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# 2023 SRCD State Policy Fellow Spotlight: Faith VanMeter, Ph.D.

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

I work in the Child Safety and Permanency Division on the Promotion and Prevention team. My team works to advance upstream services, policies, and system-change efforts to promote child and family well-being and prevent child protection system involvement. Our ultimate aim is wellbeing for all families. I support a variety of early intervention and prevention programs and initiatives. For example, I am leading a continuous quality improvement (CQI) effort for a short-term intervention program that supports families through case

management, connections to resources, and provision of concrete supports.

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

During the first few months at the agency, I began representing my team on a cross-agency collaboration to improve practice between child protection and education systems to support successful CAPTA mandated early intervention (Part C) referrals for children and families. My first task was to conduct a qualitative analysis on focus group data that were collected from early education providers and child protection workers asking about barriers to practice. I then presented the results to the providers and workers and facilitated small group discussions to gather their feedback about the results and determine actionable steps to take to improve practice. This project is still ongoing. We convene monthly to create materials for families and workers that aim to improve the referral process. This project has been particularly memorable because I utilized my research skills in a way that contributed to the creation of tangible materials that will make a direct positive impact on practice that aims to help children and families. I've also developed many new skills and learned about the value of partnering across state agencies and with the education providers and child welfare workers who carry out this work.

**How do you think the fellowship has helped further your career?**

The SRCD State Policy Fellowship has been a very valuable opportunity to transition from academia to policy. I have had support from my state agency supervisor, mentors from SRCD and the University of Minnesota, and all the other SRCD policy fellows who are going through a similar transition. The transition has been challenging, but through this support I am successfully working in policy spaces and understanding how my unique skills as a child development researcher can contribute to the policy field. Also, this fellowship has allowed me to connect with many people within state government and in external policy-oriented organizations. I am positive I will use this network to help establish the next steps in my career and will utilize it throughout my entire career. Ultimately, this fellowship experience has been an essential step in creating my path from academia to a career in policy work.

**What piqued your interest in working in policy?**

When I began graduate school, I was passionate about doing research that had important implications for vulnerable children and families. A couple of years into this work, while I knew this research was meaningful, I realized it lacked the direct impact that motivated me to pursue a career in developmental psychology. I

pivoted my research to focus primarily on the systems many vulnerable children and families travel through, such as the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. This area is inherently a policy topic because so much of what children and families who are involved in state systems experience is dictated by policy, and these experiences impact children and families in major ways. Through this work, I had the opportunity to create policy briefs and share my results directly with child welfare professionals and policymakers. This experience made me realize that I wanted to pursue a career applying my child development knowledge and research skills to help shape policy and practice to improve the wellbeing of children and families.

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

I quickly realized that a large part of the work I was doing in my agency was facilitating conversations with our partners, whether they be from other state agencies, counties, tribes, community organizations, or families with lived experience. I wanted to learn skills about how to facilitate meaningful and productive conversations that encouraged everyone to bring their experiences and ideas to the table. I traveled to a small town in northern Minnesota to attend a 3-day Art of Hosting and Harvesting training. The training was phenomenal and has shaped a great deal of my work. The training was about facilitating conversations and collecting information from those conversations. I learned methods of facilitating meetings that use a group's collective wisdom and experiences to generate ideas and solutions. This training has changed the way I facilitate and participate in group conversations, an essential part of my everyday work in the agency.

**What do you like to do in your free time?**

In the summer, you will find me in my garden, likely pulling weeds because they just keep coming back. I love having my hands in the dirt, watching the plants grow, and feeding my family with the harvest from our backyard. I also enjoy hiking and camping with my partner in Minnesota's beautiful state parks. In the colder months of the year (which is most of the year in Minnesota), I love to stay inside with a book, a warm cup of tea, and my cat.