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Spotlight on the SRCD Fellow

Spotlight on the SRCD Fellow *Sangeeta Parikshak, Ph.D.*

In my current role as an Executive Branch Policy Fellow at the Office of Head Start, which is a Federal to local program, I find myself working on a daily basis to help determine how individual programs can ensure the safety, health and school readiness of children, and promoting the development and implementation of comprehensive services, such as appropriate mental health services, for children from birth to 5 years old. My background as a clinical child psychologist and knowledge of the research in this area informs my work in this capacity.

SRCD has provided me with invaluable opportunities to explore the application of my training as a clinician and researcher. My work last year as a Congressional Fellow focusing on health and early education policy in the Office of Senator Sheldon Whitehouse taught me how vital the political climate is in the creation and reauthorization of legislation as well as the importance of relationships between policy makers, advocates, and researchers in the field. I have a much richer understanding and perspective of how legislation is created and passed through both chambers of Congress which informs my current work in the Executive Branch.

My work as a first year Executive Branch Policy Fellow in the Office of Head Start has allowed me to more fully integrate my research and clinical expertise into work that I find both important for children and families, as well as personally and professionally rewarding. At the Office of Head Start, I am housed in the Education and Comprehensive Services Division where I focus on mental health and disability services for children and families in Head Start programs. I also work jointly with the Policy and Planning division which is responsible for responding to Congressional requests. Finally, I act as a liaison between the Comprehensive Services Division and the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, which conducts research on Head Start populations. My understanding of research methods and program evaluation allows me to serve as a bridge between the individuals designing and conducting the research as well as policy makers who are interested in learning about children and families served by Head Start. In my role in these various areas, I am in the unique position to learn from and participate in the many moving parts that need to operate simultaneously to ensure vulnerable populations are receiving high quality services at such a broad scale.

Overall, the SRCD policy fellowship has allowed me to explore the field of clinical child psychology from a different lens, and feel comfortable in the knowledge that there is not necessarily a clear path and trajectory to helping children with multiple risk factors succeed in both their social-emotional as well as academic development. I have learned so much from the multiple perspectives of individuals I have worked with in both fellowship settings and am grateful to SRCD for providing the support and opportunity to become immersed in such meaningful policy work.