NEWS | POSTED JUNE 14, 2023

2023 SRCD State Policy Fellow Spotlight: Alex Busuito, Ph.D.

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In a few sentences, what is your role at the agency you work for?

In my second year as a SRCD State Policy Fellow working with the Perinatal and Early Childhood Health (PECH) team at the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), I primarily work to expand access to early childhood services for historically underserved families. This year, my time is split across two roles: 1) the state-wide roll out Medicaid billing for evidence-based family home visiting and 2) Director for Rhode Island's Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems grant.

What has been the most memorable project you have completed during your time at the agency?

Last year, I worked with the RI Medicaid office to secure permission from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to bill Medicaid for evidence-based family home visiting programs. I consulted with Medicaid and home visiting experts at Zero to Three, technical assistance from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), and policy makers from other states to help RIDOH understand the steps needed to access Medicaid funds. In my second year, I have been working to finish this project by supporting the state-wide roll-out of these billing changes.

What words of wisdom might you pass on to someone who is interested in SRCD's fellowship program?

Take every experience as it comes. My year and a half as a fellow has not always gone as expected, but every project, role, or problem has been a valuable learning experience.

What piqued your interest in working in policy?

As a child clinical psychologist, I have studied the formative nature of early relational experiences and worked with families in clinical practice to improve their health and wellbeing. As a researcher, I felt far removed from the systemic issues faced on the ground, like lack of access to food, housing, or even primary prevention for maltreatment. And, as a clinician, I felt powerless to address these systemic issues with my patients. I wanted to learn more about the policies that shaped the daily lives of the families and young children with whom I was working; specifically, I hoped to gain experience making and implementing early childhood policy and see how that policy changed in response to empirical evidence.

Why should someone else apply for this fellowship?

As a state fellow, I have exercised and grown my ability to translate - both in the way that we typically understand it (that is, making research findings accessible and meaningful to practitioners or policy makers) and in the much broader sense of bridging gaps in understanding among the many people, organizations, and levels of government that need to work together to create effective policy. Anyone who wants to work at the intersection of research and policy should be an effective translator, and would benefit massively from being a part of the SRCD fellowship.

What do you like to do in your free time?

In my free time I love to cook with and for my partner and three kids. I’m learning not to take it personally when my five- and three-year-old request plain noodles when I’ve spent 45 minutes making homemade macaroni and cheese.