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SRCD Federal Policy Fellow Professional Portfolio Abstracts: Frances Martínez Pedraza, Ph.D.

2021-2022 SRCD Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow at the Office of Child Care (OCC), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

AUTHOR

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Introduction: This portfolio highlights Dr. Frances Martínez Pedraza's fellowship contributions at the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Child Care (OCC). In the 2021-2022 fellowship year, Dr. Martínez Pedraza had the opportunity to work on a range of projects within the Program Operations and Policy Divisions. The following portfolio entries provide an overview of these projects, which include two agency strategic plan initiatives around psychological well-being and equity, two dissemination activities of program information (i.e., an annual report to Congress and a summary of COVID-19 waiver approvals), and one systems-level policy analysis on reducing barriers to child care program enrollment. All these projects provide a snapshot of the breadth of research, policy, and their intersection that happens in a program office to inform changes in program implementation. Dr. Martínez-Pedraza's experience at OCC demonstrates the

important role that program offices such as OCC have, especially in the light of a pandemic, to continue to provide care for children and families.

Portfolio Entry 1: Psychological First Aid (PFA) for Children and Youth- Abridged Training

Project Overview:

Background: The Administration for Children and Families' (ACF's) 2022 Strategic Plan includes five strategic goals aimed at supporting the ACF's mission: "to promote the economic and social well-being of children, youth, families, individuals, and communities by providing federal leadership, partnership, and resources for the compassionate and effective delivery of human services." ACF's Strategic Plan Goal 4 is to support communities and families to respond to acute needs and facilitate recovery from a range of crises and emergency situations. The Strategic Plan Pilot Team for Strategic Goal 4 is comprised of federal staff across ACF programs. This team proposes to adapt and offer ACF wide training on an abridged version of Psychological First Aid [PFA] for children and youth populations to prepare and support ACF staff in responding to emotional distresses of children, youth and families during emergencies, disasters, and adversities. The training content consists of one pre-learning exercise, three short video modules, and one post-learning exercise. The three-part video training series posted on the ACF YouTube channel is targeted for ACF Staff on the Health and Human Services (HHS) deployment list, Office of Child Care (OCC) and Office of Head Start (OHS) staff, and HHS staff on deployment to the UC/ OAW mission.

Goal(s): To adapt and offer an abridged training on Psychological First Aid [PFA] for children and youth populations to ACF staff to provide them with foundational knowledge that improves their competencies to help families, youths, and children to positively adapt, respond and recover from emergencies, disasters, and adversities.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Served as OCC's representative in ACF's Strategic Plan Pilot Team for Strategic Goal 4
- Provided subject matter expertise and feedback on the training content
- Delivered pre-recorded training module 3 focused on self-care and resilience for responders working with affected youth and families

Activity Focus Keywords: Cross-Agency Collaboration; Curriculum Development; Presentation; Professional Development
Policy Area Keywords: Mental Health and Wellness; Emergency Preparedness and Response
Knowledge & Skills Keywords: Strategic Action Planning; Workforce Training

Portfolio Entry 2: OCC Equity Assessment- US Territories

Project Overview:

Background: In response to President Biden's Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity, the Office of Child Care (OCC) is taking action to advance equity for all children and families, especially those who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. OCC's Equity Action Plan includes conducting a racial equity impact assessment. The OCC Equity Assessment workgroup identified a need to assess the impact of certain CCDF policies on child care programs in the US Territories. The goal of the workgroup is to identify the impact on child and family outcomes of CCDF Territory grantee administrative requirements (e.g., consumer education and market rate survey policies) to inform future conversations about these policies, and ultimately address related equity issues.

Goal(s): 1. To conduct a systematic investigation of available data and expert input on how CCDF administrative requirements might affect Pacific and Caribbean territory grantees, providers, and families in providing or receiving access to high-quality child care services. 2. To engage territory grantees, providers, parents, and others who support the territories (e.g., federal staff and technical assistance providers) in identifying potential administrative solutions to minimize unintended adverse outcomes and maximize opportunities and positive outcomes.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Supported OCC in identifying equity assessment goals, selecting an assessment approach and tools, and considering accessible administrative data sources.
- Collaborated in developing a workplan to implement the assessment.
- Co-facilitated a conversation with territory lead agency administrators and staff about best approaches and considerations for reaching and engaging people impacted by potential inequities of CCDF policies in the territories, including providers and families.

Activity Focus Keywords: Strategic Plan; Equity Assessment; Stakeholder Engagement
Policy Area Keywords: CCDF Administrative Requirements; Child and Family Child Care Outcomes
Knowledge & Skills Keywords: Federal and state policy connections; Incorporating a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens

Portfolio Entry 3: Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Report on States' and Territories' Priorities for Child Care Services: Fiscal Year 2021

Project Overview:

Background: The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act requires the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to issue an annual report of whether each state [and territory] uses the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) funding in accordance with provisions related to priority for services. The law requires priority for children of families with very low incomes and children with special needs; the CCDF final regulations add a third priority for servicing children experiencing homelessness.

Goal(s): To analyze and summarize most recently available Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2020 ACF-801 CCDF administrative data and information from the FFY 2022-2024 CCDF State/Territory Plans to determine whether state and territory CCDF lead agencies are prioritizing CCDF assistance to families with very low incomes, children with special needs, and children experiencing homelessness.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Drafted the Priorities Report: FY2021 in collaboration with Office of Child Care (OCC) colleagues.
- Provided intellectual leadership in the analysis of data and summary of the section on "Prioritizing children with special needs" and reviewed and provided feedback for the other sections of the report.
- Edited the report in response to OCC leadership feedback.

Activity Focus Keywords: Data Analysis; Document Review; Written Report; Administrative Data
Policy Area Keywords: Child Care Development Fund (CCDF); Priorities Report
Knowledge & Skills Keywords: What information policymakers need; Federal Reporting to Congress

Portfolio Entry 4: Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Waiver App

Project Overview:

Background: On September 30, 2021, the Office of Child Care (OCC) concludes the temporary waiver request and approval framework that had been in effect since March 1, 2020 for state, territory, and tribal lead agencies to waive certain Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) requirements due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. In response to the continued challenges experienced as a result of COVID-19, tribal and territory lead agencies are provided a new waiver opportunity to apply for temporary fiscal waivers by September 30, 2022, to extend certain funding obligation and liquidation deadlines due to COVID-19 extraordinary circumstances in accordance with 45 CFR §98.19.

Goal(s): 1. To describe and summarize the number of COVID-19 temporary waiver approvals by CCDF provision approved by the OCC between March 1, 2020 and September 30, 2021 for state, territory, and tribal CCDF lead agencies to waive certain CCDF requirements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. 2. To support tribal and territory lead agencies in their efforts to recover from the pandemic and build back better child care systems by allowing them to apply for an extension of certain obligation and liquidation deadlines to use program funds.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Drafted the Summary of Waiver Approvals for leadership approval, reporting to Congress, and public dissemination.
- Supported in reviewing COVID-19 temporary waivers requests submitted by CCDF lead agencies and preparing waiver requests package for ACF clearance and approval.
- Reviewed guidance drafted to communicate new fiscal waiver opportunities for tribal and territory lead agencies.
- Revised the waiver review and data tracking protocol and facilitated OCC staff trainings to support the review of fiscal waivers requests submitted by tribal and territory lead agencies.

Activity Focus Keywords: Data Management System; Data Visualization; Disseminate Findings; Document Review; Presentation; Written Report; Administrative Data
Policy Area Keywords: Child Care Development Fund (CCDF); CCDF Waiver Authority, Federal Response to Emergency
Knowledge & Skills Keywords: Federal and state policy connections; What information policymakers need;

Federal Reporting to Congress, Federal Staff Supports and Training

Portfolio Entry 5: Reducing Barriers to CCDF Enrollment

Project Overview:

Background: The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Program, re-authorized by the CCDBG Act of 2014, is the primary federal funding source for child care subsidies to support families with low incomes who are working or participating in education and training in paying for child care. About 1.5 million children receive child care subsidies every month funded by the CCDF program funds. Unfortunately, research suggests that some subsidy policies and implementation practices can create unintended barriers to subsidy access and retention. Current efforts at the federal level are targeting identifying strategies to reduce barriers to enrollment and facilitating the processes for low-income working families to obtain and retain

Goal(s): To conduct a policy analysis of approaches OCC might consider providing guidance to CCDF Lead Agencies as options to reduce barriers to CCDF enrollment, including simplifying application processes, cross program alignment, and ensuring continuity of services.

Contributions of Fellow:

- Conducted a literature review on the barriers to CCDF enrollment
- Analyzed relevant FFY 2022-2024 CCDF State/Territory Plan national data on strategies states use to support continuity of services.
- Explored cross-program alignment alternatives that would facilitate reducing barriers to enrollment.
- Prepared policy options for leadership to consider possible courses of action to promote reducing barriers to enrollment in CCDF programs.
- Supported OCC on drafting future program guidance

Activity Focus Keywords: Literature Review; Policy Analysis
Policy Area Keywords: Child Care Development Fund (CCDF); Eligibility and Enrollment; Early Childhood Systems Alignment
Knowledge & Skills Keywords: What information policymakers need; Incorporating a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens; Evidence-based policymaking at the federal level