

**ENS Kelsey Gresl  
JRCOSTEP Summer 2016  
Colorado State University  
Santa Fe District Office  
Santa Fe, New Mexico**



My name is Kelsey Gresl and I am a senior at Colorado State University studying Environmental Health. I am originally from Wisconsin but now live in Westminster, Colorado. I had first heard about the COSTEP in a presentation in my pre-internship seminar from Tish Morrison, a former JRCOSTEP in my program who had also worked in Santa Fe. The program sparked my interest as a way to gain experience in the field of Environmental Health, work with and make a positive impact on tribal communities, and work and live in a new location.

After making it through the long (but extremely worthwhile) application process, I was ecstatic to find out that I would be working in Santa Fe, New Mexico. New Mexico sits just below Colorado, but is somewhere I had not visited before and I was not sure what to expect. I soon learned that New Mexico is more than a desert – it is a beautiful area with rolling mountains, beautiful rock formations, and a rich history. As for Santa Fe, it certainly lives up to its name, “The City Different.”

During my orientation, I learned about the various projects and work I would be completing this summer. I was excited as much of it utilized knowledge I had learned from my classes, finally giving me a chance to apply what I had learned at school to the real world. All of the work that I would be completing would provide me with skills and knowledge that will aide me in school, my career, and even throughout my life in other ways such as further developing interpersonal skills. I was also excited to be working with my preceptor, CDR Jeff Dickson, and Sallye Countz, Sanitarian, who both would go on to provide me with a vast amount of encouragement, guidance, and support throughout the COSTEP. A large amount of the work that I would be completing would be food surveys. Because the IHS is non-regulatory, what would normally be called “inspections” are surveys, though they utilize the FDA Food Code. Many of the surveys that I would be completing would be at feast day celebrations, which are days in honor of a certain saint. My specific projects for my COSTEP included developing educational materials for difficulties faced in some of the surrounding communities such as falls, radon, and mold.

Not long after my orientation, I travelled with CDR Dickson and Ms. Countz to a pueblo where I performed my first rabies vaccinations. Rabies clinics soon became one of my favorite parts of the COSTEP as I was able to connect with community members and spend time with dogs and cats. [Though, I learned that smaller dogs are much more difficult to vaccinate than larger dogs!] I also learned that rabies clinics are a crucial part of the work that we do through the IHS due to the large number of pets in the communities.

Another exciting aspect of the COSTEP were the food surveys that we completed. Before I completed my first survey, I obtained my Food Handler's Certification through the IHS online food handler training course to familiarize myself with the codes and regulations. My first survey was done with Ms. Countz at a casino, where I assisted her in surveying a restaurant, snack bar, and bar. It was exciting and eye-opening to be a part of the survey. Later, I accompanied CDR Dickson and Ms. Countz on multiple surveys of temporary food vendors during feast day celebrations. After I accompanied them, I was able to complete my own surveys at feast days which I felt nervous about doing at first, but soon I was able to gain confidence, increase my interpersonal skills, and increase my ability to pay attention to technical details.

My favorite event of the COSTEP was the Jicarilla/Little Beaver celebration in Dulce, New Mexico. This celebration lasted two days and had over forty food vendors from all across New Mexico and the surrounding areas along with a powwow, rodeo, and carnival. We surveyed the vendors during the celebration, and I feel this is where I truly gained my full confidence in conducting surveys.

Overall, my experience as a JRCOSTEP was eye-opening and unique. I was able to build upon my knowledge learned in classes and translate them into real-world skills and learned what a career in the IHS is about. I was also able to build strong relationships with people in our office and the communities that I value deeply. I am so grateful to have had this opportunity and for the experiences that I had.

