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January 2016 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Kirby Chow, Ph.D.

2015-2016 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

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As a second year SRCD Executive Branch Fellow placed in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), I continue to strengthen my understanding of using research and data to support policy change. The opportunity to stay for a second year has allowed me to deepen my knowledge and take on more responsibility for issues related to early childhood, youth, and tribal homelessness.

It's an exciting time to work on homelessness issues at ASPE. HHS Secretary Burwell is now Chair of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), and there is considerable interest and momentum to make the most of this final year of the Obama Administration to drive the work to meet USICH's goal of preventing and ending family and youth homelessness by 2020. I staff senior leadership at ASPE on issues related to youth and family homelessness, help develop briefing materials for Secretary Burwell, and participate in conferences and meetings with various stakeholders including service providers, grantees, advocates,

private foundations, researchers, state and local government leaders, and other federal partners.

One of ASPE's primary roles in the area of homelessness is to foster and facilitate interagency collaboration and coordination both within HHS and with other departments including the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Education. I help co-lead HHS working groups on early childhood homelessness and youth homelessness and participate in the USICH tribal homelessness working group, all of which focus on efforts to ensure these vulnerable populations are connected to appropriate services and housing supports. Through my involvement in various interagency working groups, I continue to learn about the challenges and rewards of interagency collaboration, and the policy levers the federal government uses, such as tailoring funding announcements to encourage or incentivize a focus on certain populations or activities.

I have also learned about some of the ways the federal government provides guidance to communities such as through highlighting evidence-based and promising practices or issuing Information Memoranda or Information Bulletins. By working closely with an amazing ASPE colleague, I continue to learn and develop skills for strengthening partnerships, leading and facilitating meetings, and creating and carrying out work plans to drive results. I have also continued to sharpen my research skills by participating in research projects on youth homelessness and child welfare issues. For example, I help co-lead a project on family interventions for youth at-risk of or experiencing homelessness to identify evidencebased, evidence-informed, and promising practices for family preservation, connection, and reunification. The findings from this project will help us identify what information and technical assistance we need to disseminate to the field, what best practices we should highlight, and whether we need to look at policies to better address this vulnerable group's needs.

As I reflect on my 1.5 years in the fellowship program so far, I am reminded of what an incredible and invaluable learning opportunity this has been due to the talented colleagues I work with and the tremendous support from SRCD fellowship program staff and mentors. My fellowship experience has greatly broadened my awareness and understanding of the various stakeholders both within and outside of the federal government who help shape research, policy, and practice. The knowledge and lessons I have learned during my time at ASPE have helped me grow both professionally and personally, and will definitely inform my future work and efforts to meet the needs of vulnerable children and families.