

**ENS Jennifer Pak
JRCOSTEP Summer 2019
University of Washington
Gallup Service Unit
Gallup, New Mexico**

My name is Jenny Pak, and I am a student at the University of Washington in Seattle, WA. I will be graduating in the spring of 2020 with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Health. This summer, I had the opportunity to complete an externship with the Navajo Area Indian Health Service in Gallup, NM through the Junior Commissioned Officer Student Training and Externship Program (JRCOSTEP). I first heard of the program through an upperclassman at my university. She had shared her experience working with the native communities in Billings, MT which immediately got me interested due to my own experience serving at an elementary school on the Fort Hall Reservation in Blackfoot, ID. After doing some more research about the program, I knew there was no better way to spend my summer, and decided to apply. A couple months after submitting my application, I received a call for an externship with the Office of Environmental Health in Gallup, New Mexico. Once my placement was finalized, I packed my bags and flew to NM.



My preceptor was Elvina Clark-Joe, District Sanitarian, serving the Gallup and Crownpoint Service Units. I also worked with Delores Loretto, Service Unit Sanitarian, and with Nellie Benally and Josh Liles, Field Sanitarians. In addition to learning about the roles of an IHS Sanitarian, I gained experience in the field of injury prevention by attending various meetings and trainings with Theresa Yazzie, District Injury Prevention Specialist.

When I arrived in mid-June, the Crownpoint Service Unit was in the middle of their rabies vaccination clinic. I spent my first week working with Tim DenHerder and Kris Martin from the Crownpoint Service Unit at the clinic where hundreds of dogs and cats across the communities were vaccinated. I enjoyed getting to meet the community members and their adorable four-legged companions.

I had the opportunity to participate in a large variety of activities. I worked with Sanitarians from the different Service Units, as well as other departments such as the Navajo Division of Transportation and the Division of Occupational Health and Safety Management to conduct comprehensive environmental health and safety surveys, and food service surveys in various facilities on the Navajo Nation. I conducted food service surveys at fairs, responded to medical referrals for bed bugs, rodents, and falls, taught food handler trainings, participated in child car seat clinics, conducted seat belt use surveys, and conducted ventilation surveys of two medical centers.



I enjoyed my work because each day was different and presented a new challenge. Through the challenging moments, I developed a deeper understanding of the issues prevalent on the Navajo Reservation. I learned that the problems are often bigger than what any one department can address and require complex solutions, with the combined work and resources of many different groups and organizations.

Some of the most memorable times during my externship were preparing for a case review with Theresa, conducting a detention center survey with Tim, and working at the fairs with Woody, Charlene, Aaron, Donna, Jim, Tina, Kris, and Geraldine. I was able to participate in the food service surveys for three major fairs: the 4th of July Navajo Nation Fair, the Central Navajo Nation Fair, and the Navajo Nation Fair. I enjoyed conducting these inspections because it was an opportunity to apply my knowledge of food safety, and also because of the group of people I got to work with.

Before arriving in Gallup, I was nervous about many things: living on my own in a new town, meeting new people, and working in a new role. However, being on my own forced me to get out of my comfort zone. I began volunteering at the Just Move It events with Ramona Largo, the secretary at the office, and during the weekends I was busy hiking the countless trails, visiting the national monuments, attending service at the local church, taking trips to the surrounding areas, such as Sedona and Santa Fe, looking for jewelry at the flea markets, and volunteering at the 98th Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial. Throughout my time in Gallup, I developed a new appreciation for Native American culture, the southwest, the outdoors, and most importantly, country music. This was an invaluable time in my life, and I will miss being in Gallup and every single person I had the opportunity to meet and work with.

