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They say if you are lucky in your life you will have an experience that deeply impacts your life. Little did I know that this would happen to me the summer I was fortunate enough to be a COSTEP for the US Public Health Service, working with the Tucson Area Indian Health Services. I had heard about the Public Health Service from my school, Missouri Southern State University, and the second the brochure was in my hand I knew it was something I needed to venture into. I was privileged enough to be contacted by Environmental Health Sanitarian LT Angela Hodge who became my preceptor.



I conducted my JRCOSTEP as a Junior Environmental Health Officer at the Tucson Area Indian Health Service Clinic. Like the majority of people across the country, my knowledge of the Public Health Service was very limited and I was unaware of its extensive assistance to many Federal agencies. This quickly changed and by the end of my JRCOSTEP, I had become much more knowledgeable of the duties and mission of an officer in the USPHS. I was able to understand the significance of the Indian Health Service and its extensive responsibilities for the health of Native Americans across the United States.



During my time in Tucson I was allotted the opportunity to provide public health services in many settings across the Tohono O’odham Nation. Upon my first week of arrival in Tucson I headed out for the annual rabies clinic where we provided a mobile clinic to vaccinate dogs and cats on the reservation. This plays a significant role in Public Health as Rabies is a very frightening and life threatening disease when humans are exposed. We tagged the animals and made records of this in order to track the vaccinations, for people that may be affected, as in the case of a dog bite. We went to work in the desert heat, travelled to 80 villages and ended up vaccinating over 1,000 animals, a number we had been aspiring to hit.

The Environmental Health division in Tucson provides many services for the people of the Pascua Yaqui and Tohono O’odham Nations. This includes various activities from conducting food surveys of restaurants and institutions on the reservation to pool surveys for recreation centers. I was able to assist in food classes, school surveys, and other public health factors for the safety and quality of life for the people. We did home surveys to assure that no environmental health factors were linked to their health issues. The most rewarding part of the experience was actually seeing the hard work of surveying put into use as preventative medicine.

I also worked with Environmental Health Services Branch Chief CAPT Don Williams and Environmental Health Officer Travis Bowser. While out on the reservation with LT Bowser we had an exciting day of assisting in blood draws on dogs that were being tested for Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. This epidemic has just



recently hit these areas, the Environmental Health Officers and their tribal colleagues have been doing everything possible to prevent human exposure, from distributing over 600 dog tick collars, to setting dry ice traps to monitor the tick population.



During my time with the USPHS I stock piled a vast respect and appreciation for all the people who work on the reservation. Throughout my experiences with the three amazing, compassionate officers I worked closely with I could see the connections they made to the people and how much they care about their work. The work they do is so vital to supporting the reservation and its existence. I also came to appreciate the opportunity of deployment and excitement the career offers, that is incomparable to the private sector. These are just a few of the many exclusive characteristics the Commissioned Corps provides.

Based on my experience as a JRCOSTEP, I would highly recommend all Environmental Health or Public Health students to consider the internship opportunities the USPHS provides. Throughout my summer I met so many amazing people who are very proud of what they do. After this experience, I cannot imagine pursuing my career in anything else.