

ENS Christina Burton
JRCOSTEP Summer 2017
Augusta University
Fort Defiance Service Unit
Fort Defiance, Arizona

I am currently entering my last year at Augusta University, and will earn a Master of Public Health in the Spring 2018. I knew that I wanted to become a JRCOSTEP prior to starting the MPH program, however, my bachelor degree was not a qualifying degree. I had to complete one year in an accredited MPH in environmental health program before applying to the Commissioned Corps JRCOSTEP. Once I was eligible I quickly filled out the application and crossed my fingers hoping I would be accepted into the program. I knew this opportunity would be great for me as I considered joining the Corps after I graduated.



When I was given notice that I was selected to work for the Indian Health Service (IHS) at the Office of Environmental Health (OEH), Fort Defiance Service Unit, I immediately was overwhelmed with a mix of emotions. I was excited because I was given the opportunity of a lifetime, but I was nervous because I would be venturing into an area I knew little about, being so far away from home. However, I am so glad that I took this opportunity because I gained so much experience out here working with the Navajo.



On my second day I went to Hubbell's Trading Post where we dusted prairie dog burrows for fleas. The Western National Park Association reached out to OEH because they noticed the prairie dogs who lived on the Hubbell Trading Post grounds were not active. They no longer saw them in the fields and became worried that they were dying because of plague. The Trading Post had livestock on the premises, and it is a major attraction to the tourists who

visit the reservation. So, if the prairie dogs were in fact dying from plague, this could in turn become a risk for the other animals and people who operate and visit Hubbell's Trading Post. We put on hazmat suits, gloves, goggles and face masks for protection and went through the field and dusted all the prairie dog burrows with an insecticide called Delta Dust to help kill the fleas. The whole process was so fun and it was a great way to kick off the summer.

Another highlight of my summer was participating in the annual rabies virus vaccination clinics. Not growing up with animals in my home, I was a bit reserved throughout the time we did the clinics. I had never vaccinated an animal before so it was a learning experience for me. However, being able to interact with people within the various communities, and



experience something I have never been able to do before this externship was a great way for me to come out of my shell.

Along with rabies clinics I conducted many inspections and surveys. One of the most fun experiences for me was participating in temporary food stand inspections at the Fourth of July Celebration in Window Rock, AZ. I loved doing these inspections and it solidified that it is something that I hope to continue doing in my future career.

Other work included enteric surveys for *Campylobacter*, handwashing demonstrations at the Tsehootsooi Medical Center, conducting a mobile home survey, mold and bed bug inspections, food service sanitation surveys in local kitchens, car seat and seatbelt surveys, a hantavirus investigation, and a community water system survey.

My major project that I completed was in the area of injury prevention. Injury prevention is an important issue on the reservation. I comprised a proposal for beginning a car seat program at the Tsehootsooi Medical Center. My proposal consisted of extensive research on why a car seat program at the hospital is vital to this community, information on car seat programs established at other hospitals in Arizona, a detailed framework of how training would be organized and executed, and a budget analysis of funds that would be needed in order to start the program. This proposal will be given to the Tsehootsooi Medical Center for review, and hopefully in the near future they will develop this program as a way to educate expecting parents on car seat safety prior to giving birth at the hospital.

Lastly, I conducted two food handler training classes. One was for temporary vendors, and the other was for permanent vendors. I was extremely nervous about taking the lead in these trainings as I have a serious issue with public speaking. However, I am so glad that my preceptor, Elvina Joe-Clark, made me do them because it was a way for me to face my fear head on and realize that it isn't as bad as I might think. Presentations are something that public health workers will have to do sometime during their career and I am so grateful I had the opportunity to become more comfortable with it.

I learned a lot from my externship here in Fort Defiance and I am thankful for everyone that I worked with who guided me along in this journey. This externship was one that I will never forget and I was humbled by the opportunity. Traveling to an area that was completely different from what I was used to, and seeing how Native Americans on this reservation lived day to day was an eye opener for me. Navajos are a strong group of people and I am so fortunate to have been able to experience their culture and way of life through my summer JRCOSTEP. Through my involvement as a JRCOSTEP and the conversations I had with officers in the Commissioned Corps, I believe it is safe to say that once I graduate I hope to become a Commissioned Corps Officer of the United States Public Health Service.