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

AUTHOR

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Isabella Sciuto Ozenbaugh, Ph.D. is an SRCD state policy fellow. State fellows experience the day-to-day life of agencies that are tasked with delivering services and programs to support children and families, such as child welfare issues, early care and education, or parental leave policies. Her fellowship is at the Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care.

She earned a bachelor's degree in psychological science from California State University, San Marcos and received both a master's degree and Ph.D. in human development and family studies from Oregon State University. Her research focuses on the development of self-regulation in early childhood and the development and implementation of self-regulation interventions for children in preschool, kindergarten, and early elementary school.

What is your role at the agency?

I am a member of the Research, Analysis, & Data (RAD) Office in the Oregon Department of Early Learning and Care. The RAD office is responsible for supporting the agency by providing data management, data literacy, and research and policy analysis to make data-driven and informed decisions to support Oregon's children and families. As a member of the RAD 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.

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

I think the fellowship has helped further my career through exposure to a new field and industry. It has opened my eyes to new career opportunities and provided opportunities to connect with individuals in the policy/state government space. The fellowship program also has a really great alumni network with diverse careers who are very gracious with making time to connect with current fellows.

What piqued your interest in working in policy?

Through my research working with young children, parents, and child care providers, it quickly became apparent to me how impactful child care and family polices can be for supporting children's development. I realized that children and families could benefit from researchers and policymakers collaborating to ensure that policies that directly and indirectly impact children and families are backed by research and evidence. I also noticed that at times there were communication barriers between these two worlds. I became very interested in learning how to effectively communicate my research for a variety of audiences to ensure that it was accessible. In order to do this, I recognized that as a researcher I needed to learn more about the policy space.

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

My favorite aspect of the SRCD fellowship is being able to fully immerse myself in my placement agency. I have really enjoyed getting in-depth exposure to what it's like working for a state government agency. It has also been great to connect with the other individuals who work at the state agency who all come from

diverse backgrounds with a variety of experiences. Learning more about their career paths has been really valuable and has opened my eyes to additional career opportunities. The fellowship also has dedicated professional development time and funds which I have found very helpful both for the work I am involved in at my placement agency and building transferable skills that will benefit my career moving forward.

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

Something that I have learned in the last month outside of my field is how to use new (to me) data visualization tools and how to make data visuals more accessible to a wider variety of audiences. I've also learned throughout the fellowship how impactful descriptive data can be and that you don't always need fancy statistical analyses to make an impact with data.

What do you like to do in your free time?

In my free time I like to exercise, knit, and take my dog on walks and hikes. I also spend a lot of time facetiming with my nieces and nephews who live in different states. My husband is also a private pilot, so we like to take flights along the Oregon coast when the weather is nice.

Learn more about the SRCD U.S. Policy Fellowship Program here!