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Working as a Public Health Service COSTEP with the Spirit Lake Tribe in North Dakota was a rewarding experience and gave me a deeper understanding of Environmental Health.



My summer assignment started off by getting assigned several projects by the health director. My first project was to coordinate a traffic safety event for the children in each district of the Spirit Lake Nation. The main goal for the traffic safety events was injury prevention. Due to lake flooding and massive construction/semi-traffic, traffic flow has been rerouted so that the highway traffic including semi-trucks are now coming through residential communities and tribal roads of the Spirit Lake Nation putting the children and the local traffic of these communities at risk. I prepared and submitted a request to the Aberdeen Area IHS for Emergency Funding to carry out the project and received \$3,000 for the traffic safety project. The traffic safety events address the heightened risks posed to children by teaching the importance of traffic, bike, helmet, all terrain vehicle (ATV), and walking safety. It was wonderful working directly with the community and being able to see the difference that the events made afterward. It made my day every time when I would see a child wearing one of the helmets that we provided to them through the events.

During this summer, I discovered that part of being a Public Health professional is constant learning. The professionals that I worked under had attended many classes pertaining to Public Health and had many certifications and continued to attend training events to increase their knowledge. I attended a Healthy Homes Initiative Course provided by the University of Cincinnati and the National Healthy Homes Training Center. This training event not only gave me a better understanding of what makes a healthy home but also provided me with insight on the benefits of collaboration between programs in order to achieve common goals. After the training class, I also shadowed an Environmental Health nurse as she conducted surveys on local homes. The data collected would help identify the major environmental issues present in the community's housing and would be used to show funding needs in future grant applications that would improve the living environments for the tribe. The other goal of the home visit was to inform/educate the residents of the potential safety issues in their homes and what they could do to address these conditions. Another issue covered with residents was housekeeping, to help the residents we provided a cleaning kit with basic cleaning materials, natural cleaning recipes, and information on how to clean using natural ingredients.



I also had the opportunity to conduct water quality sampling during this summer as well. Under the guidance of seasoned Environmental Health specialists Mike Lee and Veronica Leaf, I completed over 50 health inspections which examined food, building, and playground safety. I was able to apply my knowledge of Public Health by educating food workers about food safety. I also created and recorded eight public service announcements (PSAs) at the local radio station. The PSAs addressed major community safety concerns including vector borne disease, traffic safety and a warning about swimming in lagoons.

During my time as a COSTEP, I was able to explore a rich culture, enhance my communication skills, test and apply my Environmental Health skills, and get a glimpse of the challenges and rewards of working in the field of public health. This was an unforgettable experience and I feel so fortunate for having had this opportunity.