

ENS Blaire Brooks
JRCOSTEP, Summer 2019
East Tennessee State University
Navajo Area Office
Window Rock, Arizona

My name is Blaire Brooks. I am an upcoming senior Environmental Health major at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, TN. I learned about JRCOSTEP during a discussion with my academic advisor. I was discussing with him some of my interests and what would be my ideal summer internship, and he immediately suggested JRCOSTEP. I began looking into the program, and I started the application process. After several months of completing paperwork and phone calls, it was official that I would be spending the summer stationed in Window Rock, AZ to work with the Indian Health Service (IHS). I was nervous about moving 1,500 miles away for the summer, but my excitement to experience a new place and culture outweighed my nervousness.

My duty station was the Navajo Area, Office of Environmental Health and Engineering (OEHE), Division of Environmental Health Services (DEHS), which supports Environmental Health and Injury Prevention programs at six Service Unit/Field Environmental Health Offices located in Crownpoint, Gallup, Fort Defiance, Many Farms, Kayenta, and Shiprock. Navajo Nation is the largest reservation in the United States, spanning four states. Due to the size, the Navajo Area Indian Health Service provides services to over 244,000 American Indians. For the summer, I was under the direction of Zoey T. McKenzie, DMV, MPH, Area Injury Prevention Specialist, and I had the opportunity to work closely with several other individuals at both my office and the surrounding Service Units, including Charlene Nelson, Woody Begay, LCDR Aaron McNeill, Yolanda Williams, and CDR Jeffrey Conner.

I worked with the Fort Defiance Service Unit to assist in administering 908 rabies virus vaccinations to pets in 11 rural communities over the course of the first two and a half weeks of my program. In addition to rabies clinics, I assisted the Fort Defiance team with multiple institutional surveys, food handler trainings, and an elder fall prevention exercise class. One of my favorite parts of the work I got to do with the Fort Defiance team were food surveys at the Navajo Nation 4th of July Celebration. We conducted food surveys of 21 food trucks, stands, and vendors each day for four days. Not only was this a great opportunity for work experience, but it was a good way to get out and meet people in the community.

Much of my time was spent working with the Fort Defiance Service Unit, but I also had the opportunity to work with the Navajo Area Division of Occupational Health and Safety Management (DOHSM) team to complete three ventilation surveys in Fort Defiance, Gallup, and Shiprock, as well as observe a Joint Commission survey in Kayenta. There were also some unexpected events that I got to attend during my JRCOSTEP. I was able to attend and participate in a planning session at the Navajo Nation Missing and Murdered Dine Relatives Forum in Shiprock, NM, as well as assist at the Gallup Service Unit *Just Move It* community fun run/walk finale.

My major project for the summer was to consolidate, organize, update, and analyze the Navajo Area Seat Belt Data. Each of the Service Units is responsible for conducting seat belt surveys at specific locations throughout the year, documenting whether or not drivers and front seat passengers are utilizing seat belts. My job was to collect any missing data from the respective Service Units, consolidate data from all six Service Units into one document and format, and create graphs to show trends in the data. In addition to data organization, part of my job was to begin seat belt survey vehicle counts for 2019. To determine what locations to perform seat belt surveys at, vehicle counts must be done at each location to determine the daily traffic volume during certain time periods. This project required me to learn and understand implementation of the University of North Carolina (UNC) seat belt protocol.

Being placed in this area provided me with many opportunities for adventures outside of work. Every weekend I was able to find a new place to visit. I was able to connect with two other JRCOSTEPs that had been stationed at different Navajo Area Service Units. Some of the highlights from my days off were hiking at El Morro National Monument, hiking to the top of Pyramid Rock at Red Rock State Park, and taking a weekend trip with the other interns to Sedona, AZ to take a bus tour to the Grand Canyon!

Overall, this summer was incredibly eye opening to me. The opportunity to work with the IHS at this location provided me with diverse work experiences. It gave me a glimpse of what a future in Environmental Health can look like, and helped me to gain clarity on what I want to pursue after graduation. Working with individuals of all levels of experience in many different disciplines really showed me how many career paths are available in this field. In addition to work experience, I was able to gain necessary life experience. Living on my own for the first time, 1,500 miles away from my friends and family, helped me to gain confidence and skills that I will need as I near graduation and move on into the professional world. I am confident that this experience and what I have learned will play a huge role in my future professional opportunities, as well as my personal life.