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January 2007 Spotlight on the SRCD Policy Fellow: Behnosh Najafi, Ph.D.

2006-2007 Federal Executive Branch Policy Fellow

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My Life as a Fellow has been quite adventurous since my arrival just a short five months ago owing to the fact that I have had placements in two different offices in that short time. There was a call for reorganization from the administration and the research team at the Child Care Bureau (CCB) in the Administration for Children and Families necessarily followed that call. The five of us that constituted the research team at CCB have now settled nicely into our new offices at the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation with the intention that we will be able to maintain close ties with the policy and technical assistance areas at the CCB. Despite the new location, we continue our work in supporting and developing child care research that addresses the needs of low-income families and children.

At this point in my fellowship placement I am working on a few projects that are of interest to me and connect in meaningful ways to my research efforts in my doctoral program. I serve on two interagency committees that both relate to early childhood education for special populations of children: 1) English

Language Learners and 2) Native American children. Each of the groups seek to better child outcomes in early childhood education among the two populations of children. This opportunity has really forced me to reword my academic language into something digestible so that I might share my research knowledge with others. In this process, I am learning how to best align research findings in a way that is closely tied to the goals of the committees.

I am broadening my skill set in other ways as well through writing and reviewing documents for others working in policy and programming arenas, taking on the responsibilities of being a federal projects officer for two program announcements and working with a technical assistance expert who is helping me to better understand approaches to evaluation that are taking place at the state level. In the new office, I am also at the beginning stages of learning more about Head Start programming, which I hope will open up opportunities to work around Migrant Head Start issues.

Overall, the fellowship opportunity has broadened my horizons in many respects including most importantly, understanding the value of using research to inform policy decisions that affect the lives of many disenfranchised communities in the United States. Although I often feel as if I’m not in Kansas anymore, I am extremely grateful for this opportunity and hope that in some small way I can make a meaningful contribution to future policy debates.