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Jr COSTEP Summer 2008
East Central University, Oklahoma
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Bethel, Alaska**

Hello, my name is Brandon Parker. I am a student working on a Bachelors of Science in Environmental Health at East Central Univerisity. I plan to complete my undergraduate degree in May 2009. Over the summer I worked in the Office of Environmental Health & Engineering (OEHE) at the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Coporation (YKHC) in Bethel, Alaska. I found out about the JrCOSTEP program from my professor Dr. Patrick Bohan, a former Capt with the Indian Health Service. I applied for the position in Alaska because of my ambition towards improving the health and well being of American Indians and Alaskan Natives.



Working at YKHC provided me the opportunity to integrate and synthesize academic preperation along with my cultural background in an actual work environment. My preceptor LTJG Brek Steele introduced me to a wide variety of professional work experiences throughout my COSTEP. The focus of the office in Bethel is to provide a wide range of environmental health services to 48 native villages within the YK Delta.



Over the summer I traveled by plane to 11 villages performing many diverse objectives. Grayling, AK was the first of my trips. There I assisted in conducting a Village Health Clinic (VHC) survey and administering rabies shots. VHCs are surveys that help maintain safe and functional clinics for local villagers. I also conducted yearly fire drills for clinic staff, observed their response, and recorded their performance. The rabies program provides the region with an economical vaccine delivery system for rural Alaska. After obtaining a Lay Vaccinator Certificate I was able to vaccinate hundreds of dogs and cats. I also entered rabies vaccination data into the OEHE Rabies Database. Conducting rabies investigations was another duty as a COSTEP. In total I performed nine investigations including one where I responded directly to an incident while it occurred. Every year villages are required to write a Consumer Confidence Report (CCR). A CCR is a water quality report detailing the status of a communities water system. I wrote CCRs for the villages of Tununak, Sleetmute, Scammon Bay, and Chefornak.

Drowning is one of the five leading causes of death in the YK Delta. Sterling Rearden, an engineering intern, and I built and installed four Kids Don't Float (KDF) stations throughout the region. KDF stations are essentially life jacket loaner stations. After the installation process we visited with village members regarding how the station works and stressed the importance of returning life jackets after use. Another duty was to operate an EPA Certified Drinking Water Laboratory. In the lab we utilized the Presence/Absence (P-A) Total Coliform and E.Coli testing technique. The lab is responsible for analyzing water from 53 native villages, 16 schools, and 47 businesses. In addition, I also had the opportunity to work with Bob White, a Remote Maintenance Worker in the villages of Nunapitchuk and Kasigluk. There I assisted in installing a circulation pump in a water treatment plant. This required some soldering, metal fabrication, and a little heavy lifting. While at the plant I also designed an electronic monthly operators report data base for the water plant operator.



My COSTEP experience in Bethel has been very memorable. I've had the opportunity to meet new cultures, travel to remote regions in Americas last frontier, and work with outstanding environmental health professionals. I recommend the JrCOSTEP program to anyone intending on pursuing a career in Environmental Health. I enjoyed comparing and contrasting my culture with the Yup'ik and Athabascan people. Most of all, this experience has given me the opportunity to help in the process of improving and protecting the Alaskan Native and American Indian way of life. Ura (Thank You).