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March 2016 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Elizabeth Shuey, Ph.D.

2015-2016 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

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When I set out to get my Ph.D. in child development, my career goal was to conduct rigorous research that could be used in meaningful ways to improve the lives of children and families. As an SRCD Policy Fellow in the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), I cannot imagine a better place to continue pursuing this goal.

OPRE is the research arm of ACF, and as such is primarily responsible for studying ACF programs and the pop ulations those programs serve. My work is focused largely on the child care portfolio within the Division of Child and Family Development. Part of my role includes attending regular meetings with the Office of Child Care so that their priorities can inform our research questions. In addition, I am the OPRE representative to the ACF Working Group on Early Childhood, which brings me into regular contact with staff from other offices focused on early childhood issues. This work across offices, learning about bridging program and research goals along with political and budgeting realities, is both exciting and challenging for me. Rather than

thinking about how my research might have practical relevance as I did when I was a graduate student, I now have opportunities every day to think about how research can directly inform both program and policy goals.

Another part of my role in OPRE is to serve on our internal Methods Team. This team contributes to ensuring that OPRE staff members are continually learning about best research practices in research methodology. I find this work a particularly nice extension of my graduate training, as well as an excellent reminder of the standards and rigor that make research truly informative for applied program and policy work.

In both of these activities as well as the many other specific projects on which I am fortunate to work, I am beyond grateful for the support and mentorship of my colleagues both at ACF and at SRCD. Although I am challenged to learn new things and think in different ways every day, I have never felt that I am on my own to find solutions or next steps. Rather, I am part of a team that shares my goal of using strong research to promote child and family well-being.