

**ENS Allen (AJ) Denicola
JRCOSTEP Summer 2015
Western Carolina University
U&O Service Unit
Fort Duchesne, Utah**

I am a senior at Western Carolina University (WCU). This is where my passion for helping others led me to study Environmental Health and Safety. Prior to applying for my JRCOSTEP, I attended an environmental health meeting put on by the WCU Environmental Health program. At the meeting, several students discussed their JRCOSTEP experiences and the difference they made within the communities they served. Following that meeting, seeking an opportunity to serve with the US Public Health Service became a personal goal.



U&O OEHE Field Office: ENS Denicola, LT Tristian Strait & LCDR Julia Majkrzak

When informed by CAPT Kenny Hicks I would be stationed in Fort Duchesne, Utah I began to anticipate the opportunity to work and explore the area. My Preceptor, LT Tristian Strait and the rest of the U&O Service Unit OEHE staff, gave me a great orientation to the Tribes and provided me opportunities for field work within my first week in the office. It was immediately clear that



this COSTEP experience would allow me to apply classroom knowledge to actual hands-on environmental health. A few of the environmental public health concerns that were addressed during my assignment were food safety, water quality, injury prevention, disease prevention, and healthy housing. My work experience started with a hazard surveillance survey of an IHS health clinic where my Preceptor was assigned as the safety officer. I was able to shadow LT Strait through the hazard surveillance process and learn more about the priority areas for healthcare safety. We also assessed safe food handling practices during the Ute Tribe's Annual 4th of July Powwow in Ft. Duchesne, where we performed 44 Temporary Food Vendor Food Safety Surveys. This was a great learning experience, where I was able to lead several of the inspections and gain

experience communicating with operators about priority issues and providing education on food safety. During the food surveys I was able to learn more hands-on application of certain Food Code parameters such as adequate handwashing stations, proper sanitization solution, sufficient hot and cold holding. I also worked with another EHO, LTJG Deardorff, who assisted with the event. A learning experience was gained from participating in a temporary food vendor course prior to the Powwow and a food handler's certification class where I learned how to implement food safety regulations in a practical manner.

It was easy to grasp the importance of the IHS mission to improve and promote public health to the highest quality after interacting with several tribal members and participating in field work experiences. A trip to Reno, Nevada to assist with the Schurz Service Unit Rabies Clinics was a firsthand example of this mission in action and the work ethic and dedication of the EHOs. We completed rabies clinics in 15 locations in northwestern Nevada with USPHS Veterinarian, CAPT Kris Carter.

LT Strait and CDR Kelli Mohler, Reno District Environmental Health Officer, guided me through my summer project, which was to assess the current method of rabies vaccination recordkeeping for the Phoenix Area Indian Health Service (IHS) and research an alternative program that would improve efficiency and be usable in the field during rabies clinics. Also, one that would enhance tribal health by having a database that can track animal bite histories. I contacted several IHS Area and District offices to determine what they used across the agency and the positives and negatives of the individual databases. This initiated the discussion for the possibility of transitioning to a new system. Several options were identified that seem to be promising for the Phoenix Area, to include an app or customizable professional software.



CAPT Carter, DVM, and
LCDR Wiggins, EHO

Work experiences led to professional relationships with several USPHS Commissioned Officers within the Phoenix Area IHS and other agencies. It was a pleasure to meet and learn from each officer. The relationships were an added bonus to the JRCOSTEP opportunity, as was the chance to interact with Tribal leaders and community members. Working with the USPHS opened my eyes to the great public health needs that exist and the importance of providing comprehensive public health services to everyone. Every opportunity I had to work with tribal communities was valued as part of my learning experience during my JRCOSTEP.



The time out west was not all about work. I was able to enjoy several excursions in Utah, Nevada, and California. In southern Utah, I enjoyed a day of canyoneering with experienced travelers within the San Rafael Swell. In northern Utah, I was able to explore Flaming Gorge via a rafting trip. Also, in Utah I was able to spend time at the Dinosaur National Monument and several trails and arches were explored. In California and Nevada, I was able to place my feet in the San Francisco Bay and bike across the Golden Gate Bridge. My last excursion led me up Mt. Tallac that provided an astronomical view of Lake Tahoe.

Although, the summer JRCOSTEP was short, my goal after graduating is to obtain my Registered Environmental Health Specialist certification and apply to the USPHS/IHS. The JRCOSTEP placed me in an area that had an abundant amount of outdoor scenery to observe and a community just as beautiful to serve. This USPHS/IHS opportunity alone has me eager to return as soon as possible. A special thanks to all those who played a role in granting me this opportunity.