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2024 SRCD State Policy Fellow Spotlight: Isabella Sciuto Ozenbaugh, Ph.D.

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SRCD Policy Fellow 2023-24 cohort

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

I am a member of the Data & Analytics (DA) Office in the Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC). The DA office is responsible for supporting the agency in using and producing high-quality data and analytics to make data-driven and informed decisions to support Oregon's children and families. As a member of the DA office, I assist on a variety of data requests from other staff within the agency and external partners by analyzing program and census data, creating data visuals, and building reports, presentations, and surveys. I have also participated in efforts to stand up a data governance structure for the agency, investigate quality observation tools, learn about implementation science and much more.

What interested you in becoming an SRCD Policy Fellow?

After my first year of graduate school, I realized how important child care and family policies are for supporting children's development and increasing their chances of thriving in the early years. This fellowship was the perfect opportunity to take my research background and really jump into a policy space without needing to have a background in the policy world. It seemed like a great bridge between the two and a way that I could maintain and utilize my research skills while also learning about and working in a space centered around policy.

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

I found the Early Learning Statewide Access Data Analysis project particularly interesting, which focused on compiling various data sources (e.g., census data, DELC program data) to evaluate eligible children's level of access to state-funded early learning programs in each of Oregon's counties. This project was memorable because I learned how data can inform important policy decisions.

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

Do not let a lack of experience in policy stop you from applying. The fellowship is designed to help you build those skills. Also, if you are interested in the State Policy Fellowship but do not have a connection with someone who works in a State government, don't be afraid to reach out to someone new through an email! It never hurts to ask!

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

Through the fellowship, I was able to participate in Oregon Legislative Days, which are days where the Oregon legislature holds various committee meetings and hearings. Most legislators are on site at Oregon's Capitol building and open their calendars to meetings with various individuals and advocacy groups. I attended the legislative days with Our Children Oregon, a statewide advocacy and child abuse prevention non-profit, and met with a variety of Oregon legislators, on both sides of the political aisle, sharing about how they can support children and families in their roles as legislators. I learned many valuable lessons from this experience including how the Oregon legislature works and how to speak about important issues from different political perspectives.

Where are you from?

I am originally from San Diego, California but currently live a little outside of Portland, Oregon.