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January 2009 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Layla Esposito, Ph.D.

2008-2009 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

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I am currently in the middle of my second year as an executive branch fellow, working at the Eunice Kenney Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). I have continued in my role as the coordinator of the Obesity Research Strategic Core, and spend a significant amount of my time working on issues related to childhood obesity. Childhood obesity is a problem which has many policy implications, so I feel fortunate to be working on an issue that truly exemplifies the need for scientists and policy makers to communicate and collaborate efforts. I have also been involved in collaborations on the study of obesity across the various institutes at NIH, and with other funding agencies, including the RWJ Foundation and the CDC. It has been a great learning experience.

During my first year, I spent a lot of time learning about the grant process at NIH. This year, under supervision, I manage a portfolio of about 30 grants. Half of the grants in my portfolio are related to obesity, and the other half are related to social and affective development in children. I have also written program

announcements, including one which specifically calls for the collaboration of scientists and policy makers in the research process. I continue to work on a project which examines the health benefits of pets, from the perspective of the human-animal companion bond. We recently convened a meeting of the world's experts in this field and the institute is moving forward with a research agenda, presentations, conferences, papers and an upcoming book.

Several new projects have also kept me busy this year. I am working on a national collaborative to address interpersonal violence across the lifespan. I have facilitated and participated in several think tank meetings, and am assisting in planning an upcoming national conference. I have also been involved in the planning of the upcoming NICHD Summer Institute on Applied Research in Child and Adolescent Development. This week long program helps train and support new investigators who are entering applied research careers in this area. Additionally, I have been involved in various writing projects over the year, including a book chapter, and several scientific papers.

I am very grateful for the opportunity of a second year in my placement. There was so much to learn and absorb in the first year, but now I feel as if I can put that knowledge into practice. As I finish the second half of the year, I hope to continue to be able to contribute to the institute in meaningful ways. The support I have received has been amazing, and I am excited about the challenges that lie ahead. Lastly, I feel fortunate to be working within the federal government at such a momentous time in the country's history. Our president has called all Americans to service, and I hope to be able to continue to serve in the capacity that the SRCD policy fellowship has trained me for.