NEWS | POSTED APRIL 1, 2009

April 2009 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Glenetta Hudson Harris, Ph.D.

2008-2009 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

AUTHOR

Glenetta Hudson Harris, Ph.D.

Twenty months have past since I first began my tenure as a SRCD Executive Branch fellow. It is amazing to see how much my skills and knowledge about the integration of research and policy have grown over time. Since working in DC, there have been overarching political changes that have served as a great backdrop for the work I perform from day to day. It is exciting to be part of efforts of using research in trying to address the nation's most pressing issues.

I continue a joint appointment at the Office of Head Start (OHS) and the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families. OHS is a program office that administers grants to agencies that provide comprehensive child development services for low-income families through Head Start and Early Head Start Programs. OPRE is a research office that advises the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families on ways to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of programs in order to enhance the economic and social wellbeing of children and families. OPRE is also

involved in research and policy analysis in addition to providing guidance on performance measurement, research and evaluation methods and dissemination of research findings.

My major responsibility as a fellow has been to serve as a liaison between OHS and OPRE. This position as a liaison has allowed me to learn the complexities of navigating the relationships between research and programming. I continue to serve as the lead for federal meetings between the two offices. These meetings serve as a venue for discussing the latest research and programmatic initiatives occurring at both offices. As a liaison, I have also been able to be a part of review panels for grants and other major policy initiatives.

My placement at OHS and OPRE is very unique in that I've had the extraordinary opportunity to be involved in projects from a programmatic side and a research evaluation side. The most recent projects in which I have been involved include those with a research to practice and a mental health focus.

The Research to Practice projects have been very important to me. I have made it my mission to ensure that Head Start practitioners are informed about the latest research relating to the work they perform. Recently, I have written and orchestrated others in writing Research to Practice Tipsheets that will be available online to all Head Start practitioners. These tipsheets use the latest ACF funded research to inform practitioners about research findings and how research can help them to improve their work. I am also in the midst of composing briefs from the Interagency School Readiness Consortium which consists of research projects that aim to identify the most effective ways to improve developmental factors that are important for preparing children for school such as socio-emotional development and language and literacy development.

The Regional Program Manager Research Corner is yet another venue for the dissemination of research to the field. It was created to ensure that Head Start regional program managers are informed of the latest ACF funded research conducted by OPRE. I am ecstatic that I am able to manage the Research Corner and support dialogue between researchers and practitioners. This venue is used to provide managers with information on cutting edge research results and the latest research initiatives in a timely way.

I have also had the privilege to contribute to sections of the Multicultural Principles that are currently being revised for Head Start programs. The principles are used as a guide by programs in working with and meeting the needs of a diverse group of families and children in Head Start. My contribution has included research on relevant topics such as the importance of learning accurate information about other cultures, discarding stereotypes and seeing cultural practices as sources of strength for children and families.

As a clinical psychologist, mental heath has also been a strong interest for me. It is quite exciting to be part of efforts to improve the mental health capacity of Head Start programs across the nation. I have been able to work with a planning committee to bring together various experts to discuss important mental health issues for Head Start. I have been able to collaborate with other interested parties in developing a mental health vision and strategic plan for addressing the nation's most pressing mental health issues.

As a SRCD Executive Branch Policy Fellow, I have been a tireless advocate in using psychological research as a tool to inform practitioners and policy development. I have learned the process of how research results can be translated into strategies and recommendations for policy-makers and guidance for practitioners. As a fellow, I have learned how government operates and consequently how to operate within the political domain. Overall, this experience has been unique and has broadened my perspective of the complicated link between science and policy. My future career goals include continuing to use psychological research to strengthen federal programs and policy.