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JrCOSTEP Summer 2012
East Central University
Spirit Lake Nation
Fort Totten, North Dakota



During the summer of 2012 I had the opportunity to work with the Spirit Lake Nation in Fort Totten, North Dakota as a Commissioned Officer for the United States Public Health service through the JRCOSTEP program. Throughout my experience working with Spirit Lake I learned that the tribe consists of just over seven thousand enrolled members and have been dealing with flooding in the region for the past 20 years causing a shortage of housing which the Tribal Council has been resolving through cooperation with FEMA.

One of the first things I was able to do when I started working was getting myself up to speed on the issues I and my supervisor Veronica Leaf would be working on for the duration of the summer. Some of the work consisted of getting the FEMA temporary housing here from Minot, injury prevention status, food protection updates, playground inspection, and other information of this sort.

Once I was up to speed and took the Indian Health Service Food Safety class along with my supervisor Mike Lee's food safety class I began conducting food and building inspections with my supervisors. This was something that I thoroughly enjoyed doing because it gave us a chance to teach people the right way to perform work in the kitchen and throughout their facilities. The most important tip I learned from my supervisors while doing food inspection was that an inspector should not go in as a hard charger when you see a violation, but instead work with the person to correct the problem and keep it fixed because we as health inspectors need to teach what we know.

Along with doing inspections at permanent food establishments we also inspected temporary food vendors. Since I am unable to be here for Fort Totten Day at the end of July I went to Rugby and Harvey to inspect and received the full experience of how food inspections work with temporary food vendors. The week I left I got lucky enough to have vendors for Fort Totten Days show up and sell early, so I was able to get pre-Fort Totten Days experience which consisted of 3 random inspections a day.

Along with receiving training and experience I also had the opportunity to teach what I have learned to the community. We started a program throughout the month of July to go around to all of the playgrounds in the community and teach the children and parents about using the playground correctly, proper nutrition, bullying, bike safety, and four wheeler safety. Being able to teach people in the community was something that I had not anticipated doing but it was exciting for me to be able to give back and help the citizens of the Spirit Lake Nation. Another way I was able to do this was with my training I received to become part of the Spirit Lake Child Protection Team.



My experience here with the Spirit Lake Nation has been more than I could have asked for because it got me out of my realm and showed me what work is like on a reservation. My time here in North Dakota has given me great hands on field experience that will help me in completing my degree in Environmental Health Science and what I have learned will stay with me throughout my career as an Environmental Health Scientist.