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2023 SRCD Federal Policy Fellow Spotlight: Shana Ratcliff, Ph.D.

Shana Ratcliff is an SRCD Federal Executive Branch Fellow in the Office of Head Start (OHS) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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

At Office of Head Start, I primarily work in the Comprehensive Services, Training, and Technical Assistance Division. My role is to support work on behavioral health, child health and safety, and disabilities and inclusion within the office and in collaboration with other offices and agencies.

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

Getting to explore what policy work means. Before the fellowship, I had a narrow view of what this entailed, but at my placement, I have been able to work on policy in ways that I hadn't realized were options before and learn about ways to apply my skills in new and exciting ways.

What interested you in becoming an SRCD Policy Fellow?

Prior to the fellowship, most of my experiences were in developmental research and clinical practice. While working in those spaces, I was often interested in and asking questions about larger-scale implementation issues, systemic barriers, and policies that impacted children and families. The fellowship has been an opportunity to develop and inform this interest with dedicated time and support.

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

You are encouraged to do informational interviews and get to know current and former fellows throughout the fellowship. These conversations have helped me learn about diverse career paths in policy and narrow in on what I am looking for in my career. It is also inspiring to meet so many brilliant, passionate people who are approaching work to support children and families from different lenses!

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

Reach out to former fellows (including me!) to learn more about it! Generally, I think that is the best way to get a sense of whether this is a good fit for you. Also, I was surprised to learn about how different the day-to-day experience of the fellowship can be depending on your placement, so talking to multiple people can be really valuable.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I love to cook and bake new recipes, but lately most of my free time has been spent playing with my puppy, Mango!