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SRCD State Policy Fellow Portfolio Abstracts: Sarah Prendergast, Ph.D.

2019-2020 State Policy Post-doctoral Fellow at the Colorado Office of Early Childhood

AUTHOR

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Portfolio Entry 1: The Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families

Project Overview:

Background: The Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families (CPTF) is an innovative partnership to promote child and family well-being and engage state and county partners across sectors (e.g., hospitals, early care and education, human services, public health, and child welfare) as well as family leaders. The CPTF recognizes that several early childhood outcomes - whether school readiness, early achievement, health, or child maltreatment - can be addressed by focusing on the well-being of families and communities through primary prevention efforts.

Goal(s): To develop and implement a statewide partnership that focuses on promoting well-being among families prenatal-age 1.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Contributed to the development of logic models and a strategic plan for the partnership.
- Engaged in CPTF stakeholder and leadership team meetings.
- Provided consultation regarding early childhood outcomes that are available and tracked across the state.
- Developed the Prevention Measurement Guide that serves as a tool for communities taking part in the CPTF and developing community prevention plans through the Child Maltreatment Prevention Framework for Action.
- Analyzed data from the Prevention Measurement Guide to support the Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) state needs assessment.
- Developed a series of maps that are available as a planning tool for communities.

Activity Focus Keywords: Cross-Agency Collaboration, Community Collaboration, Data Analysis, Data Visualization
Policy Area Keywords: Child Maltreatment, Child Welfare

Portfolio Entry 2: Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Model Development

Project Overview:

Background: The placement agency administers the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (ECMHC) program. The Colorado ECMHC program provides supportive consultation to adults caring for children at three levels of implementation: child-level, classroom-level, and program-level. The program's purpose is to promote children's social—emotional development and prevent expulsions. Colorado HB20-1053 directs the agency to design, implement and operate the statewide voluntary ECMHC program by July 2022. The formalization of the ECMHC program allows for the expansion and enhancement of services, as well as the opportunity for the program to be formally evaluated.

Goal(s): To engage practitioners and experts to determine the duration, frequency, and intensity of services; consultant qualifications, training standards, and professional development; and root the design in diversity,

equity, and inclusion.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Analyzed administrative data related to the ECMHC program's duration, frequency, and intensity of services.
- Prepared a written report, PowerPoint presentation, and talking points for the agency describing the duration (i.e., length of services in months), frequency (i.e., how often services were provided), and intensity (i.e., number of total hours of services were provided).
- Engaged in the stakeholder model development process.
- Presented research findings to the stakeholder model development team, answered questions, and provided feedback.
- Assisted in drafting a program implementation manual.

Activity Focus Keywords: Administrative Data, Data Analysis, Evaluation, Implementation Research, Program Model Development, Presentation, Written Report
Policy Area Keywords: Child Care, Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

Portfolio Entry 3: Develop Performance Management Standards

Project Overview:

Background: Colorado Community Response is an innovative practice to promote economic security and prevent child neglect among low-income families who have been referred to child welfare, but who are not required to engage in services. The program provides supportive case management and financial coaching to help families achieve family-driven goals, and to connect families to critical resources such as child care, parenting resources, or mental health services. The program has demonstrated promising outcomes, including increased parental resilience, knowledge of parenting, and reduction in child welfare involvement. The program is currently seeking to achieve evidence-based status by engaging in a rigorous evaluation, developing performance management standards to continue to improve fidelity, and determining the cost of providing services to families.

Goal(s): To conduct a randomized-controlled trial evaluation, develop performance management standards, and conduct a cost study.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Analyzed administrative data to determine performance management standards related to typical case manager caseloads, the number of families served per FTE, and the demand for services across counties.
- Conducted a cost-analysis to determine the cost of providing services to families that will be shared with Colorado legislators and will inform future CCR Requests for Proposals (RFPs).

Activity Focus Keywords: Administrative Data, Data Analysis, Cost Analysis, Evaluation, Implementation Research, RFP Development
Policy Area Keywords: Child Maltreatment, Child Welfare

Portfolio Entry 4: Development of an Agency-Wide Research and Evaluation Framework

Project Overview:

Background: The placement agency administers several early childhood and family support programs, many of which are evidence-based and engage in continuous quality improvement and outcome evaluations, and others that are promising-practices in the process of model development and rigorous testing. An agency-wide framework and protocol for managing research and evaluation projects across the spectrum of evidence presents an opportunity for cross-program collaboration and the ability for the agency to continuously learn best practices for data collection, IT support, and project management.

Goal(s): To identify gaps in the agency's capacity for research and evaluation and to develop a framework and project protocol that is adopted across program-areas.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Using the Colorado Community Response program as a pilot, conducted qualitative interviews with agency staff and external research partners to understand the agency's current research and evaluation process and how it could be improved.
- Synthesized findings from the pilot into an after-action review document and presented findings and recommendations to agency leadership.
- Assisted in the implementation of a new division-wide project management process.

Activity Focus Keywords: Conduct Interviews, Written Report

Policy Area Keywords:

Read more about Sarah's fellowship experience