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2024 SRCD Federal Policy Fellow Spotlight: Kylee Probert, Ph.D.

Dr. Kylee Probert is a second-year SRCD Federal Executive Branch Fellow in the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) 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?

I work in the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, in the Division of Child and Family Development. The office is responsible for research that informs the development, evaluation, and performance of programs that serve children and families. My work spans many of those research efforts that are relevant to

Head Start and Child Care programs.

What interested you in becoming an SRCD Policy Fellow?

In graduate school, the more involved in research I became, the more interested I became in questions like "How can we make research more useful?" and "Who does this work benefit?" I thought a lot about how research in our field can affect change and the types of settings where I could make that kind of impact. The fellowship seemed like a natural way to at least learn more about how to answer the types of questions I had.

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

I would encourage someone applying to this program to expand their views on what they believe their skillset or expertise entails. I have applied a lot of my background, training, and experience to my work in ways that I hadn't anticipated, beyond knowledge of child development of program evaluation. I knew a whole lot more than I thought I did! I also learn a lot from others, and I would also encourage those interested in this type of work to take advantage of their social networks and reach out to those who work in areas they are interested in, to learn more about how people apply their expertise in fields that work for them.

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

Because the people who work in ACF come from many different fields, I learn things from outside my area of expertise all the time. One thing I've learned a lot about lately is the federal budget, how it is structured, and the nuances of how it affects the projects I work on. It may sound boring at times, but having a thorough knowledge of what informs the development of a budget, the types of regulations that impact how funds can be used, and how grants and contracts are structured, hugely informs the work that we do. It's like a complex puzzle with a lot of moving pieces that I have enjoyed learning about.

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

Because a lot of my work centers on tribal programs and engagement, I was given the opportunity to sit in on some meetings and learn from staff from the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) and the tribal programs team at the Office of Child Care (OCC). It was interesting to hear another perspective on program design and implementation in tribal communities outside of our research office. I loved hearing about the diverse backgrounds of staff and how they view their work based on the experiences that have shaped their perspectives.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I spend a lot of time exploring the outdoor areas in my community, from hiking to farmers markets and wineries, etc. I love the community here. I also am a part of an informal book club that started amongst the fellows – I love to read!