NEWS | POSTED AUGUST 1, 2012

August 2012 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Charlayne Hayling-Williams, Ph.D.

2011-2012 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

AUTHOR

Charlayne Hayling-Williams, Ph.D.

When I reflect upon my experience as a fellow representing the Society for Research in Child Development for the last two years, I am overcome with gratitude. I realized my vision for a policy centric career relatively early in my doctoral training. From my perspective, it was only natural as a counseling psychology trainee focused on child/adolescent development, racial/ethnic disparities, and school-based intervention to focus on large scale systemic issues. Naturally, all roads lead to policy…Right? It's completely sensible for doctoral level behavioral scientists to be at the table in a position of authority when decisions related to the best practices in child development, education, mental health, juvenile justice, family and community engagement are being made...Right? Fortunately, I had supportive mentors who could value and understand my vision. Nevertheless, the dominant course is an academic one, and I felt pretty isolated in my search for a path that would equip me with both the skills and opportunities to effectively influence policy decisions that affect the individuals we care so deeply about. Quite frankly, those decisions often impede "our" collective progress as a field, and directly contradict the sophisticated findings tucked away in the annals of our

libraries that we would basically consider the things "we know for sure!"

Research skills can serve us in a variety of ways beyond scientific inquiry. As such I was able to identify and match with one of the few internship sites that offers policy training. It was only after serving one day per week at a nonprofit organization focused on child health and development policy, and research that I was able to meet someone with the type of career that I aspire to. She shared that her career began as a Congressional Branch Fellow decades ago. I immediately began to research the options. To say that I was thrilled to learn about the SRCD Policy Fellowship Program would be an understatement. I was awarded one of the two SRCD Congressional Branch Fellowships in 2010-2011. I was fortunate to work in a senior senator's office at the height of the education reform debate in our country. I helped draft legislation, brief the senator, staff hearings, and more. Nevertheless, my most important role was the role of the resident child development researcher and practitioner who could help to bridge the gap between science and policy.

My time on Capitol Hill was invaluable, and I realized the central role the federal agencies play. In preparing to be in the best position to effectuate meaningful changes for children and families, I applied for and received the Executive Branch Fellowship. I chose the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Health Resources and Services Administration as my placement. I have spent this year working to implement the national home visiting program authorized in the Affordable Care Act. Contributing to the largest investment in children and families in our history has been an amazing opportunity. However, I have learned that I would like to build my career at this juncture through working on policy initiatives at the state and local level to be closer to the communities that the policies impact most. As such, I have recently accepted a position as a senior policy advisor to the Deputy Mayor for Education in the District of Columbia.

My experiences as an SRCD Policy Fellow have undoubtedly shaped my future in multifarious ways. In my opinion, policy relevant research, advocacy, and outreach within the behavioral sciences are absolutely essential to improving the outcomes of the most vulnerable children and families. The SRCD Policy Fellowship Program is an excellent pathway for scholars committed to a career in or around the policy world and I look forward to supporting this program as a proud alum for years to come!