Model. This work seemed to be a natural fit, given my previous experience and interest in both social-emotional learning and challenging behaviors. The resulting document that I have been leading will be an internal resource, as well as a helpful guide for other Pyramid Model states throughout the country. Through this work, I was introduced to the Pyramid Model Consortium, who I will continue working with as the Illinois Pyramid Model State Lead after the conclusion of my Fellowship.

I am grateful for this experience for so many reasons (e.g. invaluable lessons and knowledge, a dissertation topic based on a community collaboration, a consulting job with the Pyramid Model Consortium), but at the top of the list has to be meeting and working with the amazing people at GOECD and the Illinois ECCE community who share my passion for improving the lives of young children and families.

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