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2023 SRCD Federal Policy Fellow Spotlight: Kelsey McKee, Ph.D.

Kelsey McKee is an SRCD Federal Executive Fellow in the Office of Head Start (OHS) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

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

I work as an analyst in the Policy and Planning Division at the Office of Head Start (OHS) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). My work at OHS includes a wide range of activities, including drafting policy guidance for Head Start programs, various internal and external efforts to support the Head

Start workforce; supporting the budget formulation process; and collaborating with colleagues in different offices to facilitate the translation of science to policy and practice. Day to day our division works to ensure that OHS policy supports Head Start programs in providing high-quality services to children and families.

What has been your favorite aspect of SRCD's fellowship? Please explain why.

My favorite aspect of the fellowship has been the opportunity to think big picture about the role of developmental science, and research broadly, in child and family policy. The fellowship seminars, where all the SRCD fellows meet with experts and discuss their experiences, provide a great opportunity for us to discuss how we can better integrate research and policy. We heard from researchers, policymakers, and everyone in-between. While there are certainly real challenges in this space, I have enjoyed learning about the many innovative and creative ways people are leveraging developmental science throughout the policymaking process.

What is something you learned in the last month outside of your field?

I recently had the opportunity to support the budget formulation process for OHS. I was entirely unfamiliar with the long and complicated process of developing the President's budget. Both the process and the underlying economic principles were outside my area of expertise. It was fascinating to see how research and policy priorities are used in the formulation of the Federal budget.

What has been an interesting professional development opportunity you have completed during the fellowship?

Earlier this year, I was one of the representatives from OHS who participated in a meeting as part of the U.S. Department of State International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP). OHS hosted a group of 15 Visitors from 15 different countries- all of whom were educators, school administrators, or representatives of education-focused government agencies or NGOs – and were participating in a four week-long IVLP professional exchange in the United States to explore the topic of early childhood education. I was able to learn a bit about how the ACF and OHS engage with international representatives. It was fascinating to hear what aspects of the American early childhood education system were of interest to the visiting experts from around the world.

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

I have two pieces of advice for someone considering the SRCD fellowship. First, go for it! I have had a great experience as an SRCD fellow and highly recommend it to anyone interested in how to promote child and family wellbeing through science and policy. Second, I suggest you prepare for the mental switch from depth to breadth. It was a big switch for me to go from focusing on the nuance of a few specific topics to working on many issues well outside my areas of expertise. I found humility and the analytical thinking skills I honed as a researcher were key in my role as a fellow.

What is your favorite book?

My favorite book is *Let the Great World Spin* by Colum McCann.