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After completing my first year in the Environmental Health Masters program at Saint Louis University, I was afforded the opportunity to work as a Jr. COSTEP for Indian Health Services and assigned to Spirit Lake Nation. Although I was unsure of myself due to my lack of cultural knowledge about the Spirit Lake Tribe and limited world experience; the Jr. COSTEP program proved to be one of the best personal and professional decisions I have made.

Working with COSTEP preceptor Veronica Leaf, Spirit Lake Environmental Health Specialist, and health inspector Mike Lee, I was able to bring the principles and concepts from my formal education together with real world public health issues to gain valuable knowledge, skills, and professional experience. One area where I received additional experience was in community injury prevention. With unintended injury maintaining its place in the top ten causes of death, the Spirit Lake program has continued their efforts in evaluating and combating injuries on the reservation. In addition to conducting yearly seatbelt usage surveys, the tribe has also begun a child car seat initiative and elder falls prevention program. The car seat program provides tribe members with free infant/toddler car seats after parents/caregivers complete a child passenger safety course. This injury intervention ensures parents are properly educated and provided the hands on skills needed to transport their child safely.



Upon arrival to the Spirit Lake community, I received outstanding food safety training from Mr. Mike Lee. After the training I was given the assignment of conducting weekly inspections of all commercial food and lodging properties throughout the reservation. From this experience I was able to not only learn the ins and outs of food safety, but also how to effectively work with managers to find workable solutions to food safety concerns. In the world of food and playground safety/inspection, I learned that ample protection can only be attained through active and positive interaction and gaining cooperation of all influential parties. Throughout my Jr. COSTEP experience I can see the same principle

holding true in other areas of public health practice.

While the main areas of focus were those of injury prevention, food safety, and playground assessments, I was also able to learn and contribute to other programs and initiatives within Tribal Health. Through the Environmental Health office, I often aided in health education activities by leading playground and food safety presentations for tribal government staff and members of the community, as well as recording environmental health PSAs with local radio staff. Other events included the tribal vet clinic, a summer healthy skills camp for kids, home inspections, and enrolling in an emergency medical responder course.

Although my time in Spirit Lake was brief, it was an environment that provided a unique public health learning opportunity. The Spirit Lake community welcomed me into their culture and lives in a way that will forever impact my professional and personal outlook. I believe serving as Jr. COSTEP functions as a foundation and catalyst for establishing a successful career as public health professional and building inter-cultural relationships, rendering an unparalleled experience.

