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Before sharing my experience as a Jr. COSTEP for the Public Health Service, I have to explain how I discovered the Public Health Service in the first place. At the beginning of my college career, I decided that my goals were to make a difference in the world, to help others, and to save lives. After some careful consideration, it seems obvious that the study of environmental health is the most effective way for me to reach those goals. My vision is to follow in an admirable alumnus' footsteps CAPT Mike Herring and join the US Public Health Service. When I was able to meet CAPT Mike Herring, he not only explained his prestigious job in the service but also described an internship that would allow me to see what the Public Health Service was about. I immediately started to research the internship and I realized it was exactly what I was looking for. The application process was long and grueling, but in the end the experiences made it all worthwhile.

After a few months I received a call from CAPT Kenny Hicks who informed me that I was accepted into the Jr. COSTEP program, and that I would be stationed in Reno, Nevada with the Indian Health Service, I was ecstatic to say the least. I knew this internship would be a new experience in many ways considering that I have lived on the east coast my entire life. I have never been east of Tennessee, and I was ready to explore new areas of the world in search of ways to learn about Environmental Health.



During my first week at the office, my preceptor Gina Pahona enlightened me on the Indian Health Service and the Reno District Office. I appreciated the education because I did not know much about either. The Reno District Office is divided up in four service units, three of which I was able to work with, namely Elko, Owens Valley and Schurz. I was able to provide assistance with the inspection of kitchens, daycares, headstarts, latchkeys, community buildings, health centers, and women shelters. I then submitted reports and surveys for most of the inspections that I assisted in. These reports allowed the facility operators to enhance safety, sanitation, and to prevent injuries.

In addition to surveying, I was also able to assist with rabies immunization clinics for 17 tribes and colonies in California, Nevada, and Utah. At first, I was confused as to why an Environmental Health Officer would be providing services such as rabies clinics to Native American reservations, but in retrospect I understand why the process is so important. Rabies clinics are a necessity on reservations to prevent the spread of rabies to domestic animals and people. Unfortunately, I witnessed someone fall victim to an animal bite during my internship, but thankfully the animal had previous rabies vaccinations that were administered by former Reno District Environmental Health Officers.

My primary COSTEP project was to design a Safety Resource Manual for the Tribal Health Centers who are interested in pursuing Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care (AAAHC). This manual will not only help Tribal Health Centers with the accreditation process, but it will also educate district staff on safety throughout the center in areas such as emergency preparedness, hazardous material, waste management, general safety, and infection control. This project not only expanded my knowledge of these topics but in other areas as well. The project taught me to manage time between various tasks as a Junior Environmental Health Officer.

This COSTEP also allowed me to get to know more about the culture and lifestyle of the Native Americans for whom I worked. During my time in Reno, I was able to attend the Pine Nut Festival/ Powwow at Walker River Reservation, and I participated in traditional festivities such as dance and prayer. I was also able to attend a ribbon cutting ceremony of a Wal-Mart that is being built on Reno/Sparks Indian Colony. This Wal-Mart will increase revenue for the tribe, and it will help provide more services for its people.



For all of my wonderful experiences, training, and education in Environmental Health, I must thank everyone at the Reno District Office of Environmental Health for allowing me the opportunity to become their COSTEP. I am especially grateful to Gina Pahona who has been such a marvelous preceptor for me. She is passionate about her job and she often goes beyond her call of duty to teach others.

I entered this CO-STEP as a student with little training and am leaving with professional training and experience and I am ready to take on the next challenge in life!