

Public Health Social Work & the Nation

Keeping up with the latest research findings and best practices in health and well-being can be difficult at best for program planners and advocates. Helping people digest all of the information and find what is most relevant to specific communities is all in a day's work for **Erica Streit-Kaplan** (SSW '00, SPH '01). As a technical assistance specialist, Erica practices public health social work through the Children's Safety Network, a project housed out of the Education Development Center (EDC).



Erica Streit-Kaplan

"We're federally funded to provide technical assistance and resources to all state and territorial maternal and child health and injury and violence prevention programs around the country," explains Erica. "This means if someone wants information on a specific topic like safe sleeping or bullying prevention, I digest the information and make it specific to their needs."

While information sharing may sound simple, complexities soon present themselves. For instance, programs in New England may have different issues and priorities than programs in Washington state, and programs focused on urban areas don't have the same needs as rural ones. "Lots of states are interested in addressing disparities in injury prevention," says Erica. But rural areas may not "have as many safety precautions, for instance roads that may not be highly trafficked, so people will speed, [car crashes may result, and] sometimes emergency response times are longer because of distance." Recognizing these challenges, Erica is bringing together several states to create a community of practice, focused on the needs of rural communities, as well as the most effective practices to meet them.

In addition to working with state health departments and coalitions to find answers to problems, Erica also works to prevent other health-related problems from happening. "Technical assistance is not just reactive, but proactive," she says. Part of her work has been working with a team in the creation of state-level fact sheets (available at: childrenssafetynetwork.org) that describe various key stakeholders, funders and programs, all of which may come from different disciplines. Getting everything down in one place is important, because, she says, "the different disciplines don't always communicate in the same language, and they have different priorities. Some are experts in children's health, others injury prevention, but we put it all together, and get it down and distributed."

The Campaign for Public Health Social Work
www.publichealthsocialwork.org

However, once preventive information and best practices are shared, there are few easy ways to measure the eventual outcomes. She says, "I get really energized thinking that something I do on a state level may eventually trickle down and keep other kids safe and healthy, prevent child abuse, reduce bullying, reduce suicide. It can be hard to see the imprint on prevention but knowing that I may be making a difference, saving someone's life or keeping her out of the hospital, is pretty encouraging."

