

ENS Nick Matysek
JRCOSTEP Summer 2016
Illinois State University
Sioux City District Office
Sioux City, Iowa

My name is Nick Matysek and I am currently a student at Illinois State University in Normal, IL. I am now entering my senior year and I'm on track to complete a Bachelor's of Science Degree in Environmental Health in Spring 2017. As part of the degree curriculum, students are required to complete nine credit hours of professional practice in order to graduate. Luckily, this summer's JRCOSTEP provided me an opportunity to gain valuable experience, both on a personal and professional level, and academically it allowed me to earn required program credits.

I first heard of the JRCOSTEP through one of my professors, CAPT George Byrns, USPHS (Ret) who, by all accounts, had a long and productive career in the USPHS. Throughout my coursework with CAPT Byrns, he drew from his experience in the USPHS Commissioned Corps; most notably his time assigned to the Indian Health Service. From his description, working for the IHS sounded like a great opportunity to make a difference in peoples' lives. In fact, his discussions are what sold me on a major in Environmental Health.

In the falls of 2014 and 2015, I had an opportunity to learn more about the Commissioned Corps during recruitment visits from CDR Mike Reed. While visiting the University, CDR Reed spoke with students about his career in the USPHS and the numerous opportunities available for JRCOSTEP assignments. I had a chance to speak with him more in depth about my own interest in the JRCOSTEP and ended up applying to the program shortly after that discussion.

The application process was extremely long, stretching almost five months, but in the end it was worth it. In early May I received my call to active duty and orders to report to the Sioux City District Office, Great Plains Area, IHS.

On my first day I was nervous and unsure what to expect. Upon arrival, my preceptor, CDR Reed, and I sat down and planned out my training objectives for the summer and after that all my nerves were settled. Over the summer, my activities would include conducting environmental health and safety surveys of a variety of different facilities, assisting with healthy homes surveys, providing EH services to powwow food vendors, as well as an injury prevention project focused on motor vehicle occupant restraint usage.

Low seatbelt usage rates are an issue throughout the Great Plains Area tribal communities. My task was to reach out to Area, District, and Service Unit Environmental Health and Injury Prevention staff to get a better picture of what is being done to increase usage. This included the collection of data related to occupant restraint observations, traffic code development, traffic citations/enforcement efforts, and information describing community outreach efforts to increase seatbelt usage. I learned a lot from this project, both about the communities I served and about the nature of injury prevention. Although most communities readily acknowledge low seatbelt use as an issue, and many actively engage in outreach activities to promote it, there appeared to be little support for enforcement activities, despite its critical role in injury prevention. The

reasons for these gaps vary between communities but are believed to contribute greatly to the low usage.

Beyond my major project, there were a couple elements which made my summer different from other JRCOSTEPs' before me. Shortly before my arrival, CDR Reed was assigned to assist with an infection control program at a local IHS hospital. This provided me with a chance to directly contribute to a Service Unit and see a portion of the public health system I may not have otherwise been exposed too. During this assignment, I was able to assist with development of a hospital-based respiratory protection program, complete hazard surveillance walkthroughs, and learn about infection prevention efforts in a clinical environment.

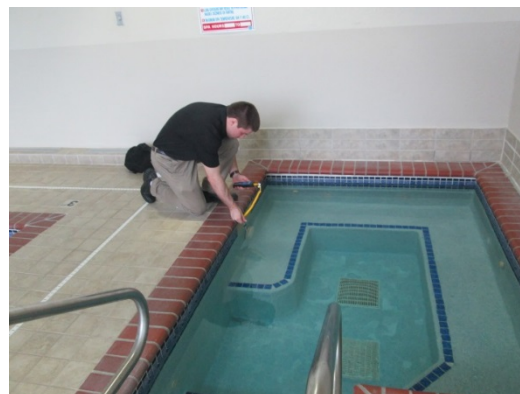
In addition, just over halfway through my JRCOSTEP experience, there was a widespread *Salmonella* outbreak in a community within the District. This event provided me with the unique experience of being part of an EH team tasked with the investigation of the foodborne illness. During the course of the investigation I had the opportunity to work in the community interviewing individuals who met the case definition. I also worked on collecting data for controls, and assisting CDR Reed in assessing how food was handled during the suspect event. This was a great opportunity to develop some epidemiology skills and to see how IHS partners with other agencies, such as state and tribal health departments on important public health matters.

On the last weekend of my time as a JRCOSTEP, I was given the chance to go work at a *Wacipi* (powwow). This provided me the unique opportunity to experience a Native American gathering, which is something that most other summer work opportunities cannot offer. The opportunity to witness the Native American culture firsthand was a great experience and one that I will not forget anytime soon.

My assignment in the Sioux City District as a JRCOSTEP was an amazing experience that I will never forget. At first I was uneasy about being so far away from home but after the experiences I had I would do it again in a heartbeat. My experience as a JRCOSTEP has helped me to grow immensely on both a personal and professional level. The opportunity to become a JRCOSTEP with the Indian Health Service is one I would highly recommend.



ENS Matysek Teaching a Powwow Food Vendor Training; Meskwaki, IA



ENS Matysek testing the temperature and water chemistry of a hotel spa; Flandreau, SD