

ENS Abby Dalsin
JRCOSTEP Summer 2017
Illinois State University
Billings Area Office
Billings, Montana

My name is Abby Dalsin. I am a student at Illinois State University (ISU), Normal, IL, pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health. As one of my degree requirements, I had to complete nine weeks of professional practice (externship). My professor, CAPT George Byrns, USPHS (Ret), frequently recounted stories from his work with the Indian Health Service (IHS). After hearing him speak fondly of his career with the IHS and learning more about the JRCOSTEP from my classmates who did it, I decided to experience this all for myself. From what others had told me, I was confident the JRCOSTEP would allow me to gain professional experience while seeing a different part of the country, learning about other cultures, and making a difference in people's lives.



Hiking in the Beartooth Mountains

A couple months after submitting my application, I accepted my assignment to the Billings Area Office, over 1,200 miles from home. While I was initially anxious about being so far from home, I was excited for the adventures Montana [and Wyoming] had in store for me. And I was not disappointed!

Upon my arrival, I worked with my preceptor, Darcy Merchant, to determine an appropriate summer project. We decided I should work on updating maps of motor vehicle crashes. My time in the office was spent using ArcGIS and SPSS to generate charts and create a poster to display the updated information.

Mr. Merchant also prepared a summer schedule that took me out of the office to all the reservations served by the Billings Area IHS, where I became familiar with general environmental health and institutional work. The first week in the office I completed swimming pool and spas training so I was prepared to complete those inspections. During inspections of healthcare facilities and recreational areas, I accompanied Service Unit Sanitarians to learn the ropes. At powwows, after introductory rounds with a Sanitarian, I was able to conduct inspections of temporary food vendors by myself. Once I learned how to do both qualitative and quantitative methods of respirator fit testing, I was put to work ensuring that healthcare facility employees had N95 respirators which would protect them against respiratory diseases.



Conducting respirator fits tests with ENS Corey Day,
JRCOSTEP, Ft. Washakie, WY

At rabies virus vaccination clinics, I issued rabies vaccination certificates, filled syringes with vaccine, and, after a quick lesson from the federal veterinarian, actually administered the vaccine to dogs and cats. Spay/neuter clinics entailed similar duties, in addition to checking-in animals before surgery and providing owners with aftercare information before they left. After working with these animal-related projects, I had the opportunity to assist with a dog bite investigation to determine if the animal had been vaccinated and if the victim should be treated for rabies exposure. This was really interesting to see both sides of rabies prevention work.



Providing rabies vaccinations, Pryor, MT

Overall, this summer was a great experience. I've been a part of a variety of environmental health duties, gotten to travel all around Montana and Wyoming to six of the eight reservations in the IHS Billings Area, and met a lot of interesting people. It's been an unforgettable summer!



Conducting a food service sanitation survey



Northern Cheyenne Chief's Powwow, Lame Deer, MT