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April 2021 Spotlight on SRCD U.S. State Policy Fellow: Andrew (Drew) McGee

Drew McGee is a SRCD State Policy Pre-doctoral Fellow who is placed in the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) in the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS)

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The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) within Colorado's Division of Human Services (CDHS) aligns resources for children, families, and early childhood professionals to best prepare children for future success through access to coordinated and quality early childhood programs and family supports. The overall mission of the OEC is to support families and communities to ensure that all children are valued, healthy, and thriving by building innovative programming, removing barriers, and implementing system changes at the state, county, and local levels.

I pursued the SRCD State Policy Fellowship and this specific placement because the goals, values, and programs within the OEC align with my future career goals. I plan to address early childhood stress and improve child development through primary prevention and intervention strategies, improve quality and access to early childhood services, and shift cultural norms and expectations around child and parent health

across my career. My personal goal is to work at the intersection of research, policy, and practice to allow flexibility and involvement in multiple efforts to address childhood adversity. I have worked on several projects within the OEC, focusing on expanding access to early childhood services and implementing early intervention and prevention efforts. Two prime examples of this work are expanding home visiting and increasing access to early childhood mental health (ECMH) consultation services across Colorado. These projects have been instrumental in expanding my understanding of the iterative nature of policy research, its evaluation scope, and the essential need for collaboration among private, public, and research partners.

To increase alignment and coordination of ECMH consultation practices across the state, the ECMH Program has undertaken several efforts to support ECMH consultants statewide. I have helped lead efforts aligning with recent legislation, Colorado HB20-1053, to understand ECMH consultation service delivery in settings outside licensed childcare, including primary care, child welfare, early intervention, and more. This project aims to collect data to inform guidelines and models for the ECMH model across the state. It has been a pleasure to work with the dedicated staff implementing and expanding ECMH consultation across the state, and this project has illustrated to me the importance of efforts to align systems (such as education, primary care, WIC offices, and more) to provide wraparound care and create meaningful change for families.

Home visiting services provide a foundational support system for families with young children that may reduce child abuse and neglect, improve birth outcomes, improve school readiness, and increase high school graduation rates for young mothers. The Home Visiting Investment Task Force is developing a set of recommendations to improve the coverage and quality of Home Visiting services across the state. As part of this task force, I have written policy briefs to outline funding options for Home Visiting services and learned details about the complex funding streams available to provide meaningful programming to families. I have collaborated with Task Force members across roles to develop recommendations which has shown me the important role of effective interagency communication in policy decisions. This private-public partnership has highlighted the complexity of collaboration across sectors and disciplines, and the impact these partnerships can have if properly implemented. My involvement in this project has improved my writing, allowing me to better communicate across audiences and settings. This involves thinking about what is actionable for governmental agencies and what policy and programmatic changes mean in local communities. It has also highlighted the importance of cross-discipline collaboration and the iterative nature of program evaluation, which serves a vital function in data-driven policy change.

I am deeply grateful for this opportunity and the knowledge, skills, connections, and impact it continues to give me. Overall, my fellowship placement has highlighted the type of future career I hope to achieve, and it has deepened my understanding and dedication to policy and research. This fellowship has also highlighted the important role that psychologists can fill in policy work: to bridge the understanding between data and individual lived experiences that data-driven policies influence and provide crucial support and expertise to improve the lives of children and families.

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