NEWS | POSTED JUNE 1, 2015

June 2015 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Kirby Chow, Ph.D.

2014-2015 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

AUTHOR

Kirby Chow, Ph.D.

After graduate school I wanted to engage in social policy research, yet had little policy experience. I have had a longstanding interest in policy relevant research topics such as family homelessness and the implications it has for children's educational and socioemotional adjustment, but was eager to learn more about what it means to actually bridge research, policy, and practice to make a meaningful difference in the lives of vulnerable children and families. The SRCD policy fellowship has given me the opportunity to do just that.

I am a first year Executive Branch Fellow placed at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) within the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE). ASPE is the principal advisor to the Secretary of HHS on policy development. At ASPE, I work in the Office of Human Services Policy in the division of Children and Youth Policy. The topic areas I focus on include youth homelessness and children in nonparental care (i.e., children who live apart from their birth parents and are either in foster care or less formal non-foster care arrangements such as living with grandparents). My involvement in each of these

areas enables me to understand the different roles ASPE plays in developing research and policy.

I am fortunate to be at ASPE at an exciting time when the Administration is focused on meeting the goal to end homelessness among families and youth by 2020. Working in the federal government has broadened and strengthened my understanding of youth homelessness to go beyond the research in academic journals, but to also understand the role of relevant federal programs, legislative and budgetary proposals that impact such programs, and the role of advocacy groups and philanthropy. I continue to develop a deeper understanding of youth homelessness by attending meetings with prominent researchers, Hill briefings and Senate hearings, webinars, and special events such as a White House Summit on youth homelessness, and the upcoming National Alliance to End Homelessness conference. My work on youth homelessness has also allowed me to better understand ASPE's role in fostering collaboration and coordination both within HHS agencies and between HHS and other federal agencies, including the Administration for Children and Families at HHS, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. I regularly participate in interagency working group meetings and calls to discuss, further articulate, and advance a federal vision to end youth homelessness. Furthermore, I assist with briefing our office leadership about youth homelessness activities through both written memos and oral briefings. ASPE helps to set the research agenda by deciding what types of research projects to fund. This past fall I assisted with writing a request for proposals for a study to conduct a literature review and key informant conversations to learn more about the subgroup of youth experiencing or at risk of long-term or chronic homelessness, including their characteristics, needs, and appropriate interventions. This winter, I assisted in the process of review of proposals to select a contractor, and in the coming months, I will assist a colleague with overseeing the contract management for this project.

In contrast, my work on children in nonparental care has allowed me to participate in a research project that ASPE conducts internally. The data for this project come from the National Survey of Children in Nonparental Care (NSCNC), and ASPE collaborates with a statistician from the National Center for Health Statistics at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. I am assisting with data analysis and the development of a publication to provide a descriptive overview of the characteristics of children in nonparental care and their caregivers, and am learning how to frame this publication with the relevant policy audiences in mind.

I am incredibly thankful for the opportunity to be an SRCD Fellow at ASPE. It is a privilege to work with and learn from extremely bright, passionate, and thoughtful colleagues who are devoted to helping low-income and vulnerable children and families.